Not All Slytherins Are Evil~Draco Malfoy

by 1RavenBlack

Summary

She is just a simple girl who never knew her parents. Cause? Death.
Now she's staying at an orphanage, with other unfortunate souls, deprived of any parental affection.
But what happens when a certain person in his early 30s comes in the picture, looking like an overgrown bat from the Addams family, tells her that she is a witch and that she will go to a famous Magic school, among others of her kind?
Professor or Overgrown bat?

Just another day....waking up,eating,trying to survive this dull hell,staying alone,reading,strolling through the forest,going to sleep.Nothing more than the same old routine...
Oh,By the way.I forgot to introduce myself,how rude of me!
Name's Raven.Raven Helena Black.I am 11 years old and...There's nothing much about me.I'm just plain old me.
Everything was being as ordinary as usual and nothing was interesting.....until....

Principal: Miss Black?
me:*looks at her shyly*Y-yes....?
Principal: Someone is here for you.Come with me.

Everyone started muttering,a soft murmur taking over the whole canteen,while I was hyperventilating a little,from too much attention brought upon myself,and for being scared of the unknown.Someone is looking for me?!Who could it be?Relatives?But that's impossible...I was told I had no family anymore...

Entering shyly in the principal's office,I notice a young man,in his late 20s or early 30s,perhaps,dressed entirely in black,with medium dark hair and dark eyes...well...he has a big nose too but *cough*.Is he an overgrown bat?O-or....a vampire?Nah...Those are only in Romania,and they have red eyes...right?RIGHT?!
Standing there in a corner shyly,trying not to be stared upon,biting my lip and looking down,I await further orders.I had no clue how I should behave,since I've never been visited before.

Bat:What happened to this girl?Why is she trembling like a lost,frightened pup?
Principal:*shrugs*She's always been this way.Different,lonely and eccentric,quite the attention seeker,yet she goes all shy and embarrassed.I never understood her.
me:*looks away**mutters*I-I-'m s-sorry...
Bat:Would you mind leaving us alone?
Principal:*nods**leaves*Behave yourself.
me:*nods*Mhm...
Bat:Take a seat.

I sit down quietly,trying to act calm,which....of course failed.He is a rather intimidating looking individual,towering over me with great height,but his style suits him perfectly,might I say...

Bat:You are miss Black,I presume?
me:Y-Yes,sir.
Snape:*hands me an envelope*Read this.

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 Miss Black,

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 sig

Minerva McGonagall

Deputy Headmistress

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HOGWARTS SCHOOL of WITCHCRAFT and WIZARDRY

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
**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 ARE NOT ALLOWED THEIR OWN BROOMSTICK

Yours sincerely,

Lucinda Thomsonicle-Pocus sig

Lucinda Thomsonicle-Pocus

Chief Attendant of Witchcraft Provisions

me: Wh-what is this? Th-there must be a mistake...
Bat: There is no mistake, miss Black. You are indeed a witch.
me: B-but... h-how?! I... I mean... I can't be a witch... I'm just... me... I'm... nothing special...
Bat: When you were angry, or excited, didn't you make things happen? Things that have no rational explanation?
me: ... When some of the kids started making fun of me..... I... I started crying and.... the wind started blowing really hard and fast.. but it wasn't affecting me.. only them.... And they started calling me a freak...
Bat: That's the problem with ignorant beings with a low intelligence level. They are afraid of what is different, and instead of trying to understand it, they shun it.
me: B-but... It is real, isn't it? It's not a joke? Is it?! *lip trembling* Everyone says I'm lying. That you are here to take me to a Freak show... *tears welling up* They say it's only a hoax.... It is real, isn't it?
Bat: It's real for us. You, me, and all the others like you, and not for them. But you got the letter. Only you.
me: Wh-what's your name? And... do you teach at this... Hogwarts as well?
Bat: I will be your potions teacher, Severus Snape.
me: Oh, groovy! Really nice to meet you! Hmmm... O-okay.... so... where am I going to get all these things? And with what money? I barely have enough money to get a pack of chewing gum...
Snape: Do you think of me so lowly, that you think I'd be expecting you to pay for these? Foolish girl.
me: S-sorry....
Snape: *getting up* Follow me.
me: Where are we going?
Snape: Pack your things. We are going in London.
me: London...? I've never been to London before....
Snape: Put your hand on my arm.
me: H-huh?
Snape: Do as I say and don't question me.

I nod quickly, touch his arm, and I suddenly feel myself pulled through a void, everything spinning around me, until we suddenly appeared in an unfamiliar place, looking very fancy, but I was feeling rather nauseous.

Snape: Don't vomit.
me: *gulping uncomfortably* *nods* Will try...

We started walking, until we went through a dark alley, straight in front of a brick wall. I was rather confused as to why we'd reach a dead end intentionally, until I saw Snape tapping some bricks with his wand in a, possibly, patterned order, which made the bricks shuffle in place, then form a door, which lead to a complete new and magical shopping area. Wicked~!

Snape: This is Diagon Alley. First, we shall get you your wand.

We arrived in front of a shop called Ollivander's Wand Shop where an old man with fluffy white hair like cotton candy was staying behind a counter, fidgeting and polishing a wand.

Ollivander: Good day to you, Professor Snape. I suppose this is Miss Black?
Snape: Indeed.
Ollivander: Come closely, deary. Now... What wand would suit you....
me: E-eh...?
Ollivander: Oh, you didn't know? The wizard never chooses his wand, Miss Black! The wand chooses him. *goes to look for a wand*
me: I'm... not even surprised anymore...
Ollivander: Perhaps... 10 ¾", vine wood, dragon heartstring core?

I took the want in my hand gingerly, then stared at it unsurely. *Wh-what should I do?*
I stare at the elderly man confused, and seeing so, he gave me a sign to do something.

Ollivander: Well what are you waiting for? Give it a go!

I blinked 3 times in confusion, shook the wand in the direction of the shelves, out of instinct. Consequently, and contrary to all my wishes, all the books on the shelves fell on the ground, while I got panicky and started apologizing, putting the wand back on the counter.

Ollivander: No, don't worry. Hmmm.... 14", willow, unicorn hair core?

Trying the new wand proved to be yet another failure, as the light bulb snapped and the windows broke. Am I really that destructive?!

me: S-SORRY!* squeaking*
Ollivander: *shaking his head* Don't worry..... but.... could it be... Thesstral tail-hair, with Phoenix feather... ash wood... 15"
I noticed Snape looking rather curious about this type of wand. Taking it, I waved it around skeptically, and all of a sudden, a warm dark shadow started blowing softly around me, glowing blue petals floating along it, and a black rose, with blood red petal ends appeared in my hair. I was shocked beyond belief, might I say, so much that I was stunned in place, with the rose in my hand. Did I really do this? How was I capable of doing such magic, without even realizing what was happening?!

Ollivander: *clapping* I never thought I would give this particularly powerful wand to such a beautiful young lady. Truly, this wand suits you, both in power, and aspect. A rare, dark and mysterious beauty. Take care of it, and learn how to use it to its full potential! *winks*

Still awestruck, I could only stare at the smiling man and nod fast, clearly excited.

Snape: How much?
Ollivander: *shakes head* Nothing! Consider it a gift! It's not always, when I meet a child with such potential! Have a great year at Hogwarts!
me: Th-thank you! Th-thank you so much, Mr. Ollivander!

After this, we went to have my robes done, the books bought and everything else.

Snape: Go and get yourself some ice-cream. I will be there in a minute.

Nodding, still giddy after the wand-picking, I went to the ice-cream vendor, Fortescue, and got a scoop of chocolate and one of strawberry. Waiting there, I saw many kids with their families, buying their school stuff merrily, a particular red haired family standing out and catching my eye. They look like such a loving family... My heart aches for that...

-?-: Um... excuse me, miss...

I turn around surprised and see boy with dark, messy hair and emerald green eyes, standing a bit shorter than me, looking lost.

me: Y-yes...?
-?-: I'm Harry. Harry Potter. And I'm a bit lost.
me: I'm Raven. Raven Black. Who were you here with?
Harry: There was this rather tall person... like... VERY tall. His name is Hagrid. He has a huge brown beard and has a calm face.
me: Like... this guy over there, coming in our direction?
Harry: Oh, yes! Thank you!
Hagrid: 'Ey 'Arry, been lookin' for yea. And yea've made a friend! What's yer name?
me: I'm Raven. Raven Black, sir.

Hagrid's face had a fast flash, then he shook my hand and smiled.

Hagrid: Friend o' 'Arry's a friend o' mine! Who're yea 'ere with?
me: Umm... I believe his is a teacher at Hogwarts... Professor Snape...? He's tall and dressed in all black. *whispers* Quite like an overgrown bat... *giggles*

Harry and Hagrid laughed with me for a while, then they had to go. After a short time, I see Snape coming my way nonchalantly.
Snape: You better take care of your new pets, understood, miss Black?

Then, he showed me a gorgeous black kitten with icy blue eyes, just like mine, and a pitch black owl with red eyes.

me: They are gorgeous... Thank you so much, professor! *tears welling up* Thank you so much...
Snape: Don't go all emotional on me, miss Black, and let's go. You will be spending the remaining time until school with me, and it is still I who will guide you to the train to Hogwarts.
me: B-but... I-it's too much to ask! You could just drop me off at the orphanage and be rid of me...! You've done way too much for me in just a few hours...!

He looked at me with a "Just shut up and move" face and walked off, having to follow him. Apparating again, we get in front of a rather fancy looking house. Walking slowly inside, I kept looking around, mesmerized by how sophisticated and classy this place looked. He used a spell to make my things go in a room that will serve as my new guest room.

Snape: Dinner at 8. Don't be late.

Then he left, allowing me to get cozy. It feels so nice... the bed is soft and comfy, like I've never seen nor felt before... it was warm in the room, with the fire cracking in the fireplace, soothing my every sense and making the atmosphere so heartwarming, family-like, that my tears started overflowing from all the emotions flooding my heart.

I grab the blanket and put it around me, standing in front of the fireplace, contemplating about everything that has been happening so far... And apparently, all of it caused me to fall asleep prematurely on the warm carpet, with the blanket over me, and hugging a fluffy pillow, completely oblivious to the fact that I forgot of the dinner appointed.

*Severus’ PoV*

Where is that idiotic girl? The food is getting cold. She is 10 minutes late!

Making my way to the guest room, I see a bundle on the floor, which without much deducing, I realised it was her, wrapped around the blanket, sleeping peacefully. Dried tears were left on her cheeks, yet the ghost of a smile was still visible. What an annoying little pest. I put her on the bed, using a simple spell and left the room without a word.
This Black girl... could she be like that bloody bastard, or like.. her...?

That is left to be seen at school.
Brunette woman: Now, who are two beautiful babies?
Ginger woman: Harry and Raven, of course! The most beautiful babies ever! You two will be best friends! And learn together, eat together...
BW: Cause mischief and havoc together, have fun together *smirks*
GW: Yami! Don't imply such things!
Yami: Soooo sooryyyyy, my dear Lily-kins! But let's face it, it's fun!
Lily: Umm... maybe... *giggles* but... it's also scary...
Yami: Oh, Lils, stop thinking about that! But... You know... after the switch... I really can't feel safe either *putting the baby boy in the crib* I never really trusted Wormtail. I mean... his animagus is a rat... what if he RATS us out!
Lily: *chuckles lightly* You learnt way too many English idioms, Yami....
Yami: *smirks* That's how us, Japanese girls roll!
Lily: I could never doubt you...
Yami: You never should! But... now... I think it'd have been better with Pads...
Lily: Yami, don't say that! He is YOUR husband and HER daddy! You can't do that!
Yami: But you and Prongs are my friends too! I can't let you three die! What would poor Harry think!
Lily: What would poor Raven think?!
Yami: I know Lily... you are right... but... Why Wormtail, of all people?! Why not Moony at least! I trust him with my life! Why not Dumbledore! Or... someone else! Heck, even Marlene or Frank!
Lily: You MUST be strong, Yami! And tonight is Halloween!
Yami: That's right! It's damn Halloween! We could have been out, begging for candies but NOOO we have to shiver in fear 'cause that Noseless bastard is trying to kill everyone!
Lily: *hugs Yami* It's okay Yami... shhh it's okay... Raven loves you.... And Sirius loves you the most and you know it... he would do anything for you... So don't be sad, at least for his sake...
Yami: I could say the same about Harry and James for you....
Lily: I.... wanted to thank you for... showing me that not all Slytherins are evil... after what happened with HIM...
Yami: Lils, stop thinking about him. Slytherins are the ones who aim high, but many of us, ever since the rise of that bastard, HAD to join him, in fear of putting their families in danger. Sure, there are psychos out there, like Lestrange, but the Malfoys.... I'm assuring you, they are only afraid. They don't want to die. The house is not what defines us, but our hearts. And you Lils. You, James, Moony, Sirius have the heart of lions. I just hope you don't end up like the guy from Braveheart... *shudders*
Lily: *chuckling* WAY too many movies, Yami!
Yami: That's my whole life! Music, books, movies and procrastinating!

Someone suddenly bursted in the room. It was a young man, with glasses. He looked exactly like a chibi Harry, but with brown eyes. I suppose he is James...

James: Lily, I have always loved you, to the moon and back again. I am honored and happy beyond limits to have met you, to have you as my wife, and have Harry as our son. Yami, thank you for being an amazing friend and one of the mischievous group of Marauders. Harry... I'm sorry we could only spend this year together... Raven, you will break hearts, you little gorgeous star... Now
girls! He is here! You must protect the kids! I will try to stop him! ...I love you!* runs back*

Lily: NO! JAMES! DON'T GO!! *sobbing*

Yami: *barricading the door* Lily! LISTEN TO ME! We MUST do something! For him! For James! And to save our little babies! Regain yourself!

A cry was then heard, followed by a blinding flash of green and an evil laugh.

James Potter had just been killed, and a sobbing Lily Potter was screaming in despair.

Yami: LILY POTTER! GET UP AND HELP ME!

As the brunette girl dragged her ginger friend up, they quickly did some charms on the door, but knew it wouldn't work against the Dark Lord. The real life Boogey man of the Wizarding World. The girls looked at each other with tears streaming down their cheeks like rivers, and went to sit in front of their babies, on their knees, whispering loving words to the infants they will never again see.

Then the door was destroyed, a low voice demanded for the babies to be given, which of course, was denied, and with 2 quick flashes of green, the women died protecting their beloved children, leaving them crying, but also, with the Dark Lord perishing along.........

Everything had been so peculiar and weird while staying at Snape's house... it felt so welcoming and nice... heartwarming... something I had never experienced until the day he came to the orphanage... I wonder, though, how can this place feel like home when he's acting still so very cold, like a Canadian Winter?

Now, standing in front of Hogwarts Express, Platform 9 3/4, a fortnight later, he gave the trunks to a man, letting me only have Lich, my cat, with me.

Snape: Now go there, search for a compartment and wait nicely to get to Hogwarts. Behave yourself. Also, don't think for a moment that I will take care of you any further or treat you differently than the others.

me: *bites lip* Oh... O-okay sir... um... good bye and... thank you so much for everything... Really.... I will never forget your kindness...

Snape: Don't mistake duty with kindness. I HAD to do it. I didn't WANT to. Now go.

Nodding sadly, I ran in the train, found an empty compartment and sat, glued to the window. Well... it was nice thinking somebody cared, even for a day...

During the ride, I started humming, while being completely absorbed by Lord of the Flies, when suddenly, I hear the door opening, and a person who has vibrant emerald eyes, just like the ginger woman from my dream, stepped inside the compartment. Harry Potter.

Harry: H-hey... again... Can I stay here?

me: *nods* of course.

Harry: How are you?

me: Good... I guess.... just excited and anxious. And you?

Harry: I guess the same...
me: Isn't it funny though? Just normal kids, and then this weird guy comes, and in a flash, the world is changed radically?

Harry: I suppose yes... At least I don't have to see my aunt, uncle and cousin for a while... *shivers*

me: At least I don't have to return to that bloody orphanage....

We started admiring the view, when the door was opened once again, this time, by a ginger boy.

GB: Excuse me... do you mind...? Everywhere else is full...

me: Sure...

Harry: Oh, sure, not at all *motioning for him to sit down*

The boy then sat down near Harry, giving a half smile.

GB: I'm Ron, by the way. Ron Weasley.

Harry: I'm Harry. Harry Potter.

me: Raven Black

Ron's eyes went wide with shock. Fangirling...?

Ron: So-so, it's true...? I-I mean... you really have the... the... *pointing to his forehead and neck* scar....

Giving a small *oh*, Harry smiled in understanding, as he lifted his fringe, letting the lightning scar to be shown, whilst I revealed the skull scar from my neck.

Ron: *excited* Wicked!

After a short while, the trolley lady came, offering us money. Having no money myself, and Ron having food from his mum, we didn't get anything.... but Harry had some golden coins, so... he took everything!! JFC Potter, did you rob a bank?!

Well, can't complain, these things are very good..

Ron got a... rat?! From his pocket, and my kitten tensed up. I hold her close, so she won't do anything bad.

He got the wand, wanting to use it on his rat. Poor animal...

As he cleared his throat, a cute girl with bushy brown hair came in the picture, asking for a toad. Apparently Neville, its owner, lost him. Not seeing it, Ron said a quick no, but this girl was intrigued by the wand, and asked if we were doing magic. Sooooo Ron did his fail of a spell, and we started chuckling.

girl: Are you sure that's a REAL spell? Now, it's not very good, is it?

me: Definitely not a genuine charm...

girl: Of course, I tried some simple ones myself, but they've worked for me. For example *sitting across from Harry* Oculus, Reparo!

Suddenly, his glasses were fixed. Magic is awesome...!

Girl: That's better, isn't it?... Holy cricket, you're Harry Potter! And you must be Raven Black! I'm Hermione Granger....... and... you are...?

Ron: Ron Weasley.
Hermione: Pleasure. You two better change in your robes. I suppose you'll be arriving soon. Good idea, Raven, for being already dressed. See you later* leaving** returning* You've got dirt on your nose, did you know? Right there.

Then she left. She's fun... I like her already.

At night, the train stopped, and we were greeted by the same big guy called Hagrid, telling us, first years, to follow him. I, Harry and Ron, got in a boat with another boy, feeling enchanted and mesmerized by the breathe-taking view of the castle at night. There were some tentacles shooting out of the Black Lake.... could it be the Giant Squid I read about in Hogwarts: A History?

Perhaps.

Going inside, we walked up the stairs, and met an elderly lady dressed in velvety green robes wearing a dark pointy hat. She looks very wise and strict, but her eyes betray her, letting the motherly look gaze upon the young children. She told us that we have to be sorted, and about the houses, points and stuff, all the formalities and left for a short while, before a bleached blond boy started talking.

boy: So it's true then. Harry Potter and Raven Black came to Hogwarts.

Mutterings between everyone started, making me scared and uncomfortable.

boy: This is Crabbe and Goyle. And I am Malfoy. DRACO Malfoy.

Ron then snorted, earning a glare from Draco.

Draco: Think my name is funny, do you? Well I don't need to ask for yours. Red hair and a hand me down robe... You must be a Weasley. Well, soon you will find out that some wizard families are better than others, Potter. Black. You don't want to go around with the wrong sort... I can help you there * extending arms*

Harry: I think I can tell the wrong sort for myself, thanks.

me: I don't need others thinking for me...

Then, the woman returned, making the boy go back to his place as she guided us through the huge gates.

All the way to the podium, everything was gorgeous. The floating candles, the chandeliers, the enchanted ceiling.... simply everything seemed like a fairy tale.

woman: Now, when I call your names, you shall come sit on this stool. Abbott, Hannah!

She put an old pointy hat on her head, then the hat suddenly shouted HUFFLEPUFF!

Then..... she shouted for me.

Black, Raven!

The hall erupted with whispers and I went to sit on the stool anxious and trembling softly. Then, I started hearing a voice inside my head... I SWEAR I'M NOT INSANE!

No, my girl, don't worry, you aren't insane, no, not yet. But you are particularly difficult, just like your parents. You are locked inside your shell, but if something happens and it's broken, you are ruthless and merciless indeed, the true wrath of a storm. But also, loving, kind and protective of those close to you. Great mind, shrewd, a hidden mischief, and a huge potential, staying hidden there... But where to
put you...Ravenclaw or Slytherin, which one appeals to you most, or rather said, who are you most appealing for. Thirst for knowledge and power, will to succeed in life, shrewdness, plenty of it, but more of a tactical, organized mind, rather than a straight-forward person. You don't rush, but think before you act. ... I know just where to put you... just like your mother, better be... SLYTHERIN!

The table erupted into rounds of cheerings and applauds, the old person at the teachers' staff got up and started clapping, and... Professor Snape's eyes glinted with a proud look, as he smirked, barely gazing in my direction. What is this...?

Some Slytherins started yelling "We got Black! We got Black!", while jumping and cheering happily. What the...?

Suddenly, I'm being greeted by the prefects, the head boy and girl, saluted by a ghost and I'm being patted on the back by Draco. It seems to me like I'm much more popular than the country's president, yet, I know naught the reason for such feat. All I know is that all this fuss is making a panic attack grow.

Draco: How are you?
me: *whispers* This is too much for me... Make them stop... or I'm going to faint here...
Draco: Stop what?
me: Too. Much. Attention!
Draco: Isn't attention nice?
me: Not when you feel like the world is pressuring you.
Draco: Hmm... Don't worry. I can handle it.

Then, he shouted at the Slytherins disturbing the peace to shut up, smirking with a Superior smirk.

Draco: All done, princess.
me: Th-thanks...

Then, the rest of the ceremony went smoothly.

Susan Bones - Hufflepuff
Terry Boot - Ravenclaw
Mandy Brocklehurst - Ravenclaw
Lavender Brown - Gryffindor
Millicent Bulstrode - Slytherin
Justin Finch-Fletchley - Hufflepuff
Seamus Finnigan - Gryffindor
Hermione Granger - Gryffindor
Neville Longbottom - Gryffindor
Morag MacDougal - Slytherin

-Malfoy, Draco-
The hat need not touch his head, for he already yelled the assigned house - Slythering. Smirking, already knowing he'd get put there, he came to seat next to me, and smiled patronising, extending his hand, as a friendship pact - Which I gladly took, despite the previous incident with the freckled Weasley.

Next were Crabbe, Goyle, Moon, Nott, Parkinson, Patil, Patil, Perks, Sally-Ann, then again, at Harry's name, the same whispers erupted, the same cheers exploding when he got put into Gryffindor. Dean Thomas, Lisa Tupid, Ron Weasley and Blaise Zabini.
Then, the headmaster gave a short... rather queer speech, as he let us eat. Damn... this is actual food.... real, high quality food....

Staring at it, not knowing where to begin, I get a little chicken meat with some mashed potatoes and enjoy the extravagant meal. Never have I ever eaten something so delicious....

**Draco:** You look extasic, Black. Never eaten before or what?

**me:** I didn't grow up with a family, remember? I suppose you know, since everyone else seems to know more about myself than I do...

**Draco:** Perhaps so, but not anymore. You may have been raised ignorant to the glorious ways of magic, nevertheless, you are still a Pureblood, and very powerful one, at that. I believe we'll make great friends.

**me:** I sure hope so too, Draco. You seem like a nice person.

**Draco:** Do I? Hmm... Maybe so. Quality over Quantity, Black, remember that.

**me:** Yet, dear friend, delegation happens by making bonds with others, be them fake or not, so it's not to be put aside~ *winks*

**Draco:** Smirks *Heh. I like you, already. Clearly, the Hat knew well.*

**me:** Magic is amazing, huh~?

After the meal was over, we were lead by the prefects to the dungeons, where the portrait of Salazar Slytherin was, and said "Pureblood", this particular word being the password. What was inside, a green, luxurious living room, noble like, made me feel unworthy of it. Do I really deserve to learn in this kind of noble environment? Perhaps not... but even so... I have to make these 7 years worth every single second.

Going up the stairs, I see I'm sharing the room with a girl called Jessie Moon and one named Emma Perks. I hope we can get along....

Inside, I see my trunk sitting casually near the bed, which lay near the window, having the extraordinary Black Lake view. It was a tad cold, but bearable, so I can sleep in shorts and a Tshirt... Despite being set underwater, in the dungeons. Mr. Slytherin sure had some eccentric views on life...

After I arrange everything, and sit in bed, to relax and read some more, I notice the door opening and a short blonde with dark brown eyes and a chestnut haired girl with hazelnut eyes came in the room, smiling to each other. They must be Jessie and Emma.

**Blondie:** Hi! You must be Raven! It's nice to meet you! I am Jessie, and this is my friend, Emma! We hope we can be friends* smiling*

**me:** N-nice to meet you... And yeah... I hope we can be friends too!

**Emma:** Yawning *Dayum, am I tired! Let's go to sleep, shall we? Unpacking for tomorrow, when we aren't as tired!*

**Jessie:** Agree! *Jumps on the bed* Ayayayaaya..... so soooft~! I'm feeling like a princess....

**Emma:** You should! We all should! We are princess-like beauties!

**Jessie:** Blushing faintly *Oh, stop it, you!*

I put the blanket up, so my embarrassed face wouldn't be seen, but then I heard some giggles and "aawwwweee"s

**Jessie:** Look at her! She's so adorable!

**Emma:** Adorable?! She's GORGEOUS! She will surely be a heartbreaker!

**Jessie:** Frost eyes-

**Emma:** And Shadow hair!
Jessie: Frost heart-
Emma: And Shadow soul!
me: *confused* hiding my face with my hands*S-stop that...
Emma: Little Dandere, I'm telling you!
me: Wh-what?
Jessie: Don't you watch anime?
me: I... didn't have a TV back at the orphanage... sorry....
Jessie: *gasp* Then we TOTALLY have to introduce you to...
Emma: The magical world of...
Jessie + Emma: HETALIA!!
me: Ermh... Okay... but tomorrow maybe... I'm tired now...

Agreeing to get to know each other next day, we went to sleep. Staring up at the green veil hanging above my head, I kept thinking-
Did my mum sleep in the same bed as I did? Was she as happy as I am today, when she first stepped inside this very castle and Common Room? Was I sorted correctly? Do I really belong here? Among these other Slytherins? Or... Am I really like my mum?... Will I ever even know...?
Waking up in the morning? Yeah that's a problem for a night owl like me, but hey, magic is worth everything and much more beyond that!
First, in Transfiguration I was sitting with Draco in the first desk in the middle row, writing about the basic stuff. I'm surprised that I don't see Harry and Ron..?
Maybe they got lost. I might have been lost too, if Jessie and Emma wouldn't have been there...
I love that Professor McGonagall is an animagus, and that cat form suits her perfectly. I wonder what my animagus would be... I must ask her about this!
After some time, Ron and Harry ran inside the classroom, panting, being happy that McGonagall wasn't there.
Silly boys...
The "cat" jumped in front of them, transforming in the said professor, leaving them completely mesmerized.

Ron: That was bloody brilliant!
McGonagall: Why thank you for that assessment, Mr. Weasley. Perhaps it would be more useful if I were to transfigure Mr. Potter and yourself into a pocketwatch? That way maybe one of you would be on time.
Harry: We got lost...
McGonagall: Then perhaps a map? I trust you don't need one to find your seats!

I put my hand over my mouth so my giggles wouldn't be heard, while Draco nudged me with his elbow and smirked. McGonagall shot me a knowing, yet amused look, and I couldn't help but grin at her.

Draco: Come now. We have potions and we most definitely don't want to be late.
me: Um.... professor Snape.... am I right...?
Draco: Yes indeed. He is the best professor at Hogwarts and of course, the Head of the Slytherin house!
me: Oh... joy... Is he... scary? Does he shout or... I don't know... taunt? I mean, I stayed with him for like a fortnight, but nothing compares to the objectivity of a teacher in class.
Draco: Yes, but it's mostly Gryffindors he attacks. They're all so petty and useless, you can't blame him. Slytherins are usually under his wing, of course, superiority always shines. Just do your job as best as you can, and listen to him. You don't want an angry Snape on your tail, now, do you?
me: * bites my lip * **whispers** Definitely not... he looks quite scary.... I don't want problems with him...

When we arrived, there the front row was mostly occupied, only 1 more seat available, for Draco, so I went in the last row, with Hermione, Ron and Harry.

We started chatting a bit, when all of a sudden the door was kicked open and Snape bursted in the class. He started reading the names of the students, and when he came to me and Harry he stopped and said "Ah yes, our new celebrities" making me shrink in my seat with fear.

Snape: You are here to learn the subtle science and exact art of potion-making. As there is
little foolish wand-waving here, many of you will hardly believe this is magic. I don't expect you will really understand the beauty of the softly simmering cauldron with its shimmering fumes, the delicate power of liquids that creep through human veins, bewitching the mind, ensnaring the senses... I can teach you how to bottle fame, brew glory, even stopper death - if you aren't as big a bunch of dunderheads as I usually have to teach.

I was both intrigued and eager for the lesson to start, but also afraid out of my wits and worried. What if I can't grasp this subject? Will he shout at me? Will I start shaking like usually? Surely hope not...

Snape:*snapping* Potter! What would I get if added powdered root of Asphodel to an infusion of Wormwood?
Harry: I don't know, sir.
Snape: Tsk tsk. Fame clearly isn't everything. Let's try again, Potter. Where would I look if I told you to find me a bezoar?
Harry: I don't know, sir.
Snape: Thought you wouldn't open a book before coming, eh, Potter?...... What is the difference, Potter, between Monkshood and Wolfsbane?
Harry: I don't know... I think Hermione does though, why don't you try her?
Snape:*snapping at Hermione* Sit down! Black! Can you answer the questions and clarify Potter's unknokledge?
me:*nods* W-ell... s-sir.... Asphodel and Wormwood make a sleeping potion very powerful, known as the Draught of Living Death. A bezoar is a stone taken from a goat's stomach and it will save you from most poisons. Monkshood and Wolfsbane are the same plant, also named Aconite.
Snape:*nods* Very well. 10 points to Slytherin. At least one of you uses the brain in her head. And one point will be taken from Gryffindor House for your cheek, Potter.

We started brewing a simple potion for curing boils as I was put in a group with Hermione, thankfully, and not with some other careless Lion. Fortunately, Snape seemed to hate everyone, but was praising Draco and me. All of a sudden, I hear a cry of pain and I look behind me, seeing Neville and Seamus’ cauldron, all melted, and their potion was sent on the ground, having "life" and making holes in kids' shoes. Afraid, we sat on our stools.

Me: Evanesco!

I said, as the potion vanished, making me sigh in relief, and warily put my feet back on the ground.

Hermione: Great saving...
me: I seriously didn't need holes in my shoes...

Snape was angry at them, for not going by the instructions, then started blaming Harry for not warning them. That's pretty much cruelty...

Snape: If miss Black weren't there with her quick wits, your shoes wouldn't exist anymore. 10 points to Slytherin.

I shrunked even lower in my seat, as I saw some Slytherins smirking proudly at me. What am I doing with my life...?
At lunch, I sat with Hermione, Ron and Harry, not wanting to see the Slytherins.
me: Sorry... for earlier...
Hermione: What do you mean?
me: Potions...
Hermione: There is no need to be sorry, if you are intelligent! It must be shown and improved!
Harry: She's right. Don't worry, I'm just glad at least you won't be tormented by him.
me: Hopefully...
Ron: There are VERY few "chosen" ones who can be seen by Snape as a potential success.
me: * puts head on the table* Please no... Let's forget we ever had potions, okay?
Harry + Ron: Deal.

Next, we went to have Flying lessons, with Madam Hooch. Awesome hair and eyes, might I say... tomboy-ish attitude... I like her style.
We stood next to the brooms and putting my hand above the broom I timidly mutter "up" so my voice won't stand out from the others', yet I see the broom raising in my hold. 
Shocked, I stare at the broom in my grasp, then I see that Draco and Harry managed to get it with their 1st try too! Impressive...

We mounted the broom, and as Madam Hooch blew her whistle, Neville started flying, losing control, his broom going in all sorts of directions... then he fell and broke his wrist... ouch...
The Professor told us not to go flying around, or else we'll be expelled, but Draco stole Neville's remembrall wanting to throw it away, so he won't ever find it.

Harry: Give that here, Malfoy!
Draco: I think I will leave it somewhere where Longbottom won't find... maybe a tree?
Harry: Give it here!
me: Draco... please don't make a show out of this...

He smirked at me charmingly, then flew off in a flamboyant manner, motioning for Harry to come after him.
Hermione trying to stop him, but he wouldn't acknowledge her, but only Malfoy's challenge. He looked at me with a knowing look, then, fearfully, I follow him on the stupid broom.
Why am I even doing this, though? I really shouldn't, and if I get in trouble with Snape, I can expect to visit the guillotine in the next second.
So much for going unnoticed.

We were up, standing in front of him, when he threw it away, and as we looked at each other and I shot off after it.
It was a scary dive, especially since the ball got so close to the ground, I could almost feel my feet touching the grass, but I caught the ball and raised the tip of the broom quickly, as I threw it to Harry as fast and powerful as I could. Unfortunately, Draco caught it easily, and yelled for Crabbe and Goyle to get it, as he threw the ball to them.
Harry managed to catch the ball midway, did a "180" with his broom, then we safely made it back to the ground, with kids cheering for us...

Please, someone kill me.
What did I get myself into?
After that, I heard mine and Harry's name being screamed by 2 different persons, a male and a female.

Guessed already?
Snape and McGonagall.

me:*whispering to Harry*It was nice knowing you,pal.

Harry was taken by McGonagall in another direction,as I was taked to another floor by Snape.

Snape:You foolish girl!Never in my entire life have I seen such recklessness from a student,nonthelss,a first year!Where was your mind?!You could have been seriously injured,beyond mending,or even died!

me:*shaking*I-I'm s-s-so sorry....I-I didn't....think...of wh-what might have...h-happened...

Snape:Of course you did NOT!In most cases I'd have sent you off in the next second!I will not tolerate such an act of disobeying to be left without consequences!

me:*bites lip hard**nods*Y-Yes,sir,I understand a-and fully take responsability.

He enters roughly in the Charms class and asks for Flint.
Ermh....I hope he says Flint as in Marcus Flint,not the actual object.

My fears were 10% gone,since it was the actual person.But what actually shocked both me and Marcus is when we saw Snape smirk and say "Flint,I have found you a seeker"

We both went "WHAT?!",staring at Snape as if he was insane.

Snape:Do NOT question my decision.

I remained stunned,as Flint started examining me.

Flint:Very light,partially tall for her age,won't be a burden for the broom,so it will be faster than average...You also say she caught the ball in that manner...Okay,then it's settled!Welcome in the team,Black!Now,don't think that since you're a first year,I will go easy on you,but on the contrary!You must demolish the other seeker!

me:Y-yes sir!I will do my best!

Flint:*smirks at Snape*Now that's some Slytherin Pride I see!*pats my head* every afternoon,after classes,see you at the pitch,clear?I will make sure to be there and teach you all there is about Quidditch.

Snape:Don't forget to kick out mr.Higgs,or make him a replacement.

Flint:*nods*Yes,sir!

After this,we had a free period,and I met up with Harry and Ron.I and Harry looked at each other in the eyes and said "Seeker?" then nodded.

me:I'm dead scared.I mean,I don't wanna make a fool of myself...but I'm also dead scared of being the centre of attention...I've always hated it...

Harry:Tell me about it...I don't want to mess up either...

Hermione:*coming out of nowhere*You WON'T make a fool of yourselves!Quidditch is in your blood.

We looked at each other in a "wtf" manner,then follower her to the trophy room.There,at Gryffindor,"James Potter" as Chaser in 1972 and "Sirius Black" as Beater,same year.So...if this is true...and this guy is my dad...then he was a Gryffindor...this makes me feel very bad...If he were alive,he'd much rather prefer Harry over me,that's what I'm sure of.

After a lot of senseless talking,we found ourselves on the 3rd floor corridor.
me: Ermh... guys... not sure we're supposed to be here...
Hermione: That's because we are NOT supposed to be here! It's the forbidden corridor.
me: Oh no...
Harry: Okay guys, let's get out of here~

But just as he said that, Mrs. Norris, Filch's cat appeared, with her crimson eyes staring deadly at us, making us run in another direction, past webs and dusty statues, until we found ourselves in front of a locked door. Harry and Ron tried to use brute force—very clever guys—

Hermione: Oh, move OVER! Alohomora!

There was a CLICK sound, then we finally went past the door, escaping from our doom... but not so much, as we were greeted by a HUGE Cerberus who started growling at us, drooling continuously and fierce.

me: Damn.

We started screaming as we ran out as fast as we could and went in front of the Gryffindor's common room, since I couldn't enter a different house's CR. Standing in front of the giant door-painting of the Fat Lady, we regained ourselves and started talking.

Hermione: You don't use your eyes, any of you, do you? He was GUARDING something.
me: That's true... he WAS standing on a trapdoor, wasn't he?
Hermione: Indeed. Now I'm going to bed before either of you get another clever idea to get us killed. Or worse, expelled.
me: She's right, as usual. I don't even know why I ran upstairs all the way with you, since my CR is down in the dungeons. Urgh, so much for extra exercise... Good night!

Turning on my heels, I try to walk as fast as I can back to the CR, avoiding suspicion, until I hear a whistle, catching my attention.

me: Oh, hello, Draco. What brings you here at this hour?
Draco: Might I ask the same of you?
me: *smiles* I got lost while chatting, then realised I was all the way up into the towers. How silly of me, innit?
Draco: Merlin, Black, you better not befriend those lousy Gryffindor scums.
me: *raises eyebrow* Why not? Is it wrong?
Draco: I tend to forget you know nothing of our world. Mudbloods and Gryffindors are what taint the Wizarding World and deprive it of its purity. They shouldn't be around you.
me: But Draco, isn't that mean? I couldn't possibly be mean to anyone who'd want to stay around me...
Draco: Purebloods stick together. You should know, from now on, that Purebloods always help each other, since all the other tainted filths are against us. Being a Slytherin is a hard job for us, especially with all the discrimination surrounding us.
me: Discrimination? Whatever do you mean?
Draco: Have you not seen the looks others give us? The look of disgust? The hatred in their eyes? And for what reason? Because we always win the House Cup? The Quidditch Cup? Because we always have the best grades?
me: I... never knew this...
Draco: You are new to this world, Black, but you must learn the hard way that even here, at Hogwarts, life isn't all sunshine and daisies. But worry not, for I shall be there for you with every step you take, guiding you on the path of victory and success.
me: Is it... really okay, though? It seems... sketchy. Surreal.
Draco: Believe whatever you wish to believe, however, know that, despite everything, Slytherins will always be there for you, and I in particular, should you ever change your mind set.
me: I... will keep that in mind. Thank you for your knowledge. I really appreciate you helping me, Draco.
Draco: *smirks* Keh. Everything to ensure my success.
me: *chuckles* You silly...

Having arrived in our CR, we bit our farewells and went to sleep, after yet another eventful day filled with new information acquired.
Halloween Tragedy

I was eating lunch quietly, contemplating everything, when suddenly, I notice Jessie and Emma sitting down next to me. They salute me as I nod my head in acknowledgement, then close my eyes and breathe in quietly.

Jessie: Are you okay? Or just sleepy?
me: Nervous...
Jessie: About?
me: Quidditch practice...
Emma: Oh yes! You're our new seeker!
me: *cringes* Unfortunately...
me: I'm scared and nervous... I don't know anything about Quidditch...
Emma: Oh yes, I remember. But even so, it's so very easy! I know you can manage to learn it in the blink of an eye *winks*
me: Today is the first time I'm supposed to practice Quidditch with Marcus... and...
Emma: He looks quite scary...
me: He isn't that bad, I suppose...
Jessie: If he knows what's best for his life, he better not be a jerk to you.
me: J-jeez... ain't like I'm gonna die... well... actually... *bangs head on the table* I just might...
Marcus: *taps my shoulder* Time to go, kid. Practice starts.
me: Aye aye, cap'n...

I follow him to the Quidditch pitch where there was a big chest. Marcus opened it and started explaining what was with those weird balls, about the teams and the teammates' role and it was easy really. On the other hand... I have to deal with the most troublesome ball. The stupid snitch.

Marcus: Now, let it be a secret between us, but I will let you use my broomstick for the trainings, okay? The school's Cleansweeps and Comets are terrible and slow, clearly no match to the ones everyone else has. So we also need a plan about that. In the meantime, you have to practice your reflexes while flying, the rest will be dealt with by us. Also, don't pay much attention to the bludger, we'll make sure it won't go near you.
me: Okay. Got it. *gets up* Then what are we waiting for, let's start this. Time is precious and the match is soon.
Marcus: *smirks* That's what I like to hear.

The training was pretty tough at the beginning but... I have to admit, it's also super fun. I never thought this would be so cool! Way to go, Quidditch!
After we finished for the day, we high fived, me more excited and exhausted than ever, and went back to our business.
What do I have now? Hmm... Oh! Charms! Sweet!
I go to my room, take a quick shower and run to the Charms class, sitting in the empty place near Draco.

Draco: Hi there?
me: Oh, Hey Draco. How are you?
Draco: Good, I guess. You?
me: *smiles* Great I suppose. The first Quidditch practice was...spectacular... You should go to the tryouts next year! I'm pretty sure you'll get in the team easily!
Draco: *snorts* Heh, well of course I will. And we will win the Quidditch Cup too, if I'm there.
me: *chuckles* Of course we will.

Then Flitwick came in the class and started our lesson. We are supposed to practice the Wingardium Leviosa charm on a feather. They started practicing—most of them bored—and then Draco hit Crabbe with the wand in the head without noticing.

me: Ouch... Careful...
Draco: *chuckles* Can YOU do it, Black?
me: I can try.... *points the wand to the feather* Wingardium Leviosa! *Surprised* I-it worked! I-I did it! No way-
Flitwick: Oh, look at that! Miss Black and Miss Granger did it! Congratulation girls, 5 points to each of you!
Draco: *nudging my shoulder* Way to go, Black. Keep it up, and we'll win the House Cup again.
me: *nodding* Yes!

Then... Seamus made the feather explode in his face... Nothing new!
After this, I was walking to the Great Hall with Hermione, when I noticed Ron, Harry, Neville and Seamus were in front of us.

Ron: It's Levio-OH-sa, not Levio-SAR. Seriously, she's a nightmare! No wonder she hasn't got any friends!

Oh no! She went ahead, furious and tearful, bumping her shoulder in his and went on ahead. I go too, following her, throwing a poisonous glare at Ron.

me: Oh really? No friends? Then what am I? A mango?! You jerk!
And I run to find her.
Perfect way to celebrate Halloween. Trying to comfort a sobbing Hermione in the bathroom. Urh, that nitwit...

me: Look, Herms, you are a genius! Literally a genius. Why do you even need to listen to anyone like HIM? He's just a brainless idiot who is JEALOUS of you! Don't listen to him, he's a dead beat who needs validation and lives in the shadow of his elder brothers! And no friends? Seriously now? You have me! Parvati and Padma, even Harry, so what else matters?
Hermione: I suppose you're right... thank you Raven.... for being such a great friend to me and supporting me.
me: *looks away* D-don't mention it... Now let's go wash up your pretty face and go to the feast, okay? Halloween treats! Spooky stuff everywhere! Come on! It's gonna be fuuun!* nudges her*
Hermione: *giggle giggle* You're right!* opens the stall room* Let's go---!
me: What the bloody hell?!
In front of us was a **HUGE** troll, with a club, swinging it at us! Damn! I quickly grabbed the robes of a stunned Hermione and drag her back in the stall, kicking shut the door, putting her down, protecting her *(horribly)* from any impact. Just like that, the troll swings the club and hits ALL the stalls, making some wood planks fall on us... and me to become deaf by her high pitch screams. *Ouch.*

I managed to get her up, as the troll was about to smash us like a crepe, and now we're against the wall. Literally. As that bastard is advancing towards us, knocking everything around. Just as we were awaiting our imminent deaths, I see Harry and Ron getting in the bathroom, scared beyond wits, just like us.

**me:** What are you doing here? Run! Go! And get help!

**Harry:** Confuse it!

He said, as he threw a tap at the wall, making noise to distract the monster. Then Ron threw a metal pipe in the shoulder, making noise as it collided with the floor, making it go after him.

**Harry:** Come on! Get here! Fast!

Hermione was still petrified on the spot so we both had to push her to the door. On the other hand, Ron was the farthest from the door, with a troll at his tail about to kill him so I take out my wand at the same time as Harry, but... I wasn't stupid enough to jump ON it and put the wand IN his nose— as said person did—but I, on the other hand, pointed it at the troll and said "**Confundo**"! Hoping that my spell would work. It's not really the easiest after all.

The troll shivered, from the spell, roared in pain, from the wand in his nose, and started going **MORE** berserker. Great save...

Just as that, Hermione was on the floor, frightened, as I was watching Harry, telling him to hang on, but Ron— saving him— used the Leviosa charm and got the club to fly out of the troll's hand, hitting its head, knocking him out.

It started to fall, in the area Hermione was in, but I managed to push her out of there... and the bastard's arm fell on my leg, making me fall to the ground.

**me:** Oh no... ouch... it's stuck...

**Hermione:** Is it... dead...?

**Harry:** Don't think so. Just knocked out...

**me:** Sheesh... that was hardcore... *tries to unstuck my leg*

Harry got the wand out of the troll's nose... and it was full of boogers... Eww... disgusting... and he wiped it off on his trousers... double ew.

Just as Ron and Harry tried to move the troll's hand off of my leg, a door slam was heard, and Professor McGonagall, Snape and Quirrell stormed inside, as we all look at them terrified for our future.

The "**brave**" Quirrell let out a shaky breathe and sat on a toilet, clutching his heart. Snape looked at the troll, then at me, with a disappointed look and I couldn't help but look at the ground in shame. I... did it again...

**McGonagall:** *dead angry* What on EARTH were you thinking of? You're lucky you weren't killed! Why aren't you in your dormitory?

I looked at everyone, seeing their terrified faces, and I decided to tell her the truth. Lying or hiding...
the truth might bring us all a worse punishment anyways. Furthermore, I suspect Snape may or may not be able to read minds...

Snape: Perhaps Miss Black could tell us what happened?

He had a stern look on his face, trying to detect any lies, if there were any. It looked though, as if he knew I was going to tell the truth.

me: W-well... professor... it was really just an unfortunate accident... formed from a pitiful choice of actions.

Hermione: Raven...! No! I'm really my fault, professor!

McGonagall: Miss Granger?

me: No Herms... it's okay... It's not your fault, okay? It's only the person who let the troll inside who is at fault. You see, professor... *cringe* ouch... well... Hermione here... is very emotional so... when she was insulted for being smart... she ran to this particular bathroom and started crying... this happening much before the feast took place, or the announcement about the troll... *bites lip* I ran after her too... trying to comfort her... telling her it's all lies... and that's she's smart and she should be proud of it... c-can anyone get me out of here p-please? M-my leg really hurts...

Snape used a spell to move over the troll's hand, and I tried to get up, but my leg failed. As I was about to fall... he caught me letting me lean on him for support.

me: T-thank you, sir...

Snape: Continue.

me: W-well... As we were about to leave this place, and come to the feast... we see the troll... and we try hiding in the stall... but... you see the outcome... Then... Harry and Ron noticed we weren't at the feast, and wanted to get us to safety... and... we worked together and... *pointing at the troll* this... happened... We are sorry... for... being reckless and stupid about this... we shouldn't have acted this way...

McGonagall seemed to understand this, nodded, and gazed at Hermione with a stern, motherly look.

McGonagall: Miss Granger, you foolish girl, how could you ever be ashamed of your great capacity?!... Well, if you are not hurt, you can go back to the tower. I still say you were lucky, but not many first years could have taken on a full-grown mountain troll. You each win five points. Professor Dumbledore will be informed of this. You may go.

Just as that, they all left, and Snape said he'll get me to the Infirmary.

Snape: I hope you realize what you did was terribly stupid.

me: Yes sir...

Snape: How did you manage?

me: Erm... well... we threw stuff at the wall, to make distracting noise, then I used the Confundus charm on it... Harry... jumped on it, and... stuck his wand in the troll's nose... and Ron used the Leviosa charm to take the club and knock it out.

Snape: How did you learn that charm? It's not in your year.

me: What's the use of a library if you don't use it? And believe it or not, Marcus gladly helps...
me learn and practise some spells above my years. He's very nice!
Snape:*smirk* You did well. You will recieve 15 points for cunning and quick-wit. Perfect Slytherin qualities.
me: E-ergh... th-thank you sir... it's really... nothing much I did though.

He ignored me the rest of the walk, until he asked for Madam Pomfrey to come and take care of my leg wound. Just as he was about to leave, he said "Next time, save yourself too, not only the others"
And he left.
Well... wasn't this day eventful?

-----

Before the big match, Gryffindor vs Slytherin, I'm at the table trying to eat... but I can't... I'm too nervous to eat...
Jessie and Emma were trying to make me forget what's going on, and focus on eating, to get stronger for the day. Draco, Crabbe and Goyle were there too, saying that we'll win and stuff.

me: You guys just jinxed everything. I bet all my money that we'll lose! And that is because of me! Harry's the other seeker! Think of it! I bet he somehow managed to get a great broomstick! And he's damn lucky! I have NO chance!.... I'm a disappointment....

I put my hands through my hair and hit my head on the table trying not to cry in fear and anxiety. Suddenly, I felt a bump on my shoulder and heard Marcus' voice.

Marcus: Do your best, Black. That's the key. Gryffindor hasn't won in AGES I'm telling you. See you there, so toughen up.
me: Thanks Marcus...
Emma: So he's not really THAT bad after all...

Just as I was about to leave, I heard owl screech and something dropped in front of me, then my dear black owl sat on my shoulder.

me: Hey there, love. How are you?

Midnight nudged my cheek as I pet his little head with my finger.

Jessie: Gurl... this... this is...
Emma: A bloody broomstick!
me: *blinks* But... I never get anything... how...?
Draco: Who cares? Open it!

I nod and quickly unwrap it. I was shocked beyond life borders, when I hear them gasp.

Draco: Nimbus 2000.... no way!
Jessie: It's the fastest broom ever made!
Emma: *hugging me* This is AWESOME! You go girl!
Jessie: Lucky! I wanna have a ride after this!
me: I... I... I...
I was too shocked to even breathe, but just as that, I smirk, snatch the broom, and run outside, near the Black Lake, and take a fast ride. The wind, the adrenaline, the freedom... This is perfect! After some time, I had to go down, to the Quidditch pitch and prepare for the match. There, Jessie came to me and handed me a small paper and winked at me and left. On the paper, with a neat writting, it said "Do your best" in green ink. I... have some ideas who it might be but... hehe... I'll surely do my best! Marcus did his encouraging speech, saying how we'll crush the Gryffs, when someone noticed my broom.

girl: Seeker has the best broom!
Marcus: *smirks* So you finally have it. Great! Even better! Our chances are above the limits! Let's win this, guys!
all: FOR SLYTHERIN!

Flint massaged my shoulders briefly, ruffled my hair, then with a champion chant, we went together to begin the match.
Cold November days...brr...I'm not too fond of this weather...but at least hanging out with Hermione, Harry and Ron is fun...even outside. Harry was reading "Quidditch through the ages"...until Snape came and confiscated the book, using some lame excuse. Harry went after him, asking for his book back, but when he came back, he kept saying that Snape is the one who wanted to steal whatever it is that the 3-headed dog guards. Way to go, genius...

me: He wouldn't...
Hermione: I know he's not very nice, but he wouldn't try and steal something Dumbledore was keeping safe.
Ron: Honestly, Hermione, you think all teachers are saints or something? I'm with Harry. I wouldn't put anything past Snape. But what's he after? What's that dog guarding?
me: That's none of our business. We should stop meddling in Dumbledore's problems.
Hermione: See? She's right! Now Harry, you go and relax. You need all your strength for tomorrow. You too, Raven. You both need it.

We said our goodbyes and went back to our common rooms. Inside the Slytherin CR people weren't too stressed. Everyone was confident we'll win, just because they always win. I... wouldn't put my trust in that, really...
I mean, it's obvious! It's Harry Potter on the other team! And who am I? Nobody.
Just then, Marcus came near me, with the rest of the team, Jessie and Emma, cheering and acting like they won already. It's making me sick.
They were trying to get me to celebrate and have fun with them. No thanks. I'd rather not.

Jessie: Loosen up a bit, come on!
Emma: We'll win! Chillax!
Marcus: We have the best team anyways, don't worry! Just catch the snitch and that's it.
Draco: Saint Potter stands no chance!

I was getting overwhelmed by all this stress put on me. Basically, everyone's expecting me to catch the damn snitch while they chill? Haha...
Well... all this pressure... made me snap.

me: LEAVE ME ALONE! STOP CELEBRATING SOMETHING THAT HASN'T HAPPENED!

With that, I pushed Marcus and Draco out of my way and went straight outside, back in the autumn cold. Great thinking, Raven, damn you, little genius!
At least I can cool off... Hopefully... And not freeze to death, metaphorically speaking.
I mean... The dark calms me, and it's cold, so I get quite numb and chilly, so I can freshen up my mind.
...
Okay that sounded weird.
I slid down the big tree, in front of the Black Lake, leaning my head on it, as I closed my eyes and took some deep breathes, trying to fill my lungs with the cold, fresh air. The only thing you could hear was the harmony music of the crickets, toads, and occasionally, the soft waves formed by a fish that would move too close to the surface. It's enchanting, really. This tree... is said to be marked as the "property" of the Marauders. A.K.A. the biggest pranksters in Hogwarts history. Honestly, I'd have loved to meet them, or maybe prank with them... but I suppose I could just stick to pranking with the twins, from time to time. Staying here like this is so calming that I feel like all my worries went away. No more Quidditch, no more trap-door treasure chest, or Cerberus, nor annoying people... nope. Nothing. Just me and the chill nature.

I felt like I was inside a fairytale, but the charm was soon broken when I realized someone was besides me, disturbing the peace with their sole presence. And that someone was none other than the nicest snake ever.

Draco: Enjoying the night, Black?
me: Well guessed.
Draco: What are you doing here, all alone?
me: Trying to relax.
Draco: Because of all the pressure?
me: Everyone in the CR, including you, kept putting that pressure on me about tomorrow. Celebrating like a bunch of idiots, saying we will win because I will catch the snitch. With everyone yelling and cheering, I felt... like I'd pass out there. Do you have any idea how much I wanted to die there?
Draco: I suppose it was kind of too exaggerated?
me: You guess?
Draco: *shrugs* I know we will win. Saint Potter won't know what hit him. You worked too hard not to succeed.
me: That's exactly the thing I was trying to run away from! You guys don't KNOW anything! That's exactly MY problem! Harry WILL catch the snitch! I know it already! I had a dream last night!
Draco: Dreams are just dreams though. Milliseconds of vivid imagination and fantasy. You dreamt what your subconscious knows stressed you the most these days.
me: Wh-what?
Draco: *glancing at me* Dreams sometimes have a meaning, but that is hardly ever. You have been stressing yourself with this match for weeks. And since you're a pessimist, your brain is used to bringing yourself down. Need I say more, or is your idiotic self too stupid to comprehend even the simplest of facts?

Woaw... I never knew Draco was indeed so smart. I mean, he and I are tied as the first in our house. Our grades are the best among Slytherins, but among 1st graders, he's the third. Just after me and Hermione. But grades don't define our intelligence, hence, him talking so easily about dreams fascinated me.

me: I know and I understood what you said. It's just... I don't particularly dream too often, but when I do, some details come true. Sometimes, even the whole main idea. That is what I'm scared of. They seem like... prophetic dreams. Also... I'm more of a realist, not a pessimist.
Draco: I want to see the day a 'realist' as you say, will see the bright side of the situation too.
me: But... That's exactly the point. You don't see the dark side, nor the bright one. You see the
Draco: How about we make a bet.
me: I don't really like bets...
Draco: Just hear me out.
me: Fine...
Draco: If we win the game, then I win the bet. If we lose, then you win.
me: What's the catch?
Draco: *smirks* Glad you asked. The loser gets to buy the winner something. What do you say?
me: I refuse.
Draco: What?! Why?!
me: Because, since I'm 90% sure I will win, then you will have to buy me something and I refuse to see anyone wasting their money on me. Not that it ever happened, with the exception of Snape bringing me here, and the broom... but that's besides the point. Nevertheless, if by any chance, the 10% happens to become true, then I will have to buy you something. Of course, that wouldn't be a problem... if I, in fact, happened to actually DO posses any monetary means. Hence, my incapability of finishing my side of the bet.
Draco: *sighs* Whatever. We should get back to the CR before we get busted and possibly earn detention too.
me: *worried look* That's exactly what I need...

We went back to the CR in silence, slowly and stealthily, not to be spotted by anyone, and successfully got inside. Saying our good-nights, we went to our rooms like nothing happened, until I hear his last words, before a door slammed shut.
"Good luck, Black. You won't need it though".

Getting inside the bed, I try to relax—what wasn't what one could call "fairly easy", since my mind kept flying in different directions. All these miracles that have been happening so far... Now, all I can hope for is... luck.

The next day, I couldn't drink, eat or talk. Nothing.
I was too scared.
I got my broom, changed in my Quidditch gear and went to the Slytherin Quidditch room, to get ready.
Marcus gave an encouraging speech and... we took off.

~Current time~

Everyone started flying around, marking goals and what not. I and Harry were watching the game, scanning around the pitch to find the snitch. Where IS that little damn thing?!

**THERE IT IS!**

I took off as fast as I could, Harry following me. Seriously how fast does this sneaky jerk go?!
Oh... Now I get why the Slytherin team is so hated... They play dirty... And their keeper is down... Merlin, no...
Problem is that just like that, like a snapping of fingers, my broom went cray cray, as if it had a mind of its own, and wouldn't listen to my commands anymore. It... It's like an untamed angry bull at a rodeo! Wha— what do I do now?! If this continues, I might fall! I'm already getting dizzy!
While trying to control the troublesome broom that had spasms, I noticed, for a split of second, that Harry has the same problem as I do. Coincidence? I THINK NOT! But who'd be mad enough to curse BOTH seekers of a Quidditch match?! That doesn't make ANY sense! Especially with every teacher watching.

Just as I was about to fall off, I managed to take hold of the handle and then the spasms stopped, so I managed to get back on the broom and continued in the Snitch-search, with Harry on my tail. The Snitch was going dangerously fast VERY close to the ground, but neither of us would back down.

Fortunately, we both managed to get up in time. I slowly started getting up on my broom, trying to reach closer and closer to the Snitch, same as Harry but... problem is...

**HE FELL**

And somehow, while he was falling, he managed to make me fall off the broom too, by knocking over mine, so we somehow started tumbling on the ground like Humpty Dumpty...

We both got up but he... looked like he's about to vomit...?

**me:** Are you feeling okay...?

He had a sick look on his face, but then, he... spit the Snitch?!... WHOAA!! That was bloody AWESOME!

**me:** *hugs him* Congrats, Harry! Great job!

**Harry:** Rather said SICK job...

Everyone started congratulating and cheering for the Harry and the Gryffindors... with the exception of the Slytherins... Oh well... hope I won't get blamed for it...

I know for certain that in that night, the Gryffindor Tower was VERY loud with their cheers, while the Slytherin Dungeon was... quiet... dangerously quiet...

So, I did what any sane person would.

**CELEBRATE WITH THE LIONS!**

And it was fun!

Sneaking into a foreign CR, disguised as a Gryffindor proved to be quite the mischief my group pulled~.

Well... more like hanging out with Hermione cause I was too shy to celebrate and I felt quite out of place there... BUT I think it wasn't bad. Everyone was very nice and cheerful, and the drinks & snacks were ON POINT! Gotta tickle the pear~.

Now, my only worry is not to get killed by my own house for fraternizing with the "enemies". However, that is a worry for the next day, not now.

Suddenly, the ginger twins came in front of me with huge mischievous grins on their faces.

**Fred:** Hey Raven-

**George:** Have a moment?

**me:** I believe I have the whole night.

**Fred:** *smirks* Perfect!

**George:** How about we play a game?

**me:** Enlighten me~

**Fred:** If you can tell us apart, we will give you a certain privilege.

**me:** Oh? And what privilege are you talking about?
George: Win, and you will see.
me: Fine then. Fred is on the left. George on the right.

They were both quite shocked. Maybe because I guessed so easily, or because I, too, wore a mischievous smirk, unusual trade mark of mine.

Fred: How did you---?
George: Even our mother mistakes us!
me: Do you really want to know how?
them: Yes!
me: Well..... Too bad. One never reveals their secrets.
them: Oh come on!
me: Maybe with other occasion. Also, I am eager to find out more about my prize.

They sighed and lead me to a secret place where nobody could find us. Then, they took out a dusty old looking parchment and unfolded it. It can't be...!

Fred: This, my dear, is the--
me: The Marauder's Map! Where did you find it?!
George: Snooped it out of Filch's drawer.
me: Wicked! No WONDER you're always so sneaky! This is a miracle, I'm telling you!
Fred: Exactly! And, we are going to share it with you.
me: Ahhh, thank you so much! This is amazing! Holy cheese, this is unironically awesome!

They were chuckling at my enthusiasm, but I bare no mind. My thoughts were full of pranking ideas.

Fred: Who would you want to be your first victim, princess?
me: *smirks* Sssssssssssnivellussssssss
George: *chuckles* You got a tough one.
me: I will take it as a challenge.
Even after the night of the Green Defeat, most of the snakes are still bitter about it, yet my problem isn't that. My problem is that I have no idea where and how to buy Christmas presents for my friends. Which is quite an inconvenience really...

In the meantime, I, Harry, Ron, Hermione and Hagrid were walking around the grounds, talking about the Quidditch incident.

Hagrid: Nonsense! Why would Snape put a curse on Harry's and Raven's broom?!
Harry: Who knows? Why'd he want to get past the 3-headed dog on Halloween?
Hagrid: Who told you about Fluffy?
me: Fluffy?
Hermione: That thing has a name?!
Hagrid: Of course he's got a name, he's mine! I got it from a fellow in a pub. Lend it to Dumbledore to guard the..
Harry: Yes?
me: You can't shut up, can you?
Hagrid: Shouldn't have said that... NO MORE QUESTIONS! Just don't ask any more questions! It's top secret, that is.
Harry: But Hagrid! Whatever Fluffy's guarding, Snape is trying to steal it!
Hagrid: Cobswalthe. Snape's a Hogwarts teacher.
Hermione: Hogwarts teacher or not, I know a hex when I see one. I read all about them. You've got to keep eye contact. And Snape wasn't blinking.
Harry: Exactly.
Hagrid: Now you listen to me. All 4 of you. You're meddling in things that aren't meant to be meddled in. It's dangerous. What that dog is guarding is strictly between professor Dumbledore and Nicholas Flamel.
me: Nicholas Flamel...?

That name sounds so familiar... but from where?

Hagrid: I shouldn't have said that... I should not have said that...

With that, Hagrid left with remorse and we kept asking each other who IS this mysterious person?

~Christmas Break~

The Hogwarts staff was preparing the decoration for Christmas everywhere, the trees were full of gorgeous lights and ornaments... wait... did I die and end up in another utopic parallel universe? Because THIS is one surreal miracle!

Most of the students were preparing to leave back home to spend the holiday with their loved ones, which, for me and Harry, meant finally a bit of silence in the castle. I said my goodbyes to Jessie and Emma, then left to the great hall, to meet with Harry and... Ron? Playing chess? And Hermione is there too, with her luggage. Hmm... Am I missing something?

Apparently, Ron's parents are going to Romania to visit his older brother Charlie, who's studying dragons, and since all 3 of us will be here, Hermione told us to search in the Restricted Section
too, and left, wishing us a "Happy Christmas".

As I was watching Harry being TOTALLY beaten up by Ron in Wizards Chess, I hear someone calling for me, with the usual, patronising "Hey, Black!". I look up and see my blond friend waving me over, his luggage being carried by the other 2 buffons he's always with. Now that's the kind of manipulation I'd want to be able to put in practice too. I go to him, as he makes Crabbe and Goyle leave—most likely to the train—and looks at me.

Draco: See you after holiday.
me: Yeah... See you soon. Happy Christmas, Draco. Hope you have a great holiday.

I said with a smile, hugging him. To my surprise, he awkwardly hugged me too and rubbed my back a bit. With that, he said his farewells, and left, but just like that, he looked back at me with his usual smirk and said "You still won the bet", leaving me dumbfounded, and yelling after him.

Nope. He only laughed.
Oh well... guess I will see what he means by that later.
I looked around and saw that Professor McGonagall wasn't there. Perfect. That means she must be in her office. THERE WE GO!
I knocked softly on the door and go inside as I hear her voice.

me: Excuse me, professor... may I ask you something?
McGonagall: What is it, miss Black?
me: Well... First of all... I wanted to help around decorating the castle. It's well... my first actually Christmas celebrated and... it already looks amazing... and the atmosphere of happiness is surrounding everything and...

McGonagall had a happy/motherly look on her face while hearing me talk.

McGonagall: I will talk to professor Flitwick about this, so you can do it together.
me: Thank you so much, professor!
McGonagall: You're welcome. Now, anything else?
me: Well... how do I get some money? I... want to buy my friends Christmas gifts and I have no idea how and... I don't want to be that one friend who can't give my friends anything...

McGonagall had a side mischievous smirk, stood up and came towards me, putting a hand on my shoulder.

McGonagall: Did you think your parents left you alone in this world, without any money?
me: I... I do? What?! Where?! How?!
McGonagall: But of course, miss Black. Come on, we have to go to Diagon Alley, to Gringotts. Go get dressed and meet me in the courtyard in 5.
me: YES, M'AM, YES!

Being very excited, I run in my room, get dressed and run outside, near professor McGonagall. We continue to walk ahead, surprisingly, chatting about school, my mum, the marauders, and so on, until we finished our way to Hogsmead, from where she proceeded in apparating us in front of the great Gringotts Bank.

Inside was HUGE and... very silent. And full of goblins. Oh well. Quite intimidating, might I say.
McGonagall pulled out a cool black key from her sleeve and handed it to the goblin, as we went on a weird ride to this certain vault, from where I took some coins from it and we left.

**McGonagall:** Now, the best place to find gifts is, of course, Hogsmead!
**me:** Sounds pretty neat.
**McGonagall:** Very much so.

We appear back in Hogsmead, as she helps me out with picking the gifts... but I don't know what to give Draco, the boy who was born with everything. That is, until I found it. The *hopefully* perfect gift for him. This ring is **EXACTLY** like the one from my favourite movie! I can't believe it! It's fantastic!

Apparently, McGonagall had to do her Christmas shopping too, so I gave her a "reason" to do it earlier and get over with it. Now, we're in the Three Broomsticks, and McGonagall ordered us both 2 shots of Fire Whiskey. As our "**dirty little secret**". As my first time drinking alcohol, I gotta say the taste is not THAT spectacular, like a nice smoothie, but also, not THAT bad either. I... could get used to it. Or not. Probably not. It's too bitter for my tastes. But spending time like this with McGonagall made me wonder if this is what it's like having a mother.

----

The next day, I woke up alone, and everything was cold, dark and lonely in the Slytherin CR. Really, nobody was here. Literally nobody. I didn't feel the motivation to get out of bed anymore... I really only want to stay in bed all day, be lazy, catch up on studies... but I'm hungry. Dammit, life, ruining my sloth plans. I didn't bother to over-dress, but as I exit my room, I see that the Slytherin Christmas tree, full of Green and Silver decorations, had presents under it. Wait..... **I HAVE PRESENTS?!** They... couldn't be someone else's, right? No, I have to check! It's... too much!

This thrilling feeling made me sit down in front of the tree and examine all the gifts, how neatly they were wrapped, and how on all of them it was **MY** name. Mine. One was from Hermione, and she gave me Stephen King book, Doctor Sleep. Apparently, Ron's mum knitted me one of those weird sweaters, with a Grey R on the green sweater, since I'm a Slytherin. Even McGonagall gave me something! So glad I got her a brooch now... It was an advanced Transfiguration book, and she wrote on the first page

"**Dear Miss Black**
*I know you will do great in your journey of becoming a Healer, despite what everyone says. Study heard, but also have fun.*
**Merry Christmas,**
**Minerva McGonagall.**"

This is the sweetest thing ever, I might cry. Now, I have 2 motherly figures. What could I ask more from life?!
From Fred and George I got some pranking supplies from Zonko's. Well... the card itself was a prank, cause it exploded after I read it... but oh well~.
From Jesse, I got a bunch of sweets, and Emma gave me 3 books on which it was written
"**Homestuck**" Well, this looks like fun?
And...this little green box with a silver bow on it?

"Merry Christmas, Black"

Is this what he meant by "You still won the bet"? Maybe, maybe not? I don't care. This is still very sweet.

Opening it, I see a gorgeous green necklace with a silver snake. So Slytherin, but it's truly gorgeous. I... really don't know what to say. I guess wearing it everyday and hugging him when I see him next will be a fair thank you? This must have cost him a fortune... Merlin, Draco... you're impossible...

What was weird though, was the letter which was on the last present.

"You are like your mother, so you have to learn how to use your "other" powers too. She would have given it to you in person, but given the circumstances, I was the one with the safe keeping. Have fun"

Inside the wrappings, a book about "Metamorphmagi" was sitting there.

Metamorphmagus... what IS that? I guess I'll give it a read tonight.

Me getting out of bed proved the be one of the few right decisions I could ever take. Me, I'm proud.

Everything went normally, but at night, I and Harry decided to go in the Restricted Section, using his Invisibility cloak, and look for information regarding that mysterious Nicholas Flamel. This task proved quite difficult, especially since, when we were looking around, Harry just HAD to take a HOWLING BOOK which made a LOT of noise, causing Filch to come in OUR direction, and as we were fleeing, Harry JUST HAD to knock over the damn LAMP. Ya know, cause why not...?

Being the Stealth Masters we were, we managed to get past BOTH Filch AND his cat, only to stumble in another room and see Snape being aggressive with Quirell, over "loyalties". Also, I suspect that Snape knows there is something weird going on around. That, or maybe he heard Harry's loud breathing. I believe both. Moreover, Filch came, telling Snape there were students out of bed, and showed him the broken lamp. Great work, Potter.

BUT at least we managed to get out of there safely! On our way though, we find a big, luxurious mirror, which Harry slowly approached in awe, touching it, saying completely enchanted "Mum? Dad?".

What IS he talking about? He held a face full of nostalgia, sorrow and disappointment, but then he ran off somewhere.

I look above and see the writing "Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi". Wait... mirrored, it'd be "Is how not your face but your hearts desire".

I looked at the mirror, expecting to see my reflection, but I was dead wrong. The same gorgeous long brunette girl with a mischievous glint in her shining forest green eyes, and a natural pranking smirk on her face, holding hands with a tall, slim young brunette man, with quite long, shaggy hair, a handsome prince-charming face, and the same mischievous smirk, was looking at me. Are this... my parents? They are absolutely gorgeous and amazing.

How was I blessed with such amazing parents, only to have to lose them and never see them again?! Hell, I don't even know the name of my father! Nobody EVER wanted to tell me his name, like he's some kind of sociopath! I know about Voldemort, before I know my daddy's name? How is that normal in any way?

That's blasphemy!
I didn't even realize I was crying, until I see mummy's face go shocked, then turn into sadness, and daddy sitting on his knees in front of me, putting his hand where my face was. That's right. I started a full sob session, falling to my knees, pressing my forehead on the mirror, and my fists on it, trying in vain to get next to them. I felt like killing someone, because they are not with me, yet I can see them, so close—.

I just want someone to hug me tightly and feel the warmth. But not like how I hug Hermione, Jessie or Emma, but how mummy or daddy would hug me. Life is cruel... Damn Voldemort... ruining lives... leaving scars...

I raised my head to look at them again, making sure the image will remain printed in my mind for centuries. They were reassuringly smiling at me, trying to make me grin, through my tears, like any parents would. How much I'd have needed them...

But just as that, I heard some loud running noises, see Harry dragging Ron to the mirror, and I moved from there, having to leave my parents behind once again. Harry really thought Ron would see his parents, poor dear. But he was so wrong. Instead, Ron saw his future self, as a Headboy, with the house cup in his hands. Harry was so confused... but I could barely hold myself to appear strong, since I knew I wouldn't be able to actually speak. My voice would crack and I'd start sobbing again.

After Ron left, I remained with Harry alone, once again, as he kept staying in front of the mirror, but I can't blame him, although... I too... wanted to see them again. Then, Dumbledore came, telling us the "REAL" meaning of the mirror, which, if you were smart enough to read above, you'd have figured it out by yourself. Then, he told us not to come here, 'cause our desire in seeing our parents would turn into a sick obsession, and we'd lose our minds, like many others before us. Most likely, he's right, but I'd still want to get a shot at seeing them. At least one more time. Let's just say, that after Dumbledore and Harry left, I finally got the chance to spend quality time with my parents. The one and only chance I'd ever get.

I told them everything that has been happening to me, from A to Z. The orphanage, Snape coming to get me, reading the letter, buying the stuff, the wand incident, the new pets, getting sorted into Slytherin, about Jessie and Emma, the teachers, the prank, the twins, about Draco, Harry, Ron and Hermione, about today and yesterday...

When I told them I was a Slytherin, mum started jumping in glee, while dad facepalmed. Seems like she won the bet?

Most likely.

*Oh daddy... you have to learn from her more.*

Maybe if they were here with me, not dead, then I'd have been more bubbly, like her, not a shy nitwit. Maybe I'd have felt more smart and beautiful. Maybe I'd have been a charmer, like daddy. Maybe... so many possibilities, it's making my head spin. Oh man, how much I'd long for this night to rewind, so I could talk to them once again...
Oh, just who would have thought that today I'd say Double Ds as not the great Daryl Dixon, but as Dragons and Detention?!

As an amazing Spring day finally arrived, wasting our time in the library was the best option. Why? Because I and Hermione managed to FINALLY find out the needed information about Nicholas Flamel, slamming the gianormus book on the table in front of Ron and Harry, complaining how stupid we were. He is the only known maker of the Philosopher's Stone. NOW that explains a lot!

them: The WHAT!?
Hermione: Honestly, don't you two READ?!
me: Doubt they ever learnt how to...
Hermione: The philosopher's stone is a legendary substance with astonishing powers. It will transform any metal into pure gold and produces the elixir of life and will make one immortal.
Ron: Immortal?
me: *rolls eyes* It means you never die.
Ron: I know what it means!
Harry: Shh!
Hermione: The only stone currently in existence belongs to mister Nicholas Flamel the alchemist, who last year celebrated his 665th birthday.
me: *whistle* One more year to go, and he'll be greeted as a king in hell.

At night we decided to go visit Hagrid and discuss with him more about the Stone, so we made our way to the Hut, and just as he was about to close the door in our faces, we all said together how we are aware of the existence of the Philosopher's Stone, making him let out a low "oh" of disbelief. Standing on the huge armchairs, Harry started saying how Snape WAS going after the stone. I really don't KNOW for certain if it IS him, but I can't really doubt one of Dumbledore's trusted men, can I?

Hagrid told us how Snape was one of the ones protecting the Stone, which was obvious indeed. Spells, enchantments, challenges, quick wits and so on...

Also, he mentioned how the only people who DID know how to get past Fluffy were him and Dumbledore... not surprised.
Just as he said that, a strange noise was heard, and Hagrid took a big... boiling egg from the cauldron above the fire?! Ergh... and put it on the table...? Apparently... it's a dragon egg?! He won it in a pub?!

I don't know if I should be surprised or not. I mean.. Wizard word or not... this still is quite unusual...

AND IT HATCHED

A very cute baby dragon came out of it. It is certainly bigger than my cat...
"Norwegian Ridgeback" is apparently the breed of this cute little fellow. Everything was sweet and adorable, until Norbert coughed fire on Hagrid's beard, which was quite hilarious if you ask me. But... at the window, a certain blond haired boy was watching curiously...

Draco Malfoy.

We ran after him but... he got to McGonagall... and she gave all 5 of us detention WITH Hagrid in the Forbidden Forest... and We got 100 points off, while they got 150 points off... dammit... Harsh, McGonagall is... but she's right...

When we got to to Hagrid, he was still moping around over Norbert being taken away, and given to Romania where most of the dragons stay. What can I say, I was still pissed at Draco for busting us... and when he started talking like a scaredy cat about the "horrors" hidden in the FF, werewolves and such, I kinda snapped...

Guess I didn't sleep enough... again...

me: Listen, Malfoy. See that? It's the moon. Do you see its shape? NOT full. Know what it means? NO werewolf's gonna bite your sorry little head off, got it? Now stop whining around like a little scaredy cat and let's go! Jeez, even my cat is braver than you!

I flipped my hair in a sassy and annoyed matter, leaving him speechless with my OOC behaviour, as I started petting Lich's head. Damn cat decided to show some affection NOW by not getting off my shoulders. She just... stands there like a scarf. Of well, I don't mind, she's quite warm. After some time, we found a puddle of silver substance, which Hagrid confirmed to be Unicorn blood. But... who would ever harm such a sweet and pure creature?! That is just pure evil! Oh... I have some ideas who might... but... I don't really want to think about it.

After this, Hagrid decided to split us up. He would go with Hermione and Ron, whilst I, with Draco, Harry and Fang the Coward. Yay. Of course he just HAD to complain the whole time. Actually, I don't think I mind too much since the eerie atmosphere surrounding us WAS literally killer. More or less because I was waiting from second to second to see Voldemort popping out of nowhere.

me: Do you want me to hold your hand so you'll stop complaining about a forest at night? Seriously, we won't get harmed.

Draco: Maybe?

I looked back at him, taken aback by his answer and scared-charming voice. I... ergh..... ERGH?! What am I supposed to do now?! I was joking, you know?! I didn't expect HIM of ALL people to actually go ALONG with it! I thought he'd be too cocky, scoff at me, and go ahead! That's... what I'd have done at least... URGH! People!

He came close to me and took the necklace in his hand, stroking it softly, wearing that slight smug smirk. He was smooth af, even if he was just as afraid.


me: *looks away* Oh, shut it.

I took him by the wrist and proceeded in dragging him after me, as I walked faster, passing a chuckling Harry. We walked like this, until we got to a weird cloaked thing towering over a dead
unicorn, drinking its blood and growling at us. We were all shocked and stunned, not knowing what to do. That is... Until the thing got up and started floating towards us, that I pushed Draco and Harry to run. Draco started screaming and running away which... is possibly the sanest decision that I and Harry SHOULD have made too. But nope. Instead, we were literally rooted on the ground, while that thing was making its way to us, and we were way too preoccupied by the burning/stinging scars! Urgh.. Outrageous!

We kept stumbling behind us blindly, until Harry tripped on a root and pulled me down along with him, that's when I was awaiting my demise. Fortunately, it never came! Because-who'd have thought-a centaur jumped over us, scaring the monster away. Wizard Word. Never be surprised of anything..

After it made the monster flee, it slowly came towards us, speaking.

**centaur:** Harry Potter. Raven Black. You must leave. There are many dangerous creatures here. The forest is not safe at this time.

**Harry:** What was that thing you saved us from?

**centaur:** A terrible creature. It's a terrible crime to slay an unicorn. Drinking the blood of one will keep you alive even if you are inches away from death. But at a terrible price. If you slay something so pure... the moment the blood touches your lips, you will have a half life. A cursed life.

**Harry:** Who'd want such a life?

**Centaur:** Can you think of no one?

**me:** Voldemort.

**Harry:** Wait... Do you mean to say that... the thing that killed the unicorn... and drank its blood... was... Voldemort?!

**centaur:** Do you know what's hidden in the school at this moment, Mister Potter? Miss Black? **me + Harry:** The Philosopher's Stone!

**Hermione:** Raven! Harry!

Oh, here they finally arrived.

**Hagrid:** Hello Firenze. You okay there, Harry? Raven?

Then Firenze told us he will leave, because we are safe, and we then decided to go back to the castle, after Hagrid looked at the corpse of the poor unicorn.

What a night...

Going with Draco to the CR in complete silence wasn't that bad. But apparently, he actually tried talking to me, yet I was too absorbed in my own thoughts to hear him.

**Draco:** *shaking me slightly* Are you ignoring me?!

**me:** *going back to reality* Ha? Wha? What happened?!

**Draco:** Egh...? I was trying to talk to you?

**me:** Were you? I apologize. I was not paying attention to my surroundings... I was... too absorbed in my own thoughts.

**Draco:** Thinking of...?

**me:** What Firenze the centaur said.
Draco: And that is...?
me: Well, after you did the best choice - no sarcasm here - in running away and... possibly wetting your pants, the thing came towards us, planning to attack us. And then the centaur came soo... you literally have no idea about our talk. But I'll keep it short.
Draco: Enlighten me.
me: It was Voldemort.
Draco: What?!
me: That thing was Voldemort.
Draco: That's such a stupid idea!
me: Is it, really?
Draco: Yes! You're just being silly listening to a creature that's half HORSE.
me: Yeah, and we evolved from euglenas. What's your point?
Draco: Don't start talking about plants with me!
me: Then you stop talking about animals with me.
Draco: *sighs exasperated* It couldn't have been Voldemort, okay? He DISAPPEARED!
me: *reveals scar on neck* Do you see this? I got this from HIM. Do you know what happens when he's around me? It HURTS.
Draco: Maybe...
me: No. No maybe. No Perhaps. No possibly. Nothing. Do you know around WHO was my scar hurting?
Draco: who...?
me: QUIRRELL!
Draco: That stuttering idiot?
me: Precisely him.
Draco: That's... ergmm... peculiar.
me: Or stupid. Yeah I know. Sounds stupid.
Draco: I didn't...!
me: Thanks. I appreciate it.

I just literally talking over him, feeling a bit scared and anxious over that piece of information, most likely making him feel very uncomfortable...
Just as we said the password and were about to go to our rooms, I call out for him, go near him, and hugged him tightly.

me: I'm sorry...
Draco: *confused* For what?
me: Talking over you. Making you feel uncomfortable. Not thanking you properly...
Draco: *rolls eyes* *pats my head* You worry too much, Black. Now go sleep.
me: Good night, Draco.
Draco: Night... By the way...
me: Yes?
Draco: Green suits you.

Was the last thing he said before he entered his room. Guess... I should wear the necklace more often...

The next day, we were frantically walking towards Hagrid, discussing theories in our heads, how it was a weird coincidence that Hagrid WANTED a dragon and SOMEHOW this mysterious person
shows up WITH a dragon egg...until...We hear him play the flute and run to him. He told us how this hooded stranger was VERY interested in the creatures he has been looking after, especially Fluffy... and Hagrid just had to run his mouth and tell him, the way to calm the Cerberus was simple.

~Music~

We gasped and quickly ran to McGonagall, requesting to talk to Dumbledore, and the COINCIDENCE made that HE was AWAY. She said he was away on Ministry business. How convenient.
3 guesses when is the stone going to be stolen? TONIGHT.
Okay.Tonight is the night.
The night when we are going to go through the trapdoor.So exciting!
If I don't make it out alive...ergh.
Well I don't know.I guess I'll just be dead.
**OH WELL.Life goes on.**

I transform myself to look like the Head Girl of my house and go to the third corridor,where our
meeting spot was,shapeshifting myself back.
Who knew that I'd actually inherit mum's metamorphmagus genes?
Also-
Who knew that your eye colour randomly changing its colour means I'm a metamorphmagus?
Clearly I had no idea.Good thing I received that book on Christmas from that mysterious person.I
suspect Dumbledore.Or McGonagall.Definitely one of them.
Anyways-

Just as I was waiting and my mind was totally not on this planet,I get pulled by 2 hands,under
a...oh.Harry's invisibility cloak.Okay that was smart.
We greet each other in shushed voices and go in the forbidden door,which held a...playing magical
harp and a sleeping Fluffy.
Sweet.
Moving its paw,we proceeded in opening the trapdoor and one by one,we dropped through
this...ergh...tunnel...right into this amazing plant called "The Devil's Snare".
But urgh...funny thing...this Devil's Snare is such a sweet and inoffensive plant that its tentacles
were only hugging us to...
DEATH.
**SUFFOCATION!**

**Hormone:**Shut up!I'm trying to remember how to kill it!
**Harry:**Well hurry up!I can't breathe!
**Hormone:**Devil's Snare, Devil's Snare .. . what did Professor Sprout say? — it likes the dark
and the damp-
**Harry:**So light a fire!
**Hermione:**Well yes of course...but..there's no wood!
**Ron:**furiously*HAVE YOU GONE MAD?!ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?!**
**Hermione:**Right...
**me:**Incendio!

With this,all of us were dropped to the ground,being able to finally breathe properly.

**Harry:**Lucky you pay attention in Herbology,Hermione.
**Ron:**Yeah...and lucky Harry doesn't lose his head in a crisis — there's no wood...!Honestly!
**Harry:**This way-

We all went in that said direction,through dark,scary rooms,fearing what our next challenge would
be,until a flapping noise could be heard in the distance.
Ron: Can you hear that? Do you think it's a ghost?
me: Most likely a winged creature.
Harry: There's light ahead. I can see something moving.

In this said room, there was light and a LOT of flying things... they are... keys? Or better~! Keys with wings. AND lemme guess! We will need a SPECIFIC key to open the door for the next challenge. We tried the Alohomora charm on the door, but with no success.

Then, we decided that, with the broom from the room, Harry has to get a silver key. We spotted it, and I tried the Accio charm.
Well... it was worth a shot...
It took a while for him to get the key, because of all the other keys around, being nuisances, but then, he caught it, came to us, unlocked the door, and the poor key went flying again, at a slower pace. Poor key... in the next room... We had to play real-life sized WIZARD chess. As in, that totally destructive chess.
We were the Black team so... white starts first.
Ron went to the Knight, Harry took the place of the bishop, Hermione the tower and I the queen. Sweet jegus, why me...
Ron started telling us what to do, and in the end... he had to sacrifice himself, despite all our protests. At least he'll live... hopefully...
As the White King threw his crown at our feet, the White Team parted, so we could pass, having to leave Ron behind, all unconscious, to take care of himself. No harm will come in his way, at least.

Harry: What do you reckon is next?
Hermione: We've had Sprout's, that was the Devil's Snare; Flitwick must've put charms on the keys; McGonagall transfigured the chessmen to make them alive; that leaves Quirrell's spell, and Snape's...
me: Quirrell's will be a piece of cake. And as for Snape's... it will be a mind challenge. Totally. I'm 100% sure of this. And even more, I think... *looking at Hermione* It will be the easiest one for us.

She nodded at me with a knowing smile, then we continued ahead. A terrible stench filled our nose, and our stinging tears started to fill our eyes as we tried to run away from that room as fast as possible, going past the HUGE dead troll.
Lucky enough, in the next room, there was a table with 7 different potions. Now I get it...
We were trapped there between purple and black flames. Oh well.

The riddle said:

Danger lies before you, while safety lies behind,
Two of us will help you, whichever you would find,
One among us seven will let you move ahead,
Another will transport the drinker back instead,
Two among our number hold only nettle wine,
Three of us are killers, waiting hidden in line.
Choose, unless you wish to stay here for evermore,
To help you in your choice, we give you these clues four:

First, however slyly the poison tries to hide
You will always find some on nettle wine's left side;
Second, different are those who stand at either end,
But if you would move onward, neither is your friend;
Third, as you see clearly, all are different size,
Neither dwarf nor giant holds death in their insides;
Fourth, the second left and the second on the right
Are twins once you taste them, though different at first sight.

me: I get it. It's not difficult. Quite easy actually
Harry: What?! Really?! How so?! Won't we be stuck here forever?
Hermione: Of course not, silly. On this paper EVERYTHING we need to know is written. Now...
me: Well... this small potion will get you through the purple fire.... back from where we came... and...
Hermione: The big one will get you through the black fire. To the Stone.
Harry: But there's only enough for 2 of us...
me: Well... Hermione... you should go back... and take care of the rest.
Harry: Get back and get Ron. Grab brooms from the flying-key room, they'll get you out of the trapdoor and past Fluffy — go straight to the owlery and send Hedwig to Dumbledore, we need him. I might be able to hold Snape off for a while and Raven to stop him the rest of the time, but we're no match for him, really
Hermione: But... What if You-Know-Who is with him?
me: We were lucky once. Maybe... just maybe...? Who knows?

Her lip started to tremble and she jumped on us, hugging us tightly, as if we wouldn't see each other again... which is... possibly accurate.
She started to praise us, how he's a great wizard and I a sly witch, and so on. She was sweet and encouraging... so... thank you, Hermione. Thank you.
She took the icy cold potion, and shuddering, she left, as we continued anxiously on our "journey". We held each other's hands, trying to comfort each other, as our breathes were ragged and we were too scared to speak, thinking of all the murderous possibilities that could have awaited us.
But... on the other side of the last door... It wasn't Snape, as they though, but nor Voldemort... In fact, to Harry's surprise and well... my expectations... it was that idiot Quirrell.
How did I know?

Well, Snape would have been an obvious idea. But since Dumbledore trusts him, I doubted it was him. Also, if it wasn't him, then, by THAT night, the one being threatened by him was, in fact, Quirrell. So, that was the next obvious choice.
Guess my logic got me somewhere, for once.

Harry: *gasps* You?! Quirrell: me.
Harry: But I thought... Snape...!

His voice... he isn't stuttering anymore. A cold, sharp, harsh voice, instead, could be heard ringing throughout the room. No, not like Snape's. He still has a velvety voice. The dark voice you'd like to hear. HIS voice, however, is... scary, threatening... unwelcoming and taunting.

Quirrell: Severus? Yes, Severus does seem the type, doesn't he? So useful to have him swooping
around like an over-grown bat. Next to him, who would suspect p-p-poor, st-stuttering P-Professor Quirrell?
Harry: But Snape tried to kill us!
Quirrell: No, no, no. I tried to kill you. Your friend Miss Granger acci-dentally knocked me over as she rushed to set fire to Snape at that Quidditch match. She broke my eye contact with you. Another few seconds and I'd have got you off that broom. I'd have managed it before then if Snape hadn't been muttering a countercurse, trying to save you.
Harry: *mumbling* Raven was right...
me: So what are you trying to do now? Get author's rights for trying to kill us or what? We get it, you're working with Voldemort, I knew it all along.
Quirrell: *smirking* How, may I ask?
me: When Snape threatened you, just as Filch came with a broken lamp from the Restricted Section. That was us there. We were right next to you, just, invisible. I trust Snape. He's the Head of my house. And if he was suspecting you, then I'd naturally suspect you too.
Quirrell: Smart, Black. Very smart. You should learn, Potter.
Harry: Snape tried to save us?
Quirrell: Of course. Why do you think he wanted to referee your next match? He was trying to make sure I didn't do it again. Funny, really . . . he needn't have bothered. I couldn't do anything with Dumbledore watching. All the other teachers thought Snape was trying to stop Gryffindor from winning, he did make himself unpopular. . . and what a waste of time, when after all that, I'm going to kill you tonight.

As he said that, Quirrell snapped his fingers. Ropes sprang out of thin air and wrapped themselves tightly around Harry and I.

Quirrell: You're too nosy to live, Potter, Black. Scurrying around the school on Halloween like that, for all I knew you'd seen me coming to look at what was guarding the Stone.
Harry: You let the troll in?
me: Could it be more obvious than that...?
Quirrell: Certainly. I have a special gift with trolls — you must have seen what I did to the one in the chamber back there? Unfortunately, while everyone else was running around looking for it, Snape, who already suspected me, he went straight to the third floor to head me off — and not only did my troll fail to beat you to death, that three-headed dog didn't even manage to bite Snape's leg off properly. Now, wait quietly, Potter. I need to examine this interesting mirror.

There, behind Quirrell, the great Mirror of Erised stood proudly.

Quirrell: What are your secrets? What DID Dumbledore do to you? This mirror is the key to finding the Stone, Trust Dumbledore to come up with something like this... but he's in London... I'll be far away by the time he gets back...

A diversion... I need to create diversions and get out of the ropes' grasps, so I can do SOMETHING.

Harry: I saw you and Snape in the forest
Quirrell: Yes. He was on to me by that time, trying to find out how far I'd got. He suspected me all along. Tried to frighten me — as though he could, when I had Lord Voldemort on my side... He had a look of lust and hunger on his face, while looking at the mirror. Seriously, that is the most perverse and weird and creepy thing I've ever seen. I see the Stone... I'm presenting
it to my master...but where is it?
Harry: But Snape always seemed to hate me so much.
Quirrell: Oh, he does, heavens, yes. He was at Hogwarts with your father, didn't you know? Both yours and Black's. They loathed each other. But he never wanted you dead
Harry: But I heard you a few days ago, sobbing — I thought Snape was threatening you.
Quirrell: *scared* Sometimes, I find it hard to follow my master's instructions — he is a great wizard and I am weak
me: You mean he was there in the classroom with you? What kind of form did he take? He obviously doesn't have a proper body, does he?
Quirrell: He is with me wherever I go, I met him when I traveled around the world. A foolish young man I was then, full of ridiculous ideas about good and evil. Lord Voldemort showed me how wrong I was. There is no good and evil, there is only power, and those too weak to seek it. . . Since then, I have served him faithfully, although I have let him down many times. He has had to be very hard on me.*shivers* He does not forgive mistakes easily. When I failed to steal the Stone from Gringotts, he was most displeased. He punished me . . . decided he would have to keep a closer watch on me...
me: How close...?
Quirrell: I don't understand?! Is the Stone... INSIDE the mirror? Do I have to break it?! How does this mirror work?! Help me, Master!

To both our horror, a creepy voice, coming from Quirrell's direction, spoke.

voice: Use the girl... or the boy...

I look at Harry and mutter a single word.
"Lie".

And just as that, Quirrell took Harry and pushed him in front of the mirror.
That's it... he did it... the stone is in his pocket... Now lie shamelessly.

Quirrell: Well?! What DO you see?!
Harry: I see myself shaking hands with Dumbledore... I... I've won the House Cup for the Gryffindor!
Quirrell cursed and shoved Harry away, but just as that, the voice spoke "He lies". Well... busted. Quirrell: Potter! Come back here and tell me the truth! What DID you see in the mirror?!
Voice: Let me speak to him. Face to face.

Oh hell no.

Quirrell: Master, you are not strong enough for this!
Voice: I am strong enough..... for this...

What? We'll see Voldemort's face now? But where?
Quirrell proceeded to strip himself of his purple turban and his back faced us... but his face too. Or better said Voldemort's face. White as chalk, glaring red eyes, and slits for nostrils.
So nice...

Voldemort: Harry Potter... Raven Black..... See what I've become? Mere shadow and vapor. I
have form only when I can share another's body...but there have always been those willing to let me into their hearts and minds. Unicorn blood has strengthened me, these past weeks...you saw faithful Quirrell drinking it for me in the forest...and once I have the Elixir of Life, I will be able to create a body of my own. Now...why don't you give me that Stone in your pocket?

*What can I do...what can I do...?!*

Voldemort: Better save your own life and join me... or you'll meet the same end as your parents. . . . Both your parents and hers died begging me for mercy.
Harry: LIAR!
me: Don't lose your cool, Harry! He's just making you be angry!
Voldemort: Smart. Sweet little Slytherin, just like I was. And yet, a pureblood like you, stays with muddbloods, half-breeds and blood traitors. You are a disgrace. But it is not your fault for being raised among filthy muggles. Sly, cunning, swift and quick-witted. Just like a true Slytherin. But I can forgive all your past behaviour, and your parents' as well, and welcome you as one of my own. You have such true potential. I can sense the murderous urge. You'd kill, even for fun if you were angry at someone. You'd do anything to achieve your goals. Ambition. All those great traits, I would love to have them. So join me. Now, or die.
me: *chuckles* Nice joke. Now, tell us. Tell us how you killed Harry's parents. Tell him, for he is not aware of it. Tell him, how you blasted his bedroom's door open, and told his mum and my mum to step aside. Tell him how, the moment you said the curse, instead of hitting us, our mothers went in its way, dying. TELL HIM! TELL HIM OF YOUR ATROCIOUS MURDERS!
Harry: What...? How...?
Voldemort: *chuckles* True... How touching... I always value bravery... Yes, boy, your parents were brave. . . I killed your father first, and he put up a courageous fight... but your mothers needn't have died... they tried trying to protect you... Now give me the Stone, unless you want them to have died in vain.
Harry: NEVER!
Voldemort: SEIZE THEM!

Just as he said that, Quirrell took a hold of both our wrists, and our scars started to cause a hellish pain on us, making us almost fall to our knees, but also, Quirrell let go of us, and stayed hunched, staring at his blistering hand. What is going on...?
Somehow, Quirrell managed to get his strength back, despite his burning hand, and pinned Harry to the ground. Both his hands were burning so bad, they melted off. He was pinning Harry with his knees, and Voldemort ordered him to kill Harry.
Not on my watch.
Just as he was about to shout the killing curse, I sprung on my feet, and jumped on Quirrell's back, burning his neck and shoulders, as Harry kept burning his face, by touching it. Voldemort was yelling around, ordering Quirrell to kill us, Quirrell was shouting in pain, for having is face blistering, Harry fell on the ground from his splitting headache, and I feel like someone's cutting my neck.
Neat.

I started shouting random spells like Rictusempra, Incendio and Bombarda, and somehow, I managed to turn both Quirrell and Voldemort to ash.
Or well... speed up the process by a little.
Seeing no more threat, I fell on my knees, in front of Harry, breathing in relief that we are both
safe, then moved the Stone from his pocket in mine, making sure it won't disappear again, and slung the arm of an unconscious Harry over my shoulder, dragging both of us back from where we came. Hopefully, Hermione would have sent the letter by now, and Dumbledore would be back already. Midway, I meet up with a rushing Dumbledore and Snape. With a weak smile, I wave to them, in a tired-happy way. Honestly, I was exhausted, but yet, the thrill and responsibility were keeping me going.

Dumbledore: Miss Black? What is going on?
me: He's dead. We killed him. And... ergh... *giving him the Stone* This little troublemaker is safe and sound. Thanks to Harry.

Dumbledore: Please do enlighten us, how did you kill him?
me: Well... I'm... not quite sure... you see... after Harry got the Stone, and Quirrell touched him, his hand started blistering. And well... that's how it kept going. We kinda... blistered him away. And after Harry passed out, I kept saying random curses to finish him off faster... I didn't want anything to happen to Harry so... I had to... I really did...!

Dumbledore: *putting a hand on my shoulder* I am aware of it and I am proud of you. All 4 of you. You did the right thing protecting what had to be protected, and also, not letting Voldemort become reanimated again. So what is troubling you?
me:... He told me to join him... he said I have all the abilities required to join him... including being a pureblood. And he said... that he'd want me... because I'd kill to achieve my objective... which I did...

Snape: He merely enumerated the traits of a Slytherin. And while most of the students don't tick all the requirements, you are one of those who do. The traits Salazar Slytherin would cherish to have in his House. The reason Voldemort recruits mostly Slytherins is because we are the most capable. Don't let him get in your head.

me: I... suppose you are right. After all, the great Merlin was, himself, a Slytherin, yet he was anything but evil.

Dumbledore: Precisely. Now, all being said, why don't you tell us all the story regarding this adventure, while we head back to the infirmary?
me: Well... it includes us breaking about... 50 rules so... as long as it doesn't mean points being taken off or us getting expelled.... *smiles* I... guess it's a nice tale to tell? Though... I quite suspect that you, Headmaster, are quite aware of everything that has been happening all along. So... some liiiittle details, being forgotten wouldn't make much of a difference, would they?

The mischievous sparkle in Dumbledore's eyes, his joyous chuckle, along with Snape's proud smirk made me grin widely and start telling them the whole story, from the very beginning.

After getting a check up from Madam Pomfrey, I had to spend the night in the infirmary, to make sure I'm better. She treated my wounds and gave me a potion to wear the mental stress and the physical exhaustion, and also, a potion to fall asleep, so I can relax. The next day, I felt fresh as a daisy, and I could go back to eat, with my friends. I suppose it was quite a shock for everyone to see me again with such a huge grin on my face. The moment I opened the door, people started to look at me, and... I wasn't even feeling anxious, self-aware, or scared!

I was... happy!

And the happiness was transformed in bliss, when Hermione, Jessie and Emma all came to hug the living daylights out of me, with watery eyes, saying how much they've missed me, and how I have to
tell them everything. We went to the Gryffindor table, and there, the Weasley twins, Lee Jordan, Neville, Dean and Seamus were all with their ears perked to hear of my tale. Obviously, the whole tale was spread among the castle VERY easily, and my proud smirk wouldn’t get off my face. That night, in the Slytherin common room. I stayed in front of the fireplace relaxing, when I felt someone staying behind me.

me: Hi Draco.
Draco: How did you know it was me?
me: Lucky guess.
Draco: Sure.
me: Anything you want?
Draco: Not particularly. How... are you?
me: I’m fine now. You?
Draco: Ergh... fine. But it's not me who saw Voldemort.
me: Fortunately.
Draco: Did he... talk to you?
me: Well... he wanted me to join him.
Draco: *gasped* What?!
me: You heard me.
Draco: Whoa... And did you accept?
me: No. But I killed Quirrell.
Draco: So the rumours are true?
me: Yep. Voldemort was on Quirrell's head. Really, quite an ugly sight. *cringes*
Draco: That's... very weird to hear.
me: Tell me about it.
Draco: Well... I'm glad you're alive.
me: Me too, really. Thank you.
Draco: Good night and take care, Black. We wouldn’t want to get less points.
me: *chuckles* You too, Draco. I couldn’t win points without your support.

~2 days later~

Harry left the hospital and now, the Great Hall is full of Slytherin flags. Apparently, we won the House Cup! Yaay!
But of course, Dumbledore couldn't NOT give us some points.

Dumbledore: First — to Mr. Ronald Weasley for the best-played game of chess Hogwarts has seen in many years, I award Gryffindor House fifty points. *loud cheers* Second — to Miss Hermione Granger... for the use of cool logic in the face of fire, I award Gryffindor House fifty points. *loud cheers* Third — to Mr. Harry Potter for pure nerve and outstanding courage, I award Gryffindor House sixty points. *super loud cheers* There are all kinds of courage, it takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies, but just as much to stand up to our friends. I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom. *super loud cheers*

All Gryffindors were celebrating and applauding each other. 170 points up is amazing! No way, that's quite a huge turn of events!
Dumbledore: But! I am not done!

Jessie and Emma started nudging me with smirks on their faces. Wait... me?!

Dumbledore: Lastly, but not the least, to Miss Raven Black-

I couldn't believe it. I was too dumbstruck by shock, my jaw dropped and I was covering my cheeks with my hands.

Dumbledore: - For remarkable quick-wit, vast range of spells known at her age and protecting her friends, while achieving her goal, by any means, I award 60 points!*super loud cheer*

Everyone from my the Slytherin House, including my Gryffindor friends were cheering for me loudly, as I was being hugged by everyone. We are tied for the 1st place! Dumbledore: By all means, I suppose the decorations should be half changed, and for the first time in the History of Hogwarts, there will be 2 winning Houses this year! Us and the Gryffindors couldn't stop cheering. That's how happy we were. Yeah, maybe it's not only 1 house, but it doesn't matter!

WE WON!
IN OUR FIRST YEAR!

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We have to leave now, the term ending, and now we're off to our homes again. I and the girls promised each other we will have months-long sleep overs, so they can get me out of that hell. Same with Ron, thankfully, promising to try to introduce me to his elder brother, Bill, who works as a curse-breaker in Egypt. Also, as I was approaching the door of the castle, McGonagall stopped me.

McGonagall: I have something that might make you happy.

She said that as she handed me a black leather bound photo album. On it, the words "Spotfur + Padfoot = Furever"; "Our little ball of fur"; "Marauders Adventures" and other sweet childish doodles were written in green and red. Slytherin and Gryffindor. Is this...? I gingerly open in, and the first picture was of two grinning teenagers giving each other many sloppy kisses.

me: Mummy and Daddy...

The next picture was on mummy on daddy's back, while Harry's dad and 2 other boys were goofing around. The next one, a stag, a black dog, an ocelot, a rat and a sandy haired boy who was facepalming sat under the Marauders' Tree.

me: Professor... they... the Marauders... were animagi...

McGonagall: That is correct, Miss Black.

me: You are one yourself too. That cat...

McGonagall: Precisely.

me: Can you teach me how to become an animagus?

McGonagall: You need to have special permission from the Ministry. I don-

me: Screw the rules! The Marauders didn't have any permission. They did it illegally. I don't
know the reason, but I can guess. Why is ONE of them a non-animagus? The one with that scar on his face? They did it for a reason. And I will find that out one day. Until then, I HAVE to learn how!

McGonagall looked at me with a proud smile, which held a glint of trouble-maker essence.

McGonagall: Very well. I will assist you in your training, however, you must be aware of the consequences of being found out.
me: I will be careful. Thank you, professor!
McGonagall: Your mother would be so proud...
me: What about my daddy? He was grinning at me, when I saw him and mummy in the Mirror of Erised.

McGonagall’s face flashed with pain for a second, then looked away uncomfortable, turning around to leave.

McGonagall: I am sure he would be too. Have a nice holiday, Miss Black.
me: You as well, professor.

What WAS that about? Why is she hiding information about dad?! What IS going on?!
As a pureblood, I MUST ask the purest of purebloods that I know. 
**Draco Malfoy.**
Why not the Weasleys?
They are good people, so consequently, they’d react the same way McGonagall did.
The Malfoys, on the other hand, are Slytherins, and I am pretty sure they would know.
Oh well-
Until next time, I suppose.
This summer break is going to be a long ride, while spending time there.
Not fair...
*I already miss Hogwarts, my real home.*
Back Home

After the eventful school year at Hogwarts, everything back here, at the orphanage seems even
duller than usual.
What's worse...is that I haven't received any letter from any of my friends, and I don't think I've ever felt so lonely...forgotten....alone in this vast world...
Hell, I didn't even get the Hogwarts letter! ....and to think the girls invited me for sleepovers some time ago...
*sighs* it can't be helped...
Maybe everything was a mistake.
Maybe I don't belong there...
Maybe I'm fated to live here, away from all the happiness...

With another nostalgic sigh, I curl up in my bed and start weeping silently under the covers, while my dear kitten was purring against my chest.
All of a sudden she stopped purring, got out of the blanket, and starter spitting dangerously, mewing at something that seemed like a threat.To my surprise, that wasn't the case.

No bully was there, instead, a little poor creatures with bat-like ears and huge eyes was staring at me friendly, with a shy grin, and waved saying "Hi!"
I call back for Lich to come stay near me, and she curls up in my lap, and I look at the little being, who introduced himself as "Dobby".

Me:Excuse me, sir...but who are you, may I ask?
Dobby:I am Dobby, Miss Black.I have come here to warn you.
Me:Wh-what?!Why?!What is going on?!
Dobby:Something terrible is going to happen!You and Mr.Potter are in grave danger!
Me:But it's Hogwarts! There's Dumbledore...and McGonagall and Snape!There's no way I'll be in danger there!
Dobby:That didn't stop the tragedyfrom taking place last time..
Me:Last time?
His eyes widened *(if it even is possible)* and he let out some grieving noises and sobs while banging his head on the wall.

Me:NO NO NO NO! PLEASE STOP! We'll both be in trouble!
Dobby:*banging his head even harder* **louder sobs*DOBBY IS SORRY,MISS! Dobby had to go against his master's word!*
Me:Your master...?
Dobby:*sits on the ground dizzy*Dobby is a House elf.Dobby has to serve his family,until death.
Me:But that's terrible...you should be free! Do everything you want to! And...not harm yourself...that's wrong...so please stop...

I tried hugging him,but he started sobbing harder,if that was even possible.

Dobby:Dobby hasn't seen such kindness before! Not many wizards are nice to us, House elves!
Me: Well, then you obviously haven't met many nice wizards. We may be extinct, but we still exist. *smiles*
Dobby: Dobby spoke ill of his family... bad Dobby! Bad! *bangs his head against the wardrobe*
Me: PLEASE STOP, DOBBY!
Dobby: Miss Black must promise she won't go back to Hogwarts!
Me: I can't make such a promise. All my friends are there. The school months are my only escape... Without it, I wouldn't feel alive...
Dobby: Friends who don't even write to you?
Me: Come again?... How did you...?
Dobby: *looks around* Miss Raven must understand Dobby meant no harm... *takes out a pile of letters*
Me: Dobby...
Dobby: Dobby only tried to protect miss Raven...
Me: FROM WHAT?!
Dobby: A grave danger! The worst danger existent!
Me: You better let me go, or you won't be able to save me from a worse danger.
Dobby: Worse danger than He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named?
Me: Myself!

Dobby looked at me quite confused and scared, but not for himself, but for me.

Dobby: Please, Miss Raven. Be safe.

He said as he snapped his fingers and disappeared. Just then, as I was staying in the middle of the room looking at the ground, confused, the director of the orphanage came in bursting through the door, making me yelp in surprise.
She started yelling at me like a velociraptor for making a ruckus and waking others up, grounded me, locking the door and, the next day, putting bars at my window, pretty much making me a prisoner in my own room.
Great.
The next 3 days I kept sulking and thinking of how to get out of here. That is, until late at night, on Harry's birthday, that I found my first ray of hope. The falling star that was supposed to grant me my wish, proved to be my salvation. A.k.a the Weasley twins, Ron and Harry, on a flying old Ford, standing outside my window.

Me: I'm not surprised anymore.
Ron: What's with you and bars at the windows?!!
Me: Harry too?
Harry: Yeah...

They managed to get the bars off, got my trunk, owl cage and cat in the back of the car, and sat in the backseat, already feeling the magic atmosphere floating around.

Me: By the way. Happy Birthday, Harry.

With that, we went back to the Weasley house. Everything looks so cozy and familial... The true meaning of a home.
Mrs. Weasley came in the living as I and Harry were staring around this home. She started yelling at
her sons for leaving the house without telling, and she got very worried. So that's how a mother is. She worries, she yells, she loves, she welcomes. She got all sweet and motherly as she saw Harry and I, and she came to hug us. The warmth... Is magical.

We all sat down at the table, as Mrs. Weasley was putting us a lot of food on the plates, and we started eating breakfast. This... man, this is really good!

Suddenly, a young ginger girl runs down the stairs frantically. I suppose this is Ginny, the younger sibling I've heard about from the Twins. She's a real cutie~

Ginny: Mum! Mummy! Have you seen my jumper?
Mrs. W: Yes, dear, it was on the cat.

Then, she looked at me and Harry (more at him though) and froze, as we greeted her. Aaaand she ran away, as her brothers started chuckling amused.

Harry: What did I do?
Ron: That's Ginny. She's been talking about you all summer. A bit annoying, really.

And again, just as he said that, Mr. Weasley came home greeting everyone cheerfully and put his stuff on a table. Guess he didn't realize I and Harry were there.

Mr. W: What a night! 9 Raids! 9!
Harry: Raids?
Ron: Dad works at the Ministry of Magic. At the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office. Dad loves muggles. Thinks they are fascinating.
Mr. W then kissed Mrs. W and sat down with us.
Mr. W: Well now.... And who are you?

Maybe he realized we aren't ginger?

Me: Um... Raven. Raven Black, sir.
Harry: Oh, sorry, Sir. I'm Harry, sir. Harry Potter.

He looked absolutely fascinated.

Mr. W: Are you really? Ron's told us all about you, of course? When did they get here?
Mrs. W: Your sons flew that car to Harry's and Raven's house and back last night! What have you got to say about that, eh?
Mr. W: Did you really? Did it go all right? I - I mean... That - that was very wrong, boys - very wrong indeed...
Ron: Let's leave them to it...

He showed me Ginny's room and Harry went to room with Ron.

me: H-hi... I hope you d-don't mind me staying here...
Ginny: Oh no no no! It's okay! Totally okay! Don't worry!
me: Y-you sure?
Ginny: Yes, yes, now sit down and make yourself home!
me: It's more of a home than I've ever felt before...
I sat on the bed and looked around the nicely decorated room, and my eyes averted to a Holyhead Harpies poster.

me: So, you're a fan of the... Holyhead Harpies, hm? Who... are they?
Ginny: Oh, you know, just the best Quidditch team ever! They are an all-girl team and they are my total favourite! When I grow up, I hope I can get to play in their team!
me: *smiles* That would be amazing! Keep dreaming like that, and I'm sure you will achieve that wish soon enough.
Ginny: *blushes faintly* Th-thank you... I really do hope that...
me: You know... practice, practice and always practice, but never forget to have fun too. That's the best part.
Ginny: I know... it's a long way to go... but I still have time. Fred and George told me of Oliver Wood. He inspires me.
me: Oh yes, Gryffindor's team captain. I think he'll be accepted in a nice team the second he leaves school. Guess you'll be the same.
Ginny: That would be amazing! *dreamy smile*
me: Try for the school team as fast as you can *winks* Weasleys have a special place in the team. Especially with the twins being the beaters *chuckles*
Ginny: *giggles* They will beat everyone who tries to take my place!

We chatted along all night, shared funny stories, about Quidditch, school, her family and what not. I guess I can say that Ginny pretty much became my cute little sister.

The next day, we received the letters—surprisingly or not, my and Harry's letters came too—but um... This year's books... are all written by this "**Gilderoy Lockhart**". Who in tarnation is he? I saw Mrs. Weasley fangirling over him. I don't like where this is going. Poor them, worried they wouldn't be able to afford the books... I really feel bad for them... I want to give them all my money, after all, I don't have any use for them! ... They need it more they I do... And that money isn't even mine! It was my parents'. Not fair at all...

As we were suppose to leave, we went in front of a fireplace. Mrs. Weasley gave some kind of ash for Harry to grab from a small pot. I and him looked confused at it and blinked. Ermg...?

**Harry: Wh-what am I supposed to do?**
**Ron: Oh that's right! He's never travelled by Floo Powder again! I'm sorry, I forgot!**
**me: Floo... powder?**

Then, Fred decided to demonstrate how it's done. You go in the fireplace, take a handful of that ash, you say the name of the destination CLEARLY, then you let the ash go, and BAM OH NO NO NO NO NO GREEN FLAMES ENGULF YOU?! THIS IS NOT OKAY?!

me: I-is he okay?!
**George: Oh, of course he is! Nothing will happen to you. Only some ash on your face, that's all. Mrs. W: Harry, would you go next?**

He went first but ermh... I don't think "$D-Diagon Alley" was a clear way to say it. Hopefully, he will find his way.

Ginny: *whispers in my ear* Don't stutter. Take a deep breathe and speak clearly please.
I nod, and try my luck too. Diagon Alley.

?: Took you quite a while, kiddo.
me: Fred?
Fred: The one and only.
me: Oh so... Harry didn't get here, right?
Fred: Only if he managed to slip by me.
me: *smiles* He got lost.
Fred: Poor bloke. Let's hope he finds his way here.
me: Yeah... Hopefully...

Then, the rest of the family arrived one by one. Poor Mrs. Weasley was quite hysterical for losing Harry. Took a while to calm her down. She calmed herself by brushing the soot off of us... And hey! Hagrid and Harry! How come Hagrid always manages to save Harry? That's a real mystery.

Anyways, Hagrid leaves and we all go to Gringotts to get money and we meet up with Hermione and her parents. Nice to see you, dearie~

We somehow managed to separate from each other, going in small groups to get whatever we needed, and I, Harry, Hermione and Ron got in front of Flourish and Blotts for the books. But, as soon as I saw the commotion inside, with all the hysterical fangirling witches over that idiot "Gilderoy Lockhart" I started to panic and went to the far back of the shop. Harry on the other hand, got pulled to the front, to take a picture with that ugly jerk.

-?-: Fancy seeing you around, Black.

I was startled by the voice, but also surprised. I didn't think I'd see Draco here at a time like this.

me: Oh, Hi there Draco. Nice seeing you too. How was your holiday?
Draco: Great as always, of course. Didn't bother writing to me, did you?
me: * looks down* Well uh... you see... it's a terrible story...
Draco: Try me.
me: They didn't allow me to let Midnight out to fly.... at all...
Draco: Stupid filthy muggles... They mistreated you, didn't they?
me: Well... uh... kinda... b-but... I'm oka-
Draco: * takes off handkerchief * wipes soot from my face * You have ash all over your face. What did you do?!
me: Er-ergh... Floo... Powder?
Draco: Floo Powder? Were you at the Weasels?
me: Urgh... Yes... They urh... saved me from the orphanage...
Draco: Saved you?
me: * nods * They put bars at my windows and locked my door so I wouldn't leave again...
Draco: Tsk. I should talk to father and mother so they will get you out of there. You could stay with us!
me: * blushes faintly * Erh... No no it's uhhh... it's okay really! D-Don't worry about me! I'm used to it ergh... I'll be okay!
Draco: Well you shouldn't!
me: I-I know but...
Draco: But nothing.

I hugged him to make him shut up and sure enough, he hugged back. We stayed like this... until he saw Harry and started to mock him for getting attention.

Ginny: Leave him alone, he didn't want all that!
Draco: Potter, you've got yourself a girlfriend?
me: They'd be cute together...

Then, Mr. Malfoy came, insulting the Weasleys, Mr. Weasley came and got mad, shockingly, they actually started fighting?! As a real fist and all kind of muggle fight?! Hagrid managed to separate them somehow. And just as Mr. Malfoy and Draco were about to leave, I whispered in his ear "That's why I don't want to come live with you" and left.

That was um... quite an eventful day. But not quite as eventful as the next day. Well, not for me, but for Harry and Ron.

We all left too late from the Burrow, by the overly enchanted car and got to the platform. Percy went first, then Fred and George, I and Ginny, Mr and Mrs. W and then Harry and Ron were supposed to come but urgh... I didn't see them. I didn't even know they weren't in the train, until later, when we already arrived at Hogwarts. I looked around with Ginny and we stayed together with Neville and a first year blonde girl called Luna. We got along really well and hopefully we will be great friends.

At the feast, everything was normal. Ginny got sorted into Gryffindor—obviously—And we listened to the speech Dumbledore had to say. The usual boring speech—wait a sec—where's Snape?

... 

Harry and Ron are in trouble.
And if they didn't come by train...
Did they...?!

Use the car to fly to Hogwarts?!
The rumours are true then...

Idiotic children! *facepalm*
Oh well, at least I know they will be okay. They always are.

After the feast, everyone goes to their house, in their rooms, and what not.
I met Emma and Jessie in our room and they started shouting and hugging me, asking why I haven't replied all summer.
After telling them the story, they started laughing, not sure if they believe me or not, but eh, at least they aren't mad at me.

Time to sleep now!

In the most comfortable bed, with the finest silky sheets every.

On the very bed that my mum once slept.
What a time to be alive

Thankfully, I didn't have the same problem as Harry and Ron...closing the barrier...only Dobby could have done it. Of course, it could have happened to me as well, but I went before with Ginny, so it would have been too obvious that way...

At least I don't have to suffer from too much attention and hate like them... Lucky me. What's even worse, the next day, at breakfast, while everything was dull, the mail came. Obviously, I didn't receive anything. Draco got a letter from his parents, the girls some sweets and magazines... and poor Ron... a Howler.

Draco: Hey, look at that! Weasley's got a Howler! Could you believe that? My parents would never do that.

me: Poor Ron... It will be so embarrassing...

Howler: STEALING THE CAR, I WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN SURPRISED IF THEY'D EXPELLED YOU, YOU WAIT TILL I GET HOLD OF YOU, I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU STOPPED TO THINK WHAT YOUR FATHER AND I WENT THROUGH WHEN WE SAW IT WAS GONE -

me: This is so scary....

As I said that, I subconsciously took ahold of Draco's sleeve, in an attempt to stop my slightly growing anxiety, from all the yelling. Poor Ron...

Howler: - LETTER FROM DUMBLEDORE LAST NIGHT, I THOUGHT YOUR FATHER WOULD DIE OF SHAME, WE DIDN'T BRING YOU UP TO BEHAVE LIKE THIS, YOU AND HARRY COULD BOTH HAVE DIED -

Draco: Calm down. She's not yelling at you, after all. You behave yourself, unlike them.

me: I could have been with them there... And the noise in general makes me flinch...

Howler: ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTED - YOUR FATHER'S FACING AN INQUIRY AT WORK, IT'S ENTIRELY YOUR FAULT AND IF YOU PUT ANOTHER TOE OUT OF LINE WE'LL BRING YOU STRAIGHT BACK HOME.

And then, the Howler ripped itself in tons of little pieces, leaving a red and scared Ron looking frightened to hell and back.

Oh well... time to start our classes, I suppose...

We learnt about Mandrakes at Herbology, some Transfiguration tricks with beetles and now, I'm heading to DADA with Draco and his 2 silly friends... until we bump into Harry and Ron, and a little 1st year taking... pictures? That's cool.

Draco started throwing mean words at Harry, something along the lines of "Why would I be jealous of someone like him? And have a split head, with an ugly scar on my forehead? And get famous with a scar? Ha. No way."

Aaaaand Ron got mad, and told Draco to eat slugs, just as Hermione shut close her Lockhart book and told them to stop... Then the said 'Teacher' arrived and I dragged Draco away. I really don't want anything to do with this creepy guy...

At his class, I made a little fort of the numerous books of him and Draco sniggered besides me.
me: I really don't like this guy. I don't fancy seeing his face either. He's so... I don't know...
Draco: Apathetic to look at?
me: Pretty much. There's something that I can't really point out that makes me feel uncomfortable... and that might be his vanity or lack of professionalism.
Draco: I'm with you here.
me: Did you notice how all his books contain alliterations? Quite unprofessional.
Draco: You're not wrong.

Lockhart: Me, Gilderoy Lockhart, Order of Merlin, Third Class, Honorary Member of the Dark Force Defense League, and five-time winner of Witch Weekly's Most-Charming-Smile Award - but I don't talk about that. I didn't get rid of the Bandon Banshee by smiling at her!

me: Lame...
Lockhart: I see you've all bought a complete set of my books - well done. I thought we'd start today with a little quiz. Nothing to worry about just to check how well you've read them, how much you've taken in - You have thirty minutes - start - now!

1. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's favorite color?
2. What is Gilderoy Lockhart's secret ambition?
3. What, in your opinion, is Gilderoy Lockhart's greatest achievement to date?
4. When is Gilderoy Lockhart's birthday, and what would his ideal gift be?

~~~~~~~~~~~ Half an Hour later ~~~~~~~~~~~

Lockhart: Tut, tut - hardly any of you remembered that my favorite color is lilac. I say so in Year with the Yeti. And a few of you need to read Wanderings with Werewolves more carefully - I clearly state in chapter twelve that my ideal birthday gift would be harmony between all magic and non-magic people - though I wouldn't say no to a large bottle of Ogdeds Old Firewhisky!... but Miss Hermione Granger knew my secret ambition is to rid the world of evil and market my own range of hair-care potions - good girl! In fact... full marks! Where is Miss Hermione Granger?

Hermione raised a trembling hand.

Lockhart: Excellent! Quite excellent! Take ten points for Gryffindor! And so - to business...

me: Save my soul, I'm going insane from this idiocy...
Draco: At least you have me *winks*
me: R-right...

Aaaand the next surprise granted by the great Lockhart was... A CAGE FULL OF PIXIES! Hooray! And what did he do next? UNLEASHED THE BEASTS! Okay, time to hide under the desks...

me: This guy needs to be thrown out of this place...

He tried to use a gibberish self-invented failure of a spell, which obviously had no effect, and proceeded to run out, letting us deal with the mayhem.
Neville even managed to get hanged on the chandelier, and the big dinosaur skeleton fell down. This is some dangerous rubbish going on here...

**Draco:** Are you going to do something?  
**me:** And possibly get attacked by a stupid little flying beast? No thanks. Besides, there's Hermione who can handle this. I don't want to get needlessly involved.  
**Draco:** *smirks* Spoken like a true Slytherin.  
**me:** Were you expecting otherwise?  
**Draco:** Never.

After such a day full of events, the next day came full of surprises. Apparently, the Slytherin Quidditch team has permission from professor Snape to train, and a full broom set of Nimbus 2001 from, obviously, Mr. Malfoy, which in exchange, had us have Draco as a Chaser. I'm glad at least they didn't replace me... I mean, he wouldn't, would he?

Silently following the team to the pitch, I see the Gryffindor team there as well, looking all ready to practice. Uh oh... this won't end well...

**Wood:** Flint! This is our practice time! We got up specially! You can clear off now!

**Flint:** Plenty of room for all of us, Wood.  
**Wood:** But I booked the field! I booked it!  
**Flint:** Ah, but I've got a specially signed note here from Professor Snape. *I, Professor S. Snape, give the Slytherin team permission to practice today on the Quidditch field owing to the need to train their new Chaser.*

**Wood:** You've got a new Chaser? Where?

At this point, Draco smugly walked in front, bearing a sly smirk on his face.

**Fred:** Aren't you Lucius Malfoy's son?  
**Flint:** Funny you should mention Draco's father, let me show you the generous gift he's made to the Slytherin team.

All six of them held out their broomsticks and as I attempted to hide myself behind the tall guys, Draco pulled me to the front with him, showing off the brooms. Seven highly polished, brand-new handles and seven sets of fine gold lettering spelling the words Nimbus Two Thousand and One gleamed under the Gryffindors' noses in the early morning sun.

**Flint:** Very latest model. Only came out last month, I believe it outstrips the old Two Thousand series by a considerable amount. As for the old Cleansweeps... sweeps the board with them.

Draco and the rest of the team were smiling condescendingly, showing off and radiating with superiority. I would too, but it's quite impossible when you are against your own friends...

**Flint:** Oh, look, a field invasion.

Oh no... Ron and Hermione were crossing the grass to see what was going on.

**Ron:** What's happening? Why aren't you playing? And what's he doing here?  
**Draco:** I'm the new Slytherin Chaser, Weasley. Everyone's just been admiring the brooms my father's bought our team. Good, aren't they? But perhaps the Gryffindor team will be able to
raise some gold and get new brooms, too. You could raffle off those Cleansweep Fives; I expect a museum would bid for them.

The Slytherin team howled with laughter, and I tried to hide a chuckle. He's the master of sassy comments and burns.

**Hermione:** At least no one on the Gryffindor team had to buy their way in. They got in on pure talent.

Hope you don't insinuate something, dear...

**Draco:** No one asked your opinion, you filthy little *Mudblood*.

I and most of the Gryffindors gasped and the rude comment, Harry was confused, Flint had to defend Draco from Fred and George, Ron attacked him as well (but failing due to his wand backfiring) and I was really disappointed.

What if I am a so called "*Mudblood*" myself? After all, I don't know anything about my family. Maybe the dreams I had were just a coincidence. Maybe my last name is just a coincidence...

A loud bang echoed around the stadium and a jet of green light shot out of the wrong end of Ron's wand, hitting him in the stomach and sending him reeling backward onto the grass.

**Hermione:** Ron! Ron! Are you all right?

Ron opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. Instead he gave an almighty belch and several slugs dribbled out of his mouth onto his lap.

This is utterly disgusting. As much as I like him as a friend, I can't help but look away and stay as far as possible. This is gross.

At night, I stayed in the Slytherin CR, staring into the fireplace, reminiscing and contemplating the way too many things that happened in the last 2 days.

I got so caught up in my own mind, that I was suddenly awoken by a splitting headache caused by a creepy slithery voice that kept saying

"*Come... come to me.... Let me rip you.... Let me tear you .... Let me kill you . . . ."*

All of a sudden, I feel a hand on my shoulder and I jump in fright with a squeal and fall on the green floor. Fortunately, it was only Draco...

**Draco:** What'd gotten into you, all of a sudden?

me: You scared me...

**Draco:** Are you sure that's all there is to it?

me: Didn't you hear that scary voice?

**Draco:** What voice?

me: In Salazar's name, please don't tell me I'm going completely bonkers...

**Draco:** Raven....? Are you okay?

me: I don't know... I literally just heard a reaaaally creepy voice asking permission to kill me in a really gruesome way. I don't know...

**Draco:** Next thing you tell me, you can talk to snakes.

me: Well... I'm not sure... Never seen one before...
Draco: Maybe you're just tired. The practice was hardcore, and it's late. Better go sleep.
me: Thanks, Draco. I'll be sure to do so...

I slowly get up and walk to my room, the girls waiting for me... oh, not really. They're already sleeping. This is for the best. I can get a really good rest right now. Hopefully, no more voices...

~~~~~~~~~~~~

Soon enough, Halloween arrived. And what greater thing could an excited student do on Halloween except celebrate with friends?
Oh yes, I know.
Go to the... death anniversary... of your friend ghost...
Sounds much like what Casper the friendly ghost would do.
But regardless... At least I'm with my friends here... and many other ghosts...
Gives me the heebee jeebees.
Everything in this room was gorgeous gothic thematic and it was quite chilly. So chilly that it might get a student out of his temperature comfort zone... SO we decided to explore~
We tried to avoid Moaning Myrtle, the girl ghost haunting the um... girls' bathroom from the first floor... But that couldn't be done because a CERTAIN Poltergeist called PEEVES decided to be a douche... aaand we hurt her feelings. Oh well..
During poor Nearly Headless Nick's death speech, Sir Patrick, the jerk ghost decided to start a game with his head being thrown around so we decided to leave... Hopefully, there's still some pudding left.

On our way though... the voice...

"... rip... tear... kill..."

me: What the...

"... soo hungry... for so long..."

Harry: You hear it too?

"... kill... time to kill..."

me: Yes, I do!

The voice suddenly moved... upwards? No words! We ran after it until-

"... I smell blood... I SMELL BLOOD!"

Harry: It's going to kill someone!

We ran through the castle until we reached a shiny wall, lit by torches. On it, it was written something in crimson liquid, looking like blood, "The chamber of secrets has been opened. Enemies of the heir, beware."
Filch's cat, was hanging by her tail from the torch bracket. She was stiff as a board, her eyes wide and staring. Is she... dead? I sure hope otherwise...

me: Holy Dryads...
Ron: Let's get out of here. We don't want to be caught here...

But it was much too late to escape from that place unnoticed. Just as we turned to leave, the students that were once in the Hall, feasting, are well... here... All the cheery chatter died out once the audience took sight of the hanging hanging cat. Poor Mrs. Norris...

"Enemies of the Heir, beware! You'll be next, Mudbloods!"

Oh, I so wonder who said that...
Thankfully, after Filch was about to strangle Harry, Dumbledore stepped in and took us to his office.

Lockhart: It was definitely a curse that killed her - probably the Transmogrifian Torture - I've seen it used many times, so unlucky I wasn't there, I know the very countercurse that would have saved her... I remember something very similar happening in Ouagadogou, a series of attacks, the full story's in my autobiography, I was able to provide the townsfolk with various amulets, which cleared the matter up at once.....
me: Don't want to cross your word, professor, but at the same time, I'm quite sure Mrs. Norris is not dead. Maybe just petrified? Or... something similar?
Dumbledore: Indeed. She's not dead, Argus.
Lockhart: Ah, I knew it!
me: I'm sure you did...

At my comment, I'm sure I spotted Snape smirk. Poor kitty though... Her red eyes were threatening looking, but she was such a sweet kitty. I proceed to pet her head absent-minded, not paying attention to the ruckus they all made. Filch was a sobbing mess... and I couldn't blame him. I'd be the same if that were to happen with my sweet Lich.

Filch: Not dead? But why's she all - all stiff and frozen?
Dumbledore: She has been Petrified, just as Miss. Black guessed. But how, I cannot say....
Filch: Ask him!

Dumbledore: No second year could have done this. It would take Dark Magic of the most advanced -

Filch: He did it, he did it! You saw what he wrote on the wall! He found - in my office - he knows I'm a - I'm a... He knows I'm a Squib!
Harry: I never touched Mrs. Norris! And I don't even know what a Squib is.
Filch: Rubbish! He saw my Kwikspell letter!

Snape: If I might speak, Headmaster, Potter and his friends may have simply been in the wrong place at the wrong time. But we do have a set of suspicious circumstances here. Why was he in the upstairs corridor at all? Why wasn't he at the Halloween feast?

Harry, Ron and Hermione all launched into an explanation about the deathday party.

Snape: But why not join the feast afterward? Why go up to that corridor? And you, Miss Black, the dungeons are downstairs.
Harry: Because - because - because we were tired and wanted to go to bed.

Snape: Without any supper? I didn't think ghosts provided food fit for living people at their
parties.

Ron: We weren't hungry (just as his stomach gave a huge rumble.)

Snape: I suggest, Headmaster, that Potter is not being entirely truthful. It might be a good idea if he were deprived of certain privileges until he is ready to tell us the whole story. I personally feel he should be taken off the Gryffindor Quidditch team until he is ready to be honest.

McGonagall: Really, Severus, I see no reason to stop the boy playing Quidditch. This cat wasn't hit over the head with a broomstick. There is no evidence at all that Potter has done anything wrong.

Dumbledore was giving Harry a searching look. His twinkling light-blue gaze made Harry feel as though he were being X-rayed.

Dumbledore: Innocent until proven guilty, Severus.

Snape looked furious. So did Filch.

Filch: My cat has been Petrified! I want to see some punishment!

Dumbledore: We will be able to cure her, Argus, Professor Sprout recently managed to procure some Mandrakes. As soon as they have reached their full size, I will have a potion made that will revive Mrs. Norris.

Lokhart: I'll make it, I must have done it a hundred times. I could whip up a Mandrake Restorative Draught in my sleep -

As soon as I heard Lockhart speak up, I cringed and looked carefully at him.

me: Don't mean to sound rude, again, professor. But I do believe the post of the Potions master is Professor Snape's, not yours. Do please, let an actual expert start the procedure.

Snape: Listen to Miss Black, Gilderoy. She noticed what you haven't quite spotted thus far. I believe, as previously stated, that I am the Potions master at this school.

There was a very awkward pause.

Dumbledore: You may go.
Snape: Except for you, Miss Black. I want to have a word with you.

They left and only the two of us remained alone. He wants the truth. It was obvious Harry spoke lies.

Snape: Speak.
me: Is it true that... there are people who can speak to snakes?
Snape: Only the heir of Slytherin can be a Parselmouth. But why such a peculiar question?
me: Draco mentioned something about conversing with snakes...
Snape: What are you insinuating, Miss Black?
me: I am insinuating that I am positive that both I and Harry heard a vicious threatening
voice that attacked Mrs. Norris and that this is connected to Parseltongue. Um... Um...! Is there any legend related to snakes in Hogwarts? I mean, our own House has the snake symbol! Obviously, it MUST be a myth related to Salazar Slytherin, right?
Snape: Are you aware of the legend of the Camber of Secrets?
me: Tell me more...
Snape: Let's see...

The story goes that Slytherin had built a hidden chamber in the castle, of which the other founders knew nothing. Slytherin, according to the legend, sealed the Chamber of Secrets so that none would be able to open it until his own true heir arrived at the school. The heir alone would be able to unseal the Chamber of Secrets, unleash the horror within, and use it to purge the school of all who were unworthy to study magic. Naturally, the school has been searched for evidence of such a chamber, many times, by the most learned witches and wizards. It does not exist.
A tale told to frighten the gullible. Or so, it is said to be.

me: Sir - what exactly do you mean by the 'horror within' the Chamber?
Snape: That is believed to be some sort of monster, which the Heir of Slytherin alone can control.
me: I can't be the only one who believes it is true.
Snape: Depends who you ask.
me: Do you believe it?
Snape: Perhaps.
me: And the so called Horror would be a... snake related beast of some sort?
Snape: You would be quite correct, Miss Black. That if, it is actually true.
me:* in a low voice*... rip ... tear ... kill ... time to kill ... I smell blood. ... I SMELL BLOOD!
Snape: Is that what you heard that lead you to that corridor, specifically to that wall?
me: Precisely. Is it not quite... peculiar. That only I and Harry heard it, and not Lockhart, Granger or Weasley? Or even Draco, after all. What is so special about the two of us that only we could hear it. It cannot be just a coincidence.

At that question, he pulled the hair away from my neck and revealed the skull scar, grim reminder of... something.

Snape: Your mother and Potter's mother died for a reason. You two. The Dark Lord is merciless, when it comes to achieving power.
me: So it is true... then... the monster is...
Snape: You are one very bright young witch, Miss Black, and obviously, one of my own house. A true Slytherin. Don't be reckless in your hunt for answers.
me: I know where to find the answers. In a Care of Magical Creatures book.
Snape: But where, precisely?
me: The... Restricted... section... b-but professor, I-I can't..
Snape: Go there. Yes, I am aware. Not, without a permission slip, that is.
me: Would you-?!
Snape:* smirks * If it weren't someone like you, you would not even dream of having a favour of mine.
me:*taking the permission slip*Thank you so much,professor!I'll be back with answers!

I quickly ran to the library, to the Restricted section, passing by all the prefects by quickly showing them the slip and bayu.

**Basilisk**

*(Also known as the King of Serpents)*

*M.O.M. Classification: XXXXX*

The first recorded Basilisk was bred by Herpo the Foul, a Greek Dark wizard and Parselmouth, who discovered after much experimentation that a chicken egg hatched beneath a toad would produce a gigantic serpent possessed of extraordinary dangerous powers. The Basilisk is a brilliant green serpent that may reach up to fifty feet in length. The male has scarlet plume upon its head. It has exceptionally venomous fangs but its most dangerous means of attack is the gaze of its large yellow eyes. Anyone looking directly into these will suffer instant death.

If the food source is sufficient (the Basilisk will eat all mammals and birds and most reptiles), the serpent may attain a very great age. Herpo the Foul's Basilisk is believed to have lived for close on 900 years.

The creation of Basilisks has been illegal since medieval times, although the practice is easily concealed by simply removing the chicken egg from beneath the toad when the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures comes to call. However, since Basilisks are uncontrollable except by Parselmouths, they are as dangerous to most Dark wizards as to anyone else, and there have been no recorded sightings of Basilisks in Britain for at least 400 years.

This...is sooo much more frightening than the whole Voldemort ordeal... Why can't we have a single normal year?
Everything Goes Downhill

I can't sleep anymore, that's for sure. And what's even worse?
The Quidditch match, obviously.
And EVEN worse, is that Hermione told me about their little plan to enter in my House's CR... and it involves a Polyjuice Potion. Easier said than done, but oh well.
Flint did his condescending encouraging speech and we went on the pitch. Let the game begin. Everything went perfectly well, except for the obvious fact that AGAIN, I and Harry were being assaulted by a psychotic BLUDGER!
Fred and George were doing a great job saving him, and so were Bole and Derrick, saving me from the close ones, where I almost fell of a broom because of that stupid ball.
Harry asked for a time out sooner than I did, and I told Flint and Draco about my problem with the Bludger... But at the same time, if they stay around me, they will make the Snitch fly away.

me: I'll be fine... Just make sure that we win by points... even if Potter catches the Snitch. We need 10 more scorings so I guess you can do it. A hexxed Bludger can't defeat me. Just... Do your jobs and don't mind me, okay?
Flint: What if you get hurt?
me: Marcus. I truly appreciate your concern but... That will be my least bother at the moment. It happens. No big deal.
Flint: Your wish is granted then, princess. Take care though.
Draco: Don't be too reckless, Raven.
me: I'll live. You should start showing off though. Everyone has to see that despite being incredibly rich and affording only quality items, we obviously have talent and actually use it with our brains, unlike those witless Gryffs.

They fist bumped me and went on the pitch and while nobody was looking, Draco hugged me quickly and told me to be careful. Obviously I was wearing the necklace he gifted me, for good luck.

But good luck is the opposite of the experiences of this match...

We dashed off after the Snitch once again, avoiding the Bludger, dodging, bumping into each other, going over obstacles and so on. Until, since my broom is faster (by 1 model), I managed to stand on my feet on the broom, balance that I mastered over LOTS of practice. But the Bludger made sure to not only break Harry's whole arm, from the elbow, but since obviously we reached with our ARMS for the bludger, it broke my arm too.
I never thought having your arm broken in such a manner hurt THIS bad... I'd have rather not known... but professionalism says otherwise...
So close... closer than Harry... so CLOSE!

*BAM*
A flaming pain is spreading throughout my torso area and I feel myself falling and stumbling on the floor, trying to gasp for air, but it's too difficult... Might have broken my ribs, my have broken my will to live, I don't know. But I can only see above me... the beautiful cloudless azure sky... a butterfly... the fact that I can't move... a crimson dot in my vision... wait what... a crimson... dot... growing bigger and bigger... towards my face... OH MERLIN'S BEARD, IT'S THAT DAMNED BLUDGER AGAIN! NONONO-

I groggily and painfully reach with right broken arm to my Quidditch robe pocket where I put my
wand, making sure it stays there, and slowly point it towards the Bludger and mutter a "Reducto" faintly, and the Bludgers is blasted to pieces. Thank Godric... Okay... I guess I can... sleep now...

~~~~~~~~~Time Skip~~~~~~~~~

I woke up in the Hospital wing and tried moving but... well... to no avail. The pain is too unbearable. But what happened?! I mean, I know I'm clumsy, I'm prone to disaster and getting hurt, and I hurt more than the usual human being (Eh, I'm just too sensitive and not pain tolerant, but whatever).


All I could hear around were some faint whispers and I felt a warmth on my right hand. Okay, I really want to know what is going on right now.

-?-: Raven...? Are you awake?

Draco? Is that you?

I wanted to say. Even mutter, but all I could do in this hoarse state was make a nodding sound.

Draco: Thank Merlin you're okay. That bloody Bludger hit you so hard, it broke your ribs and the broken bone pieces punctured our lung, making you unable to breathe properly. But that wouldn't have been too difficult to repair, Madam Pomfrey says. But that useless Lockhart thought he's some kind of Medical Wizard from St. Mungo's and decided to invent a spell to use on you, and well... you were lacking 3 pairs of ribs.

I groaned in annoyance and rolled my eyes. Why was I expecting that... Now... I just want to be able to move, for starters.

Draco: Don't force yourself. Madam Pomfrey said it'll take a while until you'll be able to continue with your usual daily routine. You'll need some assistance at the beginning.

Hearing all that made my eyes water and I started whimpering. This is soo... not okay... I am literally speechless. No words can describe the mayhem of thoughts going through my head.

Draco: H-hey, don't cry! You'll get better soon enough. Don't be such a crybaby... me: *mutters* But Draco... I can't move at all...

He bit his lip and slightly tightened the grip on my hand.

Draco: You'll be okay. I promise.

After that, Draco was ushered out by Madam Pomfrey, who gave me some potions to drink, but one had to make me sleep for the night, due to the painful process of growing bones and repairing the holes in lungs. Easy Peasy. It's just yet another night of sleeping.

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The next day, I opened my eyes and already felt much better. Better, in the meaning that I could actually move my arm without cursing my whole ancestry because of the pain. With grave difficulty, I managed to stand up as well. I need to cling on someone, and I can also walk! The miracles of modern magic. You gotta love this kind of science. Maybe one day I'll become a doctor as well. Or a researcher! That would be so exciting.

Emma and Jessie helped me out to the Slytherin table so I can properly eat breakfast and everybody greeted me cheerfully. I already feel so much better with the exception that... I suddenly
recalled my failure in catching the Snitch, upon seeing the Gryffindor table cheering thrilled and mocking my House. I couldn't help but feel ashamed and disappointed in myself... It's basically my fault, once again, that my team didn't win...

Jessie: It's okay, Raven. That Bludger went completely bonkers and injured you so bad, you could have died! Forget a silly game!

Marcus: That's right, listen to the midget. A game lost doesn't mean we necessary lost 1st place, after all. We need our seeker alive.

Emma: Chillax, Frost Eyes. We don't want your pretty eyes to shed more tears, now, do we? -?:- Well she damn well should! It's her fault AGAIN that Slytherin's team is a shame and ridiculed by everyone else! We should have shown what respect means!

me: Y-yeah... I know... sorry...

Draco: Shut up, Parkinson. Better learn what's like to be on the field, before speaking up.

Pansy: But Draco! It's completely HER fault! You were a great chaser! Scored most of the points!

Bole: Relax, kid. It was the Bludger's fault things turned out this way. No need for flame between House members.

Pansy: You must have brainwashed them in some way to pity you! The only kind of seeker you are is an ATRENTION one, aren't you? You fancy Draco, don't you?

me: *smirks* Are you jealous, perhaps?

Pansy: Me? Jealous? Of what?

me: Oh, you know. The fact that I'm such a drama queen and get all the attention?

Pansy: Which makes my previous statement true.

me: Listen, toxic player. Slytherin is the most hated house. If even between ourselves, we throw shade and hate, then we're pretty much lost. So don't come to me with that condescending aura radiating around, because you are no better than I am, nor than anyone else at this table.

She started fuming and backed off, muttering how I stole Draco for myself, as my eye twitched.

me: Remind me, why are some people like... that?

Jessie: Don't mind her. Pug face was always this way.

me: *Laughing* Pug face? Now that's quite the nickname.

Jessie: Fits, doesn't it? Emma came up with it!

Emma: I did, that's true!

me: Perfect imagination.

With that, we proceeded with our usual schedule, then, surprise surprise. A duelling club. And who were the teachers?

Snape and Lockhart.

Ohhh this will be purrrfect.

Lockhart and Snape turned to face each other and bowed; at least, Lockhart did, with much twirling of his hands, whereas Snape jerked his head irritably. Then they raised their wands like swords in front of them.

Lockhart: As you see, we are holding our wands in the accepted combative position. On the count of three, we will cast our first spells. Neither of us will be aiming to kill, of course.

Harry: I wouldn't bet on that.

Lockhart: One - two - three -
Both of them swung their wands above their heads and pointed them at their opponent. Snape cried "Expelliarmus!" Very effective. There was a dazzling flash of scarlet light and Lockhart was blasted off his feet: He flew backward off the stage, smashed into the wall, and slid down it to sprawl on the floor. Draco, I and some of the other Slytherins cheered.

me: Hope he broke his ribs...

Lockhart was getting unsteadily to his feet. His hat had fallen off and his wavy hair was standing on end.

Lockhart: Well, there you have it! That was a Disarming Charm - as you see, I've lost my wand - ah, thank you, Miss Brown - yes, an excellent idea to show them that, Professor Snape, but if you don't mind my saying so, it was very obvious what you were about to do. If I had wanted to stop you it would have been only too easy - however, I felt it would be instructive to let them see...

Snape was looking murderous. Possibly, Lockhart noticed as well.

Snape: Perhaps it would be more prudent to teach the students how to block the unfriendly spell.

Lockhart: Enough demonstrating! I'm going to come amongst you now and put you all into pairs. Professor Snape, if you'd like to help me - Snape: Perhaps... Black! Parkinson! Get here!

We both get on stage. She was glaring at me spitefully, as I nonchalantly walked on stage, superiority radiating from my composed posture (despite being still a bit damaged). We did the duel ritual and she threw a simple spell at me, which I easily blocked.

Me: Is that all you can do, Pug Face?

Pansy: Why you...! Rictusempra!

Me: *blocks* Expelliarmus!

Her wand flies out of her hand, as she looks flabbergast at me.

Me: What is it? You have Parkinson, and your wand was thrown away?

She was speechless with shame.

Me: You couldn't possibly think you would get away with yelling at me, could you? Accio wand!

I throw her back the wand, mocking her.

Me: Come on, don't be such a Pansy. Or are you going to run away in tears, craven?

She kept throwing spells at me clumsily, and I simply smirked as I repelled all of them.

Me: Didn't your momma teach you not to go against the best? You simply cannot beat them. Better run away with your tail between your legs, weakling. You're yet another toothless barking dog.

Pansy: *crying* S-SERPENTORTIA!
A snake emerged from the tip of the wand, 3 metres in front of me. Lockhart made a weird hand movement and managed to throw the poor snake in the air, and I lazily caught it, and put it over my shoulders, rubbing its chin with my fingers, and muttering to it to be a nice snakey snakey. I needn't look around to know the shocked looks of everyone and the rumour of me being the heir of Slytherin began.

**me:** I must thank you, Pansy. You gifted me with more fame, and a new pet. Say hello to my new friend, Lady Vashj.

With a hair flip and a smug smirk on my face, I walk off the stage and out the door. Diva exit, check!

Oh well. That was all nice and games, but I have to make sure my little friend is going to behave. And that it has a nice place to stay at.

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And so, Christmas is quickly arriving, all the decorations are on point, and the PolyJuice Potion is almost ready. Only need a piece of DNA from certain Slytherins. Crabbe and Goyle could be our baits. And it was simple. All they had to do was use 2 mini cakes filled with lots of Sleeping Draught, make those 2 idiots eat them—which would prove to be extremely easy—and voila. Perfect disguise.

The deed was done fairly easily, and Harry and Ron were able to transform into the 2 bimbos. But Hermione on the other hand...

Well, the hair that she got from Millicent, proved to be cat hair... and well... she looks like a furry cat now.

To the medical wing with her!

**Ron:** So, how do we get there?

**Harry:** We need the password.

**Me:** I believe I would know the password and way to my own CR, thank you very much.

I heard them slap themselves on the forehead in recognizion. Well duh...

On our way through the labyrinthine way, which made the 2 specifically confused (making sure I go through a more complicated route, so they won't be able to remember) and we met up with Ron's older and more annoying brother, Percy, who was acting all superior and powerful, cause he was a-ahem-Prefect.

He kept talking gibberish, until I heard the familiar cold sneering voice of none other than Draco Malfoy, who urged us to enter the CR and not waste our time with a boring Weasley.

Sounds fair to me.

As soon as we made ourselves comfortable on the luxurious green velvety couch in front of the fireplace, Draco left for a bit, only to return with the Daily Prophet.

**Draco:** That'll give you a laugh.

Harry saw Ron's eyes widen in shock. He read the clipping quickly, gave a very forced laugh, and handed it to Harry.

It had been clipped out of the Daily Prophet, and it said:

**INQUIRY AT THE MINISTRY OF MAGIC**

Arthur Weasley, Head of the Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office, was today fined fifty
Galleons for bewitching a Muggle car.

Mr. Lucius Malfoy, a governor of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where the enchanted car crashed earlier this year, called today for Mr. Weasley's resignation.

"Weasley has brought the Ministry into disrepute," Mr. Malfoy told our reporter. "He is clearly unfit to draw up our laws and his ridiculous Muggle Protection Act should be scrapped immediately."

Mr. Weasley was unavailable for comment, although his wife told reporters to clear off or she'd set the family ghoul on them.

Draco: Well? Don't you think it's funny? Harry: Ha, ha...
Draco: Arthur Weasley loves Muggles so much he should snap his wand in half and go and join them. You'd never know the Weasleys were pure-bloods, the way they behave.

Ron's - or rather, Crabbe's - face was contorted with fury.


Draco: *snickers* Well, go up to the hospital wing and give all those Mudbloods a kick from me. You know, I'm surprised the Daily Prophet hasn't reported all these attacks yet. I suppose Dumbledore's trying to hush it all up. He'll be sacked if it doesn't stop soon. Father's always said old Dumbledore's the worst thing that's ever happened to this place. He loves Muggle-borns. A decent headmaster would never've let slime like that Creevey in.

Draco started taking pictures with an imaginary camera and did a cruel but accurate impression of Colin.

"Potter, can I have your picture, Potter? Can I have your autograph? Can I lick your shoes, please, Potter?" He dropped his hands and looked at Harry and Ron.

Draco: What's the matter with you two?

Far too late, Harry and Ron forced themselves to laugh, but Malfoy seemed satisfied; perhaps Crabbe and Goyle were always slow on the uptake.

Draco: Saint Potter, the Mudbloods' friend. He's another one with no proper wizard feeling, or he wouldn't go around with that jumped up Granger Mudblood. And people think he's Slytherin's heir!

Harry and Ron waited with bated breath: Malfoy was surely seconds away from telling them it was him - but then

Draco: I wish I knew who it is. I could help them. Perhaps you, Raven? *smirks*
me: That'd be funny. *chuckles* Although, I can't deny, I love being able to communicate with my sweet Lady Vashj. I could make a little reptilian army.

Ron's jaw dropped so that Crabbe looked even more clueless than usual. Fortunately, Malfoy didn't
notice, and Harry, thinking fast, said, "You must have some idea who's behind it all ......
Draco:*snaps*You know I haven't, Goyle, how many times do I have to tell you? And Father
won't tell me anything about the last time the Chamber was opened either. Of course, it was
fifty years ago, so it was before his time, but he knows all about it, and he says that it was all
kept quiet and it'll look suspicious if I know too much about it. But I know one thing - last
time the Chamber of Secrets was opened, a Mudblood died. So I bet it's a matter of time
before one of them's killed this time .... I hope it's Granger.

me: Draco... Couldn't you try to refrain from death threatening one of my friends while I'm
around, please?
Draco:*sighs* You're lucky I favour you lots. Otherwise...
me: Yes, I know... Thank you though.

Ron was clenching Crabbe's gigantic fists. Feeling that it would be a bit of a giveaway if Ron
punched Malfoy, Harry shot him a warning look and said, "D'you know if the person who opened
the Chamber last time was caught?"

Draco: Oh, yeah ... whoever it was was expelled. They're probably still in Azkaban.

Harry: Azkaban?" said Harry, puzzled.

Draco: Azkaban - the wizard prison, Goyle. Honestly, if you were any slower, you'd be going
backward.
me: *chuckles* 2 speeds. On the spot and backwards.

He shifted restlessly in his chair and said,

"Father says to keep my head down and let the Heir of Slytherin get on with it. He says the
school needs ridding of all the Mudblood filth, but not to get mixed up in it. Of course, he's got a
lot on his plate at the moment. You know the Ministry of Magic raided our manor last week?"

Harry tried to force Goyle's dull face into a look of concern.

Draco: Yeah. . . Luckily, they didn't find much. Father's got some very valuable Dark Arts
stuff. But luckily, we've got our own secret chamber under the drawing-room floor -

Ron: Ho!

Malfoy looked at him. So did Harry. Ron blushed. Even his hair was turning red. His nose was also
slowly lengthening - their hour was up, Ron was turning back into himself, and from the look of
horror he was suddenly giving Harry, he must be, too.

They both jumped to their feet.

Ron: Medicine for my stomach.

Without further ado they sprinted the length of the Slytherin common room, hurled themselves at
the stone wall, and dashed up the passage. Well... that was very subtle...

Draco: Odd...
me: Eh. 2 idiotic baboons. Nothing to bother with.
Draco: True.
me: Do you really think the Heir of Slytherin is actually a student? What if it's an old guy, infiltrated in the vicinity, or even more, in the castle. Same guy who opened the Chamber before.
Draco: Because I am certain that person was sent to Azkaban.
me: Is that so...
Draco: Quite the wonder you can speak Parseltongue, though. Your parents weren't necessary known to be related to the great Salazar Slytherin.
me: You know about them?
Draco: Obviously. Your mother was a foreigner pureblood, so she's out of question. And your father comes from a long line of Slytherin purebloods, though, no relative is known to have spoken with snakes.
me: Wait... my father... wasn't he a Gryffindor?
Draco: I don't know, Black. All I know is that my mother knows. I could ask her for more information, if that would suit you.
me: Would you mind... if I were to write a letter to her myself?
Draco: Whatever you wish, milady.
me: *giggles* Thank you, milord.

After a LONG time spent in the hospital wing, Hermione is now furless, whiskerless and no longer a cat, we went to the library to discuss about the new supposed clue that Harry and Ron found in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom. T. M. Riddle's diary.

Hermione: Oooh, it might have hidden powers.

Ron: If it has, it's hiding them very well. Maybe it's shy. I don't know why you don't chuck it, Harry.

Harry: I wish I knew why someone did try to chuck it. I wouldn't mind knowing how Riddle got an award for special services to Hogwarts either.

Ron: Could've been anything. Maybe he got thirty O.W.L.s or saved a teacher from the giant squid. Maybe he murdered Myrtle; that would've done everyone a favor.....

But Harry could tell from the arrested look on Hermione's face that she was thinking what he was thinking.

Ron: What?

Harry: Well, the Chamber of Secrets was opened fifty years ago, wasn't it? That's what Malfoy said.

Ron: Yeah. . .

Hermione: And this diary is fifty years old...

Ron: Ah.. so?

Hermione: *snaps* Oh, Ron, wake up. We know the person who opened the Chamber last time was expelled fifty years ago. We know T. M. Riddle got an award for special services to the
school fifty years ago. Well, what if Riddle got his special award for catching the Heir of Slytherin? His diary would probably tell us everything - where the Chamber is, and how to open it, and what sort of creature lives in it - the person who's behind the attacks this time wouldn't want that lying around, would they? Ron: That's a brilliant theory, Hermione, with just one tiny little flaw. There's nothing written in his diary.

But Hermione was pulling her wand out of her bag. "It might be invisible ink!" she whispered. She tapped the diary three times and said "Aparecium!" Nothing happened. Undaunted, Hermione shoved her hand back into her bag and pulled out what appeared to be a bright red eraser. "It's a Revealer, I got it in Diagon Alley," she said. She rubbed hard on January first. Nothing happened.

Ron: I'm telling you, there's nothing to find in there. Riddle just got a diary for Christmas and couldn't be bothered filling it in.

Even so...There is something hidden in the name of this person that bothers me...something tells me that this T.M. Riddle had something to do with what happened 50 years ago. Maybe it's just a gut feelings, maybe I didn't eat enough. Remains to be seen after lunch.
I never thought I'd ever get shocked again while at this Witchcraft School. Boy, was I wrong. Especially upon seeing that the walls were all covered with large, lurid pink flowers. Worse still, heart-shaped confetti was falling from the pale blue ceiling. Harry went over to the Gryffindor table, where Ron was sitting looking sickened, and Hermione seemed to have been overcome with giggles while I went to sit with Draco and the girls.

**me:** What's going on?

I said while wiping confetti off his bacon.

Draco pointed to the teachers' table, apparently too disgusted to speak. Lockhart, wearing lurid pink robes to match the decorations, was waving for silence. The teachers on either side of him were looking stony-faced. From where he sat, I could see a muscle going in Professor McGonagall's cheek. Snape looked as though someone had just fed him a large beaker of Skele-Gro.

"Happy Valentine's Day!" Lockhart shouted. "And may I thank the forty-six people who have so far sent me cards! Yes, I have taken the liberty of arranging this little surprise for you all - and it doesn't end here!"

Lockhart clapped his hands and through the doors to the entrance hall marched a dozen surly-looking dwarfs. Not just any dwarfs, however. Lockhart had them all wearing golden wings and carrying harps. They look like some really ugly versions of Cupid...

**Lockhart:** My friendly, card-carrying cupids! They will be roving around the school today delivering your valentines! And the fun doesn't stop here! I'm sure my colleagues will want to enter into the spirit of the occasion! Why not ask Professor Snape to show you how to whip up a Love Potion! And while you're at it, Professor Flitwick knows more about Entrancing Enchantments than any wizard I've ever met, the sly old dog!

Professor Flitwick buried his face in his hands. Snape was looking as though the first person to ask him for a Love Potion would be force-fed poison.

**me:** This is blasphemy, I swear...

**Draco:** The only good thing Dumbledore could do right now would be to stop this atrocity and fire this idiot.

**me:** Urgh... tell me about it... It's getting worse and worse.

**Jessie:** I think it's adooorable!

**Emma:** Oh, yes! Valentine's Day is such a romantic day.

**me:** Just another pretext to spend time with your loved one or act like a love-sick puppy with your crush.

**Jessie:** That was so meaaaan. Raveeen why are you so coooold?

**me:** You are like... what? 12? And you want to have a boyfriend? You barely know your names. Being in a relationship means lots of things.

**Emma:** Like true looveee

**me:** That too, I guess...
Draco: Spare me the gibberish. We should go to class anyways.

As we went ahead of the girls to the dungeons, for Potions, I was suddenly stopped by a so called Cupid.

Cupid: Oi you, 'Aven Black! Hold on!
me: Y-yes...?
Cupid: You have a special Valentine.
me: Wh-what?! F-from who?
Cupid: Anonymus.* clears throat* You brought me sunshine, /When I only saw rain; /You brought me laughter,/When I only felt pain.

And with that, it flew away, leaving me red cheeked and Draco chuckling besides me.

me: L-let's j-just go to class...

He continued to tease me with that poem, but never mentioned it to anyone else. I wonder who it is though. Has to be someone I'm friends with, right? I wonder who though...

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During the evening break, just before dinner, I saw the Gryffindor table in a complete whispering chaos, and I easily found out that the boys' 2nd year bedroom had been ravished by someone. And between the more knowledgable ones-ahem-that diary had been also stolen. Also, I found out later, upon hanging out with Harry, what he went through while 'chatting' with the erhm... possible memory of Tom Riddle. How he found out that he received that award after making sure that the then-headmaster Dippet would expel Hagrid and find him the culprit of the death of that muggleborn girl

...The death of a muggleborn girl... could that be...?

With that thought running through my head, I sprinted in Professor Snape's office, who was enjoying a cup of tea and reading the Daily Prophet.

me: You don't actually enjoy reading that, do you?
Snape: Better than nothing, I suppose.
me: You have a whole library at disposal. Well... a whole magical library, perhaps...
Snape: Did you come here precisely to recommend me a book to read, or with an actual reason?
me: Oh, yes! That's right. Ahem. Professor, is it true that the monster from the Chamber of Secrets is a Basilisk?
Snape: What made you come up with this conclusion?
me: It all fits. It's a serpent, so it can be controlled by a Parselmouth. Or... well... the Heir of Slytherin, obviously.
Snape: That is correct.
me: Okay, so it's a Basilisk. So pretty much, if that thing were to attack us literally, we'd be damned. I mean, I and Harry could speak to it, but it won't listen if the Heir of Slytherin is there.
Snape: Obviously.
me: In the girls' bathroom from 1st floor, there is a ghost called Moaning Myrtle. She was a student here, but for how long she's been haunting that erhm.. toilet, I don't know. Could she be
the muggleborn girl that died when the Chamber of Secrets was first opened 50 years ago?
Snape: I don't know how you got all that information, but I believe it is true.
me: Professor, you would be truly underestimating my detective skills. Also, let's not forget that my gut feelings are always true, for some reason.
Snape: You might be a seer. You will find out next year, if you decide to take up Divination class.
me: Um... I'll keep that in mind. Also, as I was mentioning THAT particular bathroom, on the floor was found T.M. Riddle's diary. Tom something Riddle. Umm... it is quite a long story to tell, but let's just say that the chaos from the Gryffindor's CR was caused by the ravished boys' dormitory and secretly, the thievery act of someone who stole that diary. Is This Tom Riddle maybe... Voldemort?
Snape: Might be. What made you think that?
me: Gut feeling.
Snape: *smirk* Listen to that gut feeling of yours, it's never wrong.

Suddenly, Dumbledore came in the room, telling us about the petrification of Hermione and a certain Penelope Clearwater, a Ravenclaw friend of Percy. The shock struck me like a lightning. She was in the library... Could she have found something crucial? A clue, that cause her to be attacked? With the exception that she's a muggleborn as well...
We must act fast before something even worse happens. Thus far, only petrification occurred, but who says that next time there won't be a legit murder?
Clearly not my gut feeling.

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The following 2 weeks have been extremely unpleasing and I tried not to stay around Draco anymore. Pretty much because he kept boasting about how he's so great for being a pureblood, about the 'Mudbloods' and the murders... I can't stand it. When we're alone, he doesn't mention these things, but when others are around... urgh... the condescending personality takes over, and it's extremely awful... So best avoid it at all costs.
That didn't help my shyness though, by the fact that I became more shielded and hidden in my own shell, so I find it hard to speak up again...
And with the whole rule with a teacher getting us to the other class, the CR or the hall room... well... I couldn't talk to Harry and Ron too much anymore... Just bits and bits while our meals. This. Sucks.

After a long day, just before dinner, we heard McGonagall's frantic voice announcing everyone to go to their CRs, while teachers should go to their staffroom. There's been another attack... Wonder who...
I ran in that direction, finding all the teachers gathered around. Though surprised by my presence, nobody commented anything. I suppose that I'm preferred because I'm not as reckless or Harry, or perhaps the fact that Snape didn't shoo me away was enough to tell them it's okay for me to hear why they were so frightened.

McGonagall: It has happened. A student has been taken by the monster. Right into the Chamber itself.

Professor Flitwick let out a squeal. Professor Sprout clapped her hands over her mouth. Snape gripped the back of a chair very hard.

Snape: How can you be sure?
McGonagall: The Heir of Slytherin, left another message. Right underneath the first one. *Her skeleton will lie in the Chamber forever.*

Professor Flitwick burst into tears.

_Hooch:_ Who is it? Which student?

McGonagall: Ginny Weasley. We shall have to send all the students home tomorrow. This is the end of Hogwarts. Dumbledore always said.

Me: *gasps* No way... That cannot be...

The staffroom door banged open again. It was Lockhart, and he was beaming.

_Lockhart:_ So sorry - dozed off - what have I missed?

He didn't seem to notice that the other teachers were looking at him with something remarkably like hatred.

Me: How can you be so ignorant at a time like THIS?! How dare you? Have you no shame at all? A girl... my friend... has been literally snatched from under our noses, and dragged into the Chamber of Secrets! She was at lunch just today, and now... this!

Snape stepped forward.

_Snape:_ Just the man. The very man. A girl has been snatched by the monster, Lockhart, just as Miss Black stated in a rightful passive-aggressive manner. Taken into the Chamber of Secrets itself. Your moment has come at last.

Lockhart blanched.

_Sprout:_ That's right, Gilderoy. Weren't you saying just last night that you've known all along where the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is?

Lockhart: I - well, I -

_Flitwick:_ Yes, didn't you tell me you were sure you knew what was inside it?

Lockhart: D-did I? I don't recall -

_Snape:_ I certainly remember you saying you were sorry you hadn't had a crack at the monster before Hagrid was arrested. Didn't you say that the whole affair had been bungled, and that you should have been given a free rein from the first?

Lockhart stared around at his stony-faced colleagues.

Lockhart: I - I really never - you may have misunderstood -

McGonagall: We'll leave it to you, then, Gilderoy. Tonight will be an excellent time to do it. We'll make sure everyone's out of your way. You'll be able to tackle the monster all by yourself. A free rein at last.

Lockhart gazed desperately around him, but nobody came to the rescue. He didn't look remotely handsome anymore. His lip was trembling, and in the absence of his usually toothy grin, he looked weak-chinned and feeble.

Lockhart: Very well... I'll - I'll be in my office, getting getting ready.
After that, the teachers wore a look of sorrow, but at least got rid of Lockhart from there. Each had teacher had to make sure their students were in the Common Rooms and tomorrow first thing in the morning we will be taken home. Not today. This is just the moment I've been waiting for.

me:*smirk* Just give it a few hours. Everything will be back to normal. I can promise you that.

McGonagall: What are you talking about, Miss Black? Is there something you know that you would like to share with us?

me: Let's just say... What if the person was caught... if it all stopped...

McGonagall: What do you mean? Black, do you know mean you know something about these attacks?

me: *looking at Snape* No, professor. Not at all~*smirk*

With that, I dashed off to the 1st floor bathroom, only to find Lockhart being threatened by Harry and Ron.

me: Let me guess. He was packing up ready to leave?

Harry: How did you...?

me: You have to be stupid not to know.

Ron: Raven, the monster is-

me: A Basilisk, obviously. It would only take half the number of neurons you have to decipher that.

Ron: You knew?!

me: Well duh. It was too easy to put 2 and 2 together. I mean, the diary, what you guys told me, the muggleborn girl and so on. Hagrid would never hurt a fly and whatever monster it was, it wasn't a spider. It was a reptilian. A Serpent. A Basilisk. One that can only be controlled by a Parselmouth. In this case, more specifically, THE Heir of Slytherin.*smirks* Bet you don't even know who Tom Riddle is. Oh dear, such a hero, he has an award. Puh-lease. He's as much of a hoax as Lockhart is.

Harry: So the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets is...

me: Exactly this sink. Myrtle can confirm it.

With that, I looked at each faucet and found one with a tiny snake on it and said "Open", which hopefully was in Parseltongue, not in common language. That would have been embarrassing. Upon speaking the snake tongue, the sinks divided, leaving behind a great tunnel to...erhm... I guess the Chamber of Secrets. Pretty neat. Gotta give Salazar brownie points for being so inventive.

Harry: How come you found all this information before us?

me: Never underestimate the resourcefulness of a Slytherin. Also, I managed to delegate you pretty easily to search info. And let's not forget who my House teacher is.*ahem* Lockhart, if you would be so kind as to assure our landing is not fatal *push him in the tunnel* Thank you very much.

After hearing a thud and a groan, we proceeded in jumping in the tunnel too. It was safe... relatively speaking.

Harry: We must be miles under the school.

Ron: Under the lake, probably.
It was so dark, all 3 of us muttered the Lumos spell and it dimly lit up.

**Harry:** Remember, any sign of movement, close your eyes right away ....

But the tunnel was quiet as the grave, and the first unexpected sound they heard was a loud crunch as Ron stepped on what turned out to be a rat's skull. Harry lowered his wand to look at the floor and saw that it was littered with small animal bones.

**Ron:** Harry - there's something up there -

We froze, watching. Harry could just see the outline of something huge and curved, lying right across the tunnel. It wasn't moving.

**Ron:** Maybe it's asleep.

**me:** It's a Snake Skin...

Lockhart's hands were pressed over his eyes. Harry turned back to look at the thing, his heart beating so fast it hurt. Very slowly, his eyes as narrow as he could make them and still see, Harry edged forward, his wand held high. The light slid over a gigantic snake skin, of a vivid, poisonous green, lying curled and empty across the tunnel floor. The creature that had shed it must have been twenty feet long at least.

**Ron:** Blimey...

There was a sudden movement behind them. Gilderoy Lockhart's knees had given way. "Get up," said Ron sharply, pointing his wand at Lockhart.

Lockhart got to his feet - then he dived at Ron, knocking him to the ground. Harry jumped forward, but too late - Lockhart was straightening up, panting, Ron's wand in his hand and a gleaming smile back on his face.

**Lockhart:** The adventure ends here, boys! I shall take a bit of this skin back up to the school, tell them I was too late to save the girl, and that you two tragically lost your minds at the sight of her mangled body - say good-bye to your memories!

I swear, if he tries to use a spell on us, he better not use Ron's destroyed wand... He raised Ron's Spellotaped wand high over his head and yelled, "Obliviate!" The wand exploded with the force of a small bomb. I flung my arms shielding my head and ran, slipping over the coils of snake skin, out of the way of great chunks of tunnel ceiling that were thundering to the floor. When the falling rocks stopped, I looked around, only seeing Harry in the darkness.

**Harry:** Ron! Are you okay? Ron!

**Ron:** I'm here! I'm okay - this git's not, though - he got blasted by the wand.

**me:** That's for the best.

There was a dull thud and a loud "ow!" It sounded as though Ron had just kicked Lockhart in the shins.
Ron: What now? We can't get through - it'll take ages ...
me: Try to move the rocks from the path until we return, okay?

Harry: Wait with Lockhart. I'll go on.... If we're not back in an hour...

Ron: I'll try and shift some of this rock. So you can - can get back through. And, Harry -

Harry: See you in a bit

Soon the distant noise of Ron straining to shift the rocks was gone. The tunnel turned and turned again. This never ending tunnel was making us more and more anxious, not knowing what to expect. The fear of the unknown was great. Would the Heir be there? Is Ginny still alive? Will we be getting out back alive? As in, all of us?
After a while, we got in front of a circular door, decorated with many snakes. Such Slytherin pride. There was no need to pretend these stone snakes were real; their eyes looked strangely alive.

"Open, " I said in the same low, faint hiss. The serpents parted as the wall cracked open, the halves slid smoothly out of sight, and Harry, shaking from head to foot, walked inside.

Towering stone pillars entwined with more carved serpents rose to support a ceiling lost in darkness, casting long, black shadows through the odd, greenish gloom that filled the place. Our hearts were beating like they were in a marathon as we stood listening to the chill silence. Could the basilisk be lurking in a shadowy corner, behind a pillar? And where was Ginny? With great caution, we raised our wands at ready, trying to prepare for a potential sneak attack or ambush. But that was not the case.
As we drew level with the last pair of pillars, a statue high as the Chamber itself loomed into view, standing against the back wall. There, on the wet cold hard ground, was laying Ginny, looking lifeless. Please don't be dead... Harry sprinted to her side, dropping on his knees, muttering her name.

Harry: Ginny - don't be dead - please don't be dead -

He flung his wand aside, grabbed Ginny's shoulders, and turned her over. Her face was white as marble, and as cold, yet her eyes were closed, so she wasn't Petrified. But then she must be...

Harry: Ginny, please wake up...
me: She still has a pulse though...

All of a sudden, a smooth soft velvety voice was heard from behind us.

"She won't wake,"

Harry jumped and spun around on his knees and I peered over my shoulder. There was a young boy, around the age of the Twins, black longish hair, dark eyes, tall, with a cold yet respect inducing aura radiating with him. He wore Slytherin robes and wore a vague smug expression. His name, Tom M. Riddle.

Harry: What d' you mean, she won't wake? She's not - she's not -?
me: She's alive, I told you.

Tom: But only just.
Harry stared at him. Tom Riddle had been at Hogwarts fifty years ago, yet here he stood, a weird, misty light shining about him, not a day older than sixteen.

**Harry:** Are you a ghost?

**Tom:** A memory. Preserved in a diary for fifty years.

**me:** Ghost are more see-through...

He smirked at me and pointed toward the floor near the statue's giant toes. Lying open there was the little black diary Harry had found in Moaning Myrtle's bathroom.

**Harry:** You've got to help me, Tom. We've got to get her out of here. There's a basilisk ... I don't know where it is, but it could be along any moment ... Please, help me -

This was way too funny. After all that he learnt thus far, he really thought Tom Riddle was going to HELP him? No wonder he's not a Ravenclaw...

**Me:** *laughs* Harry... you really think... Tom Riddle is going to... help you... save Ginny?

Riddle didn't move. Harry, confused and sweating, managed to hoist Ginny half off the floor, and bent to pick up his wand again. He obviously couldn't think rationally while being under the pressure of a friend dying.

*But his wand had gone.*

**Harry:** Did you see -?

He looked up. Riddle was still watching him - twirling Harry's wand between his long fingers. "Thanks," said Harry, stretching out his hand for it. A smile curled the corners of Riddle's mouth. He continued to stare at Harry, twirling the wand idly.

**Harry:** Listen! We've got to go! If the basilisk comes -

**Tom:** *calmly* It won't come until it is called.

Harry lowered Ginny back onto the floor, unable to hold her up any longer.

**Harry:** What d'you mean? Look, give me my wand, I might need it -

Riddle's smile broadened.

**Tom:** You won't be needing it.

Harry stared at him.

**me:** Harry, don't you get it?
Harry: What d'you mean, I won't be -?
Tom: I've waited a long time for this, Harry Potter and Raven Black. For the chance to see you. To speak to you.

Harry: Look-I don't think you get it. We're in the Chamber of Secrets. We can talk later -
Tom: We're going to talk now.

Said Riddle, still smiling broadly, and he pocketed Harry's wand.
Harry stared at him.

Harry: How did Ginny get like this?
Tom: Well, that's an interesting question. And quite a long story. I suppose the real reason Ginny Weasley's like this is because she opened her heart and spilled all her secrets to an invisible stranger.
Harry: What are you talking about?
me: The diary, Harry...
Tom: *smirks* My diary. Little Ginny's been writing in it for months and months, telling me all her pitiful worries and woes - how her brothers tease her, how she had to come to school with secondhand robes and books, how-....how she didn't think famous, good, great Harry Potter would ever like her . . . .

All the time he spoke, Riddle's eyes never left Harry's face. There was an almost hungry look in them.

Tom: It's very boring, having to listen to the silly little troubles of an eleven-year-old girl. But I was patient. I wrote back. I was sympathetic, I was kind. Ginny simply loved me. No one's ever understood me like you, Tom .... I'm so glad I've got this diary to confide in .... It's like having a friend I can carry around in my pocket . . . .

Riddle laughed, a high, cold laugh.

Tom: If I say it myself, Harry, I've always been able to charm the people I needed. So Ginny poured out her soul to me, and her soul happened to be exactly what I wanted .... I grew stronger and stronger on a diet of her deepest fears, her darkest secrets. I grew powerful, far more powerful than little Miss Weasley. Powerful enough to start feeding Miss Weasley a few of my secrets, to start pouring a little of my soul back into her.
Harry: What d'you mean?

Tom: Haven't you guessed yet, Harry Potter? You are rather slow, compared to Black over here. Perhaps a Gryffindor can never outsmart a Slytherin. Ginny Weasley opened the Chamber of Secrets. She strangled the school roosters and wrote threatening messages on the walls. She set the Serpent of Slytherin on four Mudbloods, and the Squib's cat.
Harry: No...

Tom: Yes. Of course, she didn't know what she was doing at first. It was very amusing. I wish you could have seen her new diary entries ... far more interesting, they became .... Dear Tom, 'I think I'm losing my memory. There are rooster feathers all over my robes and I don't
know how they got there. Dear Tom, I can't remember what I did on the night of Halloween, but a cat was attacked and I've got paint all down my front. Dear Tom, Percy keeps telling me I'm pale and I'm not myself. I think he suspects me... There was another attack today and I don't know where I was. Tom, what am I going to do? I think I'm going mad... I think I'm the one attacking everyone, Tom!'

me: You gotta admit it's quite funny...

Harry's fists were clenched, the nails digging deep into his Palms.

Tom: It took a very long time for stupid little Ginny to stop trusting her diary. But she finally became suspicious and tried to dispose of it. And that's where you came in, Harry. You found it, and I couldn't have been more delighted. Of all the people who could have picked it up, it was you, the very person I was most anxious to meet... .

Harry: And why did you want to meet me?

Anger was coursing through him, and it was an effort to keep his voice steady.

Tom: Well, you see, Ginny told me all about you, Harry. Even some things about you, Raven.

me: About... me?

Tom: Your whole fascinating history.

His eyes roved over the lightning scar on Harry's forehead, to my skull scar on my neck and his expression grew hungrier.

Tom: I knew I must find out more about you, talk to you, meet you if I could. So I decided to show you my famous capture of that great oaf, Hagrid, to gain your trust -

Harry: Hagrid's my friend. And you framed him, didn't you? I thought you made a mistake, but -

me: And you finally get it...

Riddle laughed his high laugh again.

Tom: It was my word against Hagrid's, Harry. Well, you can imagine how it looked to old Armando Dippet. On the one hand, Tom Riddle, poor but brilliant, parentless but so brave, school prefect, model student ... on the other hand, big, blundering Hagrid, in trouble every other week, trying to raise werewolf cubs under his bed, sneaking off to the Forbidden Forest to wrestle trolls ... but I admit, even I was surprised how well the plan worked. I thought someone must realize that Hagrid couldn't possibly be the Heir of Slytherin. It had taken me five whole years to find out everything I could about the Chamber of Secrets and discover the secret entrance ... as though Hagrid had the brains, or the power! Only the Transfiguration teacher, Dumbledore, seemed to think Hagrid was innocent. He persuaded Dipper to keep Hagrid and train him as gamekeeper. Yes, I think Dumbledore might have guessed .... Dumbledore never seemed to like me as much as the other teachers did ......

Harry: I bet Dumbledore saw right through you.

Tom: Well, he certainly kept an annoyingly close watch on me after Hagrid was expelled. I knew it wouldn't be safe to open the Chamber again while I was still at school. But I wasn't going to waste those long years I spent searching for it. I decided to leave behind a diary,
preserving my sixteen-year-old self in its pages, so that one day, with luck, I would be able to lead another in my footsteps, and finish Salazar Slytherin's noble work.

Harry: Well, you haven't finished it. No one's died this time, not even the cat. In a few hours the Mandrake Draught will be ready and everyone who was Petrified will be all right again -

Tom: Haven't I already told you that killing Mudbloods doesn't matter to me anymore? For many months now, my new target has been - you.

Harry stared at him.

Tom: Imagine how angry I was when the next time my diary was opened, it was Ginny who was writing to me, not you. She saw you with the diary, you see, and panicked. "What if you found out how to work it, and I repeated all her secrets to you? What if, even worse, I told you who'd been strangling roosters?" So the foolish little brat waited until your dormitory was deserted and stole it back. But I knew what I must do. It was clear to me that you were on the trail of Slytherin's heir. From everything Ginny had told me about you, I knew you would go to any lengths to solve the mystery -- particularly if one of your best friends was attacked.

And Ginny had told me the whole school was buzzing because you 2 could speak Parseltongue ....

~~So I made Ginny write her own farewell on the wall and come down here to wait. She struggled and cried and became very boring. But there isn't much life left in her .... She put too much into the diary, into me. Enough to let me leave its pages at last .... I have been waiting for you to appear since we arrived here. I knew you'd come. I have many questions for you, Harry Potter, Raven Black.

me: I swear I feel kind of sorry that you have to speak so much just to state the obvious...

Tom: *smirks* I knew that you would find out rather easily about the whole ordeal, Raven. Ginny told me that you were a Slytherin. Said how you managed to get information from everyone without them realizing. *The true resourcefulness and cunning of a Slytherin.* I must say, I'm rather proud.

Harry: Enough. What questions do you want to ask?

Tom: Well... how is it that you a skinny boy with no extraordinary magical talent - managed to defeat the greatest wizard of all time? How did you escape with nothing but a scar, while Lord Voldemort's powers were destroyed?

There was an odd red gleam in his hungry eyes now.

Harry: Why do you care how I escaped? Voldemort was after your time ......

me: Ermh... You just might be wrong here...

Tom: Voldemort... is my past, present, and future, Harry Potter ....

me: His name... is an anagram...

He pulled Harry's wand from his pocket and began to trace it through the air, writing three shimmering words:

**TOM MARVOLO RIDDLE**

Then he waved the wand once, and the letters of his name rearranged themselves:
"You see?" I whispered.

Tom: It was a name I was already using at Hogwarts, to my most intimate friends only, of course. You think I was going to use my filthy Muggle father's name forever? I, in whose veins runs the blood of Salazar Slytherin himself, through my mother's side? I, keep the name of a foul, common Muggle, who abandoned me even before I was born, just because he found out his wife was a witch? No, Harry - I fashioned myself a new name, a name I knew wizards everywhere would one day fear to speak, when I had become the greatest sorcerer in the world!

Harry's brain seemed to have jammed. He stared numbly at Riddle, at the orphaned boy who had grown up to murder Harry's own parents, and so many others....

"You're not..", his quiet voice full of hatred.
Tom:*snaps*Not what?
Harry: Not the greatest sorcerer in the world. Sorry to disappoint you and all that, but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore. Everyone says so. Even when you were strong, you didn't dare try and take over at Hogwarts. Dumbledore saw through you when you were at school and he still frightens you now, wherever you're hiding these days -

The smile had gone from Riddle's face, to be replaced by a very ugly look.

Tom: Dumbledore's been driven out of this castle by the mere memory of me!
me: Not quite true..
Harry: He's not as gone as you might think!

He was speaking at random, wanting to scare Riddle, wishing rather than believing it to be true

Riddle opened his mouth, but froze.

Music was coming from somewhere. Riddle turned around to stare down the empty Chamber. The music was growing louder. It was eerie, unearthly; Flames erupted at the top of the nearest pillar.

A crimson bird, a Phoenix, piping its weird music to the vaulted ceiling. It had a glittering golden tail as long as a peacock's and gleaming golden talons, which were gripping a ragged bundle.

A second later, the bird was flying straight at Harry. It dropped the ragged thing it was carrying at his feet, then landed heavily on his shoulder. As it folded its great wings, Harry looked up and saw it had a long, sharp golden beak and a beady black eye. Majestique...

The bird stopped singing, gazing steadily at Riddle.

Tom: That's a phoenix.
me: Well spotted.
Harry: Fawkes?
Tom: And that -... that's the old school Sorting Hat -

So it was. Patched, frayed, and dirty, the hat lay motionless at Harry's feet. Riddle began to laugh again. He laughed so hard that the dark chamber rang with it.

"This is what Dumbledore sends his defender! A songbird and an old hat! Do you feel brave, Harry Potter? Do you feel safe now?"

Nobody answered.

Tom: To business. Twice - in your past, in my future - we have met. And twice I failed to kill you. How did you survive? Tell me everything. The longer you talk... the longer you stay alive.

Harry: No one knows why you lost your powers when you attacked me. I don't know myself. But I know why you couldn't kill me. Because my mother died to save me. My common Muggle-born mother. She stopped you killing me. And I've seen the real you, I saw you last year. You're a wreck. You're barely alive. That's where all your power got you. You're in hiding. You're ugly, you're foul -

Riddle's face contorted. Then he forced it into an awful smile.

Tom: So. Your mother died to save you. Yes, that's a powerful countercharm. I can see now ... there is nothing special about you, after all. I wondered, you see. There are strange likenesses between us, after all. Even you must have noticed. Both half-bloods, all of us orphans, raised by Muggles. Probably the only three Parselmouths to come to Hogwarts since the great Slytherin himself. We even look something alike ... but after all, it was merely a lucky chance that saved you from me. That's all I wanted to know.

Harry stood, tense, waiting for Riddle to raise his wand. But Riddle's twisted smile was widening again. I was staring at Tom, expecting to see his next move. Despite always stating "us", he is more fixed on Harry, rather than on me. I wonder if it's because of our Houses...

Tom: Now, Harry, I'm going to teach you a little lesson. Let's match the powers of Lord Voldemort, Heir of Salazar Slytherin, against famous Harry Potter and Raven Black, and the best weapons Dumbledore can give him . . . .

Sounds like a great way to start a dramatic showdown, and to expect your demise in a pretty gruesome way. Wonder if my slyness can save me again...
Thanks for the memories...

Riddle opened his mouth wide and hissed, speaking in Parseltongue.

"*Speak to me, Slytherin, greatest of the Hogwarts Four.*"

Harry wheeled around to look up at the statue, Fawkes swaying on his shoulder. I was still analysing the situation and my 12 year old brain and gut feeling told me that it would be better not to stay around Harry.

Slytherin's gigantic stone face was moving. We were horrorstruck...

And something was stirring inside the statue's mouth. Something was slithering up from its depths. The Basilisk...

Harry backed away until he hit the dark Chamber wall, and as he shut his eyes tight as Fawkes flew away. Damn...

As long as you don't look it in the eyes, it will be okay...so I'll just look down at it's huge body.

"*Kill them.*"

The basilisk was moving toward Harry. Eyes still tightly shut, he began to run blindly sideways, his hands outstretched, feeling his way - Tom was laughing. So it was good that I didn't go that way.

Harry tripped. He fell hard onto the stone. The serpent was barely feet from him,

There was a loud, explosive spitting sound right above him, and then something heavy hit Harry so hard that he was smashed into the wall. Ouchie... What to do... what to do... I have to save him...

Oh, yes of course.

~Whistle~

The Basilisk turned it's upper part towards me, distracted by my loud echoing whistle, as Fawkes kept flying around its head, then diving and slashing and gouging at its eyes. Perfect, now we can actually look at it.

**Tom:** NO! LEAVE THE BIRD! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE BOY IS BEHIND YOU. YOU CAN STILL SMELL HIM. KILL HIM!

The blinded serpent swayed, confused, still deadly. Fawkes was circling its head, piping his eerie song, jabbing here and there at its scaly nose as the blood poured from its ruined eyes.

The snake's tail whipped across the floor again. Harry ducked. Something soft hit his face.

The basilisk had swept the Sorting Hat into Harry's arms. Harry seized it. It was all he had left, his only chance - he rammed it onto his head and threw himself flat onto the floor as the basilisk's tail swung over him again. A gleaming silver sword had appeared inside the hat, its handle glittering with rubies.

"*KILL THE BOY! LEAVE THE BIRD! THE BOY IS BEHIND YOU. SNIFF --*
At this point, Harry managed to get on his feet and run into one of the tunnels, leaving me and Riddle alone.

me: Don't think I haven't noticed.
Tom:*smirks* Notice what, exactly?
me: That you want to kill Harry, and despite using the plural, you never actually tried to harm me. Why?
Tom: I think you know very well the reason.
me: Because I'm a Slytherin?
Tom: Precisely.
me: Harry was almost sorted in Slytherin too.
Tom: He has no right to be in Slytherin. And even if by chance, he were to be sorted there, he does not possess such obvious talent and traits. Not those of a Slytherin.
me: You wish to recruit me as one of your Death Eaters, if you regain your powers?

He walked in front of me, smirking enticingly, and put his cold hand on my face, staring into my eyes.

Tom: Smart girl. It's just a matter of time until I manage to get my earthly body and power back. Then, this world is going to fear the great Dark Lord like never before!
me: Mhm... Is that so...
Tom: Your dear Professor Snape was once a great supporter of mine. So were young Draco's parents. You would fit well~. Imagine all the power we could achieve once the Dark Mark appears once again on the sky, and all my followers are going to join forces to create a new era. One of power.
me: Sounds nice. Like an achievable Utopia with no existing exit.
Tom: Best kind of Utopia.

The Basilisk returned soon enough, while Harry managed to escape from the tunnel. At the peak of the action, a silvery shiny sword and two medium length daggers appeared from the hat. Harry dashed to get the sword as the Basilisk's head was ready to attack, lunging at him.

It lunged blindly -- Harry dodged and it hit the Chamber wall. It lunged again, and its forked tongue lashed Harry's side. He raised the sword in both his hands -

The basilisk lunged again, and this time its aim was true -- Harry managed to drive the sword through the roof of the serpent's mouth.

The Basilisk defeated, fell on the ground, splattering water around, as Harry slid down the wall gripping the fang that was impaling his arm, yanking it out, and dragging himself towards us. I sprinted by his side, helping him sit down near Ginny and Fawkes, disregarding the presence of Tom.

Harry: Fawkes... You were fantastic, Fawkes... . . . .

That was indeed true. Harry blinked as Fawkes put its head above the wound and shed a few pearly
tears on the poisoned wound caused by the Basilisk fang.

Tom:I'm going to sit here and watch you die, Harry Potter. Take your time. I'm in no hurry. So ends the famous Harry Potter. Alone in the Chamber of Secrets, forsaken by his friends, defeated at last by the Dark Lord he so unwisely challenged. You'll be back with your dear Mudblood mother soon, Harry... She bought you twelve years of borrowed time... but Lord Voldemort got you in the end, as you knew he must...

But as clever and witty as Tom is, apparently, he didn't study about magical beasts too well.

me: I don't know if you're aware, but the tears of a Phoenix are able to cure any kind of wound.

More pearly tears were shining all around the wound -- except that there was no wound. It had completely healed.

Tom: Get away, bird! Get away from him - I said, get away --!

Riddle was pointing Harry's wand at Fawkes; there was a bang like a gun, and Fawkes took flight again in a whirl of gold and scarlet.

Tom: Phoenix tears. Of course ... healing powers ... I forgot. . . how could I overlook such a trivial yet important fact... But it makes no difference! In fact, I prefer it this way. Just you and me, Harry Potter ... you and me....

What he hadn't noticed was that while he wasn't paying attention, I kicked the diary right next to Harry. Fang near him, diary near him... He should know what to do.

For a split second, both Harry and Riddle, wand still raised, stared at it. Without any kind of hesitation, as if reading my mind, Harry grabbed the basilisk fang and plunged it straight into the heart of the book. There was a long, dreadful, piercing scream. Ink spurted out of the diary in torrents, streaming and flooding the floor. Riddle was writhing and twisting, screaming and flailing and then POOF.

He had gone.

The venom did the whole job of erasing the memory of Tom, without him realizing I had any part in it. The less he knows, the better.

I slowly approach him, smiling and ruffling his hair in pride, saying how brave he was, and just like that, a faint groan was heard from behind us.

Ginny woke up.

Upon seeing the diary, memories flood back to her, and she let out a gasp and started sobbing.

Ginny: Harry -- oh, Harry -- I tried to tell you at breakfast, but I couldn't say it in front of Percy -- it was me, Harry -- but I -- I swear I didn't mean to -- Riddle made me, he took me over -- and how did you kill that -- that thing? Where's Riddle? The last thing I remember is him coming out of the diary --
Harry: It's all right, Ginny.

He held up the diary, and showing Ginny the fang hole.

me: Riddle's finished. Look! Gone for good. Him and the basilisk.
Harry: Yes, after a long time. C'mon, Ginny, let's get out of here --
Ginny: I'm going to be expelled! I've looked forward to coming to Hogwarts ever since B-Bill came and n-now I'll have to leave and -- w-what'll Mum and Dad say?
me: *hugging her* Relax, dear. It wasn't your fault. You were just one unfortunate student who somehow got the diary. You did what any teenager would do. Write in it. Then, you were manipulated. Against your will. You will be just fine.

After a few minutes of walking in the dark, around snake skin and rocks, we finally got to the entrance where we left Ron.

Harry: Ron! Ginny's okay! I've got her!

"Ginny!" Ron thrust an arm through the gap in the rock to pull her through first.
Ron: How come you've got a sword? A-and daggers?
me: Urgh... Long story...

Harry: I'll explain when we get out of here

Ron: But --

me: Later. Where's Lockhart?

Ron: Back there. He's in a bad way. Come and see.

The Great Wizard Gilderoy Lockhart was sitting there, humming placidly to himself.

Ron: His memory's gone. The Memory Charm backfired. Hit him instead of us. Hasn't got a clue who he is, or where he is, or who we are. I told him to come and wait here. He's a danger to himself

Lockhart: Hello. Odd sort of place, this, isn't it? Do you live here?
Ron: No... Have any of you thought how we're going to get back up this?

Fawkes then started waving its tail around, telling us to grab hold of it, to fly us back to the bathroom. Well... It's a Phoenix after all... No ordinary bird...
Upon stepping on the floor, Myrtle let a disappointed groan. Apparently... she wanted to have a ghost-Harry share the bathroom with you... that is just... well... creepy. In a stalkerish way.

Fawkes lead us to McGonagall's office, where we were greeted by Mr. and Mrs. Weasley and of course, Professor McGonagall... and Dumbledore too~!
We weren't too presentable... all covered in muck and slime... and a memory-less Lockhart... but hey! At least we are alive~!... barely...
Mrs. Weasley jump-hugged her daughter in relief, followed by Mr. Weasley, both happy to see the
girl safe and sound. Fawkes flew on Dumbledore's shoulder, and the Weasley parents hugged me, Harry and Ron tightly, asking us how did we manage to save her. That was the Daily Question.

I went to the desk, putting my two shiny daggers, with small shiny emeralds on the handle, and Salazar-Slytherin was written on them, and Harry put the sword on the table as well. Then Harry started telling the story, and I simply added the obvious facts that apparently weren't so obvious for Harry and Ron. After all, if I were to tell the story, it would give some people a bad reputation, including me.

McGonagall: Very well. So you found out where the entrance was -- breaking a hundred school rules into pieces along the way, I might add - but how on earth did you all get out of there alive?

me: What's life without a little risk?

He told them about Fawkes's timely arrival and about the Sorting Hat giving him the sword. But refrained to speak about the diary. Harry looked at Dumbledore, who smiled faintly, the firelight glancing off his half-moon spectacles.

Dumbledore: What interests me most, is how Lord Voldemort managed to enchant Ginny, when my sources tell me he is currently in hiding in the forests of Albania.

Nicely saved, old man.

Mr. Weasley. W- what's that? You-Know-Who? Enchant Ginny? But Ginny's not ... Ginny hasn't been ... has she?

me: It was this diary. Tom Riddle wrote it when he was sixteen.

He took the diary from my hands and inspected it thoroughly.

Dumbledore: Brilliant. Of course, he was probably the most brilliant student Hogwarts has ever seen... Very few people know that Lord Voldemort was once called Tom Riddle. I taught him myself, fifty years ago, at Hogwarts. He disappeared after leaving the school ... traveled far and wide ... sank so deeply into the Dark Arts, consorted with the very worst of our kind, underwent so many dangerous, magical transformations, that when he resurfaced as Lord Voldemort, he was barely recognizable. Hardly anyone connected Lord Voldemort with the clever, handsome boy who was once Head Boy here.

me: Wouldn't have guessed unless I knew his name. It's an anagram, after all. A witty, very well made one.

Mrs. Weasley: But, Ginny... What's our Ginny got to do with - with -- him? Ginny: His d-diary... I've b-been writing in it, and he's been w-writing back all year

-Mr. Weasley: Ginny! Haven't I taught you anything. What have I always told you? Never trust anything that can think for itself if you can't see where it keeps its brain? Why didn't you show the diary to me, or your mother? A suspicious object like that, it was clearly full of Dark Magic --

Ginny: I d-didn't know! I found it inside one of the books Mum got me. I th-thought someone had just left it in there and forgotten about it --
Dumbledore: Miss Weasley should go up to the hospital wing right away. This has been a terrible ordeal for her. There will be no punishment. Older and wiser wizards than she have been hoodwinked by Lord Voldemort. Bed rest and perhaps a large, steaming mug of hot chocolate. I always find that cheers me up. You will find that Madam Pomfrey is still awake. She's just giving out Mandrake juice -- I daresay the basilisk's victims will be waking up any moment.

Ron: So Hermione's okay!

Dumbledore: There has been no lasting harm done, Ginny.

With that, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley proceeded to take Ginny to the Hospital wing, leaving the 5 of us alone.

Dumbledore: You know, Minerva, I think all this merits a good feast. Might I ask you to go and alert the kitchens? McGonagall: Right. I'll leave you to deal with Potter, Black and Weasley, shall I? Dumbledore: Certainly.

She left and we gazed uncertainly at Dumbledore. What is going to happen exactly?

Dumbledore: I seem to remember telling you both that I would have to expel you if you broke any more school rules... Which goes to show that the best of us must sometimes eat our words. You will receive Special Awards for Services to the School and -- let me see - yes, I think two hundred points a piece for each house... But one of us seems to be keeping mightily quiet about his part in this dangerous adventure. Why so modest, Gilderoy?

Now this should be funny.

Ron: Professor Dumbledore... there was an accident down in the Chamber of Secrets. Professor Lockhart -- Lockhart: Am I a professor? Goodness. I expect I was hopeless, was I?

Ron: He tried to do a Memory Charm and the wand backfired.

Dumbledore: Dear me. Impaled upon your own sword, Gilderoy!

Lockhart: Sword? Haven't got a sword. That boy has, though. He'll lend you one.

Dumbledore: Would you mind taking Professor Lockhart up to the infirmary, too, Mr. Weasley? I'd like a few more words with Harry and Raven.

With that, Ron grabbed Lockhart's sleeve and walked away, looking more annoyed than ever. Poor him, having to deal with a clueless Lockhart.

Dumbledore: First of all, I want to thank you. You must have shown me real loyalty down in the Chamber. Nothing but that could have called Fawkes to you. And so you met Tom Riddle, I imagine he was most interested in you...

Harry: Professor Dumbledore ... Riddle said I'm like him. Strange likenesses, he said ....

Dumbledore: Did he, now? And what do you think, Harry?

Harry: I don't think I'm like him! I mean, I'm -- I'm in Gryffindor, I'm . .
um...Professor...The Sorting Hat told me I'd -- I'd have done well in Slytherin. Everyone thought I was Slytherin's heir for a while ... because I can speak Parseltongue.

Dumbledore: You can speak Parseltongue, Harry. And so can Raven, who is indeed a Slytherin. That is because Lord Voldemort -- who is the last remaining ancestor of Salazar Slytherin -- can speak Parseltongue. Unless I'm much mistaken, he transferred some of his own powers to you the night he gave you that scar. Not something he intended to do, I'm sure.

Harry: Voldemort put a bit of himself in me?

Dumbledore: It certainly seems so.

me: It was quite obvious after all. We are in no way related to the great Salazar Slytherin himself, yet, we can still communicate with serpents. Take a wild guess...

Harry: So I should be in Slytherin. The Sorting Hat could see Slytherin's power in me, and it -

Dumbledore: Put you in Gryffindor. Listen to me, Harry. You happen to have many qualities Salazar Slytherin prized in his hand-picked students. His own very rare gift, Parseltongue - resourcefulness - determination -- a certain disregard for rules. Yet the Sorting Hat placed you in Gryffindor. You know why that was. Think.

Harry: It only put me in Gryffindor... because I asked not to go in Slytherin...

Dumbledore: Exactly! Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities. If you want proof, Harry, that you belong in Gryffindor, I suggest you look more closely at this.

On the sword that he pulled from the Old Sorting Hat, it was engraved "Godric Gryffindor".

Dumbledore: Only a true Gryffindor could have pulled that out of the hat, Harry. What you need, Harry, is some food and sleep. I suggest you go down to the feast, while I write to Azkaban -- we need our gamekeeper back. And I must draft an advertisement for the Daily Prophet, too... We'll be needing a new Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher... Dear me, we do seem to run through them, don't we?

Being a Slytherin is not that bad though... I wonder why does everyone think it's okay to bash us and boast the Gryffindors? We are not all evil. We are just highly ambitious and would do anything to achieve greatness, even walking over corpses. But not everybody is a Death Eater, as it's so well presumed...

We went to go out, but just as Harry reached for the door handle, the door burst open so violently that it bounced back off the wall. Scary...

Lucius Malfoy stood there, fury in his face. And cowering behind his legs, heavily wrapped in bandages, was Dobby...!

Dumbledore: Good evening, Lucius.
Mr. Malfoy almost knocked Harry over as he swept into the room. Dobby went scurrying in after him, crouching at the hem of his cloak, a look of abject terror on his face. Poor little house elf...I'm not even surprised..

The elf was carrying a stained rag with which he was attempting to finish cleaning Mr. Malfoy's shoes. Apparently Mr. Malfoy had set out in a great hurry, for not only were his shoes half-polished, but his usually sleek hair was disheveled. Ignoring the elf bobbing apologetically around his ankles, he fixed his cold eyes upon Dumbledore.

Lucius: So! You've come back. The governors suspended you, but you still saw fit to return to Hogwarts.

Dumbledore: Well, you see, Lucius, the other eleven governors contacted me today. It was something like being caught in a hailstorm of owls, to tell the truth. They'd heard that Arthur Weasley's daughter had been killed and wanted me back here at once. They seemed to think I was the best man for the job after all. Very strange tales they told me, too.... Several of them seemed to think that you had threatened to curse their families if they didn't agree to suspend me in the first place.

Lucius: So -- have you stopped the attacks yet? Have you caught the culprit?

Dumbledore: We have.

Lucius: Who is it?

Dumbledore: The same person as last time, Lucius. But this time, Lord Voldemort was acting through somebody else. By means of this diary.

Lucius: I see. . .

Dumbledore: A clever plan. Because if Harry, Raven here and their friend Ron hadn't discovered this book, why -- Ginny Weasley might have taken all the blame. No one would ever have been able to prove she hadn't acted of her own free will ....And imagine...what might have happened then .... The Weasleys are one of our most prominent pure-blood families. Imagine the effect on Arthur Weasley and his Muggle Protection Act, if his own daughter was discovered attacking and - killing Muggle-borns .... Very fortunate the diary was discovered, and Riddle's memories wiped from it. . .Who knows what the consequences might have been otherwise ......

Lucius: Very fortunate.

Harry: Don't you want to know how Ginny got hold of that diary, Mr. Malfoy? Lucius: How should I know how the stupid little girl got hold of it?

Harry: Because you gave it to her. In Flourish and Blotts. You picked up her old Transfiguration book and slipped the diary inside it, didn't you?

Lucius: Prove it. Dumbledore: Oh, no one will be able to do that. Not now that Riddle has vanished from the book. On the other hand, I would advise you, Lucius, not to go giving out any more of Lord Voldemort's old school things. If any more of them find their way into innocent hands, I think Arthur Weasley, for one, will make sure they are traced back to you.

Lucius: . . . We're going, Dobby!

He wrenched open the door and as the elf came hurrying up to him, he kicked him right through it. We could hear Dobby squealing with pain all the way along the corridor...
me: Go rescue him.

Harry: Right. Professor Dumbledore, can I give that diary back to Mr. Malfoy, please?

Dumbledore: Certainly, Harry, but hurry. The feast, remember ......

Harry grabbed the diary and dashed out of the office.

me: Guess I'll go too now...
Dumbledore: I have a curiosity, if you wouldn't mind, Raven.
Me: Yes, professor?
Dumbledore: I found some ... things from professor Snape.
me: Like what exactly, might I ask?
Dumbledore: You are a one of a kind student. Somehow, you remind me of your parents. Somehow, you remind me of dear Severus himself.
Me: Huh? How so?
Dumbledore: That is a long tale for another time. My question for you is, while talking to him, did Voldemort get any kind of interest in you?
me: Perhaps, I might say. He said I could very well become one of his supporters, once he raises back to power.
Dumbledore: Feared as much. Once you get old enough, I will have to put my trust in you and your loyalty. It might just be the only way to defeat Voldemort, if he succeeds in regaining his power and body.
me: What should I do?
Dumbledore: You, my dear, are a true Slytherin. The traits that you have would be cherished by the great Salazar Slytherin himself. Despite what I told Harry just now, you do have what it takes. Cunning, sly, you know how to lie, know how to fake, know how to hide emotions and expressions. Professor Snape speaks highly of you. Perhaps a special training would be ... beneficial for the future events.
me: So, pretty much act like a rogue-detective?
Dumbledore: Quite so. Did you see what's written on the daggers?
me: Salazar and Slytherin. Now, I won't ask why did they appear, but rather, with what purpose.
Dumbledore: Daggers are known to be often bathed in poison for lethal and sure results. But did you know that they can be washed with a healing liquid?
me: Like Phoenix Tears?
Dumbledore: Yes, exactly! You can save one's life with a deadly weapon.

me: That sounds peculiar and out of the ordinary. I love it.
Dumbledore: I would ask you, if it weren't a terrible idea, to go back to the Chamber, get at least one of those Basilisk fangs and give them to professor Snape. He also has a vial of Phoenix tears and he will know what to do.
me: So, the infusion won't wear out from the dagger if it's not used, right? Only upon use.
Dumbledore: You can only use each one once, before the effect disappears. Use them wisely. You may keep them, but let them be our secret only.
me: Yes, sir. Thank you so much.
Dumbledore: Enjoy the feast and the holiday. Now off you go, peep peep!
As he ushered me to the feast, I hid the daggers under my robes and exited with a smirk. From now on, the real fun begins.

The feast was like never before and it lasted the whole night. Everyone was cheering, the petrified ones were back, Hagrid was back, safe and sound. Everything was perfect.

Apart from Draco, who was sulking. His father was no longer a school governor either.

I went near him, trying to cheer him up.

me: I'm sorry. It must really be terrible.
Draco: You wouldn't know.
me: That is true. After all, my parents are... well... I don't know.
Draco: *sighs* If only Potter wasn't...
me: Chill, Draco. What was about to happen was really bad. You speak now from what your parents taught you, but trust me. You would NOT want Voldemort to raise again.
Draco: How do you know?!
me: My mother was killed because of him. Because she didn't want to give me up. Imagine all those Death Eaters who were forced to join, to save their families. Quite like your parents. Also, the whole Slytherin thing... it literally made it mandatory for all of them to join, to save their loved ones... Others, like the Potters, didn't want anything to do with the evil, and preferred to die, rather than give up. You see... There are good and bad things, regardless of which side you take. But there was never really good.
Draco: Guess you're right...
me: Cheer up, Draco. You have nothing to lose or gain, anyways. Enjoy the magical education you're receiving and have fun with your friends.
Draco: What friends? Nobody's a real friend. They're only goons following me around cause they're too stupid to think for themselves, or just idiots liking me cause of my family and attitude.
me: I like you, Draco. I don't care about what's around that. Just you. I am your friend, only if you consider me so.
Draco: I... guess I... do...
me: *smiles* See. Let's enjoy the rest of the 5 years we have here and not worry about anything, okay?

He nodded and pinky promised to enjoy the school years together.

After a long train ride, while I was waiting for the orphanage director to pick me up, I went to Draco to give him a little parting gift.

me: Here. A small 'Don't forget me' gift. Hope you like it.
Draco: *puts on the ring* Thanks... It's really nice...
me: *smiles* Glad you like it.
Narcissa: Dear, are you sure you don't want to stay with us?
me: Thank you so much for the offer, Mrs. Malfoy, but urgh... I can't really... you know... disturb... Maybe other time...

She smiled at me and nodded in understanding, hugged me, and told me to write them, before they left. Oh trust me dear, I will write. I must find out the truth.

And with that, I exited the Platform 9 & 3/4 and made my way to where the orphanage director was.
waiting me. Now, for a VERY long and uneventful summer break...
Sirius Black, the Escaped Convict

Ever wondered how it would be like, living with the Malfoys?
Well, the last 2 weeks of the summer break, I was 'blessed' to be 'saved' by Draco and his father, and well... It's not THAT bad, I suppose.
If only I keep a relatively small distance from Lucius, so I won't hear his hate rant.
Narcissa on the other hand, is a sweetheart.
She was nice enough to tell me all about the Daily Prophet's Breaking News.

"Sirius Black, The Escaped Convict"

Apparently, it's not just a name coincidence. He is, in fact, my father.
He was convicted for betraying his own wife (my mother) and his best friends (Harry's parents) to Voldemort. He was called a loyal supporter of the Dark Lord. And it's also said that he killed his best friend, Peter Pettigrew, and only a finger remained of him.
I don't know about you, but this story seems very... sketchy to me.

me: Narcissa... Do you really believe this... story?
Narcissa: This is what we've been told. Everything is a mystery, covered by the higher ups of the Ministry.
me: Lucius is a higher up in the Ministry.
Narcissa: Not at that time. We were barely 20 at that time.
me: Oh... that's right...
Narcissa: I cannot tell you a specific answer, for I do not know myself. But being a Black myself, I know that your father was a Gryffindor. He was 4 years younger than me. Young, always with his 3 friends, always being a mischievous prankster. The Marauders, they called themselves. Padfoot was Sirius, Prongs was James, Harry's father, Moony was Remus Lupin, and Wormtail was Peter. Nobody except for themselves know the origin of those nicknames, but they were quite silly, in a funny, pueril way.
me: I don't know if it's strictly subjective, or just a gut feeling, but I don't believe my father was the guilty one. I mean, the whole story with Pettigrew seems so...
Narcissa: Hard to believe? Quite so. I would want him to be innocent, but unless proven otherwise, he's sentenced to be trash in Azkaban.
me: What if he was framed?
Narcissa: Then someone should find out and prove his innocence.
Me: Hmm...
Narcissa: Don't do anything too reckless, please. I know you are a Slytherin, but at the same time, I know your parents... Quite too energetic, if you understand what I mean.
me: Yes, I follow you here... I suppose it rubbed on me as well.

She sighed and patted my hair smiling motherly, then left... somewhere.
Well, the time spent here wasn't too eventful. Mostly Quidditch practice, some homework, reading the new textbooks, some lesson repeating. But it was quite fun, must I say.

~As so, September 1st arrived, and we are now in the train compartments.~
I put my luggage in Draco's compartment, then went to find Harry, Ron and Hermione, who were in the same compartment as Mr. R.J. Lupin.
me: So he is the new DADA teacher?
Hermione: Seems so.
me: Remus Lupin... I wonder...
Hermione: Hm? Said something?
me: Oh no, no, don't mind me.

Harry told us how he got mad at his 'Aunt' Marge and blew her up, how he took the Knight Bus, got to the Leaky Cauldron, how my father is after him as well, bla bla bla. Better not to say that I know anything... might appear suspicious...

Ron: Blimey, Raven! His name is Sirius Black, so he's obviously a relative of yours! Maybe he is your father or... or uncle! Or... something!
Hermione: That's right... He might be after you too...
me: I... I don't know... But that's irrelevant. All Pureblood families are related in some way, and I don't even know if I'm actually part of THE House of Black. I mean, Ron, your own paternal grandmother, Cedrella Weasley, was actually a Black herself. Harry, your paternal grandfather, Charles Potter, married Dorea Black. Even Neville is related to the Black family. He has a relative called Callidora Black.
Ron: Did you really stay to analyse the whole Black family tree?
me: Pretty much. And I'm not in it.
Ron: Well maybe that's because you were barely 1 year old when your parents died.
me: Sirius Black isn't said to be married with anyone either. And if he was indeed my father, married to my mother, after like... 13 years, you'd think it would have been stated otherwise.
Hermione: We'll find out, sooner or later. Why not ask an adult or a professor? I bet they know better.
me: Right... I guess I might do that...

Busted. Oh, Hermione, I love your wits, but I have to fool you too.

~

I was sitting in front of Lupin, aka 'Moony' I was trying to visualize him as a younger version, one that would be friends with my father. He was covered with his robe, only his sandy brown hair could be seen. Near him, a glass filled with a transparent liquid. A certain liquid that slowly started to transform into ice, just like the window, being covered with frost, just as the train was slowly starting to stop, and an eerie atmosphere, like one from a really good horror movie, could be felt. Did we break down? No, that cannot be the case. It's a Hogwarts train, after all. Suddenly, it was pitch black, and someone opened the compartment door. Someone fell on my legs, someone probably sat on Crookshanks' tail or something... and those 2 someones happened to be Neville and Ginny.

Professor Lupin appeared to have woken up at last, as he told us to be quiet. Nobody dared utter a sound. There was a soft, crackling noise, and a shivering light filled the compartment. Lupin appeared to be holding a handful of flames, only by casting the simple spell Lumos. They illuminated his tired, grey face, but his eyes looked alert and wary.

"Stay where you are," he said in the same hoarse voice, and he got slowly to his feet with his handful of fire held out in front of him.
But the door slid slowly open before he could reach it.

Standing in the doorway, illuminated by the shivering flames in Lupin's hand, was a cloaked figure that towered to the ceiling. Its face was completely hidden beneath its hood. There was a hand
protruding from the cloak and it was glistening, grayish, slimy-looking, and scabbed, like something dead that had decayed in water.... But it was visible only for a split second. Why do I feel so depressed and anxious all of a sudden? Is it because of this thing? Is it some kind of magical creature toying with my emotions? It couldn't possibly be a beast with such power, I would have known... but then... what is it...

And then the thing beneath the hood, whatever it was, drew a long, slow, rattling breath, as though it were trying to suck something more than air from its surroundings.

An intense cold swept over us all. I can't breathe. My heart is beating faster than ever, my lungs burning, my breath is caught in my throat and I'm panicking while trying to inspire the needed amount of air, but with no avail. Hot tears were starting to sting my eyes, as they were quickly welling up and rolling down my cheeks. I felt like I was suffocating. It's just like having a panic attack, all over again, but everything was ice cold, instead of warm.

As I felt darkness slowly taking over me, thinking that I had met my demise, in the very distance, I could hear terrified screaming and pleadings from two women. But why do they seem so familiar... So... very...

___

**Raven! Raven! Wake up~! Come on, get up! Wake up!**

But I don't want to get up, Miss...

Suddenly someone started slapping my face, telling me to wake up, and I jolted awake and tried to regain my breath. The room was dimly lit, and familiar faces were around me. I was on the train compartment seat. And also... I'm alive, and Professor Lupin was handing me a piece of chocolate.

**Lupin:** Here, eat. You'll feel better.

**me:** Thank you...

**Hermione:** Are you okay, Raven?

**me:** Don't know... Did I just have another panic attack?

**Hermione:** I don't know, but Harry fainted too.

**me:** Then it simply cannot be a coincidence. What was that black cloaked figure?

**Lupin:** That was a dementor. It was sent by Azkaban in search of Sirius Black.

**me:** Oh... is that so... Such an atrocious act... sending dementors in a train full of students... that's a blasphemy!

**Lupin:** I know, and you are right. Now, excuse me, but I will have a word with the driver.

With that, he left, while we were still looking at each other weirdly, trying to grasp the reality of what had just happened.

A dementor...

I have to know more about them.

Poor Ginny was still shaking like mad, silently sobbing, and I went to hug her.

This 'dementor' was toying with our emotions. Obviously I and Harry went through some deep traumatic problems. And Ginny... last year... Yes! It all makes sense!

**me:** Don't act all shocked that I, Harry and Ginny were affected more than you did. That thing was using our negative emotions and memories against us. Let's not forget what we've been
through, and help each other at these times. I wouldn't be surprised if those dementors would pay us an unwelcomed visit at Hogwarts too.

Harry: She's right, I guess...
Ron: We'll be there to stuff you guys with bars of chocolate, that's cool.
me: That's the spirit, Ronald.

We chuckled at his comment, and the train started moving once again. At least we were able to slightly lighten the mood. Soon enough we went off the train, in the carriages and just in front of the Castle. Just as I expected, the presence of 2 hooded Dementors was clearly seen, towering, guarding each side of the door.
As we stepped down, a drawling, delighted voice sounded just behind us.

"You fainted, Potter? Is Longbottom telling the truth? You actually fainted?"

Draco elbowed past Hermione to block Harry's way up the stone steps to the castle, his face gleeful and his pale eyes glinting maliciously.

Ron: Shove off, Malfoy.
Draco: Did you faint as well, Weasley? Did the scary old Dementor frighten you too, Weasley?
me: No, he didn't. I did.
Lupin: Is there a problem?

Malfoy gave Professor Lupin an insolent stare, which took in the patches on his robes and the dilapidated suitcase. With a tiny hint of sarcasm in his voice, he said, "Oh, no -- er -- Professor," then he smirked at Crabbe and Goyle and led them up the steps into the castle.

Great... just what I needed... Draco making fun of Harry for fainting, but I also DID FAINT. Grr..

Just as the door into the Great Hall stood open at the right, I heard Professor Snape's voice calling me.

Once in his office, he sat down and said gravely~
"Professor Lupin sent an owl ahead to say that you were taken ill on the train, Black."
Oh.. Oh no.. no no...

me: B-but I'm just fine... I--
Pomfrey: Oh, it's you, What happened, dear?
Snape: It was a Dementor.

They exchanged a dark look, and Madam Pomfrey clucked disapprovingly.

Pomfrey: Setting Dementors around a school. She won't be the last one who collapses. Yes, she's all clammy. Terrible things, they are, and the effect they have on people who are already delicate --
me: B-but I'm not delicate!
Pomfrey: Of course you're not.
Snape: What does she need?
Pomfrey: Well, she should have some chocolate, at the very least.
me: I've already had some. Professor Lupin gave me some. He gave it to all of us.
Pomfrey: Did he, now? So we've finally got a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher who knows his remedies?

Snape: Are you sure you feel all right, Black?

me: Yes.

Snape: Very well then. You may go now. Try to get some rest.

After that, Dumbledore introduced us to the new DADA teacher, Professor Lupin AND Professor Hagrid, and said a few words about the Dementors.

~

At the next day's breakfast, I had the terrible inspiration to sit next to Draco, who was constantly making fun of Harry for fainting, along with his friends, and well, I snapped, slammed the knife in the table, leaving it there, glaring at Draco, and whispered in his ear "Next time you decide to make fun of Harry, remember that, I fainted as well". And with that, I stormed out of the room, to the first class, which was Divination.

The class was up in the North Tower, and it was guarded by a Knight Portrait. I avoided Draco as much as possible and stayed with Jessie and Emma at a table that resembled a fortune telling one. The room resembled a cozy chamber crammed with carpets, crystal balls, feathers, china porcelain sets and so on.

teacher: Sit, my children, sit. Welcome to Divination. My name is Professor Trelawney. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye. Many witches and wizards, talented though they are in the area of loud bangs and smells and sudden disappearings, are yet unable to penetrate the veiled mysteries of the future. It is a Gift granted to few. The first term will be devoted to reading the tea leaves. Next term we shall progress to palmistry. In the second term, we shall progress to the crystal ball -- if we have finished with fire omens, that is. Unfortunately, classes will be disrupted in February by a nasty bout of flu. I myself will lose my voice. I wonder, dear, *looking at Pansy* if you could pass me the largest silver teapot?

Pansy: S-sure...

me: Don't drop it.

She glared at me and picked the large teapot, then looked again at me with a superior smug look and said "I'm better than you think, Black". Unfortunately, just as she turned around, while flipping her hair, she tripped over her shoelaces and bumped into a table, fell down, and the teapot dropped. Embarrassed, she started saying it was my fault, and what not, and I simply waved my wand, muttered "Reparo" and told her to tie her shoelaces next time. The Professor though... was looking at me like I was one of the 7 World's Modern Wonders.

teacher: M-My dear... You... You already ARE a possessor of the rare Divination Gift.

me: I... am?

teacher: Yes, of course! There are no coincidences or hunches, it's just a prediction about to happen. You feel its vibe!

me: Oh... woaw... that's cool...?

teacher: I'm so glad I finally found someone worthy!

Just as she said that, she hugged my head in a quite creepy way, then returned in her winged armchair, leaving me awestruck. Snape wasn't quite wrong, it seems...

So now, we started the tea leaf reading. I and the girls drank in a silly posh way, then exchanged the
sippy cups, and looked at them.

me: Let's see, Jessie, you have... a desk, which means... a letter with good news... maybe... and grapes, which mean happiness.

Jessie: I sure hope so!

teacher: Very well, dear. *pats my head* Oh, give me the cup.

me: Oh, that is mine.

teacher: Hmm... You have a guitar, which is happiness in love. You have... a pepperpot, which means a troublesome secret and... oh... oh no... no! My dear... y-you... have the... - the worst omen of all! The omen of... death!

me: You mean... the Grim?

teacher: Precisely, dear girl. Beware, sweet child, beware of the many dangers around you! Class dismissed...! Until next time!

She said as she ushered us out of the door, trying to regain her breathe. Oh well... that was... eventful. I didn't act like I was scared of the threat, but I know what's this all about.

Our next class was Transfiguration, and professor McGonagall transformed from her tabby cat animagus, back into herself, but with no applause.

McGonagall: Don't tell me you also had the first class of Divination.

me: Pretty much.

McGonagall: Who's going to die now?

me: Obviously, I am meant to die. "M-my dear y-you've g-got the Grim... the w-worst omens of all!"

We both chuckled at my 'great' impersonation of Professor Trelawney, and started our class perfectly normal.

McGonagall: You should know, Black, that Sibyll Trelawney has predicted the death of one student a year since she arrived at this school. None of them has died yet. Seeing death omens is her favorite way of greeting a new class. If it were not for the fact that I never speak ill of my colleagues -- Divination is one of the most imprecise branches of magic. I shall not conceal from you that I have very little patience with it. True Seers are very rare, and Professor Trelawney... You look in excellent health to me, Black, so you will excuse me if I don't let you off homework today. I assure you that if you die, you need not hand it in.

me: I will keep that in mind, Professor. Perhaps, if I am to die, I will ask my ghost to hand in my homework.

McGonagall: * small smile * Very well.

~~~

Our next class was with the Gryffindors. Great, I start to dread having classes with my friends, because of Draco and his gang. Care of Magical Creatures, with Hagrid. Lo' and behold, the mockery of the great purebloods...

Hagrid: Everyone gather 'round the fence here! That's it -- make sure yeh can see -- now, firs' thing yeh'll want ter do is open yer books --

Draco: How?
Hagrid: Eh?
Draco: How do we open our books?
Hagrid: Hasn' -- hasn' anyone bin able ter open their books?
The class all shook their heads.
Hagrid: Yeh've got ter stroke 'em. Look --

He took Hermione's copy and ripped off the Spellotape that bound it. The book tried to bite, but
Hagrid ran a giant forefinger down its spine, and the book shivered, then fell open and lay quiet in
his hand.

Draco: Oh, how silly we've all been! We should have stroked them! Why didn't we guess!
Hagrid: I -- I thought they were funny...
Draco: Oh, tremendously funny! Really witty, giving us books that try and rip our hands off!
me: Shut up, Malfoy. Don't listen to him, Hagrid. They are funny indeed. Just, after we've found
out how to tame them.
Hagrid: Right then so -- so yeh've got yer books an'...an'...now yeh need the Magical
Creatures. Yeah. So I'll go an' get 'em. Hang on...

He strode away from them into the forest and out of sight.

Draco: God, this place is going to the dogs. That oaf teaching classes, my father'll have a fit
when I tell him --
Harry: Shut up, Malfoy.
Draco: Careful, Potter, there's a Dementor behind you --

"OooOoooh!" squealed Lavender Brown, pointing toward the opposite side of the paddock.

Trotting toward them were a dozen of the most bizarre creatures ever seen. They had the bodies,
hind legs, and tails of horses, but the front legs, wings, and heads of what seemed to be giant
eagles, with cruel, steel-colored beaks and large, brilliantly, orange eyes. The talons on their front
legs were half a foot long and deadly looking. Each of the beasts had a thick leather collar around
its neck, which was attached to a long chain, and the ends of all of these were held in the vast hands
of Hagrid, who came jogging into the paddock behind the creatures Hippogriffs.

Hagrid: Gee up, there! Hippogriffs! Beau'iful, aren' they?

Each of them had different colours, ranging from stormy gray, bronze, pinkish roan, gleaming
chestnut, and inky black.

Hagrid: So, if yeh wan' ter come a bit nearer...
me: Hell yes, I so do!
Hagrid: Great! Now, firs' thing yeh gotta know abou' Hippogriffs is, they're proud. Easily
offended, Hippogriffs are. Don't never insult one, 'cause it might be the last thing yeh do. Yeh
always wait fer the Hippogriff ter make the firs' move. It's polite, see? Yeh walk toward him,
and yeh bow, an' yeh wait. If he bows back, yeh're allowed ter touch him. If he doesn' bow,
then get away from him sharpish, 'cause those talons hurt. Right -- who wants ter go first?
me: I do!
Jessie: Raven, remember the tea leaves!
me:*smirks* What's life without a little risk?
Hagrid: Good, Raven! Right then -- let's see how yeh get on with Buckbeak.

With a confident look, I wink at my fellow Slytherins and flip my hair, stretching my arms, ready for some new excitement that won't involve a possible imminent death.

He untied one of the chains, pulled the grey Hippogriff away from its fellows, and slipped off its leather collar. The class on the other side of the paddock seemed to be holding its breath. Malfoy's eyes were narrowed maliciously.

Hagrid: Easy now, Raven. Yeh've got eye contact, now try not ter blink... Hippogriffs don' trust yeh if yeh blink too much...

I controlled my blinking pretty easily, and Buckbeak started staring at me with its great orange eyes.

Hagrid: Tha's it! Tha's it, Raven.. now, bow.

With a step back, I did a gracious bow, not breaking eye contact. The Hippogriff was still staring haughtily at him. It didn't move.

Hagrid: Ah... Right -- back away, now, Raven, easy does it --

The Hippogriff suddenly bent its scaly front knees and sank into what was an unmistakable bow.

Hagrid: Well done, Raven! Right -- yeh can touch him! Pat his beak, go on!

me:*patting him* Who's a gorgeous hippogriff? Yes, you are~

As I couldn't break my grin, the class kept applauding.

me: Hagrid, d'you think I could... you know... Have a ride?
Hagrid: I re'kon 'e might let yer!

With this, he pick me up, put me on the hippogriff's back, told me to be careful not to pull his feathers, and with a pat on his back, Buckbeak took off into the sky.

This is truly amazing! This is so much like riding a horse, but in air! The freedom it gives you, is so much better than riding a broom. It's so... Perfect.

I never knew that the landscapes from high up are that picturesque, but obviously, you never truly know until you've experienced first hand. The Black Lake was shining with the glow of the sun, the azure sky was clear of all clouds, the Castle looked as magical and noble as always, the forest, emerald green and chilly, filled with the occasional bat that served as a treat for the playful and giddy hippogriff. It was obvious that he was also feeling free and happy.

Once we landed back from where we took off, and I dismounted, despite the round of applause, I was feeling quite sad that the flight ended.

Hagrid: Good work, Raven! Okay, who else wants a go?

Emboldened by my success, the rest of the class climbed cautiously into the paddock. Hagrid untied the Hippogriffs one by one, and soon people were bowing nervously, all over the paddock. Neville ran repeatedly backward from his, which didn't seem to want to bend its knees. Ron and Hermione practiced on the chestnut.
Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had taken over Buckbeak. He had bowed to Draco, who was now patting his beak, looking disdainful.

me: Good job, Draco. Seems like he's able to tolerate you.  
Draco: This is very easy. I knew it must have been, if Potter there could do it... I bet you're not dangerous at all, are you? Are you, you great ugly brute?

me: DON'T SAY THAT!

It happened in a flash of steely talons; Draco let out a high pitched scream and next moment, Hagrid was wrestling Buckbeak back into his collar as he strained to get at Draco, who lay curled in the grass, blood blossoming over his robes.

Draco: I'm dying! I'm dying, look at me! It's killed me!
me: You're not dying, Draco. You're very much alive.
Hagrid: Yer not dyin! Someone help me -- gotta get him outta here --

me: Let's get him to Madam Pomfrey, Hagrid.

Hermione ran to hold open the gate as Hagrid lifted Malfoy easily. There was a long, deep gash on Malfoy's arm; blood splattered the grass and Hagrid ran with him, up the slope toward the castle. Madam Pomfrey took care of him immediately, applied some potion on his gash, and bandaged it well, telling him to rest.

Draco: I-I'm going to die...
me: Don't think you can play victim with me, Draco.
Draco: Erh.. but it hurts...
me: Life hurts, but you wouldn't know, would you.
Draco: Why are you so mean to me, all of a sudden?
me: I don't quite appreciate you belittling my friends and dismissing their emotions as insignificant, just because you hate them. You make fun of Harry, for fainting because of the Dementor, but so did I. Why is he so different? It hurts me too. You're indirectly affecting me too.
Draco: I didn't know...
me: Dementors affect the ones with bad experiences worse than the others. You yourself were scared, yet you don't admit it.
Draco: You did mention having a panic attack...
me: That is not funny at all. It hurts. Also, it's your own fault for insulting the hippogriff. Had you not made fun of it, you wouldn't have been maimed. But sure, let's radiate with superiority because we are the great Draco Malfoy!

He looked down at his lap, biting his lip, not appreciating my comments.

me: Look, Draco... I really appreciate that you try to sustain yourself from spitting rude comments while around me... and that sometimes you simply cannot refrain... I do understand... But the way everyone is putting the problem, I cannot remain neutral for too long.
Draco: Then just be my friend! You don't need anyone else.
me: *sighs* One day, maybe you'll understand the importance of friends. Until then, you see the
need of little 'slaves' as they are for you right now. Delegation is a must for us.

Draco: Why do you need them, then?

me: Someone needs to defeat Voldemort, right?

Draco: Why fight him, when you can join him?

me: Because I do not wish a life with lack of freedom.

Draco: Who says he'll be back though?

me: The signs. Ask your father, if you don't believe me. Also, he tried twice in the last 2 years. He will be back sooner than expected.

Draco: Then why do YOU have to fight him? Why not Potter?

me: *shows the scar* See this? It's pretty much like a mark. It's my destiny. Plus, Harry doesn't have the wits to do it alone. He's just a lone Gryffindor. He cannot compare to the cunning of a Slytherin.

Draco: Well obviously, but...

me: Trust me Draco. We all have our missions. Whether it's for the good or the bad, little counts. But Draco, some of us simply... do not have a choice to make. They are taken by others, and you have no word in it. You will see, one day though...

Draco: No, I won't. Raven, I am Draco Malfoy, a Pureblood Slytherin, from a respected and well-known wealthy family. I will be the one making choices and manipulating others, not ME being the puppet!

me: *smiles* I sure do hope so, Draco... But if he raises... even puppeteers will have strings attached to them.

Draco: What do you know that you're not telling me?

me: I cannot tell you, nor anyone else. It's my own mission in life. My only purpose.

Draco: Nobody has a single reason for living. And if your life goal is self-destruction, then it's obviously not the true one. You have to discover the one that will lead to a better life.

me: You know... You just might be right. I will keep that in mind.

Draco: See? My advice is great. You should listen to me more.

me: You see... "If you remember me, then I don't care if everyone else forgets." Remember this in times of darkness, okay?

Draco: Why?

me: Just do. I have my own reason for that.

Draco: If you say so...

me: Try to get some rest. I'll check on you later. Get well soon, Draco.

With that, I kissed his forehead and left to go to dinner, meeting up and chatting with the girls. No more drama llama.

~

The next day, at Potions, you wouldn't believe how Draco could fake his 'pain'.

me: I knew you were begging attention and pity, but really? From Pug Face? You disgust me, Draco. *shakes head*.

Draco: Wait, Raven! -

me: Glad you like the ring though.

Snape made Ron 'help' Draco with his Potion work. And by work, he meant doing all the work. He
was being as cruel as ever with the Gryffindors, but I tried to ignore everything, while doing the
t potion with Jessie and Emma who, fortunately, don't ask too many stupid questions or speculate.
What a time to be alive.
Another day at Hogwarts, and things are already a great mess.

As all classes have been ruined by the pathetic attitude of a certain blond-haired boy, (except
Transfiguration, of course), I surely hope that Professor Lupin is going to be able to deal with all of
us. Please, make this year's DADA classes actually worth learning...
If you really are the great Marauder Moony, then you should be able to deal with a bunch of
dunderheads. Wish you all the luck in the word.
The first class of Defence Against the Dark Arts with Professor Remus Lupin started in a mischievous way, when Peeves was stuffing a gum in a keyhole and Remus totally roasted the Poltergeist with a chuckle and a new useful spell, that made the gum jump right into its right nostril, which earned laughs from everyone (except certain snakes).

As we entered the office, Snape was present there as well, reading the newspaper and 'warned' Lupin that he has Neville in his class, a potential anti-magic horror. Poor Neville.

But Lupin is a nice person who apparently loves working with children and tries to teach them something, so he made Neville his assistant. What for? Well, we will be learning first-hand witness, about Boggarts, shapeshifters that recreate you worst fear. So... this class will help us fight and win against our worst fright.

I wonder what my fear is, but at the same time, I don't quite wish to share it with everyone. It's quite an embarrassing experience and people will know my weakness. Okay no, I know what I will do! I'll stay just behind Harry. This way, I will see his weakness and I'll get encouraged to fight as well. Hope it's something silly and laughable... I don't want people to laugh at me... no... no..

Okay wait. Relax. If I stress myself this way, my fear will change. I have no time for nonsense. Okay, Neville's Boggart changed into Snape, much to his hatred, who stormed out angrily. With the simple spell 'Ridikkulus', Snape's whole attire changed into Neville's grandmother's outfit... which looked quite eccentric, but oh well. Everyone started laughing at the hilarious sight in front of us, and Lupin clapped, continuing the line.

Parvati's Boggart changed into a snake, then into a clown... ermh... HOW IS THAT LESS FRIGHTENING? I, myself, am absolutely HORRORSTRUCK by clowns! Urgh... Ron's obviously a spider, then roller skates magically appeared on his legs, making it not stand still.

Thee'en, was Harry. We were all still euphoric, from the fits of laughter and the energetic music, but the Boggart... Oh Great Salazar, the Boggart shifted into a... Dementor. The terrifying atmosphere took over as the creature approached Harry dangerously, then Lupin jumped in front of him, and it shifted into a... yellowish sphere covered by smoke...? Wait that is... a moon covered by clouds... a full moon... But why would Remus be afraid of a full moon? As much as I remember from the Muggle horror movies, werewolves transformed into their wolf forms when it's a full moon out. But uh... oh, wait a second...

I did study the DADA book this summer, with Draco and I do remember a specific lesson about... werewolves...! No way! Is 'Loony Loopy Lupin' a Lycan? I mean, Lupin has Latin origins to wolf and so on, but... or maybe he was attacked? Moon... Moony... maybe that's it! It all makes sense! Or maybe his animagus is a wolf. Hmm... I shall find out soon enough! Yet, that scar on his face~

... Oh well, at least the class has been dismissed and I didn't have to be embarrassed in front of the class! Yay!

Draco obviously made fun of Harry all the time, and I ignored his comments thoroughly, but hmm... yes... after lunch I'm going to talk to Lupin about this. He will be alone in his office... and I
will talk freely to him...Oh, even better! The photo album McGonagall gifted me at the end of 1st year! Oh, yes. I will *bribe* him with it.

--

*_knock knock_*

Me: Ahem, Professor Lupin? May I come in? *enters*
Lupin: Ah, miss Black, hello. What is it?
Me: You see, I was wondering... if Uncle Moony remembers me?

The look on his face was priceless. Shocked to no avail by my question phrasing.

Lupin: Excuse me?
Me: Oh, I am sorry. Am I mistaken? Are you not one of the great Marauders? The great prankster Moony, friend with Prongs, Wormtail and... Padfoot?
Lupin: How do you know about all this?
Me: If not for the Marauders’ Map, then maybe for this particular gift from our great Transfiguration professor?

I showed him the album full of moving pictures that a Tumblrette would call *GIFs* in the Muggle Word, and he flipped through each page, examining every picture to the very detail and a nostalgic look with a glint of happiness covered his face.

Me: Isn’t it great? Having such happy memories and reminiscing good old days, through pictures?
Lupin: Somehow...
Me: This album... makes me feel both alive and quite dead. The energy and happiness radiating from each picture is enchanting. But at the same time... it reminds me that I do not have such friends. Perhaps it’s my personality, or my dreaded house. But who knows. Maybe one day...
Lupin: Raven, everyone finds someone to accept them, despite their flaws. If someone like me managed to, then so will you.
Me: The world may never know. Also... while contemplating such world philosophy, may I ask a favour of you?
Lupin: What would that be?
Me: May I try to see what my Boggart would be? I was just behind Harry and I did not quite have the chance to brave my fear nor find out what my weakness is, and try to fight against it.
Lupin: Very well. The Boggart is in this wardrobe. Are you sure you want to try?
Me: Positive.

I moved in front of the wardrobe, and Lupin opened it carefully, and out of it, no black mist came out, nor a skinny boney arm. On the contrary, out of the wardrobe, a psycopathic looking Sirius Black, full Convict attire, glaring daggers at me with his clouded stormy grey eyes dragged his way out of that wardrobe. His long dark shaggy hair, similar with mine in colour, was a great mess, not combed in years. He was slowly approaching me, a wand in his right hand, trembling dangerously.

Boggart: My daughter... Oh, Sweet child o’ mine, how did you manage to escape the wrath of the Dark Lord, I do not know. But this time, I have you. Your mother died. She died like a fool, trying to save a helpless puny infant. But this time, I have you...!! Hahaha... I’m going to end you... once and for all... the Lord’s greatest enemy shall fall, and HE will raise once again!
He started laughing like a mad man, lifted his sleeve, revealing the Dark Mark on his arm, and the pointed his wand at me, and just before he could shout the spell, I muttered the Ridikkulus spell, and Sirius transformed in a more neat version of him, with a toy broomstick in his hand, and lots of bows in his hair, a pink suit. He looked quite childish, and I forced myself to laugh, so it will return to its place.

Me: I see...
Lupin: Raven, please be careful, and do not search for this maniac. He is the reason why you-
Me: No. I am not scared of him. I am scared that my prediction is wrong, which never happened before...I never admitted to anyone that Sirius Black is my father, despite their suspicions. I always tell them it's just a coincidence. If they find out, I will get in real trouble soon. But... Moony... throwing everything you've said aside... do you really think that... this man... Padfoot... your best friend... would betray his best friend to Voldemort himself, and kill Pettigrew, leaving just a... finger... out of him?
Lupin: How do you know all of this?!
Me: I have my sources. Narcissa Malfoy, who was also a Black in her school years. McGonagall, a teacher during that time. I'm a Slytherin, Remus. And pardon me for being so rude, but if you truly believe... If you really are convinced 100% that my father is guilty of such atrocities... then... you are even more... guilty than him. You betray your long lost friendship...
Lupin: I do not! You cannot go against the facts! Don't act mature and all-knowing, because you were not there.
Me: Neither were you. But tell me, Sherlock, have you ever considered that your best friend was... perhaps... framed?
Lupin: Framed? You watched too many muggle movies.
Me: I ask you of this. Keep the album, and explain to me, what spell was the one you used against the dementor. It wasn't anything I've seen before. Something so pure, with such glowy white misty light...-
Lupin: The Patronus Charm is a highly advanced spell that won't be learnt until a lot later.
Me: I care less for how difficult it is. I care only to defend myself.
Lupin: You are quite the impulsive person... Much like your mother...
Me: A Slytherin like me, thank you very much.

He ruffled my hair and chuckled, telling me that he'll teach me some day soon, and that I shouldn't stress too much with anything at the moment. Not even Sirius Black. The Patronus Charm... who would know...
Oh, that's right! Snape!
Okay, run-run-run-there!
His office
*Knock knock*
I go inside and see him reading an actual book now.
Lord of the Rings.

Me: I love your style in books.
Snape: Glad my taste in literature appeals to your preference. Tell me, Black, what did you come to pester me about?

Me: Tell me about the Patronus Charm-

He looked me dead in the eyes, processing.
Snape: Being one of those affected more by those vile creatures, and also being a perfectly capable and competent student, I suppose I can allow myself to spend some time teaching you about this particular spell.

Me: Thank you! Finally someone who understands.

Snape: First of all, to be able to produce such a powerful and difficult charm, you have in mind your most happiest of memories. The ones that make your eyes sparkle with joy and glee-

Me: Don't hate me, but it's quite out of character for you to be speaking about happiness, and same for me as well.

Snape: *Dementors*. Toy with your worst fears. Play you emotionally and psychologically.

Me: You're right... is it possible not to have such a powerful memory?

He looked at me, got his wand out, and conjured a full Patronus that took the shape of a Doe. The mist around, the light radiating from the Doe made my heart sparkle with a weird warmth I've never felt before, and my eyes sparkled in amazement, looking at the Patronus like a child. I never knew that it could take the shape of an Animal as well...

Me: That was... gorgeous...

Snape: If I can do it, then so can *you*. Practice loads and you shall succeed.

Me: The animal... does it have a special meaning? Personality traits? Or is it just random?

Snape: Sometimes it shifts like an animal resembling the personality of your loved one. Sometimes it shifts like your own personality traits. Depends on what is most important to you.

Me: Mhm... Okay... is it the same with the Animagus?

Snape: Animagus? Why did you-

Me: Just curious. Professor McGonagall's Animagus is a cat.

Snape: Yes, it does resemble your Animagus. But the process of becoming an Animagus is extremely difficult and lots of documents to the Ministry are required.

Me: *smirks* Extremely difficult yet not impossible.

He hid his smirk by clearing his throat, and we carried on with the lesson. It took a lot of time and tries. But it was worth it. I managed to get, after the first lesson, enough mist to repel a Dementor for a short while. It's certainly a huge progress, that is true. But it will take a while until I manage to conjure a full-bodied Patronus. Oh well, I have time. Not like I'll be attacked inside the castle.

*What a time to be alive, right?*

Well, the next classes weren't particularly interesting, just at DADA of course, since we learnt about Red Caps, nasty little goblin-like creatures that lurked wherever there had been bloodshed: in the dungeons of castles and the potholes of deserted battlefields, waiting to bludgeon those who had gotten lost. Then Kappas, creepy. water-dwellers that looked like scaly monkeys, with webbed hands itching to strangle unwitting waders in their ponds.

COMC became rather dull since the... ahem... incident with Buckbeak and Draco...

And well...

Now, first weekend at Hogsmead.

Thing is, my permission slip was signed by Narcissa, since the orphanage director didn't want to sign mine, so I hope it will work.

He said we should hand the permission slips before Halloween, so rather go now.

me: Professor...

Snape: What is it now, Black?
me: If Draco's mother signed the Hogsmead slip, is it okay? Nobody at the orphanage wanted to have anything with me or my school problems so erh... yeah..

Snape: You know very well that Mrs. Malfoy is not your guardian, tutor or parent, so no, despite the unfortunate luck you have, no, I cannot accept it. And no, I cannot sign it either.

me: Tsk. Dammit.

Snape: If I were you, I wouldn't worry so much. I know you will find a way to sneak out rather easily.

I was quite flabbergast when I heard his last comment, but hey- He knows me better. I didn't expect anything else from him.

Oh, yes, how could I be so silly. I'm a metamorphmagus and barely 5 people know about it. I could very easily morph into some random person and that's it! Or go sneaky sneaky like Harry... or use the Marauders Map.

Why not all of them?

I asked Harry to borrow me the Invisibility Cloak for a while and he agreed. I used a tunnel that lead to Honeydukes and used the Invisibility cloak to get sneaky sneaky. Everything was perfect and I managed to join up with Draco. Let's just say that I lied to him when I said that by signing the slip I could come... ehehe.

Draco: Glad you could join.

me: So am I. So... you know these places better. Could you recommend some places to visit?

Draco: Well... there's Honeydukes, if you want to stack up on sweets. There is... Tomes and Scrolls, a famous bookshop. Zonko's, a jokes shop. Gladrags Wizardwear, obviously a clothes shop. Dominic Maestro's, a music shop. And well... there is also Madam Puddifoot's Tea Shop I guess...

me: Let's see... Why don't we go to the Tea shop first. I love tea. Then, maybe for books. Need to start reading again. I finished my Muggle books already. Then we'll see.

Draco: Milady~

I took his arm and we started chatting while on our way to the Tea Shop. Might I say, this Draco is quite charming.

The atmosphere inside was really warm and welcoming, filled with a sweet tint, and all around us were... well... couples.

Ahem, nevermind that.

I and Draco are barely just friends, so I could enjoy a nice hang out with a friend.

We both enjoyed calming our nerves and relaxing with cups of sweet scented Cherry Vanilla tea, and 2 little cinnamon biscuits, while discussing theories and our general thoughts about the world. It's always nice to share your views with someone else with some working neurons...

Oh well. At the bookshop I found an interesting horror series that I bought on spot, I managed to fill my bag with sweets and pranking items, we enjoyed great music and I even bought an Ocarina! We went to admire some really nice clothes and a particular black witchy dress caught my attention. I know what I'll buy once I get more money from Gringotts!

On the carriage back to the Castle, we were joined by Crabbe, Goyle and Parkinson who ruined the mood.

Pansy: Liked the magic of Hogmeade, Black? Bet you've never seen anything quite like it. Living like a filthy muggle, abandoned, knowing nothing of wizardry?
me: Actually, yes. I did enjoy visiting, thank you very much for asking. Draco was a real sweetheart too, to show me around and join me in visiting each place.
Pansy: WHAT?
me: Jealous?
Pansy: Why would I be?!
me: Dunno. Just asking.

She was fuming while I turned back to Draco to chat. I was trying to hide my smirk, but oh well. #rekt.
Hogsmeade is great, but you have to be with friends and have money to spend. Lots of them.
We head a great Halloween feast, and then went to sleep, sharing my day with the girls and everything we bought, until, we were 'awoken' by professor Snape who got all Slytherins in the Great Hall. Here there were all the students from the other Houses, and we had to sleep in sleeping bags.
Only to find out later, while feigning sleep, that Sirius Black tried to break into the Gryffindor CR. Very smart, dad....

**OKAY SO BREAKING NEWS THE NEXT DAY**

Nobody knows how dad got in the castle.
Snape suspects Lupin.
Dumbledore has NO clue, for the first time, what is going on. What a liar.
We won't be playing against Gryffindor, thank Salazar, because Draco is **injured**.
We'll be playing against Ravenclaw.
Hufflepuff has a new Seeker and Captain, Cedric Diggory.
Gryffindor vs Hufflepuff will be played in horrendous conditions.
I made great progress with the Patronus.

**AND**

**THIS DADA CLASS IS TAUGHT BY, NONE OTHER THAN**

*drum roll*

**SNAPE.**

And what are we studying?

* Werewolves. *

Oh, the irony.

He told us to turn to page 394 after lots of arguing with Gryffindor students and taking 15 points off for disobedience.

**Snape:** Which of you can tell me how we distinguish between the werewolf and the true wolf?

Everyone sat in motionless silence; I suppose I could raise my hand but...

**Snape:** Anyone? Are you telling me that professor Lupin hasn't even taught you the basic distinction between --

**Pansy:** Well, Professor Lupin got as far as teaching Hinkypunks.

**Snape:** Well, well, well, I never thought I'd meet a third-year class who wouldn't even recognize a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are...

**me:** U-umm... professor...

**Snape:** Speak.

**me:** Werewolves and Wolves differ in several ways. For instance, Werewolves are humans that can transform into a wolf-like being, whereas wolves are simple, four-legged creatures that
can't transform into any other figure. Also, Werewolves are super strong, whereas wolves only have ordinary strengths, speed and senses like domesticated dogs normally have. Werewolves also only transform in their wolf form while it's a full moon. Most of the times, wolves will not attack humans, particularly lone wolves. There are some exceptions, of course. Werewolves, on the other hand, are driven to attack other creatures. A rabid wolf might be indistinguishable from a werewolf in this instance. An obvious difference would be their size too.

Snape: Very well. At least someone bothers to study once in a while. 10 points to Slytherin.

Great... thanks, Snape. But please, bring Lupin back
Oh well.
Hufflepuffs apparently won the match because of a Dementor attacking Harry, and he fainted-free fall—his broom was wrecked by the Willow.
Also, as I went to Hogsmeade again with Draco, apparently Harry sneaked in as well, and found out that Sirius was a great friend of his parents and their Secret Keeper as well.
Oh great, Harry's finding out more and more things, this is absolutely and extremely amazing!

**NOT.**
The last thing I need is him wanting revenge on my dad. Or finding out he is my dad.
Or what if...
What if he already found out but just didn't tell me?!
Oh, Merlin's beard, this is sooo so bad...
And Hagrid, although free of all charges, has to try to talk to the Ministry people to save Buckbeak's life too...
This will be difficult, but if all 5 of us try, maybe we can save the sweet hippogriff...

**Damn you, Lucius Malfoy...**

---

**PARAM PAM PAM**

**IT'S CHRISTMAS DAY!**

And although I'm alone again, let's see if I got any presents—
Oh my, the tree and decorations are so enchanting to look at! Especially with gifts underneath!
Am I becoming more conceited and vain? I don't know. Perhaps?
From Jessie and Emma I got the Kuroshitsuji Manga, from Hermione the series of Game of Thrones (oh, Herms, I love you so much for this), from Harry, Ron and the twins got me some sweets and some pranking stuff, Ginny made some handmade bracelets that I absolutely adore, and even Mrs. Weasley got me a green knitted sweater with a grey R on it! How lovely! I shall thank her personally in a letter—
Draco and his mum sent me a Merry Christmas letter and a silver set of jewelry, with green emeralds and snakes. So Slytherinish, I love it—

**AND OH MERLIN'S BEARD, I GOT A FIREBOLT?**
**B-BUT? HOW IS THIS POSSIBLE? FROM WHOM?**
**WH-whoa?!!**
**Who'd waste so much money on ME?**

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

At lunchtime I went down to the Great Hall, to find that the House tables had been moved against the walls again, and that a single table, set for twelve, stood in the middle of the room. Professors
Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Sprout, and Flitwick were there, along with Filch, the caretaker, who had taken off his usual brown coat and was wearing a very old and rather moldy-looking tailcoat. There were only two other students, extremely nervous-looking first years.

**Dumbledore:** Merry Christmas! As there are so few of us, it seemed foolish to use the House tables... Sit down, sit down!

**me:** Merry Christmas, everyone!

Just as I sat down between Snape and McGonagall, Harry, Ron, and Hermione sat down side by side at the end of the table.

"**Crackers!**" said Dumbledore enthusiastically, offering the end of a large silver noisemaker to Snape, who took it reluctantly and tugged. With a bang like a gunshot, the cracker flew apart to reveal a large, pointed witches hat topped with a stuffed vulture.

As we started eating, doors of the Great Hall opened again. It was Professor Trelawney, gliding toward them as though on wheels. She had put on a green sequined dress in honor of the occasion, making her look more than ever like a glittering, oversized dragonfly.

**Dumbledore:** Sibyll, this is a pleasant surprise!

**Sibyll:** I have been crystal gazing, Headmaster and to my astonishment, I saw myself abandoning my solitary luncheon and coming to join you. Who am I to refuse the promptings of fate? I at once hastened from my tower, and I do beg you to forgive my lateness...

**Dumbledore:** Certainly, certainly. Let me draw you up a chair --

And he did indeed draw a chair in midair with his wand, which revolved for a few seconds before falling with a thud between Professors Snape and Flitwick. Professor Trelawney, however, did not sit down; her enormous eyes had been roving around the table, and she suddenly uttered a kind of soft scream.

**Sibyll:** I dare not, Headmaster! If I join the table, we shall be thirteen! Nothing could be more unlucky! Never forget that when thirteen dine together, the first to rise will be the first to die!

**McGonagall:** We'll risk it, Sibyll. Do sit down, the turkey's getting stone cold.

Professor Trelawney hesitated, then lowered herself into the empty chair, eyes shut and mouth clenched tight, as though expecting a thunderbolt to hit the table. Professor McGonagall poked a large spoon into the nearest tureen.

**Sibyll:** But where is dear Professor Lupin?

**Dumbledore:** I'm afraid the poor fellow is ill again. Most unfortunate that it should happen on Christmas Day.

**McGonagall:** But surely you already knew that, Sibyll?

Professor Trelawney gave Professor McGonagall a very cold look.

**Sibyll:** Certainly I knew, Minerva. But one does not parade the fact that one is All-Knowing. I frequently act as though I am not possessed of the Inner Eye, so as not to make others nervous.

**McGonagall:** That explains a great deal.

Trelawney's voice suddenly became a good deal less misty.
Sibyll: If you must know, Minerva, I have seen that poor Professor Lupin will not be with us for very long. He seems aware, himself, that his time is short. He positively fled when I offered to crystal gaze for him --
McGonagall: Imagine that--
Dumbledore: I doubt that Professor Lupin is in any immediate danger. Severus, you've made the potion for him again?
Snape: Yes, Headmaster.
Dumbledore: Good. Then he should be up and about in no time... Derek, have you had any of the chipolatas? They're excellent.

The first-year boy went furiously red on being addressed directly by Dumbledore, and took the platter of sausages with trembling hands.

Professor Trelawney behaved almost normally until the very end of Christmas dinner, two hours later. Full to bursting with Christmas dinner and still wearing their cracker hats, Harry and Ron got up first from the table and she shrieked loudly.

Sibyll: My dears! Which of you left his seat first? Which?
Ron: Dunno?
McGonagall: I doubt it will make much difference unless a mad axe-man is waiting outside the doors to slaughter the first into the Entrance Hall.

Even Ron laughed. Professor Trelawney looked highly affronted. Just then, they left, leaving Hermione behind to deal with some matters with McGonagall.

After the uneventful Christmas break, lots of interesting stuff happened, to compensate.
Slytherin won against Ravenclaw (obviously)
Harry also got a Firebolt but was confiscated by McGonagall to see if it was jinxed and/or sent by a certain SIRIUS BLACK (which would totally explain the gift). But, how did he get the money? How did he get into Gringotts?
Well, I shall ask him if I get the chance. Hopefully.
Scabbers was 'eaten' by Crookshanks and now Ron hates Hermione (poor girl)

Gryffindor won against Ravenclaw.
Party Hard in their CR.
UNTIL
I found out the next day because of the terrible chaos at their table.
That NONE OTHER THAN MY FATHER
Managed to break into his ex-House.
Thanks to the passwords for the whole week written by Neville on a note and lost somewhere.
And threatened Ron with a knife.
But that doesn't make much sense. Something is clearly amiss.
I have to find out the truth about the purpose of this escapade

And guess what am I going to do this weekend?
Day and night I am going to go on a search for my father.
Hmmm that's quite the objective, might I say. Fits as a book title as well.

~In search for the lost father~
New York Bestseller!
Harry decided to sneak with Ron in Hogsmeade again. Everything was fine. With a tiny exception.

SNAPE FOUND THE MAP
INSULTED HIM REAAAALLLY BADLY
AND NOW LUPIN HAS THE MAP.
Clever, Potter...
I'll get it back, somehow.
But how did I find out? Harry obviously didn't have the guts to tell me. Heart of a lion...
Lupin told me and warned me again.
What did I tell him?

"You better watch for the map, in case Pettigrew decides to appear. You never know. You'll be surprised by how many things you can learn through a simple map".

But what's even worse?
Despite my and Hermione's struggles, Hagrid lost the case, and Buckbeak was sentenced to death...

Hagrid: S'all my fault. Got all tongue-tied. They was all sittin' there in black robes an' I kep' droppin' me notes and forgettin' all them dates yeh looked up fer me, Hermione. An' then Lucius Malfoy stood up an' said his bit, and the Committee jus' did exac'ly what he told 'em...
Ron: There's still the appeal! Don't give up yet, we're working on it!
Hagrid: S'no good, Ron... That Committee's in Lucius Malfoy's pocket. I'm jus' gonna make sure the rest o' Beaky's time is the happiest he's ever had. I owe him that.... Look at him blubber!

Malfoy, Crabbe, and Goyle had been standing just inside the castle doors, listening...

Draco: Have you ever seen anything quite as pathetic? And he's supposed to be our teacher!

Oh no, dear. You've crossed the imaginary line, that I simply cannot allow. Harry and Ron both made furious moves toward Malfoy, but I got there first -- SMACK!

I slapped him across the face with all the strength she could muster. Malfoy staggered. Harry, Ron, Crabbe, and Goyle stood flabbergasted as Hermione raised her hand again.

me: Don't you dare call Hagrid pathetic, you foul, miserable --

Everyone stared at me in shock, not expecting me, out of all people, to slap Draco. I didn't expect it either, but this pissed me off on another level. Poor dear Buckbeak... Ugh.

"C'mon." Malfoy muttered, and in a moment, all three of them had disappeared into the passageway to the dungeons.

"Raven!" Ron said again, sounding both stunned and impressed.
me: Make sure you win the Quidditch Cup, Potter.
At the match, despite wanting to win the Cup this year as well, I was determined to let them win. I was too annoyed with the behaviour of some people.

Since the second part of the year, I switched positions with Draco, letting him be the seeker, so I won't take the blame anymore.

Lee: And it's Gryffindor in possession, Alicia Spinner of Gryffindor with the Quaffle, heading straight for the Slytherin goal posts, looking good, Alicia! Argh, no -- Quaffle intercepted by Warrington, Warrington of Slytherin tearing up the field -- WHAM! -- nice Bludger work there by George Weasley, Warrington drops the Quaffle, it's caught by -- Johnson, Gryffindor back in possession, come on, Angelina -- nice swerve around Montague -- duck, Angelina, that's a Bludger! SHE SCORES! TEN-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!

Angelina punched the air as she soared around the end of the field; the sea of scarlet below was screaming in delight.

"OUCH!"

Angelina was nearly thrown from her broom as Marcus Flint went smashing into her.

Fred: Sorry! Sorry, didn't see her!

A moment later, Fred Weasley chucked his Beater's club at the back of Flint's head. Flint's nose smashed into the handle of his broom and began to bleed.

Hooch: That will do! Penalty shot to Gryffindor for an unprovoked attack on their Chaser! Penalty shot to Slytherin for deliberate damage to their Chaser!

Fred: Come off it, Miss!

Lee: Come on, Alicia! -- YES! SHE'S BEATEN THE KEEPER! TWENTY-ZERO TO GRYFFINDOR!

Harry turned the Firebolt sharply to watch Flint, still bleeding freely, fly forward to take the Slytherin penalty. Wood was hovering in front of the Gryffindor goal posts, his jaw clenched.

Lee: 'Course, Wood's a superb Keeper! -- Superb! Very difficult to pass -- very difficult indeed -- YES! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! HE'S SAVED IT!

Relieved, Harry zoomed away, gazing around for the Snitch, but still making sure he caught every word of Lee's commentary. It was essential that he held Malfoy off the Snitch until Gryffindor was more than fifty points up --

Lee: Gryffindor in possession, no, Slytherin in possession -- no! Gryffindor back in possession and it's Katie Bell, Katie Bell for Gryffindor with the Quaffle, she's streaking up the field -- THAT WAS DELIBERATE!

Montague, a Slytherin Chaser, had swerved in front of Katie, and instead of seizing the Quaffle had grabbed her head. Katie cart-wheeled in the air, managed to stay on her broom, but dropped the Quaffle.

Madam Hooch's whistle rang out again as she soared over to Montague and began shouting at him.
A minute later, Katie had put another penalty past the Slytherin Seeker.

Lee: THIRTY-ZERO! TAKE THAT, YOU DIRTY, CHEATING --
Minerva: Jordan, if you can't commentate in an unbiased way --
Lee: I'm telling it like it is, Professor!

Look, the Snitch!
I pushed Harry a bit, signaling him to follow the direction I was pointing at.
WHOOSH.

One of the Bludgers came streaking past Harry's right ear, hit by the gigantic Slytherin Beater, Derrick. Then again...

WHOOSH.

The second Bludger grazed Harry's elbow. Bole, was closing in.
Harry had a fleeting glimpse of Bole and Derrick zooming toward him, clubs raised -- He turned the Firebolt upward at the last second, and Bole and Derrick collided with a sickening crunch. Ouchie...

Lee: Ha haaa! Too bad, boys! You'll need to get up earlier than that to beat a Firebolt! And it's Gryffindor in possession again, as Johnson takes the Quaffle -- Flint alongside her -- poke him in the eye, Angelina! -- it was a joke, Professor, it was a joke -- oh no -- Flint in possession, Flint flying toward the Gryffindor goal posts, come on now, Wood, save --!

But Flint had scored; there was an eruption of cheers from the Slytherin end, and Lee swore so badly that Professor McGonagall tried to tug the magical megaphone away from him.

Lee: Sorry, Professor, sorry! Won't happen again! So, Gryffindor in the lead, thirty points to ten, and Gryffindor in possession --

It was turning into the dirtiest game I have ever played in. Enraged that Gryffindor had taken such an early lead, the Slytherins were rapidly resorting to any means to take the Quaffle. Bole hit Alicia with his club and tried to say he'd thought she was a Bludger. George Weasley elbowed Bole in the face in retaliation. Madam Hooch awarded both teams penalties, and Wood pulled off another spectacular save, making the score forty-ten to Gryffindor. This is getting worse and worse.

Katie scored. Fifty-ten. Fred and George Weasley were swooping around her, clubs raised, in case any of the Slytherins were thinking of revenge. Bole and Derrick took advantage of Fred's and George's absence to aim both Bludgers at Wood; they caught him in the stomach, one after the other, and he rolled over in the air, clutching his broom, completely winded.

Madam Hooch was beside herself --

Hooch: YOU DO NOT ATTACK THE KEEPER UNLESS THE QUAFFLE IS WITHIN THE SCORING AREA! Gryffindor penalty!

And Angelina scored. Sixty-ten. Moments later, Fred Weasley pelted a Bludger at Warrington, knocking the Quaffle out of his hands; Alicia seized it and put it through the Slytherin goal -- seventy-ten.
The Gryffindor crowd below was screaming itself hoarse -- Gryffindor was sixty points in the lead, and if Harry caught the Snitch now, the Cup was theirs

*The Snitch was sparkling twenty feet above us.*

Harry put on a huge burst of speed; the wind was roaring in his ears; he stretched out his hand, but suddenly, the Firebolt was slowing down --

Draco, without us realizing, was holding on to Harry's broom end. Really nice...

Hooch: Penalty! Penalty to Gryffindor! I've never seen such tactics

Lee: YOU CHEATING SCUM! YOU FILTHY, CHEATING B --

Professor McGonagall didn't even bother to tell him off. She was actually shaking her finger in Malfoy's direction, her hat had fallen off, and she too was shouting furiously.

Alicia took Gryffindor's penalty, but she was so angry she missed by several feet. The Gryffindor team was losing concentration and the Slytherins, delighted by Malfoy's foul on Harry, were being spurred on to greater heights.

Lee: Slytherin in possession, Slytherin heading for goal -- Black scores -- Seventy-twenty to Gryffindor... Angelina Johnson gets the Quaffle for Gryffindor, come on, Angelina, COME ON!

Harry looked around. Every single Slytherin player was streaking up the pitch toward Angelina, including the Slytherin Keeper -- they were all going to block her -- Harry wheeled the Firebolt around, bent so low he was lying flat along the handle, and kicked it forward. Like a bullet, he shot toward the Slytherins.

"AAAAAARRRRGH!!"

They scattered as the Firebolt zoomed toward them; Angelina's way was clear.

Lee: SHE SCORES! SHE SCORES! Gryffindor leads by eighty Points to twenty!

Nice one, Potter.

Harry, who had almost pelted headlong into the stands, skidded to a halt in midair, reversed, and zoomed back into the middle of the field. Then he saw Draco diving after the Snitch, and he came forward, threw himself forward, took both hands off his broom, knocked his arm out of the way and --

"YES!"

He pulled out of his dive, his hand in the air, and the stadium exploded. Harry soared above the crowd, an odd ringing in his ears. The tiny golden ball was held tight in his fist, beating its wings hopelessly against his fingers.

Then Wood was speeding toward him, half-blinded by tears; he seized Harry around the neck and sobbed unrestrainedly into his shoulder. Harry felt two large thumps as Fred and George hit them; then Angelina's, Alicia's, and Katie's voices, "We've won the Cup! We've won the Cup!" Tangled together in a many-armed hug, the Gryffindor team sank, yelling hoarsely, back to earth.

Wave upon wave of crimson supporters was pouring over the barriers onto the field. Hands were
raining down on their backs. Harry had a confused impression of noise and bodies pressing in on him. Then he, and the rest of the team, were hoisted onto the shoulders of the crowd. Thrust into the light, he saw Hagrid, plastered with crimson rosettes -- "Yeh beat 'em, Harry, yeh beat 'em! Wait till I tell Buckbeak!"

Yes. I'm glad I helped Harry catch the Snitch. I'm glad they finally won. But what I hate with a burning passion? That absolutely nobody, except for the Slytherins, would shout in happiness if we won. On the other hand, now that the Gryffindors won, everyone is cheering. So nice...

Now, I have to make sure that I won't get assaulted by a mad Slytherin.

On the other hand, the exams went very well, might I say. DADA's exam was super awesome, like an obstacle run, the Potions one was easy peasy lemon squizy, yada yada, and for Divination well... The fact that I saw in the crystal ball a black dog that resembled the Grim, eating a rat... and then Trelawney went into a prediction/prophecy state and--

THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT... THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT'S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER HE WAS. TONIGHT... BEFORE MIDNIGHT... THE SERVANT... WILL SET OUT... TO REJOIN... HIS MASTER...

This, again, could mean Sirius, but he wasn't a supporter of his! At least I doubt it. Maybe Pettigrew was? Maybe... His Animagus... I wonder... if he was...

Time to turn back to Lupin once again.

I run in his office once again (I seem to like running around, huh?) and went near him.

Lupin: Ah, Raven, nice to see you here.
me: Likewise. Look, I have a question, and I just want you to confirm it, not lie.

Lupin: More tales from my years at Hogwarts?
me: Precisely. Were the Marauders Animagi?

Lupin: Yes.

me: What was my father's? Was it a black dog or something?

Lupin: Yes? How did you know?

me: Trelawney keeps saying that the Grim is going to kill me and blah blah blah.

Lupin: I must tell you something.

me: Yes...?

Lupin: I have to admit... you were right about Pettigrew?

me: Oh?

Lupin: At first I didn't believe it... thought you were just reckless, much like your parents... Slytherin ambition to be right... but then...

me: Then what?

Lupin: I spotted Pettigrew's name on the Marauders Map.

me: No way!

Lupin: *nods gravely* The map never lies. I made it myself, with the other 3... James was a stag, Sirius a dog, Pettigrew a rat...
me: Well yeah... My dad was a dog. Known for his loyalty to his loved ones, whereas Pettigrew was a rat. He literally RAT ted you out.

Lupin: *snorts* I am quite ashamed of myself... that I knew him more than you did, and yet you still believed in his innocence, while I, and nobody else, did.

me: It's okay, Moony.

Lupin: And I know where he's hiding as well.

me: Oh?

Lupin: The Shrieking Shack.

me: But how does anyone get so close to that... that...

Lupin: The Whomping Willow was planted when I first started my years here...

me: I am aware of your condition, Moony. Don't worry. Your secret is safe.

Lupin: I appreciate that.

me: I also have to tell you a secret.

me: I worked with McGonagall the whole year to perfect my skills and well... You see... My animagus is a black fox...

Lupin: But why... did you want to become one?

me: Ambition. If my dad could, then why couldn't I? And also, curiosity. I wanted to see what my Animagus form would be.

Lupin: *sighs* Why am I not surprised... Your mother's was a Margay, or an Ocelot.

me: Those felines are so sweet...

Lupin chuckled and we chatted a bit more, until I had to go to Hagrid and support him. Apparently Hermione, Harry and Ron were here as well. Hagrid, despite being happy that we were there for him, Fudge and the others were approaching and he had to shoo us. And, surprisingly, the damn rat was there too...

We had no choice. As Hermione threw the cloak over us, voices could be heard at the front of the cabin. Hagrid looked at the place where they had just vanished from sight.

**Hagrid:** Go quick. Don' listen...

And he strode back into his cabin as someone knocked at the front door.

Slowly, in a kind of horrified trance, we set off silently around Hagrid's house. As we reached the other side, the front door closed with a sharp snap.

**Hermione:** Please, let's hurry, I can't stand it, I can't bear it...

We started up the sloping lawn toward the castle. The sun was sinking fast now; the sky had turned to a clear, purple-tinged gray, but to the west there was a ruby-red glow. Ron stopped dead in his tracks.

**Hermione:** Oh, please, Ron-

**Ron:** It's Scabbers -- he won't -- stay put -- Scabbers, it's me, you idiot, it's Ron.

**Hermione:** Oh, Ron, please let's move, they're going to do it!

**Ron:** Okay -- Scabbers, stay put --

We walked forward; Harry, like Hermione, was trying not to listen to the rumble of voices behind
Ron: I can't hold him -- Scabbers, shut up, everyone'll hear us --

The rat was squealing wildly, but not loudly enough to cover up the sounds drifting from Hagrid's garden. There was a jumble of indistinct male voices, a silence, and then, without warning, the unmistakable swish and thud of an axe.

Hermione swayed on the spot.

Hermione: They did it! I'd -- don't believe it -- they did it!
me: Those... monsters...How could they?!
Harry: Hagrid...
Hermione: How -- could -- they?...How could they?
Ron: Come on...

We set off back toward the castle, walking slowly to keep themselves hidden under the cloak. The light was fading fast now.

Ron: Scabbers, keep still. What's the matter with you, You stupid rat? Stay still -- OUCH! He bit me!
Hermione: Ron, be quiet! Fudge'll be out here in a minute --
Ron: He won't -- stay -- put --

Scabbers was plainly terrified. He was writhing with all his might, trying to break free of Ron's grip.

me: What's the matter with him?

Crookshanks. Whether he could see them or was following the sound of Scabbers's squeaks, Harry couldn't tell.

Hermione: Crookshanks! No, go away, Crookshanks! Go away!
Ron: Scabbers -- NO!

Too late -- the rat had slipped between Ron's clutching fingers, hit the ground, and scampered away. In one bound, Crookshanks sprang after him, and before we could stop him, Ron had thrown the Invisibility Cloak off himself and pelted away into the darkness. It was impossible to run full out under the cloak; We pulled it off and it streamed behind them like a banner as they hurtled after Ron.

Ron: Get away from him -- get away -- Scabbers, come here -- Gotcha! Get off, you stinking cat --

Harry and Hermione almost fell over Ron; they skidded to a stop right in front of him. He was sprawled on the ground, but Scabbers was back in his pocket; he had both hands held tight over the quivering lump.

Hermione: Ron -- come on back under the cloak - Dumbledore -- the Minister -- they'll be coming back out in a minute --
Suddenly, the sound of soft pounding of gigantic paws could be heard.... Something was bounding toward us, quiet as a shadow -- an enormous, pale-eyed, jet-black dog... could this be...?

Harry reached for his wand, but too late -- the dog had made an enormous leap and the front paws hit him on the chest. But the force of its leap had carried it too far; it rolled off him. Ron was on his feet, as the dog sprang back toward them he pushed Harry aside; the dog's jaws fastened instead around Ron's outstretched arm. Harry lunged forward, he seized a handful of the brute's hair, but it was dragging Ron away as easily as though he were a rag doll --, then, the giant dog got a hold of his leg and dragged him into a small hole at the very base of the Willow. I know what I must do.

Being behind them, I transformed into my Animagus form, and luckily, being pitch black, nobody noticed me as I darted after the dog in the passageway, just as Lupin mentioned. The Shrieking Shack, huh...?

The dog then transformed back into its human form-- Sirius Black-- just as I suspected, looking directly at Ron, who was cowering in a corner, while I lay, still as a fox, with the cat, on a dusty bed. Harry and Hermione dashed across to him.

**Hermione:** Ron -- are you okay?

**Harry:** Where's the dog?

**Ron:** Not a dog, Harry, it's a trap --

**Harry:** What --

**Ron:** He's the dog... he's an Animagus.

Ron was staring over Harry's shoulder. Harry wheeled around. With a snap, the man in the shadows closed the door behind them.

"**Expelliarmus!**" he croaked, pointing Ron's wand at them. Harry's and Hermione's wands shot out of their hands, high in the air, and Black caught them. Then he took a step closer. His eyes were fixed on Harry.

**Sirius:** I thought you'd come and help your friend. Your father would have done the same for me. Brave of you not to run for a teacher. I'm grateful... it will make everything much easier.

Harry suddenly darted forward, but there was a sudden movement on either side of him and two pairs of hands grabbed him and held him back...

**Hermione:** No, Harry!

**Ron:** If you want to kill Harry, you'll have to kill us too!

**Sirius:** Lie down. You will damage that leg even more.

**Ron:** Did you hear me? You'll have to kill all three of us!

**Sirius:** There'll be only one murder here tonight.

**Harry:** Why's that? Didn't care last time, did you? Didn't mind slaughtering all those Muggles to get at Pettigrew... What's the matter, gone soft in Azkaban?

**Hermione:** Harry! Be quiet!

**Harry:** HE KILLED MY MUM AND DAD!
He was wriggling lots, trying to break free from Ron's and Hermione's grip, and I jumped from the bed and snarled at him maliciously.

One of Harry's hands fastened over his wasted wrist, forcing the wand tips away; the knuckles of Harry's other hand collided with the side of Black's head and they fell, backward, into the wall -- Hermione was screaming; Ron was yelling; there was a blinding flash as the wands in Black's hand sent a jet of sparks into the air that missed Harry's face by inches; Harry felt the shrunken arm under his fingers twisting madly, but he clung on, his other hand punching every part of Black it could find.

But Black's free hand had found Harry's throat, and I took a bite of Harry's shirt, trying to pry him away. I may not have too much strength though...

**Sirius:** No. I've waited too long --

The fingers tightened, Harry choked, his glasses askew.

Then he saw Hermione's foot swing out of nowhere. Black let go of Harry with a grunt of pain; Ron had thrown himself on Black's wand hand and Harry heard a faint clatter -- He fought free of the tangle of bodies and saw his own wand rolling across the floor; he threw himself toward it but

"Argh!"

Crookshanks had joined the fray; both sets of front claws had sunk themselves deep into Harry's arm; Harry threw him off, but Crookshanks now darted toward Harry's wand --

"NO YOU DON'T!" roared Harry, and he aimed a kick at Crookshanks that made the cat leap aside, spitting; Harry snatched up his wand and turned --

"Get out of the way!" he shouted at Ron and Hermione.

They didn't need telling twice. Hermione, gasping for breath, her lip bleeding, scrambled aside, snatching up her and Ron's wands. Ron crawled to the four-poster and collapsed onto it, panting, his white face now tinged with green, both hands clutching his broken leg.

Black was sprawled at the bottom of the wall. His thin chest rose and fell rapidly as he watched Harry walking slowly nearer, his wand pointing straight at Black's heart.

**Sirius:** Going to kill me, Harry?

Harry stopped right above him, his wand still pointing at Black's chest, looking down at him. A livid bruise was rising around Black's left eye and his nose was bleeding.

**Harry:** You killed my parents.

**Sirius:** I don't deny it. But if you knew the whole story.

**Harry:** The whole story? You sold them to Voldemort. That's all I need to know.

**Sirius:** You've got to listen to me. You'll regret it if you don't... You don't understand....

**Harry:** I understand a lot better than you think. You never heard her, did you? My mum... trying to stop Voldemort killing me... and you did that... you did it....

I transformed back into my human self and tried to pry Harry away from him. I'm afraid that he would hurt Sirius, blinded by revenge.
me: Harry, stop! This is not the man you want to get revenge on! You've mistaken!
Ron: Raven?
me: Please don't do anything reckless before hearing him out! He's innocent!
Harry: That's nonsense! Raven, he killed your mother!
me: No, he did not! My father would have never harmed my mother, nor his best friends! Harry, listen to me, please! Reason the situation!
Harry: Your... father? You said it was just a name coincidence! You lied to us!
me: Because I didn't want you to think I took part in a crime, but Harry, listen to me! I have proof that Sirius Black is not the reason why Lily and James Potter died!

The seconds lengthened. And still Harry stood frozen there, wand poised, Black staring up at him, Crookshanks on his chest. Ron's ragged breathing came from near the bed; Hermione was quite silent.
And then came a new sound --
Muffled footsteps were echoing up through the floor -- someone was moving downstairs.

Hermione: WE'RE UP HERE! WE'RE UP HERE -- SIRIUS BLACK -- QUICK!

The door of the room burst open in a shower of red sparks and Harry wheeled around as Professor Lupin came hurtling into the room, his face bloodless, his wand raised and ready. His eyes flickered over all of us, in terrible conditions.

"Expelliarmus!" Lupin shouted.

Harry's wand flew once more out of his hand; so did the two Hermione was holding. Lupin caught them all deftly, then moved into the room, staring at Black, who still had Crookshanks lying protectively across his chest.

Then Lupin spoke, in a very tense voice.

"Where is he, Sirius?"

Black's face was quite expressionless. For a few seconds, he didn't move at all. Then, very slowly, he raised his empty hand and pointed straight at Ron. Mystified, Harry glanced around at Ron, who looked bewildered.

Lupin: But then...... why hasn't he shown himself before now? Unless ---- unless he was the one... unless you switched... without telling me?

Very slowly, his sunken gaze never leaving Lupin's face, Black nodded.

me: *whispers* I told you, Remus. He is innocent.
Harry: Professor, what's going on --?

But he never finished the question, because what he saw made his voice die in his throat. Lupin was lowering his wand, gazing fixed at Black. The Professor walked to Black's side, seized his hand, pulled him to his feet so that Crookshanks fell to the floor, and embraced Black like a brother.

"I DON'T BELIEVE IT!" Hermione screamed.
Lupin let go of Black and turned to her. She had raised herself off the floor and was pointing at Lupin, wild-eyed.
Hermione: You -- you --
Remus: Hermione --
hermione: You and him!
me: Hermione, calm down --
Hermione: I didn't tell anyone! I've been covering up for you --
Remus: Hermione, listen to me, please. I can explain --
Harry: I trusted you, and all the time you've been his friend!
Remus: You're wrong. I haven't been Sirius's friend, but I am now -- Let me explain....
Hermione: NO! Harry, don't trust him, he's been helping Black get into the castle, he wants you dead too -- he's a werewolf!

There was a ringing silence. The sound of yet another slap could be heard, as I smacked Hermione across the face, just as I have done with Draco previously.

me: Would all of you just shut UP for a second and listen to them?! They have the explanation EVERYONE is looking for, yet nobody bothers to LISTEN! And what does the fact that Remus is a Werewolf have to do with ANYTHING at ALL? He's still an amazing human being who didn't want to get infected with Lycan genes! Tsh... Racists...
Remus: Thank you, Raven. Not at all up to your usual standard, Hermione. Only one out of three, I'm afraid. I have not been helping Sirius get into the castle and I certainly don't want Harry dead. But I won't deny that I am a werewolf.
Ron: Get away from me, werewolf!
me: Shut up! Leave him alone, jerk!

Lupin stopped dead. Then, with an obvious effort, he turned to Hermione.

Remus: How long have you known?
Hermione: Ages. Since I did Professor Snape's essay...
Remus: He'll be delighted. He assigned that essay hoping someone would realize what my symptoms meant... Did you check the lunar chart and realize that I was always ill at the full moon? Or did you realize that the Boggart changed into the moon when it saw me?
Hermione: Both.
me: Well, Joke's on you, genius. I've known since the boggart incident, and yet, I didn't do such a fuss, like y'all are doing right now. You should be ashamed of yourselves. All the year, you've adored him, for being such an amazing person and teacher, and now, you hate him for such a minor flaw that he never wished for? It's like hating you, Hermione, for having that bush of a hair.

She blushed and looked away, as Lupin forced a laugh.

Remus: You're the cleverest witches of your age I've ever met.
Hermione: I'm not. If I'd been a bit cleverer, I'd have told everyone what you are!
Remus: But they already know. At least, the staff do.
Ron: Dumbledore hired you when he knew you were a werewolf. Is he mad?
Remus: Some of the staff thought so. He had to work very hard to convince certain teachers that I'm trustworthy --
Harry: AND HE WAS WRONG! YOU'VE BEEN HELPING HIM ALL THE TIME!
me: You know nothing, Potter!
Harry: And you! Obviously you'd help your own kin! You're an evil Slytherin! Always friends with the Malfoys, and Snape, and all the other pureblood freaks!

me: Oh, boo-hoo! Toujours pur! En stirps nobilis et gens antiquissima Black. Lo! the well-known noble stock and most-ancient clan Black. Behold the lineage of well-born and time-honored family, Black! The Noble and Most Ancient House of Black. Yes, Potter, I am friends with Slytherins, and I am a proud Slytherin as well. Just like my mother was. But at least I have enough common-sense as to not be a filthy racist, like you all are! You should be ashamed of yourselves! Calling yourselves Gryffindors... Dumbledore would be ashamed of you.

Sirius: Where...did you get that from?

Me: Ahem. Narcissa showed me more of my ancestry.

Sirius: Not something I'm proud of.

Me: Well, I am, regardless.

After that outburst that left everyone stunned and speechless, I felt two frail yet strong arms embracing me, trying to calm me down, and I turned around, hugging my dad for the first time ever. The feeling is better than I thought.

Remus: I have not been helping Sirius. If you'll give me a chance, I'll explain. Look --

He separated Harry's, Ron's and Hermione's wands and threw each back to its owner; Harry caught his, stunned.

Remus: There. You're armed, we're not. Now will you listen? We've been helping him, because we know he was here.

Remus: The map. The Marauder's Map. I was in my office examining it --

Remus: Of course I know how to work it. I helped write it. I'm Moony -- that was my friends' nickname for me at school.

Ron: You wrote --?

me: Yes, Potter. Now shut up.

Remus: The important thing is, I was watching it carefully this evening, because I had an idea that you might try and sneak out of the castle to visit Hagrid before his Hippogriff was executed. And I was right, wasn't I? You might have been wearing your father's old cloak, Harry--

Remus: How d'you know about the cloak?

Remus: The number of times I saw James disappearing under it... The point is, even if you're wearing an Invisibility Cloak, you still show up on the Marauder's Map. I watched you cross the grounds and enter Hagrid's hut. Twenty minutes later, you left Hagrid, and set off back toward the castle. But you were now accompanied by somebody else.

Remus: I couldn't believe my eyes! I thought the map must be malfunctioning. How could he be with you?

Harry: No one was with us!

Remus: And then I saw another dot, moving fast toward you, labeled Sirius Black... I saw him collide with you; I watched as he pulled two of you into the Whomping Willow --

Ron: One of us!
me: No, Ronald. Two of you.

He had stopped his pacing, his eyes moving over Ron.

Remus: Do you think I could have a look at the rat?
Ron: What? What's Scabbers got to do with it?
Remus: Everything. Could I see him, please?

Ron hesitated, then put a hand inside his robes. Scabbers emerged, thrashing desperately; Ron had to seize his long bald tail to stop him escaping. Crookshanks stood up on Black's leg and made a soft hissing noise.
Lupin moved closer to Ron. He seemed to be holding his breath as he gazed intently at Scabbers.

Ron: What? What's my rat got to do with anything?
Sirius: That's not a rat.
Ron: What d'you mean -- of course he's a rat --
Remus: No, he's not. He's a wizard.
Sirius: An Animagus, by the name of Peter Pettigrew.
So close, yet so far...

Ron: You're both mental.
Hermione: Ridiculous!
Harry: Peter Pettigrew's dead! He killed him twelve years ago!
me: Some people you are...
Sirius: I meant to, but little Peter got the better of me... not this time, though!

And Crookshanks was thrown to the floor as Black lunged at Scabbers; Ron yelled with pain as Black's weight fell on his broken leg.

Remus: Sirius, NO! WAIT! You can't do it just like that -- they need to understand -- we've got to explain-
Sirius: We can explain afterwards!
Remus: They've -- got -- a -- right -- to -- know -- everything! Ron's kept him as a pet! There are parts of it even I don't understand, and Harry -- you owe Harry the truth, Sirius!

He stopped struggling, though his hollowed eyes were still fixed on Scabbers, who was clamped tightly under Ron's bitten, scratched, and bleeding hands.

Sirius: All right, then. Tell them whatever you like. But make it quick, Remus. I want to commit the murder I was imprisoned for...
Ron: You're nutters, all three of you. I've had enough of this. I'm off.

He tried to heave himself up on his good leg, but Lupin raised his wand again, pointing it at Scabbers.

Remus: You're going to hear me out, Ron. Just keep a tight hold on Peter while you listen.
Ron: HE'S NOT PETER, HE'S SCABBERS!
me: Stop shouting, idiot!
Harry: There were witnesses who saw Pettigrew die. A whole street full of them...
Sirius: They didn't see what they thought they saw!
Remus: Everyone thought Sirius killed Peter. I believed it myself -- until I saw the map tonight. Because the Marauder's map never lies... Peter's alive. Ron's holding him, Harry.

Then Hermione spoke, in a trembling, would-be calm sort of voice, as though trying to will Professor Lupin to talk sensibly.

Hermione: But Professor Lupin... Scabbers can't be Pettigrew... it just can't be true, you know it can't...
Remus: Why can't it be true?
Hermione: Because... because people would know if Peter Pettigrew had been an Animagus. We did Animagi in class with Professor McGonagall. And I looked them up when I did my homework -- the Ministry of Magic keeps tabs on witches and wizards who can become animals; there's a register showing what animal they become, and their markings and things... and I went and looked Professor McGonagall up on the register, and there have been only seven Animagi this century, and Pettigrew's name wasn't on the list.
Remus: Right again, Hermione! But the Ministry never knew that here used to be three unregistered Animagi running around Hogwarts. Just as dear Raven here is an Animagus too, yet professor McGonagall refused to document her as one.
Sirius: If you're going to tell them the story, get a move on, Remus. I've waited twelve years, I'm not going to wait much longer.
Remus: All right... but you'll need to help me, Sirius, I only know how it began...

Lupin broke off. There had been a loud creak behind him. The bedroom door had opened of its own accord. All five of them stared at it. Then Lupin strode toward it and looked out into the landing.

me: What was that?
Remus: There's no one there...
Ron: His place is haunted!
me: And you're silly enough to believe that?
Remus: It's not. The Shrieking Shack was never haunted... The screams and howls the villagers used to hear were made by me.

He pushed his graying hair out of his eyes, thought for a moment then said, "That's where all of this starts -- with my becoming a werewolf, None of this could have happened if I hadn't been bitter... and if I hadn't been so foolhardy..."

He looked sober and tired. Ron started to interrupt, but Hermione, said, "Shh!" She was watching Lupin very intently.

Remus: I as a very small boy when I received the bite. My parents tried everything, but in those days there was no cure. The potion that Professor Snape has been making for me is a very recent discovery. It makes me safe, you see. As long as I take it in the week, preceding the full moon, I keep my mind when I transform... I'm able to curl up in my office, a harmless wolf, and wait for the moon to wane again. Before the Wolfsbane Potion was discovered, however, I became a fully fledged monster once a month. It seemed impossible that I would be able to come to Hogwarts. Other parents weren't likely to want their children exposed to me. But then Dumbledore became Headmaster, and he was sympathetic. He said that as long as we took certain precautions, there was no reason I shouldn't come to school... I told you, months ago, that the Whomping Willow was planted the year I came to Hogwarts. The truth is that it was planted because I came to Hogwarts. This house the tunnel that leads to it -- they were built for my use. Once a month, I was smuggled out of the castle, into this place, to transform. The tree was placed at the tunnel mouth to stop anyone coming across me while I was dangerous. My transformations in those days were -- were terrible. It is very painful to turn into a werewolf. I was separated from humans to bite, so I bit and scratched myself instead. The villagers heard the noise and the screaming and thought they were hearing particularly violent spirits. Dumbledore encouraged the rumor... Even now, when the house has been silent for years, the villagers don't dare approach it... But apart from my transformations, I was happier than I had ever been in my life. For the first time ever, I had friends, four great friends. Sirius Black, Yami Megurine... Peter Pettigrew... and, of course, your father, Harry -- James Potter. Now, my three friends could hardly fail to notice that I disappeared once a month. I made up all sorts of stories. I told them my mother was ill, and that I had to go home to see her... I was terrified they would desert me the moment they found out what I was. But of course, they, like
you, Raven, Hermione, worked out the truth... And they didn't desert me at all. Instead, they did something for me that would make my transformations not only bearable, but the best times of my life. They became Animagi.

Harry: My dad too?
Remus: Yes, indeed. It took them the best part of three years to work out how to do it. Your father, Yami and Sirius here were the cleverest students in the school, and lucky they were, because the Animagus transformation can go horribly wrong -- one reason the Ministry keeps a close watch on those attempting to do it. Peter needed all the help he could get from Yami, James and Sirius. Finally, in our fifth year, they managed it. They could each turn into a different animal at will.
Hermione: But how did that help you?
Remus: They couldn't keep me company as humans, so they kept me company as animals. A werewolf is only a danger to people. They sneaked out of the castle every month under James's Invisibility Cloak. They transformed... Peter, as the smallest, could slip beneath the Willow's attacking branches and touch the knot that freezes it. They would then slip down the tunnel and join me. Under their influence, I became less dangerous. My body was still wolfish, but my mind seemed to become less so while I was with them.
Sirius: Hurry up, Remus.

Remus: I'm getting there, Sirius, I'm getting there... well, highly exciting possibilities were open to us now that we could all transform. Soon we were leaving the Shrieking Shack and roaming the school grounds and the village by night. Sirius and James transformed into such large animals, they were able to keep a werewolf in check. I doubt whether any Hogwarts students ever found out more about the Hogwarts grounds and Hogsmeade than we did... And that's how we came to write the Marauder's Map, and sign it with our nicknames. Sirius is Padfoot. Peter is Wormtail. James was Prongs and Yami was Spotfur.
Harry: What sort of animal --?
Hermione: That was still really dangerous! Running around in the dark with a werewolf! What if you'd given the others the slip, and bitten somebody?
Remus: A thought that still haunts me. And there were near misses, many of them. We laughed about them afterwards. We were young, thoughtless -- carried away with our own cleverness. I sometimes felt guilty about betraying Dumbledore's trust, of course... he had admitted me to Hogwarts when no other headmaster would have done so, and he had no idea I was breaking the rules he had set down for my own and others' safety. He never knew I had led four fellow students into becoming Animagi illegally. But I always managed to forget my guilty feelings every time we sat down to plan our next month's adventure. And I haven't changed...

Lupin's face had hardened, and there was self-disgust in his voice.

Remus: All this year, I have been battling with myself, wondering whether I should tell Dumbledore that Sirius was an Animagus. But I didn't do it. Why? Because I was too cowardly. It would have meant admitting that I'd betrayed his trust while I was at school, admitting that I'd led others along with me... and Dumbledore's trust has meant everything to me. He let me into Hogwarts as a boy, and he gave me a job when I have been shunned all my adult life, unable to find paid work because of what I am. And so I convinced myself that
Sirius was getting into the school using dark arts he learned from Voldemort, that being an Animagus had nothing to do with it...so, in a way, Snape's been right about me all along.

Sirius: Snape? What's Snape got to do with it?
Remus: He's here, Sirius. He's teaching here as well.
me: Surprise-Surprise, he teaches Potions.
Sirius: *snarls* Of course...

Remus: Professor Snape was at school with us. He fought very hard against my appointment to the Defense Against the Dark Arts job. He has been telling Dumbledore all year that I am not to be trusted. He has his reasons...you see, Sirius here played a trick on him which nearly killed him, a trick which involved me --

Sirius: It served him right. Sneaking around, trying to find out what we were up to...hoping he could get us expelled....

Remus: Severus was very interested in where I went every month. We were in the same year, you know, and we -- er -- didn't like each other very much. He especially disliked James. Jealous, I think, of James's talent on the Quidditch field...anyway Snape had seen me crossing the grounds with Madam Pomfrey one evening as she led me toward the Whomping Willow to transform. Sirius thought it would be -- er -- amusing, to tell Snape all he had to do was prod the knot on the tree trunk with a long stick, and he'd be able to get in after me. Well, of course, Snape tried it -- if he'd got as far as this house, he'd have met a fully grown werewolf - - but your father and Yami, who'd heard what Sirius had done, went after Snape and pulled him back, at great risk to his life...Snape glimpsed me, though, at the end of the tunnel. He was forbidden by Dumbledore to tell anybody, but from that time on he knew what I was....

Harry: So that's why Snape doesn't like you, because he thought you were in on the joke?

"That's right," sneered a cold voice from the wall behind Lupin.
Severus Snape was pulling off the Invisibility Cloak, his wand pointing directly at Lupin.

me: Great job, Potter.
Snape: I found this at the base of the Whomping Willow. Very useful, Potter, I thank you.... You're wondering, perhaps, how I knew you were here? I've just been to your office, Lupin. You forgot to take your potion tonight, so I took a gobletful along. And very lucky I did... lucky for me, I mean. Lying on your desk was a certain map. One glance at it told me all I needed to know. I saw you running along this passageway and out of sight.

Remus: Severus --
Snape: I've told the headmaster again and again that you're helping your old friend Black into the castle, Lupin, and here's the proof. Not even I dreamed you would have the nerve to use this old place as your hideout --
Remus: Severus, you're making a mistake. You haven't heard everything -- I can explain -- Sirius is not here to kill Harry --
Snape: Two more for Azkaban tonight. I shall be interested to see how Dumbledore takes this... He was quite convinced you were harmless, you know, Lupin...a tame werewolf --
me: Better make it three more, cause I'm so not leaving my father behind again.
Remus: You foo... Is a schoolboy grudge worth putting an innocent man back inside Azkaban?
BANG! Thin, snakelike cords burst from the end of Snape's wand and twisted themselves around Lupin's mouth, wrists, and ankles; he overbalanced and fell to the floor, unable to move. With a roar of rage, Black started toward Snape, but Snape pointed his wand straight between Black's eyes.

Snape: Give me a reason. Give me a reason to do it, and I swear I will.

Black stopped dead. It would have been impossible to say which face showed more hatred.

Hermione: Professor Snape -- it wouldn't hurt to hear what they've got to say, w-would it? me: It was all a misunderstanding, please, just listen to them! Hermione: Miss Granger, you are already facing suspension from this school. You, Black, Potter, and Weasley are out-of-bounds, in the company of a convicted murderer and a werewolf. For once in your life, hold your tongue. Hermione: But if -- if there was a mistake -- Snape: KEEP QUIET, YOU STUPID GIRL! DON'T TALK ABOUT WHAT YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

Smart move, Snape. Let your ego and hatred get the better of you.

Snape: Vengeance is very sweet. How I hoped I would be the one to catch you.... Sirius: The joke's on you again, Severus. As long as this boy brings his rat up to the castle, I'll come quietly.... Snape: Up to the castle? I don't think we need to go that far. All I have to do is call the Dementors once we get out of the Willow. They'll be very pleased to see you, Black... pleased enough to give you a little kiss, I daresay... I --

What little color there was in Black's face left it.

Sirius: You -- you've got to hear me out... The rat -- look at the rat -- me: P- Please don't do that... But there was a mad glint in Snape's eyes that I never seen before. He seemed beyond reason. More so than usual.

Snape: Come on, all of you. I'll drag the werewolf. Perhaps the Dementors will have a kiss for him too -- me: NO! Don't hurt them!

Before he knew what he was doing, Harry had crossed the room in three strides and blocked the door.

Snape: Get out of the way, Potter, you're in enough trouble already. If I hadn't been here to save your skin --

Harry: Professor Lupin could have killed me about a hundred times this year. I've been alone with him loads of times, having defense lessons against the Dementors. If he was helping Black, why didn't he just finish me off then?

Snape: Don't ask me to fathom the way a werewolf's mind works. Get out of the way, Potter. me: That was rude and senseless.
Harry: YOU'RE PATHETIC! JUST BECAUSE THEY MADE A FOOL OF YOU AT SCHOOL YOU WON'T EVEN LISTEN --
Snape: SILENCE! I WILL NOT BE SPOKEN TO LIKE THAT! Like father, like son, Potter! I have just saved your neck; you should be thanking me on bended knee! You would have been well served if he'd killed you! You'd have died like your father, too arrogant to believe you might be mistaken in Black -- now get out of the way, or I will make you. GET OUT OF THE WAY, POTTER!
me: Stop it...!!

Before Snape could take even one step toward him, Harry raised his wand.

"Expelliarmus!" he yelled -- except that his wasn't the only voice that shouted. There was a blast that made the door rattle on its hinges; Snape was lifted off his feet and slammed into the wall, then slid down it to the floor, a trickle of blood oozing from under his hair. He had been knocked out.

Harry looked around. I, Ron and Hermione tried to disarm Snape at exactly the same moment. Snape's wand soared in a high arc and landed on the bed next to Crookshanks.

Sirius: You shouldn't have done that.. You should have left him to me...
Hermione: We attacked a teacher... We attacked a teacher... Oh, we're going to be in so much trouble --
me: At least he's not the head of YOUR house, Granger... He'll hate me SO much from now on... and Bully me... and hate me like he hates Harry... Oh bloody hell... Can I just... Obliviate him?!

Lupin was struggling against his bonds until Black bent down quickly and untied him. Lupin straightened up, rubbing his arms where the ropes had cut into them.

Remus: Thank you, Harry.
Harry: I'm still not saying I believe you.
Remus: Then it's time we offered you some proof. You, boy -- give me Peter, please. Now.
Ron: Come off it... Are you trying to say he broke out of Azkaban just to get his hands on Scabbers? I mean... Okay, say Pettigrew could turn into a rat -- there are millions of rats -- how's he supposed to know which one he is after if he was locked up in Azkaban?
Remus: You know, Sirius, that's a fair question. How did you find out where he was?

Sirius put one of his claw-like hands inside his robes and took out a crumpled piece of paper, which he smoothed flat and held out to show the others. It was the photograph of Ron and his family that had appeared in the Daily Prophet the previous summer, and there, on Ron's shoulder, was Scabbers.

Remus: How did you get this?
Sirius: Fudge. When he came to inspect Azkaban last year, he gave me his paper. And there was Peter, on the front page on this boy's shoulder... I knew him at once... how many times had I seen him transform? And the caption said the boy would be going back to Hogwarts... to where Harry was...
Remus: My God... His front paw...
Ron: What about it?
me: He's got a toe missing...
Remus: Of course... so simple... so brilliant... he cut it off himself?
Sirius: Just before he transformed. When I cornered him, he yelled for the whole street to hear that I'd betrayed Lily and James. Then, before I could curse him, he blew apart the street with the wand behind his back, killed everyone within twenty feet of himself -- and sped down into the sewer with the other rats....
Remus: Didn't you ever hear, Ron? The biggest bit of Peter they found was his finger.
Ron: Look, Scabbers probably had a fight with another rat or something! He's been in my family for ages, right --
me: Why are you so stubborn?
Remus: Twelve years, in fact. Didn't you ever wonder why he was living so long?
Ron: We -- we've been taking good care of him!
me: A rat's lifespan is 1 to 2 years...
Remus: Not looking too good at the moment, though, is he? I'd guess he's been losing weight ever since he heard Sirius was on the loose again....
Ron: He's been scared of that mad cat!
Sirius: This cat isn't mad. He's the most intelligent of his kind I've ever met. He recognized Peter for what he was right away. And when he met me, he knew I was no dog. It was a while before he trusted me... Finally, I managed to communicate to him what I was after, and he's been helping me...
Hermione: What do you mean?
Sirius: He tried to bring Peter to me, but couldn't... so he stole the passwords into Gryffindor Tower for me... As I understand it, he took them from a boy's bedside table... But Peter got wind of what was going on and ran for it. This cat -- Crookshanks, did you call him? -- told me Peter had left blood on the sheets... I supposed he bit himself... Well, faking his own death had worked once.
Harry: And why did he fake his death? Because he knew you were about to kill him like you killed my parents!
Remus: No, Harry--
Harry: And now you've come to finish him off
Sirius: Yes, I have.
Harry: Then I should've let Snape take you!
me: No way!
Remus: Harry, don't you see? All this time we've thought Sirius betrayed your parents, and Peter tracked him down -- but it was the other way around, don't you see? Peter betrayed your mother and father -- Sirius tracked Peter down --
Harry: THAT'S NOT TRUE! HE WAS THEIR SECRET-KEEPER! HE SAID SO BEFORE YOU TURNED UP. HE SAID HE KILLED THEM!
me: Why is everyone screaming...?!

He was pointing at Black, who shook his head slowly; the sunken eyes were suddenly over bright.

Sirius: Harry... I as good as killed them... I persuaded Lily and James to change to Peter at the last moment, persuaded them to use him as Secret-Keeper instead of me... I'm to blame, I know it... The night they died, I'd arranged to check on Peter, make sure he was still safe, but when I arrived at his hiding place, he'd gone. Yet there was no sign of a struggle. It didn't feel right. I was scared. I set out for your parents' house straight away. And when I saw their house, destroyed, and their bodies... I realized what Peter must've done... what I'd done....
Remus: Enough of this. There's one certain way to prove what really happened. Ron, give me that rat.

Ron: What are you going to do with him if I give him to you?

Remus: Force him to show himself. If he really is a rat, it won't hurt him... Ready, Sirius?

Sirius: Together?

Remus: I think so. On the count of three. One -- two -- THREE!

A flash of blue-white light erupted from both wands; for a moment, Scabbers was frozen in midair, his small gray form twisting madly -- Ron yelled -- the rat fell and hit the floor. There was another blinding flash of light and then -- It was like watching a speeded-up film of a growing tree. A head was shooting upward from the ground; limbs were sprouting; a moment later, a man was standing where Scabbers had been, cringing and wringing his hands. Crookshanks was spitting and snarling on the bed; the hair on his back was standing up. He was a very short man, hardly taller than Harry and Hermione. His thin, colorless hair was unkempt and there was a large bald patch on top. He had the shrunken appearance of a plump man who has lost a lot of weight in a short time. His skin looked grubby, almost like Scabbers's fur, and something of the rat lingered around his pointed nose and his very small, watery eyes. He looked around at them all, his breathing fast and shallow. He's quite spazic...

Remus: Well, hello, Peter. Long time, no see.

me: No way...

Peter: S--Sirius... R--Remus... My friends... my old friends...

Sirius's wand arm rose, but Lupin seized him around the wrist, gave him a warning took, then turned again to Pettigrew, his voice light and casual.

Remus: We've been having a little chat, Peter, about what happened the night Lily and James died. You might have missed the finer points while you were squeaking around down there on the bed --

Peter: Remus, you don't believe him, do you...? He tried to kill me, Remus....

Remus: So we've heard. I'd like to clear up one or two little matters with you, Peter, if you'll be so --

Peter: He's come to try and kill me again! He killed Lily, James and Yami and now he's going to kill me too... You've got to help me, Remus....

Black's face looked more skull-like than ever as he stared at Pettigrew with his fathomless eyes.

Remus: No one's going to try and kill you until we've sorted a few things out.

Peter: Sorted things out? I knew he'd come after me! I knew he'd be back for me! I've been waiting for this for twelve years!

Remus: You knew Sirius was going to break out of Azkaban? When nobody has ever done it before?

Peter: He's got dark powers the rest of us can only dream of! How else did he get out of there? I suppose He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named taught him a few tricks!

Black started to laugh, a horrible, mirthless laugh that filled the whole room.

Sirius: Voldemort, teach me tricks?
Pettigrew flinched as though Black had brandished a whip at him.

Sirius: What, scared to hear your old master's name? I don't blame you, Peter. His lot aren't very happy with you, are they?
Peter: Don't know what you mean, Sirius --
Sirius: You haven't been hiding from me for twelve years. You've been hiding from Voldemort's old supporters. I heard things in Azkaban, Peter... They all think you're dead, or you'd have to answer to them... I've heard them screaming all sorts of things in their sleep. Sounds like they think the double-crosser double-crossed them. Voldemort went to the Potters' on your information... and Voldemort met his downfall there. And not all Voldemort's supporters ended up in Azkaban, did they? There are still plenty out here, bidding their time, pretending they've seen the error of their ways. If they ever got wind that you were still alive, Peter --
Peter: Don't know... what you're talking about... You don't believe this -- this madness, Remus --
Remus: I must admit, Peter, I have difficulty in understanding why an innocent man would want to spend twelve years as a rat.
Peter: Innocent, but scared! If Voldemort's supporters were after me, it was because I put one of their best men in Azkaban -- the spy, Sirius Black!
Sirius: I, a spy for Voldemort? When did I ever sneak around people who were stronger and more powerful than myself? But you, Peter -- I'll never understand why I didn't see you were the spy from the start. You always liked big friends who'd look after you, didn't you? It used to be us... me and Remus... and James... and Yami...

Pettigrew wiped his face again; he was almost panting for breath.

Peter: Me, a spy... must be out of your mind... never... don't know how you can say such a --
Sirius: Lily and James only made you Secret-Keeper because I suggested it. I thought it was the perfect plan... a bluff... Voldemort would be sure to come after me, would never dream they'd use a weak, talentless thing like you... It must have been the finest moment of your miserable life, telling Voldemort you could hand him the Potters.
Hermione: Professor Lupin? Can -- can I say something?
Remus: Certainly, Hermione.
Hermione: Well -- Scabbers -- I mean, this -- this man -- he's been sleeping in Harry's dormitory for three years. If he's working for You-Know-Who, how come he never tried to hurt Harry before now?
Peter: There! Thank you! You see, Remus? I have never hurt a hair of Harry's head! Why should I
Sirius: I'll tell you why! Because you never did anything for anyone unless you could see what was in it for you. Voldemort's been in hiding for fifteen years, they say he's half dead. You weren't about to commit murder right under Albus Dumbledore's nose, for a wreck of a wizard who'd lost all of his power, were you? You'd want to be quite sure he was the biggest bully in the playground before you went back to him, wouldn't you? Why else did you find a wizard family to take you in? Keeping an ear out for news, weren't you, Peter? Just in case your old protector regained strength, and it was safe to rejoin him....
Pettigrew opened his mouth and closed it several times. He seemed to have lost the ability to talk.

Hermione: Er -- Mr. Black -- Sirius? If you don't mind me asking, how -- how did you get out of Azkaban, if you didn't use Dark Magic?
Peter: Thank you! Exactly! Precisely what I --

I silenced him with a look. Dad was frowning slightly at Hermione, but not as though he were annoyed with her. He seemed to be pondering his answer.

Sirius: I don't know how I did it... I think the only reason I never lost my mind is that I knew I was innocent. That wasn't a happy thought, so the Dementors couldn't suck it out of me... but it kept me sane and knowing who I am... helped me keep my powers... so when it all became... too much... I could transform in my cell... become a dog. Dementors can't see, you know... They feel their way toward people by feeding off their emotions... They could tell that my feelings were less -- less human, less complex when I was a dog... but they thought, of course, that I was losing my mind like everyone else in there, so it didn't trouble them. But I was weak, very weak, and I had no hope of driving them away from me without a wand... But then I saw Peter in that picture... I realized he was at Hogwarts with Harry... perfectly positioned to act, if one hint reached his ears that the Dark Side was gathering strength again... ready to strike at the moment he could be sure of allies... and to deliver the last Potter to them. if he gave them Harry, who'd dare say he'd betrayed Lord Voldemort? He'd be welcomed back with honors... So you see, I had to do something. I was the only one who knew Peter was still alive... It was as if someone had lit a fire in my head, and the Dementors couldn't destroy it... It wasn't a happy feeling... it was an obsession... but it gave me strength, it cleared my mind. So, one night when they opened my door to bring food, I slipped past them as a dog... It's so much harder for them to sense animal emotions that they were confused... I was thin, very thin... thin enough to slip through the bars... I swam as a dog back to the mainland... I journeyed north and slipped into the Hogwarts grounds as a dog. I've been living in the forest ever since, except when I came to watch the Quidditch, of course. You fly as well as your father did, Harry...

He looked at Harry, who did not look away.

Sirius: Believe me... Believe me, Harry. I never betrayed James and Lily. I would have died before I betrayed them...

"No!"

Pettigrew had fallen to his knees as though Harry's nod had been his own death sentence. He shuffled forward on his knees, groveling, his hands clasped in front of him as though praying.

"Sirius -- it's me... it's Peter... your friend... you wouldn't --"

Sirius kicked out and Pettigrew recoiled.

Sirius: There's enough filth on my robes without you touching them.
Peter: Remus! You don't believe this -- wouldn't Sirius have told you they'd changed the plan? Remus: Not if he thought I was the spy, Peter. I assume that's why you didn't tell me, Sirius? Sirius: Forgive me, Remus.
Remus: Not at all, Padfoot, old friend. And will you, in turn, forgive me for believing you were the spy?
Sirius: Of course. Shall we kill him together?
Remus: Yes, I think so.
Peter: You wouldn't...you won't...! Ron...haven't I been a good friend...a good pet? You won't let them kill me, Ron, will you...you're on my side, aren't you?
Ron: I let you sleep in my bed!
Peter: Kind boy...kind master...You won't let them do it...I was your rat...I was a good pet....
Sirius: If you made a better rat than a human, it's not much to boast about, Peter.
Peter: Sweet girl...clever girl...you -- you won't let them...Help me....

Hermione pulled her robes out of Pettigrew's clutching hands and backed away against the wall, looking horrified. Pettigrew knelt, trembling uncontrollably, and turned his head slowly toward Harry.

Peter: Harry...Harry...you look just like your father...just like him...
Sirius: HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO HARRY? HOW DARE YOU FACE HIM? HOW DARE YOU TALK ABOUT JAMES IN FRONT OF HIM?
Peter: Harry...Harry, James wouldn't have wanted me killed...James would have understood, Harry...he would have shown me mercy...
Sirius: You sold Lily and James to Voldemort! Do you deny it? My dear Yami had to die because of you!

Pettigrew burst into tears. It was horrible to watch, like an oversized, balding baby, cowering on the floor.

Peter: Sirius, Sirius, what could I have done? The Dark Lord...you have no idea...he has weapons you can't imagine...I was scared, Sirius, I was never brave like you and Remus and James. I never meant it to happen...He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named forced me --
Sirius: DON'T LIE! YOU'D BEEN PASSING INFORMATION TO HIM FOR A YEAR BEFORE LILY AND JAMES DIED! YOU WERE HIS SPY!
Peter: He -- he was taking over everywhere! Wh-what was there to be gained by refusing him?
Sirius: What was there to be gained by fighting the most evil wizard who has ever existed? Only innocent lives, Peter!"
Peter: You don't understand! He would have killed me, Sirius!
Sirius: THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE DIED! DIED RATHER THAN BETRAY YOUR FRIENDS, AS WE WOULD HAVE DONE FOR YOU!
Remus: You should have realized, if Voldemort didn't kill you, we would. Good-bye, Peter.

Hermione covered her face with her hands and turned to the wall.

Harry: NO! You can't kill him. You can't.
Sirius: Harry, this piece of vermin is the reason you have no parents. This cringing bit of filth would have seen you die too, without turning a hair. You heard him. His own stinking skin meant more to him than your whole family.
Harry: I know. We'll take him up to the castle. We'll hand him over to the Dementors... He can go to Azkaban... but don't kill him.
Peter: Harry! You -- thank you -- it's more than I deserve -- thank you --
Harry: Get off me. I'm not doing this for you. I'm doing it because -- I don't reckon my dad would've wanted them to become killers -- just for you. He can go to Azkaban. If anyone deserves that place, he does....
Remus: Very well. Stand aside, Harry. I'm going to tie him up. That's all, I swear. But if you transform, Peter, we will kill you. You agree, Harry?
me: Let's just get this over with... It's way too much chaos for no reason.

Harry looked down at the pitiful figure on the floor and nodded so that Pettigrew could see him.

Remus: Right, Ron, I can't mend bones nearly as well as Madam Pomfrey, so I think it's best if we just strap your leg up until we can get you to the hospital wing.

He hurried over to Ron, bent down, tapped Ron's leg with his wand, and muttered, "Ferula." Bandages spun up Ron's leg, strapping it tightly to a splint. Lupin helped him to his feet; Ron put his weight gingerly on the leg and didn't wince.

Ron: That's better, Thanks.
Hermione: What about Professor Snape?
Remus: There's nothing seriously wrong with him. You were just a little -- overenthusiastic. Still out cold. Er -- perhaps it will be best if we don't revive him until we're safety back in the castle. We can take him like this....

He muttered, "Mobilicorpus." As though invisible strings were tied to Snape's wrists, neck, and knees, he was pulled into a standing position, head still lolling unpleasantly, like a grotesque puppet. He hung a few inches above the ground, his limp feet dangling. Lupin picked up the Invisibility Cloak and tucked it safely into his pocket.

Sirius: And two of us should be chained to this, Just to make sure.
Remus: I'll do it.
Ron: And me.

Sirius conjured heavy manacles from thin air; soon Pettigrew was upright again, left arm chained to Lupin's right, right arm to Ron's left. Ron's face was set. He seemed to have taken Scabbers's true identity as a personal insult. Crookshanks leapt lightly off the bed and led the way out of the room, his bottlebrush tail held jauntily high.

So, if this is the end of all the drama, then... I finally have my dad free and with me, safe and sound, and I'll be able to leave the orphanage and live with him! Yes! Oh, Great Salazar, that'd be just perfect!

~But that obviously wasn't the case, as the clouds that cloaked the full moon disappeared, exposing Moony to the terrible moonlight... without having taken the Potion...~
Hermione: Oh, my -- He didn't take his potion tonight! He's not safe!
Sirius: Run-! Run. Now!

But Harry couldn't run and I couldn't leave a barely alive dad hold off a full-strength werewolf all by himself. Ron was chained to Pettigrew and Lupin. He leapt forward but Black caught him around the chest and threw him back.

Sirius: Leave it to me -- RUN!

There was a terrible snarling noise. Lupin's head was lengthening. So was his body. His shoulders were hunching. Hair was sprouting visibly on his face and hands, which were curling into clawed paws. Crookshanks's hair was on end again; he was backing away -- Witnessing a transformation like this...it must hurt worse than I thought... Poor Moony doesn't deserve this...

As the werewolf reared, snapping its long jaws, Sirius disappeared from our side. He had transformed into the enormous, bearlike dog bounded forward. As the werewolf wrenched itself free of the manacle binding it, the dog seized it about the neck and pulled it backward, away from Ron and Pettigrew. They were locked, jaw to jaw, claws ripping at each other. I shot a Petrifying spell at Pettigrew, then transformed into my relatively small-sized fox Animagus and jumped into the fight, chewing aggressively on his ankles. Lupin used his huge claws to hurl Sirius to a wall, leaving him barely conscious, then started chasing me around, growling. I hoped that being canines would help communicate but alas...

I was jumped on, then pushed away, rolling onto a tree stump, then clawed on, with three big gashes were on my back and belly. Madam Pomfrey better know how to stop hemorrhages, or else... I know dad was also fatally wounded himself, but he somehow managed to get up, despite his terrible condition and padded after the wolf that was about to claw at me again. Jumped on his back and chewed on his leg, making the werewolf chase him instead.

But then, from beyond the range of vision, a yelping, a whining: a dog in pain could be heard.

I jumped on my paws frantically and ran full speed after them. Come on, Moony, don't kill your best friend NOW.

I managed to keep Moony at bay, but Sirius transformed into his human form, at the lakeshore, and I see exactly why. Dementors were roaming the place. He was crouched on all fours, his hands over his head, werewolf having run from the sight.

"Nooo," he moaned. "Nooo... please...."

I morphed back and took out my wand, trying to conjure a Patronus as well as I could, but apart from some swirls of white mist, nothing would come out. This was obviously not enough to keep a single Dementor away from us, not to talk about several of them...

No... I can hear my mother screaming as I'm slowly sinking to my knees, too weakened to stand up or think. My conscious was run over my darkness, and the last thing I saw was a huge white stag chasing away the depressive monsters, as I fainted.

When I came to my senses, Harry and Hermione were trying to reason with Dumbledore about Sirius' innocence. Apparently, Snape lied about everything and thought it'd be okay to let my
faTHER BE KISSED BY THE DEMENTOR? Oh, Merlin no, I SO won't let that happen!

Pretty much, Dumbledore told us (in his own Mystic riddles) to use Hermione's Time Turner and save Sirius' life. Somehow...
Okay, time for action.

**Hermione:** Come here, Quick! Here --

She had thrown the chain around our necks too.

**Hermione:** Ready?
**me:** As I'll ever be.
**Harry:** What are we doing?

Hermione turned the hourglass over three times. The dark ward dissolved. We in the deserted entrance hall and a stream of golden sunlight was falling across the paved floor from the open front doors.

**Harry:** Hermione, what --?
**Hermione:** In here!
**Harry:** What -- how -- Hermione, what happened?
**me:** We've gone back in time.
**Hermione:** Three hours back...
**Harry:** But --
**Hermione:** Shh! Listen! Someone's coming! I think -- I think it might be us! Footsteps across the hall...
**me:** I think it's us going down to Hagrid's!
**Harry:** Are you telling me, that we're here in this cupboard and we're out there too?
**me:** Pretty much.
**Hermione:** I'm sure it's us. It doesn't sound like more than four people... and we're walking slowly because we're under the Invisibility Cloak -- We've gone down the front steps....
**Harry:** Where did you get that hourglass thing?
**Hermione:** It's called a Time-Turner, and I got it from Professor McGonagall on our first day back. I've been using it all year to get to all my lessons. Professor McGonagall made me swear I wouldn't tell anyone. She had to write all sorts of letters to the Ministry of Magic so I could have one. She had to tell them that I was a model student, and that I'd never, ever use it for anything except my studies... I've been turning it back so I could do hours over again, that's how I've been doing several lessons at once, see? But... Harry, I don't understand what Dumbledore wants us to do. Why did he tell us to go back three hours? How's that going to help Sirius?
**Harry:** There must be something that happened around now he wants us to change... What happened? We were walking down to Hagrid's three hours ago....
**me:** BUCKBEAK!
**Hermione:** But -- how will that help Sirius?
**Harry:** Dumbledore said -- he just told us where the window is -- the window of Flitwick's office! Where they've got Sirius locked up! We've got to fly Buckbeak up to the window and rescue Sirius! Sirius can escape on Buckbeak -- they can escape together!
**Hermione:** If we manage that without being seen, it'll be a miracle!
Harry: Well, we've got to try, haven't we? Doesn't sound like anyone's there... Come on, let's go.

Harry pushed open the closet door. The entrance hall was deserted. As quietly and quickly as they could, they darted out of the closet and down the stone steps. The shadows were already lengthening, the tops of the trees in the Forbidden Forest gilded once more with gold. We planned to go around by the greenhouses so we could be close, but not nearby Hagrid's front door.

We made our way silently through the trees, keeping to the very edge of the forest. Then, as we glimpsed the front of Hagrid's house, we heard a knock upon his door. We moved quickly behind a wide oak trunk and peered out from either side. Hagrid had appeared in his doorway, shaking and white, looking around to see who had knocked. Then, our own voices could be heard. Well, theirs. I went there a bit later...

Creeeping through the trees until we saw the nervous Hippogriff, tethered to the fence around Hagrid's pumpkin patch. Poor Beaky...

Harry: Now?
Hermione: No! If we steal him now, those Committee people will think Hagrid set him free! We've got to wait until they've seen he's tied outside!
Harry: That's going to give us about sixty seconds...
Hermione: That's Hagrid breaking the milk jug. I'm going to find Scabbers in a moment --
Harry: Hermione, what if we -- we just run in there and grab Pettigrew --
Hermione: No way! Don't you understand? We're breaking one of the most important wizarding laws! Nobody's supposed to change time, nobody! You heard Dumbledore, if we're seen --
Harry: We'd only be seen by ourselves and Hagrid!
Hermione: Harry, what do you think you'd do if you saw yourself bursting into Hagrid's house?
Harry: I'd -- I'd think I'd gone mad... or I'd think there was some Dark Magic going on --
Hermione: Exactly! You wouldn't understand, you might even attack yourself! Don't you see? Professor McGonagall told me what awful things have happened when wizards have meddled with time... Loads of them ended up killing their past or future selves by mistake!
Harry: Okay! It was just an idea, I just thought --

But Hermione nudged him and pointed toward the castle. Dumbledore, Fudge, the old Committee member, and Macnair the executioner were coming down the steps.

Hermione: We're about to come out!

And sure enough, moments later, Hagrid's back door opened and our past-selves walked out. As our past-selves wanted to remain with Hagrid, a knock was heard on Hagrid's front door. The execution party had arrived. Hagrid turned, around and headed back into his cabin, leaving the back door ajar.

Macnair: Where is the beast?
Hagrid: Out -- outside.
Fudge: We -er... have to read you the official notice of execution, Hagrid. I'll make it quick. And then you and Macnair need to sign it. Macnair, you're supposed to listen too, that's
Macnair's face vanished from the window. It was now or never.

me: Wait here. I'll do it.

As Fudge's voice started again, Harry darted out from behind his tree, vaulted the fence into the pumpkin patch, and approached Buckbeak.

Fudge: It is the decision of the Committee for the Disposal of Dangerous Creatures that the Hippogriff Buckbeak, hereafter called the condemned, shall be executed on the sixth of June at sundown --

Careful not to blink, I stared up into Buckbeak's fierce orange eyes once more and bowed. Buckbeak sank to his scaly knees and then stood up again. I began to fumble with the knot of rope tying Buckbeak to the fence.

Fudge: ... sentenced to execution by beheading, to be carried out by the Committee's appointed executioner, Walden Macnair...
me: Come on, Buckbeak... come on, we're going to help you. Quietly... quietly...
Fudge: ... as witnessed below. Hagrid, you sign here...

I threw all my weight onto the rope, but Buckbeak had dug in his front feet. Dammit, stubborn suicidal lazy hippogriff...

Macnair: Well, let's get this over with. Hagrid, perhaps it will be better if you stay inside --
Hagrid: No, I -- I wan' ter be with him.... I don' wan' him ter be alone --

Footsteps echoed from within the cabin.

me: Buckbeak, move!

I tugged harder on the rope around Buckbeak's neck. The Hippogriff began to walk, rustling its wings irritably. They were still ten feet away from the forest, in plain view of Hagrid's back door. "One moment, please, Macnair," came Dumbledore's voice. "You need to sign too." The footsteps stopped. Harry heaved on the rope. Buckbeak snapped his beak and walked a little faster.

Hermione: Raven, hurry!

We could still hear Dumbledore's voice talking from within the cabin. He gave the rope another wrench. Buckbeak broke into a grudging trot. We reached the trees....

Hermione: Quick! Quick!

They darted out from behind her tree, seizing the rope too and adding their weight to make Buckbeak move faster. Harry looked over his shoulder; we were now blocked from sight; we couldn't see Hagrid's garden at all.

Harry: Stop! They might hear us.
Hagrid's back door had opened with a bang. We stood quite still; even the Hippogriff seemed to be listening intently. Silence... then --

**Fudge:** Where is it? Where is the beast?
**Macnair:** It was tied here! I saw it! Just here!
**Dumbledore:** How extraordinary.
**Hagrid:** Beaky!

There was a swishing noise, and the thud of an axe. The executioner seemed to have swung it into the fence in anger. And then came the howling, and this time they could hear Hagrid's words through his sobs.

"Gone! Gone! Bless his little beak, he's gone! Musta pulled himself free! Beaky, yeh clever boy!"

Buckbeak started to strain against the rope, trying to get back to Hagrid. We tightened our grip and dug their heels into the forest floor to stop him.

**Macnair:** Someone untied him! We should search the grounds, the forest.
**Dumbledore:** Macnair, if Buckbeak has indeed been stolen, do you really think the thief will have led him away on foot? Search the skies, if you will.... Hagrid, I could do with a cup of tea. Or a large brandy.
**Hagrid:** O' -- o' course, Professor! Come in, come in....

We heard footsteps, the soft cursing of the executioner, the snap of the door, and then silence once more.

**Harry:** Now what?
**Hermione:** We'll have to hide in here. We need to wait until they've gone back to the castle. Then we wait until it's safe to fly Buckbeak up to Sirius's window. He won't be there for another couple of hours.... Oh, this is going to be difficult....

She looked nervously over her shoulder into the depths of the forest. The sun was setting now.

**Harry:** We're going to have to move. We've got to be able to see the Whomping Willow, or we won't know what's going on.
**Hermione:** Okay. But we've got to keep out of sight, Harry, remember....

We moved around the edge of the forest, darkness falling thickly around them, until we were hidden behind a clump of trees through which we could make out the Willow.

**Harry:** There's Ron!... And there's Sirius! Looks even worse from here, doesn't it? Wait, how did you know before all of us?
**me:** Gut instinct. Headstrong belief in my own father. Some facts from some knowledgeable personalities...
**Harry:** And you managed to make Lupin believe in his innocence too?
**me:** Pretty much. Took awhile to make the doubt part overgrow the factual part, but it worked. None of you would listen though, so I preferred to keep my thoughts to my self. Guess it was for the best.
Harry: Yeah...
me: Ration isn't exactly your strong point, unfortunately.

The moment they disappeared, the tree began to move again. Seconds later, we heard footsteps quite close by. Dumbledore, Macnair, Fudge, and the old Committee member were making their way up to the castle.

Hermione: Right after we'd gone down into the passage! If only Dumbledore had come with us...
Harry: Macnair and Fudge would've come too. I bet you anything Fudge would've told Macnair to murder Sirius on the spot....
me: Let's just remember how you guys acted, after all...

Then --

Harry: Here comes Lupin!

As another figure sprinting down the stone steps and halting toward the Willow. Clouds were obscuring the moon completely. Lupin seized a broken branch from the ground and prod the knot on the trunk. The tree stopped fighting, and Lupin, too, disappeared into the gap in its roots.

Harry: If he'd only grabbed the cloak. It's just lying there.... If I just dashed out now and grabbed it, Snape'd never be able to get it and --
Hermione: Harry, we mustn't be seen!
Harry: How can you stand this? Just standing here and watching it happen? I'm going to grab the cloak!
me: Harry, no!

Hermione seized the back of Harry's robes not a moment too soon. Just then, we heard a burst of song. It was Hagrid, making his way up to the castle, singing at the top of his voice, and weaving slightly as he walked. A large bottle was swinging from his hands.

Hermione: See? See what would have happened? We've got to keep out of sight! No, Buckbeak!

The Hippogriff was making frantic attempts to get to Hagrid again; Harry seized his rope too, straining to hold Buckbeak back. Hagrid meandered tipsily up to the castle. He was gone. Buckbeak stopped fighting to get away. His head drooped sadly. Barely two minutes later, the castle doors flew open yet again, and Snape came charging out of them, running toward the Willow. Harry's fists clenched as Snape skid to a halt next to the tree, looking around. He grabbed the cloak and held it up. Snape seized the branch Lupin had used to freeze the tree, prodded the knot, and vanished from view as he put on the cloak.

Hermione: So that's it. We're all down there... and now we've just got to wait until we come back up again....

She took the end of Buckbeak's rope and tied it securely around the nearest tree, then sat down on the dry ground, arms around her knees.
Hermione: Harry, there's something I don't understand... Why didn't the Dementors get Sirius? I remember them coming, and then I think I passed out... there were so many of them....

Harry sat down too. He explained what he'd seen; how, as the nearest Dementor had lowered its mouth to Harry's, a large silver something had come galloping across the lake and forced the Dementors to retreat.

me: Well, obviously I fainted before you, but I remember a silvery stag.
Hermione: But what was it?
me: There's only one thing it could have been, to make the Dementors go. A real Patronus. A powerful one.
Hermione: But who conjured it? Didn't you see what they looked like? Was it one of the teachers?
Harry: No... He wasn't a teacher.
Hermione: But it must have been a really powerful wizard, to drive all those Dementors away... If the Patronus was shining so brightly, didn't it light him up? Couldn't you see --?
Harry: Yeah, I saw him. But... maybe I imagined it... I wasn't thinking straight... I passed out right afterward....
Hermione: Who did you think it was?
Harry: I think -- I think it was my dad.
Hermione: You know... they are... well... dead.
Harry: I know that.
Hermione: You think you saw ghosts?
me: Doubt it.
Hermione: But then --
Harry: Maybe I was seeing things. But... from what I could see... it looked like him.... I've got photos of him.... I know it sounds crazy.

I started thinking at the passed opportunity that I just had and wasted away. Maybe I can still do something to stop Pettigrew from... running away... though petrified...

And then, at last, after over an hour...

Hermione: Here we come!

We saw Lupin, Ron, and Pettigrew clambering awkwardly out of the hole in the roots. Then came Hermione... then the unconscious Snape, drifting weirdly upward. Next came I, Harry and dad. Any moment now, that cloud was going to move aside and show the moon...

Hermione: Harry, we've got to stay put. We mustn't be seen. There's nothing we can do....
Harry: So we're just going to let Pettigrew escape all over again...
Hermione: How do you expect to find a rat in the dark? There's nothing we can do! We came back to help Sirius; we're not supposed to be doing anything else!
me: *smirking* Actually...-

The moon slid out from behind its cloud. The tiny figures across the grounds stopped. Then we saw movement --
Hermione: There goes Lupin! He's transforming.
Harry: Hermione! We've got to move!
Hermione: We mustn't, I keep telling you --
Harry: Not to interfere! Lupin's going to run into the forest, right at us!
Hermione: Quick! Quick! Where are we going to go? Where are we going to hide? The Dementors will be coming any moment --
Harry: Back to Hagrid's! It's empty now -- come on!

As they kept running, I morphed into my fox form, just as past-me petrified the Rat. I'll stay here and watched until he's somehow transformed and fled the scene. Why did the spell lift... Could it be, because I fainted?
Yes, that might be the case. Then, I just have to be careful and catch the rat, tying him up in a safe spot and show him to Dumbledore. Hagrid got to the Castle, but Dumbledore didn't. Could he still be there?
Hmm-- Just as I thought that, the binding curse on Pettigrew slowly lifted, and he quickly got the wand left laying on the ground near him, morphed into a rat, and darted away. But just about 10 metres away, I caught him tightly as he kept squeaking frantically, as I was running full speed to the Hut, and started scratching on the front door. Just then, Dumbledore opened the door with a pleased look on his face, and let me in.

Dumbledore: Ah, what a delight to have such a beautiful fox in here, gifting me its prey. What brings you hear, dear?

He picked up the rat and examined it.

Dumbledore: Oh yes, I see. Interesting creature you have here. One would say its greatest trait would be treachery, am I right?

I couldn't be seen as my real self, but as an animal, I was fine. I nodded my head and went on my back paws, trying to reach Pettigrew, growling at him.

Dumbledore: My, my, is there something evil about this rat? It couldn't simply be an ordinary one then, could it? Let's see what bothers you so...

With a flick of the wand, the rat was forced to reveal its true form, and a frightened trembling Pettigrew stood in front of the chuckling Dumbledore.

Dumbledore: Such a smart fox we have here. Sly animals indeed.

Pettigrew: P-P-Professor D-Dumbledore..! S-S-Such a-a delight! Yes, indeed!
Dumbledore: Your hand is quite harmed. I wonder, how did you lose a finger, when it was said it has been the last piece of him remaining intact? This little fox thought otherwise. Animals are smart, you see. Feel when someone isn't one of their kin.

Pettigrew: B-B-But Professor! T-this fox isn't an animal e-either! Sh-she is a girl! Black's g-girl!
Dumbledore: Is that so?

Pettigrew: Y-Yes! Her a-and that k-killer, Black, a-a-assaulted me!
Dumbledore: Quite interesting you being alive is. I do recall hearing that the cause of your friends' death was Sirius Black.

Pettigrew: B-but I m-managed t-to survive!
Dumbledore: And framed an innocent man, husband and father. Quite the irresponsible and
immoral act, might I say.

He kept stuttering and pleading for mercy, just as he did with us at the Shreaking Shack, but with no avail. Dumbledore kept making amusing comments about the betrayer, then decided to take him back to the Castle after transforming him in his rat form, and I followed them. Problem is, just as we walked out, Snape appeared with our fainted bodies and saw us. Great thing he doesn't know about my Animagus form...

Snape: See, Dumbledore. Not all Gryffindors are as high and mighty as you make them be. Most of them are just reckless cowards who disregard rules and the plain existence of anyone around them.

Dumbledore: Might be so. But there is also a Slytherin you obviously care about.

Snape: A Slytherin who wanted to cling on the only existing part of her family that would drag her out the the forgotten muggle place?

Dumbledore: Yes, dear Miss Black, witty mind, in a brave body. Such a pity she has to live there.

Snape: Why can't I just take care of her, Dumbledore? You know I'm well capable of it!

Dumbledore: Another got to her way faster than you did.

Snape: And who would that be, might I ask?

Dumbledore: Young Mr. Malfoy, of course. You cannot say you haven't noticed.

Snape: Obviously, I did notice. But how does this affect anything?

Dumbledore: Narcissa's proposal to move in at theirs.

Snape: Is that... so...

Dumbledore: Don't worry, Severus. I have a premonition that you will have enough time to make sure young Miss Black is under your protective wing. Soon enough. Just have patience.

Snape: What patience, Dumbledore? I waited 12 years, trying to make sure she's in a safe environment, but you just would not listen!

Dumbledore: Everything is part of a greater plan, Severus. You just must wait.

Snape: So you said the last time, and as far as I am aware, both Lily and Yami are dead.

Dumbledore: Unfortunate events indeed, but see the bigger picture, so is Voldemort, for now.

Snape: So what? He will just get his power back, this time, even worse.

Dumbledore: And that is exactly where Harry and Raven will have the greatest influence.

Snape: You keep telling me to wait, yet no progress is seen.

Dumbledore: Please, trust me, Severus. And have trust in Raven's decisions, even in the darkest of times. She won't lose her head.

Snape: I am fully aware. She's a Slytherin, after all.

Dumbledore: So was Voldemort.

Snape: She's not evil like him.

Dumbledore: You are wrong. She has equally both good and bad in her. It matters only which side she prefers to join. Power, or love. Quite the similar decision, right?

Snape glared at Dumbledore, then we walked in silence, Snape getting the past-us to the hospital wing, but Dumbledore decided to go have a talk to Fudge and tell him about all the misunderstanding, in private. All I know is that, as I ran up to the meeting spot, at the Hospital wing, I saw Dumbledore saying the words that I dreaded most.

"I apologize, Raven. Such radical changes cannot be made."
He said, as he locked us in the room, with Madam Pomfrey, who gave us chocolate. Just as we started eating, a growling loud noise was heard in the distance.

Pomfrey: What was that? Really -- they'll wake everybody up! What do they think they're doing?
Dumbledore: He must have Disapparated, Severus. We should have left somebody in the room with him. When this gets out --
Snape: HE DIDN'T DISAPPARATE! YOU CAN'T APPARATE OR DISAPPARATE INSIDE THIS CASTLE! THIS -- HAS -- SOMETHING -- TO -- DO -- WITH -- POTTER!
Dumbledore: Severus -- be reasonable -- Harry has been locked up --

BAM.

The door of the hospital wing burst open. Fudge, Snape, and Dumbledore came striding into the ward. Dumbledore alone looked calm. Indeed, he looked as though he was quite enjoying himself. Fudge appeared angry. But Snape was beside himself.

Snape: OUT WITH IT, POTTER! WHAT DID YOU DO?
Pomfrey: Professor Snape! Control yourself!
Fudge: See here, Snape, be reasonable. This door's been locked, we just saw --
Snape: THEY HELPED HIM ESCAPE, I KNOW IT!
Fudge: Calm down, man! You're talking nonsense!
Snape: YOU DON'T KNOW POTTER! HE DID IT, I KNOW HE DID IT --
Dumbledore: That will do, Severus. Think about what you are saying. This door has been locked since I left the ward ten minutes ago. Madam Pomfrey, have these students left their beds?
Pomfrey: Of course not! I would have heard them!
Dumbledore: Well, there you have it, Severus. Unless you are suggesting that Harry, Raven and Hermione are able to be in two places at once, I'm afraid I don't see any point in troubling them further.

Snape stood there, seething, staring from Fudge, who looked thoroughly shocked at his behavior, to Dumbledore, whose eyes were twinkling behind his glasses. Snape whirled about, robes swishing behind him, and stormed out of the ward.

Fudge: Fellow seems quite unbalanced. I'd watch out for him if I were you, Dumbledore.
Dumbledore: Oh, he's not unbalanced. He's just suffered a severe disappointment.
Fudge: He's not the only one! The Daily Prophet's going to have a field day! We had Black cornered and he slipped through our fingers yet again! All it needs now is for the story of that Hippogriff's escape to get out, and I'll be a laughingstock! Well... I'd better go and notify the Ministry....
Dumbledore: And the Dementors? They'll be removed from the school, I trust?
Fudge: Oh yes, they'll have to go. Never dreamed they'd attempt to administer the Kiss on an innocent boy... Completely out of control... no, I'll have them packed off back to Azkaban tonight... Perhaps we should think about dragons at the school entrance....
Dumbledore: Hagrid would like that

Just like that, Ron woke up, and we had to explain to him everything.
Well, other than that, Lupin was forced to resign, gave us the Marauders’ Map back, Sirius signed our Hogsmeade permission slips that we directly handed to Dumbledore and well… I’ll go back to the orphanage.

On another note, I managed to say quite the heartly fare-well to my friends who didn't suspect anything (I hope).

Now, to go home and hope I'll be able to have a nice(r) Summber break!
The Dark Mark

I woke up with a jolt, trying to control my heavy breathing and my panicky heart. What... what just happened? Was it a dream? Or a vision... or a prediction?
I mean, it's quite impossible, hypothetically speaking, to have the same dream (or nightmare) more than 3 times a week... although, I never had visions like this one before... nor as frequent...
But it definitely has to be something important if I can dream of Voldemort, his snake, Nagini and Wormtail, killing a Muggle in the same old shack, and at the same time, my scar is burning like never before. Or actually, scratch that. It hurt like this in the first 2 years, when we met Voldemort. Unlucky.
I look up at the clock and see that I woke up 10 minutes before the alarm, so I stop it and go prepare for the Quidditch World Cup.
Oh, I might have forgotten to mention that Draco and his family invited me over at their house for the last 2 weeks of holiday, and got the best seats at the Cup for all 4 of us?
So sweet of them!
As I finish getting ready, I go and knock on Draco's door, and it got opened quite fast, being greeted by a tired yet handsome looking Draco, wearing his signature side smirk as usual.

me: Good morning, Draco.
Draco: Good morning. Quite excited, aren't you?
me: Absolutely!
Draco: You should make a bet with Ludo Bagman. You're going to win.
me: How so?
Draco: Don't play innocent, Black. You're a seer.
me: *giggles* Oh my, caught right in the act~! How embarrassing.
Draco: * chuckles* Let's eat something and then we leave.
me: The faster, the better!

Chuckling once again, he put his arm around my waist and we went to the kitchen, being greeted by Narcissa with a warm motherly smile. She told us that Lucius already left with the Minister and we'll also leave after breakfast. While chatting with Draco, she put a hand on my shoulder and looked at me with a motherly worried look.

Narcissa: Raven, darling, I hope I don't disturb you, but did you have any visions lately?
me: Well... You see...
Narcissa: Are they related to Him?
me: Yes... Also, my scar was burning.
Narcissa: How often did it happen?
me: 3 times this week.
Narcissa: * sighs * It was ought to happen, sooner or later. Unfortunately, it was sooner than expected. The signs were clear as daylight... The marks were acting up. I hope you don't think of us as evil or...-
me: Narcissa, please. I would have done the same, have I been in the same situation as you or Lucius. The difference between us and the others is that we prefer to sacrifice our freedom in order to protect the ones we love, while they prefer to sacrifice themselves AND their loved ones, so that evil won't triumph. And I... I'd rather die then see the few people I care about die because of my poor choice.
Narcissa: Thank you, Raven. If only the others would see the other side of it...
me:Society is ruled by money and wrong morals. Unless someone speaks up and goes against it, nothing is going to change.
Narcissa:I think that someone is going to be you, in fact.
me:*smiles*I ironically, I believe the same.
Draco: Wouldn't it be great though? Having a Slytherin being the hero for once? Not Saint Potter over and over again? Or that Dumbledore... So said greatest wizard in the world... I call that rubbish!
me: Oh please. The old man may be a great wizard with tremendous power and wit, but nobody ever can outpower and outwit THE Great Merlin. Who, by the way, was a Slytherin. So jokes on you.

As the grave tension disappeared, we finished eating and headed to the destination, meeting with Lucius and the Minister.
Having arrived at the ENORMOUS stadium, we went to get our perfect seats, and the Minister introduced us to the 2 playing teams, Ireland and Bulgaria, including the famous and young Bulgarian seeker, Viktor Krum. I couldn't help but shy out, being surrounded by so many new people, but Draco was feeling really well, chatting with them freely, especially with Viktor (the age gap not being too big). The Ireland Team left to their couch, and the adults went to talk, leaving I, Draco and Viktor to chat, despite the little language barrier problem. I also managed to get some 'secrets' out from Viktor with my sly-sly speech, and heard that some students from his Wizarding school, the Durmstrang Institute, located in Scandinavia, are coming over at Hogwarts for some event. It's actually surprising how they accepted a wizard so far away from home, but they don't accept Muggleborns. Oh well...

After our pleasant chat, Draco and I went to our seats, returning with the Malfoys, the Minister having already left, and met up with the Head of the Sports Department... none other than Ludo Bagman, an ex-beater from the greatest English Quidditch team. He was really excited about the match and wanted to bet with as many people as possible, so I went to him with a small side smile and proposed my bet, that Ireland is going to win, but Viktor will catch the Snitch, and with a devious smirk, we shook hands and went away.

Draco: How much did you bet?
me: 100 galleons.
Draco: Just?
me: That's all I took with me. I've more in the bank.
Draco: You're so leaving him broke.
me: Then, I did my job *smirks*

After a while, we went to our seats, only to be surprised by seeing Fudge, with the Bulgarian Minister and the Weasleys, along with Harry and Hermione. Now... that's quite awkward...

Lucius: Ah, Fudge. How are you? I don't think you've met my wife, Narcissa? Or our son, Draco? Miss Black, our guest.
Fudge: How do you do, how do you do? And allow me to introduce you to Mr. Oblansk - Obalonsk - Mr. - well, he's the Bulgarian Minister of Magic, and he can't understand a word I'm saying anyway, so never mind. And let's see who else - you know Arthur Weasley, I daresay
Lucius: Good lord, Arthur. What did you have to sell to get seats in the Top Box? Surely your house wouldn't have fetched this much?
Fudge: Lucius has just given a very generous contribution to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries, Arthur. He's here as my guest.

Arthur: How - how nice...

Mr. Malfoy's eyes had returned to Hermione, who went slightly pink, but stared determinedly back at him. He nodded sneeringly to Mr. Weasley and continued down the line to his seats. Draco shot Harry, Ron, and Hermione one contemptuous look, then settled himself between his father and I. Good thing Fudge was there and it was only passive-aggressiveness between those 2...

Ludo: Everyone ready? Minister - ready to go?

Fudge: Ready when you are, Ludo.

Ludo whipped out his wand, directed it at his own throat, and said "Sonorus!" and then spoke over the roar of sound that was now filling the packed stadium; his voice echoed over them, booming into every corner of the stands.

Fudge: Ladies and gentlemen... welcome! Welcome to the final of the four hundred and twenty-second Quidditch World Cup! And now, without further ado, allow me to introduce... the Bulgarian National Team Mascots!

Narcissa: I wonder what they've brought... Aaah! Veela!

With that, a hundred of Veela, the most gorgeous women ever existing, dancing around the stadium, capturing the attention of everyone, especially the eyes of the opposite gender. The show was spectacular... How I wish I looked like one of them. They are simply the embodiment of perfection. As I was still gazing at them in admiration, I feel hot breathe on my neck and a low voice.

Draco: How shameful. They brought a hundred Veela, but missed out the most beautiful girl.

me: Huh? What do you mean? They're all perfect!

Draco: I suppose they are pretty. But at least I get to see you everyday, and they don't.

me: What are you saying...?

Draco: The beauty of a Veela is nothing compared to yours.

My eyes widened at that comment and I couldn't help but stutter hearing that utopic compliment, and I looked away, embarrassed, his low chuckle emanating in my ears.

Draco: Did you know that your eyes turn pink when you're embarrassed?

me: T-they do not~!

Draco: *chuckles* They do so though.

me: S-shut up.

Draco: If you wish~

Godamn him... who does he think he is?! With that gorgeous face and platinum hair and stormy grey eyes and... You know what? Forget it! No way in hell! Not now! No no no... No! Focus on the game, Raven! Look at the Leprechauns!

Ludo: And now, ladies and gentlemen, kindly welcome - the Bulgarian National Quidditch Team! I give you - Dimitrov! Ivanova! Zograf! Levski! Vulchanov! Volkov! Aaaaaaand - Krum! And now, please greet - the Irish National Quidditch Team! Presenting - Connolly!

Using the Omnioculars at normal speed, we watch the Irish team score goal after goal, and many maneuvers from which I could surely learn a lot.

In the end, the match finished just as I predicted, it Ireland winning with 170 and Krum catching the Snitch, finishing with 160. Ludo owes me 100 galleons hehehe.

I go near him, while he was paying the twins, and smirking, extending my hand towards him. He sighed and handed me the sum, walking away sulking.

**me:** It was a pleasure doing business with you, Mr. Bagman.

After the whole celebrating deal, I felt something was about to happen, as Draco dragged me away from his parents who were also preparing for... something. Could it be...? Please no... But my fears proved to be true, because not long after, fire started to engulf the tents, and the cheers were replaced with frightened screams. The Death Eaters returned...

Draco dragged me to a certain place, where a light peaked. Hermione! She illuminated her wand... and Ron and Harry are there too!

**Harry:** Tripped over a tree root.
**Draco:** Well, with feet that size, hard not to.
**me:** Draco... Don't start a fight...
**Ron:** *cursing frantically*
**Draco:** Language, Weasley. Hadn't you better be hurrying along, now? You wouldn't like her spotted, would you?

He nodded at Hermione, and at the same moment, a blast like a bomb sounded from the campsite, and a flash of green light momentarily lit the trees around them. My scar started to burn and I slapped my hand to my neck as anxiety started taking over me. Come on, not now! Be strong! Please...

**Hermione:** What's that supposed to mean?
**Draco:** Granger, they're after Muggles. D'you want to be showing off your knickers in midair? Because if you do, hang around... they're moving this way, and it would give us all a laugh.

**me:** Draco! Don't be mean with a girl!
**Harry:** Hermione's a witch.
**Draco:** Have it your own way, Potter. If you think they can't spot a Mudblood, stay where you are.

**Ron:** You watch your mouth!

**Hermione:** Never mind, Ron.

There came a bang from the other side of the trees that was louder than anything they had heard. Several people nearby screamed. Malfoy chuckled softly.

I started breathing heavily, my eyes started watering, and I walked away, sitting on the ground, trying to get myself back together. All this panicking everywhere isn't doing me any kind of good. And Draco thinks all this is actually beneficial, dammit! Okay... Breathe... nevermind what's going on out there, nobody is going to attack you. You're a pureblood, and you are in great relations with all the
other pureblood families. Nobody will attack you...

Draco: Scare easily, don't they? I suppose your daddy told you all to hide? What's he up to -
trying to rescue the Muggles?
Harry: Where're your parents? Out there wearing masks, are they?
Draco: Well... if they were, I wouldn't be likely to tell you, would I, Potter?
Hermione: Oh come on, let's go and find the others.
Draco: Keep that big bushy head down, Granger.
me: RUN ALREADY! Keep low and don't get caught!

They ran, as Draco chuckled amused, then kneeled in front of me, same signature smirk on his face.

Draco: Ruining my fun, princess.
me: I'm dying here and all you care about is mocking others.
Draco: Control your breathing, and you'll get better.
me: Oh really? Think I'm not trying that already?!
Draco: Don't get so worked up, you're making it worse.
me: Then stop stating the obvious. You're not helping.
Draco: Then how about this.

He put his hands on my face, staring into my eyes deeply, and I couldn't help but get lost in his
mesmerizing stormy grey eyes and I felt like I was in a trance, being enchanted by them. I put my
hands gingerly over his, and he started controlling his breathe, slow and steady, so I could try and
keep copying his. Feeling myself having calmed down, I close my eyes in relief, and hang my
head, muttering a thank you.

Draco: See, princess. I'm not all that useless after all.
me: I never said that!
Draco: I know, I'm just teasing. Let's just hope I'll be there every time to save you.
me: Yeah... My hero... Hehehe...
Draco: *kissing my cheek* Your knight. Now let's go, before we get caught.
me: O-okay....
Draco: Oh and, by the way-
me: Hm...?
Draco: *winks* Pink suits you.

Trying to shield my blushing face as he held my hand, guiding me to where his parents were, a loud
"MORSMORDRE!" and the Dark Mark appeared on the cloudy sky, and shock took over me biting
my lip, staring at it while going along with Draco to his parents, to quickly go away from there.

After the whole ordeal with the Dark Mark, which didn't really disturb the Malfoys, Narcissa
informed us that we had to go buy the books... and that the letter included... dress robes...? Like... Festive and all? What?! Is it for that event?
Well, Narcissa told me about the Triwizard tournament that is going to take place at Hogwarts this
year, and Durmstrang and Beauxbatons are going to attend. How marvelous~! I can't wait to see
it! But... There's going to be a catch, no matter what, and with the incident at the World Cup... ah... I
sure hope nothing bad's going to happen to me.
The House Cup won't take place anymore—no surprise here, Mad-Eye Moody is our new DADA teacher, The Triwizard Tournament, the students from the other 2 Schools will arrive in October, and the 3 champions will be selected on Halloween night. Thankfully, Dumbledore stated that only those of 17 years old or older can participate, so since I'm only close to 15, I'm not going to be able to participate no matter what... right?

That night, in the Common Room, after everyone left to sleep, I kept staying in front of the fireplace, staring at the burning fire, so much in deep thought, that I jumped scared when I felt a hand on my shoulder. It was Draco.

**me:** What is it?
**Draco:** Are you okay?
**me:** Yeah, I just... Have a bad feeling.
**Draco:** About the Tournament?
**me:** Precisely.
**Draco:** Explain.
**me:** With the whole Dark Mark thing at the World Cup, and how every year something peculiar happened to both I and Harry, having connections to Voldemort...
**Draco:** You think you'll be forcefully involved again?
**me:** I think... no... I SAW that... I will somehow have my name written on a burnt piece of paper... read out loud by a confused Dumbledore...
**Draco:** That might be your chance at fame though. Don't let Potter steal the spotlight again!
**me:** I don't want to die!
**Draco:** You won't die, Raven. You're too smart for it. You're a Slytherin. You're a survivor.
**me:** But... Draco... I'm afraid... If Voldemort rises then...
**Draco:** Then you're going to be protected.
**me:** Then he's going to want me to work for him, no matter what. I... he... talked to me... Both in my 1st and 2nd year... Draco, he's a Slytherin too. You know how we are like...
**Draco:** We always get what they want.
**me:** Exactly.
**Draco:** Look, if your name gets written and also gets read, I'm going to testify that you didn't have any intention to enter this, okay?
**me:** It will mean the world to me...
**Draco:** That just mean we're going to spend more time together.
**me:** I suppose you're right...
**Draco:** Let me be by your side, princess.
**me:** Okay... I trust you, Draco.
**Draco:** *soft smile* I'm glad.
**me:** *blinks* Actually... I think I might have a plan... What if--

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Until Halloween night, nothing interesting happened. The classes were the same, and Moody proved...
to be quite an interesting and intriguing teacher, despite his quirks. I and Draco became even better friends, and I know I can trust him with this problem.

This whole September was amazing.

On October 1st, the students from the 2 Wizarding School made their spectacular entrance in the Hall.

The girls from Beauxbatons did a swift and graceful dance, enchanting all boys, having blue butterflies flying around them. I sighed in admiration watching the girls, and remembered that most of the girls had Veela blood in them. Then, the students from Durmstrang did some moves with their canes, showing off their masculinity. Not bad, might I say.

After the show, they sat with us at the table. Ironically, Viktor was there too, and sat next to I and Draco, and Dumbledore and the Minister told the rules of the tournament, and showed us the real chooser of the contestants.

~The Goblet of Fire~
Seer Luck and Feign Innocence

These days I and Draco have been stuck like glue, just as he promised. Moreover, I had told both Snape and McGonagall about my suspicions (not mentioning anything about my plan), so they would help me with my alibi. At least... I hope it works...

Fast forward to the day when we find out the champions, I stay between Draco and Viktor and we chat lightly—being too nervous and anxious.

Me: I know you will be chosen, Viktor. You have the greatest potential anyways. You WILL be a champion1
Viktor: *small smile* Zhank yoo, Raven.
---
Dumbledore: And the champion from Durmstrang... will be Viktor Krum!

Everyone started cheering and applauding, Karkaroff was booming with pride, I and Draco patted him on his back and congratulated him with proud smiles on our faces.

Dumbledore: The champion from Beauxbatons... will be Fleur Delacour!

She was definitely excited, but many others were disappointed. Especially her house rivals, who started sobbing pitifully.

Me: *sighs* Such pity, such drama.
Draco: *snickers* Crybabies.
Me: If I hadn’t known better, I thought you were talking about me–
Draco: Never will I dare speak ill of you, milady.
Me: Prince Charming.
---
Dumbledore: And the Hogwarts champion... will be Cedric Diggory!

Everyone, especially the Hufflepuffs, started cheering loudly for him, as he disappeared in the secret room.

Me: Better him than any Gryffindor.
Draco: Tell me about it.
Dumbledore: Excellent! Well, we now have our three champions. I am sure I can count upon all of you, including the remaining students from Beauxbatons and Durmstrang, to give your champions every ounce of support you can muster. By cheering your champion on, you will contribute in a very real -

But Dumbledore suddenly stopped speaking, and it was apparent to everybody what had distracted him. The fire in the goblet had just turned red again, sparks were flying out of it, a long flame shot suddenly into the air, and from it two other pieces of parchment flew.

Me: Great Salazar, I beg if you, don’t make it be my name there! Please!

He was holding my hands, trying to reassure and soothe me, but I was far too spazzic to think. I was too scared to calm down. I knew what was about to happen and my doom was awaiting me. Automatically, it seemed, Dumbledore reached out a long hand and seized the parchments. He held
them out and stared at the names written upon it. There was a long pause, during which Dumbledore stared at the slips in his hands, and everyone in the room stared at Dumbledore. He cleared his throat and read out -

"Harry Potter and Raven Black."

My jaw dropped and I could feel my eyes starting to water, as I was trembling and whimpering. A nightmare come true...

There was no applause. A buzzing, as though of angry bees, was starting to fill the Hall; some students were standing up to get a better look at Harry as he sat, frozen, in his seat; and I, looking like a scared deer.

Up at the top table, Professor McGonagall and Professor Snape had got to their feet and swept past Ludo Bagman and Karkaroff to whisper urgently to Professor Dumbledore, who bent his ear toward them, frowning slightly.

Me: Wh-why...why me...who did this....?

At the top table, Professor Dumbledore had straightened up and nodded to the two Professors.

Dumbledore: Harry Potter! Raven Black! Harry, Raven! Up here, if you please!

Draco gave me a reassuring smile, telling me that Snape will solve this misunderstanding, and urged me to go through this Walk of Shame, to the headmaster.

On my feet, standing between the wall and the Slytherin table, I started walking for what felt like an eternity. The buzzing grew louder and louder with each step I took. After what seemed like a lifetime, I was right in front of Dumbledore, feeling the stares of all the teachers upon my shaking, pitiful figure.

Dumbledore: Well... through the door, you two.

Staring at Severus with pleading puffy eyes, I hold Harry's hand really tight and we go through the door out of the Great Hall, in a smaller room, lined with paintings of witches and wizards. A handsome fire was roaring in the fireplace opposite of us.

Viktor Krum, Cedric Diggory, and Fleur Delacour were grouped around the fire. They looked strangely impressive, silhouetted against the flames. Krum, hunched-up and brooding, was leaning against the mantelpiece, slightly apart from the other two. Cedric was standing with his hands behind his back, lean, tall and slender, staring into the fire. Viktor looked at me with concern showing in his eyes, as I hugged him, in my moments of despair and weakness, repeating again and again that I didn't want this to happen.

Fleur looked around when Harry walked in and threw back her sheet of long, silvery hair.

Fleur: What is it? Do zey want us back in ze Hall?

She thought he had come to deliver a message. There was a sound of scurrying feet behind him, and Ludo Bagman entered the room. He took Harry by the arm and led him forward.

Ludo: Extraordinary! Absolutely extraordinary! May I introduce - incredible though it may seem - the fourth Triwizard champion? And the fifth, huddled with Mr. Krum over there?

Viktor Krum straightened up. His surly face darkened as he surveyed Harry whilst Cedric looked
nonplussed. He looked from Bagman to Harry and back again as though sure he must have misheard what Bagman had said. They didn't even look at me, however, as I was still trembling. Fleur Delacour, however, tossed her hair, smiling, and said, "Oh, vairy funny joke, Meester Bagman."

Ludo: Joke? No, no, not at all! Harry's and Raven's names just came out of the Goblet of Fire!

Krum's thick eyebrows contracted slightly. Cedric was still looking politely bewildered. Fleur frowned.

Fleur: But evidently zair 'as been a mistake. Zhey cannot compete. Zhey are too young.
Me: Listen to her, Ludo! I won't have anything to do with this! I'm NOT going to participate! You can't make me!
Ludo: Well... it is amazing. But, as you know, the age restriction was only imposed this year as an extra safety measure. And as their names came out of the goblet... I mean, I don't think there can be any ducking out at this stage.... It's down in the rules, you're obliged... They will just have to do the best they-
Me: NO! I REFUSE TO ACCEPT THIS!

The door behind us opened again, and a large group of people came in: Professor Dumbledore, followed closely by Mr. Crouch, Professor Karkaroff, Madame Maxime, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Snape. The buzzing of the hundreds of students could be heard on the other side of the wall, before Professor McGonagall closed the door.
I ran to Snape and held his hands, shaking them frantically as I was trying to speak coherently and explain the situation.

Fleur: Madame Maxime! Zhey are saying zat zees little boy and girl are to compete also!

Madame Maxime had drawn herself up to her full, and considerable, height. The top of her handsome head brushed the candle-filled chandelier, and her gigantic black-satin bosom swelled.

Madame Maxime: What is ze meaning of zis, Dumbly-dorr?
Karkaroff: I'd rather like to know that myself, Dumbledore. Three Hogwarts champions? I don't remember anyone telling me the host school is allowed three champions - or have I not read the rules carefully enough?
Maxime: C'est impossible! 'Ogwarts cannot 'ave three champions. It is most injust.
Me: Exactly! Listen to her!
Karkaroff: We were under the impression that your Age Line would keep out younger contestants, Dumbledore. Otherwise, we would, of course, have brought along a wider selection of candidates from our own schools.

"It's no one's fault but Potter's, Karkaroff," said Snape softly as he put a hand on my head to calm me down. His black eyes were alight with malice. "Don't go blaming Dumbledore for Potter's determination to break rules. He has been crossing lines ever since he arrived here -"

"Thank you, Severus," said Dumbledore firmly, and Snape went quiet, though his eyes still glinted malevolently through his curtain of greasy black hair.

Professor Dumbledore was now looking down at Harry, who looked right back at him, trying to discern the expression of the eyes behind the half-moon spectacles.
"Did you put your name into the Goblet of Fire, Harry?" he asked calmly.

"No," said Harry. He was very aware of everybody watching him closely. Snape made a soft noise of impatient disbelief in the shadows.

Dumbledore: Did you ask an older student to put it into the Goblet of Fire for you?

"No," said Harry vehemently.

Maxime: Ah, but of course 'e is lying!
McGonagall: He could not have crossed the Age Line. I am sure we are all agreed on that -
Maxime: Dumbly-dorr must 'ave made a mistake wiz ze line.
Dumbledore: It is possible, of course.
me: But the Weasley twins tried to compete too, and couldn't put their names in the Goblet! And they are almost of age!
Snape: That is very correct as well.
McGonagall: Dumbledore, you know perfectly well you did not make a mistake! Really, what nonsense! Harry nor Raven could have crossed the line themselves, and as Professor Dumbledore believes that they did not persuade an older student to do it for them. I'm sure that should be good enough for everybody else!
Karkaroff: Mr. Crouch... Mr. Bagman... you are our - er - objective judges. Surely you will agree that this is most irregular.
Crouch: We must follow the rules, and the rules state clearly that those people whose names come out of the Goblet of Fire are bound to compete in the tournament.
Ludo: Well, Barty knows the rule book back to front.
Karkaroff: I insist upon resubmitting the names of the rest of my students. You will set up the Goblet of Fire once more, and we will continue adding names until each school has three champions. It's only fair, Dumbledore.
Ludo: But Karkaroff, it doesn't work like that. The Goblet of Fire's just gone out - it won't reignite until the start of the next tournament -
Karkaroff: in which Durmstrang will most certainly not be competing! After all our meetings and negotiations and compromises, I little expected something of this nature to occur! I have half a mind to leave now!
-?-: Empty threat, Karkaroff. You can't leave your champion now. He's got to compete. They've all got to compete. Binding magical contract, like Dumbledore said. Convenient, eh?

Moody had just entered the room. He limped toward the fire, and with every right step he took, there was a loud clunk.

Karkaroff: Convenient? I'm afraid I don't understand you, Moody.
Moody: Don't you? It's very simple, Karkaroff. Someone put their names in that goblet knowing they'd have to compete if it came out.
Maxime: Evidently, someone 'oo wished to give 'Ogwarts three bites at ze apple!
Karkaroff: I quite agree, Madame Maxime. I shall be lodging complaints with the Ministry of Magic and the International Confederation of Wizards -
Moody: If anyone's got reason to complain, it's them, but... funny thing... I don't hear him saying a word... her though...
Fleur: Why should zhey complain? Zhey 'ave ze chance to compete, 'avn't zhey? We 'ave all been 'oping to be chosen for weeks and weeks! Ze honor for our schools! A thousand
Galleons in prize money - zis is a chance many would die for!
Moody: Maybe someone's hoping they are going to die for it.
Ludo: Moody, old man... what a thing to say!
me: But it's as he says! I've seen this happening in one of my visions! We tried to make the vision not come true, but it didn't work...
Karkaroff: We all know Professor Moody considers the morning wasted if he hasn't discovered six plots to murder him before lunchtime. Apparently he is now teaching his students to fear assassination too. An odd quality in a Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher, Dumbledore, but no doubt you had your reasons. And you, girl? Yet another "Seer"?
Moody: Imagining things, am I? Seeing things, eh? It was a skilled witch or wizard who put the boy's name in that goblet...
Maxime: Ah, what evidence is zere of zat?
Moody: Because they hoodwinked a very powerful magical object! It would have needed an exceptionally strong Confundus Charm to bamboozle that goblet into forgetting that only three schools compete in the tournament.... I'm guessing they submitted Potter's and Black's names under a fourth and fifth school, to make sure they were the only ones in their category....
Karkaroff: You seem to have given this a great deal of thought, Moody, and a very ingenious theory it is - though of course, I heard you recently got it into your head that one of your birthday presents contained a cunningly disguised basilisk egg, and smashed it to pieces before realizing it was a carriage clock. So you'll understand if we don't take you entirely seriously...
Moody: There are those who'll turn innocent occasions to their advantage. It's my job to think the way Dark wizards do, Karkaroff - as you ought to remember...
Dumbledore: Alastor! How this situation arose, we do not know. It seems to me, however, that we have no choice but to accept it. Cedric, Raven and Harry have been chosen to compete in the Tournament. This, therefore, they will do....
Maxime: Ah, but Dumbly-dorr -
Dumbledore: My dear Madame Maxime, if you have an alternative, I would be delighted to hear it.

Dumbledore waited, but Madame Maxime did not speak, she merely glared. She wasn't the only one either. Snape looked furious; Karkaroff livid; Bagman, however, looked rather excited.

Dumbledore: Well, shall we crack on, then? Got to give our champions their instructions, haven't we? Barty, want to do the honors?
Barty: Yes... Yes... the first task... The first task is designed to test your daring... so we are not going to be telling you what it is. Courage in the face of the unknown is an important quality in a wizard... very important.... The first task will take place on November the twenty-fourth, in front of the other students and the panel of judges. The champions are not permitted to ask for or accept help of any kind from their teachers to complete the tasks in the tournament. The champions will face the first challenge armed only with their wands. They will receive information about the second task when the first is over. Owing to the demanding and time-consuming nature of the tournament, the champions are exempted from end-of-year tests. I think that's all, is it, Albus?
Dumbledore: I think so. Are you sure you wouldn't like to stay at Hogwarts tonight, Barty?
Barty: No, Dumbledore, I must get back to the Ministry. It is a very busy, very difficult time at the moment... I've left young Weatherby in charge... Very enthusiastic... a little overenthusiastic, if truth be told...
Dumbledore: You'll come and have a drink before you go, at least?
Ludo: Come on, Barry, I'm staying! It's all happening at Hogwarts now, you know, much more exciting here than at the office!
Barty: I think not, Ludo.
Dumbledore: Professor Karkaroff - Madame Maxime - a nightcap?

But Madame Maxime had already put her arm around Fleur's shoulders and was leading her swiftly out of the room. They were talking very fast in French as they went off into the Great Hall. Karkaroff beckoned to Krum, and they too, exited, though in silence.

Dumbledore: Harry, Cedric, I suggest you go up to bed I am sure Gryffindor and Hufflepuff are waiting to celebrate with you, and it would be a shame to deprive them of this excellent excuse to make a great deal of mess and noise. Raven, may I have a word with you?
me: Of course...

Just as he said that, Harry and Cedric had left to their common rooms. I, though, remained there, having the professors' eyes peering on me, as I cleared my throat.

me: So... uhm... is there any chance... that I may be excused from competing?
Snape: Not likely.
me: *sigh* Thought so... But... like... The visions... the staging of my name being put in the Goblet... Headmaster... why did you do that? I am quite sure that Harry could have been able to keep himself out of fatal trouble. So why... me as well...?
Dumbledore: I believe you know the answer already, Miss Black. Although, I am quite impressed that you managed to find out it was me.
me: Feared as much... And, to point out, I saw your beard.
Snape: Dumbledore, just because she's my best student, doesn't mean you can use her for your everyday espionage mission. You know bloody well he is trying to recruit her! You're putting her directly in harm's way and you did not even get my approval.
me: Well... The prophecy cannot be avoided... I will do as I am commanded and shall succeed in my tasks, no matter the costs.
McGonagall: But, Dumbledore, the risks... think about it! We cannot endanger the life of a student!
me: It cannot be helped. I am the only one that can do it. Sacrifices must be made in order to achieve peace. However... Peace through war can never be achieved. But what does it matter, for I will not be remembered, but at least my sacrifice might benefit others... not that I cared, in the least... Anyway, I believe I have to prepare for the worst, so please excuse me... have to make sure I live through this.

As I said that, I made my leave and went to mine own Common Room. There, on the sofa in front of the fireplace, a worried Draco sat, munching on a Liquorice Wand and reading the Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, looking very cozy in his black sleeping wear and a emerald green bathrobe.

me: I was not aware that this book existed in the Wizarding World as well. It is one of my
favourites. How do you find it?
Draco: It's high time you arrived, Black. Might I say, for the love of this pointless conversation, it is one of my favourites as well. I am re-reading it.
me: That's wonderful, but a book discussion is never pointless.
Draco: It is, when there are other matters, far more important, to discuss. Quite like your absence. Care to explain?
me: I suppose you could say that... our plan worked. It's great playing on both sides, isn't it? Beneficial. Such a win-win situation.
Draco: I am glad this worked, but I must enquire about the purpose of this folly.
me: Not a folly, but a very well-prepared scheme. As I told you before, Voldemort will rise at the end of this year. And since someone used Potter's name for the Goblet, for sacrificial purposes, then it's clear I must somehow save his ass, just as Dumbledore planned all along. His only downfall was that I had a vision and caught him in the act. The prophecy states clearly "either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives". So if Potter dies, Voldemort will take our freedom permanently, which will cause permanent damage. That's why I must make sure he is safe. On the other hand, Dumbledore too... I won't be his sacrificial experiment, as Potter is. Playing the innocent card with everyone puts me in a great light, you know?
Draco: *smirks* As expected of such a brilliant Slytherin like you. And I expect my second part in this is to make sure you won't be seen the same as Potter, correct?
me: Precisely. As much as I love mocking others, I couldn't possibly take it myself. And since I must focus on the tasks and fooling both sides of the war... Yeah.
Draco: Consider it done, milday.
me: *smirk* I knew I could count on you, my lord.
Draco: Any suggestions?
me: Make sure he knows he's hated by most people and that I am in a graceful light. He must stay in despair and know the struggle.
Draco: Potter stinks.
me: Make badges with that slogan, and you're my hero.
Draco: Your wish is my command~

With that, I smirked and kissed his cheek, going to my dormitory, preparing my plans to conquer the fame that I deserve.

My Slytherin Pride.

The next day, contrary to what I believed, and opposite to how Harry was being treated, the members of my own House acted in a very protective way and made the Ravenclaws join our side in cheering. Also, Draco managed to make the Hufflepuffs think that Harry was stealing Cedric's fame and that I was a victim of this whole ordeal, since wherever Harry's name appears, I'm always dragged as well. On the subject of influence and manipulation, Draco is top.

It was clear that the rest of the school, just like the Gryffindors, thought Harry had entered himself for the tournament. Unlike the Gryffindors, however, nobody seemed impressed.

The Hufflepuffs, who were usually on excellent terms with the Gryffindors, had turned remarkably cold toward the whole lot of them. One Herbology lesson was enough to demonstrate this. It was plain that the Hufflepuffs felt that Harry had stolen their champion's glory; a feeling exacerbated, perhaps, by the fact that Hufflepuff House very rarely got any glory, and that Cedric was one of the
few who had ever given them any, having beaten Gryffindor once at Quidditch. Even Professor Sprout seemed distant with him - but then, she was Head of Hufflepuff House. Not that I care, as long as I am not affected.

And now we have Care of Magical Creatures which meant seeing the Gryffindors too. So exciting~

Draco: Ah, look, boys, it's the champion! Got your autograph books? Better get a signature now, because I doubt he's going to be around much longer... Half the Triwizard champions have died... how long d'you reckon you're going to last, Potter? Ten minutes into the first task's my bet.

Crabbe and Goyle guffawed sycophantically, but Draco had to stop there, because Hagrid emerged from the back of his cabin balancing a teetering tower of crates, each containing a very large Blast-Ended Skrewt.

Draco: Take this thing for a walk? And where exactly are we supposed to fix the leash? Around the sting, the blasting end, or the sucker?

Hagrid: Roun' the middle. Er - yeh might want ter put on yer dragon-hide gloves, jus' as an extra precaution, like. Harry - you come here an' help me with this big one....

me: It's okay, Draco, this is easy. I will do it.

The class was widely scattered now, and all in great difficulty. The skrewts were now over three feet long, and extremely powerful. No longer shell-less and colorless, they had developed a kind of thick, grayish, shiny armor. They looked like a cross between giant scorpions and elongated crabs - but still without recognizable heads or eyes. They had become immensely strong and very hard to control.

me: So, tell me. What did you do to attract everyone on our side?

Draco: Easy, princess. Slytherins were always ours, to begin with. Ravenclaws always preferred us too, since we know how to appreciate hard-work and greatness. And the Hufflepuffs? Some boosting of Diggory, flattery, deprecating of Potter and saying how scared and vulnerable you are, because of him, and that's it. Simple.

me: Teach me, master~

Draco: Don't worry, Black. I'm sure you can actually do it, if you bothered. And if you would stop delegating.

me: *chuckles* Yeah... not likely.

Now though, we have Double Potions was always a great experience, but these days it was nothing short of perfect. Being shut in a dungeon for an hour and a half with Snape and the Slytherins, all of whom seemed determined to help me and punish Harry as much as possible for daring to become school champion, was about the most pleasant thing I could imagine.

When he and Hermione arrived at Snape's dungeon after lunch, they found the Slytherins waiting outside, each and every one of them wearing a large badge on the front of his or her robes. They all bore the same message, in luminous red letters that burnt brightly in the dimly lit underground passage:

**SUPPORT CEDRIC DIGGORY - THE REAL HOGWARTS CHAMPION!**

"Like them, Potter?" said Draco loudly as Harry approached. "And this isn't all they do - look!"
He pressed his badge into his chest, and the message upon it vanished, to be replaced by another one, which glowed blue.

**SUPPORT RAVEN BLACK-
THE PEACEFUL CHAMPION!**

Pansy: We're lucky to have Raven compete for us as well, right? At least she didn't WANT to steal all the fame! She tried to convince the professors and the minister that she shouldn't compete and talk the rules out of them, but alas, she was destined to be a champion. All the best for us. You, on the other hand, Potter...

With that, Draco pressed the badge again and it glowed green:

**POTTER STINKS!**
The Slytherins howled with laughter. Each of them pressed their badges too, until the message **POTTER STINKS** was shining brightly all around Harry.

"Oh very funny," Hermione said sarcastically to Pansy Parkinson and her gang of Slytherin girls, who were laughing harder than anyone, "**really witty.**"

"Want one, Granger?" said Malfoy, holding out a badge to Hermione. "I've got loads. But don't touch my hand, now. I've just washed it, you see; don't want a Mudblood sliming it up."

I gasped and nudged Draco in his ribs, telling him softly not to insult my friend, but he just smiled charmingly.

He had reached for his wand before he'd thought what he was doing. People all around them scrambled out of the way, backing down the corridor. Just as he did that, I got my wand out of my sleeve, went in front of Draco, and looked warningly at Harry.

me: **Don't start a fight, Harry.**
Hermione: **Harry!**
Draco: **Go on, then, Potter. Moody's not here to look after you now - do it, if you've got the guts**
Harry: **Funnunculus!**
me: **Protego!**
Draco: **Densaugeo!**

Jets of light shot from our wands, hit each other in midair, and ricocheted off at angles - Harry's hit Goyle in the face, and Draco's hit Hermione. Goyle bellowed and put his hands to his nose, where great ugly boils were springing up - Hermione, whimpering in panic, was clutching her mouth.

"**Hermione!**"

Ron had hurried forward to see what was wrong with her; Harry turned and saw Ron dragging Hermione's hand away from her face. It wasn't a pretty sight. Hermione's front teeth - already larger than average - were now growing at an alarming rate; she was looking more and more like a beaver as her teeth elongated, past her bottom lip, toward her chin - panic-stricken, she felt them and let out a terrified cry. I also went to her and since her teeth were still growing, I used the Finite Incantatem counter-spell on her, so they'd stop. However, she must go to the medic...

"**And what is all this noise about?**" said a soft, deadly voice.

Snape had arrived. The Slytherins clamored to give their explanations; Snape pointed a long yellow finger at me and said, "**Explain.**"
me: Harry attacked us, sir -
Harry: We attacked each other at the same time!
Draco: - and he hit Goyle - look -

Snape examined Goyle, whose face now resembled something that would have been at home in a book on poisonous fungi.

**Snape:** Hospital wing, Goyle.
**Ron:** Malfoy got Hermione! Look!

He forced Hermione to show Snape her teeth - she was doing her best to hide them with her hands, though this was difficult as they had now grown down past her collar. Pansy Parkinson and the other Slytherin girls were doubled up with silent giggles, pointing at Hermione from behind Snape's back.

Snape looked coldly at Hermione, then said, "I see no difference."

Hermione let out a whimper; her eyes filled with tears, she turned on her heel and ran, ran all the way up the corridor and out of sight.

It was lucky, perhaps, that both Harry and Ron started shouting at Snape at the same time; lucky their voices echoed so much in the stone corridor, for in the confused din, it was impossible for him to hear exactly what they were calling him. He got the gist, however.

**Snape:** Let's see. Fifty points from Gryffindor and a detention each for Potter and Weasley. Now get inside, or it'll be a week's worth of detentions.

Going in the room, Draco and I sat down, as he turned his back on Snape and pressed his badge, smirking. *POTTER STINKS* flashed once more across the room.

**Snape:** Antidotes! You should all have prepared your recipes now. I want you to brew them carefully, and then, we will be selecting someone on whom to test one...

And then a knock on the dungeon door was heard. It was Colin Creevey; he edged into the room, beaming at Harry, and walked up to Snape's desk at the front of the room.

**Snape:** Yes?
**Colin:** Please, sir, I'm supposed to take Harry Potter and Raven Black upstairs.
**Snape:** Potter and Black have another hour of Potions to complete. They will come upstairs when this class is finished.
**Colin:** Sir - sir, Mr. Bagman wants them... All the champions have got to go, I think they want to take photographs...
**Snape:** Very well, very well. Potter, Black, leave your things here, I want you back down here later to test your antidote.
**Colin:** Please, sir - he's got to take his things with him. All the champions...
**Snape:** Very well! Take your bag and get out of my sight!

I looked at Draco as I bit my lip to stop a smirk, passed him a vial with the antidote, and went to Snape to give him the other vial and left with a nod. Seer luck -

Harry swung his bag over his shoulder, got up, and headed for the door. As he walked through the Slytherin desks, *POTTER STINKS* flashed at him from every direction.

**Colin:** It's amazing, isn't it, Harry? Isn't it, though? You being champion?
Harry: Yeah, really amazing. What do they want photos for, Colin?
Colin: The Daily Prophet, I think!
me: W-wait... what?! Th-The Daily Prophet?!
Harry: What, don't tell me your Seer visions didn't tell you this much.
me: Of course I knew about the photo session... B-But... THE Daily Prophet?
Harry: *sighs* Just great... Exactly what I need. More publicity.
Colin: Good luck!

We were in a fairly small classroom; most of the desks had been pushed away to the back of the room, leaving a large space in the middle; three of them, however, had been placed end-to-end in front of the blackboard and covered with a long length of velvet. Six chairs had been set behind the velvet-covered desks, and Ludo Bagman was sitting in one of them, talking to a blonde witch who was wearing magenta robes.

Viktor Krum was standing moodily in a corner as usual and not talking to anybody. Cedric and Fleur were in conversation. Fleur kept throwing back her head so that her long silvery hair caught the light. A paunchy man, holding a large black camera that was smoking slightly, was watching Fleur out of the corner of his eye.
Bagman suddenly spotted Harry, got up quickly, and bounded forward.

Ludo: Ah, here they are! Champions number four and five! In you come, Raven, Harry, in you come... nothing to worry about, it's just the wand weighing ceremony, the rest of the judges will be here in a moment -
Harry: Wand weighing?
Ludo: We have to check that your wands are fully functional, no problems, you know, as they're your most important tools in the tasks ahead. The expert's upstairs now with Dumbledore. And then there's going to be a little photo shoot. This is Rita Skeeter. She's doing a small piece on the tournament for the Daily Prophet....
Rita: Maybe not that small, Ludo.

Her hair was set in elaborate and curiously rigid curls that contrasted oddly with her heavy-jawed face. She wore jeweled spectacles. The thick fingers clutching her crocodile-skin handbag ended in two-inch nails, painted crimson.

Rita: I wonder if I could have a little word with Raven before we start? The youngest champion? You know... to add a bit of color?
Ludo: Certainly! That is - if Raven has no objection?
me: Actually, Harry is younger than me. So if you'd be interested, I think he'd be a rather suitable subject of interest.
Harry: W-ait, wha--?
Rita: Lovely! Then so it shall be - We don't want to be in there with all that noise. Let's see... ah, yes, this is nice and cozy.

I started chatting with Viktor, with little difficulties regarding the language barrier, when suddenly we were startled by a loud aggravated shout from Harry and Dumbledore who came to his rescue.

Rita: Dumbledore! How are you? I hope you saw my piece over the summer about the International Confederation of Wizards' Conference?
Dumbledore: Enchantingly nasty. I particularly enjoyed your description of me as an obsolete
Rita: I was just making the point that some of your ideas are a little old-fashioned, Dumbledore, and that many wizards in the street -

Dumbledore: I will be delighted to hear the reasoning behind the rudeness, Rita, but I'm afraid we will have to discuss the matter later. The Weighing of the Wands is about to start, and it cannot take place if one of our champions is hidden in a broom cupboard.

He sat down quickly next to Cedric, hooking up at the velvet-covered table, where four of the five judges were now sitting - Professor Karkaroff, Madame Maxime, Mr. Crouch, and Ludo Bagman. Rita Skeeter settled herself down in a corner; as she slipped the parchment out of her bag again, spread it on her knee, suck the end of the Quick-Quotes Quill, and place it once more on the parchment.

Dumbledore: May I introduce Mr. Ollivander? He will be checking your wands to ensure that they are in good condition before the tournament.

Ollivander: Mademoiselle Delacour, could we have you first, please?

Fleur Delacour swept over to Mr. Ollivander and handed him her wand.

Ollivander: Hmm... Yes, nine and a half inches... inflexible... rosewood... and containing... dear me...

Fleur: An 'air from ze 'ead of a veela. One of my grandmuzzer's.

Ollivander: Yes... yes, I've never used veela hair myself, of course. I find it makes for rather temperamental wands... however, to each his own, and if this suits you... Orchideous! And a bunch of flowers burst from the wand tip. Very well, very well, it's in fine working order. Mrs Black, if you please.

I got up from my sit and smiled at Fleur, as she went past me, grinning, and gave the wand to Ollivander.

Ollivander: Oh yes, one of my very best creations, I remember it very well. Thestral tail-hair, with Phoenix feather... ash wood... 15". Quite the special one, just like Mr. Potter's. I see it's well taken care of, polished and clean regularly, impeccable state. Let's see...

me: May I?

Ollivander: *smiles* Go ahead!

I took the wand from his hand, and just as I have when I first received this wand, I I waved it around gracefully, and a warm dark shadow started blowing around me, glowing blue petals floating around the wind, and a black rose, with blood petal ends appeared in my hair, just as before.

Ollivander: Yes, perfect, perfect! Quite nostalgic, if I dare say. Mr. Diggory, you next.

I glided back to my seat, smiling at Cedric as I passed him.

Ollivander: Ah, now, this is one of mine as well, isn't it? Yes, I remember it well. Containing a single hair from the tail of a particularly fine male unicorn... must have been seventeen hands; nearly gored me with his horn after I plucked his tail. Twelve and a quarter inches... ash... pleasantly springy. It's in fine condition... You treat it regularly?

Cedric: *smiles* Polished it last night.

Mr. Ollivander sent a stream of silver smoke rings across the room from the tip of Cedric's wand,
pronounced himself satisfied, and then said,

**Ollivander:** Mr. Krum, if you please. Hmm. this is a Gregorovitch creation, unless I'm much mistaken? A fine wand-maker, though the styling is never quite what I... however... Yes... hornbeam and dragon heartstring? Rather thicker than one usually sees... quite rigid... ten and a quarter inches... *Avis!*  

The hornbeam wand let off a blast hike a gun, and a number of small, twittering birds flew out of the end and through the open window into the watery sunlight.

**Ollivander:** Good. Which leaves... Mr. Potter. Aaaah, yes. Yes, yes, yes. How well I remember.

Mr. Ollivander spent much longer examining Harry's wand than anyone else's. Eventually, however, he made a fountain of wine shoot out of it, and handed it back to Harry, announcing that it was still in perfect condition.

**Dumbledore:** Thank you all. You may go back to your lessons now - or perhaps it would be quicker just to go down to dinner, as they are about to end. **Ludo:** Photos, Dumbledore, photos! All the judges and champions, what do you think, Rita? **Rita:** Er - yes, let's do those first. And then perhaps some individual shots.

The photographs took a long time. Madame Maxime cast everyone else into shadow wherever she stood, and the photographer couldn't stand far enough back to get her into the frame; eventually she had to sit while everyone else stood around her. Karkaroff kept twirling his goatee around his finger to give it an extra curl; Krum, skulked, half-hidden, at the back of the group. The photographer seemed keenest to get Fleur and I at the front, but Rita Skeeter kept hurrying forward and dragging Harry into greater prominence. Then she insisted on separate shots of all the champions. At last, we were free to go. Thankfully...

Just as I went to dinner, I was greeted by a very excited Pansy, and a smirking Draco.

**Pansy:** How did the photoshoot go? I bet you eclipsed everyone with your grace and beauty!  
**me:** Well... I don't know about that. Fleur had the best chance to do so. I mean... Look at her! She's gorgeous!  
**Draco:** Her beauty pales in comparison to yours, Black. Especially since you don't need Veela genes to charm and seduce anybody.  
**me:** D-Draco, come on... Don't say such things...  
**Pansy:** But he's right, Raven! Come on, you must be starving after such a busy day.  
**me:** Yeah... you're right...  

I sat down and started eating, feeling quite well after such an entertaining day—apart from when Hermione's teeth started growing—and then Emma and Jessie spotted me and sat down in front of me, smirking mischievously.

**Emma:** So? Did you manage to steal the spotlight?  
**me:** Quite a bit, I believe.  
**Jessie:** Well no wonder, with the unnatural colour of your eyes... Did you plan for it?  
**me:** Wait, what?!  
**Draco:** Your eyes are pink again, princess~.  
**me:** N-no way..!  
**Draco:** *smirks* Was it something I said?
Jessie: Must be it!
me: G-guys... s-stop embarrassing me!
Emma: But you're cute when you're embarrassed.
Draco: Back off, Perks. Only I'm allowed to say such things to her.
me: Stop that, please!
Pansy: Leave her alone, she's a blushing mess...
Jessie: Say, Pug-face, since when do you like Raven so much? Wasn't it just last year when you wanted to strangle her?
Pansy: *looks away awkwardly* I... well... realized that... I do not own Draco... and... that I should stop being so condescending... because it's just as you said. Our house is the most hated, and if we don't stick together... then we will fall.
Emma: You can't just expect to-
me: I'm glad I could help, Pansy. Friends?
Pansy: Can I really be friends with you?

She squeaked gleefully at me as I nodded at her, much to the others rolling their eyes at her behaviour, and she sat next to me, engaging in a light conversation. This shall be interesting... And the first task... Salazar Save Me...
I woke up with a jolt and started breathing heavily. All night I've been dreaming of dragons and being chased by them. Obviously, this is a sign.
I put on my slippers and go swiftly out of the room, not disturbing the girls, and enter the boy's room, gently shaking Draco awake, feeling anxiety rise in my brain. I have to calm down and think of ways to go against a dragon and I need all the help I can get. Especially since the First Task is...well...next week.
Draco easily woke up, and in a sleepy voice and half-opened eyes he mumbled my name and asked what was I doing there.
I briefly told him the situation, to which he immediately woke up, got his warming robe over his pyjamas and went with me to the library, so we could research on the topic.
Thanks to Newt Scamander's 'Fantastic Beasts and Where to find them', we saw all the types of dragons, their description and their danger meter. Also, we found other books related to dragon-taming and how to calm them. Guess that's how Ron's elder brother got interested in dragon-taming.

Draco: As far as I remember, you're only allowed your wand and I don't know what you could do with it.
me: Definitely not poke its eye out.
Draco: *snorts* Yeah, and maybe throw a bucket of water to extinguish the flames.
me: In our first year, Hagrid had a giant Cerberus guarding the Philosopher's stone. The way to get him to calm down was music... So Quirrell bewitched a harp so play while he went through the trapdoor... think that could work?
Draco: Could be a possibility... But how will you get a harp out of nowhere?
me: Maybe not necessary a harp... but maybe... another medieval instrument... that dragons
might be nostalgic of...
Draco: What do you mean?
me: Considering that I doubt young wizards learn about this things much in their 'History classes', here is this. The dragons were stereotypical in the Medieval ages, when the dragon stole the princess, and the prince had to kill the dragon and save the fair maiden. At those times, there were many entertainers that would play music for the kings. Mostly the lute, harp, later on, the viol, an early version of the violin... And so on. See the connection?
Draco: Interesting mythology these muggles have... It could work, I suppose, but we better ask an adult as well... or more.
me: Good... And if that's settled... I have to start practicing again... And ask Flitwick for an instrument from his choir...
Draco: Piece of cake.
me: Hope so.

After our research hours, we went to eat breakfast and start our lessons. Luckily for us, we had potions first. Perfect opportunity to ask Snape for his opinion. The Slytherins and the Gryffindors sit themselves on the opposite sides of the room, I stay next to Draco and await instructions of the potions we're about to brew. Obviously, what we have to do is easy-for our standards-and we finish first-much to Hermione's dismay-and high-five as we are rewarded 10 points each.

At the end of the lesson, I stay behind and go next to Snape.

me: Ahem... Professor... May I ask something regarding a more... controversial topic that regards... let's say... possibilities?
Snape: Like...?
me: Dragons... such majestic yet dangerous creatures... are there ways to... calm them?
Snape: Perhaps there are.
me: In some books, they say music helps, yet, they never state what kind.
Snape: And your trouble is...?
me: If a dragon were to hear music played by a medieval instrument... such as... a lute... would they calm down?
Snape: It is a high chance indeed. And your purpose is?
me: Staying alive and successfully finishing the First Task with a high score?
Snape: Then I wish you the very best and advise you to ask someone with more knowledge on the matter as well.
me: Thank you for your wisdom, professor. Have a good day.
Snape: Black!
me: Yes~?
Snape: Bring pride to this house.
me: *smirks* Don't I always?
Snape: Precisely.

I asked Hagrid the same thing, and he said he talked to Charlie about this, and yes, Dragons can be lowkey calmed with a certain type of music, and Flitwick let me borrow the lute. Guess I have to practice a song in the meantime...

At dinner, while I was discussing with the group about songs I should play, I see Harry coming towards our table, and with a concerned and confused face, I got up and quickly went near him, asking what's wrong.
Harry: Dragons. That's the First Task.
me: Just found that out in the morning. Bit of a nightmare, really.
Harry: Yeah... also, Padfoot said to be aware of Karkaroff. He was a... y'know...
me: Death Eater. I can imagine. But... How or when did you talk to him?
Harry: He uh... his face appeared in the fire in the Common Room last night. I had sent him a letter previously telling him about everything that's happened.
me: Oh... right... Did he mention me?
Harry: Ergh... He told me to tell you this as well...
me: Ah, yes. Very fatherly. Thank you, Harry. And be careful.
Harry: Have you found any way to beat them? He mentioned a very simple spell but... He hadn't had the chance to say it, cause Ron intrerrupted us... and he was gone.
me: A simple spell... I don't know, Harry... The only thing that crosses my mind would be to Accio the object we'd have to get. I mean... what else could we have to o against a dragon?!
Harry: Right... You're right... I'll tell Hermione too! Thanks, Raven~!

Pfew... that was close... If two champions from the same School AND Year were to come up with the same idea... it would have been bad.

The next week, while I was in the Common Room, practicing the lute, Snape came in and told me to hurry to the First task, and that the others better hurry and get nice front seats.
Hearing their encouraging words, I inhale deeply and let Draco get my lute, as I hurry to the tent in the forest.
I was dressed comfortably, in combat boots, black jeans, a dark green loose Tshirt and a black warm hoodie, with the green serpent ring and necklace from Draco, to show off my house Pride.

There, Ludo told us that we had to collect a golden egg and that we had to pick up a small 'model' of something from a purple silk bag. Saying a confident 'Ladies First', I choose the first dragon, a little dragon with pearly scales that line its body, and glittering multi-coloured eyes that have no pupils. The Antipodean Opaleye. Not particularly dangerous and rarely killing, unless he's hungry. It had the number 1 around its neck.

me: He's gorgeous... May I keep him, Mr. Bagman?
Ludo: Uh.. well.. since it'll remain a miniature... sure.. I think?
me: Thank you!

I said, as I snuggled the little dragon close to my face.
Next was Fleur, who put a shaking hand inside the bag and drew out a tiny, perfect model of a dragon - a Welsh Green. It had the number two around its neck. Krum pulled out the scarlet Chinese Fireball. It had a number three around its neck. He didn't even blink, just sat back down and stared at the ground. Cedric put his hand into the bag, and out came the blueish-gray Swedish Short-Snout, the number four tied around its neck. Harry put his hand into the silk bag and pulled out the Hungarian Horntail, and the number five. It stretched its wings as he looked down at it, and bared its minuscule fangs.

Guess I'm the first to show off.

I go in there, a bit nervously, my eyes being multicolour, to match the dragon, and I look at her - since she's rather smaller in size than a male would be, and I smile and greeted her, as she started hissing at me.
One night, I hold on you
Ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh, you

Castamere, Castamere, Castamere, Castamere

I calmly took out my wand, Accio-ed my lute, and bewitched it to playing while I continue singing the Rains of Castamere from the Game of Thrones series. Medieval music on point. The dragon started wagging her tail to match the music and would every so often spread her wings, showing that she was happy.

A coat of gold, a coat of red
A lion still has claws
And mine are long and sharp, my Lord
As long and sharp as yours

With this, I started 'dancing' around until I reached the dragon, as she put her head near me, and I started humming briefly, stroking her and petting her snout, saying admiring words about her, which seemed to please her.

And so he spoke, and so he spoke
That Lord of Castamere
And now the reins weep o'er his halls
With no one there to hear.

Looking at her with my multicolour eyes, in her matching eyes, I plant a soft kiss on her snout, and she curled down, relaxing to my music.

Yes, now the rains weep o'er his halls
And not a soul to hear

Ending, I grab the golden egg and with a graceful bow, I left the area, giving Ludo the egg with a smirk, leaving behind a cheerful crowd.

Draco, Pansy, Emma and Jessie all came to congratulate me on my amazing performance and in the back, Snape trailed behind with a proud smirk on his face, saying that I did well. Then, I went for the scoring.

Draco: It's marks out of ten from each one
me: Oh great... Let's see the subjectivity start.

Madame Maxime - raise her wand in the air. What hooked like a long silver ribbon shot out of it, which twisted itself into a large figure nine.

Pansy: Great! Maybe she took a point off for not being too flashy?
Emma: Oh, yes, because just ANYONE can tame a dragon!

Mr. Crouch came next. He shot a number ten into the air.

Jessie: Looking good! That's how you do it!

Next, Dumbledore. He put up a nine. The crowd was cheering harder than ever.

Snape: Dumbledore obviously wouldn't know what talent was, even if it hit him in the face.
Ludo Bagman - ten.

me: He must really like me. Quite cool, since I robbed him of 100 galleons last time we met.
Draco: Don't complain, silly.

And now Karkaroff raised his wand. He paused for a moment, and then a number shot out of his wand too - four.

I burst into laughter when I saw that four, since he obviously wanted Krum to be in first place.

After the task was over, I was on the first place and Harry and Viktor were second, Charlie told us, and also, that the champions were to stay behind in the tent for a little longer, to have a word with Ludo. Draco said he'd wait outside in the meantime. Fleur, Cedric, Harry and Krum all came in together. One side of Cedric's face was covered in a thick orange paste, which was presumably mending his burn. I went next to him with a worried look.

me: Are you going to be okay?
me: Thank you. I think I have a thing for magical creatures. Or...maybe colourful things?
Cedric: *chuckles* I see you really kept the little dragon.
me: Oh yes! Look at her! She's so adorable and pretty! And very affectionate! She loves snuggling.
me: *grins* *puts her on his shoulder* I think she likes you. Dragon snuggles are the best.
Cedric: You're right. She's adorable.
Ludo: Well done, all of you! Now, just a quick few words. You've got a nice long break before the second task, which will take place at half past nine on the morning of February the twenty-fourth - but we're giving you something to think about in the meantime! If you look down at those golden eggs you're all holding, you will see that they open... see the hinges there? You need to solve the clue inside the egg - because it will tell you what the second task is, and enable you to prepare for it! All clear? Sure? Well, off you go, then!
me: - Oh nice. Let's look inside a golden egg and find a magical treasure. Woo-hoo!

Soon enough, winter came, and Snape had to make an announcement to all the Slytherins.

Snape: The Yule Ball.... has been a tradition of the Triwizard Tournament... since its inception. On Christmas Eve night, we and our guests... gather in the Great Hall... for a night of well-mannered frivolity. As representatives of the host school... I expect each and every one of you to put your best foot forward. And I mean this literally, because... the Yule Ball is, first and foremost... a dance, unfortunately for you and the rest of the ungraceful chimpanzees attenting.

At the word 'dance' everyone started fidgeting and whispering around. I was rooted to the spot, since I absolutely DREAD dancing.

Snape: The house of Salazar Slytherin has commanded the respect of the wizard world for
nearly 10 centuries. I will not have you, in the course of a single evening, besmirching that name... by behaving like a bunch of dunderheads. Now, to dance... is to let the body breathe. Inside every girl, a secret swan slumbers... longing to burst forth and take flight. Or so, McGonagall says, for lack of better words to describe some overly-hyped giggling nitwits.

Daphne Greengrass let out a shrill giggle. Tracey Davis nudged her hard in the ribs, her face working furiously as she too fought not to giggle. They both looked around at Draco.

me: Did those words honestly come out of your mouth...?
Snape: Inside every boy, a lordly lion prepared to prance... What a ridiculous analogy she came up with, Mrs. Black!
me: Y-yes, sir?
Snape: Traditionally, the champions and their partners open the ball.
me: Can I pretend to be dead during that night?
Snape: Unfortunately, no.
me: Couldn't I rather dance with the dragon? At least that would be less embarrassing than showing up without a partner or with no... dancing skills.
Snape: You seem rather energetic today, don't you think? How about you join me? Maybe that will put a stopper to your... witty remarks.
me: Wouldn't it be rather counterproductive if you show the others how to dance, when I personally cannot not? So rather, ask a girl with dancing skills, and urgh... a more obvious grace, to show us how it's done, and I promise you a dance at the ball. Deal?
Snape: *smirks* Sharp tongue. Mrs. Davis, since you've been talking all the time over me, I suppose you'd be more than enthusiastic to show off your dancing skills?
Tracey: Oh... me? N-no, I could never..
Snape: Here. Now.
Tracey: Y-yes, professor...
Snape: Pay attention, Black.

Tracey looked absolutely embarrassed as she started dancing with an extremely awkward looking Snape. Then, he told everyone to start practicing until the class was over. The girls around me quickly got to their feet, while the boys looked around, not willing to dance. I tried to hide myself behind all the girls that were giggling and whispering around, trying to find a partner, when suddenly, one of the boys got up confidently and made his way to our side. All the girls started blushing and giggling, thinking they'd be picked by our real prince charming. I bit my lip as Pansy smirked and nudged me with a knowing wink. Draco, obviously, was that prince charming, who got past the girls without even looking at them, and went straight to me, with a confident trademark smirk.

Draco: Will you offer me this dance, milady?
me: *looks away* If I could dance, I would... but... uh...
Draco: No better way to learn then.
me: G-guess you're right...

With a sigh, I gingerly took his hand and slowly started dancing, me being extremely embarrassed, and him guiding and teaching me.

Draco: Nice eyes.
me: *sighs* They're pink again, right?
Draco: Of course. They seem to always be pink while I'm around. Any particular reason?
me: Um.. I don't know...
Draco: Don't you?
me: You just seem to always be around when I'm in embarrassing situations.
Draco: Then I'm one lucky fellow.
me: If you say so...

Despite being completely red, I actually got my dancing skills straightened up, thanks to Draco. Guess I'll try not to die while opening the ball...

The next day, I woke up with a single black rose on the nightstand, and a small piece of paper, on which it was written in dark green cursive

"Will you offer me this dance, milady?"

I smiled gently, knowing from who this is from, and put the rose in a glass of water. Leaving the girl's dormitory, Draco was waiting on the couch, chatting with the goons, when he spotted me and smirked, standing up to greet me.
I only kissed his cheek and whispered a soft "Yes" in his ear, as I went to eat breakfast, the smile never leaving my face that day.

The next week, after dinner, Hermione invited me to go study with her in their Common Room- sneaky sneaky-for the upcoming tests and what not.

Hermione: Why weren't you two at dinner?
Ginny: Because - oh shut up, stop laughing, you two - because they've both just been turned down by the girls they asked to the ball!
Ron: Thanks a bunch, Ginny.
Hermione: All the good-looking ones taken, Ron? Eloise Midgen starting to look quite pretty now, is she? Well, I'm sure you'll find someone somewhere who'll have you.
Ron: Hermione, Neville's right - you are a girl...
Hermione: *acidity* Oh well spotted.
Ron: Well - you can come with one of us!
Hermione: No, I can't.
Ron: Oh come on, we need partners, we're going to look really stupid if we haven't got any, everyone else has...
Hermione: *blushing* I can't come with you, because I'm already going with someone.
Ron: No, you're not! You just said that to get rid of Neville!
Hermione: Oh did I? Just because it's taken you three years to notice, Ron, doesn't mean no one else has spotted I'm a girl!
Ron: Okay, okay, we know you're a girl. That do? Will you come now?
Hermione: I've already told you! I'm going with someone else!

And she stormed off toward the girls' dormitories again.

Ron: She's lying.
Ginny: She's not.
Ron: Who is it then?
Ginny: I'm not telling you, it's her business.
Ron: Right, this is getting stupid. Ginny, you can go with Harry, and I'll just -
Ginny: *blushing* I can't. I'm going with - with Neville. He asked me when Hermione said no, and I thought... well... I'm not going to be able to go otherwise, I'm not in fourth year. I think I'll go and have dinner.
Ron: What's got into them?
me: Maybe the fact that you're insensitive pricks. That's why no girl would ever want to go dance with you.
Ron: Oh, that's right, Raven. You're a girl. A Slytherin... but still a girl.
me: Don't even try. First of, I've been asked on the first day. Secondly, I wouldn't stoop so low as to dance with someone like you or Harry, who don't know how to behave. Have a good day filled with desperation.

And with that, I followed Hermione in her room and started studying, occasionally talking about the dance and our partners or other details.

The dance came sooner than expected!
I got the bags and ran to the Gryffindor Common Room, to the girl's dormitory, to get changed together, and Draco said he'll wait in the Great Hall.
I made my hair bleach blonde like his, and my eyes emerald green, put on the Jewellery set from Narcissa, the green dress, and let Ginny do my make up, which was quite daring and confident, which I guess helped a lot.

Once we were done, Ginny went with Neville, since he waited for her in the CR, and I and Hermione timidly went to the Great Hall.

Hermione: Can you go first? It would help a lot...
me: Sure. Just, be confident. You look gorgeous and you'll have a great time with Viktor. He's a nice guy.
Hermione: Yeah... you're right... Thank you, Raven. And, you're stunning too. Malfoy better be a gentleman with you, or else...
me: *chuckles* He is, trust me... Here I go...

I slowly transcend down the stairs, the heel of my black boots clinking softly, and soon, I am greeted by a grinning Draco, dressed in black, a dark green tie, looking as handsome as ever.

Draco: You'd put any princess to shame, you know.
me: That better be true. After all, we have to steal their eyes.
Draco: You definitely will. You look stunningly beautiful, milday.
me: Thank you, Draco. You as well, look quite handsome.
Draco: Only the best for my lady.

I and Draco were first in line, then Fleur with her date, Cedric with Cho, Viktor with Hermione, and Harry with Parvati.

The whole night, we danced together, chatting, making fun of Harry's and Ron's failed attempt at asking girls out, commenting on others and what not. Even the Weird Sisters started playing, which was amazing!
I even managed to get a dance out of Snape, just as I promised him, to which he smirked.
me: I suppose there will be no point reduction, since I kept my end of the deal?
Snape: You are correct, Mrs. Black.
me: That's great then.
Snape: Seems you also learnt how to dance properly.
me: Might I say, I had a good teacher.
Snape: You're doing well, Black. Keep on being a Slytherin, and you'll finish this Tournament successfully.
me: That's what I intend. Hopefully, more visions will come up.
Snape: Don't doubt the inevitable.
me: True. Also, when I tried opening the egg... There was screeching... Like a strangled pterodactyl.
Snape: *snorts* Charming.
me: I was thinking... of any beast that might make these sounds... but the only thing that crossed my mind is yet another mythological story.
Snape: About?
me: Sirens. Or mermaids.
Snape: Do tell.
me: I know like... 2 stories. One in which the sirens would have angelic voices, to lure the sailors in the waters, and then drown them... and one in which they have terrible voices, unless underwater. Which would seem to be the case.
Snape: And with this information, what do you intend to do?
me: Maybe... put the egg underwater and see if I can hear anything useful? Or... at all?
Snape: You're definitely your mother's girl, Mrs. Black. Just as shrewd as her.
me: Thank you, sir. I appreciate it.

As the song ended, I flashed him a smile and went back to Draco and told him the idea, and Draco suggested using the Prefect's bathroom— and use this opportunity to relax as well—.

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As I said, the next evening, I went to relax in the Prefect's bathroom. The tub was huge, filled with warm water and bubbles, there were colourful lights in the water, everywhere around was golden, and there was stained glass. But one particular window was peculiar—it had a mermaid standing on a rock, with her tail in water, playing with her hair.
Sighing, I made gills on my neck. Made my eyes be like those of fish, to see clearly and not be bothered, and opened the egg. Instead of that dreadful screech, an angelic voice could be heard:

"Come seek us where our voices sound,
We cannot sing above the ground,

And while you're searching, ponder this:
We've taken what you'll sorely miss,

An hour long you'll have to look,
And to recover what we took,
But past an hour-- the prospect's black,

Too late, it's gone, it won't come back"

That's it!
With that, I ran back to the Common room and told Draco about it, trying to decipher the riddle.
me: Maybe Dumbledore will take something precious from each champion and throw it in the Black Lake, and we have to take it back?
Draco: Probably. Something extremely precious, as it says.
me: And if not taken back, it will remain there...? That's scary...
Draco: Don't worry, you'll take it back for sure, whatever it is.
me: Thanks to my Metamorphmagus ability, I can just get gills on my neck and have no problem breathing underwater.
Draco: Lucky you~
me: Think I'll encounter mermaids?
Draco: I think so. It says so in the riddle.
me: It's been a childhood dream. I've seen cartoons with the Little Mermaid. It was nice...
Draco: And now it's real.
me: I'm so lucky, aren't I?
Draco: *smirks* But of course. Nobody else is *THE* Raven Black, right?
me: Yes, Draco, you're right. Good night for now, Prince Charming.
Draco: Sweet dreams, my lady~
Surprisingly, thanks to Pansy, I managed to get in time for the 2nd task. Maybe just a bit too early, for there, around the Black Lake, was only the two of us, Cedric, and the judges. Being a freezing February morning and having to swim so early? Horror. Although... I guess I'm a bit disappointed cause Draco nor Hermione are here to encourage me. Perhaps they were too busy with their studies? Couldn't blame them, really... Or maybe it's simply too early for either of them? At least Pansy is here to encourage me and help me forget about the bad thoughts that keep passing through my mind. It's okay... I can do it... now though... I have to think what is it that could have been taken from me, so I know what to look for?! Soon enough everyone arrived— even a late Harry— and we could start our task.

Ludo: Well, all our champions are ready for the second task, which will start on my whistle. They have precisely an hour to recover what has been taken from them. On the count of three, then. One... two... three!

And with this signal, we jumped in the ice cold water and went our different ways. Viktor transformed his head into a shark head, Fleur and Cedric used Bubble head, Harry seems to be really spazzic so I don't really know...

And me? I just transformed myself into a mermaid, just like in my childhood dreams, after I watched the Little Mermaid. Just, a better colours palette~

After a lot of swimming and trying not to get creeped out by the bottom of the lake and its spooky environment, I started hearing angelic voices, singing the exact lyrics I heard from the egg, which were obviously guiding me to the treasure I must seek.

Having arrived to a clear sight, I was shocked to see that the reason why Draco, Hermione and Ron weren't there before the task, was because they were being trapped here, unconscious and waiting to be rescued, tied by a roped huge rock. Not nice, Dumbledore...

Harry was there too, trying to rescue Ron, when all of a sudden, Cedric passed by us, showing us that time was passing, and that we must hurry.

Knowing that Hermione was to be rescued by Viktor, I take out my wand, burn the rope around Draco's legs, and use a spell to get me to the surface faster.

As soon as we hit the surface and breathe fresh air, I transform myself back, and check if he's okay and apologise. He started chuckling faintly and clinged on me, as I took him to a safe place, as Pansy, Emma and Jessie put warm towels on us (still shivering though...)

And in the end, all was well, Cedric was declared 1st place, Harry 2nd and I 3rd, and we could continue with our daily routine, knowing that all 3 of us are tied for the 1st place in the next task, on June 24th.

Joy.

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Soon enough though, Hermione came to me and told me in private what they have discussed with...
Sirius about Snape and Karkaroff, about Barty Crouch's son, Death Eaters and what not. It wasn't a surprise really, but the fact that I didn't get to see him or talk to him is quite irritating. Y'know... because I'm his daughter, not them, and yet, I haven't had the occasion to talk to him this year. Grr...

Also... poor Hermione, after Rita's article with her Love Triangle consisting of Harry-Hermione-Viktor, many fangirls have been sending her death threats and dangerous stuff... and her hands got burned by some acid substance from an envelope. Guess someone won't receive mail for awhile....

Snape told me about the whole Barty Crouch problem, since he disappeared and stunned Krum and all... It's quite peculiar, but since he mentioned Bertha and his son... maybe. Bertha is dead and his son might just not be dead, as they say?

He told me about Karkaroff's and Barty Crouch Jr.'s trials, which was quite interesting and sad. I have been told Snape was a Death Eater once, turned double agent, and I have no reason to mistrust him. After all, he had helped me train quite a lot too. Especially in Occlumency and Legilimency.

I also told him about my latest vision I had last night, about Voldemort, who got a letter. Snape just nodded and kept on pondering our next move.

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Just like a thought, June came, and the 3rd task was tonight. The 5 champions have been brought to a nice and cozy room, where the families were to encourage them and what not.

Obviously, Sirius couldn't be there, for neither me nor Harry. But Ron's mum and elder brother were there to support him. As for me? Narcissa, bless her soul, with a shy yet motherly grin on her face, was waiting for an embrace.

It was quite touching, might I say, and it really helped boost my moral and keep a positive thinking, despite the bad things that have been happening. I swear, I owe her so much..

Ludo: Ladies and gentlemen, in five minutes' time, I will be asking you to make your way down to the Quidditch field for the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament. Will the champions please follow Mr. Bagman down to the stadium now...

Hagrid, Professor Moody, Professor McGonagall, and Professor Flitwick came walking into the stadium and approached Bagman and the champions. They were wearing large, red, luminous stars on their hats, all except Hagrid, who had his on the back of his moleskin vest.

McGonagall: We are going to be patrolling the outside of the maze. If you get into difficulty, and wish to be rescued, send red sparks into the air, and one of us will come and get you, do you understand?

Ludo: Off you go, then!

"Good luck, Harry, Raven," Hagrid whispered, and the four of them walked away in different directions, to station themselves around the maze. Bagman now pointed his wand at his throat, muttered, "Sonorus," and his magically magnified voice echoed into the stands.

Ludo: Ladies and gentlemen, the third and final task of the Triwizard Tournament is about to begin! Let me remind you how the points currently stand! Tied in first place, with eighty-five points each - Mr. Cedric Diggory and Mr. Harry Potter, Miss. Raven Black of Hogwarts
In second place, with eighty points - Mr. Viktor Krum, of Durmstrang Institute! And in third place - Miss Fleur Delacour, of Beauxbatons Academy! ...So... on my whistle, Raven, Harry and Cedric! Three - two - one -!!

As the whistle blew, the 3 of us went in the Maze, and went our separate ways. I lit up my wand and started walking at a rapid pace so I wouldn't waste time. I used my wand as a compass, got easily rid of a boggart and one of Hagrid's explosive beasts. Screams of both Fleur and Cedric could be heard close from where I was, but I didn't want to concern myself with them. I have my own task to win... If my vision won't come true. And, to my luck, I met a sphinx who told me I was near the cup.

Sphinx: You are very near your goal. The quickest way is past me.
me: Perfect. I shall be answering your riddle then.
Sphinx: Great. Answer on your first guess - I let you pass. Answer wrongly - I attack. Remain silent - I will let you walk away from me unscathed.
me: Seems fair. Can I hear the riddle?

The sphinx sat down upon her hind legs, in the very middle of the path, and recited:

"First think of the person who lives in disguise,
Who deals in secrets and tells naught but lies.
Next, tell me what's always the last thing to mend,
The middle of middle and end of the end?
And finally give me the sound often heard
During the search for a hard-to-find word.
Now string them together, and answer me this,
Which creature would you be unwilling to kiss?"

me: Nice one... Let's see... All the clues add up to a creature I wouldn't want to kiss... A person in disguise, a spy, obviously. The last thing to mend, Er... no idea... 'middle of middle'... the last bit again? 'The sound often heard during the search for a hard-to-find word... Er's a sound! Spy... er... Spider! A creature I wouldn't want to kiss... a spider! Gosh, definitely, they're gross.

The sphinx smiled more broadly. She got up, stretched her front legs, and then moved aside for him to pass.

me: Thank you!

I started running in the direction... my wand was pointing, and as soon as I spotted the gleaming of the Cup, Harry and Cedric were there too.
After a lot of arguing and a potential hedge swallowing us, we agreed to take it together.
All would have been well... if the Cup didn't prove to be a Portkey!

"Where are we?" Harry inquired.

Cedric shook his head. He got up, pulled Harry to his feet, and they looked around.

These weren't the Hogwarts grounds completely; even the mountains surrounding the castle were...
gone. These is a dark and overgrown graveyard; the black outline of a small church was visible beyond a large yew tree. A hill rose above them to their left.

me: Umm... we're gonna die.
Cedric: Did anyone tell you the cup was a Portkey?
Harry: Nope... Is this supposed to be part of the task?
Cedric: I dunno. Wands out, d'you reckon?
me: This is bad... so bad... You've no idea...
Harry: Shh... Someone's coming.

Whoever it was, he was short, and wearing a hooded cloak pulled up over his head to obscure his face. The thing in the person's arms looked like a baby... No way-Harry lowered his wand slightly and glanced sideways at Cedric, who shot him a quizzical look. They both turned back to watch the approaching figure. It stopped beside a towering marble headstone, only six feet from us. For a second, us and the short figure simply looked at one another.

All of a sudden, both my and Harry's scars started hurting so much, that we fell on the ground, clutching the said scar, and we heard a high, cold voice say, "Kill the spare." and the familiar sound of a second voice, screeched the words to the night: "Avada Kedavra!"

As soon as the green spell hit Cedric, he was on the ground, dead. And, without remorse, the casting person revealed himself to be none other than Wormtail. He slammed Harry on Tom Riddle's grave stone, and me on a nearby tree, making sure I won't interfere. He wouldn't dare kill me, would he? The short man in the cloak had put down his bundle, lit his wand, and was dragging Harry toward the marble headstone. Harry saw the name upon it flickering in the wandlight before he was forced around and slammed against it.

The liquid in the cauldron seemed to heat very fast. The surface began not only to bubble, but to send out fiery sparks, as though it were on fire. Steam was thickening, blurring the outline of Wormtail tending the fire. The movements beneath the robes became more agitated.

"Hurry!"

The whole surface of the water was alight with sparks now. It might have been encrusted with diamonds.

"It is ready, Master."

"Now..." said the cold voice.

Wormtail pulled open the robes on the ground, revealing what was inside them. It was as though Wormtail had flipped over a stone and revealed something ugly, slimy, and blind - but worse, a hundred times worse. The thing Wormtail had been carrying had the shape of a crouched human child. Its arms and legs were thin and feeble, and its face - no child alive ever had a face like that - flat and snakelike, with gleaming red eyes. It was Voldemort.

The thing seemed almost helpless; it raised its thin arms, put them around Wormtail's neck, and Wormtail lifted it. And then Wormtail lowered the creature into the cauldron; there was a hiss, and it vanished below the surface. The scar burning almost past endurance, please... let it drown....
Wormtail was speaking. His voice shook; he seemed frightened beyond his wits. He raised his wand, closed his eyes, and spoke to the night.

"Bone of the father, unknowingly given, you will renew your son!"

A fine trickle of dust rose into the air at Wormtail's command and fell softly into the cauldron. The diamond surface of the water broke and hissed; it sent sparks in all directions and turned a vivid, poisonous-looking blue. Wormtail was whimpering. He pulled a long, thin, shining silver dagger from inside his cloak. His voice broke into petrified sobs.

"Flesh - of the servant - w-willingly given - you will - revive - your master."

He stretched his right hand out in front of him - the hand with the missing finger. He gripped the dagger very tightly in his left hand and swung it upward. And he cut his hand off... Wormtail was gasping and moaning with agony.

"B-blood of the enemy...forcibly taken...you will...resurrect your foe."

He cut Harry's arm and let the blood from the knife drip in the cauldron.

The liquid within turned, instantly, a blinding white. Wormtail, his job done, dropped to his knees beside the cauldron, then slumped sideways and lay on the ground, cradling the bleeding stump of his arm, gasping and sobbing.

The cauldron was simmering, sending its diamond sparks in all directions, so blindingly bright that it turned all else to velvety blackness. Nothing happened.... Suddenly, the sparks emanating from the cauldron were extinguished. A surge of white steam billowed thickly from the cauldron instead, obliterating everything in front of us.

Lord Voldemort rose once more.
Voldemort slipped one of those unnaturally long-fingered hands into a deep pocket and drew out a wand. He caressed it gently too; and then he raised it, and pointed it at Wormtail, who was lifted off the ground and thrown against the headstone where Harry was tied; he fell to the foot of it and lay there, crumpled up and crying. Voldemort turned his scarlet eyes upon Harry, laughing a high, cold, mirthless laugh.

**Wormtail:** My Lord... my Lord... you promised... you did promise...

**Voldy:** Hold out your arm.

**Wormtail:** Oh Master... thank you, Master...

He extended the bleeding stump, but Voldemort laughed again.

**Voldy:** The other arm, Wormtail.

**WT:** Master, please... please...

Voldemort bent down and pulled out Wormtail's left arm; he forced the sleeve of Wormtail's robes up past his elbow, exposing his Mark.

**Voldy:** It is back... they will all have noticed it... and now, we shall see... now we shall know...

He pressed his long white forefinger to the brand on Wormtail's arm, and I could feel a searing pain radiating from the neck scar. It was obvious Harry could feel the same electrifying feeling, by the sound of his screams.

**Voldy:** How many will be brave enough to return when they feel it? And how many will be foolish enough to stay away? You stand, Harry Potter, upon the remains of my late father, a Muggle and a fool... very like your dear mother. But they both had their uses, did they not? Your mother died to defend you as a child... and I killed my father, and see how useful he has proved himself, in death...

**Me:** Are you growing sentimental?

**Voldy:** You see, dear Black, that house upon the hillside? My father lived there. My mother, a witch who lived here in this village, fell in love with him. But he abandoned her when she told him what she was... He didn't like magic, my father... He left her and returned to his Muggle parents before I was even born, she died giving birth to me, leaving me to be raised in a Muggle orphanage... but I vowed to find him... I revenged myself upon him, that fool who gave...
me his name...Tom Riddle....
Me:*I suppose, we all have this pain to live with, but the blood family is never one we can
choose, but always brings you pain. The true family is the one you choose.
Voldy:*smirks* Such strong feelings... if it is as you say, then look, my true family returns....

He extended me his hand, so I could raise from the ground, guiding me to where all the Death
Eaters gathered, fearfully.
All of them were hooded and masked. And one by one they moved forward... slowly, cautiously, as
though they could hardly believe their eyes Voldemort stood in silence, waiting for them. Then one
of the Death Eaters fell to his knees, crawled toward Voldemort and kissed the hem of his black
robes.

Guy1: Master...Master...

The Death Eaters behind him did the same; each of them approaching Voldemort on his knees and
kissing his robes, before backing away and standing up, forming a silent circle, which enclosed
Tom Riddle's grave

Me:*scoffs* Are these cowards really what you would call a loyal family? I'm disappointed...
Voldy: Their loyalty shall be proved today and in the future quests that are to come. Welcome,
Death Eaters. Thirteen years... thirteen years since last we met. Yet you answer my call as
though it were yesterday, we are still united under the Dark Mark, then! Or are we?

He put back his terrible face and sniffed, his slit-like nostrils widening.

Voldy: I smell guilt. There is a stench or guilt upon the air.
Me: How can you smell without a nose?
Voldy: Their guilt is so intense, it is felt without trouble.
Me: You're not wrong...
Voldy: I see you all, whole and healthy, with your powers intact - such prompt
appearances! And I ask myself... why did this band of wizards never come to the aid of their
master, to whom they swore eternal loyalty?
Me: Because they are a bunch of cowards with no faith in their master?
Voldy: Indeed, right you are, for they must have believed me broken, they thought I was gone.
They slipped back among my enemies, and they pleaded innocence, and ignorance, and
bewitchment... And then I ask myself, but how could they have believed I would not rise
again? They, who knew the steps I took, long ago, to guard myself against mortal death?
They, who had seen proofs of the immensity of my power in the times when I was mightier
than any wizard living? And I answer myself, perhaps they believed a still greater power
could exist, one that could vanquish even Lord Voldemort... perhaps they now pay allegiance
to another... perhaps that champion of commoners, of Mudbloods and Muggles, Albus
Dumbledore?
Me: Dumbledore is nothing more than an abusive bastards who finds himself omniscient.
Voldy: Dumbledore... It is a disappointment to me... I confess myself disappointed....

One of the men suddenly flung himself forward, breaking the circle. Trembling from head to foot,
he collapsed at Voldemort's feet.

Guy: Master! Master, forgive me! Forgive us all!

Voldemort began to laugh. He raised his wand.
"Crucio!"

The Death Eater on the ground writhed and shrieked. The tortured Death Eater lay flat upon the ground, gasping.

Voldy: Get up, Avery. Stand up. You ask for forgiveness? I do not forgive. I do not forget. Thirteen long years...I want thirteen years' repayment before I forgive you. Wormtail here has paid some of his debt already, have you not, Wormtail?...You returned to me, not out of loyalty, but out of fear of your old friends. You deserve this pain, Wormtail. You know that, don't you?
WT: Yes, Master...please. Master...please...
Voldy: Yet you helped return me to my body. Worthless and traitorous as you are, you helped me...and Lord Voldemort rewards his helpers....

Voldemort raised his wand again and whirled it through the air. A streak of what looked like molten silver hung shining in the wand's wake. Momentarily shapeless, it writhed and then formed itself into a gleaming replica of a human hand, bright as moonlight, which soared downward and fixed itself upon Wormtail's bleeding wrist.

Wormtail's sobbing stopped abruptly. His breathing harsh and ragged, he raised his head and stared in disbelief at the silver hand, now attached seamlessly to his arm, as though he were wearing a dazzling glove. He flexed the shining fingers, then, trembling, picked up a small twig on the ground and crushed it into powder.

Me: I believe you to be too merciful...
WT: My Lord, Master...it is beautiful...thank you...thank you....
Voldy: May your loyalty never waver again, Wormtail.
WT: No, my Lord...never, my Lord...
Me: Lying rat...You couldn't possibly believe him, do you?
Voldy: *smirks* Fear makes people loyal.
Me: That's...not wrong.

Wormtail stood up and took his place in the circle, staring at his powerful new hand, his face still shining with tears. Voldemort now approached the man on Wormtail's right.

Voldy: Lucius, my slithery friend, I am told that you have not renounced the old ways, though to the world you present a respectable face. You are still ready to take the lead in a spot of Muggle-torture, I believe? Yet you never tried to find me, Lucius....Your exploits at the Quidditch World Cup were fun, I daresay...but might not your energies have been better directed toward finding and aiding your master?
Lucius: My Lord, I was constantly on alert. Had there been any sign from you, any whisper of your whereabouts, I would have been at your side immediately, nothing could have prevented me -
Voldy: And yet you ran from my Mark, when a faithful Death Eater sent it into the sky last summer? Yes, I know all about that, Lucius....You have disappointed me...I expect more faithful service in the future.
Lucius: Of course, my Lord, of course....You are merciful, thank you....
Voldy: The Lestranges should stand here. But they are entombed in Azkaban. They were faithful. They went to Azkaban rather than renounce me....When Azkaban is broken open, the Lestranges will be honored beyond their dreams. The dementors will join us...they are
our natural allies...we will recall the banished giants...I shall have all my devoted servants returned to me, and an army of creatures whom all fear....

Me:It is the end of all hope for Dumbledore and his supporters.

Voldy:Macnair...destroying dangerous beasts for the Ministry of Magic now, Wormtail tells me? You shall have better victims than that soon, Macnair. Lord Voldemort will provide....

Macnair:Thank you, Master...thank you.

Voldy:And here-we have Crabbe...you will do better this time, will you not, Crabbe? And you, Goyle?

Them:Yes, Master...We will, Master....

me:This is no different from their children's behaviour at all. Same lack of any grey matter.

Voldy:Those two are pitiful, but too dumb to desert me. The same goes for you, Nott.

Nott:My Lord, I prostrate myself before you, I am your most faithful -

Voldy:That will do. And here we have six missing Death Eaters...three dead in my service. One, too cowardly to return...he will pay. One, who I believe has left me forever...he will be killed, of course...and one, who remains my most faithful servant, and who has already reentered my service. He is at Hogwarts, that faithful servant, and it was through his efforts that our young friend arrived here tonight....but, we have two guest of honour today. They shall be you, my dear, Raven Black, our youngest and most eager follower here, and Harry Potter who has kindly joined us for my rebirthing party. One might go so far as to call him my guest of honor.

There was a silence. Then the Death Eater to the right of Wormtail stepped forward, and Lucius Malfoy's voice spoke from under the mask.

Lucius:Master, we crave to know...we beg you to tell us...how you have achieved this...this miracle...how you managed to return to us....

Voldy:Ah, what a story it is, Lucius. And it begins - and ends - with my young friend here. I hold you no ill-will, dear Raven, since you proved yourself different throughout these years that I've watched over you.

He walked lazily over to stand next to Harry, so that the eyes of the whole circle were upon the two of them. The snake continued to circle.

Voldy:You know, of course, that they have called these children, my downfall? You all know that on the night I lost my powers and my body, I tried to kill them. Their mothers died in the attempt to save him - and unwittingly provided them with a protection I admit I had not foreseen.... I could not touch them.

Voldemort raised one of his long white fingers and put it very close to Harry's cheek.

Voldy:His mother left upon him the traces of her sacrifice.... This is old magic, I should have remembered it, I was foolish to overlook it...but no matter. I can touch him now.

Harry started screaming in pain, as He touched his scar. Voldemort laughed softly in his ear, then took the finger away and continued addressing the Death Eaters.

Voldy:I miscalculated, my friends, I admit it. My curse was deflected by the woman's foolish sacrifice, and it rebounded upon myself. Aaaah... pain beyond pain, my friends; nothing could have prepared me for it. I was ripped from my body, I was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost... but still, I was alive. What I was, even I do not know... I, who have gone
further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality. You know my goal - to conquer death. And now, I was tested, and it appeared that one or more of my experiments had worked...for I had not been killed, though the curse should have done it. Nevertheless, I was as powerless as the weakest creature alive, and without the means to help myself...for I had no body, and every spell that might have helped me required the use of a wand....I remember only forcing myself, sleeplessly, endlessly, second by second, to exist....I settled in a faraway place, in a forest, and I waited....Surely, one of my faithful Death Eaters would try and find me...one of them would come and perform the magic I could not, to restore me to a body..., but I waited in vain....

Me: Ahh... you sure do love your monologues. Do you think they actually listen to a word you say? Or just tremble in fear at your very sight? Voldy: *soft laugh* Is the power overwhelming them so? Me: I think it is.

The shiver ran once more around the circle of listening Death Eaters. Voldemort let the silence spiral horribly before continuing.

Voldy: Black... you have proven to be more useful and worthy of your name and status than any other fool I have recruited thus far. Me: You have my thanks. Voldy: You have officially been welcomed into my close group of loyal followers, if you would accept it. Me: I believe refusing means my imminent death, which would be quite inconvenient, for, unlike those idiotic Gryffindors, I value my life more than a Poker chip. Voldy: A wise decision, as expected. Me: I vow to be your loyal follower, no matter the cost, whatever the task at hand might be.

I lift my sleeve up to reveal my porcelain white skin. He took my hand softly, and with a triumphant smirk, inked my skin with the Dark Mark. I tried to control my breathing, as I felt a mild panic surge through my body. Did I do the right thing? Well... not like I had a choice in the matter. I don't want to die. But how will I hide this from everyone? Long sleeves are great but... At least I'm anaemic. Snape... Snape... He's the only one who can know. And Narcissa. Only they must know.

He grinned victoriously, having conquered yet another powerful supporter, and left me in the hands of Lucius, averting his gaze toward Potter. Voldemort smiled his terrible smile, his red eyes blank and pitiless and moved slowly forward and turned to face Harry, raising his wand.

"Crucio!"

His screams of pain echoed throughout the graveyard, along with His laughs.

Voldy: You see, I think, how foolish it was to suppose that this boy could ever have been stronger than me. But I want there to be no mistake in anybody's mind. Harry Potter escaped
me by a lucky chance. And I am now going to prove my power by killing him, here and now, in front of you all, when there is no Dumbledore to help him, and no mother to die for him. I will give him his chance. He will be allowed to fight, and you will be left in no doubt which of us is the stronger. Just a little longer, Nagini. Stay with your new caretaker.

Me: Nagini, come to me, please.
Voldy: Now untie him, Wormtail, and give him back his wand.

Wormtail approached Harry, who scrambled to find his feet, to support his own weight before the ropes were untied. Wormtail raised his new silver hand, pulled out the wad of material gagging Harry, and then, with one swipe, cut through the bonds tying Harry to the gravestone. Wormtail walked out of the circle to the place where Cedric’s body lay and returned with Harry’s wand, which he thrust roughly into his hand without looking at him. Then Wormtail resumed his place in the circle of watching Death Eaters.

Voldy: You have been taught how to duel. Harry Potter? We bow to each other. Harry, come, the niceties must be observed....Dumbledore would like you to show manners....Bow to death, Harry....

Me: Ahem... isn't this a little too...
Lucius: *whispers* I'd not question his decisions if I were you, Black.

Me: ... Y-Yeah... right. ...

The Death Eaters were laughing again. Voldemort's lipless mouth was smiling. Harry did not bow.

Me: Potter, just do as he says!
Voldy: I said, bow!

Voldemort said, raising his wand - and Harry tried to resist, but his spine curve as though a huge, invisible hand were bending him ruthlessly forward, and the Death Eaters laughed harder than ever. Fake mirth. That's all they'll ever know.

The Cruciatus curse is truly remarkable...

Voldy: Very good. And now you face me, like a man... straight-backed and proud, the way your father died.... And now - we duel.

Me: He is a reckless child, not his father...
Lucius: *puts his hand on my shoulder* You'll get used to it.

Voldemort raised his wand, hitting Harry again with the Cruciatus Curse. The pain was so intense, that he was screaming more loudly than he'd ever screamed in his life. And then it stopped. Harry rolled over and scrambled to his feet; he was shaking as uncontrollably.

Voldy: A little break, a little pause... That hurt, didn't it. Harry? You don't want me to do that again, do you?

Harry didn't answer.
He's not going to obey.
He's going to die.
Like Cedric.
I... can't let that happen...
Ever.
Never.

Voldy: I asked you whether you want me to do that again. Answer me! Imperio!
"I WON'T!"

That voice was strong and loud, booming through the graveyard. But how did he manage to resist through the Curse?!

Voldy: You won't? You won't say no? Harry, obedience is a virtue I need to teach you before you die... Perhaps another little dose of pain?

This time he was prepared, and hid behind a tomb.

Voldy: We are not playing hide-and-seek, Harry. You cannot hide from me. Does this mean you are tired of our duel? Does this mean that you would prefer me to finish it now, Harry? Come out, Harry... come out and play, then... it will be quick... it might even be painless... I would not know... I have never died....

Before Voldemort could stick his snakelike face around the headstone. Harry stood up... he gripped his wand tightly in his hand, thrust it out in front of him, and threw himself around the headstone, facing Voldemort.

Voldemort was ready. As Harry shouted, "Expelliarmus!" Voldemort cried, "Avada Kedavra!"

A jet of green light issued from Voldemort's wand just as a jet of red light blasted from Harry's - they met in midair - and suddenly Harry's wand was vibrating as though an electric charge were surging through it.

He and Voldemort were both being raised into the air.

The golden thread connecting Harry and Voldemort splintered; though the wands remained connected.

And then an unearthly and beautiful sound filled the air... It was coming from every thread of the light-spun web vibrating around Harry and Voldemort. A phoenix song.

That's a sign. A sign of hope.

Me: Don't break the connection!
Harry: I know that! The music...
Me: This is your hope!

I ran to him, and hugged him from behind, holding his wand-hand as tight as possible, as he was struggling with it.

At once, Voldemort's wand began to emit echoing screams of pain... then - Voldemort's red eyes widened with shock - a dense, smoky hand flew out of the tip of it and vanished... the ghost of the hand he had made Wormtail... more shouts of pain... and then something much larger began to blossom from Voldemort's wand tip, a great, grayish something, that looked as though it were made of the solidest, densest smoke... It was a head... now a chest and arms... the torso of Cedric Diggory?!

It emerged in its entirety from the end of Voldemort's wand, as though it were squeezing itself out of a very narrow tunnel... and this shade of Cedric stood up, and looked up and down the golden thread of light, and spoke.

Me: Cedric?!
Cedric: Hold on, you two.
Next, was the ghost of the old man I saw in my nightmare, at the beginning of the year.

**Old man:** He was a real wizard, then? Killed me, that one did.... You fight him, kids...

The shadow of Bertha Jorkins surveyed the battle before her with wide eyes.

**Bertha:** Don't let go, now! Don't let him get you, Harry, Raven! - don't let go!

She and the other two shadowy figures began to pace around the inner walls of the golden web, while the Death Eaters flitted around the outside of it... and Voldemort's dead victims whispered as they circled the duelers, whispered words of encouragement to us, and hissed words we couldn't hear to Voldemort.

The smoky shadow of a tall man with untidy hair fell to the ground.

**Me:** Prongs?!

**James:** Your mothers are coming... They want to see you... it will be all right... hold on.... You can do it.

And the smoky, shadowy form of Lily Potter blossomed from the end of Voldemort's wand, fell to the ground, and straightened like her husband. She walked close to us, looking down at us, and she spoke in the same distant, echoing voice as the others, but quietly, so that Voldemort, his face now livid with fear as his victims prowled around him, could not hear.... Her ghost was followed by my own mother's one, who was muttering what sounded like Japanese curses, while glaring at Voldemort.

**Lily:** When the connection is broken, we will linger for only moments... but we will give you time... you must get to the Portkey, it will return you to Hogwarts... do you understand, Harry?

**Harry:** Yes...

**Yami:** You guys better beat the hell outta this guy and bring him down! He has to pay for everything he's done to us!

**Me:** *nods* Got it.

**Cedric:** Raven.. take my body back, will you? Take my body back to my parents..

**Raven:** I will. I promise.

**James:** Do it now, be ready to run... do it now....

**Harry:** NOW!

He pulled his wand upward, and the golden thread broke; the cage of light vanished, the phoenix song died - but the shadowy figures of Voldemort's victims did not disappear - they were closing in upon Voldemort, shielding us from his gaze.

Harry got to his body, as Voldemort kept yelling for his followers to stun us, so he could kill us, but to no avail, for I kept blocking and parrying their attacks with ease.

**Harry:** Raven, it's time!

**Me:** Let's go, fast!

**Voldy:** Stand aside! I will kill him! He is mine!

Harry's hand had closed on Cedric's wrist; one tombstone stood between us and Voldemort. Just before he could say another spell, Harry Accio'd the Portkey Cup, and we vanished back. Back where we belong.

*Hogwarts.*
The weird sensation of being teleported by a Portkey was still confusing, and the screams, cheers and other noises weren't helping at all.

Raven! Harry!

As I open my eyes, I see the eyes of Dumbledore and Snape, hovering over us. The dark shadows of a crowd of people pressed in around them, pushing nearer.

Harry let go of the cup, but he clutched Cedric to him even more tightly. He raised his free hand and seized Dumbledore's wrist, while Dumbledore's face swam in and out of focus.

Me: This is bad... very bad...

Harry: He's back. He's back. Voldemort.


Me: Cedric's dead! Voldemort...

"He's dead!" "He's dead!" "Cedric Diggory! Dead!"

Dumbledore: Harry, you can't help him now. It's over. Let go.

Harry: He wanted me to bring him back. He wanted me to bring him back to his parents....

Me: And that's what we did.

Dumbledore: That's right. Harry... just let go now....

Dumbledore bent down, and with extraordinary strength for a man so old and thin, raised Harry from the ground and set him on his feet. I, on the other hand, looked calm, but a panic attack was horribly affecting me, and all I could think of was jump on Snape and drag him away from all the ruckus. A quiet, dimly-lit classroom, far away from everything.

Snape: What happened?

Me: * takes a deep breathe * So... um.... the Cup was a Portkey... I suppose that wasn't supposed to happen... someone from the inside... someone who wanted both I and Harry to be killed. Took the 3 of us to a graveyard... and Voldemort was there...

Snape: Worse than we feared.

Me: Pettigrew killed Cedric. Made a potion... got his body back....

Snape: The Dark Lord got his body back?

Me: Positive. And the Death Eaters came... and then we dueled... well, more like, Potter dueled. I was... thankfully ignored or... pushed aside for other reasons that I will tell later... but...

Snape: You dueled with the Dark Lord?

Me: Yes yes... Got away... Harry's wand... did something funny... I saw... Cedric's spirit... shadow... whatever. And an old man's... Bertha Jorkins... Lily and James... and...

Snape: And Yami?

Me: . . . And Yami.

Snape: I see...

Me: He took a bone from his father's grave, and Wormtail's right hand, and Harry's blood...

Snape: And the Death Eaters returned.

Me: Yes. Avery, Lucius, Crabbe, Goyle, Nott... Loads of them that I don't know of. There's a Death Eater here who put our names in the Goblet of Fire, they made sure we got through to the end... Erh-ghmm... N- No way...

Snape: What is it?
Me: Moody...
Snape: Alastor Moody may look evil, but he is a top class Auror.
Me: No... No... That's cannot be the Moody you guys know...
Snape: Are you absolutely positive of this?
Me: *bites my lip* Absolutely certain.
Snape: So be it. Let's inform Dumbledore about this.

With that, with the slightest glint of worry in his eyes, he grabbed my wrist and dragged me to Dumbledore, and went to where Harry was with the imposter.

"Stupefy!" There was a blinding flash of red light, and with a great splintering and crashing, the door of Moody's office was blasted apart -

Moody was thrown backward onto the office floor. Harry, still staring at the place where Moody's face had been, saw Albus Dumbledore, Professor Snape, and Professor McGonagall looking back at him.
The look upon Dumbledore's face as he stared down at the unconscious form of Mad-Eye Moody was more terrible than imagined. There was no benign smile upon Dumbledore's face, no twinkle in the eyes behind the spectacles. There was cold fury in every line of the ancient face; a sense of power radiated from Dumbledore as though he were giving off burning heat.
And Snape is known for his glares that make you shrink under the ground in fear.

Dumbledore stepped into the office, placed a foot underneath Moody's unconscious body, and kicked him over onto his back, so that his face was visible. Snape followed him, looking into the Foe-Glass, where his own face was still visible, glaring into the room. Professor McGonagall went straight to Harry.

McGonagall: Come along, Potter. Come along... hospital wing...
Dumbledore: No.
McGonagall: Dumbledore, he ought to - look at him - he's been through enough tonight -
Dumbledore: He will stay, Minerva, because he needs to understand. Understanding is the first step to acceptance, and only with acceptance can there be recovery. He needs to know who has put him through the ordeal he has suffered tonight, and why.

Me: So it is as I feared. Again.
Harry: Moody... How can it have been Moody?
Me: This is not Alastor Moody.
Dumbledore: You have never known Alastor Moody. The real Moody would not have removed you from my sight after what happened tonight. The moment he took you, I knew - and I followed.
Me: And a Seer's suspicion is never wrong.

Dumbledore bent down over Moody's limp form and put a hand inside his robes. He pulled out Moody's hip flask and a set of keys on a ring. Then he turned to Professors McGonagall and Snape.

Dumbledore: Severus, please fetch me the strongest Truth Potion you possess. Minerva, go down to the kitchens and bring up the house-elf called Winky. Raven, kindly go down to Hagrid's house, where you will find a large black dog sitting in the pumpkin patch. Take the dog up to my office, tell him I will be with him shortly, then come back here.

Me: A - Are you sure it's okay?
Dumbledore: *nods* Go, my child.
I wasn't proud of my lack of athletic skills, but I did my best to sprint to the location of Hagrid's hut, where the 'dog' kept pacing around.

Me: Look uhm... I suggest you follow me... Dumbledore's orders. Don't worry, everything is... just fine...

He obediently ran to my side and nuzzled my hand to pet him, but I couldn't bring myself... to touch him... I... can't...
I awkwardly petted his head twice, then told him to follow me, as I ran to Dumbledore's office.

Me: Okay um... I have to go... I urhm... Have to see how Snape's most powerful Truth potion works and urhm... yeah... s-stay here, please.

Ignoring his whines, I ran back to the 'crime scene', just to see that Snape had returned and McGonagall had with Winky at her heels.

Snape: Crouch! Barty Crouch!
McGonagall: Good heavens.
Me: Did I just hear Barty Crouch?

Filthy, disheveled, Winky peered around Snape's legs. Her mouth opened wide and she let out a piercing shriek.

Winky: Master Barty, Master Barty, what is you doing here?

She flung herself forward onto the young man's chest.

Winky: You is killed him! You is killed him! You is killed Master's son!
Dumbledore: He is simply Stunned, Winky. Step aside, please. Severus, you have the potion?

Snape handed Dumbledore a small glass bottle of completely clear liquid: the Veritaserum. Dumbledore got up, bent over the man on the floor, forced the man's mouth open and poured three drops inside it. Then he pointed his wand at the man's chest and said, "Ennervate."

Crouch's son opened his eyes. His face was slack, his gaze unfocused. Dumbledore knelt before him, so that their faces were level.

Dumbledore: Can you hear me?
Barty: Yes.
Dumbledore: I would like you to tell us how you came to be here. How did you escape from Azkaban?
Barty: My mother saved me. She knew she was dying. She persuaded my father to rescue me as a last favor to her. He loved her as he had never loved me. He agreed. They came to visit me. They gave me a draft of Polyjuice Potion containing one of my mother's hairs. She took a draft of Polyjuice Potion containing one of my hairs. We took on each other's appearance. Winky: Say no more. Master Barty, say no more, you is getting your father into trouble!
Barty: The dementors are blind. They sensed one healthy, one dying person entering Azkaban. They sensed one healthy, one dying person leaving it. She was careful to drink Polyjuice Potion until the end. She was buried under my name and bearing my appearance. Everyone believed her to be me.
Dumbledore: And what did your father do with you, when he had got you home?
Barty: Staged my mother's death. A quiet, private funeral. That grave is empty. The house-elf nursed me back to health. Then I had to be concealed. I had to be controlled. My father had to use a number of spells to subdue me. When I had recovered my strength, I thought only of finding my master...of returning to his service.
Dumbledore: How did your father subdue you?
Barty: The Imperius Curse. I was under my father's control. I was forced to wear an Invisibility Cloak day and night. I was always with the house-elf. She was my keeper and caretaker. She persuaded my father to give me occasional treats.
Winky: Master Barty, Master Barty. You isn't ought to tell them, we is getting in trouble....
Dumbledore: Did anybody ever discover that you were still alive? Did anyone know except your father and the house-elf?

Barty: A witch in my father's office. Bertha Jorkins. She came to the house with papers for my father's signature. Winky showed her inside and returned to the kitchen, to me. But Bertha Jorkins heard Winky talking to me. She came to investigate. She heard enough to guess who was hiding under the Invisibility Cloak. She confronted him.
Dumbledore: Tell me about the Quidditch World Cup.
Barty: Winky talked my father into it. She spent months persuading him. I had not left the house for years. I had loved Quidditch. He agreed in the end. It was carefully planned. My father led me and Winky up to the Top Box early in the day. Winky was to say that she was saving a seat for my father. I was to sit there, invisible. When everyone had left the box, we would emerge. Winky would appear to be alone. I managed to steal a wand.

Dumbledore: So you took the wand and what did you do with it?
Barty: We went back to the tent. Then we heard them. We heard the Death Eaters. The ones who had never been to Azkaban. The ones who had never suffered for my master. They had turned their back. They did not. Winky was afraid to see me so angry. She used her own brand of magic to bind me to her. She pulled me from the tent, pulled me into the forest, away from the Death Eaters. I used the stolen wand to cast the Dark Mark into the sky. Ministry wizards arrived. When Winky was discovered, my father knew I must be nearby. Now it was just Father and I, alone in the house. And then...and then... My master came for me... He arrived at our house late one night in the arms of his servant Wormtail. My master had found out that I was still alive. He had captured Bertha Jorkins in Albania. He had tortured her. She told him a great deal. She told him about the Triwizard Tournament. She told him the old Auror, Moody, was going to teach at Hogwarts. He tortured her until he broke through the Memory Charm my father had placed upon her. She told him I had escaped from Azkaban. My master conceived a plan, based upon the information Bertha had given him. He needed me. He arrived at our house near midnight. My father answered the door. It was very quick. My father was placed under the Imperius Curse by my master. And I was released. I awoke. I was myself again, alive as I hadn't been in years.

Dumbledore: And what did Lord Voldemort ask you to do?
Barty: He asked me whether I was ready to risk everything for him. I was ready. It was my dream, my greatest ambition, to serve him, to prove myself to him. He told me he needed to place a faithful servant at Hogwarts, who would guide Harry Potter and Raven Black through the Triwizard Tournament without appearing to do so. A servant who would watch over Harry Potter and Raven Black. Ensure they reached the Triwizard Cup. Turn the cup
into a Portkey, which would take the first person to touch it to my master. But first -
Me: You needed Alastor Moody. You and Pettigrew did the Polyjuice Potion beforehand. Then
captured Moody...That day when we heard Moody was attacked...it was you...and then you
acted as him, until now. Isn't that right?
Barty: Certainly. Dumbledore: And what became of Wormtail after you attacked Moody?
Me: Saw him serving as Voldemort's lackey. He helped him gain his body back.

Dumbledore: But your father escaped.
Barty: Yes. After a while he began to fight the Imperius Curse just as I had done. There were
periods when he knew what was happening. My master decided it was no longer safe for my
father to leave the house. He forced him to send letters to the Ministry instead. He made him
write and say he was ill. But Wormtail neglected his duty. He was not watchful enough. My
father escaped. My master guessed that he was heading for Hogwarts. My father was going to
tell Dumbledore everything, to confess. He was going to admit that he had smuggled me from
Azkaban. My master sent me word of my father's escape. I used the map I had taken from
Harry Potter. The map that had almost ruined everything.
Me: Incompetent as always..
Dumbledore: Map? What map is this?
Barty: Potter's map of Hogwarts. Potter saw me on it. Potter saw me stealing more
ingredients for the Polyjuice Potion from Snape's office one night. He thought I was my
father. We have the same first name. I took the map from Potter that night. I told him my
father hated Dark wizards. Potter believed my father was after Snape.
Me: The Marauders Map shows every person in Hogwarts, their name and where they are
specifically. It's perfectly accurate.
Barty: For a week I waited for my father to arrive at Hogwarts. At last, one evening, the
map showed my father entering the grounds. I pulled on my Invisibility Cloak and went down to
meet him. He was walking around the edge of the forest. Then Potter came, and Krum. I
waited. I could not hurt Potter; my master needed him. Potter ran to get Dumbledore. I
Stunned Krum. I killed my father.

Winky: Noooo! Master Barty, Master Barty, what is you saying?
Dumbledore: You killed your father... What did you do with the body?
Barty: Carried it into the forest. Covered it with the Invisibility Cloak. I had the map with
me. I watched Potter run into the castle. He met Snape. Dumbledore joined them. I watched
Potter bringing Dumbledore out of the castle. I walked back out of the forest, doubled around
behind them, went to meet them. I told Dumbledore Snape had told me where to
come. Dumbledore told me to go and look for my father. I went back to my father's body.
Watched the map. When everyone was gone, I Transfigured my father's body. He became a
bone... I buried it, while wearing the Invisibility Cloak, in the freshly dug earth in front of
Hagrid's cabin. I offered to carry the Triwizard Cup into the maze before dinner.
Me: And you turned it into a Portkey.
Barty: My master's plan worked. He is returned to power and I will be honored by him
beyond the dreams of wizards.
Me: Great. Yet another psychopath.

Dumbledore stood up. He stared down at Barty Crouch for a moment with disgust on his face.
Then he raised his wand once more and ropes flew out of it, ropes that twisted themselves around
Barty Crouch, binding him tightly. He turned to Professor McGonagall.
Dumbledore: Minerva, could I ask you to stand guard here while I take Harry and Raven upstairs?
McGonagall: Of course.
Dumbledore: Severus, please tell Madam Pomfrey to come down here; we need to get Alastor Moody into the hospital wing. Then go down into the grounds, find Cornelius Fudge, and bring him up to this office. He will undoubtedly want to question Crouch himself. Tell him I will be in the hospital wing in half an hour's time if he needs me.

Snape nodded silently and swept out of the room.

Dumbledore: I want you to come up to my office first. Harry, Raven. Sirius is waiting for us there.
Me: Right...
Harry: Professor, where are Mr. and Mrs. Diggory?
Dumbledore: They are with Professor Sprout. She was Head of Cedric's house, and knew him best.

In his office, Sirius was waiting. In one swift moment, he had crossed the room. I couldn't bring myself to stay close to them. I kept my distance, staying glued to the door.

Sirius: Harry, are you all right? I knew it - I knew something like this - what happened? What happened?

Dumbledore began to tell Sirius everything Barty Crouch had said. He sat down opposite Harry, behind his desk. He was looking at Harry, who avoided his eyes.

Dumbledore: I need to know what happened after you touched the Portkey in the maze. Sirius: We can leave that till morning, can't we, Dumbledore? Let him have a sleep. Let him rest.
Me: No. I'll tell you what happened, just like I told Severus. You, of all people, must know.

With a deep breathe, I told them everything that happened, skipping about the...bad part. As far as I can see, Harry wasn't conscious when...that happened, so it's better left unsaid for now.

Me: Professor... I know I'm 'All-Knowing', but I have no explanation for how or why did the wands connect. I thought it had something to do with the same core but... It doesn't seem right. Dumbledore: Priori Incantatem. Sirius: The Reverse Spell effect?
Dumbledore: Exactly. Harry's wand and Voldemort's wand share cores, you were correct, Raven. Each of them contains a feather from the tail of the same phoenix. This phoenix, in fact.
Harry: My wand's feather came from Fawkes?
Dumbledore: Yes. Mr. Ollivander wrote to tell me you had bought the second wand, the moment you left his shop four years ago. Raven, your wand is spectacular as well, I am sure you are aware of that.
Me: I am.

Sirius: So what happens when a wand meets its brother?
Dumbledore: They will not work properly against each other. If, however, the owners of the wands force the wands to do battle... a very rare effect will take place. One of the wands will force the other to regurgitate spells it has performed - in reverse. The most recent first... and
then those which preceded it....Which means that some form of Cedric must have reappeared.
Me:Cedric,Bertha,Lily,James...Yami..
Sirius:Yami came back to life?!
Me:No spell can reawaken the dead...
Dumbledore:All that would have happened is a kind of reverse echo. A shadow of the living Cedric would have emerged from the wand...am I correct?
Harry:He spoke to me.The...the ghost Cedric, or whatever he was, spoke.
Dumbledore:An echo,which retained Cedric's appearance and character. I am guessing other such forms appeared...less recent victims of Voldemort's wand....The last murders the wand performed.In reverse order. More would have appeared, of course, had you maintained the connection. Very well,what did they do?

Harry described how the figures that had emerged from the wand had prowled the edges of the golden web, how Voldemort had seemed to fear them, how the shadow of Harry's mother had told him what to do, how Cedric's had made its final request.

Dumbledore:I will say it again,you have shown bravery beyond anything I could have expected of you tonight. You have shown bravery equal to those who died fighting Voldemort at the height of his powers. You have shouldered a grown wizard's burden and found yourself equal to it - and you have now given us all we have a right to expect. You will come with me to the hospital wing. I do not want you returning to the dormitory tonight. A Sleeping Potion, and some peace...Sirius, would you like to stay with them?

Sirius nodded and stood up. He transformed back into the great black dog and walked with Harry and Dumbledore out of the office, accompanying them down a flight of stairs to the hospital wing.

Me:I urh...have other things to do.I need to talk to Severus...Severus...yes...I need him...
Sirius:Snape?Why him?
Me:I...just....Bye!

I opened the door in a hurry,and in the hallway,I caught a glimpse of Mrs. Weasley, Bill, Ron, and Hermione grouped around a harassed-looking Madam Pomfrey.They were too busy,fortunately,so I managed to slip past them.
I kept muttering for Snape,feeling panic flowing through me again.
Where is he...Where...is he when...I need him?!

Suddenly,I feel a strong hand grip my shoulder,and I jump,letting out a small scream,then turned around,glancing at his dark,amused eyes.
I found him.
And just as before,I dragged him to yet another silent,dim-lit classroom,and stayed glued to the open window,trying to breathe the fresh,chill air from outside to calm down.

Snape:What is it this time?You sure do enjoy dragging me around in classrooms,and calling me by my first name,as if we are friends.
Me:With all due respect but...I believe after this day,we share a bond closer than anyone else around.
Snape:Black...What is it?
Me:Can you show it to me?Y-Your....Dark Mark.....?

He raised an eyebrow,looking at me confused,but lifted his sleeve skeptically.
Snape: There. The Dark Mark. It is not as clear as it was an hour or so ago, when it burned black, but you can still see it. Now, tell the purpose.

I turned my back to him, hugging myself, and letting a silent sob.

Me: Did you know that Voldemort wanted to recruit me? That he treated my traits so much? It seems unreal... I knew it was going to happen but... so early... and like that...

Snape: Raven, calm down.

Me: HOW CAN I CALM DOWN?! ... I'm not ready... not yet... I have so much more to learn...

With my face streamed with tears, I lift my sleeve up, revealing a faint Dark Mark, gleaming in the light of the moon. He stared at it, concerned, then at my shaky form. I couldn't control myself any longer, and jumped on him, hugging him as tight as possible. He slowly put his arms around me, in an attempt to comfort me.

Snape: You have a lot to learn this summer, Black. Prepare yourself, for I do not appreciate lazy students.

Me: Don't mistake me for some sleazy Gryffindors! I'm a Black, not a Potter!

Snape: *smirks* That's what I like to hear. Dumbledore will have to be informed of this, however, I shall handle that matter.

Me: Help me... don't ever leave me... please...

Snape: I won't.

Me: I believe you.

The next night, after Cedric's funeral and Dumbledore's speech, I plopped myself in front of the fireplace, in our empty Common Room, thinking of the future, when my favourite blond appears and sits next to me.

Draco: So... did it really happen?

Me: I don't lie.

Draco: I see...

Me: Your father was there.

Draco: Was he?

Me: Yes.

Draco: Not surprised. He was one of his most loyal supporters.

Me: Was he, really...

Draco: Well, he must have been. Otherwise...

Me: Otherwise, both you and Narcissa would have been dead. He wasn't loyal to Voldemort. He was loyal to his family.

Draco: I... guess you're right.

Me: I am. And I need to speak to Narcissa.

Draco: You could always stay over summer at ours. The offer is still available.

Me: I am aware. I suppose it wouldn't be a problem.

Draco: You are very welcomed, Black.

Me: Yeah yeah...

Draco: We will be okay.
Me: We won't.
Draco: Yes, we-
Me: NO, Draco, we will NOT be okay!
Draco: Fine, whatever...
Me: Just promise me something. Before we leave and...whatever that is next to happen...
Draco: What is it?
Me: Never leave me. You're my only real friend.
Draco: *scoffs* Yeah, right, as if I thought of ditching you.
Me: *smiles* Good call. Goodnight, Draco.
Draco: Goodnight, Raven.

And with yet another terrible tragedy, our 4th year and Hogwarts has ended, and with it, all our hopes for the future.
All we have left is to see what time and fate have in store for us.
Over the summer, I managed to persuade Snape to let me live with him, so he can teach me the necessities for being a double-agent like himself. And so, the summer holiday quickly passed, and we had to go to yet another Order of the Phoenix meeting.

Oh, I might have forgotten to mention, Sirius isn't exactly happy that I chose Snape over him, and Molly isn't happy that I persuaded Moody (easily, might I say) to let me join the Order. However, the only 3 people who know about the Dark Mark on my arm are Snape, Moody and Dumbledore... and today, the rest will have to be informed.

The meeting went on as usual, despite it being one of the more important ones. Talking about recruiting, protecting Potter and myself, and the prophecy. The only "prophecy" I managed to make this summer is how I'm absolutely positive that this year is going to be the death of me.

Oh well, no big deal.

After the meeting finished, despite never staying to eat, Snape agreed to stay a bit more, seeing that Harry arrived too. It might make things... more interesting. Especially because of the dementor incident.

Mostly, groups were formed and different subjects were discussed, so I carried on my conversation with Snape about my future career as a Healer. That is, until Sirius' big mouth opened.

Sirius: You know, I'm surprised at you. I thought the first thing you'd do when you got here would be to start asking questions about Voldemort.

Harry: I did! I asked Ron and Hermione but they said we're not allowed in the Order, so--

Molly: And they're quite right. You're too young.

Sirius: Since when did someone have to be in the Order of the Phoenix to ask questions? Harry's been trapped in that Muggle house for a month. He's got the right to know what's been happen-

George: Hang on!

Fred: How come Harry gets his questions answered?

George: We've been trying to get stuff out of you for a month and you haven't told us a single stinking thing!

Fred: You're too young, you're not in the Order... Harry's not even of age! And Raven either, but she's in the Order!

Sirius: It's not my fault you haven't been told what the Order's doing, that's your parents' decision. I gave Raven my permission to join us. Harry, on the other hand--

Molly: Excuse you, but I didn't NEED your permission to join this "secret" society. I was allowed to join because I brought great contribution to it... And because Dumbledore said so. So don't put me on the same level as Potter.

Molly: It's not down to you to decide what's good for Harry! You haven't forgotten what Dumbledore said, I suppose?

Sirius: Which bit?

Molly: The bit about not telling Harry more than he needs to know.

Sirius: I don't intend to tell him more than he needs to know, Molly. But as he was the one who saw Voldemort come back, he has more right than most to-
Molly: He's not a member of the Order of the Phoenix! He's only fifteen and--
Sirius: --and he's dealt with as much as most in the Order, and more than some--
Molly: No one's denying what he's done! But he's still--
Sirius: He's not a child!
Molly: He's not an adult either! He's not James, Sirius! And she is not Yami!
Sirius: I'm perfectly clear who they are, thanks, Molly.
Molly: I'm not sure you are! Sometimes, the way you talk about them, it's as though you think you've got your best friends back!
Me: ENOUGH! I've had enough of this! I swear, you both act like bratty children when it comes to Potter! Potter this, Potter that! He's NOT a member of the Order, and he won't be for at least 3 year now, but since everything we've been discussing so far is HIS protection and how to defeat a certain someone, just answer him with the basic information AND SEND HIM OFF TO BED! Don't you get it? You are all responsible adults here, but if you just decide to fight and argue among yourselves, then there's no way to defeat him. Have a bit of reason, please!
Snape: As usual, Miss Black here is right and has a more functional brain than all of you put together. So I suggest you end this charade, pacify Potter's needs, and forget about this.
Lupin: *sighs* Very well. I agree with Raven, here. Harry has the right to know the general idea.
Molly: Well ... I can see I'm going to be overruled. I'll just say this: Dumbledore must have had his reasons for not wanting Harry to know too much, and speaking as someone who has Harry's best interests at heart--
Sirius: He's not your son.
Molly: He's as good as! Who else has he got?
Sirius: He's got me!
Molly: Yes, the thing is, it's been rather difficult for you to look after him while you've been locked up in Azkaban, hasn't it?
Me: OKAY, that escalated quickly, and while *glares at Sirius* I absolutely agree with Mrs. Weasley on this one...
Lupin: You're not the only person at this table who cares about Harry, Molly. And Sirius, sit down. I think Harry ought to be allowed a say in this. He's old enough to decide for himself.
Harry: I want to know what's been going on.
Molly: Very well. Ginny, Ron, Hermione, Fred, George, I want you out of this kitchen, now.
Twins: We're of age!
Ron: If Harry's allowed, why can't I?
Ginny: Mum, I want to hear!
Molly: NO! I absolutely forbid--
Arthur: Molly you can't stop Fred and George. They are of age--
Molly: They're still at school--

I tried to close my eyes, feeling drained of energy from all the yelling, when a sudden flash image came in my mind, which made me jolt in my chair, which didn't remain unnoticed by some adults. It was myself, looking in the mirror, with a desperate expression, face and hands full of blood, and clawing at my throat.
But it disappeared, just as it appeared.

Snape: Don't let your guard down.
Me: It wasn't that... but worse...
Lupin: Raven, are you feeling alright?
me: Yes, great, uh...

Snape: Let the commotion end, and you'll tell them.
me: I can't do it alone...
Snape: You're not alone.
me: Yes... yes... right...

Lupin: Okay, Harry ... what do you want to know?

Harry: Where's Voldemort? What's he doing? I've been trying to watch the Muggle news, and there hasn't been anything that looks like him yet, no funny deaths or anything-
Sirius: That's because there haven't been any funny deaths yet, not as far as we know, anyway....
me: And we know quite a lot.
Lupin: More than he thinks we do, anyway.

Harry: How come he's stopped killing people?

Sirius: Because he doesn't want to draw attention to himself. It would be dangerous for him. His comeback didn't come off quite the way he wanted it to, you see. He messed it up.
Lupin: Or rather, you messed it up for him.

Harry: How?
Sirius: You weren't supposed to survive! Nobody apart from his Death Eaters was supposed to know he'd come back. But you survived to bear witness.
Lupin: And the very last person he wanted alerted to his return the moment he got back was Dumbledore. And you made sure Dumbledore knew at once.

Harry: How has that helped?
me: Really, Potter? Are you that stupid?

Bill: Are you kidding? Dumbledore was the only one You-Know-Who was ever scared of!
Sirius: Thanks to you, Dumbledore was able to recall the Order of the Phoenix about an hour after Voldemort returned.

Harry: So, what's the Order been doing?

Sirius: Working as hard as we can to make sure Voldemort can't carry out his plans.
me: In translation, nothing.

Harry: How d'you know what his plans are?

Lupin: Dumbledore's got a shrewd idea and Dumbledore's shrewd ideas normally turn out to be accurate.

Harry: So what does Dumbledore reckon he's planning?
Sirius: Well, firstly, he wants to build up his army again. In the old days he had huge numbers at his command: witches and wizards he'd bullied or bewitched into following him, his faithful Death Eaters, a great variety of Dark creatures. You heard him planning to recruit the giants; well, they'll be just one of the groups he's after. He's certainly not going to try and take on the Ministry of Magic with only a dozen Death Eaters.
me: There's more than a dozen, trust me. And let's not add the whole Azkaban to the number.

Harry: So you're trying to stop him getting more followers?

Lupin: We're doing our best.

Harry: How?

Bill: Well, the main thing is to try and convince as many people as possible that You-Know-Who really has returned, to put them on their guard. It's proving tricky, though.

Harry: Why?

Tonks: Because of the Ministry's attitude. You saw Cornelius Fudge after You-Know-Who
came back, Harry. Well, he hasn't shifted his position at all. He's absolutely refusing to believe it's happened.
Harry: But why?
me: Politicians.
Harry: If Dumbledore--
Arthur: Ah, well, you've put your finger on the problem. Dumbledore.
Tonks: Fudge is frightened of him, you see.
Harry: Frightened of Dumbledore?
Arthur: Frightened of what he's up to. Fudge thinks Dumbledore's plotting to overthrow him. He thinks Dumbledore wants to be Minister for Magic.
Harry: But Dumbledore doesn't want--
Arthur: Of course he doesn't. He's never wanted the Minister's job, even though a lot of people wanted him to take it when Millicent Bagnold retired. Fudge came to power instead, but he's never quite forgotten how much popular support Dumbledore had, even though Dumbledore never applied for the job.
Lupin: Deep down, Fudge knows Dumbledore's much cleverer than he is, a much more powerful wizard, and in the early days of his Ministry he was forever asking Dumbledore for help and advice. But it seems he's become fond of power, and much more confident. He loves being Minister for Magic and he's managed to convince himself that he's the clever one and Dumbledore's simply stirring up trouble for the sake of it.

Harry: How can he think that? How can he think Dumbledore would just make it all up--that I'd make it all up?
Sirius: Because accepting that Voldemort's back would mean trouble like the Ministry hasn't had to cope with for nearly fourteen years. Fudge just can't bring himself to face it. It's so much more comfortable to convince himself Dumbledore's lying to destabilise him.
Lupin: You see the problem. While the Ministry insists there is nothing to fear from Voldemort it's hard to convince people he's back, especially as they really don't want to believe it in the first place. What's more, the Ministry's leaning heavily on the Daily Prophet not to report any of what they're calling Dumbledore's rumour-mongering, so most of the wizarding community are completely unaware anything's happened, and that makes them easy targets for the Death Eaters if they're using the Imperius Curse.
Harry: But you're telling people, aren't you? You're letting people know he's back?
me: Use your brain, Potter. Sirius is thought to be a mad mass-murderer and the Ministry's put a ten thousand Galleon price on his head, he can hardly stroll up the street and start handing out leaflets, can he? Lupin is known as the Big Bad Wolf of the wizard world, and the others have jobs in the Ministry, and they can't risk them.
Sirius: And it's very important for us to have spies inside the Ministry, because you can bet Voldemort will have them.
Arthur: We've managed to convince a couple of people, though. Tonks here, for one--she's too young to have been in the Order of the Phoenix last time, and having Aurors on our side is a huge advantage-- Kingsley Shacklebolt's been a real asset, too; he's in charge of the hunt for Sirius, so he's been feeding the Ministry information that Sirius is in Tibet.
me: Totally not weird...
Harry: But if none of you are putting the news out that Voldemort's back--
Sirius: Who said none of us are putting the news out? Why d'you think Dumbledore's in such trouble?
Harry: What d'you mean?
me: He's risking his hide for this cause.
Lupin: They're trying to discredit him. Didn't you see the Daily Prophet last week? They reported that he'd been voted out of the Chairmanship of the International Confederation of Wizards because he's getting old and losing his grip, but it's not true; he was voted out by Ministry wizards after he made a speech announcing Voldemort's return. They've demoted him from Chief Warlock on the Wizengamot--that's the Wizard High Court--and they're talking about taking away his Order of Merlin, First Class, too.
Bill: *chuckles* But Dumbledore says he doesn't care what they do as long as they don't take him off the Chocolate Frog Cards.
Me: *smirks* At least he'd end up as one of those Ultra Rare (UR) cards.
Arthur: It's no laughing matter. If he carries on defying the Ministry like this he could end up in Azkaban, and the last thing we want is to have Dumbledore locked up. While You-Know-Who knows Dumbledore's out there and wise to what he's up to he's going to go cautiously. If Dumbledore's out of the way--well, You-Know-Who will have a clear field.
Harry: But if Voldemort's trying to recruit more Death Eaters it's bound to get out that he's come back, isn't it?
Sirius: Voldemort doesn't march up to people's houses and bang on their front doors, Harry. He tricks, jinxes and blackmails them. He's well-practised at operating in secret. In any case, gathering followers is only one thing he's interested in. He's got other plans too, plans he can put into operation very quietly indeed, and he's concentrating on those for the moment.
me: Erghh... I beg to differ... in a way?
Sirius: Raven, don't get me wrong, but you weren't there when he started recruiting.
me: *gets up* I... think there is something we, us a close group, have to discuss, and be aware of.
Snape: And take note that everything is absolutely on Dumbledore's orders.
Me: Yes. Correct.
Sirius: What do Dumbledore's orders have to do with our current topic?
me: . . . I can't. No, Severus, I can't.
Snape: You can and you will.
me: They won't understand! Especially Potter or Sirius!
Snape: And why are you concerned about them?
me: B-Because if the worst comes to happen, we must know who to trust.
Snape: Very well. Not under these circumstances.
Me: Thanks...
Sirius: Snape, what's going on with my daughter?
me: *mutters* Don't call me that...
Snape: Your "daughter" needs to be pushed... in the right direction!
me: NO!

Ignoring me, he got up, took ahold of my right wrist, and firmly pulled up my sleeve, which revealed the Mark, earning horror-gasps.

Sirius: . . . How?
Snape: It was that, or her death, so don't you dare act irrationally, as usual.
Lupin: Tell us the details. This way, everyone will understand and the confusion will be cleared.
me: Mainly 2 reasons. One of them was to save my life, the night Cedric died. If I was
unimportant, like Harry, he'd have tried to kill me on the spot. However, circumstances made it be that I'm a Slytherin with a significant importance to him, and he offered me a chance of... "redemption", let's say. He has been trying to recruit me since the 1st Year.

Lupin: So you took it, and lived to tell the story.

Me: Precisely. I don't care much about my life, but I'd rather not end it pointlessly. And so, having talked to Dumbledore before, we decided that I would also take the role of a double-agent, just like Severus.

Severus: As you previously mentioned, spies are important everywhere, and the Dark Lord seems rather... fond of Miss Black over here.

Me: So... why not exploit the opportunity, while there is. Just as Severus said, he seems to... favours me, let's say?

Sirius: But what were you thinking?! You are one of them! A Death Eater!

Lupin: Sirius, don't be unreasonable, please.

Harry: *gets up* Raven, how could you?! I was there! He killed my parents! He kill your mother! He did all those terrible things!

Me: And he didn't finish the job. What was I supposed to do then, Your Excellence? Just go to him and say... *mocking* 'No, dear Tom, I won't join you, cause I'm a suicidal idiot who has nothing to gain or lose from joining you!'? Do you hate me so, that you'd rather see me dead, than aiding the good side's cause?

Harry: There's no good in siding Voldemort!

Me: *waves* Oh, give me a break. You're not even worth arguing with. Do something useful for once.

Harry: Don't think you noticed, but I managed to stop him quite some times now!

Me: But did you do it by yourself? I don't think so. So, how about you shut up, Scar face, and get over it. Or do you not want to abide Dumbledore's rules? Oh, has your Dumbledore obsession passed?

Harry: Enjoy the Death Eater tea party then. And I don't have a Dumbledore obsession!

Me: Oh, but I will make sure to. Now, Sirius. Do you have any complaints about this? Or anyone else, for the matter?

Lupin: *smiles sadly* He knows best. I just hope you'll be careful.

Sirius: I'm not okay with the idea. I'm absolutely mad that Dumbledore stole my only daughter's life for this.

Me: Please, try to refrain from calling me your daughter. I am unable to recognize you as my father figure. I have no father. I am an orphan. You can be Potter's, though. I'm sure that with his daddy issues, he'd more than likely enjoy the attention.

Sirius: Raven, please-

Me: *smiles* It was a delight to be here, Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, and thank you for your hospitality once again. Be well and take care. All of you. See you in the Prefect compartment, Hermione.

Sirius: *gets up* Prefect? Hold on a second-

Me: Severus, if you will,-

Severus: *nods to the others* Very well.

Not looking behind, we hurried out of Sirius' house and apparated back to his, where we prepared for our journey back to Hogwarts. Such joy!

That night, however, I dreamt not of my bloody self, but the brink of my consciousness ended with a vision of my own self, dancing in silence with the young version of Tom Riddle, who was
smirking down on me.

At the Hogwarts feast, Hagrid has been replaced by Professor Grubbly-Plank, and the DADA teacher is... a pink ugly hag. Even Snape and McGonagall can't look at her. She's horrible. She looks like trouble.

This year, we have OWLs to take, and I absolutely need the highest mark, in Potions alike, to be able to continue my NEWTs and, further on, my career as a Healer, and Snape knows that. So, today, in our first Potions class, he started his OWLs speech.

Snape: Settle down. Before we begin today's lesson, I think it appropriate to remind you that next June you will be sitting an important examination, during which you will prove how much you have learned about the composition and use of magical potions. Moronic though some of this class undoubtedly are, I expect you to scrape an "Acceptable" in your OWL, or suffer my... displeasure. After this year, of course, many of you will cease studying with me. I take only the very best into my NEWT Potions class, which means that some of us will certainly be saying goodbye. But we have another year to go before that happy moment of farewell, so, whether or not you are intending to attempt NEWT, I advise all of you to concentrate your efforts upon maintaining the high pass level I have come to expect from my OWL students. Today we will be mixing a potion that often comes up at Ordinary Wizarding Level: the Draught of Peace, a potion to calm anxiety and soothe agitation. Be warned: if you are too heavy-handed with the ingredients you will put the drinker into a heavy and sometimes irreversible sleep, so you will need to pay close attention to what you are doing. The ingredients and method--are on the blackboard—you will find everything you need—in the store cupboard—you have an hour and a half... start.

Me: Professor?
Snape: Yes, Miss Black?
Me: If one makes the potion strong enough, can they go into a coma?
Snape: Is it possible, indeed. Why, ask?
Me: *chuckles* Well, obviously, this way I won't need to look at the Teacher's staff and have my eyes bleed from the PINK Toad that's supposed to teach us about Defence Against the DARK Arts.
Snape: *smirks* Pink is obviously the most successful defense against the Dark Arts.
Me: And against one's sight.
Snape: Be silent and return to your work.
Me: As you wish, professor.
Draco: *smirks* Nice one, Black.
Me: Thank you, Draco. But were you doubting my humour?
Draco: I could never.
Me: Good.

Having stayed with Snape for the whole summer had its perks. He had tons of Potion books and ingredients, so I managed to practice as much as I wanted to (which was a lot) since I wasn't allowed by law to use my wand (yet). So, I pretty much memorised this potion by heart.
Snape: A light silver vapour should now be rising from your potion.
Me: Silver it is. But can I keep it?
Snape: Depends on the quality of it.
Me: Oh, please, as if it is anything but perfect.
Snape: *inspects it* Great as usual, but I expect nothing else of you. 10 points to Slytherin, and yes, you may keep a vial of it.
Me: Why, thank you, Sir.
Snape: However, I cannot say the same about Potter's poor attempt. Potter, what is this supposed to be?
Harry: The Draught of Peace.
Snape: Tell me, Potter, can you read?
Harry: Yes, I can.
Snape: Black, come over here.
Me: *in front of Harry* Yes, professor?
Snape: Can you spot the mistake in it?
Me: Ermh... which one? It's all wrong from... almost the beginning. How did you manage to make dark vapour rise?
Snape: The first mistake, from where it went downhill, just like his future career chances. Can you tell?
Me: Erhm... I think... the... the syrup... Harry, did you forget to add the hellebore syrup?
Harry: The what?
Snape: You are correct, Miss Black. 10 points to Slytherin, again. Read the third line of the instructions for me, Potter.
Harry: "Add powdered moonstone, stir three times counter-clockwise, allow to simmer for seven minutes then add two drops of syrup of hellebore." Oh..
Snape: Did you do everything on the third line, Potter?
Harry: *mutters* No.
Snape: I beg your pardon?
Harry: No. I forgot the hellebore.
Snape: I know you did, Potter, which means that this mess is utterly worthless. Evanesco.

The contents of Harry's potion vanished; he was left standing foolishly beside an empty cauldron.

Snape: Those of you who have managed to read the instructions, fill one flagon with a sample of your potion, label it clearly with your name and bring it up to my desk for testing. Homework: twelve inches of parchment on the properties of moonstone and its uses in potion-making, to be handed in on Thursday.

Before I left for DADA class, I went close to Snape and muttered jokingly *"prepare for the Pink Fever fest"* and left, chuckling to myself.

But despite trying to lighten my own mood, I knew, since the beginning, that a class with a person who's that obsessed with Pink, would be horrible. If only it were the singer, and not the colour... Oh wait.
She's a muggle...
Carry on!

####
When we entered the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom, Umbridge was already seated at the teachers desk, wearing the fluffy pink cardigan of the night before and the black velvet bow on top of her head, and I was trying not to gag at her sense of fashion.

The class was quiet as she entered the room.

Pinky: Well, good afternoon!
Us:*mutters* Good afternoon.
Pinky: Tut, tut. That won't do, now, will it? I should like you, please, to reply "Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge". One more time, please. Good afternoon, class!
Us: Good afternoon, Professor Umbridge.
Pinky: There, now. That wasn't too difficult, was it? Wands away and quills out, please.
Me:*mutters* What a drag...

Umbridge opened her handbag, extracted her own wand, which was an unusually short one, and tapped the blackboard sharply with it; words appeared on the board at once:

---

**Defence Against the Dark Arts**

**A Return to Basic Principles**

Pinky: Well now, your teaching in this subject has been rather disrupted and fragmented, hasn't it? The constant changing of teachers, many of whom do not seem to have followed any Ministry-approved curriculum, has unfortunately resulted in your being far below the standard we would expect to see in your OWL year. You will be pleased to know, however, that these problems are now to be rectified. We will be following a carefully structured, theory-centred, Ministry-approved course of defensive magic this year. Copy down the following, please.

She rapped the blackboard again; the first message vanished and was replaced by:

---

**Course Aims:**

1. Understanding the principles underlying defensive magic.

2. Learning to recognise situations in which defensive magic can legally be used

3. Placing the use of defensive magic in a context for practical use.

Pinky: Has everybody got a copy of Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard?

There was a dull murmur of assent throughout the class.

Pinky: I think we'll try once again. When I ask you a question, I should like you to reply, "Yes, Professor Umbridge", or "No, Professor Umbridge".

Me: Oh, give me a break.

Pinky: So~ has everyone got a copy of Defensive Magical Theory by Wilbert Slinkhard?

Us: Yes, Professor Umbridge.

Pinky: Good. I should like you to turn to page five and read "Chapter One, Basics for Beginners". There will be no need to talk.

Professor Umbridge left the blackboard and settled herself in the chair behind the teacher's desk, observing them all closely with those pouchy toad's eyes.
I took a piece of paper and wrote on it, to communicate with Draco, without being caught disrupting the class.

Me: This is worse than listening to Binns' lectures...
Draco: Boring. Just play pretend.
Me: Yeah yeah...
Draco: What's Granger doing?
Me: She obviously read the book before, and realized it's less useful than paper toilet.
Draco: What do you mean?
Me: They teach you no spells. It's worse than a Muggle class. Trust me on this.
Draco: Disgusting. Are all Muggle classes this boring and useless?
Me: Positive.
Draco: Too bad. We always get the best.
Me: I wonder... This class will be a show.
Draco: Huh?
Me: Just watch and expect detentions to fly.

The chapter they had been instructed to read was so tedious that more and more people were choosing to watch Hermione's mute attempt to catch Professor Umbridge's eye rather than struggle on with 'Basics for Beginners'. When more than half the class were staring at Hermione rather than at their books, Professor Umbridge seemed to decide that she could ignore the situation no longer.

Pinky: Did you want to ask something about the chapter, dear?
Hermione: Not about the chapter, no.
Pinky: Well, we're reading just now. If you have other queries we can deal with them at the end of class.
Hermione: I've got a query about your course aims.
Pinky: And your name is?
Hermione: Hermione Granger.
Pinky: Well, Miss Granger, I think the course aims are perfectly clear if you read them through carefully.
Hermione: Well, I don't. There's nothing written up there about using defensive spells.
Pinky: Using defensive spells? Why, I can't imagine any situation arising in my classroom that would require you to use a defensive spell, Miss Granger.
Me: But surely, this class is called DEFENCE against the Dark Arts, right? Or did I mistakenly go in the Lecture Club class?
Pinky: Students raise their hands when they wish to speak in my class, Miss...?
Me: *smirks* Black. Raven Black. Y'know, the mass-murderer's daughter.
Draco: *mutters* What are you doing?!

Harry and Hermione immediately raised their hands too. Professor Umbridge's pouchy eyes lingered on Harry for a moment before she addressed Hermione.

Pinky: Yes, Miss Granger? You wanted to ask something else?
Hermione: Yes. Surely the whole point of Defence Against the Dark Arts is to practise defensive spells?
Pinky: Are you a Ministry-trained educational expert, Miss Granger?
Me: Are you?
Hermione: No, but-
Pinky: Well then, I'm afraid you are not qualified to decide what the "whole point" of any class is. Wizards much older and cleverer than you have devised our new programme of study. You will be learning about defensive spells in a secure, risk-free way--
Harry: What use is that? If we're going to be attacked, it won't be in a--
Pinky: Hand, Mr Potter!

Harry thrust his fist in the air. Again, Professor Umbridge promptly turned away from him, but now several other people had their hands up, too.

Pinky: And your name is?
Dean: Dean Thomas.
Pinky: Well, Mr Thomas?
Dean: Well, it's like Harry said, isn't it? If we're going to be attacked, it won't be risk free.
Pinky: I repeat—do you expect to be attacked during my classes?
Dean: No, but--
Me: But there is life outside of your class.
Pinky: I do not wish to criticise the way things have been run in this school, but you have been exposed to some very irresponsible wizards in this class, very irresponsible indeed—not to mention, extremely dangerous half-breeds.
Me: Excuse me if I'm wrong, but you seem to me like the cross between a Pink Toad and a corpse.
Pinky: Hand, Miss Black! And Detention for a week!
Me: *holds my wrist* This, professor, is a hand. Do you need a picture of it too?
Dean: If you mean Professor Lupin, he was the best we ever-
Toad: Hand, Mr Thomas! As I was saying—you have been introduced to spells that have been complex, inappropriate to your age group and potentially lethal. You have been frightened into believing that you are likely to meet Dark attacks every other day--
Hermione: No we haven't we just—
Pinky: Your hand is not up, Miss Granger!

Hermione put up her hand. Professor Umbridge turned away from her.

Pinky: It is my understanding that my predecessor not only performed illegal curses in front of you, he actually performed them on you.
Dean: Well, he turned out to be a maniac, didn't he? Mind you, we still learned loads.
Pinky: Your hand is not up, Mr. Thomas! Now, it is the view of the Ministry that a theoretical knowledge will be more than sufficient to get you through your examination, which, after all, is what school is all about. And your name is?
Parvati: Parvati Patil, and isn't there a practical bit in our Defence Against the Dark Arts OWL? Aren't we supposed to show that we can actually do the counter-curses and things?
Pinky: As long as you have studied the theory hard enough, there is no reason why you should not be able to perform the spells under carefully controlled examination conditions.
Parvati: Without ever practising them beforehand? Are you telling us that the first time we'll get to do the spells will be during our exam?
Pinky: I repeat, as long as you have studied the theory hard enough--
Harry: And what good's theory going to be in the real world?
Pinky: This is school, Mr. Potter, not the real world.
Me: I don't think we'll all magically die before we finish school.
Pinky: Hand, Miss Black!
Harry: So we're not supposed to be prepared for what's waiting for us out there?
Pinky: There is nothing waiting out there, Mr. Potter.
Harry: Oh, yeah?
Pinky: Who do you imagine wants to attack children like yourselves?
Me: Any evil-doer?
Harry: Hmm, let's think... Maybe... Lord Voldemort?
Me: Oh, shit, you hit the nerve hard.
Pinky: Ten points from Gryffindor, Mr. Potter. Now, let me make a few things quite plain. You have been told that a certain Dark wizard has returned from the dead--
Harry: He wasn't dead, but yeah, he's returned!
Pinky: Mr. Potter, you have already lost your house ten points do not make matters worse for yourself. As I was saying, you have been informed that a certain Dark wizard is at large once again. This is a lie.
Harry: It is NOT a lie! I saw him, I fought him! Raven was there too! Tell her!
Pinky: Detention, Mr. Potter! Tomorrow evening. Five o'clock. My office. I repeat, this is a lie. The Ministry of Magic guarantees that you are not in danger from any Dark wizard. If you are still worried, by all means come and see me outside class hours. If someone is alarming you with fibs about reborn Dark wizards, I would like to hear about it. I am here to help. I am your friend. And now, you will kindly continue your reading. Page five, "Basics for Beginners".'
Me: *raises hand*
Pinky: Yes, Miss Black?
Me: I always imaged a Dictatorship period to be darker, not hot pink. I, personally, don't really care what anyone thinks about the Voldemort or Dumbledore dispute, but what I know, is that I'm not okay with a friend being killed and being called "an accident", especially under those circumstances. I accept any kind of detention you wish to offer me, but I have a snake tongue that has finally come loose. You see... I'm a rather sickly person, so I don't have a high tolerance... to bullshit.
Pinky: You just managed to take off 10 points from Slytherin, and earned yourself a prolonged detention. Are you happy, Miss Black?
Me: Certainly. It feel great to mock death. *clears throat* CEDRIC DIGGORY WAS KILLED BY VOLDEMORT! Thank you very much. *sits down*
Draco: *looking at me weirdly* You are out of your mind.
Me: *nods* I'm simply suicidal.
Harry: So, according to you, Cedric Diggory dropped dead of his own accord, did he?
Pinky: Cedric Diggory's death was a tragic accident.
Me: Sounds to me like your birth.
Harry: It was murder. Voldemort killed him and you know it.
Pinky: Come here, Miss Black, Mr. Potter, dears.

We both went up to her desk, him fuming with anger, me completely calm, mixed with triumph and anxiety.

Professor Umbridge pulled 2 small rolls of pink parchment out of her handbag, stretched it out on the desk, dipped her quill into a bottle of ink and started scribbling, hunched over so that Harry could not see what she was writing. Nobody spoke. After a minute or so she rolled up the parchment and tapped it with her wand; it sealed itself seamlessly so that he could not open it.
Pinky: Take this to Professor Snape and Professor McGonagall accordingly, dears.
Me: *mock bow* Have a pink day.

The second we exited the classroom, we looked at each other and high-fived in accomplishment.

Me: They all believed us.
Harry: Hopefully.
Me: Hell will break loose this year.
Harry: Yeah... Better be prepared...

Snape: Why aren't you in class? What have you done?
Me: Now, don't hate me... but I've been sent to see you.
Snape: Sent? What do you mean, sent?

Snape took the parchment from my grasp, frowning, slit it open with a tap of his wand, stretched it out and began to read. His eyes zoomed from side to side as he read what Umbridge had written, and with each line they became narrower. He looked at me blankly, then dragged me inside his study. The door closed automatically behind me.

Snape: Well? Is this true?
Me: I can't forge a detention slip that well.
Snape: Is it true that you mocked Umbridge?
Me: Yes.
Snape: You called her a mixed breed between a Pink toad and a corpse?
Me: Yes.
Snape: You told her Mr. Diggory was murdered?
Me: Yes.
Snape: You said her birth was a tragic accident?
Me: Yes.

He sat down behind his desk, an amused glint in his eyes. He opened a drawer, and handed me a chocolate bar.

Snape: It's one of your favourites, isn't it.
Me: It certainly is.
Snape: Have a seat.
Me: *sits* I know I was reckless...
Snape: And?
Me: And I shouldn't go against her...
Snape: But?
Me: But... Potter angered her worse. I just mocked her existence. He went full Leo rage and yeah...
Snape: Tsk. Incompetent dunderhead.
Me: Sure hope you don't mean me.
Snape: Jokes aside, You need to be careful. Misbehaviour in Dolores Umbridge's class could cost you much more than house points and a detention.
Me:*sighs* The Ministry again...
Snape: Indeed. I'd choose caution, if I were you.
Me: Well... I needed to end my school life with at least a detention, right?
Snape: It says here she's given you detention every evening for the next 3 weeks, starting tomorrow.
Me: Oh great, perfect "Welcome back" gift.
Snape: You will go to her room at five o'clock tomorrow for the first one. Just remember: tread carefully around Dolores Umbridge.
Me: Can't wait to get blinded by her pink room...
Snape: Did you listen to Dolores Umbridge's speech at the start-of-term feast?
Me: The Ministry of Magic is trying to interfere at Hogwarts.
Snape:*nods*
Me: Ahhh, what a terrible fate is in store for me!
Snape: You'll survive, I'm sure.

Her room is pink.
Her carpet is pink.
She has plates with magical cats in them, on the wall.
She has white and pink porcelain.
Brown sugar.

SHE IS WORSE THAN VOLDEMORT!

Pinky: You will be writing lines today, Miss Black. You're going to be using a rather special quill of mine. Here you are.

She handed me a long, thin black quill with an unusually sharp point.

Pinky: I want you to write, 'I am a traitor'.
Me: That's quite an unusual sentence.
Pinky: Dear, your father's traitor blood runs in your veins, it's only natural. You have betrayed the Ministry's trust by making such accusations, and my own, for telling such jests and mockery.
Me: Fair enough. How many times?
Pinky: Oh, as long as it takes for the message to sink in. Off you go.

Sink in?
That sounded like a double-standard metaphor.
I seem to have gotten the wrong idea.

Me: You haven't given me any ink.
Pinky: Oh, you won't need ink.
Me: As you say.

The second I placed the point of the quill on the paper, another vision with a young Tom Riddle flashed, but this time, he was kissing the back of my bloody hand, tenderly, but with a devious smirk on his face.
I brushed away the vision, and proceeded with the writing.

*I am a traitor.*

Huh.
I might have heard that before.

The words had appeared on the parchment in what appeared to be shining red ink. At the same time, the words appeared on the back of my right hand, making me bite my lip, in pain, as they cut into my skin as though traced there by a scalpel - yet even as I stared at the forming cut, the skin healed over again, leaving the place where it had been slightly redder than before but quite smooth.

I wrote it again.

*I am a traitor.*

And felt the searing pain on the back of my hand for a second time; once again, the words had been cut into my skin; once again, they healed over seconds later.

And on it went. Again and again I wrote the words on the parchment in my own blood. And, again and again, the words were cut into the back of my hand, healed, and reappeared the next time I set quill to parchment.

Darkness fell outside Umbridge's window.

**Pinky:** Come here.

My hand was stinging painfully. When I looked down at it I saw that the cut had healed, but that the skin there was red raw and somehow scratched.

**Pinky:** Hand.

I extended my hand, which she took in her own.

**Pinky:** Tut, tut, I don't seem to have made much of an impression yet. Well, we'll just have to try again tomorrow evening, won't we? You may go.

With a nod, I left her office, then went straight to the dormitory, washed my hand with cold water, and used my Metamorphmagus abilities to hide the redness.
That's how I shall proceed from now on.

3 weeks have passed, and I feel like I'm at my wit's end. Desperation is surging through me whenever I take a glimpse of the colour Pink or of that damn hag.
The words encrypted in my hand keep invading my mind.

*I am a traitor.*

Every day, I have had to write them in my own skin, and have it as a daily reminder of my worthlessness.
I am a traitor.

The cut in the back of my right hand opened and began to bleed afresh.

I am a traitor.

The cut dug deeper, stinging and smarting.

I am a traitor.

Blood trickled down his wrist.

With every page written, I'd glance out of the window, trying to predict the time, then drop my eyes back to the parchment shining with blood.

I am a traitor.

I am a traitor.

I am a traitor.

Pinky: Let's see if you've got the message yet, shall we?

The second she grabbed my bleeding hand, pain seared through both my hand and the scar on my neck, which made me snatch my hand back.

Pinky: Yes, it hurts, doesn't it? Because in truth, you know, you deserve to be punished. Well, I think I've made my point, Miss Black. You may go.

I ran as fast as I could to Snape's room, despite the ungodly hour of past midnight. I know teachers are supposed to take watch at night and all... but it's still too late. But I couldn't hide it anymore. It's too much. The pain. The visions. The desperation. They have overwhelmed me.

*knock**knock*

Silence

*knock**knock**knock*

Silence

Me: Oh, Bloody hell, please Severus, open up! It's me, Raven! *cries* I need you...

I continued to frantically knock on the door, until skin started to scratch from my knuckles, letting small droplets fall from them. But I couldn't feel anything else anymore, but my own rush of desperation.

-?- What in heavens do you think you're doing? Such a ruckus at this hour. You should be fast asleep by now! Do you really made it on your bucket list to take off tons of points from my
own house, Black?
Me: Severus...?

Having heard his voice, I immediately calmed down, and hugged him tightly, sobbing in his chest. He sighed, opened the door, and put me on his bed, as he started making a calming tea, infused with the Draught of Peace that I've created prior. He poured it in a nice green porcelain cup, put it on a tray, handed it to me, then sat on a chair in front of me.

Snape: Speak.
Me: She... She's horrible... She's just like him... enjoys torturing people... psychologically... and physically...
Snape: What do you mean?

I raised my hand shakily in front of him, and, cancelling the Metamorphmagus abilities, let the deep cuts on my hand appear, with fresh blood still on them. His eyes widened, as he tried to heal me with his wand, but I stopped him.

Me: Don't. She can't know I told anybody about this... And if it's treated, then it will hurt worse next time she gives me detention.
Snape: She won't be giving you detention anymore, if you behave.
Me: Trust me... I could be an angel, and she'd still find something to punish me for. Breathing, probably.
Snape: This is unacceptable.
Me: It is... and it hurts... and the words...
Snape: You're no traitor. Don't just let her words affect you like this.
Me: But can I really just pass them off so easily, when they are engraved in my own skin?
Snape: What would you have me do, then? I have no authority over her, and neither has Dumbledore.
Me: Try to make her let me have detentions with you, from time to time... I don't want to die...
Snape: You won't die from that, don't be silly.
Me: This is just the beginning, Severus. And if the beginning is horrible... just imagine how it will carry on...
Snape: Have you had any visions lately?
Me: Yes... I have... but I don't understand them. They are not like before. I don't think they are necessary my own visions, but they are not from HIM either.
Snape: What did you see?
Me: Mostly myself... in self-destructive images... or with the youthful, human version of Him... dancing... or him, kissing my hand. What could they mean?
Snape: I do not know for sure. I will consult Dumbledore about this, and will inform you right away. However, these visions themselves destroy you mentally. I suggest you block them as well.
Me: I feel like they are trying to tell me something... I just don't know what... or if there are more to come.
Me: I don't do that. Danger usually finds me, however.

He escorted me back to the Common Room, but unexpectedly, Draco was there, on the couch, playing mindlessly with his wand, creating green sparks.
But I wasn't paying attention to my surroundings, as I tried to make my way to the dormitory. However, my presence was not left unnoticed.

Draco: No goodnights, Black?
Me: Oh... Draco, hello. Why... are you awake?
Draco: Why are you?
Me: Detention...
Draco: Oh, right.
Me: Good night.
Draco: Really? I wait for you to come back, and you just ditch me?
Me: Sorry...
Draco: *gets up* What's wrong with you?
Me: I'm just fine, thank you.
Draco: No snarky remarks, no sarcasm. Yes, you're so fine.
Me: What do you want to know? That pink hag is giving me a hard time. Big deal.
Draco: Let me help you. Just like you helped me.
Me: Did I?
Draco: Yes, you did.
Me: I see...
Draco: *gently slaps me* Snap out of it! Use your brain when you're talking to me!
Me: Look, just forget it. I appreciate the concern but...
Draco: *sighs* And here I was trying to conf... nevermind that now.
Me: What did you want to say?
Draco: Nothing! Forget it! Come on, let's go sleep. Don't need a detention for falling asleep in class.

He went to leave the room, to his own dormitory, but I caught his wrist, and kissed his cheek, muttering "Sweet dreams", and left to sleep.
Don't let me Drown.

So, once again, time passed, and yet another DADA class arrived to kill us all. Joy.

Pinky: Wands away. As we finished Chapter One last lesson, I would like you all to turn to page nineteen today and commence "Chapter Two, Common Defensive Theories and their Derivation". There will be no need to talk.
Me: *mutters* Elementary school 101, welcome back.

Hermione had her hand in the air again.

Pinky: What is it this time, Miss Granger?
Herm: I've already read Chapter Two.
Pinky: Well then, proceed to Chapter Three.
Herm: I've read that too. I've read the whole book.
Pinky: Well, then, you should be able to tell me what Slinkhard says about counter-jinxes in Chapter Fifteen.
Herm: He says that counter-jinxes are improperly named. He says "counter-jinx" is just a name people give their jinxes when they want to make them sound more acceptable. But I disagree.
Pinky: You disagree?
Herm: Yes, I do. Mr. Slinkhard doesn't like jinxes, does he? But I think they can be very useful when they're used defensively.
Pinky: Oh, you do, do you? Well, I'm afraid it is Mr. Slinkhard's opinion, and not yours, that matters within this classroom, Miss Granger.
Herm: But-
Pinky: That is enough. Miss Granger, I am going to take five points from Gryffindor house.

There was an outbreak of muttering at this.

Harry: What for?
Herm: Don't you get involved!
Pinky: For disrupting my class with pointless interruptions.
Me: Oh really? Since when is having an opinion and disagreeing with another illegal? As far as I remember, this is a free country, not a dictatorship, so our points of view shouldn't be disregarded, as members of the same society... unfortunately.
Pinky: I am here to teach you using a Ministry-approved method that does not include inviting students to give their opinions on matters about which they understand very little.
Me: In other words, you're here to throw a book at our heads, read it... and be paid for doing nothing.
Herm: Raven, don't!
Pinky: Five points from Slytherin. Your previous teachers in this subject may have allowed you more licence, but as none of them-- with the possible exception of Professor Quirrell, who did at least appear to have restricted himself to age-appropriate subjects-- would have passed a Ministry inspection--
Harry: Yeah, Quirrell was a great teacher, there was just that minor drawback of him having
Lord Voldemort sticking out of the back of his head.
Pinky: I think another week's detentions would do you some good, Mr. Potter.
Me: I don't know which case is worse, Quirrell's two-faced problem, or Pinky's.
Pinky: Miss Black seems to wish for a seat next to Mr. Potter in detention.
Me: *shrugs* Sounds fair to me.

The cut on the back of my hand had barely healed and, by the following morning, and throughout the next week, it was bleeding again. Can't complain though, huh?

After the horrid lesson, Hermione pulled me aside, in an empty corridor, and started telling me about her brilliant idea.

Me: So... you want me to join the Anarchy against her?
Hermione: Well... somehow, yes.
Me: What do I have to do?
Hermione: Join our club, that we have yet to form, and...
Me: Sounds easy enough, but in a club, in order to teach the others, there must be at least 1 knowledgeable person. Hermione, I know you are one of them, but you are lacking in experience. And Harry is at the complete opposite spectrum of you.
Hermione: I know... which is why I wanted to ask you to help us most. I know you have... experience... and that you study a lot... especially that area of expertise...
Me: I won't deny anything. I have collected tons of books of spells and have tried them out myself. Some... more or less dangerous than others.
Hermione: That's brilliant anyways. So, will you agree?
Me: There's one problem, dear.
Hermione: I don't see it?
Me: Who would want to be taught by the Slytherin Prefect? You know how the prejudices go and... I'm not the best seen, anyways.
Hermione: It's among friends, I promise. It's not many of us, but in order to be able to pass our OWLs and defend ourselves in need... and just broaden our boundries...
Me: *sighs* I shall comply. However... take care of me there. I'm under too much stress and pressure already. Even more, and I can just go off myself.
Hermione: *looks* I understand... with th-that Mark and... her... and everything...
Me: Things are out of control. Completely bonkers. Just like the Mad Hatter. But it's fine, little Alice. I'll get high like the Blue Caterpillar and start the teaching.
Hermione: *giggles* Let's go meet the others.
Me: Where at?
Hermione: Hog's Head.
Me: Great Honeymoon destination...

Inside, there were more people than I imagined, as I and Hermione entered last, having been awaited by the lot.

Harry and Ron, Neville, Dean, Lavender, Parvati and Padma, Cho and one of her usually-giggling girlfriends, then Luna Katie Bell, Alicia Spinnet and Angelina Johnson, Colin and Dennis Creevey Ernie Macmillan, Justin Finch-Fletchley, Hannah Abbott, a Hufflepuff girl, three Ravenclaw
boys, Ginny, closely followed by a tall skinny blond boy, who is a member of the Hufflepuff Quidditch team and, Fred and George Weasley with their friend Lee Jordan.

Me:*raise an eyebrow* Just a few friends, huh?
Herms: Yes, well, the idea seemed quite popular. Ron, do you want to pull up some more chairs?
Me: So... what am I supposed to say?
Herms: I've told you, they just want to hear what you have to say. I'll speak to them first.
Me: Please do.
Neville: Hi, Raven!
Me: Hey, Neville--.
Herms: Well... um... hi.
Me: Chill, 'Mione. You've got this.
Herms: Yes. Well... erm... well, you know why you're here. Erm... well, Harry here had the idea... that it might be good if people who wanted to study Defence Against the Dark Arts--and I mean, really study it, you know, not the rubbish that Umbridge is doing with us... because nobody could call that Defence Against the Dark Arts... Well, I thought it would be good if we, well, took matters into our own hands. And by that I mean learning how to defend ourselves properly, not just in theory but doing the real spells--
Michael: You want to pass your Defence Against the Dark Arts OWL too, though, I bet?
Herms: Of course I do. But more than that, I want to be properly trained in defence because... because... because Lord Voldemort is back.

The reaction was immediate and predictable. Cho's friend shrieked and slopped Butterbeer down herself; Terry Boot gave a kind of involuntary twitch; Padma Patil shuddered, and Neville gave an odd yelp that he managed to turn into a cough. All of them, however, looked fixedly, even eagerly, at Harry.

Me: I don't get how you get scared of the name of the person you've never had to experience the malice of.
Herms: Well... that's the plan, anyway. If you want to join us, we need to decide how we're going to--
Blond: Where's the proof You-Know-Who's back?
Herms: Well, Dumbledore believes it--
Blond: You mean, Dumbledore believes them.
Ron: Who are you?
Blond: Zacharias Smith. And I believe we have the right to know what makes them say You-Know-Who's back.
Me: Listen, dunderhead, whether you believe us or not, is strictly up to you, I couldn't care less if you did. You can drop dead right here and I wouldn't even bother to report it. But facts are facts, and some here actually give a damn about their education. Stay or not, I don't care. Now shut up, you're lowering the IQ of the whole Hogsmeade.
Harry: It's Okay, Raven. What makes me say You-Know-Who's back? I saw him. We both did. But Dumbledore told the whole school what happened last year, and if you didn't believe him, you won't believe me, and I'm not wasting an afternoon trying to convince anyone.
Zach: All Dumbledore told us last year was that Cedric Diggory got killed by You-Know-Who and that you brought Diggory's body back to Hogwarts. He didn't give us details, he didn't tell us exactly how Diggory got murdered, I think we'd all like to know--
Me: If you are insensitive enough to talk about Cedric's death in the presence of his then girlfriend, then I suggest you leave the room before I hex you to death. Hermione gathered us here to learn how to defend ourselves, not to *mocks* learn how Voldemort kills people.

Harry: If you've come to hear exactly what it looks like when Voldemort murders someone I can't help you.

Herms: So ... So ... like I was saying ... if you want to learn some defence, then we need to work out how we're going to do it, how often we're going to meet and where we're going to--

Susan: Is it true that you can produce a Patronus?

Harry: Yeah.

Susan: A corporeal Patronus?

Me: Mine is a wolf. His is a stag.

Harry: Er--you don't know Madam Bones, do you?

Susan: She's my auntie. I'm Susan Bones. She told me about your hearing. So--is it really true? You make a stag Patronus?

Harry: Yes.

Lee: Blimey, Harry! I never knew that!

Fred: Mum told Ron not to spread it around. She said you got enough attention as it was.

Harry: She's not wrong.

With that, I whipped out my wand, and with a blank expression on my face, I sent the silvery mist, that soon turned into a majestic wolf, prowling around the room.

Might I say, all these idiots kept gawking at it in admiration.

Keh, they better.

The veiled witch sitting alone shifted very slightly in her seat.

It's something off about her, might I say...

However, I can't pinpoint exactly what.

Terry: And did you kill a Basilisk with that sword in Dumbledore's office? That's what one of the portraits on the wall told me when I was in there last year..

Me: Those portraits better stop gossipping so much, or even this meeting will be found out as the daily morning drama for breakfast..

Justin Finch-Fletchley whistled; the Creevey brothers exchanged awestruck looks and Lavender Brown said 'Wow!' softly.

Neville: And in our first year, they saved that Philological Stone--

Herms: Philosopher's!

Neville: Yes, that--from You-Know-Who.

Cho: And not to mention, all the tasks they had to get through in the Triwizard Tournament last year--getting past dragons and merpeople and Acromantula and things ...

Me: No more arachnids, please.

There was a murmur of impressed agreement around the table.

Harry: Look, I ... I don't want to sound like I'm trying to be modest or anything, but ... I had a lot of help with all that stuff ...

Michael: Not with the dragon, you didn't, that was a seriously cool bit of flying ...

Harry: Yeah, well-

Susan: And nobody helped you get rid of those dementors this summer.
Harry: No, no, OK, I know I did bits of it without help, but the point I'm trying to make is... it was mostly luck. And I was never alone.

Me: I don't know about you, Potter, but I don't base my existence on sheer luck. I use my knowledge, wits and skills. Try that too, next time.

Herms: Yes, well, the point is, are we agreed we want to take lessons from Harry and Raven?

Them: *agree*.

Herms: Right. Well, then, the next question is how often we do it. I really don't think there's any point in meeting less than once a week--

Angelina: Hang on, we need to make sure this doesn't clash with our Quidditch practice.

Cho: No, nor with ours.

Zach: Nor ours.

Harry: Raven?

Me: Sorry, I dropped out. Had a bad feeling about this year so... yeah.

Herms: I'm sure we can find a night that suits everyone, but you know, this is rather important, we're talking about learning to defend ourselves against V-Voldemort's Death Eaters--

Ernie: Well said! Personally, I think this is really important, possibly more important than anything else we'll do this year, even with our OWLs coming up! I, personally, am at a loss to see why the Ministry has foisted such a useless teacher on us at this critical period. Obviously, they are in denial about the return of You-Know-Who, but to give us a teacher who is trying to actively prevent us from using defensive spells--

Herms: We think the reason Umbridge doesn't want us trained in Defence Against the Dark Arts, is that she's got some... some mad idea that Dumbledore could use the students in the school as a kind of private army. She thinks he'd mobilise us against the Ministry.

Luna: Well, that makes sense. After all, Cornelius Fudge has got his own private army.

Harry: What?

Luna: Yes, he's got an army of Heliopaths.

Herms: No, he hasn't.

Luna: Yes, he has.

Neville: What are Heliopaths?

Luna: They're spirits of fire, great tall flaming creatures that gallop across the ground burning everything in front of--

Neville: They don't exist, Neville.

Luna: Oh, yes, they do!

Herms: I'm sorry, but where's the proof of that?

Luna: There are plenty of eye-witness accounts. Just because you're so narrow-minded you need to have everything shoved under your nose before you--

Me: ENOUGH! This is becoming ridiculous from both of you! I don't care if it's true or not. If it is, then let them scorch me to death, I wouldn't mind. But we need to end this meeting SUCCESSFULLY!

Ginny: *mocks Pinky*: Hem, hem

Me: That... gave me a heart attack.

Ginny: *chuckles* Weren't we trying to decide how often we're going to meet and have defence lessons?

Herms: Yes, yes, we were, you're right, Ginny.

Lee: Well, once a week sounds cool.

Angelina: As long as--
Herms: Yes, yes, we know about the Quidditch. Well, the other thing to decide is where we're going to meet...
Me: Don't worry about that. The answer will come sooner than expected, in the most unexpected way.
Herms: Right, well, we'll try to find somewhere. We'll send a message round to everybody when we've got a time and a place for the first meeting.

She rummaged in her bag and produced parchment and a quill, then hesitated, rather as though she was steeling herself to say something.

Herms: I--I think everybody should write their name down, just so we know who was here. But I also think, that we all ought to agree not to shout about what we're doing. So if you sign, you're agreeing not to tell Umbridge or anybody else what we're up to.
Me: If she finds out, we can use the paper to cut our own throats. She's worse than good old Voldemort. I mean, did you see her fashion sense?

Fred reached out for the parchment and cheerfully wrote his signature, but several people looked less than happy at the prospect of putting their names on the list.

Zach: Er...well... I'm sure Ernie will tell me when the meeting is.
Ernie: I--well, we are prefects. And if this list was found... well, I mean to say... you said yourself, if Umbridge finds out--
Harry: You just said this group was the most important thing you'd do this year.
Ernie: I--yes, yes, I do believe that, it's just--
Herms: Ernie, do you really think I'd leave that list lying around?
Ernie: No. No, of course not, I--yes, of course I'll sign.
Me: Don't worry about the details. We've got it all sort out.

Nobody raised objections after Ernie.
After we all signed, I nod at Hermione and left the place.

Deciding that I'd use a lazy day, I changed into my sleepwear and went to wash my face and brush my teeth once again.
However, the second I splattered water on my face and looked at the mirror, the flash image of a sleep-deprived self, pulling at self's hair aggressively went before my eyes.
It startled me to no end, for it left, just as it came.
Barely unnoticed, but lingering in my mind, appearing and disappearing like lightning.

Okay, take a deep breathe.
Nothing bad has happened lately, right?
Oh, wait.
The detention.
Again.

I glanced at the damaged hand, and a jolt of pain suddenly electrified my whole body, especially on the hand and neck area.
Despair knows no wit, for it maddens the victim, leading me to punch the mirror as hard as possible, and clutch hard on two of its bloody shards.

That's it.
No more vision.
I can't see it anymore.
I can calm down and repair this.
Urgh, what a mess...
This needs to stop.

I went for the handle, to get my wand, when another vision flashed my sight, but this time, more gentle.
It was of dear Tom, once again, kissing the my cheek, with the same devious smirk.

What seemed peculiar, is that with each vision, the image stays longer, and appears more... spazzic. Distorted.
Like it's trying to change to another one.
More gorey.
More self-destructive.

What kind of warning is this even?
It's not something Voldemort can do, for I'm too well-trained to let him just barge in my mind like this.
But... could it be...
My own unconscious self-destruction?

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**BY ORDER OF THE HIGH INQUISITOR OF HOGWARTS**

*All student organisations, societies, teams, groups and clubs are henceforth disbanded.*

*An organisation, society, team, group or club is hereby defined as a regular meeting of three or more students.*

*Permission to re-form may be sought from the High Inquisitor* (Professor Umbridge).

*No student organisation, society, team, group or club may exist without the knowledge and approval of the High Inquisitor.*

*Any student found to have formed, or to belong to, an organisation, society, team, group or club that has not been approved by the High Inquisitor will be expelled.*

*The above is in accordance with Educational Decree Number Twenty-four.*

*Signed: Dolores Jane Umbridge, High Inquisitor*

Oh.
Great.
That's exactly what I needed.

Draco: Huh. Wonder what made her make up this rule.
Me: Good question.
Draco: Probably just Potter being an idiot, as usual. At least there's one more teacher with
common sense, who hates him.
Me: And me as well.
Draco: Well... you kind of asked for it.
Me: She begged mockery the second she decided to be a pink nightmare.
Draco: *chuckles* If you say so. At least it's not all that bad, right? Some lines?
Me: Yeah... piece of cake.
Draco: Thanks for the Seeker position, by the way. But are you sure you want to resign?
Me: My gut feeling is always right, dear Draco. One's got to do what one's got to do. That's how the saying goes, am I right?
Draco: Mayhaps so.
Me: Besides... I haven't been too successful either. I just put my House in a bad spotlight, always being second to... him.
Draco: No, no, no. Don't think of that. Nobody dares speak ill of you, especially not in my presence. I'm quite the influence, you see.
Me: I'm aware. Not difficult to notice.
Draco: Then don't put yourself down. You are one of the House prides. Act like one. Miss Prefect~.
Me: O-Oh, right, yes. I'm a Prefect. Pansy was the first to congratulate me.
Draco: Glad to know she's finally sane.
Me: She's not that bad, might I say.
Draco: *kisses me hand* My lady deserves the best.
Me: *flushes* Ah... I... Th-Thanks, I guess...
Draco: *chuckles* At least pink suits you.

Kissing my cheek, he left me there, rooted on the spot, with my hand on the spot he kissed, and staring dead ahead. Half of me thought it was sweet. But the other half recalled a sudden and previous vision, similar to the scene that has just occurred.

Me: Bloody hell... I'm a Seer, but I definitely didn't see that one coming... sheesh...

Potions class is the best delight of my day, for I feel in my own natural habitat between shimmering cauldrons and various ingredients. Arriving first, I quickly took my usual seat at the front of the class, pulled out parchment, a quill and my copy of One Thousand Magical Herbs and Fungi. The class around was whispering about what Neville had just done, but when Snape closed the dungeon door with an echoing bang, everybody immediately fell silent.

Snape: *sneers* You will notice that we have a guest with us today.

He gestured towards the dim corner of the dungeon and Umbridge was sitting there, clipboard on her knee. Oh, sweet baby Lady Vashj, I've been so much in my own head with excitement for this lesson, that I missed her presence. And now, even poor Severus has to suffer her presence.

Snape: We are continuing with our Strengthening Solution today. You will find your mixtures as you left them last lesson; if correctly made they should have matured well over the weekend; instructions on the board. Carry on.
Umbridge spent the first half hour of the lesson making notes in her corner. Then, she strode between two lines of desks towards Snape, who was bending over Dean Thomas's cauldron.

Pinky: Well, the class seem fairly advanced for their level. Though I would question whether it is advisable to teach them a potion like the Strengthening Solution. I think the Ministry would prefer it if that was removed from the syllabus.
Me: *mutter* Don't you dare...

Snape straightened up slowly and turned to look at her.

Pinky: How ... how long have you been teaching at Hogwarts?
Snape: Fourteen years.
Pinky: You applied first for the Defence Against the Dark Arts post, I believe?
Snape: Yes.
Pinky: But you were unsuccessful?
Snape: Obviously.

Professor Umbridge scribbled on her clipboard.

Pinky: And you have applied regularly for the Defence Against the Dark Arts post since you first joined the school, I believe?
Snape: Yes.
Pinky: Do you have any idea why Dumbledore has consistently refused to appoint you?
Snape: I suggest you ask him.
Pinky: Oh, I shall.
Snape: I suppose this is relevant?
Pinky: Oh yes, yes, the Ministry wants a thorough understanding of teachers'--er--backgrounds.

As she said that, I felt the quill I was holding snap in my grip, which made several heads turn their way towards me...including hers.

Pinky: Ah, Miss Black, once again.
Me: Um... that's me indeed.
Pinky: Since you are the Prefect from Professor Snape's House, I'm going to ask you some question regarding the class.
Me: Right.
Pinky: Tell me, Miss Black, why do you think Professor Snape has been denied the post of the DADA teacher?
Me: I don't believe I am qualified enough to know the answer myself. It is you who kept saying that unqualified people shouldn't speak.
Pinky: *eye twitch* However, I am asking for an opinion, not a certified answer.
Me: Weren't you the one saying the opinions don't matter? I believe the topic of discussion occurred quite recently, too.
Pinky: Miss Black, I merely asked you a question, and I expect a legitimate answer.
Me: Are you saying that I'm allowed to say... anything on this matter? My... true, humble, honest and unnecessary opinion?
Pinky: Yes, Miss Black, I want to hear it today.
Me: Today is at 11:59 pm as well, so if you'd let me walk around at such hour to-
Pinky: BLACK!
Me: Yes?
Pinky: Yes, Ma'am!
Me: Oh, you flatter me, but there's no need to call me Ma'am, professor.
Pinky: *red with fury* I'll ask one more time, Black, and if I don't hear an answer-
Me: Detention again?
Pinky: Continue this way, and you can be expelled for destructive behaviour.
Me: What a surprise.
Pinky: And your answer.
Me: *exasperated sigh* You want to know my answer? Fine. As you know, in 5 years we've had 5 different DADA teachers, more or less competent. However, there's only ONE true Potions Master, and that is Professor Snape. Can't imagine our Headmaster would like to replace Professor Snape from his rightful post of Potions, when that is where his true potential shines. As for the DADA post... any desperate, unknowledgeable individual can get that post. Quite like you.
Pinky: *fuming* Very well, Black. Detention for one more month. *leaves*.
Me: Well, wasn't that refreshing.
Snape: 10 points to Slytherin.
Ron: *chuckles*.
Me: *hits the back of his head* Shut up
Snape: *hits the back of his head* No amusement in my class.

At the end of the class, Snape told me to stay behind.
Guilt took over me, so I hung my head down, as I leaned on the desk in front of his own desk.

Snape: Are you out of your mind?
Me: Don't hate me, please. Do anything, but please don't hate me. That'd be the worst possible outcome.
Snape: *sighs* You're more troublesome than I imagined.
Me: I couldn't stop myself. I know, I was reckless and stupid, but I was fully aware of my actions.
Snape: Why?
Me: Why...?... Because you're the only person, despite everything, who truly cared about me... and remembered I exist on this planet as more than just a waste of space. You looked after me and took care of me, even if I was pretty much a stranger to you... and I just... felt... the need to do it too... at least once...
Snape: I appreciate the thoughts, but I am a grown adult who can take care of himself. I don't need your assistance.
Me: I can't stop caring about you, Severus. We are more alike than you know. I know how it is to be bullied and... I couldn't stand the idea of you being treated that way...
Snape: Next time, care for yourself as well. I'm doing better than you in that regard if it weren't obvious enough.
Me: It's in our nature. We share the same Zodiac Sign, Severus. Remember that, when you think about the reason behind my actions.
Snape: Nevertheless... Your witty remarks are gold.
Me: *winks* Learnt from the best.
Soon, we had to go to our first Group meeting place, which, as Harry says (being told by Dobby recently) is the Room of Requirement.

As we made sure to check the Marauder's Map for any threats and made our way to the Floor in cause, and wished for the room to appear and aid our needs.

And it did.

The walls were lined with wooden bookcases and instead of chairs there were large silk cushions on the floor. A set of shelves at the far end of the room carried a range of instruments such as Sneakoscopes, Secrecy Sensors and a large, cracked Foe-Glass.

**Ron:** These will be good when we're practising Stunning!

**Herms:** And just look at these books! A Compendium of Common Curses and their Counter-Actions ... The Dark Arts Outsmarted ... Self-Defensive Spellwork ... wow ... Harry, this is wonderful, there's everything we need here!

And without further ado she slid Jinxes for the Jinxed from its shelf, sank on to the nearest cushion and began to read, and I got a Dark Arts book, taking a seat next to her.

There was a gentle knock on the door. Harry looked round. Ginny, Neville, Lavender, Parvati and Dean had arrived.

**Dean:** Whoa. What is this place?

Harry began to explain, but before he had finished more people had arrived and he had to start all over again. By the time eight o'clock arrived, every cushion was occupied. He moved across to the door and turned the key protruding from the lock; it clicked in a satisfyingly loud way and everybody fell silent, looking at him. Hermione carefully marked her page of Jinxes for the Jinxed and set the book aside.

**Harry:** Well, this is the place we've found for practice sessions, and you've--er--obviously found it OK.

**Cho:** It's fantastic!

**Fred:** It's bizarre. We once hid from Filch in here, remember, George? But it was just a broom cupboard then.

**Dean:** Hey, what's this stuff?

**Harry:** Dark detectors. Basically they all show when Dark wizards or enemies are around, but you don't want to rely on them too much, they can be fooled... Well, I've been thinking about the sort of stuff we ought to do first and--er--What, Hermione?

**Herms:** I think we ought to elect a leader.

**Cho:** Harry's leader.

**Herms:** *looks at me* Yes, but I think we ought to vote on it properly. It makes it formal and it gives him authority.

**Me:** I'm fine with it.

**Herms:** *nods* So--everyone who thinks Harry ought to be our leader?

Everybody put up their hand.

**Herms:** Er--right, thanks. And--what, Hermione?

**Herms:** I also think we ought to have a name. It would promote a feeling of team spirit and
unity, don't you think?
Angelina: Can we be the Anti-Umbridge League?
Fred: Or the Ministry of Magic are Morons Group?
Me: Maybe something more...neutral.
Herms: I was thinking, more of a name that didn't tell everyone what we were up to, so we can refer to it safely outside meetings.
Cho: The Defence Association? The DA for short, so nobody knows what we're talking about?
Ginny: Yeah, the DA's good. Only let's make it stand for Dumbledore's Army, because that's the Ministry's worst fear, isn't it?

There was a good deal of appreciative murmuring and laughter at this.

Herms: All in favour of the DA? That's a majority--motion passed!

She pinned the piece of parchment with all of their signatures on it on to the wall and wrote across the top in large letters:

---
DUMBLEDORE'S ARMY
---

Harry: Right, shall we get practising then? I was thinking, the first thing we should do is Expelliarmus, you know, the Disarming Charm. I know it's pretty basic but I've found it really useful--
Zach: Oh, please, I don't think Expelliarmus is exactly going to help us against You-Know-Who, do you?
Harry: I've used it against him. It saved my life in June.
Me: Not only that though. Priori Incantatem...
Harry: But if you think it's beneath you, you can leave. Fine. I reckon we should all divide into pairs and practise.

We all paired up, and I stayed with Hermione, awaiting further instructions.

Harry: Right--on the count of three, then--one, two, three.

The room was suddenly full of shouts of Expelliarmus.

Me: Well done, Hermione.
Herms: Thank you.
Me: However, most of these guys missed the aim of it. It's supposed to disarm them, not... throw them backwards.
Herms: Thank you for doing this. I appreciate it.
Me: Any time.

After some time, though...

Harry: Okay, stop! Stop. STOP! That wasn't bad, but there's definite room for improvement. Let's try again.

He moved off around the room to correct others.
What can I say, this is boring so far, but whatever... charity work and Karma.
After this practice hours, we decided to meet up next Wednesday.
Herms: You see the numerals around the edge of the coins? On real Galleons that's just a serial number referring to the goblin who cast the coin. On these fake coins, though, the numbers will change to reflect the time and date of the next meeting. The coins will grow hot when the date changes, so if you're carrying them in a pocket you'll be able to feel them. We take one each, and when Harry sets the date of the next meeting he'll change the numbers on his coin, and because I've put a Protean Charm on them, they'll all change to mimic his. Thanks for the idea, Raven.

Me: *shrugs* Well--I thought it was a good idea. I mean, even if Umbridge asked us to turn out our pockets, there's nothing fishy about carrying a Galleon, is there?

Terry: You can do a Protean Charm?

Herms: Yes, we both can.

Terry: But that's ... that's NEWT standard, that is.

Me: And? Big deal. It's easy.

Terry: How come you're not in Ravenclaw? With brains like yours?

Herms: Well, the Sorting Hat did seriously consider putting us in Ravenclaw during our Sorting, right?

Me: Mhhhyeaaah... but it decided on our current Houses in the end.

Herms: So, does that mean we're using the Galleons?

There was a murmur of assent and everybody moved forwards to collect one from the basket.

Harry: You know what these remind me of?

Me: The Mark. I know.

Herms: Well ... yes, she came up with the idea ... but you'll notice I decided to engrave the date on bits of metal rather than on our members' skin.

Harry: Yeah ... I prefer your way.

Me: *rubbing my arm* I suppose the only danger with these is that we might accidentally spend them.

Ron: Fat chance. I haven't got any real Galleons to confuse it with.

###

_Weasley cannot save a thing,_

_He cannot block a single ring,_

_That's why Slytherins all sing:_

_Weasley is our King._

_Weasley was born in a bin_

_He always lets the Quaffle in_

_Weasley will make sure we win_

_Weasley is our King._

Draco wrote this hymn for the Slytherins to chant during the match against Gryffindor, when he found out Ron was elected the new Keeper. Well, it's very creative, might I say... it's trouble.

Potter caught the Snitch, nothing surprising, which made Draco and the others mad.
And Crabbe, as the new Beater, whacked the Bludger at Harry the moment he saw him catch the Snitch.

I went down the pitch to congratulate the team, and Draco, on his great performance, as the new seeker, but he merely scoffed and went with the team to the Gryffindor team, white-faced with fury, and sneering.

Draco: Saved Weasley's neck, haven't you? I've never seen a worse Keeper ... but then he was born in a bin ... did you like my lyrics, Potter?

Me: Draco, please don't.

Harry didn't answer. He turned away to meet the rest of the team who were now landing one by one, yelling and punching the air in triumph; all except Ron, who had dismounted from his broom over by the goalposts and seemed to be making his way slowly back to the changing rooms alone.

Draco: We wanted to write another couple of verses! But we couldn't find rhymes for fat and ugly--we wanted to sing about his mother, see--

Angelina: Talk about sour grapes.

Draco: --we couldn't fit in useless loser either--for his father, you know--

Me: Don't pick up fights like this!

Draco: You're not my mother, Black. You can't control me.

Me: I wasn't trying to! I just don't want you hurt or something.

Draco: *scoffs* As if they can hurt me.

Fred and George had realised what Malfoy was talking about. Halfway through shaking Harry's hand, they stiffened, looking round at Malfoy.

Angelina: Leave it! Leave it, Fred, let him yell, he's just sore he lost.

Draco: - but you like the Weasleys, don't you, Potter? Spend holidays there and everything, don't you? Can't see how you stand the stink, but I suppose when you've been dragged up by Muggles, even the Weasleys' hovel smells Okay-

I kept trying in vain to stop Draco, who kept ignoring me and pushing me aside. Harry grabbed hold of George. Meanwhile, it was taking the combined efforts of Angelina, Alicia and Katie to stop Fred leaping on Malfoy, who was laughing openly. Harry looked around for Madam Hooch, but she was still berating Crabbe for his illegal Bludger attack.

Draco: Or perhaps, you can remember what your mother's house stank like, Potter, and Weasley's pigsty reminds you of it--

I was so upset about this, that I didn't realise slapping Draco, until the whole pitch went quiet. He stared at me in shock and hurt, but at the same time, Harry and George were sprinting towards the blond... and all teachers were watching. He had completely forgotten that all the teachers were watching. Harry merely drew back the fist clutching the Snitch and sank it as hard as he could into Malfoy's stomach-

Angelina: Harry! HARRY! GEORGE! NO!

He could hear girls' voices screaming, Malfoy yelling, George swearing, a whistle blowing and the bellowing of the crowd around him, but none of them cared, until I used a spell to knock them all backwards.

Me: Really, guys? I know you hate Draco and he had it coming, but using such a
barbaric,muggle way of harming? You're despicable!

Hooch: What do you think you're doing?

Malfoy was curled up on the ground, whimpering and moaning, his nose bloody, and I sat down near him, put his head on my lap, and proceeded to fix his nose with a simple yet effective spell, called Episkey.

George was sporting a swollen lip; Fred was still being forcibly restrained by the three Chasers, and Crabbe was cackling in the background.

Hooch: I've never seen behaviour like it--back up to the castle, both of you, and straight to your Head of House's office! Go! Now.

Snape scolded Draco a lot, which made him glare at me. However, he praised my healing spell skills, which I'm happy about. I'm glad that at least he let us off easily.

At the Common Room though, being alone, he could release his rage in peace.

At me.

By shouting.

Draco: So now you made up with Potter and diss me?

Me: When did I diss you? I just told you not to get into trouble.

Draco: You slapped me.

Me: Because you insulted-

Draco: POTTER'S mother, not yours!

Me: My mother was best friends with his mother! They technically lived in the same place for a long time!

Draco: It's not like I care about her either, y'know? Cause she's dead?

Me: I noticed that some years ago...

Draco: I don't even get why I started pitying you. Why did I think you were different?

Me: I, well... I know I'm nothing important, but...

Draco: Saint Black... always stealing the spotlight...

Me: *flinch* Draco, please, be reasonable, I don't want the attention!

Draco: Oh really? Is that why you keep trash-talking Umbridge and getting detentions?

Me: I don't want detentions! Especially not with her! She's evil! Horrible!

At the mention of that, he kept making his way towards me, intimidating, until my back touched the wall, and I couldn't escape his wrath.

Draco: Why, because she doesn't agree with you?

Me: *lip quiver* N-No... that's n-not it...

Draco: Right, cause all this time you haven't tried to change me.

Me: I did not! I just want us to be friends! Please, Draco, I apologize for offending you!

Draco: Prove that you're not doing it for attention. All you know is cry and whine. Just like Potter. I hate you!

I looked down, with a sniff, biting my lip and feeling tears making their way down my cheek, as I slowly lifted my hand, and made my hand reveal the engraved words from my hand.

I am a traitor.

When he saw that, he gasped and gingerly took my hand into his grasp.
Draco: How...?
Me: Umbridge's detention have more... depth... in their lines...
Draco: Why didn't you tell anyone?
Me: Snape knows...
Draco: You must get this healed before-
Me: I can't. She thinks nobody knows. Plus, it's going to be worse if I heal it and carve into it again... for this whole month.
Draco: You can't go. I'll talk to her to at least let off some of your detention. She likes me, maybe I can-
Me: Don't bother... it won't work...
Draco: I-
Me: Do you still... hate me now?

He looked at me with a guilty expression, then took me in his arms, and cradled me protectively, stroking my hair soothingly.

Draco: I could never hate you. Not you. Out of all the people, never you.
Me: I don't want to lose you.
Draco: You won't. I'm not going anywhere.

Hagrid has finally returned, and with this, his examination by Umbridge.

What did he bring us?
Thestrals.
Because that's an incredible idea.

A pair of blank, white, shining eyes were growing larger through the gloom and a moment later the dragonish face, neck and then skeletal body of a great, black, winged horse emerged from the darkness. It surveyed the class for a few seconds, swishing its long black tail, then bowed its head and began to tear flesh from the dead cow with its pointed fangs.

Most of the people can't see it.
They have not witnessed death yet.

Most of the rest of the class were wearing expressions as confused and nervously expectant. We were only four other people who seemed to be able to see them: I, Harry, a stringy Slytherin boy standing just behind Goyle, watching the horse eating with an expression of great distaste on his face; and Neville, whose eyes were following the swishing progress of the long black tail.

Hagrid: Now ... put yer hands up, who can see 'em? Yeah ... yeah, I knew you'd be able ter, Raven, Harry, An' you too, Neville, eh? An'--
Draco: Excuse me, but what exactly are we supposed to be seeing?

For an answer, Hagrid pointed at the cow carcass on the ground. The whole class stared at it for a few seconds, then several people gasped and Parvati squealed. Bits of flesh stripping themselves away from the bones and vanishing into thin air had to look very odd indeed.

Parvati: What's doing it? What's eating it?
Me: Thestrals
Hagrid: Hogwarts has got a whole herd of 'em in here. Now, who knows --?
Me: Only people who have seen death.
Hagrid: That's exactly right, ten points ter Slytherin. Now, Thestrals--

_Hem, hem._

No. Way.

Professor Umbridge had arrived. She was standing a few feet away from Harry, wearing her pink hat and cloak again, her clipboard at the ready. Hagrid, who had never heard Umbridge's fake cough before, was gazing in some concern at the closest Thestral, evidently under the impression that it had made the sound.

_Hem, hem._

Hagrid: Oh, hello!
Pinky: You received the note I sent to your cabin this morning? Telling you that I would be inspecting your lesson?
Hagrid: Oh, yeah. Glad yeh found the place all righ'! Well, as you can see-- or, I dunno-- can you? We're doin' Thestrals today--
Pinky: I'm sorry? What did you say?
Hagrid: Er-- Thestrals! Big-- er-- winged horses, yeh know!

He flapped his gigantic arms hopefully. Professor Umbridge raised her eyebrows at him and muttered as she made a note on her clipboard: _'Has ... to ... resort ... to ... crude ... sign ... language.'_

Hagrid: Well ... anyway ... er ... what was I sayin?

'_Appears ... to ... have ... poor ... short ... term ... memory._' muttered Umbridge, loudly enough for everyone to hear her.

Hagrid: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was gonna tell yeh how come we got a herd. Yeah, so, we started off with a male an' five females. This one, name o' Tenebrus, he's my special favourite, firs' one born here in the Forest--
Pinky: Are you aware, that the Ministry of Magic has classified Thestrals as "dangerous"?
Hagrid: Thestrals aren' dangerous! All righ', they might take a bite outta yeh if yeh really annoy them --

'_Shows ... signs ... of... pleasure ... at ... idea ... of... violence._' muttered Umbridge, scribbling on her clipboard again.

Hagrid: No-- come on! I mean, a dog'll bite if yeh bait it, won' it-- but Thestrals have jus' got a bad reputation because o' the death thing-- people used ter think they were bad omens, didn' they? Jus' didn' understand, did they?
Pinky: Please continue teaching as usual. I am going to walk, and ask them questions.
Herms:* mutters* You hag, you evil hag! I know what you're doing, you awful, twisted, vicious--
me:* holds her hand* Shh... it's okay... it's how it is... 

Hagrid: Erm ... anyway, so -- Thestrals. Yeah. Well, there's loads o' good stuff abou' them ... 
Pinky: Do you find that you are able to understand Professor Hagrid when he talks?
Pansy: * chuckles * No ... because ... well ... it sounds ... like grunting a lot of the time ...'
Umbridge scribbled on her clipboard. The few unbruised bits of Hagrid's face flushed, but he tried to act as though he had not heard Pansy's answer.

Hagrid: Er ... yeah ... good stuff abou’ Thestrals. Well, once they're tamed, like this lot, yeh'll never be lost again. 'Mazin' sense o' direction, jus' tell 'em where yeh want ter go--
Draco: Assuming they can understand you, of course.
me: Stop disrupting the class. It's unethical.
Pinky: The same could be said about you too, Miss Black.
me: Indeed.
Pinky: You can see the Thestrals, Longbottom, can you?
me: This is highly insensitive and insensible of you!
Pinky: Who did you see die?
Neville: My ... my grandad.
Pinky: And what do you think of them?
Neville: Erm... Well, they're ... er ... OK ...
Pinky: Students ... are ... too ... intimidated ... to ... admit ... they ... are ... frightened.
me: Well MAYBE if you'd stop misinterpreting their words-
Neville: No! No, I'm not scared of them!
Pinky: It's quite all right, Hagrid, I think I've got enough to be getting along with. You will receive the results of your inspection in ten days' time, Miss Black, detention for disrupting the class again.
me: WHAT NOW?!
Pinky: And for shouting.

I was left jaw dropped as she left the place with a poison smile on her face.
I was devastated once again.
Draco tried to take my hand and comfort me, but I yanked it from his grasp and stormed back to the castle.

I want to kill this wench ASAP.
Stabby Stabby.
Gingerbread man

As I was practicing Occlumency once again with Severus, I didn't realize just how late it got, until I nodded off on the armchair, while hearing his smooth, low, velvety voice.

At first, I dreamt of a dark gothic castle, like those in stories with Vampire counts. The macabre violin song was ringing throughout the Ball room, and I was in the middle, gracefully dancing with a certain charming individual with long-ish dark hair and enchanting ruby eyes. However, that fantasy dream soon switched to another dark room, but I didn't feel... human anymore. My body felt like it had automatically shifted, just like I used to with my Metamorphmagus abilities.

*I felt... smooth, slicky and flexible.*

I was gliding between shining metal bars, across dark, cold stone floor... flat against the floor, sliding along my scaled belly... it was dark, yet I could sense my surroundings around me, shimmering in strange, vibrant colours... I turned my head... at first glance the corridor was empty...

But no...

A man was sitting on the floor ahead, his chin drooping onto his chest, his outline gleaming in the dark... looking like a gingerbread man... with hair on fire...

He was alive but drowsy... sitting in front of a door at the end of the corridor...

My instincts made me have animalistic desires... to bite the man... but I must control the urge...

I have more important things to do... like getting home...

But the man was stirring... a silver Cloak fell from his legs as he jumped to his feet; And I immediately sensed his vibrant, blurred outline towering above me, saw a wand withdrawn from a belt...

I have no choice...

I cannot stop myself...

**I am a traitor...**

Just like she said...

I am a merciless, thirsty beast who must end her primal desire.

Blood.

I sprung high from the floor and struck
Once,
Twice,
Three times.

Plunging my fangs deeply into the man's flesh, feeling his ribs splinter beneath my jaws, feeling the warm gush of blood...
Sweet, crimson blood, with a tint of salty flavour, and a somehow metallic taste.

The man was yelling in pain... then he fell silent...

He slumped backwards against the wall...

Blood was splattering on to the floor...

And I kept slithering in it...

Until my neck started to sting and hurt terribly... it was aching fit to burst...
That is when I woke up with a yelp and fell on the floor, still shocked at the events. It was all in my head...
Or was it really?

When I stood up, hurriedly, I saw a flash of light, then a picture of my bare neck, being clawed and bloodied, and I lost my balance, leaning on Severus.

Snape: I believe it is against common etiquette to fall asleep during class.
Me: I am sorry... but I may have a justification...
Snape: You were being restless. Any vision?
Me: I believe so... but first... we must go to Dumbledore. I believe Potter is there by now, and all will be explained... I hope.
Snape: Very well. Lean on me.

As we entered through his office door, we notice Potter, with Ron and McGonagall.

Dumbledore: If I may guess, miss Black has had the same... nightmare, as to say... mr. Potter?
me: I believe so, professor.
Harry: It wasn't a nightmare!
Minerva: Very well, then, Potter, you tell the Headmaster about it.
Harry: I ... well, I was asleep. But it wasn't an ordinary dream... it was real... I saw it happen... Ron's dad-- Mr. Weasley-- has been attacked by a giant snake.
me: I can confirm the accuracy of his statement... but in better terms...
Dumbledore: How did you see this?
Harry: Well... I don't know-- Inside my head, I suppose--
Dumbledore: You misunderstand me, I mean--
me: If you must know the gravity of the situation... we were the snake. Everything was in first person... the point of view of the snake in cause...
Dumbledore: Is Arthur seriously injured?
me: Fatally injured. Somehow, we must act with haste, if we wish to save him.

Dumbledore stood up, and addressed one of the old portraits hanging very near the ceiling.

Dumbledore: Everard? And you too, Dilys! You were listening?

A sallow-faced wizard with a short black fringe and an elderly witch with long silver ringlets in the frame beside him, both of whom seemed to have been in the deepest of sleeps, opened their eyes immediately.
The wizard nodded; the witch said, 'Naturally.'

Dumbledore: The man has red hair and glasses, Everard, you will need to raise the alarm, make sure he is found by the right people--

Both nodded and moved sideways out of their frames, but instead of emerging in neighbouring pictures, neither reappeared. One frame now contained nothing but a backdrop of dark curtain, the other a leather armchair.

Dumbledore: Everard and Dilys were two of Hogwarts' most celebrated Heads. Their renown is such that both have portraits hanging in other important wizarding institutions. As they are free to move between their own portraits, they can tell us what may be happening elsewhere...
me: Those are some life goals...
Harry: But Mr. Weasley could be anywhere!
me: He is not Schrödinger's cat...
Dumbledore: Please sit down, all 5 of you. Everard and Dilys may not be back for several minutes. Professor Snape, if you could draw up extra chairs.

Professor Snape pulled his wand from the pocket of his robe and waved it; 5 chairs appeared out of thin air, straight-backed and wooden. Dumbledore was now stroking Fawkes's plumed golden head with one finger. The phoenix awoke immediately. He stretched his beautiful head high and observed Dumbledore through bright, dark eyes.

'We will need,' Dumbledore said very quietly to the bird, 'a warning.'

There was a flash of fire and the phoenix had gone.

Dumbledore now swooped down upon one of the fragile silver instruments, carried it to his desk, sat down facing them again and tapped it gently with the tip of his wand.

The instrument tinkled into life at once with rhythmic clinking noises. Tiny puffs of pale green smoke issued from the minuscule silver tube at the top. Dumbledore watched the smoke closely, his brow furrowed. After a few seconds, the tiny puffs became a steady stream of smoke that thickened and coiled in the air ... a serpent's head grew out of the end of it, opening its mouth wide.

'Naturally, naturally,' murmured Dumbledore apparently to himself, still observing the stream of smoke without the slightest sign of surprise. 'But in essence divided?'

The smoke serpent, however, split itself instantly into two snakes, both coiling and undulating in the dark air. With a look of grim satisfaction, Dumbledore gave the instrument another gentle tap with his wand: the clinking noise slowed and died and the smoke serpents grew faint, became a formless haze and vanished.

Dumbledore replaced the instrument on its spindly little table. There was a shout from the top of the wall to their right; the wizard called Everard had reappeared in his portrait, panting slightly.

'Dumbledore!'

Dumbledore: What news?
Everard: I yelled until someone came running, said I'd heard something moving downstairs-- they weren't sure whether to believe me but went down to check-- you know there are no portraits down there to watch from. Anyway, they carried him up a few minutes later. He doesn't look good, he's covered in blood, I ran along to Elfrida Cragg's portrait to get a good view as they left--
Dumbledore: Good. I take it Dilys will have seen him arrive, then--

And moments later, the silver-ringleted witch had reappeared in her picture, too; she sank, coughing, into her armchair.

Dilys: Yes, they've taken him to St. Mungo's, Dumbledore ... they carried him past my portrait ... he looks bad ... 
Dumbledore: Thank you, Minerva, I need you to go and wake the other Weasley children. Minerva: Of course ... And Dumbledore-- what about Molly?
Dumbledore: That will be a job for Fawkes when he has finished keeping a lookout for
anybody approaching. But she may already know ... that excellent clock of hers ...

Professor McGonagall got up and moved swiftly to the door. Harry cast a sideways glance at Ron, who was looking terrified.

Dumbledore now was carrying a blackened old kettle, which he placed carefully on his desk. He raised his wand and murmured, 'Portus!' For a moment the kettle trembled, glowing with an odd blue light; then it quivered to rest, as solidly black as ever. Dumbledore marched over to another portrait, this time of a clever-looking wizard with a pointed beard, who had been painted wearing the Slytherin colours of green and silver and was apparently sleeping so deeply that he could not hear Dumbledore's and other portraits' voices when they attempted to rouse him.

me: Is that...?

'Phineas, Phineas! Phineas! Phineas! PHINEAS!'

Phineas: Did someone call?
Dumbledore: I need you to visit your other portrait again, Phineas. I've got another message.
Phineas: Visit my other portrait? Oh, no, Dumbledore, I am too tired tonight.
me: But will you do it for an authentic 100% Pureblood from the house of Black that is actually a Slytherin, unlike that filth that happens to live in OUR noble house?
Phineas: *raises an eyebrow* You must be our new young Miss. Black?
me: Not sure how young is one that is 15 years OLD, but yes, the one and only.
Phineas: If my dear great-great-great-granddaughter asks that, then who am I to be opposed to her wish? Though he may well have destroyed my picture by now, he's done away with most of the family--
me: Sirius knows not to destroy your portrait. He is not as stupid as he seems... I hope.
Dumbledore: You are to give him the message that Arthur Weasley has been gravely injured and that his wife, children, Raven Black and Harry Potter will be arriving at his house shortly. Do you understand?
Phineas: Yes, yes ... very well ...
me: Thank you, grandfather!
Dumbledore: *chuckles* That was a better persuasion than I could have ever managed with him.
me: You have to know how to touch the... sensitive points.

Fred, George and Ginny were ushered inside by Professor McGonagall, all three of them looking dishevelled and shocked, still in their night clothes.

Ginny: Harry-- what's going on? Professor McGonagall says you saw Dad get hurt--
Dumbledore: Your father has been injured in the course of his work for the Order of the Phoenix. He has been taken to St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries. I am sending you back to Sirius's house, which is much more convenient for the hospital than The Burrow. You will meet your mother there.
Fred: How're we going? Floo powder?
Dumbledore: No. Floo powder is not safe at the moment, the Network is being watched. You will be taking a Portkey. We are just waiting for Phineas Nigellus to report back ... I want to be sure that the coast is clear before sending you--
There was a flash of flame in the very middle of the office, leaving behind a single golden feather that floated gently to the floor.

Dumbledore: It is Fawkes's warning. Professor Umbridge must know you're out of your beds. ... Minerva, go and head her off--tell her any story--
me: I wonder how she found out...

Professor McGonagall was gone in a swish of tartan.

Phineas: He says he'll be delighted. My great-great-grandson has always had an odd taste in house-guests.

Dumbledore: Come here, then. And quickly, before anyone else joins us.

Me: As in, the pink toad. But what about professor Snape?

Dumbledore: Him and I must make some preparations for you return.

me: Very well.

Just as we finished the countdown to touch the old kettle Portkey, I felt the same stinging sensation that made me gasp in pain. I reached for the kettle, as I felt my legs giving up, and then we were transported to Old Grimmauld place.

'Back again, the blood-traitor brats. Is it true their father's dying?'

The migraine I had was so bad at that moment, that the old portrait of my grandmother screaming made me snap.... But not only me, for when I yelled "SHUT UP!", my own father roared "QUIET!".

Sirius: Are you feeling alright?
me: Never better...

The only sources of light were the fire and one guttering candle, which illuminated the remains of a solitary supper; Sirius was hurrying towards us, looking anxious. He was unshaven and still in his day clothes; there was also a slightly Mundungus-like whiff of stale drink about him.

me: Drinking cheap stuff again?

Sirius: What's going on? Phineas Nigellus said Arthur's been badly injured--
Fred: Ask them--
George: Yeah, I want to hear this for myself.

The twins and Ginny were staring at us. Kreacher's footsteps had stopped on the stairs outside.

Harry: It was--I had a--a kind of--vision ...
me: He dreamt of it. It was a dream that came true. That's all.

And so, Harry started narrating his vision, but in 3rd person, this time.

Fred: Is Mum here?

Sirius: She probably doesn't even know what's happened yet. The important thing was to get you away before Umbridge could interfere. I expect Dumbledore's letting Molly know now.

Ginny: We've got to go to St. Mungos. Sirius, can you lend us cloaks or anything?

Sirius: Hang on, you can't go tearing off to St. Mungo's!
Fred: Course we can go to St. Mungo's if we want! He's our dad!

Sirius: And how are you going to explain how you knew Arthur was attacked before the
hospital even let his wife know?
George: What does that matter?
Sirius: It matters because we don't want to draw attention to the fact that Harry is having visions of things that are happening hundreds of miles away! Have you any idea what the Ministry would make of that information?
Ginny: Somebody else could have told us ... we could have heard it somewhere other than Harry.
Sirius: Like who? Listen, your dad's been hurt while on duty for the Order and the circumstances are fishy enough without his children knowing about it seconds after it happened, you could seriously damage the Order's--
Fred: We don't care about the dumb Order!
George: It's our dad dying we're talking about!
Sirius: Your father knew what he was getting into and he won't thank you for messing things up for the Order! This is how it is--this is why you're not in the Order--you don't understand--there are things worth dying for!
Fred: Easy for you to say, stuck here! I don't see you risking your neck!
me: ENOUGH! This has blown OUT of proportion because you two idiots never use your head! EVER! This is not the first time the Order happened, and YOUR PARENTS were MEMBERS of it! THEY signed up for this! For YOUR well-being! So that's why I strongly suggest you SHUT you TRAP and SIT like the obedient little gingers that you are and try to see the REASON behind this. If you go reckless now, you sacrifice EVERYTHING that has been done thus far for OUR good.
Fred: But what if something happens to him?!
me: And what? Do you have some greater affinity towards healing that I didn't know about? If not, then QUIET! You are USELESS! And even worse than that, you keep trying to ruin the cause that your parents have been fighting for!
Sirius: She's right, you know?
me: Oh, shut up, you dunderhead! They are right too, in their own stupid way. It's YOUR fault for being stuck in this situation. You and your recklessness. You, who thought were SO strong, to bring justice to your friends and wife! But in the end, you absolutely FUCKED UP! Excuse my language, but you kinda ruined my childhood. And now, you're useless. Oh wait... the whole Order is useless... I forgot.

The little colour remaining in Sirius's face drained from it, but when he spoke, it was in a voice of shaky calm.

Sirius: I know it's hard, and I realize my mistakes, but we've all got to act as though we don't know anything yet. We've got to stay put, at least until we hear from your mother, all right?
me: *mutter* It's too late to apologize...
Sirius: Come on! Lets all ... let's all have a drink while we're waiting. Accio Butterbeer!

He raised his wand as he spoke and 7 bottles came flying towards them out of the pantry, skidded along the table, scattering the debris of Sirius's meal, and stopped neatly in front of the 7 of us.

Soon, a burst of fire in midair illuminated the dirty plates in front of us and a scroll of parchment fell with a thud on to the table, accompanied by a single golden phoenix tail feather.

I snatched up the parchment before Sirius could, and as I skimmed over it, I handed it to George, saying it's from his mother. He ripped it open and read aloud: 'Dad is still alive. I am
setting out for St. Mungo's now. Stay where you are. I will send news as soon as I can. Mum.'

George: Still alive ... But that makes it sound ...
Me: It sounds as it sounds. Enough overthinking.

At ten past five in the morning by Ron's watch, the kitchen door swung open and Mrs. Weasley entered the kitchen. She was extremely pale, but when we all turned to look at her, Fred, Ron and Harry half rising from their chairs, she gave a smile.

Molly: He's going to be all right... He's sleeping. We can all go and see him later. Bill's sitting with him now; he's going to take the morning off work.

Fred fell back into his chair with his hands over his face. George and Ginny got up, walked swiftly over to their mother and hugged her. Ron gave a very shaky laugh and downed the rest of his Butterbeer in one.

'Breakfast!' said Sirius loudly and joyfully, jumping to his feet. 'Where's that accursed house-elf? Kreacher! KREACHER!'

But Kreacher did not answer the summons.

me: Can you not do your own meal?
Sirius: I can and I will! So, it's breakfast for-- let's see-- 8... bacon and eggs, I think, and some tea, and toast--

Having said that, I went to the dusty library, trying to relax myself. But not long after, I see Sirius entering slowly through the door with 2 trays, full of food, and sit next to me, on the floor.

Sirius: You chose the dustiest room in the house, I believe.
me: Hoping to get an asthma attack.
Sirius: I... brought food.
me: Appreciate that you're trying to communicate with me, but that won't prove to be too successful.
Sirius: And why, may I ask?
me: I'm not a sociable extrovert like you.
Sirius: You don't have to be. Remus was always a man of few words. And somehow, so was your mother.
me: Adorable.
Sirius: I know you may never forgive me, but I wish I could at least have the chance to redeem myself, in the short time that we have together.
me: I don't know if I can...
Sirius: Don't think of it as a path to redemption. Just let me do my job.
me: Like what?
Sirius: Try to make peace with you, the same way I used to with your mother.
Me: Oh~? Tell me more.
Sirius: The secret was...
me: Yes...?
Sirius: Books and food. She absolutely loved to stay alone in bed, with a mug of hot chocolate with marshmallows, some snacks and sandwiches, and a pile of books on her stand. I
swear, sometimes I thought her and Moony were twins.
me:*chuckles* How adorable.
Sirius: Until 5th grade, both her and Evans used to hang around Snape all the time. But unlike Miss. Ginger, Yami was more open to mischief.
me: Until 5th grade... then what happened?
Sirius: *sighs* Not our proudest moments, I confess. Moony tried to stop me and Prongs, but the crowd was chanting, clapping and all... the Marauders were at it again... we were so young and reckless...
Me: You still are.
Sirius: I suppose so.
me: And... what did you do to Severus?
Sirius: *sighs* Humiliated him... worse than ever... in front of everyone... And the girls stopped us...
me: And... what did he do?
Sirius: He obviously felt terrible... and being rescued by a Gryffindor... mudblood, and a foreign blood traitor...
me: *shocked* Oh no... He told them that, didn't he?
Sirius: *nods* He kept trying to apologize to them day and night... Yami moved a while with Lily, Alice, and Marlene... bless them... He even slept in front of our Common Room Portrait... But to no avail...
me: No way... I... never... I... *sharp breathe* Severus...
Sirius: Do you pity him?
me: Of course I do... Being bullied is horrible, and what you did is unforgiveable. You wouldn’t know, though... but... Severus, the Capricorn... his traits start to get more and more visible, with each revealed information about him.
Sirius: I tried to make peace with him, but...
me: He will never forgive you. I can tell you, for I am a Capricorn myself, and we hold life long grudges. Sensitive hearts... truly emotional... but always hidden behind a blank mask... how truly sad it is, to be forever doomed by despair... It truly hurts.
Sirius: I know words mean nothing, but I truly feel sorry.
me: Both of us acknowledged it. It is a beginning.
Sirius: *sighs* Anyways, you need to sleep. It's been a while since you did, and you're tired.
Me: You have no idea how much I needed a break from life.
Sirius: Umbridge is giving you a hard time?
Me: Yes, and not only. Some problems with keeping friendships, but it’s fine.
Sirius: I won't push it. Not now. But try at least to relax while away from there.
Me: Thanks... Sleep well.
Sirius: Don't blame yourself for what happened, okay? It's lucky you saw it, otherwise Arthur wouldn't be alive.
Me: Harry would have seen it. And I don't blame myself. I embraced those visions long ago, and I learnt to control them... somehow.
Sirius: *chuckles* I'm not surprised. Your mother was an exceptional witch herself. It's no wonder you are even more than that.
Me: Thanks, Sirius. Stay out of trouble.
Sirius: Good night... *whisper* my dear daughter.
---

When we woke up, we went to St. Mungo's, escorted by Tonks and Alastor.
'Here we go,' said Moody a moment later.

There, witches and wizards in lime-green robes were walking up and down the rows, asking questions and making notes on clipboards. Their emblem embroidered on their chests: a wand and bone, crossed.

**Harry:** Are they doctors?
**Me:** Healers. That's my dream job.
**Molly:** Over here!

There was also a large portrait of a witch with long silver ringlets which was labelled:

**Dilys Derwent**  
*St. Mungo's Healer 1722-1741*  
*Headmistress of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry 1741-1768*

**Me:** You are my role model in life, Dilys...

Dilys was eyeing the Weasley party closely as though counting them; when I caught her eye she gave a tiny wink, walked sideways out of her portrait and vanished.

**ARTEFACT ACCIDENTS - Ground floor**  
*Cauldron explosion, wand backfiring, broom crashes, etc.*

**CREATURE-INDUCED INJURIES - First floor**  
*Bites, stings, burns, embedded spines, etc.*

**MAGICAL BUGS - Second floor**  
*Contagious maladies, e.g. dragon pox, vanishing sickness, scrofungulus, etc.*

**POTION AND PLANT POISONING - Third floor**  
*Rashes, regurgitation, uncontrollable giggling, etc.*

**SPELL DAMAGE - Fourth floor**  
*Unliftable jinxes, hexes, incorrectly applied charms, etc.*

**VISITORS' TEAROOM / HOSPITAL SHOP - Fifth floor**

*IF YOU ARE UNSURE WHERE TO GO, INCAPABLE OF NORMAL SPEECH OR UNABLE TO REMEMBER WHY YOU ARE HERE, OUR WELCOMEWITCH WILL BE PLEASED TO HELP.*

Molly moved forward to the desk.

**Molly:** Hello, my husband, Arthur Weasley, was supposed to be moved to a different ward this morning, could you tell us--?
**Witch:** Arthur Weasley? Yes, first floor, second door on the right, Dai Llewellyn Ward.
**Molly:** Thank you. Come on, you lot.

We followed her through the double doors and along the narrow corridor beyond, which was lined with more portraits of famous Healers and lit by crystal bubbles full of candles that floated up on
the ceiling, looking like giant soapsuds. More witches and wizards in lime-green robes walked in and out of the doors they passed; a foul-smelling yellow gas wafted into the passageway as we passed one door, and every now and then we heard distant wailing.
We climbed a flight of stairs and entered the Creature-Induced Injuries corridor, where the second door on the right bore the words:
'Dangerous' Dai Llewellyn Ward: Serious Bites.
Underneath this was a card in a brass holder on which had been handwritten:
Healer-in-Charge: Hippocrates Smethwyck.
Trainee Healer: Augustus Pye.

Tonks: We'll wait outside, Molly. Arthur won't want too many visitors at once ... it ought to be just the family first.

Mad-Eye growled his approval of this idea and set himself with his back against the corridor wall, his magical eye spinning in all directions. I and Harry drew back, too, but Mrs Weasley reached out a hand and pushed us through the door, saying, 'Don't be silly, you two, Arthur wants to thank you.'

The ward was small and rather dingy, as the only window was narrow and set high in the wall facing the door. Most of the light came from more shining crystal bubbles clustered in the middle of the ceiling. The walls were of panelled oak and there was a portrait of a rather vicious-looking wizard on the wall, captioned:
Urquhart Rackharrow, 1612-1697, Inventor of the Entrail-expelling Curse.

There were only three patients. Mr. Weasley was occupying the bed at the far end of the ward beside the tiny window. He was propped up on several pillows and reading the Daily Prophet by the solitary ray of sunlight falling on to his bed. He looked up as they walked towards him and, seeing who it was, beamed.

Arthur: Hello! Bill just left, Molly, had to get back to work, but he says he'll drop in on you later.
Molly: How are you, Arthur? You're still looking a bit peaky.
Arthur: I feel absolutely fine. If they could only take the bandages off, I'd be fit to go home.
Fred: Why can't they take them off, Dad?
Arthur: Well, I start bleeding like mad every time they try. It seems there was some rather unusual kind of poison in that snake's fangs that keeps wounds open. They're sure they'll find an antidote, though; they say they've had much worse cases than mine, and in the meantime I just have to keep taking a Blood-Replenishing Potion every hour.
Me: That was no ordinary snake and I hope you're aware of that.
Arthur: Yes, yes, I can imagine. But that fellow over there—Bitten by a werewolf, poor chap. No cure at all.
Molly: A werewolf? Is he safe in a public ward? Shouldn't he be in a private room?
Arthur: It's two weeks till full moon. They've been talking to him this morning, the Healers, you know, trying to persuade him he'll be able to lead an almost normal life. I said to him-- didn't mention names, of course-- but I said I knew a werewolf personally, very nice man, who finds the condition quite easy to manage.
George: What did he say?
Arthur: Said he'd give me another bite if I didn't shut up. And that woman over there, won't tell the Healers what bit her, which makes us all think it must have been something she was handling illegally. Whatever it was took a real chunk out of her leg, very nasty smell when
they take off the dressings.
Fred: So, you going to tell us what happened, Dad?
Arthur: Well, you already know, don't you? It's very simple--I'd had a very long day, dozed off, got sneak ed up on and bitten.
Fred: Is it in the Prophet, you being attacked?
Arthur: No, of course not, the Ministry wouldn't want everyone to know a dirty great serpent got--
Molly: Arthur!
Arthur: -got--er-- me.
George: So where were you when it happened, Dad?
Arthur: *smiles* That's my business. I was just reading about Willy Widdershins's arrest when you arrived. You know Willy turned out to be behind those regurgitating toilets back in the summer? One of his jinxes backfired, the toilet exploded and they found him lying unconscious in the wreckage covered from head to foot in--
Fred: When you say you were "on duty", what were you doing?
Me: Don't push it.
Molly: You heard your father, we are not discussing this here! Go on about Willy Widdershins, Arthur.
Arthur: Well, don't ask me how, but he actually got off the toilet charge, I can only suppose gold changed hands--
George: You were guarding it, weren't you? The weapon? The thing You-Know-Who's after?
Molly: George, be quiet!
Arthur: Anyway, this time Willy's been caught selling biting doorknobs to Muggles and I don't think he'll be able to worm his way out of it because, according to this article, two Muggles have lost fingers and are now in St. Mungo's for emergency bone re-growth and memory modification. Just think of it, Muggles in St. Mungo's! I wonder which ward they're in?
Fred: Didn't you say You-Know-Who's got a snake, Harry? A massive one? You saw it the night he returned, didn't you?
Molly: That's enough. Mad-Eye and Tonks are outside, Arthur, they want to come and see you. And you lot can wait outside. You can come and say goodbye afterwards. Go on.

I stayed where I was, with a thinking look on my face, as the two entered the room.

Me: Did you find anything?
Tonks: They searched the whole area but couldn't find the snake anywhere. It just seems to have vanished after it attacked you, Arthur ... but You-Know-Who can't have expected a snake to get in, can he?
Me: What if He sent the snake to do...that?
Moody: I reckon he sent it as a lookout, 'cause he's not had any luck so far, has he? No, I reckon he's trying to get a clearer picture of what he's facing and if Arthur hadn't been there the beast would've had a lot more time to look around. So, you and Potter say you saw it all happen?
Me: Indeed.
Molly: You know, Dumbledore seems almost to have been waiting for them to see something like this.
Me: And it's not unnatural. We all know there is a link between the 3 of us.
Moody: Yeah, well, there's something funny about the these kids, we all know that.
Molly: Dumbledore seemed worried about Harry when I spoke to him this morning. But he didn't seem to worried about Raven...
Me: That's because Dumbledore tells me of his plans involving me, unlike with Potter. Being a Seer has its perks.
Moody: The boy's seeing things from inside You-Know-Who's snake. Obviously, Potter doesn't realise what that means, but if You-Know-Who's possessing him--
Me: He has no idea how to defend himself, that ignorant fool. Hiding all those obvious hints... Glad at least we are safe...

-----

After we arrived home, Harry has been acting strange, and I suspect he's heard the conversation from the Hospital.
I stayed to chat a bit more with Moody, then I heard a door slam and went to check on it.

"Well, you have! And you won't look at any of us!"
"It's you lot who won't look at me!"

"Maybe you're taking it in turns to look, and keep missing each other,"
"Very funny"

"Oh, stop feeling all misunderstood! Look, the others have told me what you overheard last night on the Extendable Ears--"
"Yeah? All been talking about me, have you? Well, I'm getting used to it."

"We wanted to talk to you, Harry, but as you've been hiding ever since we got back--"
"I didn't want anyone to talk to me."

"Well, that was a bit stupid of you, seeing as you don't know anyone but me who's been possessed by You-Know-Who, and I can tell you how it feels."
"I forgot."

Having heard enough, I barged in the room, glaring at Harry.

me: Just a BIT stupid? I believe this one doesn't use his brain at all. All this time he's been relying on his friends, and now he's purposely avoiding them. How absolutely rude.
Harry: I'm sorry. So... so, do you think I'm being possessed, then?

Ginny: Well, can you remember everything you've been doing? Are there big blank periods where you don't know what you've been up to?

Harry: No.
Ginny: Then You-Know-Who hasn't ever possessed you. When he did it to me, I couldn't remember what I'd been doing for hours at a time. I'd find myself somewhere and not know how I got there.
Me: Obviously you're not possessed, dunderhead. Both of us dreamt of it. It was a vision sent to us with a reason... or, maybe it was purely unintentional... Hmmmm...
Harry: That dream I had about your dad and the snake, though--
Hermione: Harry, you've had these dreams before. You had flashes of what Voldemort was up to last year.
Harry: This was different. I was inside that snake. It was like I was the snake ... what if Voldemort somehow transported me to London--?
me: Are you seriously considering that? Next thing, you'll say Dumbledore has wings.
Hermione: One day, you'll read Hogwarts: A History, and perhaps it will remind you that you can't Apparate or Disapparate inside Hogwarts. Even Voldemort couldn't just make you fly out of your dormitory, Harry.
Ron: You didn't leave your bed, mate. I saw you thrashing around in your sleep for at least a minute before we could wake you up.

---

The next day, I somehow woke up quite early and went downstairs, to grab something to eat before the whole lot awakens. However, I had forgotten it was Christmas, so I was shocked when I saw so many presents under the Christmas tree. I just kept staring at it, lost in a trance, when I suddenly felt a hand on my shoulder, making me jolt.

Lupin: Quite beautiful, isn't it?
me: Please don't scare me like that.
Lupin: *chuckles* I apologize, Raven. I didn't expect anyone else to be awake at this hour.
me: Neither did I, to be honest.
Lupin: Surprised?
me: Kinda...
Lupin: As you grow older, you make new friends. So, more gifts received ... but also, more gifts to give.
me: I forgot about Christmas...
Lupin: *smiles* I can understand why. You've been put under so much pressure lately, by your duties for both sides, and the new events, that Christmas was the last thing you'd have thought about.
me: I feel guilty now ... At least it's still early and I already have the gifts wrapped.
Lupin: I can help you put them under the Tree.
me: I'd be thankful ... *chuckles* Santa Moony~.

He chuckled nostalgic as he helped me with the presents, then got some cookies and hot chocolate with marshmallows and went to unwrap our presents, before the others could see us.

Leaning my head on his shoulder, we open each other's presents, and look at each other with amusement.
Books and Chocolate.

Molly got us both jumpers with R on them. Mine is dark green with a silver R and his is dark brown with a red R.
Hermione got me the some Agatha Christie books.
Ron and Harry some sweets.
The twins gave me some free samples of their newest prank prototypes.
Hagrid got me a book about the caring of small, magical creatures.
Tonks got me a small, working model of a wolf, that howls and leaps around.
Snape got me some books about Healing.
The next one was clumsily wrapped. It was from Sirius.
Inside, there were some unopened letters addressed to both I and my mother. I held them in my hands, but hadn't had the courage to open them myself. Not yet.

Moony saw that and put a comforting hand on my shoulder.

Lupin: You can read them tonight, when you are alone.
me: I... guess I will...

I shook my head and put the letters in my pocket, before opening the last one. It was neatly wrapped, in dark green wrapper, with a silvery bow.

me: But... how...?
Lupin: Who's that from?
me: *mumbles* Dumbledore, you sly old git...
Lupin: There's a note inside.

Inside, there was a necklace with a pastel pink charm, that apparently changes its colour, depending on your mood, kinda like my eyes.

'Happy Christmas, and all that. I wish we got to spend more time together, these days. I'm sorry things have been so difficult lately. When this is all over, I'll make it up to you. I promise. I hope you like this necklace just as much as I love your pink eyes. - D.M.'

I hid my face in my palms and tried to breathe, to regain my composure. I wasn't expecting Draco to send me a gift, nonetheless to receive it here, thanks to Dumbledore. I sighed, put on the necklace that became pastel pink, and leaned on Remus, closing my eyes.

Remus: I see the mutual infatuation between you and young Draco is still as strong as ever.
me: Not sure how strong... but he can understand me better than anyone. Quite peculiar indeed.
Remus: Enjoy every moment of happiness while it lasts, Raven. Cherish every second of it.
me: There is no time for such nonsense as feeling nowadays. They make you vulnerable. Having that role assigned to me, I cannot allow myself to become attached.
Remus: There's always hope and light in the world, if only you search for it.

But soon, we were interrupted by Molly and the twins, being all cheery—until she saw that Percy sent her the jumper back with no note. Poor Molly...
I let Remus try to cheer her up. He always does wonders.

---

After everyone woke up, we went to St. Mungo's, where Arthur had to explain that he let a Trainee Healer experiment with Stitches on him, so we left them alone, to get some tea. On our way there, we met up with Lockhart, who was still there, with memory loss and...
Neville and his grandmother.

Ron: It's us, Neville! Have you seen—? Lockhart's here! Who've you been visiting?
me: *slapping Ron* Some decency, you insensitive idiot! It's a hospital!
grandma: Friends of yours, Neville, dear? Ah, yes. Yes, yes, I know who you are, of course. Neville speaks most highly of you.
me: It is a pleasure meeting you.
Harry: Er--thanks...

grandma: And you two are clearly Weasleys. Yes, I know your parents--not well, of course--but fine people, fine people ... and you must be Hermione Granger? Yes, Neville's told me all about you. Helped him out of a few sticky spots, haven't you? He's a good boy, but he hasn't got his father's talent, I'm afraid to say.

Ron: What? Is that your dad down the end, Neville?

me: SHHH!

grandma: What's this? Haven't you told your friends about your parents, Neville?

Neville took a deep breath, looked up at the ceiling and shook his head.

grandma: Well, it's nothing to be ashamed of! You should be proud, Neville, proud! They didn't give their health and their sanity so their only son would be ashamed of them, you know!

Neville: I'm not ashamed...

grandma: Well, you've got a funny way of showing it! My son and his wife were tortured into insanity by You-Know-Who's followers.

Hermione and Ginny both clapped their hands over their mouths. Ron stopped craning his neck to catch a glimpse of Neville's parents and looked mortified.

grandma: They were Aurors, you know, and very well respected within the wizarding community. Highly gifted, the pair of them. I--yes, Alice dear, what is it?

Neville's mother had come edging down the ward in her nightdress. Her face was thin and worn now, her eyes seemed overlarge and her hair, which had turned white, was wispy and dead-looking. She did not seem to want to speak, or perhaps she was not able to, but she made timid motions towards Neville, holding something in her outstretched hand.

grandma: Again? Very well, Alice dear, very well-- Neville, take it, whatever it is

But Neville had already stretched out his hand, into which his mother dropped an empty Drooble's Best Blowing Gum wrapper.

grandma: Very nice, dear,

Neville: Thanks, Mum.

His mother tottered away, back up the ward, humming to herself.

grandma: Well, we'd better get back. Very nice to have met you all. Neville, put that wrapper in the bin, she must have given you enough of them to paper your bedroom by now.

Neville pocketed the wrapper, and the door closed behind us.

Herms: I never knew...

Ron: Nor did I...

Ginny: *mutters* Nor me.

Harry: I did

me: Same.
Harry: Dumbledore told us but we promised we wouldn't tell anyone ... that's what Bellatrix Lestrange got sent to Azkaban for, using the Cruciatus Curse on Neville's parents until they lost their minds.

Herms: Bellatrix Lestrange did that? That woman Kreacher's got a photo of in his den?

me: *sighs* Charming aunt I have, don't I?

The last day home arrived, and with it, Snape came in the kitchen, while I was enjoying a cup of hot chocolate with Remus.

me: Fancy seeing you here. Hope you liked me gift for you.
Snape: Likewise. Dumbledore sent me-
Sirius: Snape? What are you doing in my house?
Snape: Correct me if I'm wrong, but it's your mother's house. Dumbledore's orders, bring Potter here. Alone.
Sirius: I don't fancy taking orders from strangers.
me: Can't you just go and avoid all the drama?

He left with a look of disbelief, and Remus left after him.

me: So childish. You think he'd learn by now.
Snape: Idiots never learn. You got my letter, I presume?
me: My luggage is under the table.
Snape: Perfect.
Harry: Er-
Snape: Sit down, Potter.
Sirius: You know, as I said, I think I'd prefer it if you didn't give orders here, Snape. It's my house, you see.
Snape: I was supposed to see you alone, Potter, but Black--
Sirius: *loud* I'm his godfather!
me: And nobody is deaf around!
Snape: *quiet* I am here on Dumbledore's orders, but by all means stay, Black, I know you like to feel ... involved.
Sirius: What's that supposed to mean?
Snape: Merely that I am sure you must feel--ah--frustrated by the fact that you can do nothing useful for the Order. The Headmaster has sent me to tell you, Potter, that it is his wish for you to study Occlumency this term.
Harry: Study what?
me: Occlumency, genius. The magical defence of the mind against external penetration. An obscure branch of magic, but a highly useful one.
Harry: Why do I have to study Occlu--thing?
me: OCCLUMENCY!
Snape: Because the Headmaster thinks it a good idea. You will receive private lessons once a week, but you will not tell anybody what you are doing, least of all Dolores Umbridge. You understand?
Harry: Yes. Who's going to be teaching me?
me: *snorts* Just the best.
Snape:*raises an eyebrow*I am.
Sirius:Why can't Dumbledore teach Harry?Why you?
me:But what's wrong with him?
Sirius:Everything!
Snape:I suppose because it is a headmaster's privilege to delegate less enjoyable tasks.I assure you I did not beg for the job.Spending time with this ingrate is much less enjoyable than spending time with your daughter.At least she has potential and will to learn.I will expect you at six o'clock on Monday evening, Potter. My office. If anybody asks, you are taking remedial Potions. Nobody who has seen you in my classes could deny you need them.
me:*chuckling*That's not wrong...
Sirius:Wait a moment!
Snape:I am in rather a hurry, Black. Unlike you, I do not have unlimited leisure time.
Sirius:I'll get to the point, then.If I hear you're using these Occlumency lessons to give Harry a hard time, you'll have me to answer to.
Snape:How touching. But surely you have noticed that Potter is very like his father?
Sirius:Yes, I have!
Snape:Well then, you'll know he's so arrogant that criticism simply bounces off him.

Sirius pushed his chair roughly aside and strode around the table towards Snape, pulling out his wand as he went. Snape whipped out his own. They were squaring up to each other, Sirius looking livid, Snape calculating, his eyes darting from Sirius's wand-tip to his face.

'Sirius!' said Harry loudly, but Sirius appeared not to hear him.

Sirius:I've warned you, Snivelus.I don't care if Dumbledore thinks you've reformed, I know better--
Snape:Oh, but why don't you tell him so? Or are you afraid he might not take very seriously the advice of a man who has been hiding inside his mother's house for six months?
Sirius:Tell me, how is Lucius Malfoy these days? I expect he's delighted his lapdog's working at Hogwarts, isn't he?
Snape:Speaking of dogs, did you know that Lucius Malfoy recognised you last time you risked a little jaunt outside? Clever idea, Black, getting yourself seen on a safe station platform ... gave you a cast-iron excuse not to leave your hidey-hole in future, didn't it?

'NO!' Harry yelled, vaulting over the table and trying to get in between them. 'Sirius, don't!' This looks more and more like a soap opera.

Sirius:Are you calling me a coward?
Snape:Why, yes, I suppose I am.
Sirius:Harry-- get-- out-- of-- it!

The kitchen door opened and the entire Weasley family, plus Hermione, came inside, all looking very happy, with Mr. Weasley walking proudly in their midst dressed in a pair of striped pyjamas covered by a mackintosh.

'Cured!' he announced brightly to the kitchen at large. 'Completely cured!'

He and all the other Weasleys froze on the threshold, gazing at the scene in front of them, which was also suspended in mid-action, both Sirius and Snape looking towards the door with their wands
pointing into each other's faces and Harry immobile between them, a hand stretched out to each, trying to force them apart, and I watching them bored.

'Merlin's beard,' said Mr. Weasley, the smile sliding off his face, 'what's going on here?'

Both Sirius and Snape lowered their wands. Harry looked from one to the other. Each wore an expression of utmost contempt, yet the unexpected entrance of so many witnesses seemed to have brought them to their senses. Snape pocketed his wand, turned on his heel and swept back across the kitchen, passing the Weasleys without comment. At the door he looked back.

**Snape:** Six o'clock, Monday evening, Potter.
**Me:** *getting my luggage* Glad to see you're all better, Mr. Weasley. Also, Sirius, I'm SO glad that you fought with Severus over Harry's well-being, being your godson and all, but cared naught about me, your daughter, as usual. Fare-thee-well~!

Taking his arm, we went to his house, enjoying the last moments without the ugly toad. This last half of school year is going to be tough, I can feel it. Just hope I can manage.
I couldn't sleep last night. Despite closing my mind, I could still feel the immense glee He was feeling....
Doesn't he EVER try to sleep? Give me a break...

However, in the morning, while eating breakfast with Pansy, and looking like a complete zombie, I hear a commotion at the Gryffindor table, caused by Hermione, who had the Prophet on the table. Eyeing them curiously, I slowly get up and go next to them, trying not to be noticed.

She pointed at ten black-and-white photographs that filled the whole of the front page, nine showing wizards' faces and the tenth, a witch's. Some of the people in the photographs were silently jeering; others were tapping their fingers on the frame of their pictures, looking insolent. Each picture was captioned with a name and the crime for which the person had been sent to Azkaban.

Antonin Dolohov, convicted of the brutal murders of Gideon and Fabian Prewett.

Algernon Rookwood, convicted of leaking Ministry of Magic secrets to He Who Must Not Be Named.

Bellatrix Lestrange... convicted of the torture and permanent incapacitation of Frank and Alice Longbottom.

MASS BREAKOUT FROM AZKABAN
MINISTRY FEARS BLACK IS 'RALLYING POINT'
FOR OLD DEATH EATERS

That is preposterous!
No wonder he was so overjoyed!
Ah... I'll have a hell of a job to do...

Ron: There you are, Harry. That's why he was happy last night.
Harry: I don't believe this. Fudge is blaming the breakout on Sirius?
me: He needs a scapegoat.
Herms: What other options does he have? "Sorry, everyone, Dumbledore warned me this might happen, the Azkaban guards have joined Lord Voldemort"--stop whimpering, Ron--"and now Voldemort's worst supporters have broken out, too." I mean, he's spent a good six months telling everyone you and Dumbledore are liars, hasn't he?

Dumbledore and Professor McGonagall, like us, were deep in conversation, both looking extremely grave. Professor Sprout had the Prophet propped against a bottle of ketchup and was reading the front page with such concentration that she was not noticing the gentle drip of egg yolk falling into her lap from her stationary spoon. Meanwhile, at the far end of the table, Umbridge was tucking into a bowl of porridge. For once her pouchy toad's eyes were not sweeping the Great Hall looking for misbehaving students. She scowled as she gulped down her food and every now and then she
shot a malevolent glance up the table to where Dumbledore and McGonagall were talking so intently.

Further in the newspaper, Bode's death, the guy next to Lockhart at St. Mungo's, has been reported. Ron said he worked in the Department of Mysteries, which makes a hella lot of sense.

At least the DA meetings proved to be more... improving, to say the least. And her detentions don't phaze me much anymore. They just... hurt.

---

Not much has been happening lately, with the exception that winter passed ever so quickly. Harry gave an interview for the Quibbler, and now Umbridge banned it in the school, and forbid Harry the Hogsmead trips.

But hey!
The interview was quite good--! And he even managed to convince some people of the truth behind Voldy... especially from THIS school.

Many more Occlumency lessons passed, I sometimes assisted Harry too, because he was failing miserably, but this time... he protected himself and got a glimpse of Severus' memories.

In turn, he used such a powerful spell, that Harry got knocked down, and saw visions he has never seen before...

Until a familiar feminine scream was heard and I immediately bolted to see what was going on.

The screams were coming from the Entrance Hall.

Students had come flooding out of the Great Hall, where dinner was still in progress, to see what was going on; others had crammed themselves on to the marble staircase.

Professor McGonagall looked as though what she was watching made her feel faintly sick.

Professor Trelawney was standing in the middle of the Entrance Hall with her wand in one hand and an empty sherry bottle in the other, looking utterly mad. Her hair was sticking up on end, her glasses were lopsided so that one eye was magnified more than the other; her innumerable shawls and scarves were trailing haphazardly from her shoulders, giving the impression that she was falling apart at the seams.

Two large trunks lay on the floor beside her, one of them upside-down; it looked very much as though it had been thrown down the stairs after her.

**Sybill:** No! NO! This cannot be happening... it cannot... I refuse to accept it!

**Toad:** You didn't realise this was coming? Incapable though you are of predicting even tomorrow's weather, you must surely have realised that your pitiful performance during my inspections, and lack of any improvement, would make it inevitable that you would be sacked?

**Sybill:** You c-- can't! You c-- can't sack me! I've b-- been here sixteen years! H-- Hogwarts is m-- my h-- home!

**Toad:** It was your home, until an hour ago, when the Minister for Magic counter signed your Order of Dismissal. Now kindly remove yourself from this Hall. You are embarrassing us.

I ran in front of her, in a protective stance.

**me:** Actually, you cannot send her home. THIS is her home! I have read all your ridiculous and useless decrees, and it says nowhere that that you have that power!

**Toad:** Detention, Black! It seems you do love getting in trouble, much like your criminal father.
me: I don't care about your stupid detention! But before you make others obey your rules, make sure you respect them yourself!

But she stood and watched, with an expression of gloating enjoyment, as Professor Trelawney shuddered and moaned, rocking backwards and forwards on her trunk in paroxysms of grief. Professor McGonagall had broken away from the spectators, marched straight up to Trelawney and was patting her firmly on the back while withdrawing a large handkerchief from within her robes.

Minerva: There, there, Sybill ... calm down ... blow your nose on this ... it's not as bad as you think, now ... you are not going to have to leave Hogwarts ...

Toad: Oh really, Professor McGonagall? And your authority for that statement is ... ?

'That would be mine,' said a deep voice.

The oaken front doors had swung open. Students beside them scuttled out of the way as Dumbledore appeared in the entrance. Leaving the doors wide open behind him he strode forwards through the circle of onlookers towards Trelawney, tear-stained and trembling, on her trunk, McGonagall alongside her.

Toad: Yours, Professor Dumbledore? I'm afraid you do not understand the position. I have here--an Order of Dismissal signed by myself and the Minister for Magic. Under the terms of Educational Decree Number Twenty-three, the High Inquisitor of Hogwarts has the power to inspect, place upon probation and sack any teacher she--that is to say, I--feel is not performing to the standards required by the Ministry of Magic. I have decided that Professor Trelawney is not up to scratch. I have dismissed her.

Dumbledore: You are quite right, of course, Professor Umbridge. As High Inquisitor you have every right to dismiss my teachers. You do not, however, as Miss Black said, have the authority to send them away from the castle. I am afraid, that the power to do that still resides with the Headmaster, and it is my wish that Professor Trelawney continue to live at Hogwarts.

Sybill: No--no, I'll g--go, Dumbledore! I sh--shall--leave Hogwarts and s--seek my fortune elsewhere--

Toad: No. It is my wish that you remain, Sybill. Might I ask you to escort Sybill back upstairs, Professor McGonagall? Miss Black, please aid her.

me: As you wish, Headmaster.

Minerva: Of course. Up you get, Sybill ...
me: I have sacrificed my soul to Satan. Now I am but a mortal shell.
Draco: *chuckles* Funny how we're in the same House, but we never get to see each other.
me: The exams are coming up. I'm not particularly fond of staying out more than needed.
Draco: I am aware of that. But you're prepared enough to get the best grades. I know you're planning something.
me: Draco, dear, I am overthrilled to see my aunt in person. I kind of fancy her hair. It's nice, don't you think?
Draco: You mean...?
me: Bellatrix Lestrange, of course. Your mother's sister. Lovely, isn't she? I hope she won't kill me on the spot.
Draco: It's the rise of the Dark Lord and not even Dumbledore can avoid or stop that.
me: You are correct, Draco.
Draco: Correct? And are you going to stay there and accept it? I thought you were against it.
me: I believe you have working eyes. I do stay here and accept it. I'm quite at peace, as you can see.
Draco: . . . There's more to it than meets the eyes, isn't it?
me: Did you know that He can read minds, so to speak? He is a very gifted Legillimence.
Draco: It's to be expected of someone of that power.
me: *chuckles* I may not be yet skilled enough to block him, at a closer range, but then again... I'm particularly good at fooling people.
Draco: Yourself, as well?
me: I'm rather proud of my ability to tell lies. I can trick not only others, but even my own heart.
Draco: Why must you do that? Can't we live happily, even during his reign?
me: Ask your mother, Draco. She will not be able to tell you much, but I am certain you will understand. Ask you mother, not your father, for the real answers will come from her.
Draco: Why her and not you? You are here right now, aren't you?
me: Something bad is going to happened tomorrow. Something so bad...
Draco: Is it Umbridge again? Giving you a hard time?
me: After defending Trelawney? Don't be surprised.
Draco: You asked for it.
me: Don't I always?
Draco: Why must you be so complicated all the time?
me: If I were easy to understand, would I have been as interesting? It is in my nature, after all. Mystery.
Draco: If you will not listen to my advice, then at least let me thank you for the Christmas gift. Also... necklace suits you, just as I thought.
me: Thank you. But in moments like this, I'd rather not see more pink than I have to.

He chuckled and came to me, kissing my cheek, then left, with a soft 'Good night'.
Oh, Draco... If only you knew...

###

At the DA lessons, we finally started working on Patronuses, which everybody has been very keen to practise, though, as Harry kept reminding them, producing a Patronus in the middle of a brightly lit classroom when they were not under threat was very different from producing it when confronted by something like a Dementor.
I just sat there, in the middle of the room, on the floor, playing with my wolf Patronus.

Cho: Oh, don't be such a killjoy! They're so pretty!
Harry: They're not supposed to be pretty, they're supposed to protect you. What we really need is a boggart or something; that's how I learned, I had to conjure a Patronus while the boggart was pretending to be a Dementor--
Lavender: But that would be really scary! And I still--can't--do it!
Harry: You've got to think of something happy.
Neville: I'm trying...
Seamus: Harry, I think I'm doing it! Look--ah--it's gone ... but it was definitely something hairy, Harry!
Hermione: They are sort of nice, aren't they?
me: They are adorable.

The door of the Room of Requirement opened, and closed.
Dobby the house-elf was peering up at Harry from beneath his usual eight woolly hats.

Harry: Hi, Dobby! What are you-- What's wrong?

The elf's eyes were wide with terror and he was shaking. The members of the DA closest to Harry had fallen silent; everybody in the room was watching Dobby. The few Patronuses people had managed to conjure faded away into silver mist, leaving the room looking much darker than before.

me: Prepare yourselves. The Horror is coming.
Dobby: Harry Potter, sir ... Harry Potter, sir ... Dobby has come to warn you ... but the house-elves have been warned not to tell ...
Harry: What's happened, Dobby?
Dobby: Harry Potter ... she ... she ... Harry: Who's "she", Dobby?
me: Umbridge.
Harry: What about her? Dobby--she hasn't found out about this--about us--about the DA? Is she coming?
Dobby: Yes, Harry Potter, yes!
me: I suggest you start running away.

Harry straightened up and looked around at the motionless, terrified people gazing at the thrashing elf.

'WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR?' Harry bellowed. 'RUN!'

They all pelted towards the exit at once, forming a scrum at the door, then people burst through. Hope they had the sense not to try and make it all the way to their dormitories. It was only ten to nine; if they just took refuge in the library or the Owlery, which were both nearer--

Herms: Harry, Raven, come on!

He scooped up Dobby, who was still attempting to do himself serious injury, and ran with the elf in his arms to join the back of the queue.
Harry: Dobby--this is an order--get back down to the kitchen with the other elves and, if she asks you whether you warned me, lie and say no! And I forbid you to hurt yourself!
Dobby: Thank you, Harry Potter!

I nonchalantly exited the room, with my Patronus still around me, until I reached Draco, who caught Harry.

Draco: Trip Jinx, Potter! Hey, Professor--PROFESSOR! I've got one!
Toad: It's him! Excellent, Draco, excellent, oh, very good--fifty points to Slytherin! I'll take him from here ... stand up, Potter! Oh, and who do we have here? Miss Black has decided to show up as well!
me: You know how they say. The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime.
Draco: *shocked* Raven...?

Harry got to his feet, glaring at the pair of them. Umbridge never looked so happy. She seized our arms in a vice-like grip and turned, beaming broadly, to Draco.

Toad: You hop along and see if you can round up any more of them, Draco. Tell the others to look in the library--anybody out of breath--check the bathrooms, Miss Parkinson can do the girls' ones--off you go--and you, you can come with me to the Headmaster's office.
me: You have quite the wrestler grip.

The office was full of people. Dumbledore was sitting behind his desk, his expression serene, the tips of his long fingers together. Professor McGonagall stood rigidly beside him, her face extremely tense. Cornelius Fudge, Minister for Magic, was rocking backwards and forwards on his toes beside the fire, apparently immensely pleased with the situation; Kingsley Shacklebolt and a tough-looking wizard with very short wiry hair and the freckled, bespectacled form of Percy Weasley hovered excitedly beside the wall, a quill and a heavy scroll of parchment in his hands, apparently poised to take notes.

The portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses were not shamming sleep tonight. All of them were alert and serious, watching what was happening below them.

Fudge: Well. Well, well, well...
me: Have you discovered the Fountain of Youth, Minister? You seem to like wells a lot.

Shacklebot and Dumbledore had looks of amusement on their faces. The Minister, not so much.

Toad: He was heading back to Gryffindor Tower and she was next to him. The Malfoy boy cornered him.
Fudge: Did he, did he? I must remember to tell Lucius. Well, Potter, Black... I expect you know why you are here?
me: No, sir, not quite.

Fudge looked incredulously from me to Umbridge. Dumbledore gave the carpet the tiniest of nods and the shadow of a wink.

Fudge: So you have no idea why Professor Umbridge has brought you to this office? You are
not aware that you have broken any school rules?
me: More like barbarically dragging us here. But breaking school rules? As a Prefect, I am supposed to abide all rules, that I have thoroughly read times and times again. So no, I am not aware. 
Fudge: Or Ministry Decrees?
me: Not that I'm aware of. 
Fudge: So, it's news to you, is it, that an illegal student organisation has been discovered within this school?
me: And since when does walking through corridors mean I am part of an organisation of the sort?
Toad: I think, Minister, we might make better progress if I fetch our informant. 
Fudge: Yes, yes, do. There's nothing like a good witness, is there, Dumbledore? 
Dumbledore: Nothing at all, Cornelius. 

Umbridge moved past us into the room, gripping by the shoulder Cho's curly-haired friend, Marietta, who was hiding her face in her hands. 

Toad: Don't be scared, dear, don't be frightened, it's quite all right, now. You have done the right thing. The Minister is very pleased with you. He'll be telling your mother what a good girl you've been. Marietta's mother, Minister, is Madam Edgecombe from the Department of Magical Transportation, Floo Network office-- she's been helping us police the Hogwarts' fires, you know. 
Fudge: Jolly good, jolly good! Like mother, like daughter, eh? Well, come on, now, dear, look up, don't be shy, let's hear what you've got to-- galloping gargoyles! 

As Marietta raised her head, Fudge leapt backwards in shock, nearly landing himself in the fire. He cursed, and stamped on the hem of his cloak which had started to smoke. Marietta gave a wail and pulled the neck of her robes right up to her eyes, but not before everyone had seen that her face was horribly disfigured by a series of close-set purple pustules that had spread across her nose and cheeks to form the word 'SNEAK'. 

me: Are you quite alright? You look quite disfigured... ugly, might I say. Such a pity, I believe you should be urgently sent to St. Mungo's... or to marry Big Foot. 
Toad: Quiet! Never mind the spots now, dear, just take your robes away from your mouth and tell the Minister-- 

But Marietta gave another muffled wail and shook her head frantically. 

Toad: Oh, very well, you silly girl, I'll tell him. Well, Minister, Miss Edgecombe here came to my office shortly after dinner this evening and told me she had something she wanted to tell me. She said that if I proceeded to a secret room on the seventh floor, sometimes known as the Room of Requirement, I would find out something to my advantage. I questioned her a little further and she admitted that there was to be some kind of meeting there. Unfortunately, at that point this hex, came into operation and upon catching sight of her face in my mirror the girl became too distressed to tell me any more. 
Fudge: Well, now, it is very brave of you, my dear, coming to tell Professor Umbridge. You did exactly the right thing. Now, will you tell me what happened at this meeting? What was its purpose? Who was there?
Fudge: Haven't we got a counter-jinx for this? So she can speak freely?
Toad: I have not yet managed to find one. But it doesn't matter if she won't speak, I can take up the story from here. You will remember, Minister, that I sent you a report back in October that Potter and Black had met a number of fellow students in the Hog's Head in Hogsmeade--
Minerva: And what is your evidence for that?
Toad: I have testimony from Willy Widdershins, Minerva, who happened to be in the bar at the time. He was heavily bandaged, it is true, but his hearing was quite unimpaired. He heard every word Potter said and hastened straight to the school to report to me--
me: Oh, so that's why he wasn't prosecuted for setting up all those regurgitating toilets! I thought it was money bribe.
Minerva: What an interesting insight into our justice system!
portrait: Blatant corruption! The Ministry did not cut deals with petty criminals in my day, no sir, they did not!
Dumbledore: Thank you, Fortescue, that will do.
Toad: The purpose of Potter's meeting with these students, was to persuade them to join an illegal society, whose aim was to learn spells and curses the Ministry has decided are inappropriate for school-age--
Dumbledore: I think you'll find you're wrong there, Dolores.
Fudge: Oho! Yes, let's hear the latest cock-and-bull story designed to pull Potter and Black out of trouble! Go on, then, Dumbledore, go on-Willy Widdershins was lying, was he? Or was it Potter's identical twin in the Hog's Head that day? Or is there the usual simple explanation involving a reversal of time, a dead man coming back to life and a couple of invisible dementors?
Percy: *laughs* Oh, very good, Minister, very good!
me: Have you no manners? It is impolite to disturb an official meeting.
Dumbledore: Cornelius, I do not deny--and nor, I am sure,--that they were in the Hog's Head that day, nor that they were trying to recruit students to a Defence Against the Dark Arts group. I am merely pointing out that Dolores is quite wrong to suggest that such a group was, at that time, illegal. If you remember, the Ministry Decree banning all student societies was not put into effect until two days after Harry's Hogsmeade meeting, so he was not breaking any rules at all in the Hog's Head.
Toad: That's all very fine, Headmaster, but we are now nearly six months on from the introduction of Educational Decree Number Twenty-four. If the first meeting was not illegal, all those that have happened since most certainly are.
Dumbledore: Well, they certainly would be, if they had continued after the Decree came into effect. Do you have any evidence that any such meetings continued?
Toad: Evidence? Have you not been listening, Dumbledore? Why do you think Miss Edgecombe is here?'
Dumbledore: Oh, can she tell us about six months' worth of meetings? I was under the impression that she was merely reporting a meeting tonight.
Toad: Miss Edgecombe, tell us how long these meetings have been going on, dear. You can simply nod or shake your head, I'm sure that won't make the spots worse. Have they been happening regularly over the last six months? Just nod or shake your head, dear, come on, now, that won't re-activate the jinx.

Everyone in the room was gazing at the top of Marietta's face. Only her eyes were visible between
the pulled-up robes and her curly fringe. Perhaps it was a trick of the firelight, but her eyes looked oddly blank. And then-Marietta shook her head.
Umbridge looked quickly at Fudge, then back at Marietta.

Toad: I don't think you understood the question, did you, dear? I'm asking whether you've been going to these meetings for the past six months? You have, haven't you?

Again, Marietta shook her head.

Toad: What do you mean by shaking your head, dear?
Minerva: I would have thought her meaning was quite clear, there have been no secret meetings for the past six months. Is that correct, Miss Edgecombe?

Marietta nodded.

Toad: But there was a meeting tonight! There was a meeting, Miss Edgecombe, you told me about it, in the Room of Requirement! And Potter was the leader, was he not, Potter organised it, Potter--why are you shaking your head, girl?
Minerva: Well, usually when a person shakes their head, they mean "no". So unless Miss Edgecombe is using a form of sign-language as yet unknown to humans--

Professor Umbridge seized Marietta, pulled her round to face her and began shaking her very hard. A split second later Dumbledore was on his feet, his wand raised; Kingsley started forwards and Umbridge leapt back from Marietta, waving her hands in the air as though they had been burned.

me: I believe THAT is against the rules.
Dumbledore: I cannot allow you to manhandle my students, Dolores.
Shacklebot: You want to calm yourself, Madam Umbridge. You don't want to get yourself into trouble, now.
Toad: No. I mean, yes--you're right, Shacklebolt--I--I forgot myself.
me: Pity.

Marietta was standing exactly where Umbridge had released her. She seemed neither perturbed by Umbridge's sudden attack, nor relieved by her release; she was still clutching her robe up to her oddly blank eyes and staring straight ahead of her.

Fudge: Dolores, the meeting tonight--the one we know definitely happened--
Toad: Yes, yes ... well, Miss Edgecombe tipped me off and I proceeded at once to the seventh floor, accompanied by certain trustworthy students, so as to catch those in the meeting re-handed. It appears that they were forewarned of my arrival, however, because when we reached the seventh floor they were running in every direction. It does not matter, however. I have all their names here, Miss Parkinson ran into the Room of Requirement for me to see if they had left anything behind. We needed evidence and the room provided. The moment I saw Potter's and Black's names on the list, I knew what we were dealing with.
Fudge: Excellent, excellent, Dolores. And ... by thunder...See what they've named themselves? Dumbledore's Army.

Dumbledore reached out and took the piece of parchment from Fudge. He gazed at the heading scribbled by Hermione months before and for a moment seemed unable to speak. Then he looked
up, smiling.

Dumbledore: Well, the game is up. Would you like a written confession from me, Cornelius -- or will a statement before these witnesses suffice?

McGonagall and Kingsley look at each other. There was fear in both faces. They did not understand what was going on, and nor, apparently, did Fudge.

Fudge: Statement? What--I don't--?
Fudge: But--but--You?
Dumbledore: That's right.
Fudge: You organised this?
Dumbledore: I did.
Fudge: You recruited these students for--for your army?
Dumbledore: Tonight was supposed to be the first meeting. Merely to see whether they would be interested in joining me. I see now that it was a mistake to invite Miss Edgecombe, of course.

Marietta nodded. Fudge looked from her to Dumbledore, his chest swelling.

Fudge: Then you have been plotting against me!
Dumbledore: That's right.
Harry: NO!

I nudged him in the ribs hard, Kingsley flashed a look of warning at him, McGonagall widened her eyes threateningly.

Harry: No--Professor Dumbledore--!
me: Shut up, Potter. This is the truth unveiled and we have nothing to do against it. It's over.
Dumbledore: Listen to Raven, Harry, or I am afraid you will have to leave my office.
Fudge: Yes, shut up, Potter! Well, well, well--I came here tonight expecting to expel Potter and instead--
Dumbledore: Instead you get to arrest me. It's like losing a Knut and finding a Galleon, isn't it?
Fudge: Weasley! Weasley, have you written it all down, everything he's said, his confession, have you got it?
Percy: Yes, sir, I think so, sir!
me: Oh, so now he remembers your name?
Fudge: The bit about how he's been trying to build up an army against the Ministry, how he's been working to destabilise me?
Percy: Yes, sir, I've got it, yes!
Fudge: Very well, then, duplicate your notes, Weasley, and send a copy to the Daily Prophet at once. If we send a fast owl we should make the morning edition! You will now be escorted back to the Ministry, where you will be formally charged, then sent to Azkaban to await trial!
Dumbledore: Ah, yes. Yes, I thought we might hit that little snag.
Fudge: Snag? I see no snag, Dumbledore!
Dumbledore: Well, I'm afraid I do.
Fudge: Oh, really?
Dumbledore: Well--it's just that you seem to be labouring under the delusion that I am going to--what is the phrase?--come quietly. I am afraid I am not going to come quietly at all, Cornelius. I have absolutely no intention of being sent to Azkaban. I could break out, of course--but what a waste of time, and frankly, I can think of a whole host of things I would rather be doing.

Umbridge's face was growing steadily redder; she looked as though she was being filled with boiling water. Fudge stared at Dumbledore with a very silly expression on his face, as though he had just been stunned by a sudden blow and could not quite believe it had happened. He made a small choking noise, then looked round at Kingsley and the man with short grey hair, who alone of everyone in the room had remained entirely silent so far. The latter gave Fudge a reassuring nod and moved forwards a little, away from the wall.

Dumbledore: Don't be silly, Dawlish. I'm sure you are an excellent Auror--I seem to remember that you achieved "Outstanding" in all your NEWTs--but if you attempt to--er--bring me in by force, I will have to hurt you.

The man called Dawlish blinked rather foolishly. He looked towards Fudge again, but this time seemed to be hoping for a clue as to what to do next.

Fudge: So, you intend to take on Dawlish, Shacklebolt, Dolores and myself single-handed, do you, Dumbledore?
Dumbledore: Merlin's beard, no, not unless you are foolish enough to force me to.
Minerva: He will not be single-handed!
Dumbledore: Oh yes he will, Minerva. Hogwarts needs you!
Fudge: Enough of this rubbish! Dawlish! Shacklebolt! Take him!

A streak of silver light flashed around the room; there was a bang like a gunshot and the floor trembled; a hand grabbed the scruff of I and Harry's necks and forced us down on the floor as a second silver flash went off; several of the portraits yelled, Fawkes screeched and a cloud of dust filled the air. Coughing in the dust, a dark figure fell to the ground with a crash in front of him; there was a shriek and a thud and somebody cried, 'No!'; then there was the sound of breaking glass, frantically scuffling footsteps, a groan ... and silence.

Professor McGonagall crouched beside us; she had forced both of us and Marietta out of harm's way. Dust was still floating gently down through the air.

Dumbledore: Are you all right?
me: Never better. Nice show.

Dumbledore: Unfortunately, I had to hex Kingsley too, or it would have looked very suspicious, He was remarkably quick on the uptake, modifying Miss Edgecombe's memory like that while everyone was looking the other way-- thank him, for me, won't you, Minerva?
me: It was rather remarkable.
Dumbledore: Thank you, Raven. Now, they will all awake very soon and it will be best if they do not know that we had time to communicate--you must act as though no time has passed, as though they were merely knocked to the ground, they will not remember--
Minerva: Where will you go, Dumbledore? Grimmauld Place?
Dumbledore: Oh no, I am not leaving to go into hiding. Fudge will soon wish he'd never dislodged me from Hogwarts, I promise you.
me: Best of luck in your mission, then. It went better than expected.
Dumbledore: Indeed. I must thank you for your cooperation.
me: Everything for the good of this school.
Harry: Professor Dumbledore ...
Dumbledore: Listen to me, Harry. You must study Occlumency as hard as you can, do you understand me? Do everything Professor Snape tells you and practise it particularly every night before sleeping so that you can close your mind to bad dreams--you will understand why soon enough, but you must promise me--

The man called Dawlish was stirring. Dumbledore seized Harry's wrist.

Dumbledore: Remember--close your mind--you will understand.

Fawkes circled the office and swooped low over him. Dumbledore raised his hand and grasped the phoenix's long golden tail. There was a flash of fire and the pair of them were gone.

Fudge: Where is he? Where is he?
Kingsley: I don't know!
Toad: Well, he can't have Disapparated! You can't do it from inside this school--
Dawlish: The stairs!
Fudge: Well, Minerva, I'm afraid this is the end of your friend Dumbledore.
me: You would be surprised.
Minerva: You think so, do you?
Fudge: You'd better get those three off to bed.
Phineas: You know, Minister, I disagree with Dumbledore on many counts ... but you cannot deny he's got style ... 
me: *winks at him* You know it.

---

In the Common Room, I saw Draco and Pansy, waiting.
Pansy was looking worried, while Draco just looked pensive.

Pansy: Raven! Merlin, Raven, I'm so sorry! I didn't look on the paper when I gave it to Umbridge, and I didn't know you were involved! If only I knew, I would have gotten rid of it or something! Draco told me you were taken as well and--
me: *hugs her* Don't worry, Pansy. You did what was right. I don't blame you. I'm glad you thought of me, though.
Pansy: Y-you're not mad at me? You don't hate me?
me: Hate you? No, not at all. I have foreseen this quite awhile ago. If I wanted that paper not to be found, I would have hidden it myself.
Draco: She came to me by herself, when I caught Potter. It was all part of the plan, I presume?
me: You could say that.
Draco: And what happened?
me: Umbridge is the new Headmaster now. Rejoice while you can. At least we can win this year's House Cup.
Pansy: Forget about the House Cup! I'm more worried about you! I heard from rumours how she treats Potter at detentions... she's doing the same to you, isn't she? Professor Snape must be informed immediately!

me: Pansy, please calm down. Everything is going to be okay, I promise.

Pansy: But, why are you reassuring me, when I should be doing that to you?

Draco: That's just what she does. Turning everything in her favour, no matter how dire or dark the situation may be.

me: Dear Draco, we are Slytherins, aren't we? That's what we're best at. Now, off to sleep, you two. Long days await us.

Pansy: Just be careful, okay? You are our model.

Draco: Listen to her, Black. She knows what she's saying, as a common Slytherin student.

me: I've become a...role model... for our fellow Slytherin students?

Pansy: *smiles* Even if you don't realize it, you manage to empower us through your existence. Maybe the world doesn't have to be so bad to us, after all.

me: That's what I like to hear. I suppose I can say that I am happy. At least I know I did something good during these years.

Pansy: Also... Could you teach me the Patronus charm as well? There are many of us who want that...

me: *smiles* I'd be delighted to. If anyone wishes, I can help them right here, in the Common Room.

Pansy: Yay! I will gather more people to join! Thanks! It's getting late now, so we all better head to sleep. G'night!

As she left, I didn't realize I had a serene smile on my face, until I feel Draco behind me, hugging me and putting his chin on my head.

Draco: You're being reckless.

me: I am.

Draco: I could have gotten you out of trouble.

me: It had to be done.

Draco: Why is it always you who has to sacrifice herself during all of Dumbledore's schemes?

me: I am the most capable. They can't gain peace without me. I just do what I have to do.

Draco: Aren't you getting tired of this? Can't you be a little selfish sometimes?

me: I am being selfish right now. You don't realize it, but I wasn't supposed to be alive.

Draco: But you are, and that's all that matters. What about your happiness?

me: My happiness is knowing you all are alive and well. And with Him alive, that cannot happen.

Draco: My parents lived well enough!

me: They did not. Since Abraxas got involved with Him in school, it hasn't been okay. Your parents were automatically forced to join. They lived in fear.

Draco: But they lived well and were seen as superior.

me: Just wait until next year...

Draco: What exactly have you Seen?

me: Nothing in particular. Let's just go to sleep. Big days ahead~.

As I tried to leave, he pulled me closer to him, in a tight embrace, whispering "Just a bit longer". I complied, turning around and embracing him myself, enjoying the comfortable silence and warmth.
Thankfully, Fred and George were nice enough to start pulling extreme pranks, like firework-dragons that act in different ways if you try to vanish or destroy them.

The professors especially had their fun in calling her to get rid of the dragons, because they 'lacked authority'.

On the other hand, Draco joined Umbridge's Inquisition Squad very proudly, making me avoid him as much as possible.

How could he? After he found out about the terrible things she'd done to me? Disgraceful.

Unfortunately, exams were coming up sooner than expected, and Umbridge was as horrible as always.

But things have been peculiar even for Severus, who seemed to be even more irritable than usual.

One faithful day, I noticed this~.  

CAREERS ADVICE

All fifth-years are required to attend a short meeting with their Head of House during the first week of the summer term to discuss their future careers. Times of individual appointments are listed below.

Looking at the note, it says that for Healing, you need at least "E" at NEWT level in Potions, Herbology, Transfiguration, Charms and Defence Against the Dark Arts. It will be difficult, but not impossible. Guess I have to bother more with Herbology and Charms.

Soon, my appointment with Snape arrived, and lucky enough, I managed to skip DADA to attend it. However, to my horror, what I wasn't expecting was to see the Pink Toad in a corner, staring intently at us with that poison grin of hers.

I felt petrified and my mind went blank, until his velvety voice snapped me out of it, and I sat down in front of him, biting my lip.

Snape: As you know, Black, this meeting is to talk over any career ideas you might have, and to help you decide which subjects you should continue into the sixth and seventh years. I believe your option remains Healing, am I correct?

me: Er-....Y-Yes, sir.

Snape: You'd need top grades for that, obviously, as it's written in the prompt. They ask for a minimum of five NEWTs, and nothing under "Exceeds Expectations" grade. Then you would be required to undergo multiple practices at St. Mungo's. It's a difficult career path, Black, they only take the best. The wizarding world is in dire need of competent healers.

At this moment, Professor Umbridge gave a very tiny cough, as though she was trying to see how quietly she could do it. I flinched at it, but Snape just ignored her.

Snape: You'll want to know which subjects you ought to take, though, I suppose you already know.

me: Yes. First of all, Potions, naturally. Poisons and antidotes are the basics of Healing.

Snape: Certainly. I would also advise-

Umbridge gave another cough, a little more audible this time. Snape closed his eyes for a
Snape: I would also advise Herbology, since it goes well with Potions and you'll have to know each ingredient's properties to know what to use. And I ought to tell you now, Black, that I do not accept students into my NEWT classes unless they have achieved "Outstanding" at Ordinary Wizarding Level. I'd say you've got my subject easily covered, since you have a natural affinity for it, but you also cannot neglect the other subjects. You ought to do Transfigurations and Defense Against the Dark Arts for-

Umbridge gave her most pronounced cough yet.

Snape: May I offer you a cough drop, Dolores?
Toad: Oh, no, thank you very much. I just wondered whether I could make the teensiest interruption, Severus?
Snape: I daresay you'll find you can.
Toad: I was just wondering whether Miss Black has quite the temperament for a Healer?
Snape: Really? Well, Black, if you are serious in this ambition, which you are, as your House says, I would advise you to concentrate hard on bringing your Charms and Herbology up to scratch. I see Professor Flitwick has graded you between "Acceptable" and "Exceeds Expectations" for the last two years, so your Charmwork seems satisfactory. As for Defence Against the Dark Arts, your marks have been generally high, Professor Moody in particular thought you... are you quite sure you wouldn't like a cough drop, Dolores?
Toad: Oh, no need, thank you, Severus, I was just concerned that you might not have Raven's most recent Defence Against the Dark Arts marks in front of you. I'm quite sure I slipped in a note.
Snape: What, this thing? Yes, as I was saying, Black, Professor Moody thought you showed a pronounced aptitude for the subject, and obviously for a Healer-
Toad: Did you not understand my note, Severus?
Snape: Of course I understood it.
Toad: Well, then, I am confused... I'm afraid I don't quite understand how you can give Miss Black false hope that--
Snape: *sneers* False hope? She has achieved high marks in all her Defence Against the Dark Arts tests--
Toad: I'm terribly sorry to have to contradict you, Severus, but as you will see from my note, Raven has been achieving very poor results in her classes with me--
Snape:... All Defence Against the Dark Arts tests set by a competent teacher.

Hearing that, I looked at him in shock, as Umbridge's smile vanished as sudden as a light bulb blowing. She sat back in her chair, turned a sheet on her clipboard and began scribbling very fast indeed, her bulging eyes rolling from side to side. Snape turned back to me, slightly smirking and hiding his rage.

Snape: Any questions?
me: What sort of character and aptitude tests do you need to take, if you get enough NEWTs?
Snape: Well, you'll need to demonstrate the ability to react well to pressure and so forth. Human lives are at stake, so you need to be alert at all times. It will mean a lot more study even after you've left school, so unless you're prepared to--
Toad: You need to be patient and not explode when criticized, to be a Healer.
Snape: Unless you're prepared to take even more exams after Hogwarts, you should really
Professor Umbridge stood up. She was so short that this did not make a great deal of difference, but her fussy, simpering demeanour had given place to a hard fury that made her broad, flabby face look oddly sinister.

**Toad:** Black has no chance whatsoever of becoming a Healer!

Snape got to his feet, too, and in his case this was a much more impressive move, being very tall and towering over the pink wench.

**Snape:** Black, I will assist you to become a Healer, even if it is the last thing I do. You're a Slytherin and you are my top student, I will make sure you achieve the required results. St. Mungo's and the Ministry will never employ Raven Black! No Hospital would turn away an impeccable aspiring Healer, Dolores. Black, this concludes our careers consultation. Go study and do not dare to slack off.

Seeing that pinky was about to blow off, I quickly scattered out of the room and let Severus deal with her.

How the tables turned, huh? Guess I'll have to thank him later for protecting me.

Unfortunately for the School, The Twins transformed a whole corridor into a swamp and escaped via brooms, leaving us all idiots behind miserable.

**But things got worse, with the Exam-period having arrived.**
The exams themselves were not bad, especially since I managed to calm myself with a nice Draught of Peace, but Hermione told me Pinky's allies tried to take Hagrid away, but managed to hit McGonagall with 4 stunning charms.

Just a few more, and it'd have stunned a bloody dragon...

This is not normal...

It could have been fatal.

That's where muggle lawsuits should come in handy...

And our allies were growing fewer and fewer...

Huh... what a time to be alive.

But during the History exam, Potter got a vision and fell off the chair, meaning that he got a vision...

If it's one I didn't get, then it was made to confuse.

This is bad...

After the exam, I rushed to Herms and Ron and we got to him, to see what was going on.

As expected, he saw Voldemort threatening Sirius, which was obviously a lie, but he wouldn't listen to a traitor.

**Desperation was flooding his mind.**

**Harry:** How're we going to get there?

**Ron:** G-get there?

**H:** Get to the Department of Mysteries, so we can rescue Sirius!

**R:** But-- Harry...

**H:** What? What?

**Herms:** Harry... er ... how ... how did Voldemort get into the Ministry of Magic without anybody realising he was there?

**H:** How do I know? The question is how we're going to get in there!

**Herms:** But ... Harry, think about this, it's five o'clock in the afternoon ... the Ministry of
Magic must be full of workers ... how would Voldemort and Sirius have got in without being seen? Harry ... they're probably the two most wanted wizards in the world ... you think they could get into a building full of Aurors undetected?
H: I dunno, Voldemort used an Invisibility Cloak or something! Anyway, the Department of Mysteries has always been completely empty whenever I've been--
me: Highly irrational...
Herms: You've never been there, Harry. You've dreamed about the place, that's all.
H: They're not normal dreams! How d'you explain Ron's dad then, what was all that about, how come I knew what had happened to him?
R: He's got a point.
me: Maybe Voldemort is using the same trick to fool us.
Herms: This is just -- just so unlikely! Harry, how on Earth could Voldemort have got hold of Sirius when he's been in Grimmauld Place all the time?
R: Sirius might've cracked and just wanted some fresh air. He's been desperate to get out of that house for ages--
Herms: But why--... why on earth would Voldemort want to use Sirius to get the weapon, or whatever the thing is?
H: I dunno, there could be loads of reasons! Maybe Sirius is just someone Voldemort doesn't care about seeing hurt--
me: Can you stop yelling already, you self-conceited dunderhead?! I am worried too, but we can't act irrational, or we might put everyone's life in danger!
R: You know what, I've just thought of something. Sirius's brother was a Death Eater, wasn't he? Maybe he told Sirius the secret of how to get the weapon!
H: Yeah-- and that's why Dumbledore's been so keen to keep Sirius locked up all the time!
me: Yeah... so keen to keep Sirius locked up in Azkaban.
Herms: Look, I'm sorry, but neither of you is making sense, and we've got no proof for any of this, no proof Voldemort and Sirius are even there--
R: Hermione, Harry's seen them!
Herms: But Raven hasn't!
H: Maybe she's lying, then!
Herms: Okay... I've just got to say this--
H: What?
Herms: You ... this isn't a criticism, Harry! But you do ... sort of ... I mean-- don't you think you've got a bit of a... a saving-people thing?
H: And what's that supposed to mean, a "saving-people thing"?
Herms: Well ... you ... I mean ... last year, for instance ... in the lake ... during the Tournament ... you shouldn't have ... I mean, you didn't need to save that little Delacour girl ... you got a bit ... carried away ... I mean, it was really great of you and everything, everyone thought it was a wonderful thing to do--
H: That's funny, because I definitely remember Ron saying I'd wasted time acting the hero ... is that what you think this is? You reckon I want to act the hero again?
Herms: No, no, no! That's not what I mean at all!
H: Well, spit out what you've got to say, because we're wasting time here!
Herms: I'm trying to say -- Voldemort knows you, Harry! Maybe it's just as Raven says! He took Ginny down into the Chamber of Secrets to lure you there, it's the kind of thing he does, he knows you're the... the sort of person who'd go to Sirius's aid! What if he's just trying to get you into the Department of Myst--?
H: Hermione, it doesn't matter if he's done it to get me there or not. They've taken McGonagall to St. Mungo's, there isn't anyone from the Order left at Hogwarts who we can tell, and if we don't go, Sirius is dead!
me: Oh really?
Herms: But Harry--what if your dream was--was just that, a dream?
me: Or a voluntary vision sent to you intentionally, to confuse you. It seems like it worked well.
H: You don't get it! I'm not having nightmares, I'm not just dreaming! What d'you think all the Occlumency was for, why d'you think Dumbledore wanted me prevented from seeing these things? Because they're REAL, Hermione--Sirius is trapped, I've seen him. Voldemort's got him, and no one else knows, and that means we're the only ones who can save him, and if you don't want to do it, fine, but I'm going, understand? And if I remember rightly, you didn't have a problem with my saving-people thing when it was you I was saving from the dementors, or--he rounded on Ron--when it was your sister I was saving from the Basilisk--
R: I never said I had a problem!
Herms: But Harry, you've just said it, Dumbledore wanted you to learn to shut these things out of your mind, if you'd done Occlumency properly you'd never have seen this-
H: IF YOU THINK I'M JUST GOING TO ACT LIKE I HAVEN'T SEEN-
me: VOLDEMORT IS USING YOU! Think, Potter! Sirius told you there was nothing more important than you learning to close your mind!
H: WELL, I EXPECT HE'D SAY SOMETHING DIFFERENT IF HE KNEW WHAT I'D JUST--

The classroom door opened. Harry, Ron and Hermione whipped around. Ginny walked in, looking curious, closely followed by Luna, who as usual looked as though she had drifted in accidentally.

Ginny: Hi. We recognised Harry's voice. What are you yelling about?
me: His frustrations, as usual.
H: Never you mind.
G: There's no need to take that tone with me. I was only wondering whether I could help.
H: Well, you can't.
me: Of coo~rse! The mighty and powerful Harry James Potter doesn't need any help from us, peasants.
Luna: You're being rather rude, you know, Harry?
Herms: Wait. Wait ... Harry, they can help. Listen. Harry, we need to establish whether Sirius really has left Headquarters.
H: I've told you, I saw--
Herms: Harry, I'm begging you, please! Please let's just check that Sirius isn't at home before we go charging off to London. If we find out he's not there, then I swear I won't try to stop you. I'll come, I'll d-do whatever it takes to try and save him.
H: Sirius is being tortured NOW! We haven't got time to waste.
Herms: But if this is a trick of Voldemort's, Harry, we've got to check, we've got to.
H: How? How're we going to check?
Herms: We'll have to use Umbridge's fire and see if we can contact him. We'll draw Umbridge away again, but we'll need lookouts, and that's where we can use Ginny and Luna.
me: Brilliant, another life-long detention with the Toad. I'm in.
H: Okay. If you can think of a way of doing this quickly, I'm with you, otherwise I'm going to the Department of Mysteries right now.
Herms: Right. Right ... well ... one of us has to go and find Umbridge and--and send her off in the wrong direction, keep her away from her office. They could tell her--I don't know--that Peeves is up to something awful as usual ...
R: I'll do it. I'll tell her Peeves is smashing up the Transfiguration department or something, it's miles away from her office. Come to think of it, I could probably persuade Peeves to do it if I met him on the way.
Herms: Now, we need to keep students right away from her office while we force entry, or some Slytherin's bound to go and tip her off.
G: Luna and I can stand at either end of the corridor and warn people not to go down there because someone's let off a load of Garrotting Gas. Fred and George were planning to do it before they left.
Herms: Well then, Harry, you and I will be under the Invisibility Cloak and we'll sneak into the office and you can talk to Sirius-
H: He's not there, Hermione!
Herms: I mean, you can check whether Sirius is at home or not while I keep watch, I don't think you should be in there alone, Lee's already proved the windows a weak spot, sending those Nifflers through it.
H: I ... okay thanks.
me: I'll go prepare then. Good luck.

I swiftly ran to Snape's office, telling him about the plan of those idiots, then ran to Umbridge's office, only to find, to my shock, everyone trapped by a Slytherin, and Umbridge, looking as hysterical as ever.

me: ...Oh...
Umbridge: How wonderful of you to join us, Black. I bet you wanted to see that criminal father of yours more than ever.

I tried to turn around and run, but the door was closed magically, before I could even try. She made the Slytherins holding the captives stay apart from each other, as she pushed me in a chair, then got in my face, with that warty face.
Trying to look away from her, I noticed Draco looking rather worried and torn, between his duty for Umbridge and... me.

Toad: Good, good. Well, it looks as though Hogwarts will shortly be a Weasley-free zone, doesn't it? So, Black. You stationed lookouts around my office and you sent this buffoon to tell me the poltergeist was wreaking havoc in the Transfiguration department when I knew perfectly well that he was busy smearing ink on the eyepieces of all the school telescopes. Mr. Filch having just informed me so.
me: Next time, I should actually tell Peeves the plan before I proceed with it.
Toad: Clearly, it was very important for you to talk to somebody. Was it Albus Dumbledore? Or the half-breed, Hagrid? I doubt it was Minerva McGonagall, I hear she is still too ill to talk to anyone.
me: Yes, of course. I would never miss a chance to defy you.
Toad: Very well. Very well, Miss Black... I offered you the chance to tell me freely. You refused. I have no alternative but to force you. Draco-- fetch Professor Snape.

There was silence in the office except for the fidgetings and scufflings resulting from the Slytherins' efforts to keep Ron and the others under control. Ron's lip was bleeding on to
Umbridge's carpet as he struggled against Warrington's half-nelson; Ginny was still trying to stamp on the feel of the sixth-year girl who had both her upper arms in a tight grip; Neville was turning steadily more purple in the face while lugging at Crabbe's arms; and Hermione was attempting, in vain, to throw Millicent Bulstrode off her. Luna, however, stood limply by the side of her captor, gazing vaguely out of the window as though rather bored by the proceedings.

Snape: You wanted to see me, Headmistress?
Toad: Ah, Professor Snape. Yes, I would like another bottle of Veritaserum, as quick as you can, please.
S: You took my last bottle to interrogate Potter. Surely you did not use it all? I told you that three drops would be sufficient.
me: *chough* Idiot...
Toad: You can make some more, can't you?
S: Certainly. *smirks* It takes a full moon-cycle to mature, so I should have it ready for you in around a month.
Toad: A month? A month! But I need it this evening, Snape! I have just found Potter using my fire to communicate with a person or persons unknown!
S: Really? Well, it doesn't surprise me. Potter has never shown much inclination to follow school rules.
Toad: I wish to interrogate him and Black! I wish you to provide me with a potion that will force him to tell me the truth!
S: I have already told you that I have no further stocks of Veritaserum. Unless you wish to poison Potter and I assure you I would have the greatest sympathy with you if you did--I cannot help you. The only trouble is that most venoms act too fast to give the victim much time for truth-telling.
Toad: You are on probation! You are being deliberately unhelpful! I expected better, Lucius Malfoy always speaks most highly of you! Now get out of my office!
me: That's not how you're supposed to treat people...

Snape gave her an ironic bow and turned to leave, but just then, I got the worst headache-vision thus far, which made me scream in agony as I saw something unexpected.

It was a version of I, dressed in an elegant black dress, looking more exhausted than ever, in front of the long Malfoy table.
There, Draco and his parents looked concerned at me, but I didn't understand why-
Until I felt a cold blade at my throat, slowly cutting my skin, as small ruby droplets kept following down my neck.
But I wasn't scared.
I felt... oddly peaceful.
Until the blade suddenly was plunged deep into my throat, and all I could do was try to scream, as I gripped my neck.

Then I got back to reality, and by then, as I tried to regain my breathe, I noticed Snape had left. That's too bad... I'd have begged for a calming potion...

Toad: Putting on a show, I see? A mummer's charade.... I am left with no alternative ... this is more than a matter of school discipline ... this is an issue of Ministry security ... yes ... yes ... me: I don't want to die...
Draco: Professor ... I don't think Black is feeling well.
Toad: The weaker she is, the more she'll tell. You've been forcing me, Black. ... I do not want...
to, but sometimes circumstances justify the use ... I am sure the Minister will understand that I had no choice ... The Cruciatus Curse ought to loosen your tongue.

Draco: Excuse me?!

Herms: No! Professor Umbridge--it's illegal.

me: Don't... kill... me... D-Don't...

But Umbridge took no notice. There was a nasty eager, excited look on her face.

Draco: The Minister wouldn't want you to break the law, Professor Umbridge!

Toad: What Cornelius doesn't know won't hurt him. He never knew I ordered dementors to go after Potter last summer, but he was delighted to be given the chance to expel him, all the same.

H: It was you? You sent the dementors after me?

me: Don't... He will... kill... me... if I die...

Toad: Somebody had to act. They were all bleating about silencing you somehow, discrediting you, - but I was the one who actually did something about it... only you wriggled out of that one, didn't you, Potter? Not today though, not now-

Draco: Professor, please, don't-

Toad: Crucio!

I gasped at the sudden shock, letting my head back, staring at the pink cieling, trying to regain my breathe.

me: He'll kill you... He'll save me... you'll die...

Herms: NO! We'll have to tell her!

H: No way!

Herms: We'll have to, Harry, she'll force it out of you anyway, what's... what's the point?

And Hermione began to cry weakly into the back of Millicent Bulstrode's robes. Millicent stopped trying to squash her against the wall immediately and dodged out of her way looking disgusted.

Toad: Well, well, well! Little Miss Question-all is going to give us some answers! Come on then, girl, come on!

Herms: I'm-- I'm sorry everyone. But-- I can't stand it-

Toad: That's right, that's right, girl! Now then... with whom was Potter communicating just now?

Herms: Well, he was trying to speak to Professor Dumbledore.

Toad: Dumbledore? You know where Dumbledore is, then?

Herms: Well... no! We've tried the Leaky Cauldron in Diagon Alley and the Three Broomsticks and even the Hog's Head-

Toad: Idiot girl- Dumbledore won't be sitting in a pub when the whole Ministry's looking for him!

Herms: But... but we needed to tell him something important!

Toad: Yes? What was it you wanted to tell him?

me: The weapon... haha...

Toad: Lead me to the weapon.

Herms: I'm not showing... them.

Toad: It is not for you to set conditions.

Herms: Fine! Fine... let them see it, I hope they use it on you! In fact, I wish you'd invite loads
and loads of people to come and see! Th--that would serve you right--oh, I'd love it if the wh- whole school knew where it was, and how to u-use it, and then if you annoy any of them they'll, be able to s-sort you out!

me:They'll...kill you...I've seen it...

Toad:All right, dear, let's make it just you and me ... and we'll take Potter, too, shall we? Get up, now.

Draco:Professor Umbridge, I think some of the Squad should come with you to look after-

Toad:I am a fully qualified Ministry official, Malfoy, do you really think I cannot manage two wandless teenagers alone? In any case, it does not sound as though this weapon is something that school children should see. You will remain here until I return and make sure none of these escape.

Draco:All right.

After Umbridge left with Hermione and Potter, I got the biggest grin on my face, then started laughing hysterically.

Concerned, Draco got in front of me, trying to calm me down, but all I did was glare at him, with a smirk on my face.

me:I thought you'd choose me over her. Guess you're into older and uglier women. That's a pity, huh?

Draco:Huh? No, that's not it! I wasn't expecting you to come here, not now and not then either-

me:Oh, Draco, you think I'm that powerless? You must be mistaken... I got you all where I wanted... so clueless...

Draco: You just had a vision, did you not? What was it about?

me: You were there too, and you looked much more mature and pretty... all while scared to death... it suits you so well...

Draco: That's ridiculous! I told you, I'm never going to be stuck in that position!

Swift as a viper, I grabbed him by the throat, and got dangerously closer to his face, making him blush slightly, and stop breathing.

me: You never know how the tables turn, love. But hey... pink suits you well, too~.

I quickly pushed him in my place, on the chair, then made the rest of the Slytherins fall asleep, as I helped the others escape.

Ron: Bloody brilliant...

me: Yes, sure. Go meet up with the others and don't wait for me. I'll come soon as well. Good luck.

Ginny: Take care, too!

me: I'll be fine.

I quickly ran back to Snape's office and told him about the idiots, who hurried to the Ministry, despite my warnings.

Facepalming, we hurried to gather the other Order members, and save those dunderheads (but it was obvious that he himself couldn't come, because he'd blow his cover).

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The second I apparated near Sirius, I got a vision which made me lose balance and fall on my knees. It was only for a split of a second, but I saw his demise.
me: You are not coming with us.
Sirius: You must be joking.
me: *smirks* I am positively sirius.
Sirius: It's not the time to jest now, Raven! Those kids are in danger.
me: Do you want to die?
Sirius: Die? I won't die, Merlin's beard!
me: I just fell because I saw you die. Once was enough, I don't think I want to see it twice, and this time, real.
Remus: Sirius, maybe you should listen to her.
Sirius: Harry went out there, thinking I was in danger and he's risking his life trying to save me! I can't abandon him! I am his Godfather!
me: AND YOU ARE MY FATHER! But it obviously never mattered for you! Potter! Potter! Potter everywhere! But what about me?! I AM YOUR DAUGHTER! Why do you never do something for me?! Don't I matter for you at all?!
Sirius: No, please don't misunderstand. You know I love you the most in this life.
me: *twitch* D-Don't speak... Don't you dare say that! You're a liar! Liar! Liar!
Sirius: I'm not, I swear! Please, just try to-
me: Forget it! Go there and die for all I care! Die for Potter's sake! But know that if anything happens, I won't bother to either save you or mourn you. Have Potter do that for you.
Remus: Raven, calm down, and let's go, please.
me: Yes, of course, because I always have to fix Potter's stupid and reckless mistakes...

I took Remus arm and we apparated to the Department of Mysteries, fighting right away the Death Eaters.
Soon, the other members arrived too, and soon, everything became more and more familiar. Bellatrix' mess of a hair flashed before my eyes, and that's when I knew I had to act-
I pointed my wand in Sirius' direction and muttered "Stupefy", which him him before his cousin's spell did.
I got on my feet with haste and ran after my aunt, in another room, where I crucio'ed her, giggling with glee.
Letting her get back up, we started duelling and taunting each other.

Bella: I was and am the Dark Lord's most loyal servant. I learned the Dark Arts from him, and I know spells of such power that you, pathetic little girl, can never hope to compete--
me: Sorry, but I strongly believe I've surpassed you in every way. He much favours me, over an overused fossil like you.
Bella: GIVE ME THE PROPHECY!
me: What prophecy are you talking about?
Harry: *running in* The prophecy is gone!
Me: WHAT PROPHECY?!
Bella: Potter, I'm going to give you one chance! Give me the prophecy-- roll it out towards me now-- and I may spare your life!
H: Well, you're going to have to kill me, because it's gone! And he knows! Your dear old mate Voldemort knows it's gone! He's not going to be happy with you, is he?
Bella: What? What do you mean?
H: The prophecy smashed when I was trying to get Neville up the steps! What do you think Voldemort'll say about that, then?
Bella: LIAR! YOU'VE GOT IT, POTTER, AND YOU WILL GIVE IT TO ME! Accio prophecy! ACCIO PROPHECY!
me:*mutters*I suppose rage runs in the family...
H: Nothing to summon! It smashed and nobody heard what it said, tell your boss that!
Bella: No! It isn't true, you're lying! MASTER, I TRIED, I TRIED--DO NOT PUNISH ME--
H: Don't waste your breathe! He can't hear you from here!

The conversation became very heated between those two, until I felt a new presence arriving, and that's when I knew it was Him. Surprised, I ran past the brunette and went to kneel in front of my Master. He let out a soft chuckle, and made me rise, putting his cold hand on my face.

Voldy: You've done well gathering everyone here, my dear. Now, it's my turn. So, you smashed my prophecy? No, Bella, he is not lying ... I see the truth looking at me from within his worthless mind ... months of preparation, months of effort ... and my Death Eaters have let Harry Potter thwart me again ...

me: I... had no idea about this prophecy... I have failed you, Master, please accept my most profound apologies-
Bella: Master, I am sorry, I knew not, I was fighting the Animagus Black! Master, you should know--
Voldy: My dear Raven, not telling you the objective of your mission was my intention, and there is no need for apologies. You have done your job well, just as expected, and I am proud... which cannot be said the same about your aunt here. I shall deal with you in a moment, Bellatrix. Do you think I have entered the Ministry of Magic to hear your snivelling apologies?
Bella: But Master-- he is here-- he is below--
Voldy: I have nothing more to say to you, Potter. You have irked me too often, for too long. AVADA KEDAVRA!

But the headless golden statue of the wizard in the fountain had sprung alive, leaping from its plinth to land with a crash on the floor between Harry and Voldemort. The spell merely glanced off its chest as the statue flung out its arms to protect Harry.

Voldy: What--? Dumbledore!
D: It was foolish to come here tonight, Tom. The Aurors are on their way--
Voldy: By which time I shall be gone, and you will be dead!

Dumbledore flicked his own wand: the force of the spell that emanated from it was such that this time Voldemort was forced to conjure a shining silver shield out of thin air to deflect it. The spell, whatever it was, caused no visible damage to the shield, though a deep, gong-like note reverberated from it-- an oddly chilling sound.

Voldy: You do not seek to kill me, Dumbledore? Above such brutality, are you?
D: We both know that there are other ways of destroying a man, Tom. Merely taking your life would not satisfy me, I admit-
Voldy: There is nothing worse than death, Dumbledore!
D: You are quite wrong. Indeed, your failure to understand that there are things much worse than death has always been your greatest weakness--

They continued to fight, fighting like I've never seen anything so majestic before, until Voldy disappeared, and the water fell with a crash back into its pool, slopping wildly over the sides,
drenching the polished floor.

'MASTER!' screamed Bellatrix.

Sure it was over, sure Voldemort had decided to flee, Harry made to run out from behind his statue guard, but Dumbledore bellowed: 'Stay where you are, Raven, Harry!'

For the first time, Dumbledore sounded frightened.
Harry then fell on the ground, writhing on the floor and screaming bloody murder, until he stopped, and Voldemort's voice was clearly coming from his body.

Kill me now, Dumbledore ... If death is nothing, Dumbledore, kill the boy ...

After that, I'm not much sure what happened, but I believe Potter fought Voldemort, and regained his mind, and with that, the Minister and all his co-workers arrived just in time to see the Dark Lord vanish along with Bellatrix, and stand there, shocked and frightened beyond belief.
That's how Fudge finally realised the truth and gravity of the situation, and accepted to have a serious talk with Dumbledore.
With that, we took a Portkey back to his office.

There, Phineas saw us and started talking about how Dumbledore holds us in great esteem and all that.

H: You... You were right... It's my fault he died, when he shouldn't... I...
me: Maybe next time listen to me, dumbass.
H: I killed your father.
me: He wasn't my father. He was yours.
H: That's not true!
me: He is as stubborn as you are. I told him not to come, but he insisted he had to save you. You, Potter. You. Always you. It has always been you, and it will always be you.
H: I... I'm sorry... I should have listened to you, dammit!
me: Calm down, Potter! You're gonna mess up Dumbledore's office!
H: WHO CARES ANYMORE?!! HE'S DEAD! SIRIUS IS DEAD, AND I KILLED HIM!
me: ENOUGH OF THIS!

Just as he was about to trash around more, the door opened, revealing Sirius and Dumbledore, making Potter stop dead in his tracks, with the chair held high in his hands, staring like he's seen the 8th World Wonder.

H: S-Sirius...? B-But, I saw you die! How?!
me: Idiots are like parasites, you know? They never leave you.
S: That hurt, Raven.
me: Deeper than the Marianna Trench?
S: Think so.
me: Then, I did my job. You deserve to be hurt.
S: *sighs* I suppose you're right.
me: I mean, if Potter here wouldn't have been a bull-headed idiot, none of this would have had to happen, but at least there's no more... prophecies or whatever.
D: I believe Raven here saw Sirius' death, just before it happened, and managed to alter his fate, am I correct?
me: Since he didn't want to stay home, I guess my quick reactions worked well... sort of.
D: You've played your part well, I was pleasantly surprised.
me: I'm doing this so well, I'm afraid I might forget what side I'm on.
D: When in doubt, balance all the good and bad, and you will know where your allegiance lies.
me: *sighs* Right, whatever.

Dumbledore than started explaining Harry about the situation, about Voldemort, and why he had to stay with his Aunt and Uncle, but that is when I started growing more and more restless.

me: Okay, listen, I don't want to interfere much, but what about me? Yeah, I know my mum had no relatives and Sirius' brother is long dead, but Narcissa is Sirius' cousin, after all! Okay, let's say Lucius wouldn't have accepted, of course, but then, what about Remus? Or even McGonagall? Is an orphanage REALLY better than staying with a loving guardian? Especially since there is no existent protective charm there? You threw me there just like how you found Tom Riddle, and I'm not sure how to feel about that.

D: I am aware that it was not the best decision I could make, but I believed you'd inherit your mother's traits, and so, become an amazing Slytherin, if you can understand where I'm going.
me: Yes, of course, how could I not. I forgot my fate has been sealed the moment I was born, forgive me for asking the obvious. Oh, hold on... I believe I'm not the only one in this situation, after all. How... utterly ironic, Dumbledore.

I was about to leave the room, but he stopped me once again, as he said he must tell us the truth about the prophecies. The true prophecy was recorded and we listened to it, loud and clear. First Potter's, and now mine.

"The one born under the sign of Alpha and Omega of the year, she, who shines brighter than light and is engulfed in the deepest shadow, holds the strength to choose the triumphant side, be it love or power, be it good or evil, she who wields the power to change destinies will also be the one to slither her way to victory"

me: I... I mean... What the hell?
D: This is the truth of it and I'm sorry for having kept it for so long.
me: I... can't even begin to show my dissatisfaction. Why didn't I know this important detail? ME? ... You know what? Whatever, it doesn't matter, in the end. The result will be the same. At least now we both know the truth, right?
H: It's rather shocking.
me: Yes, yes, who cares. I'm out of here.
S: Raven, please wait.
me: I have only one word for you. For you and Potter too.

With that, I slapped both of them as hard as I could, glaring at them.

me: Next time bother listening to me. I swear, you couldn't be any more typically reckless Gryffindors! I get that you don't care about your lives, but maybe there's an idiot out there who still does! Keep that in mind next time you go all suicidal.
S: *chuckles* You so do love me, don't you?
me: Tsk. I might have made a mistake in saving you, after all. Your mouth is too loud.

He then hugged me tightly, patting my head, and for the first time, I felt what having a dad is like. Not that I'd admit it... yet.

The next day, in the train back home, I found a compartment all by myself and decided to actually
me: Hello, stranger.
Draco: What happened, really?
me: I'm sorry about your father. I had nothing to do with that.
Draco: I asked what happened. I was worried.
me: Worried? Why? What for?
Draco: What Umbridge did to you! I thought you snapped or something. The way you were acting crept me out.
me: Ah, that. Well... That curse isn't exactly enjoyable, you know? It hurt... And I had a vision, with him.
Draco: What did it mean?
me: He promised he'd kill her. He'd... kill her... for what she did to me.
Draco: Do you believe it?
me: I... don't know... I suppose I don't know anything anymore... I'm close to slipping, honestly.
Draco: Slipping... Are you torn between the light and the dark?
me: *blinks* The light and the dark... you say?
Draco: Isn't it how they call it? The good and the bad, and all that?
me: Well... You are right. I know it's wrong... but it feels so right... and not? For once, it feels like someone finally appreciates me for who I am, and there is no more discrimination, no more pain...
Draco: But...?
me: But it's morally wrong, and as much as it hurts, the light has good sides too...
Draco: All the pain can be gone if you choose right, isn't that true? Just choose the Lord, and it will be over! No more Potter or sacrificing for Dumbledore.
me: It's not that simple, Draco. If it were, I'd have chosen it. But, if I have to choose between Light and Dark, and Love and Power, which two go together? Can I really only choose one of each?
Draco: If that is what worries you, then don't forget I'm here. And so is mother and Parkinson.
me: I know... but I'm not sure what side are you on, either.
Draco: What do you mean? My father went to Azkaban for it, shouldn't it be obvious by now?
me: Draco... I'm sorry for what I did to you in her office. I guess I got too emotional. But... that might be the only slip I'll be allowed to do, without dying. This Summer, with him back, so many things are going to change... so many... that I'm afraid.
Draco: It will all be fine, it's our Lord, after all!
me: Can you not think out of the box at all? Think, Draco, you're smart. Feel, for you have a heart, even if you don't want to admit it. Use your brain. Your father will get out of Azkaban faster than you can imagine. I can only imagine how the Death Eater meetings are going to be... And... you will be there too... I don't want to see that happening...
Draco: What do you fear so much? There is nothing that our relatives haven't done before.
me: I... don't want to see you suffering, Draco. You are the only person that I don't want to become corrupted and thrown into this madness. Maybe you don't realise this now... And you might find it silly, but your innocence is the light of my days. I became addicted to it without realising... and if that light would get taken over by shadows... then...
Draco: *sighs* I don't understand a word you're saying, or better said, maybe I don't want to accept your warning until I've witnessed the fear you keep mentioning, but until then, I will be
Never lose this light that shines so beautifully.

Biting my lip, I hugged him tightly, trying to control my feelings the best I could, and I believe he tried the same, as he embraced back, and we stayed like this, until the end of the ride, where, holding hands, we got out, and the first person we saw was Narcissa with a sad smile on her face, as she kissed our heads and got us to the Manor, where a gloomy and and dead atmosphere had taken over.

Sighing, I tried turning around, only to feel a wet sensation on my cheek, and hear a sadistic laughter-

Gasping, shocked at what had happened, I slowly raised my hand to my cheek, touching the liquid that was falling down my cheek at a rapid pace. Bellatrix had thrown her dagger in my direction, trying to welcome me warmly. Her sister tried to scold her, but it was all blocked out, when Voldemort gracefully made his way to us. Poor Draco had no idea how to react anymore, and just stood there, petrified, while I was bowing to the Lord. He raised my head up with both hands on my face, and wiped the blood, with a soft, sinister smile.

Voldemort: Bella, I believe this is not the proper way to greet our dear young Raven. Not after she has helped our cause so much.

me: I can hide it easily anyways, please do not waste your time with someone as low as myself.

Voldemort: You may be lower, in comparison to me, but you stand much higher than the ones around you.

me: I... I do not know what to say, I feel flattered, My Lord.

Voldemort: Give me your hand.

me: Uhm....

Voldemort: Reveal it.

me: It is not sightly, Master.

Voldemort: Nonetheless, I wish to see it.

me: *sighs* Your wish is my command.

Voldemort: Such gruesome scars on such a small, delicate hand. Such lying words, strongly encrypted into your flesh.

me: I got burnt playing with fire, My Lord. It is my own fault.

Voldemort: * kisses my hand * I will prove to you that you chose the right side. The one who did it, tell me a name, and they will be dead. I will show you that there is something here that Dumbledore can never give you, no matter how much he tries.

me: Wh-What is it?

Voldemort: Acceptance. Power. Knowledge. You are among the ones like you, there is no room for that filthy discrimination that you had to go through all these years. You hate them, do you not? All those filthy Gryffindors who strut around, thinking they're better than anyone else?

me: I... I do...

Voldemort: Admit it to yourself. Do you want to finally be recognised for your strengths? For your wisdom?

me: I do!

Voldemort: There is no need to shy away anymore, my dear, for you are safe here. This is your home, from now on, and I will protect you.

me: Is... Is it okay to ask so much of you, Master? I'm not worthy of such praise-

Voldemort: Severus is my most loyal servant, and you too, will become the same. I ask for nothing more than loyalty, and in return, I can give you everything you desire.
I could feel my breathe hitching in my throat. It took so much to keep calm, and even though I knew everything was a hoax, it felt so convincing and hit all the right marks. I suppose Slytherins are truly the masters of manipulation, after all.

But did I care?

Perhaps not.

Revenge sounds sweeter than I could ever imagined.

With tears in my eyes, I suddenly fell to my knees and bowed deeply, showing all my respect and devotion for the Lord.

Voldy: Rise, my child, as a new one. A child of the darkness, who has fully embraced her qualities and is willing to nourish them. Rise, and say a name. Get revenge!

me: I am Raven Black, a proud Slytherin and eternal servant of My Master, the Dark Lord. I am a Death Eater and I want my revenge! Dolores Umbridge, the bitch who tormented me the whole year! I want her dead! Tortured into insanity, just like she's done to me! Make her suffer for her sins!

Voldy: *laughs* That's it! That's the determination I wanted to see! The ambition of a true Slytherin, one that most of the vermins that call themselves Death Eaters lack, unfortunately. I will kill her, and it won't be painless.

me: You have my eternal gratitude and servitude.

Voldy: You should start teaching young Draco here what it takes to be one of us, for he will soon join our ranks.

me: Yes, My Lord!

And with that, a new life begun.

A new life of never-ending indecisions, problems, existential questions, pain and frustrations and crisis.

A true life...

As a Death Eater.
In the dim-lit living-room of the Malfoy Manor, five Death Eaters await their master's arrival, to hear of the secret plan that is to happen in the near future. One might think they'd wait in silence, but the dark, curly haired Lestrange woman kept sneering at me, her own niece, for I do not belong with them. After all, I have only served the Lord for a few months. Narcissa remained silent, while Severus tried to smoothly make her sister shut up. Poor Draco was confused and scared beyond understanding, especially without Lucius around. I, on the other hand, grew impatient with her immaturity and lashed out with a simple spell, to knock her off her chair.

me: Have you no respect for this meeting? Have you no shame? The Dark Lord is about to arrive, and you behave like a spoiled brat? Unbelievable! 
Bella: You should not be here! You are too young to be trusted!
me: Cease your jealousy. I am simply better than you.
Sev: Do you doubt our Lord's decisions, Bellatrix?
Bella: O-Of course not! But I still don't trust either of you!
-?-:- Do I hear the sound of mistrust?

With a gasp, I quickly left my seat and went to greet the Lord, leaving Severus faintly smirking, and Bellatrix disheveled and staring in disbelief.

me: My Lord, you've arrived!
Voldy: I have, my child. I see you have been behaving well.
me: Everything I do is for my Lord.
Voldy: I like the sound of it, which is why, I have decided to trust you and young Draco here, with a special mission.
me: Anything, my Lord.
Voldy: Kill Dumbledore.

The atmosphere in the room got significantly tenser at the sound of that order. So tense, if fact, that you could cut it with a knife. My breathe was hitched in my throat, and I stole a glance at Severus, who seemed just as surprised as I was.

me: M-My Lord, Draco just recently became one of us. Isn't this task a bit difficult for him? Voldy: It is. Which is exactly why you will be there to aid him and make sure the mission is a success. Understood?
me: I... Yes, my Lord. I will think of something to make sure Dumbledore will die and ensure the ultimate success for our cause.
Voldy: That's what I like to hear~.

After the meeting was over, I took Draco's hand in mine and lead him to my room, trying to help him relax.
me: Draco, it will be fine. We will manage this, somehow.
Draco: But it's Dumbledore! Even He has trouble dealing with Dumbledore! What can WE do?!
me: I don't know yet, love, but we have a whole year to think of something.
Draco: I just--...What--...Why?! What even is going on anymore?!
me: Draco...love, try to calm down. In 2 days we're going back to Hogwarts and we will be fine, okay? I will protect you, no matter what.
Draco: How...Just how can you pretend so well? You look so confident and fearless...Like you're a whole other person entirely...Even in these chaotic situations!
me: That's what I've been doing for the past years. It's not easy, but...it's what I have to.
Draco: Do you think...We will get out of this alive?
me: Of course we will! Don't even dare think otherwise!
Draco: You were right. Things aren't as I imagined them to be...It's like a never-ending nightmare! And it hasn't even began for real!
me: Yeah...I know...But please be brave. We can do this!
Draco: Could you...Could you hold me tonight?
me: Let's spend the night like this, together. Nothing can harm us if we are together, right?
Draco: Mhm... Guess you're right...Don't leave me...Ever.
me: I never will.

With that, we laid on the comfy bed, me embracing him tightly, as I played with his soft platinum hair reassuringly, hoping he will be able to fall asleep and feel at peace.

The next day I went with Severus back at his home, reluctantly leaving Draco alone with only his mother there, but there was nothing to be done.

(Perhaps not so) Surprisingly, however, while I was in the room, reading, two certain individuals entered the house, stayed for a while, then left just like that. Upon further inspection, I see Severus on his sofa, pretending to read the newspaper yet looking rather...Out of it.

me: You did it, didn't you?
Snape: I did.
me: *sighs* After what happen last night, the whole thing made more sense. I just hoped it wouldn't happen.
Snape: Your aunt is surely...Persuasive.
me: I want her to drop dead already! No, even better, I want to torture her into insanity, just like what she did to Neville's parents.
Snape: The only difference is, Bellatrix's sanity has always been questionable.
me: *chuckles* You're not wrong. Just promise me we'll be alright. All three of us. I couldn't care less what happens to anyone else...No, not even me, just you and Draco.
Snape: Didn't I tell you to mind your own business before you care about others?
me: *smiles* First Year after the Troll incident. How could I forget? My leg still hurts sometimes when I think of it.
Snape: Good girl. Maybe actually follow that advice for once.
me: As if you do~.
On our way to Hogwarts, I stayed with Draco, Pansy and Blaise in a compartment, until a small 3rd-grader came by to give Zabini and I invitations to see Slughorn, like he's some kind of celebrity. Clearly, the meeting didn't last long, and I got back to our compartment, relatively pissed off and bored out of my mind. To make matters worse, after Zabini told Draco everything that's been happening at the meeting, he got exponentially more annoyed, until he sighed and let his head on my lap, so I could play with his hair.

**Finally, he calmed down.**

However, at the end of our ride, Draco ushered us to go ahead, as he took care of the intruder - most likely Potter - and we got reunited back at the Castle, where the Sorting, the Feast and the Speech happened.

What was more than peculiar was Dumbledore's darkened hand that seemed wilted. Severus teaching DADA was not a surprise for me since he told me long before of his and the Headmaster's arrangements.

And so, the next day we began our schedule with Potions, along with the Gryffindors. Shocker or not, Harry and Ron were incredibly late yet still present, and had to fight over the last new book. *Lucky guess who won.*

Slughorn quizzed us on 3 potions, which Hermione answered faster than the blink of an eye, earning 20 points, then he made some of us sniff the Amortentia one, just for the fun of the lesson.

Slughorn: Ah, Miss Black, Professor Snape talked very highly of you, saying you're his brightest student and excel in Potions. And how many O.W.L.s did you get?

me: All of them. Outstanding for 10, except for History of Magic, where I got an E... Maybe that was because I almost fell asleep during the examination... *grins* Oops, my bad~!*shrugs*

Slughorn: *laughs* Very well done indeed! And, might I say, I might have done the same if I were you. Now, what do you smell, my dear?

me: Let's see...I smell...the scent of the forest after the rain...Hot chocolate...and um...Green apples.

Slughorn: Those are very lovely scents indeed! Thank you, Raven. Next!

Draco: Vanilla, heavy velvety curtains, red wine and the burnt logs in the fireplace.

Slughorn: Ah, yes, rich and classy scents, just as expected. Very nice tastes, Mr. Malfoy.

Ernie: Professor, what's in that one?

me: Felix Felicis, obviously.

Slughorn: Miss Black, very well! It'd be foolish to ask whether you know what it does, correct?

me: Drink it and you'll be extra lucky for quite a while. I suggest taking it before exams... *winks* It lets you pass all your OWLs with flying colours.

Slughorn: *laughs* Raven, Raven, you sure do have a great sense of humour!

me: Why, professor, they say flattery gets you nowhere! *grins* Which is true, since you don't get a vial of flattery.

Slughorn: Who needs flattery when you have luck, amirite?

me: Precisely!

Michael: Have you ever taken it, professor?
Slughorn: Yes, twice in my life. Once when I was 24 and once when I was 57! Best two days in my life.
me: Oho, professor, I bet you whoever that lucky lady was, sure had a nice day as well.
Slughorn: I know I did.

Now, Slughorn made that potion our prize if we managed to successfully complete the Draught of Living Dead. Piece of cake!
Stretching, I grab the ingredients and start the process, grinning from ear to ear that this was one of the potions Severus taught me quite recently, during the Summer holiday.
Looking left and right, I raised my eyebrow in confusion seeing everyone struggling or doing wrong steps in completing the said potion. All of them, except Potter, surprisingly, who managed to finish not long after me.

Slughorn: Raven, my girl, I couldn't help but notice you didn't even touch your book! Have you already memorised it during Summer?
me: You could say I'm just a highly passionate about this subject, just as Professor Snape mentioned before.
Slughorn: Yes, yes, how could I forget. Then, this is your rightfully earned prize, dear! Use it well!
me: *grins* Thank you so much, professor! I'm sure the day I choose to drink this is going to be one to remember!

On our wait to the next class, Draco suddenly stopped and grasped my wrists, looking straight into my eyes, confused.

me: What is it, Draco?
Draco: How did you do that?
me: Do...What, exactly?
Draco: Charm Slughorn, of course! And do that potion!
me: *confused* Charming Slughorn is just about the easiest thing in the world. And the Draught of Living Dead is one of the potions Severus taught me last month. Why?
Draco: But how did you manage to chop off those sopophorous beans?!
me: Chop them off? You have to crush them!
Draco: Beg your pardon?! It clearly says so in the book!
me: Let me see that-....!! No way! It does say so!
Draco: Told you so..
me: But...Half of this potion has wrong instructions. It's virtually impossible to chop one of those beans off and even if you manage to, it'd be fruitless. Ah...Whatever. I'll just take a look at the book tonight, correct everything there is to correct, if needed, and I'll just give it to you. I don't need it. *winks* Who knows, maybe next time a lucky potion is the prize, I'll just let you win it~.
Draco: The way I see it, we'd need more than luck...Whatever, thanks, love. If at least your odds are up, then I think we may have a chance. Use it well.

With that, he kissed my cheek and held my wrist gently, going together to the next class.
However slightly boring this Potions class might have been without Severus, I got to see him in DADA, where he passionately spoke about Dark Arts and the proper way of defending yourself against them.

As well as that, he had us practice non-verbal spells against each other, which for most of them proved to be a true challenge, and cheeky Potter managed to use such a strong Protective Charm against Snape, that he was forcefully thrown back.

Gasping, I run to his side, making sure he's alright, yet he was not even paying attention to his injuries, but to backlash the insensitive way Potter replied.

From then on, this year was relatively and surprisingly usual, without much to bother about- and especially not Quidditch-, and thanks to Snape, I managed to avoid Slughorn's parties quite often (and when not, I just dragged Draco to suffer with me).

However, what started as a nice Hogsmeade trip ended up rather strange for me, Pansy, Emma and Jessie who walked around and gossiped like regular teenage girls, enjoying the peaceful snow, until a shrill shriek echoed around the village which caught our attention enough to have us run in that direction, and see the Trio and Hagrid there, next to Katie Bell and her friend.

On the ground, next to Katie, there was a package, from underneath which a shimmery glint could be seen. Ron bent to touch it, but Harry stopped him frantically. Crouching down and taking the paper away carefully, an ornate opal necklace was visible, poking out of the paper.

Harry: I've seen that before. It was on display in Borgin and Burkes ages ago. The label said it was cursed. Katie must have touched it. How did Katie get hold of this?

me: *confused* The hell were you doing in a place like that?

Harry: Shush.

Leanne: Well, that's why we were arguing. She came back from the bathroom in the Three Broomsticks holding it, said it was a surprise for somebody at Hogwarts and she had to deliver it. She looked all funny when she said it...Oh no, oh no, I bet she'd been Imperiused and I didn't realize!

me: Someone used a curse on her? Under everyone's noses? That's creepy.

Herms: She didn't say who'd given it to her, Leanne?

Leanne: No...she wouldn't tell me...and I said she was being stupid and not to take it up to school, but she just wouldn't listen and...and then I tried to grab it from her...and - and -!

Emma: It's okay, Leanne, she'll be alright!

Jessie: Bet on it! Let's bring her to Madam Pomfrey and she'll be just as new!

When we returned back to Hogwarts, I whispered to the girls to go back to the Common Room and to make sure Draco would be there to wait for me. We sure need to have a little... domestic chat.

There, we met with McGonagall and Filch, and realising the gravity of the situation, she told him to bring the necklace I showed her to Severus, and we were to follow her into her office.

After Leanne told her what happened, she was sent to the Hospital Wing to regain herself, and Minerva looked at us, awaiting a more... descriptive narrating of the feat.

McGonagall: What happened when Katie touched the necklace?

Harry: She rose up in the air and then began to scream, and collapsed.

me: Wait, really? That's a far worse curse than I expected.

McGonagall: You weren't there, Miss Black?
me: I did not see it happen, no. I only arrived there after I heard her scream, and by that
time, she was already on the ground, unconscious.
Harry: Professor, can I see Professor Dumbledore, please?
McGonagall: The headmaster is away until Monday, Potter.
Harry: Away?
me: Don't be so rude, Harry! You're speaking to a teacher, not to Sirius!
Harry: That's none of your business, is it?
McGonagall: Yes, Potter, away! But anything you have to say about this horrible business
can be said to me, I'm sure!
Harry: I think Draco Malfoy gave Katie that necklace, Professor.
me: I beg your pardon?!
McGonagall: That is a very serious accusation, Potter. Do you have any proof?
Harry: No, but...
me: If it's a no, then stop speculating like that!

Throwing a glare in my way, he told her about Draco's visit to Borgin and Burkes and the
conversation they had over-heard between him and Mr. Borgin. That was, to say, not good in the
slightest.
When he had finished speaking, Professor McGonagall looked slightly confused.

McGonagall: Malfoy took something to Borgin and Burkes for repair?
Harry: No, Professor, he just wanted Borgin to tell him how to mend something, he didn't
have it with him. But that's not the point, the thing is that he bought something at the same
time, and I think it was that necklace -
McGonagall: You saw Malfoy leaving the shop with a similar package?
Harry: No, Professor, he told Borgin to keep it in the shop for him -
Herms: But Harry, Borgin asked him if he wanted to take it with him, and Malfoy said no -
Harry: Because he didn't want to touch it, obviously!
Herms: What he actually said was, 'How would I look carrying that down the street?'
Ron: Well, he would look a bit of a prat carrying a necklace.
me: Rude.
Herms: Oh, Ron, it would be all wrapped up, so he wouldn't have to touch it, and quite easy
to hide inside a cloak, so nobody would see it! And even if someone were to see him with a
necklace, he could just say it was a gift for Raven or his mother. Everyone know he's always
gifted her jewelry for Christmas. I think whatever he reserved at Borgin and Burkes was
noisy or bulky, something he knew would draw attention to him if he carried it down the
street - and in any case, I asked Borgin about the necklace, don't you remember? When I
went in to try and find out what Malfoy had asked him to keep, I saw it there. And Borgin
just told me the price, he didn't say it was already sold or anything -
me: Guys...What the hell have you been doing?! Don't you know that stalking is rude? But
this just took it to the next level of creepiness. Harry, you just hate Draco and Slytherins in
general and that's why you want to blame him for everything weird that's been happening
lately.
Harry: That's not true! Malfoy is evil, anyways, and his parents are Death Eaters, just like
you, if you haven't forgotten, so I'm sorry for suspecting the obvious! And besides, Hermione,
you were being really obvious, he realized what you were up to within about five seconds, of
course he wasn't going to tell you - anyway, Malfoy could've sent off for it since
McGonagall: That's enough! Potter, I appreciate you telling me this, but we cannot point the finger of blame at Mr. Malfoy purely because he visited the shop where this necklace might have been purchased. The same is probably true of hundreds of people -
Ron: that's what I said -
McGonagall: and in any case, we have put stringent security measures in place this year. I do not believe that necklace can possibly have entered this school without our knowledge -
Harry: But -
me: Besides, Potter, Draco didn't come to Hogsmeade today. I think he mentioned having a detention.
Harry: How do you know that?
McGonagall: That is true, Miss Black. He was doing detention with me. He has now failed to complete his Transfiguration homework twice in a row. So, thank you for telling me your suspicions, Potter, but I need to go up to the hospital wing now to check on Katie Bell. Good day to you all.
me: Good day, professor...

Feeling a huge dose of adrenaline and worry rush through me, I sprint to the Common Room, stutter the password frantically and get inside, looking spazzically for Draco, like a lost meerkat. There he was, on the ground, in front of the fireplace, staring into the dancing flames, lost in thought.

Draco: Parkinson told me you were expecting to see me.
me: That is correct.
Draco: Then, what is it?
me: You, uh...You didn't tell me you lacked the time for homework. I could have helped...Or something.
Draco: Don't bother. It will all be in vain, after all. After this year, nothing will matter anymore.
me: No, don't say that, please! It's like you're giving up your life and hope and I cannot accept something like that.
Draco: What else is there for me? You were there when he said it. Kill him, or he'll kill my parents. Who cares if I fail a class?
me: And you think the necklace attempt would have gotten you anywhere? Potter knows you were at Borgin's and what you asked him. They were spying on you.
Draco: *shrugs* Who cares? Let them spy all they want.
me: Why do you not let me help you? We're in this together! I cannot let you suffer this burden alone.
Draco: Don't you already have so much to deal with? Pretending to me his most loyal servant and whatever? It's obvious for everyone that he prefers you.
me: That's exactly why I have to help you. That, and because...
Draco: Because...?
me: Because...The only thing that's still protecting us is Dumbledore, and he's weakening greatly, trying to find ways to...eradicate the evil. Its not only I who's trying to help you. Besides...We're like a dynamic duo, aren't we? Always have been.
Draco: *snorts* It's always been you, Perks and Moon, the cheerful Slytherin Trio.
me: And yet, everyone knows we're closest to one another.
Draco: Do they?
me: *smiles* I thought you always knew the gossips around?
Draco: Maybe sometimes I'm afraid to hear them.
me: Don't worry, Draco, you have me. And no matter what happens, I will be here for you, okay?
Draco: And what if something happens? Didn't you always say how you have to fight and sacrifice yourself to defeat the evil, just like Potter? What then? I will just be alone again, with nobody to care or understand me. I don't want that.
me: I...Well...
Draco: I'm not going to let you die. I can't do that. If you die...I couldn't live with myself.
me: And if I don't die? What difference would it make?
Draco: It may sound selfish, but at least I won't have any regret living a life of despair with you by my side. The world could end and it won't matter for me.
me: Do I really matter so much to you, that you would give up your freedom, just for me to stay by your side?
Draco: I'd wish for nothing more in this world.
me: Wish no further, I'm not going anywhere.
Draco: Come here. Let me enjoy our time together as much as I can. Allow me to be selfish for just a little longer.
me: *smirks* If that's how it is, then allow me to do your Transfigurations homework~.
Draco: *smiles* Ah, just do what you want.
me: Don't I always?
Draco: You do.

With that, I went to sit next to him, cuddling to his side, him wrapping his arm around me, holding hands, and enjoying the peace and the lovely sounds the burning wood made.

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Sooner than later, Christmas came, and with that, Slughorn's famous Slug Party, to which I forced Draco to accompany me.
Trying to blend in wasn't too easy, however, since we both stood out (with our elegance) thanks to our matching outfits, and as soon as we got there, I was dragged around by Hermione, trying to escape McLaggen.
And if that wasn't enough, just as she spun me around a couple of times and McLaggen came about asking for her, I hear my name being shakily said by a woman.
Woman that proved to be Trelawney, tipsy from way too much Sherry on her tongue, speaking with Luna and Slughorn.

Trelawney: Raven Black!!
me: Ergh...Hello.
Trelawney: My dear girl! The rumors! The stories! 'The Chosen One'! Of course, I have known for a very long time. . . . The omens were never good, for you or for Harry. . . . But why have you not returned to Divination? For you, of all people, the subject is of the utmost importance!
me: I think I can handle my visions just well.
Slughorn: Ah, Sybill, we all think our subject's most important! But I don't think I've ever
known such a natural at Potions! You and Harry both are natural! and...instinctive, you know - like his mother! I've only ever taught a few with this kind of ability, I can tell you that, Sybill - why even Severus -Stop skulking and come and join us, Severus!

Seeing a drunk Slughorn just randomly put his arm around Snape and drag him towards us, I choked on air from the shock, staring at his hateful face.

Slughorn: I was just talking about Raven's exceptional potion-making! Some credit must go to you, of course, you taught her for five years!
Snape: Well of course, she is a brilliant student from my own house who chose to be attentive and consistent in her progression.
Slughorn: She's a natural, I'm telling you! You should have seen what she gave me, first lesson, Draught of Living Death - never had a student produce finer on a first attempt, I don't think even you, Severus -
me: That's because he taught me this Summer how to do it. There's no one better at this than him.
Slughorn: *laughs* Look at her, so modest! Remind me what other subjects you're taking, Raven?
me: Potions, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Charms, Transfiguration, Herbology...
Snape: All the subjects required, in short, for a Healer.
me: Yep. I'm hoping...Ergh... I AM going to become a Healer.
Slughorn: And a great one you'll make too!

As we continued out annoying chat regarding fame and my future, we suddenly see Draco being dragged by the ear toward them by Argus Filch., making me gasp in surprise and run over to them.

me: What the hell are you doing?! Put him down!
Filch:Professor Slughorn! I discovered this boy lurking in an upstairs corridor. He claims to have been invited to your party and to have been delayed in setting out. Did you issue him with an invitation?
me: Of course yes! He came here as my date! Now cease this madness, you're embarrassing everyone here!
Slughorn: It's nothing, nothing. If he's Raven's date, then it's alright. I did know your grandfather, after all...
me: Oh, right, Abra...I mean Abraxas, was it? Heard he was a great person.
Draco: He always spoke very highly of you, sir. Said you were the best potion-maker he'd ever known...
me: Isn't that adorable? Professor, I never knew your fame was so great around the country. Damn, I must have surely missed a lot while staying in the muggle world! Now I'm jealous!
Slughorn: *laughs* No need, no need, m'girl! Everything is a lesson and a new experience! It's all worth it, in the end!
Snape: I'd like a word with you, Draco.
Slughorn: Now, Severus, it's Christmas, do n't be too hard -
me: It's okay, professor. It was a lovely party and thank you for inviting us! I'm looking forward to the next one as well, so I'll keep in touch. Happy Christmas everyone and good
Not awaiting his answer, I grabbed both their wrists and hurry out the of the party, glaring at Filch and turning on the corridor, checking so nobody would listen on us.

me: Fan-freaking-tastic! Not even on Christmas night can we enjoy anything fine in this world!
Snape: Perhaps your date here shouldn't have been caught sneaking around.
me: Can you blame us, Severus? Honestly, look at us. We look like we've been sleep deprived and tortured for months with no end, and still, it's not even the beginning.
Snape: I can blame you, especially since you know very well the consequences of failing.
me: Severus, please-
Snape: We cannot afford mistakes. Draco, if you are expelled-
Draco: I didn't have anything to do with it, all right?
Snape: I hope you are telling the truth, because it was both clumsy and foolish. Already you are suspected of having a hand in it.
me: Ah, yes...Potter and his group.
Draco: For the last time, I didn't do it, okay? That Bell girl must've had an enemy no one knows about -
me: Draco had detention with McGonagall that day!
Draco: -don't look at me like that! I know what you're doing, I'm not stupid, but it won't work - I can stop you!
Snape: Ah... Aunt Bellatrix has been teaching you Occlumency, I see. What thoughts are you trying to conceal from your master, Draco?
Snape: I'm not trying to conceal anything from him, I just don't want you butting in!
Snape: So that is why you have been avoiding me this term? You have feared my interference? You realize that, had anybody else failed to come to my office when I had told them repeatedly to be there, Draco -
Draco: So put me in detention! Report me to Dumbledore!
Snape: You know perfectly well that I do not wish to do either of those things .
me: Guys, stop it already! We are not enemies here! We're trying to reach the same goal!
Draco: That's just how it is, Black! And you'd better stop telling me to come to your office!
Snape: Listen to me. I am trying to help you. I swore to your mother I would protect you. I made the Unbreakable Vow, Draco -
Draco: Looks like you'll have to break it, then, because I don't need your protection! It's my job, he gave it to me and I'm doing it, I've got a plan and it's going to work, it's just taking a bit longer than I thought it would! Better use that Vow to protect her! I don't need it, but Merlin knows she does!
me: Draco...
Snape: What is your plan?
Draco: It's none of your business!
Snape: If you tell me what you are trying to do, I can assist you ...
Draco: I have all the assistance I need, thanks, I'm not alone!
Snape: You were certainly alone tonight, which was foolish in the extreme, wandering the corridors without lookouts or backup, these are elementary mistakes -
me: He was with me! He had my alibi!
Draco: That, and I would've had Crabbe and Goyle with me if you hadn't put them in detention!
Snape: Keep your voice down! If your friends Crabbe and Goyle intend to pass their Defense Against the Dark Arts OWL this time around, they will need to work a little harder than they are doing at pres-
Draco: What does it matter? Defense Against the Dark Arts - its all just a joke, isn't it, an act? Like any of us need protecting against the Dark Arts-
Snape: It is an act that is crucial to success, Draco! Where do you think I would have been all these years, if I had not known how to act? Or your dear Black here, slithering her way around him like a vixen? Why do you think your dear Aunt Bellatrix hates her so much? Now listen to me! You are being incautious, wandering around at night, getting yourself caught, and if you are placing your reliance in assistants like Crabbe and Goyle -
Draco: They're not the only ones, I've got other people on my side, better people!
Snape: Then why not confide in me, and I can-
Draco: I know what you're up to! You want to steal my glory!
Snape: What-?!
Draco: They're not the only ones, I've got other people on my side, better people!
Snape: You are speaking like a child. I quite understand that your fathers capture and imprisonment has upset you, but -
me: Draco, wait-! Don't go!

Before I could do anything to stop him, he strode away faster than the blink of an eye, to where I could guess, was our Common Room.

Snape: Charming.
me: I think I'm losing my mind...
Snape: That's one thing you can't afford.
me: I know, I know...But he's not telling me anything...All he's saying is that he'd gladly give up his freedom for me...But...Severus...You and I both know...
Snape: He's not a bad kid, but he should work on his emotions.
me: I know...
Snape: You should take better care of yourself. I know studying and all the planning doesn't allow you much self-care, but that doesn't mean you should neglect it.
me: I...I don't know anymore...I just...*deep breathe* I want this all to be all over already...This prolonged agony...
Snape: Have you had any visions lately?
me: Yes...They don't let me sleep...The girls are getting worried...Pansy, Emma and Jessie...I keep waking up in the middle of the night to the same kind of vision...It's so unsettling...So scary...
Snape: What is it about?
me: I don't even know...! It's just me, killing everyone...Torturing them, Lucius near me, and in front of me...It's either Emma...or Jessie...or Hermione...Hell, even Pansy and Draco were in that spot...A-And...
Snape: And myself.
me: *nods* Y-Yes...I've seen Sirius die...And Remus...Tonks and even Fred...Ahhh, I'm losing my mind!!
Snape: I believe it's time you stopped those destructive visions.
me: B-But...What if they hold the truth? Even one of them? What if something happens to any of them and I could have prevented it? Even with just a warning? Like...Like how I saved Sirius!
Snape: *sighs* You cannot save everyone, Raven.
me: But at least I can try...I don't have much to leave, Severus! Only this year and the next, maybe, but at least, I want to believe I lived with no regrets.
Snape: I'm not alive here just to see you die. I let Yami and Lily die, and that was my mistake from the start. I shouldn't have trusted either him nor Dumbledore to keep them safe. This time, however, I'm not going to fail again. A job well done is the one you do yourself.

I couldn't even phantom what was going through my mind anymore, but I could feel my breath hitch in my throat as a sob escaped and a waterfall of tears streamed down my cheeks, as I threw myself in his arms, holding him as tight as I could.

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Today was the day everyone left to go home for Christmas and with that in mind and another week of feeling zombie-like, I quietly walked up to the teacher's table, in front of Severus, and biting my lip and trying not to let any more sorrow show on my face, I extended my hand to him, in a pleading manner.

me: Can we go home, Severus? Just this once, I want to see what's it like to really celebrate Christmas. It doesn't have to be anything important...Just us. Please. I...*whispers* don't know if I'll ever get that chance again...

Looking at me in slight surprise, he blinked twice, then raised to his feet, came over to me and put his arm around my shoulder, guiding me to his office, as I clinged on his cape.
He told me to pack everything up and that he'll await me on the train, and that's how we finally spent a Christmas together.

As hilarious as it sounded, he took me to his house to unpack, then we went to the Bank to get money, got a tree, decorations and all that mattered, and putting silly muggle carols on the background, we started decorating the house and the tree with fairy lights, ornaments, and colourful tinsels.
In the end, he had to raise me up and put the Star on the peak of the Tree, cause I couldn't reach it, but it was all worth it.
Taking the magic camera, I started taking pictures of just about everything, later putting them in an album.

Who'd have thought Christmas could be so nice?
After we finished we baked cookies and settled in front of the fireplace, me leaning on him, looking at the tree quietly, with an obvious smile on my face.
This whole atmosphere was relaxing and cheerful, just like how nothing bad could happen to us. Like there was no evil around to harm us.

What was weird, however, was a knock on the door, which after opening it, revealed a black dog that transformed into Sirius as he padded his way inside the house.
me: Ergh...? What are you doing here?
Sirius: Hermione told me you might be here. Dumbledore too.
me: Ah...Right. So...Hi?
Sirius: *smiles* I just...Erh...Wanted to say "Happy Christmas" for tomorrow. I'm a bit sad that you didn't choose to spend it with me and the lot, but I can understand why.
me: Well...Thanks, I guess. Happy Christmas to you too, Sirius.
Sirius: Here, a gift. Remus told me you haven't opened the letters yet, which makes complete sense, really, but I think you need this more than I do.
me: It's nicely wrapped. Did you do it yourself?
Sirius: *grins* No, I used to suck at this. Everyone would know their gifts were from me by the way they were wrapped...
me: *snorts* Yami...Mum taught you, didn't she?
Sirius: *nods* Yes, she did. Should have seen their shocked faces when the gifts weren't so poorly wrapped, it was hilarious.
me: I can only imagine, Pads. I also appreciate the colour scheme. If I dare say, quite matching.
Sirius: There may be some evil guys, but you and your mother are ever-living proof not all of you are the same.
me: Tonks' mother too, I believe?
Sirius: Ah, yes, dear Andromeda. I quite miss her.
me: Why don't you go visit her one day? I bet she misses you too.
Sirius: You know...I just might. *winks* Thanks, Midnight.
me: *confused* Midni-...Did you just give me a Marauder Name?
Sirius: I think you deserve it, after all. Bye, kid.
me: Th-Thanks...See you!

Grinning, he unexpectedly engulfed me in a hug, kissing my head, then with a wink, he ran away, leaving me there, awestruck and rooted to the spot, staring at the spot in front of me, as Severus got up and closed the door in front of me.

Severus: Well, then? Open it already.
me: I...ergh...Yes, of course.

Blinking in confusion, I gently unwrap the gift, my hands shaking like crazy, and what was there made my legs tremble in emotion, slapping a hand over my mouth, trying to muffle my cry. Inside there was a framed, moving picture of dad and mum, grinning in my direction and dancing under the cherry blossom trees. It was so beautiful, so full of feelings that I couldn't even stand anymore, and falling to my knees, I hug the imagine tightly to my chest, letting big droplets of waters fall from my eyes like a river.

_This could have still been real, had HE not been there to ruin everything._

_If Wormtail didn't betray them, she'd still be alive._

_If HE wasn't such a threat to everyone, that could even be me and Draco one day._
And yet...All of these are so surreal...Happiness is ephemeral...
And I will have to die, for my loved ones to live.
I cannot even be selfish in my decision, for I couldn't bear to see them suffering, especially at the
hand of that...That monster.
Nobody should have to live with such pain all their life.
Nobody should have to hide their emotions and pretend to be someone they're not, just to complete
some silly mission.

*People should be free and happy.*

*And if my death will ensure that ...*

... *Then so be it.*
And so, the Winter holidays passed with haste, we started the Apparition lessons and things were going well and even better, Dumbledore finally confided in me with the last memories he had, especially the one from Slughorn. More than anything, he told me that he wanted Harry to somehow persuade the Potions teacher to tell him how the real memory took place and that I should help him if I could.

Frankly, I wished to have Felix Felicis for my own benefit, but brewing it takes about 6 months and since Snape is no longer the Potions Master, trying to steal some of it will be way too obvious. So...Perhaps just giving him the potion I won would suffice...But can I really afford to do something like that, when I and Draco have such a horrible task to complete.

*Only time knows the answer.*

The problem was that after today's boring Potion's class, Potter was obviously dragging around in a way to remain alone with Slughorn, which could only mean one thing...One highly problematic thing.

**Harry:** Sir, I wanted to ask you something.

**Slughorn:** Ask away, then, my dear boy, ask away...

**Harry:** Sir, I wondered what you know about ... About Horcruxes?

me: *eyes widen* About what?
Slughorn: What did you say?
Harry: I asked whether you know anything about Horcruxes, sir. You see -
Slughorn: *whispers* Dumbledore put you up to this. Dumbledore's shown you that - that memory. Well? Hasn't he?
Harry: Yes.
Slughorn: Yes, of course. Of course ... Well, if you've seen that memory, Harry, you'll know that I don't know anything - anything about Horcruxes.'
Harry: Sir, I just thought there might be a bit more to the memory -
Slughorn: Did you? Then you were wrong, weren't you? WRONG!

His usual calm and cheery expression changed into one of desperation, as he tried to make us get out of his sight so he wouldn't have to relive the horrible moment when his former beloved student asked the same thing, which turned into a disaster.
Just outside the room, I slap the brunet on the back of his head, sighing in exasperation at his idiocy.

me: You know, Dumbledore should have known better than to ask you to show subtlety while asking this weirdo about his super-important secret.
Harry: What was I supposed to do?!
me: *shrugs* Maybe not become the shadow of his own memory. Anyways, better luck next time.

Shaking my head, I go to the next class, which seemed to be just as monotone as ever.
Many days passed, but what seemed to be the most interesting part was Ron's birthday, when he got poisoned by Romilda Vane's love potion...Or maybe something else.
I was standing in the hospital with his siblings, worrying about him, as Harry told the story for the 5th time, explaining how the actual poison was in the mead, and perhaps there was somebody out there who wished to harm either of the 3. After his parents came in the room, the non-Weasleys had to leave because of the "No more than 6 or 7 visitors!" policy, but what I truly disliked was the fact that Harry truly believes Snape is turning against Dumbledore and Hagrid having overheard their fights one night didn't help at all.
Indeed, it was rather a heated argument, and in some ways, I can truly agree with Severus, since this whole double-agent thing is really troublesome and painful...A real drag to keep up with.

And for what, really?
Sometimes, I truly question whether or not this is worth it. Being on the good side just for the sake of being good. What more could happen that would make my life miserable, and along that, the life of the ones I hold dear to my heart?
Well, actually more than I would even want to imagine, but I'd rather not even think about that.

And so, the Gryffindor vs Hufflepuff Quidditch match was over, and since then, Draco has been going a bit too often to the 7th floor, which I discovered was actually him entering the Room of Requirement. I had no idea what he was doing there, but from the rumours around, I suspect the thing that Draco wants to repair is in there. Something that maybe they have at Borgin's...But what?

Sighing, I decided to give Potter the Lucky Potion, after attempt #60, I guess, at trying to make Slughorn tell us the truth. Clearly, the guy was an idiot, and no matter what... Well, I actually did
start a Felix Felicis potion that I keep in the bathroom, but thankfully, nobody realised anything and the Potions teacher only thought that I was doing experiments.

Now, it was finally time for the Apparation exam, which, unfortunately from Draco, Ernie and Harry, they were the only ones too young to take it. Obviously enough, I passed the exam with flying colours, which made me quite cheerful, so at the end of the day, I went to my Common Room, where Pansy, Jessie, Emma and Blaise were cheering their success...But no Draco in sight.

Emma: Raven, girl, look at the Butterbeer we sneaked from Hogsmeade! Come cheer up a bit! We just passed this troublesome exam!
Jessie: And! And! THE best sweets from Honeydukes!
Pansy: And let's not forget the Firewiskey~!
Jessie: HELL YES!
me: Uh...Yes, congrats everyone. Has anyone seen Draco?
Pansy: Um...Not that I'm aware of. He was with the other two in Potions, right?
Blaise: I'll check our dorms.
me: He worries me. Have you seen? He looks so sickly grey all the time, as if his dangerously pale skin didn't already put an obvious emphasis on how his bad sleep deprivation is affecting him and his health.
Pansy: *frowns* Well...I can't say I haven't noticed a change in him, but it's not much I can say, since he'll just snap at me and leave.
me: He...He got so much thinner than he already was. His bones are showing through his skin and he gets much easier bruised. He looks like a walking skeleton or something. I...
Blaise: He's not here either. Maybe you should search for h-
me: Thanks for the help, guys. See you later.

Sighing, I walk quickly out of the room, checking every place I could think of, even the kitchens and bathrooms, and in the end, I managed to find him in the boy's restroom, sobbing in a corner, Myrtle trying to soothe him.

me: Oh, Draco...

I bit my lip as he flinched at his name, trying to hide his head in his knees. I walk to him and sit on the ground next to him, gently petting his hair, saying soothing words, then pulling his arms away from his body so I could hug him tightly, letting him cry in my embrace.

me: It's okay, my love, it's going to be okay, I promise.
Draco: N-No, it won't! I can't m-make this happen! I'm g-going insane!
me: No, sweetheart, we will pull this through, I promise you! I won't let Him touch you, I swear, you will be okay. Just please, I beg of you, talk to me. Stay with me, Draco, please.
Draco: I'm..I'm scared, Raven...I'm so scared...For myself, for my family...For you...For...Us. I-I...I don't know what to do...
me: Shh, don't worry, I'm here and nothing will happen to either of us. Lucius and Narcissa have always been faithful and devout followers of his and even if he threatened you, it was so it would ensure you will do the deed, he won't kill them, I promise. Besides, I'm here...
to guide you. You are not doing this alone, my love, so please, look at me.
Draco: It's all hopeless...E-Even if we succeed, what happens next is going to be far worse anyways, so why even bother?!
me: Because it's always going to get worse before it gets better. Yes, he will reign, but in the end, the good always prevails. It's like Karma or something and He has already done a ton of horrible things so far.
Draco: I don't want to lose you...But I can't...I can't do it...It won't work . . . And unless I do it soon ... He says he'll kill me...

I could only hold him tightly in my arm before he got up and went to lean on the sink, trying to wash away his tears and calm himself, even if it didn't quite work out the way it should have. The problem was that as Draco kept a tight grip on the sink, so tight that I could swear his knuckles turned white, he looked at the cracked mirror and gasped in shock, then turned around faster than the blink of an eye and threw a hex at what appeared to be a gawking Potter who appeared there out of nowhere and tried to hex Draco back, but I easily deflected it, yelling at the jerk to stop being such an idiot.

Of course, that didn't work, so I ran at Harry, trying to give him a piece of my mind without actually retorting to violence, until I heard the dreaded spell that Severus told me about, the "Sectumsempra", being yelled by the brunet as he hit the blond straight-on.

Blood spurted from Draco's face and chest as though he had been slashed with an invisible sword. He staggered backward and collapsed onto the waterlogged floor with a great splash, his wand falling from his limp right hand.

me: POTTER?!! WHAT HAVE YOU DONE, YOU MONSTER?!!
Harry: N-No...I...I didn't...
me: I'm gonna kill you!

But before I could even think of doing something, I ran at Draco, putting his head on my lap and trying to stop his bleeding with the little medical knowledge I had, tears falling down my face seeing how completely useless I was in trying to save the one I came to love so much.
Is that really all I can do? Stare at him and just cry?
Darn, Hogwarts, and you not putting any important Healing spells in the important curriculum...

"MURDER! MURDER IN THE BATHROOM! MURDER!" Myrtle screamed as loud as she could, the sound booming everywhere, until the door banged open behind Harry and he looked up, terrified - Snape had burst into the room, his face livid.

me: Severus! Severus, save him, please! I can't...! The spells I know just...
Severus: I know. Hold him down.

Pushing Harry roughly aside, he knelt over Draco, drew his wand, and traced it over the deep wounds the curse had made, muttering an incantation that sounded almost like song. A song that I will definitely remember and one that will haunt all my dreams for an eternity.
The flow of blood seemed to ease, Snape wiped the residue from Malfoy's face and repeated his spell.
Now the wounds seemed to be knitting.
When Snape had performed his countercurse for the third time, he half-lifted Malfoy into a standing position and I helped him stand.
Snape: Black, he needs the hospital wing. There may be a certain amount of scarring, Malfoy, but if you take dittany immediately we might avoid even that...Take him there and tell Madam Pomfrey that I will explain everything later.
me: Yes, sir.

With no hesitation, I gently help Draco walk and we make our way to the Hospital Wing, all whilst I keep telling Draco encouraging words, even if he's rather out of it. Madam Pomfrey knew just what to do and gave him dittany, letting him rest on the bed and I could only draw a chair, hold his hand tightly, kissing his knuckles, trying not to cry more than I already had today.

I have to compose myself and finally convince Draco to tell me the master plan that he's been working on ever since the beginning of the year. If we want to come out of this together, we MUST work together.

And that is exactly what we did, straight out of the Hospital, Draco dragged me to the Room of Requirement where he told me his plan and we started working on the cabinet, praying that the trick would work and we could finally succeed with the mission.

One day, however, Dumbledore called me in his office to discuss about me coming with him to get the next Horcrux, but of course, I had to be with Draco, so I didn't have time to fool around. Besides, he already has Potter as his Lab Rat. Just as I was about to turn around and leave, the said Rat burst into the office, saying how Trelawney was thrown out of RoR by someone who was cheering in happiness and of course, the annoying brunet had to suspect Draco cause why not.

me: You know what to do, Dumbledore. You do your job, I do mine. You take Potter, I take...You know very well by now.
Dumbles: Your presence will be missed, Raven.
me: Lucky you, you have Harry to keep you company. I think the mission will go smoothly without me being there anyways. Besides, I'm positive you already knew how this whole ordeal would come out. You die, I die, nothing out of the ordinary.
Harry: Wh-What's going on here?
me: Nothing to concern yourself with, Potter. Anyways, Dumbledore, uhmm...Y-Y'know...
Dumbledore: I think I can guess.
me: Yes. Uhm...Good luck, I guess. Not that you need it with Boy Wonder next to you.
Dumbledore: Better than me, I wish you the best of luck, Raven. You have grown so much...You will become an amazing Healer one day.
me: *bites lip* Don't kid yourself...You know better than anyone alive that it's not going to happen.
Harry: Why wouldn't-
me: Bye, Potter. Keep up with his pace, okay? He's quite fast for an old man.

Waving at them lazily and stealing one more glance at the smiling old man, I sigh and go to the RoR where Draco was awaiting me, hugging me tightly, ecstatic at the fact that he managed to repair the cabinet all by himself and that we can put the mission on motion now.
We quickly contacted the ones that were supposed to come and we left for Dumbledore's office, where Draco disarmed the Headmaster, but oddly enough, Potter wasn't there. I could only think that Dumbledore somehow hid him with his Invisibility Cloak or something.

Dumbles: Good evening, Draco. I see you brought Raven with you as well.
Draco: Who else is here?
Dumbles: A question I might ask you. Or are you acting alone?
Draco: No. I've got back-up. There are Death Eaters here in your school tonight.
Dumbles: Well, well. Very good indeed. You found a way to let them in, did you?
Draco: Yeah. Right under your nose and you never realised!
Dumbles: Ingenious. Yet ... Forgive me ... Where are they now? You seem unsupported.
Draco: They met some of your guard. They're having a fight down below. They won't be long ... I came on ahead. I - I've got a job to do.
Dumbles: Well, then, you must get on and do it, my dear boy.
me: Damn it, old man...
Dumbles: Draco, Draco, you are not a killer.
Draco: How do you know? You don't know what I'm capable of. You don't know what I've done!
Dumbles: Oh, yes, I do. You almost killed Katie Bell and Ronald Weasley. You have been trying, with increasing desperation, to kill me all year. Forgive me, Draco, but they have been feeble attempts ... So feeble, to be honest, that I wonder whether your heart has been really in it...
Draco: It has been in it! I've been working on it all year!
me: I mean, we obviously HAD to, after all.
Draco: Yes. And tonight -
Dumbles: Yes, you have managed to introduce Death Eaters into my school which, I admit, I thought impossible ...How did you do it? Ahhh...Perhaps you ought to get on with the job alone. What if your back-up has been thwarted by my guard? As you have perhaps realised, there are members of the Order of the Phoenix here tonight, too. And after all, you don't really need help ... I have no wand at the moment ... I cannot defend myself.
me: Shut up.
Dumbles: I see. You are afraid to act until they join you?
Draco: I'm not afraid! It's you who should be scared!
Dumbles: But why? I don't think you will kill me, Draco. Killing is not nearly as easy as the innocent believe ... So tell me, while we wait for your friends ... How did you smuggle them in here? It seems to have taken you a long time to work out how to do it.
Draco: I had to mend that broken Vanishing Cabinet that no one's used for years. The one Montague got lost in last year.
Dumbles: That was clever ... There is a pair, I take it?
me: Of course there is.
Draco: The other's in Borgin and Burkes and they make a kind of passage between them.
Montague told me that when he was stuck in the Hogwarts one, he was trapped in limbo but sometimes he could hear what was going on at school, and sometimes what was going on in the shop, as if the Cabinet was travelling between them, but he couldn't make anyone hear him ... In the end he managed to Apparate out, even though he'd never passed his test. He nearly died doing it. Everyone thought it was a really good story, but I was the only one who realised what it meant - even Borgin didn't know - I was the one who realised there could be a way into Hogwarts through the Cabinets if I fixed the broken one.
Dumbles: Very good. So the Death Eaters were able to pass from Borgin and Burkes into the school to help you ... A clever plan, a very clever plan ... And, as you say, right under my nose ...

Draco: Yeah. Yeah, it was!
Dumbles: But there were times, weren't there, when you were not sure you would succeed in mending the Cabinet? And you resorted to crude and badly judged measures such as sending me a cursed necklace that was bound to reach the wrong hands ... poisoning mead there was only the slightest chance I might drink ...

me: Stop meddling so much, will you? What's done is done, there's nothing else to say.
Draco: Wait, Raven, let him speak. You still didn't realise who was behind that stuff, did you?
Dumbles: As a matter of fact, I did. I was sure it was you.
Draco: Why didn't you stop me, then?
Dumbles: I tried, Draco. Professor Snape has been keeping watch over you on my orders -
Draco: He hasn't been doing your orders, he promised my mother -
Dumbles: Of course that is what he would tell you, Draco, but -
me: You can't break an Unbreakable Vow, Dumbledore. You, of all people, know that very well.
Draco: He's a double-agent, you stupid old man, he isn't working for you, you just think he is!
Dumbles: We must agree to differ on that, Draco. It so happens that I trust Professor Snape -

As the conversation between the two continued, it was clear that Draco was less and less able to even think about killing Dumbledore. His hands were trembling like crazy, his face became whiter than before, his voice was breaking and he just looked considerably worse than Dumbledore altogether, which is worrying.

All I could do was have my arm around his torso, supporting him, while the other hand was on his wand wrist, trying to keep it raised, in case any Death Eater was to come around and see us.

Dumbles: There is little time, one way or another. So let us discuss your options, Draco.
me: Dumbledore, you know very well that the second we got our Marks, the mere idea of being allowed to choose was completely eradicated. The only options we have is "Kill or Be Killed".
Draco: I haven't got any options! I've got to do it! He'll kill me! He'll kill her! He'll kill my whole family!
Dumbles: I appreciate the difficulty of your position. Why else do you think I have not confronted you before now? Because I knew that you would have been murdered if Lord Voldemort realised that I suspected you.
me: Don't say his name anymore...
Dumbles: I did not dare speak to you of the mission with which I knew you had been entrusted, in case he used Legilimency against you. But now at last we can speak plainly to each other ... No harm has been done, you have hurt nobody, though you are very lucky that your unintentional victims survived ... I can help you, Draco.
Draco: No, you can't. Nobody can. He told me to do it or he'll kill us. I've got no choice.
Dumbles: Come over to the right side, Draco, and we can hide you more completely than you can possibly imagine. What is more, I can send members of the Order to your mother tonight...
to hide her likewise. Your father is safe at the moment in Azkaban ... When the time comes we can protect him too ... Come over to the right side, Draco ... You are not a killer ...

me: THAT'S NOT TRUE, DUMBLEDORE! YOU CAN'T SAVE US! IT'S BEYOND YOU OR ANY OF THE ORDER'S MEMBERS! He'll just track us down with ease and torture us to death! You KNOW this!

But before any of us could say anything else, footsteps were heard thundering up the stairs and a second later I and Draco were buffeted out of the way as four people in black robes burst through the door on to the ramparts.

Amycus: Dumbledore cornered! Dumbledore wandless, Dumbledore alone! Well done, Draco, well done!

me: You're such a pain, Amycus...

Dumbles: Good evening, Amycus. And you've brought Alecto too ... Charming ...

The woman gave an angry little titter.

Alecto: Think your little jokes'll help you on your death bed, then?

Dumbles: Jokes? No, no, these are manners.

Greyback: Do it.

me: Why are YOU here anyways?!

Dumbles: Is that you, Fenrir?

Greyback: That's right. Pleased to see me, Dumbledore?

Dumbles: No, I cannot say that I am ...

me: Nobody is, for the matter.

Greyback: But you know how much I like kids, Dumbledore.

Dumbles: Am I to take it that you are attacking even without the full moon now? This is most unusual ... You have developed a taste for human flesh that cannot be satisfied once a month?

Greyback: That's right. Shocks you, that, does it, Dumbledore? Frightens you?

Dumbles: Well, I cannot pretend it does not disgust me a little. And, yes, I am a little shocked that Draco here invited you, of all people, into the school where his friends live...

Draco: I didn't...I didn't know he was going to come -

Greyback: I wouldn't want to miss a trip to Hogwarts, Dumbledore. Not when there are throats to be ripped out ... Delicious, delicious ...

Yaxley: Now, Draco, quickly!

Greyback: I'll do it.

Yaxley: I said no!

Alecto: Draco, do it, or stand aside so one of us -

But at that precise moment the door to the ramparts burst open once more and there stood Snape, his wand clutched in his hand as his black eyes swept the scene, from Dumbledore slumped against the wall, to the four Death Eaters, including the enraged werewolf, and myself and Draco.

me: Sev...!

Amycus: We've got a problem, Snape. The boy doesn't seem able -

Dumbles: Severus ...Severus ... Please ...

Severus raised his wand and pointed it directly at Dumbledore, making a green spell hit the old man right in the chest.
'Avada Kedavra!'

Both I and Draco stared at Dumbledore's dead figure as he was pushed by the spell and went into a free-fall from the Astronomy Tower. It seemed like the only Symbol of Power that the good side has...The Symbol of Innocence and Youth was killed by the dreadful evil and both I and Draco realised how horribly messed up things have become...An infinite times more complicated and complex than they already were.

**Dumbledore was dead.**

Voldemort was not.

The only one who could kill him now is Potter and I have no way to aid him because I am both a traitor in their eyes, and I will be stuck in the castle for the next year. But, I think that's the least of my concerns for now. After all, Dumbledore always told me that I am fated to die one day, so I'm ready for it. What's I'm ready for...Is leaving Draco behind. I'm absolutely terrified by the thought of anything happening to him, but at the same time, seeing his broken, sobbing form and imagining how terrible he'd feel if I...

**No.**

Don't think like that. I am replaceable, after all. Even if I die, the sun will still rise tomorrow and Draco will be able to find someone else. As long as he's alive and well, all is going to be okay.

**Yes, that's it.**

Keep Draco alive no matter what. And in the process, make sure your friends and his family is still going to be fine. After all...

That's my destiny.

*I am fated to die.*
It was a dark night, darker than any before, sombre and quiet like a graveyard, the Malfoy Manor being packed with Death Eaters awaiting their master to arrive for the meeting. The long table had many chairs for the most important members, yet two of them were empty - The Lord's and his Right Hand's - That would be me.

How did I get here? Why did I end up walking around in a long Black dress like Morticia's, my arm hooked to the Dark Lord's, Lady Vashj and Nagini slithering next to us, as we made our way to the grant living room, waiting to pass judgement to our victim - Charity Burbage, Hogwarts' Muggle Studies professor. Or that is what she was before getting kidnapped and suspended upside down above our meeting table, pleading for her life to Severus and Draco.

Voldy: A lovely night, isn't it?
Me: The perfect night to pass judgement.
Voldy: Indeed, my dear, and not only. Today we will discuss the fate of this lady. Severus, I am sure you remember your own colleague, correct?
Severus: Yes.
Voldy: For everyone who doesn't know, this woman is a former Professor of Hogwarts. Do you know what her subject was? Muggle Studies!

A boom of loud laughter echoed around the room from the brainwashed death eaters, much like my own curly haired aunt.

Bella: Ha! Muggle studies! Spare me, as if anyone could even THINK those stupid muggles could be any interesting or better than us! What a joke!
Voldy: You are right, Bellatrix, and today we will show her what we do to the muggle lovers, those filthy nobodies who dare taint out pure lineage!
Bella: Allow me, my Lord! Please, allow me to show my devotion to you and our cause!
Voldy: Your enthusiasm is appreciated, but today is the time for our dear Raven to shine and be an example for all of you. Such a young soul, yet so ambitious, intelligent and ready to do anything for her goals. Such spirit is rarely seen in people nowadays...And unfortunately, it lacks in most of you as well. So let today be an example of much needed ruthlessness, mixed with mercy.

Saying that, he carresed my face, then told me in parseltongue what shall be done, but I already knew what was to be done. I called out Lady Vashj and she hissed at me lovingly as she climbed up my leg then latched onto my extended arm as I pointed the next victim. She went to slither on the table and as she approached the professor, she raised a bit and stopped, waiting for the signal, which I provided.

"DEATH"
And with that, she opened her mouth, showing off her deadly fangs and started biting off from the victim, allowing no time for pleadings, only screams of agony and splurs of blood spattering left and right. I could only look at the scene unfolding, my heart in pain, but not for the person I just executed, but for the fact that I ended up looking at something so gruesome and monstrous without flinching, feeling disgusted or afraid.

I was slowly realising what a monster I had become over the past weeks...Months...Years... From the innocent girl who I was back in Year 2, who would've thought I would become a criminal.

A murderer.

And for what...?

"For the greater good" he said.

But is that really the truth of it all? Is this agony ever going to end? Is my sacrifice going to mean anything?

I glanced right to see Severus' eyes, blank, devoid of any expression, until he looked me in the eyes, and a hidden resentment and worry only I could see glinted, which made me avert my gaze to the opposite direction, to the owners of the Manor. Lucius looked afraid, trembling internally out of worry. Narcissa was barely even blinking, trying to somehow hold the hands of her husband's and son, to somehow calm them down and toughen them up.

And Draco...

My poor Draco...

He was blinking so rapidly, trying to wipe away the tears, not even able to look anywhere but down, fear so evident on his face.

I had to take him out of there somehow... Get him out of there, save him, hold him tight and reassure him, telling him not to worry, that everything is going to be okay. The only thing I wanted to do was to run to him and get away from this place, to a safe haven where there could be only us and no evil.

But I couldn't...

Voldy: Very good, very good, Raven! You have proved your worth, dedication and spirit for our cause and I believe by now everyone in this room was deeply moved by all the sacrifices you have made thus far in these past years. There should no doubt of your loyalty to me...I have deep faith in all of you, my loyal followers and yet, between each other exists such an abyssal grudge and hate...Such envy, just as our dear Bellatrix. in her limitless passion, has been nurturing intense jealousy over Severus' dearest student, one of the people I trust the
most in this room...So I ask of you to bring me answers.

Sev: My Lord, if I may speak, it has been known since the very beginning that Lestrange has shown nothing but hatred towards me, so I believe it only natural that she should show the same mistrust towards miss Black here, her own relative. Perhaps she feels...Replaced?

Me: I'm sorry for being far more beautiful and talented than you, auntie, but I was born perfect and I came here to serve the Lord, driven by the same desire to prove myself and walk over the bastards who thought me inferior to them.

Bella: Silence! That is clearly not true! Those two are simply not to be trusted! They are the same - sneaky, slimy, sly...Liars who wish success and benefit from leeching my Lord!

Me: Sounds like what a jealous person would say. Excuses!

Voldy: It seems like Severus and Raven have quite a strong bond of trust -Unbreakable, if I dare say...But I wonder, young one, if you are aware of the lie Severus has been feeding you since the very beginning.

Me: Lie...? My Lord, whatever are you saying? I...I don't understand.

Voldy: Oh, sweet Summer child. You, who has suffered your whole childhood in a filthy muggle orphanage, all alone, devoid of anyone caring for you, no parent or sibling...You, an innocent and adorable child, shy and reserved by nature, yet your wit and ambition obvious, you cling on the first person who showed you any sort of sympathy, the first person who so happened to be Severus Snape, your House's headteacher, the one who fought for you, against any injustice you suffered, and Merlin knows they weren't few.

Me: Well, yes, but that has never been a secret, so why is my life story being brought up now?

Voldy: You and I are not very different, young one. My father too was alive, but away, not even wanting to know I existed, and yet, there is something different...

Sev: My Lord, please, she shouldn't know.

Me: Sirius Black is a stranger to me and I care naught of what happens to him anymore. And my mother is dead, hence why I have this neat skull mark on my neck, just like Potter.

Voldy: *chuckles* That is where the truth ends and lies start to build up your reality - The reality that the wretched Dumbledore created and Severus made sure it happened...Yami Black, your mother, is alive and well, resting.

Me: ...I...What? Come again, I think I misheard or something...

Voldy: There is no use trying to run away from the truth or deny it...But Severus, why don't you explain everything to your dear pupil? You are one of the only people who know the secret, after all...Right, Lucius? Narcissa?

Lucius: We don't know anything about Yami Black, my Lord.

Narcissa: My Lord, is it true that Raven's mother is alive? She's been like a daughter to me all these years, but if Yami is alive, I believe she has the right to meet her for the first time.

Lucius: Narcissa, don't interfere! It's the Lord's decision!

Voldy: Why, Lucius, but Narcissa is entirely right. My gift for Raven, for doing such an impeccable job killing Dumbledore, is to erase the lies and bring her to her mother.

Me: Why...? Why....did nobody tell me...Why...? Sev...You knew...? Is that true, Sev...?

Sev: Raven, I...

Voldy: Go ahead, Severus, she deserves to know.

Me: Sevy...Please...I want to know...

By now, my whole was trembling lightly, one hand over my chest, clutching my heart, while the other was on the side of my neck, unconsciously scratching at my scar.

My eyes, switching shades between the grey, green and blue from the shock, were nervously
glancing up and down, from the ground, to Severus and occasionally to Voldemort, confused and hurt, betrayed, all whilst my hair, instead of having its usual ebony black colour, it began to lighten, a dark blue shade taking over, slowly turning to a lighter shade, no longer being able to control my emotions, sorrow evident in my body movements.

Sev: Yami never died. Apart from our Lord and myself, only Bellatrix and Dumbledore knew the truth.
Me: Why them?? Why did she have to hide?
Sev: She wasn't exactly hidden...But it was a mercy for everyone to think she was dead, rather than...
Bella: Crazy! Insane! I knew because I Crucio'ed her into insanity! Oh, dear Sevy was SO angry, he'd have done the same to me, but the Dark Lord saved me~!
Sev: *nods* She is well now, resting in Saint Mungo's.
Me: ...Huh?
Sev: Dumbledore wanted it to be a secret from you as well, for your own good. "To keep you safe" as he said.
Me: Severus....Are you...*screams* ARE YOU FUCKING STUPID, SEVERUS SNAPE?!
YOU STUPID MAN, HOW DARE YOU KEEP SOMETHING SO IMPORTANT FROM ME?!
HOW DARE YOU LET THAT OLD GEEZER TELL YOU WHAT TO DO, AND MORE, LIE TO ME LIKE THAT, SO SHAMELESSLY?!
Sev: It had to be -
Me: FUCK THAT! Screw you and SCREW DUMBLEDORE! All you two did was to fuck my life over again and again and....AND FOR WHAT?! Only to lie a lie?!
Sev: I am sorry, but-
Me: You know what a smart man once said? Everything before "but" is horseshit and he was right! But there's more! What about the scar?! My memories?! The prophecy?!
Sev: All made by him. He implanted fake memories in your head, made that scar and invented a prophecy so you'd help him.
Me: I have no words left for you. You helped him. You stupid, brainless puppet...You complete retard! Never talk to me again, do you hear me?! I wish to see you dead soon! You deserve NOTHING!
Sev: Don't say that-
Me: You have NO right to speak! You're worse than Bellatrix!
Voldy: Now, now, dear, do you wish to finally be reunited with your mother?

Barely able to choke down a sob, I bite my lip real hard, enough to almost draw blood, and looking down, I grasp Voldemort's hand in both my own, wiping away a tear and speaking in a weirdly gentle voice, barely audible.

"Your wish shall be granted" he chuckled as he apparated us in a St. Mungo's patient chamber and staying all alone, I see a brunette woman in a white nightgown, staring blankly at the wall in front of her, humming a soft tone - One that weirdly enough, I recognised and started humming along, approaching her bed slowly.

Me: Mum...?
I barely said above a whisper, but she paid me no mind or flinch.

Me: Why isn't she doing anything?
Voldy: Are you aware of the fate of the Longbottoms?
Me: No way...! You mean to say that...
Voldy: Quite so.
Me: But...But why...? Why would Bellatrix do something like this for no reason?!
Voldy: She always hated your father, and this was a way for revenge.
Me: Ah....Hahaha...No way...
Voldy: It is the truth, unfortunately.

Slowly, I go to sit down next to her, making her look at me, tilting her head tot he side, like a confused puppy, and yet, holding the same serene smile and look on her face.

Mum: Hello.
Me: Hello. How are you feeling?
Mum: I'm okay...Are you a nurse? Never seen you before.
Me: I'm a visitor. I wish to become a Healer, though.
Mum: *nods* Lovely and noble career. If I had a daughter, I'd be so proud to know she made it so far.
Me: Ah...Haha...W-Well, that's very sweet of you.
Mum: Who are you?
Me: My name is Raven. I'm a witch at Hogwarts, just like were a few years ago.
Mum: Hm...? Witch? Hogwarts? What are those?
Me: Wh-What do you mean? You don't remember?
Mum: *chuckles* Silly, there is no such thing as magic!
Me: Ah...M-My Lord...?
Mum: Is that your father? It's really nice to see new people around.
Voldy: As you can see, she exhibits extreme memory loss and as the charts say, there is no way of recovery. She will remain handicapped and unaware her whole life. She is not your mother anymore, Raven. She hasn't been since that incident.
Mum: Ah...Hello! New visitors, who are you?
Me: Uh...Huh? I just introduced myself.
Mum: Are you sure? I don't remember.
Me: Oh my God...
Voldy: Is this what you wanted, Raven? To watch your mother suffer eternally?
Me: No...I...
Mum: Are you the new nurse?
Me: No...I'm a visitor...
Mum: Oh...Okay...I wish my daughter would become a Healer...If I ever have one.
Me: L-Lovely...
Voldy: Don't you want to end her suffering? She's hurting so much...And will never be normal again...
Me: I can't....I...I couldn't....Possibly...K-Kill...Her...
Voldy: It would only be mercy. And if it's from you, it will show how much you love her.
Enough to sacrifice yourself to do it, instead of letting others do it.
Me: Ah....No...No way....
Mum: Have I seen you before?
Me: Ahhh!!! No...Goodness....No....Why....?! WHy me?! WHY IS IT ALWAYS ME?!
Mum: Are you okay, dear?
Me: No, I'm not!
Mum: I see...Hello.
Me: Hello...?
Mum: Are you the new nurse?
Me: GODAMN IT!
Voldy: You know how to put a stop to this madness...
Me: Yes...That's right...I know...I can do it...
Mum: Do I know you?
Me: Yes...You do...
Mum: Oh really? I don't remember.
Me: I'm your Healer. And I'm here to entertain you for the day.
Mum: Hm...?What does that mean?
Me: May I know your favourite colour?
Mum: My favourite colour...What could it be...
Me: Do you remember?
Mum: Yes...Green. I've always loved green...
Me: Ah...How...How lovely...
Mum: What do you want to do?
Me: Let me make you laugh for a bit.
Mum: Okay...

Getting up I sigh, closing my eyes, then perform a Patronus charm, making my wolf jump around playfully, nudging my mother's hand and cheek, before completely vanishing, making her laugh and clap in glee.

Mum: Oh, that was wonderful! Can you do more?
Me: Yes...I can.

I started doing more random spells to entertain her, until she said she was pretty tired, which was barely 10 minutes later.
She smiled softly, laying down on her bed.

Me: Hey...I remembered I know a green spell. Do you want to see it? It's very pretty.
Mum: Yes, show me!
Me: Very well...*whispers* I love you, mum...

Just as I did the Killing curse, I heard a faint "Thank you, Raven" making me fall to my knees, slapping my hands over my mouth, my scream muffled by them, tears falling down endlessly.

She was moving no more.
Voldy: You did well, Raven. You gave her a blessing. She's no longer suffering or in pain now. She thanked you.
Me: Yes...You're right...But it hurts...So much...
Voldy: Let us return to the Mansion, you deserve to rest now.
Me: *nods* O-Okay...

He apparated us back to the Mansion, where he kept praising my deed, before dismissing everyone...But I couldn't hear...
I could see nothing...Feel nothing...

I already killed two people...One of my teachers...And my own mother.
I...
I did her a mercy...
Right...?

I didn't even realise there were only 4 other people in the room, or that I slumped to my knees, looking blankly ahead, until I felt a firm hand on my shoulder, which made me jolt up and slap the person as hard as I could, shrieking at him.

It was Severus.

Me: You...! You did this! You made me into what I am! A MURDERER! I became what I dreaded the most and it's ENTIRELY YOUR FAULT! Never touch me again! Never come anywhere close to me! Never talk to me! STAY AWAY FROM ME! F O R E V E R !
Sev: Raven, calm down-
Me: Do NOT tell me what to do! Disappear! Go away! I swear, if I see you again...I...I don't know what I'll do! Take it as a warning...!
Sev: I-
Me: GO AWAY, DAMN IT!!!

He only nodded and left the room, letting me look up at the ceiling, tears not stopping to fall down endlessly.

Draco: Raven...
Me: ...
Draco: Let's go to our room.
Me: Everyone around me is dying...And I'm the cause of it.
Draco: No, you're not! It's his fault. His and Snape's and Dumbledore's! We can trust no one but ourselves. Just us...Family.
Me: However...I am not your family. I am merely your classmate.
Draco: What...? How can you even say something like that?
Me: Your father got in Azkaban because of me. You got stuck in this mess because of me...I shouldn't stay around you any longer...I'm only bringing misfortune to everyone. I should leave...
Draco: Will you shut up already?!
Me: Huh...?
Draco: Stop saying all these stupid words! You are part of our family and that's how it's been since Year 1! You never brought us misfortune, but on the contrary, you saved the day over and over and...And stop belittling yourself, it's pissing me off!

Me: Draco...

Draco: I won't have you speaking ill of yourself anymore, get it? It's always been us against the world...Against everyone. I can't lose you. So...I won't let you lose yourself, get it?

Me: Draco...What are you trying to say...?

Draco: You've saved me all these years, but now, let me be the one to save you.

Me: I couldn't possibly let you carry this burden. You can't carry my cross, it will crush you.

Draco: I'm done hearing that you have to sacrifice yourself to save us! Just for once, let me help you. Weren't you the one always claiming that I'm not alone? Well then, neither are you.

Me: I...I...Well...

Not letting me saying anything further, he put both his hands on my face, raising it up so I could look him in the eyes, mine leaking with many tears, pink and puffy and in pain, while his full of sorrow and love.

He kissed my head before he put his forehead to mine, whispering the 3 words I never imagined I would ever hear, especially not from him.

"I love you."

Hearing those words, I started outright sobbing, throwing myself in his arms, clutching desperately at the back of his shirt, not wanting to ever let go.

My heart hurt so much that I couldn't think, I couldn't breathe anymore.

I just wanted to stay like this, in his embrace, never to let go again.

I just wanted to take him away and disappear from this world, from this cruel madness that engulfed us and didn't want to let us go from its shackles, burning us eternally.

"I love you so much, Draco...Never let me go...Please..."

"I never will."

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