**Through the Quiet Emerald Eyes (The Philosopher's Stone)**

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| Rating: | **Teen And Up Audiences** |
| Archive Warning: | **Graphic Depictions Of Violence** |
| Category: | **M/M** |
| Fandom: | **Harry Potter - Fandom** |
| Relationship: | **Remus Lupin/Sirius Black**. Nobody else yet because it's book one and they're all smol babs, but in the future we will have lots of gay things. |
| Additional Tags: | **Deaf Harry Potter**, **AU**, **Slytherin Trio**, **Music Refernces**, **Rewrite**, **Loosely based on this other AU series I did, But some differences**, **House unity**, **Dumbledore Bashing**, **Because honestly, what else do you expect? I have a working human brain after all, and so does my co-creator, so we know that shit is fuuuuuucked, anyway, Slytherin Harry Potter, Slytherin Ron Weasley, Slytherin Hermione Granger, based on a pretty popular tumblr post, that i wrote, from a blog that i share with my friends, and there are probably some other posts I'll reference throughout the series, both mine and others, Iranian Harry, PoC Harry, Black Hermione, Abusive Dursleys, Fix-it fic, wolfstar, future drarry, Severus Snape gets his shit fixed REAL fast, because while I am in no way cool with canon snape, we're both like, yeah..., Character Development, because there were so many possibilities, and rowling f*cked it up, real bad, I have been writing for SIX HOURS, because someone made a comment, that spawned a whole new series, when I'm already writing another series, and have an eighth year fic I haven't touched in almost a year, HELLOOOO IT'S ME, YOUR ADHD, AND YOU'LL JUST KEEP STARTING THINGS, UNTIL YOU DIE!!!!!!!!!!!, but seriously, I'M SO ADHD, my smol son, in so many universes I love thee, and I just can't get enough of rewriting your story, my wee baby harry, and my other wee babies, and also everyone that isn't already dead by this book is gonna live, except dumbledore obviously, because he sucks, but seriously i ain't gon kill the faves, because fuck that shit you heartless monster, yes ik i'm looking at you, you queerbaiting transphobe, but guess what I'm fixing your shit, and you can't stop me, because i make no money off of this, But it is okay, because harry will be safe, and happy and loved, and it is nearly four am, and i have work tomorrow, and my head is pounding, so here you go my babies.** |

**Series:** Part 1 of **Through the Quiet Emerald**

**Collections:** [Our Harry Potter](http://archiveofourown.org/works/14852573)

**Stats:**

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Summary

Slytherin Trio. Deaf Harry. No ridiculous modification of beloved character behavior to turn them into evil monsters. Because fuck that shit.
Ron is a Slytherin and he is perfect. Because for some reason Slytherin Harry fics tend to demonise Ron and I am not about that shit.
Chapter 1

Harry waited nervously in the Great Hall, eyes trying to take everything in while also watching Ron and Hermione’s mouths. So far, he’d managed to go the whole train ride without giving his new friends (and wasn’t that a strange word for him- friends) any reason to suspect that he was deaf, but it was a lot easier in the compartment with just him, Ron, Hermione, and Neville (and Ron had been skeptical of the little black muggleborn girl with the bushy hair and large front teeth at first, but Harry had been so eager to help look for the toad, to help anyone at all, that he’d shoved aside his doubts for his new friend).

The Dursleys didn’t care that Harry was deaf because of their neglect in not taking him to the hospital when he got a life-threatening ear infection 6 years ago, he had to be normal. So when he survived the infection, alone in his cupboard, but lost his hearing as a result, they gave him no chance to adjust. He learned to read lips to avoid slaps and didn’t let his speaking ability decrease in the least, as a mispronounced word was worth a smack with the belt, and he didn’t like slaps with the belt. Unpleasant at the time, the point was that he had no trouble following conversations between small groups, his eyes expertly tracking the movements of the speakers’ lips and giving no indication that he was in a world of total silence. Hermione’s had been difficult to read at first, because she spoke so quickly, but he quickly learned that if Hermione was talking, that meant no one else was talking, so he could focus exclusively on her and catch at least most of what was said.

But now he was in the corridor outside the Great Hall with the entirety of the first years, and he had the gnawing fear that people might be trying to talk to him and he didn’t realise. If anyone caught on that he couldn’t hear, there would be questions, and then things might come up about his home life. And if Uncle Vernon found out that he’d let people find out about the cupboard and the beatings and how little food he had… his back ached, reminding him that he still had wounds that had barely scabbed over. For a week, for a glorious week after Hagrid took him to Diagon Alley, things had been wonderful- he was in Dudley’s second bedroom, and the Dursleys were afraid enough to feed him three times a day and keep their hateful hands off of him. How was he supposed to know that Dudley would go snooping in his room while he was out for a walk and find the letter that notified students not to use magic during the summers, on top of the Hogwarts Informational Packet that he’d picked up at Flourish and Blotts’? After that… well, the cupboard was tighter after he’d had a bedroom for a little bit, and starvation was worse when you’d been lured into the false belief that it was over. He pulled his robes tighter around his small form and reviewed the glamour charm in his head- as soon as he was officially sorted and allowed to use magic, he’d put it on, and no one would have to know, if he could only keep his wits about him.

Hermione Granger watched as Harry, deep in thought, didn’t even react to the entrance of the ghosts and the surprised squealing of the students around him. There had been other things, too, that worried her. On the train, for example, he’d been looking so intently at her when she spoke. In primary school, there had been a HoH student that had watched the teacher the same way. And Ronald Weasley had mentioned how he’d seemed to have trouble understanding his mum at first, when she tried to tell him about the platform. On an impulse, she reached out and tapped him on the shoulder, politely ignoring his jump of surprise.

“Are you deaf?” she asked him in sign language, seeing no need to mince words. He didn’t answer, but his eyes widened, so he’d clearly understood her. He was about to try to squeak out a denial when they were interrupted by the entrance of a stern-looking woman in emerald robes. Hermione watched Harry again, how carefully he squinted at her as she spoke about the four houses (and come to think of it, his glasses looked way too old to be the proper, updated prescription…)
She had no chance to try to talk to him during the first part of the sorting, either, because she and
Harry were in different parts of the line, arranged alphabetically as they were. But she watched as
the first students were sorted. She was so proud of Neville for making it into Gryffindor. *That ought
to start him on the path to finding his self-worth,* she thought in satisfaction, cheering even when he
accidentally sat down with the hat, cheeks burning as he brought it back.

By the time *Granger, Hermione* was called, she was beginning to rethink her immediate decision to
ask to be placed in Gryffindor. The hat was nearly 2000 years old, and it had seen things in Neville
that Neville couldn’t see in himself. She would see what it had to say about her before she made any
decisions.

*Ah, a bright mind you have,* the hat spoke into her mind as soon as it was placed on her head. *While
you’ve certainly the courage for Gryffindor, I dare say their impulsivity would drive you mad. And
Hufflepuff is out— you’re far too ruthless, and you see in black and white, right and wrong.
Hufflepuffs, while a noble house, would be a direct contrast to what you are. You’d be a wonderful
Ravenclaw, but I think they’d drive you mad as well— they love learning, yes, but on their own terms
and their own time. They’re the type to neglect their homework to do dangerous experiments and
drag teachers on tangents. You’d be a wonderful Slytherin— Salazar himself would be proud.*

*Very well then, put me in Slytherin,* Hermione thought, considering the matter done.

*Not so fast— there has not been a muggleborn Slytherin since the war, and bigotry still lingers. It will
not be an easy path for you, my child. I could put you in Ravenclaw or Gryffindor, as I have done
with others in your situation. I dare say Flitwick would love your dedication.*

*Nothing in my life has been an easy path,* Hermione argued. *I’ve been facing racism, and I’ve been
teased for liking books. I’ve always been too loud, or not girly enough, or not good enough. I want
to go where I actually have a chance to do something, to change their minds. Put me in Slytherin.*

*Very well,* the hat said, “SLYTHERIN!”

The room went so quiet you could hear a wand drop, and even Harry could tell by the sudden
stillness that every single student in the hall was silent. Hermione didn’t seem to care, however, as
she made her way to the green and silver table, her eyes like a bronze warship and her head held
high. Her frizzy curls bounced around her face as she moved, but she carried herself like a queen
nonetheless. Harry felt his hands sweat— if Hermione could tell he was deaf, so early on, would the
hat send him back? Would he have to leave the only place he’d ever felt like he had a chance to
belong, even if he wasn’t quite normal here either, all because he couldn’t hear? Would they at least
let him eat before they sent him back in disgrace to his cruel relatives? He was queasy and terrified
by the time the last person in front of him was sorted, and he saw Professor McGonagall call his
name as he slunk up to the hat, wishing he could disappear into the floor.

*Not a bad mind,* the hat said, and Harry nearly fell off the stool— he could *hear* it. Had he— but no, he
realised as he watched people’s lips move at the tables but heard nothing. The hat was just sharing
its thoughts.

*Plenty of courage, too,* the hat said, *loyal to a fault to those who deserve it. You’re cunning, or you
wouldn’t have survived this long. So much drive to find your place. But where should I put you?*

Anywhere, Harry thought desperately. *Just as long as you let me stay.*

Well then, the hat decided with finality. *Better be “SLYTHERIN!”*

Harry made his way to the table, trying to be noticed as little as possible, avoiding Malfoy and sitting
next to Hermione, who turned to him again, but seeing the panic on his face, said nothing and merely spoke to him out loud, although Harry noticed that she moved her lips much slower than she had on the train.

Finally, the hat called Ron, who was questioning everything he thought he knew. An hour ago, he thought Slytherin was for evil gits like Malfoy, but if there was one thing he was sure of, it’s that his new friend Harry wasn’t evil, and he was in Slytherin. And Hermione, although bossy, wasn’t evil either- she was too righteous to be evil, and Ron had to admit he was growing fond of her- she hadn’t mocked his family for being poor, and she’d grudgingly admitted she hadn’t had many close friends growing up, or anyone at all to talk to, much like Harry. When he stepped up to the stool, he was actually questioning his desire to go into Gryffindor- Harry and Hermione were the first people he’d ever known who didn’t treat him like he was just another Weasley. He was Ron (or Ronald, in Hermione’s case).

Ahh, so many confused youth tonight, the hat chuckled, and Ron thought queasily that wrestling a troll would involve a lot less circuitous thought. You would go well in Gryffindor, no doubt, or Hufflepuff, with loyalty like yours, but you would suit Slytherin as well. You are a strategist, Ron Weasley, and your mind is unique from that of your brothers. You are loyal, but only to those who have earned your trust, and you are someone who will stick by the people you love until the very end. Ron took a brief moment to think that that sounded far too ominous for a boarding school and a funny hat talking to an eleven-year-old. But tell me- this Malfoy boy that you so dislike, would you be willing to put up with him?

For Harry, Ron thought. Yeah.

Well then, that’s settled, the hat seemed to preen in satisfaction. But I bid you to keep an open mind- you’re not the only one in Slytherin that has grown up in the shadow of your family, and for many, the shadows have been colder.

Before Ron could respond to that, the hat yelled out his placement, and he could see everyone in the hall staring again, almost as hard as they had for Harry. Well, he’d definitely differentiated himself from his family now. He looked nervously at his brothers, expecting disappointment, but while Percy was scowling, George and Fred were giving him big thumbs up, probably already planning to wring the Slytherin password out of him and use it to create havoc. Ron didn’t even care about that at the moment as he smiled back, relieved, before setting down next to Harry.

“A Weasley in Slytherin, huh?” a tall black boy in their year asked. Blaise Zabini, his mind supplied, remembering the name that had just been called.

“Er, yeah, what’s it to you?” he asked, a little defensive.

“Relax, mate- I’m not going to attack you or anything. I was just going to ask if you liked wizard’s chess. I’ve asked everyone else in our year, but they either don’t know or don’t like it.”

“Oh, I love chess,” Ron agreed easily, calming down.

“Cool, we should play sometime,” Blaise said.

“Definitely,” Ron agreed. “My set is pretty old, but it knows what it’s doing.”

Meanwhile, Harry, satisfied that Hermione was absorbed enough in conversation with a pug-faced girl named Pansy Parkinson to be paying any attention to him, was taking a look at the staff table. Their new head of house scared him a little, but the girl on his other side, Daphne Greengrass, had just given him a strange look when he asked if teachers were allowed to beat students, so he assumed
he was at least safer with him than he was at the Dursleys. He pushed his plate away, still-mostly uneaten. He hadn’t eaten anything in the past three days except for a few sweets on the train, and he felt like he might throw up if he tried any more of the decadent food, however much he wanted to.

“Aren’t you going to eat some more, Harry?” Hermione turned back to him, and Harry shook his head.

“Nervous stomach,” he lied, and she gave him a searching look but didn’t say anything.

Eventually, the meal ended, and it was time to work their way to the dungeons. Harry was quite good at memorizing his way around, unable to rely on any sounds to help, but even he wasn’t able to keep up with all the twists and turns. Snape gave a short speech about house unity and the importance of behaving, of representing themselves well, and Harry had to force himself to keep watching the professor, the dirty look he was receiving making him want to hide his eyes, but then he wouldn’t know the rules.

The first years all shared a dormitory, and Harry was about to take the bed closest to the window, which looked out into the lake, when he felt himself pushed aside, holding back a wince as the fresh lashes on his back rubbed against the wall.

“This is my bed, Potter,” Malfoy was telling him, and Harry didn’t need to know the tone was pompous.

“Hey!” Ron stalked up to him, face glowering. “It doesn’t have your name on it, and Harry got to it first!”

“Oh shut it, Weasel- just because you wormed your way into a place you don’t belong-”

“Stop it,” Blaise ordered them, pulling Draco back by the shoulder. “We have to live here together for seven years, so we need to get along. Draco, I know you like sleeping by the window, but Harry saw it first.”

“It’s fine,” Harry mumbled, blushing despite his dark skin tone. “I don’t wanna cause any trouble. I’ll just take the bed next to it.” With some effort, he dragged the trunk from the bed at the window to the next one, feeling the scabs on his back strain and crack open, the wetness of new bleeding dribbling down. Luckily, his shirt was big enough that it couldn’t seep through to be seen on his robes.

“It’s okay mate, you don’t have to…” Ron started to say, but Harry smiled at him, long dark lashes framing his emerald eyes, which seemed enormous on his small face, but not in an unpleasant way.

“I don’t mind. Then maybe we could have beds next to each other, if you want…” Harry looked nervous, uncertain, and Ron smiled at him reassuringly, already feeling a protective instinct towards his friend. He may be the same age, but he looked so much younger, and Ginny had never really needed Ron to play the big brother, so Ron decided that whatever Harry needed, he would supply. Including comfort in a strange place.

“I’d love that- here- these two are closest to the bathroom, which will be nice when we’re in a rush in the morning.”

“What do you say, Draco?” Blaise looked sternly at the blonde, who sighed. “Thank you, Potter!” he called out, but Harry, who was looking away, didn’t respond. His fists clenched, feeling insulted, but Theodore Nott put his hand on Draco’s shoulder.

“Easy, mate- I don’t think he meant anything by it. I don’t think he feels very well- he barely
touched dinner. And you were kind of mean to him on the train, too... why don't we try again tomorrow?"

“He was rude to me too,” Draco grumbled, but he’d already given in.

“And I’m sure he didn’t mean to hurt your feelings,” Blaise told him. “Look, I know your dad has this idea of how you should behave, but nobody needs to know if you don’t pull that crap here.”

“Can we leave my father out of this, please?” Draco’s face had clouded over a little.

“Fine, mate- whatever you want. Just- promise you’ll try not to make drama this year. It’d be a little different if they were in Gryffindor, but we all live together now, and I don’t want to walk into a war zone every time I try to sleep,” Theodore chided gently.

Down in the girls dorm, Hermione was getting to know her own roommates- Pansy Parkinson, Tracey Davis, Daphne Greengrass, and Millicent Bulstrode.

“Daphne, stop,” Pansy complained out of nowhere. “You’re making the rest feel bad about ourselves with your perfect hair and your stupid pretty face. I’d literally kill people for your nose.”

“Yours isn’t so bad- it fits your facial structure,” Millicent grumbled. “I look like there’s a hag in my family tree.”

“Oh, shut up,” Tracey ordered her. “Sure, you’re a little bigger than most of us, and maybe your face is a little plainer, but you’ve got lovely hair, and a strong jawline like that is a rare feature in a woman.”

“Thanks,” Millie said, brightening a little. “I’d still love to have Hermione’s skin tone, though- it’s gorgeous.”

“Oh, wow, that’s really nice of you,” the muggleborn was taken aback- when did the trouble come? “I... are there not racists in the wizarding world? It’s not so much fun when people tell you you’d look better if you straightened your hair.”

“We don’t really discriminate on skin colour here,” Tracey explained. “Blood status- well, that’s different, but luckily for you, all our parents were neutral in the war. Some of the older girls, though... here,” she rifled through her bag and pulled out a number of bracelets with a little matching round charm on them.

“I’m a half-blood, so I’m also expecting some trouble... my mum gave me these bracelets- if we each wear one, the charm will heat up if one of us is in trouble, and we can get a teacher, or at least there will be more of us so it’s a fair fight against whoever’s messing with us.”

“Green and silver,” Pansy hummed, pleased. “That’s great. If it had been something like red and gold, not even your perfect cheekbones could convince me to debase myself with it.”

“You’re a shameless flirt, you know that?” Daphne rolled her eyes as they all took a bracelet and hooked them around their wrists, the magic adjusting to fit them perfectly.

“Only with cute girls,” she contradicted, winking at Hermione. “And we’re all cute girls here.”

“Uh, I actually kind of wanted to talk to Professor Snape about something,” Hermione changed the subject. “Do I have enough time before curfew?”

“Half an hour,” Millie answered, looking at her watch. “Good luck.”
“Gee, thanks,” Hermione chuckled, a bit morbidly. Their head of house was a bit scary.

The shiny black leather of her new school oxfords caught the firelight and reflected it, sending little shadows dancing across the stone. Most of the lights had been extinguished so close to curfew, and only a few lanterns stayed lit in the common room as upper years chatted with each other or, in the case of one couple, snogged passionately.

Her feet took her tip-tapping to the Professor’s office, and Hermione gathered her courage to knock on the door.

“Enter,” the man’s smooth, quiet baritone seemed to fill the whole office, and Hermione took a deep breath and squared her shoulders.

“Ah, Ms. Granger. Our muggleborn… enigma,” thin lips quirked sardonically under the hooked nose. “I hope you haven’t encountered trouble this early in the year?”

“No sir, I’ve been fine so far. But I wanted to ask you- does Hogwarts have any resources for deaf students?”

“Deaf students?” the professor’s tone was incredulous, and his face gave off the impression that he was about to scold her for wasting his time. “Hogwarts does not currently have any deaf students.”

“I… I think it does, sir,” Hermione looked him in the eye, and even the professor was slightly taken aback by the determination there. “I have good reason to believe Harry is deaf.”

“Harry Potter?” Snape’s voice, previously condescendingly cordial with just a bit of an edge, now turned hostile, his expression a snarl. “Perfect Harry Potter couldn’t be deaf- and if he was, he’d be shouting it to anyone who would listen, expecting special treatment.”

Hermione didn’t care for his tone, and she wondered why the man was being so needlessly cruel towards one of his own students. She squared her chin again. “He didn’t react to the ghosts at all, like he didn’t even hear them. And wouldn’t you rather be safe than sorry, for the sake of your house?” She didn’t use an honorific, feeling he hadn’t earned it. What was this guys’ problem?

“Fine,” he capitulated, realising he wasn’t going to get rid of this one easily- understandable, he supposed, for the first muggleborn Slytherin in 20 years. “Flint!” The prefect, who must have had some sort of magical link to Snape, appeared immediately.

“Yes sir?” he deferred.

“Go collect Potter and bring him here. I wish to speak to him.” He nodded and then was out the door again, and three minutes later came back, a very nervous-looking Harry trailing behind him, big green eyes, Lily’s eyes, looking anxiously at him. Snape hardened his heart and dropped his eyes, refusing to open that box of repressed emotion.

“Ms. Granger here seems to suspect you’re deaf,” he scoffed. “Will you put her ridiculous fears at ease and stop wasting my time?”

“I’m not deaf,” Harry mumbled, but his eyes were wide and frightened, and Merlin, Lily’s had never looked like that. Looking closer, Severus realised that Potter didn’t look quite like he suspected him. While his skin tone was nearly the exact same shade as his father’s, although perhaps a touch lighter, he didn’t wear the same haughty, arrogant expression James had (well, the word for it would be confident, but Severus’ perceptions were coloured both by his hatred of Harry’s father and the fact that James did treat him differently than he did the people who adored him so). He had Lily’s chin as well, and her soft, cupid’s bow lips, but the most startling difference was the expression on his face,
demure, almost... scared. And his cheeks were rather hollow... didn't children usually still have a little baby fat at his age? He seemed to be drowning in his robes, as well, even though they weren't especially large. Harry shifted uncomfortably under his attention.

With no notice or sudden movements, he let out a loud bang from his wand, and Hermione jumped, but Harry showed no reaction, and his face didn't change until he realised that his classmate had spooked at something, at which point he looked wildly around. Suspicions officially aroused, Severus waved his wand to perform a basic diagnostic charm on his hearing- and the results came back quickly. Completely, profoundly, irreversibly deaf. He hadn't been deaf the night his parents were killed, of that Severus was sure. His eyes narrowed as another suspicion made his heart drop to his knees. Oh, why couldn't the boy have been an arsehole? He thought to himself as he slowly reached out to tap Harry's shoulder. As he'd feared, the child flinched violently.

"Come on, Potter, we're going to the nurse," he ordered, over-enunciating his words almost comically, and Harry would have laughed at how unnecessarily ridiculous he looked if he wasn't so nervous.

"I... that's not necessary sir, really... I can read lips just fine, sir, and I don't want to be a burden," he stuttered out.

Oh gods, Severus thought to himself. Abuse is looking more and more likely.

"Tell me Potter, who did you grow up with?" he asked, softening his tone just a little.

"Erm, my aunt and uncle, sir... Vernon and Petunia Dursley."

"Fuck!" Snape swore. "Bloody fucking hell!"

"Um, sir...?" Harry put forth tentatively, backing away a little nervously.

"Petunia raised you?" he tried not to let the venom in his voice sneak onto his face lest the child think it was directed at him.

"Er, yeah- I mean, yes sir," he corrected, eyeing the professor warily.

"Come, child- we're going to the hospital wing. I didn't think even Albus could be that bloody blind." Professor Snape clutched him by the arm, sending a look towards Hermione that clearly told her to go back to her dorm. Then Harry found himself being dragged through the fire place, and oh dear what was happening? But then he was in a large, white room full of beds that smelled of the disinfectant Petunia made him use when he cleaned the house, and a short little witch with grey hair in a bun that seemed to take up far more than her physical space was stepping towards them.

"What seems to be the problem?" she asked, shooting a concerned look at Harry.

The medi-witch held her questions and went to pick Harry up to place him on a bed, only to find her hands sticky with blood. Harry saw the red substance and panicked, scrambling back and nearly falling off the bed.

"Shhh, it's alright child," she promised him. "I'm just going to take a look at your back."

"I fell!" he blurted, and Madame Pomfrey traded a concerned look with Professor Snape.

"However it happened, I need to take a look at it, alright luv?" she mouthed carefully, and Harry,
Harry had no choice as she stripped him of his robes and large t-shirt, poking at his wrist with a concerned look on her face- Vernon had tossed him out of the car this morning and he’d landed on it, but he was pretty sure it was just a simple fracture and would fix itself like they always did. It would just hurt for a couple days.

Whatever displeasure she felt when she saw his wrist, it increased tenfold when she saw his chest and his back, gasping. Behind her, Severus snarled in pure fury, and Harry started to tremble.

“Did they do this?” he asked Harry, stepping forward, and Harry shrank back as Poppy gave him a stern look.

“We’ll take care of this later,” she told him, disappointed he was letting his own feelings from the past affect the case, even if his anger was on behalf of Harry instead of directed at him. Turning to Harry, she clucked softly as she ran a few diagnostics charms, and they both had to take a deep breath to keep their magic from reacting to the results. Severe lesions dating back years, several untreated broken bones, one from this morning and at least three of which would need to be reset. Profound deafness from an untreated ear infection that was very nearly fatal. Severe malnutrition, underweight, compromised immune system. Minor infections in the current wounds on his back and chest.

“Well, dear, you’ll be here a few days, I’m afraid, and we’ve got a little infection on your chest and your back we’ve got to take care of, alright? I’m going to clean it out very carefully and bandage it, and then I’ll fix your wrist. There’s an old injury on your left collarbone and a couple on your right leg that healed wrong, but I’ll take care of those tomorrow so you can sleep. I’m sure you’re exhausted.”

Harry nodded, looking crestfallen as Poppy grabbed a few disinfectant potions. Severus, noticing Harry’s distraction, did something that he really shouldn’t have, but it was really the only option he saw- Harry was both a Potter and an Evans, and an abused child to boot, so he was too stubborn and scared to ever be honest with them.

Merlin keep me out of hell for this, he groaned inwardly as he carefully entered Harry’s mind, looking for old memories of the Dursleys that he could show Dumbledore. He was even angrier than he thought he’d be, once he did.

Harry was cooking at the stove- he was maybe three or four, although he was so small it was hard to tell. Bacon grease splashed from the pan and hit his hand, and he cried out softly as his lip warbled. Petunia, doting on her own son at the table, noticed and sniffed, telling him that he shouldn’t cry, ungrateful little brat, as she held his hands to the burners. He was thrown in the cupboard under the stairs, for Merlin’s sake, and Severus had to admit he was impressed as he watched the burns heal. He was five, and his ears hurt so, so bad, as he curled up in his cupboard, clutching his ragged blanket as tears streamed silently down his face.

“Are you well enough to do your chores yet, boy?” Vernon roared, opening the cupboard, and got only a whimper in response from a half-conscious little boy. “Useless,” he’d muttered as he aimed a kick at his little ribcage and slammed the door shut again.
From there, the memories were silent, disconcertingly so, and Severus watched along with Harry, trying and failing to read Petunia’s lips as she gave him his chore list. He asked her to repeat it, his voice quiet and respectful (i.e. terrified). She whacked him with the frying pan she’d been holding, and Harry ambled away, clutching his head with one hand and a bucket of soapy water in the other.

He watched the madness of the Hogwarts letters, cursing Albus for angering the beasts, simply for his own amusement. If Harry Potter hadn’t been getting his letters, he should have sent someone to investigate. Then came Harry’s pure joy at learning that his parents weren’t useless drunks, that they had loved him. *Lily, a drunk,* he scoffed. *Even James had more dignity than that.* And Diagon Alley- the wonder of the magical world brought with it happiness far more powerful than it should have been, simply because it was one of Harry’s few good memories. And then Hagrid had dropped him back there- why had Dumbledore sent Hagrid, when it was Minerva’s job to handle such cases? Granted, the giant was friendly, but definitely not observant. And then Harry Potter, who Severus had automatically expected to be a lazy student, floating through on his fame, was studying his school books with a nearly manic intensity in his sad little bedroom, until his cousin found the information pamphlet and Harry was pushed back into the cupboard, after a thorough beating for ‘lying.’

*The no magic rule doesn’t apply to first years!* Severus screamed in his head, but of course memory- Harry couldn’t hear him, and the pamphlet didn’t specify. He pulled out, realising there were thousands more memories but unwilling to look at them.

Harry looked at him intently, having eventually picked up on the foreign presence in his mind. “You’re not going back there,” he told the boy, inserting his entire being into the statement. Then he stalked out, planning a ‘conversation’ with Dumbledore while Poppy muttered something about how his prescription was ‘so out of date it’s a miracle he could see.’ He had a bone to pick.
“ALBUS PERCIVAL WULFRIC BRIAN DUMBLEDORE!” Severus boomed as he burst into the headmaster’s office, and both he and Minerva looked up in surprise from where they had been discussing class schedules.

“What is it, my boy?” Albus asked, holding his hands up placatingly.

“VERNON AND PETUNIA DURSLEY?! YOU FOOL!” he screamed as he violently jerked the pensieve down from its shelf, forcefully pulling his memories from Harry’s mind out of his own head and shoving them in the pensieve, grabbing Dumbledore, and, as an afterthought, McGonagall and pulling them down with him into the bowl, forcing them to look at the memories he’d just seen and Harry’d lived through. Minerva came out shaking, and Dumbledore was pale, frozen in shock.

“I TOLD YOU THOSE MUGGLES WERE THE WORST SORT!” Minerva joined in Severus’ anger, slapping her boss across the face, hard.

“I… I knew he wasn’t exactly happy there, but I didn’t…”

“HE SAVED THE FUCKING WIZARDING WORLD- HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPY!” Minerva screamed.

“Well- we’ll put protection charms on him this summer, and pace a guard outside the house,” Albus said.

“HE’S NOT GOING BACK THERE AT ALL!” Minerva and Severus boomed, furiously, at the same time.

“He must- his mother’s blood protection-”

“MEANS NOTHING IF THEY KILL HIM- HE’S DEAF, ALBUS, AND SCARRED! DO YOU WANT TO CAUSE MORE PERMANENT DAMAGE, YOU OLD FOOL?!” Minerva smacked him again.

“I- he…”

“I bet there’s a will,” Severus realised suddenly. “And I’m willing to guess that you neglected to open it?”

Albus confirmed the theory by paling further.

“We’re going to Gringotts,” Severus grabbed his Gryffindor colleague by the arm, taking them both through the floo.

“Sir, it is ten-thirty at night,” a goblin started grumpily, but the looks on the two angry professor’s faces stopped him.

“We need to see the Potter will,” Severus growled, and the goblin looked at him in disbelief.

“The Potter will is the property of Albus Dumbledore, the executor of their estate.”

“Says who?” Minerva was under the impression that the Potter’s had put control of their estate in the care of the family goblin.
“I… Griphook was presented a court order to turn over custody by the Wizengamot,” the desk-goblin said, suddenly looking disgruntled. “I’d forgotten about that- rather blocked it out, really.” He shook his head darkly. “Nevertheless, I must have his written permission to give you access to the will.”

“Here’s your permission,” Severus snarled as he pulled the shrunken pensieve out of his pocket, and the goblin wisely stuck a finger in, as it appeared the man was fully prepared to shove him in. He came out looking surlier than ever, rather a feat for a goblin who dealt with incompetent, condescending wizards all day.

“Very well- there is a clause for this sort of mismanagement- follow me,” he told them, leading them through the darkened buildings to the mines before taking them to the main Potter vault (the others were Harry’s trust fund and the one made to hold all the fanmail and gifts he’d been sent over the years).

The will lied in a glass box in the front of the vault, amongst old books, land deeds for various properties the Potter’s owned, and piles and piles of Galleons. Old armour, relics, and ownership contracts for various muggle and wizarding companies, as well as stock in others.

“There’s another vault for the rest of the money, as it wouldn’t all fit here, but we can handle that later,” the goblin said. He put his fingerprint on the lock of the case that held the will, and they ripped it open.

*Last will and testament of Lily and James Potter, October 30, 1981.*

All our property, estates, and capital shall go to our son, Harry James Potter, and in the event of our death, custody of him (and custody of the estate, until his coming of age) shall be arranged in the following order.

- **Sirius Black**, who, it should be noted, is no longer our secret keeper, so it is possible that we will die, and in this case, he shall not be responsible. Please tell him it wasn’t his fault- he was trying to do what was best for us.

- Alice and Frank Longbottom.

- **If neither of the above parties are available and fit to care for Harry, his custody shall be split in a joint arrangement between Minerva McGonagall and Severus Snape (James would like to point out that the latter was a right git, but he believes he could come around). Under NO circumstances shall he be placed in the home of Vernon and Petunia Dursley.**

*James and Lily Potter.*

“Well, fuck.” Severus swore, while Minerva gasped- Sirius Black, *her* Sirius Black, was innocent. That was the first thought swirling in her head, and Severus was looking at the will with an equally disbeliefing expression- Lily had… Lily had trusted him, after everything he’d done… granted, he was a contingency plan, but still…

“I guess she forgave you,” Minerva said, picking up on his thought process.

“And we have to free the mutt,” Severus groaned, head in his hands.
“Yes, yes we do,” Minerva was smiling brilliantly. “And Harry will be safe- which is the important thing.”

“Control of the estate shall be immediately transferred to you,” the goblin told them.

“Wonderful- put Griphook back in charge of the financials,” Minerva ordered confidently.

“Yes ma’am,” the goblin bowed respectfully. “There were a number of stipends sent to these muggles for Harry’s… care,” and Severus barely had time to register that the goblin had called a client by his first name, a manner of affection and respect almost never given to a client, before anger took over at the idea. “Shall I confiscate said funds from Albus Dumbledore’s account to replenish the amount, since he was controlling the account illegally?”

“Yes, yes you shall,” Severus ordered. Then, remembering his manners: “Thank you.” Then his eyes fell on an envelope and a package lying under the will. There envelope said “For Harry,” and the box was labelled “memories for Harry.”

“May we take these?” Minerva asked the goblin.

“You may take anything that you like, so long as it is in Harry’s best interests,” the creature, who Severus finally realised was named Ragnok as his mind slowed down enough to read the nametag, told them. “I take it he is undergoing… medical treatment?” he clenched his knobby fists.

“Yes,” Severus shook his head. “Fairly extensive.”

“Then these will make him feel better- in the meantime, I will begin the procedurals for freeing Sirius Black,” Ragnok said.

Severus almost couldn’t believe that he was asking this when he’d hated the boy three hours ago, but he swallowed anxiously. “When he’s freed… will we… lose Harry?” he asked, first name slipping out as he motioned to himself and Minerva. This was a little piece of herself Lily had left him, trusted him with- the most important piece of herself, really- and Severus was determined to do right by both of them.

“That will have to be worked out between the three of you- he technically has first rights, but I doubt he will be in any state to take care of a child after spending ten years in Azkaban for a crime he didn’t commit, so I’m sure there will be some cooperation involved,” Ragnok informed them, and Severus exhaled, not entirely satisfied with the answer but accepting it was the best he would get at the moment. He took up Harry’s packages as he and Minerva made their way back to Hogwarts.

The next morning, Harry was sitting up his bed, his left arm in a sling and his right leg in a cast (the nurse said the spell would probably hurt, so Harry had prepared himself for pain only to be pleasantly surprised at how mild it was, which caused the corners of Poppy’s eyes to wrinkle in dissatisfaction that he was so used to pain) as he tried his best to finish a bowl of porridge, since Madame Pomfrey was looking at him so beseechingly.

“When can I go to classes?” he asked her, his green eyes bright behind the narrow, round gold frames of the new glasses she’d gotten him (charmed to his actual prescription, and the child’s delight at how clear the world was did not make her smile as it should, because he shouldn’t have been barely functioning with a 9-year-old prescription in the first place. Another year or two and he would have been close to blind as well as deaf). The medi-witch pulled his fingers away from where he was trying to worm them under his cast to give his leg a good scratch, and he looked grumpily at her as she scolded him mildly.
“Let it heal dear, and probably next Monday, if you let yourself rest and recover. Just in time for the first flying lesson.”

“Oh,” he pouted, clearly not satisfied with the answer.

“Just like your father,” Poppy told him as she pulled the half-empty bowl of porridge away and thrust a nutrient potion at him, along with one for pain, immunity, bone strength, and another for respiratory development. “He was always trying to get out of here too.”

“You knew my father? Really?” Harry asked eagerly, the unpleasant taste of the first potion forgotten as his soft, enormous eyes begged her for more information.

“I did- he was on the quidditch team and always doing stupid stunts, or he was in for a prank gone wrong. Right pain in my arse, he was,” she said with a laugh. “But I loved him,” she ruffled Harry’s messy hair. “He charmed the house elves into bringing him his favourite treats, too. Iranian food like his mother made.”

“I’m Iranian?” Harry cocked his head. “The Dursleys always called me a stupid Arab, so I thought I was from Afghanistan or something.” In his excitement at finding out about his roots, the unpleasant tidbit had slipped out.

“You are Iranian dear, and certainly not stupid. Although you’re just as British as anyone else here, I promise you,” she clenched her fists. “Your grandmother left a wonderful collection of beautiful hijabs in the old Potter manor, many of them ones she’d brought over from Iran, so I’m sure you’ll be able to explore more of your heritage one day.”

“We have a manor?” Harry asked excitedly, as Poppy sat at the end of his bed, patting his leg gently as she prepared to entertain him to distract from his boredom.

“Several, dear- the Potters are an old, rich family. You’ll inherit the properties when you come of age.”

“Whoa,” Harry breathed. Then, with a curious head tilt (why did he have to be so damn cute?) “Tell me more about my parents, please.”

Poppy had just launched into stories from Lily’s healer apprenticeship (until the war started and she took up the call for new aurors, she’d been preparing to go into medicine, and she’d hoped to go back to it, after the war) when Severus and Minerva entered again, carrying a number of packages and looking thunderous.

“Er, hello Professors,” Harry said, still wary around both of them, Minerva because she seemed strict and Snape because he seemed, well… angry.

“Hello dear,” Minerva said brightly, trying to put him at ease. “How are you doing this morning?”

“I don’t hurt anymore, but Madame Pomfrey still won’t let me go to class,” he complained, and Poppy rolled her eyes.

“Yes, you do hurt- you just have an extremely high pain tolerance, and I really should keep you two weeks, but I’ll let you go after one if you behave yourself, since your head of house also has some healer training.”

“You fix people?” Harry blurted out before he could help himself, his expression one of disbelief, and neither of the woman could hold back a laugh.
“Yes, I do… in some cases,” he sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose… this was going to be an experience, raising a child. Oh dear gods… “And I feel I owe you an…” he took a deep breath as he prepared to push the words out of his mouth, “apology… for my behaviour last night. I’m afraid I didn’t get along with your father, and I shouldn’t have taken it out on you. And I shouldn’t have scared you by reacting so badly when I found out what happened to you,” in an unusual display of his emotions, the professor wrung his hands nervously.

“It’s okay,” Harry shrugged, going back to fiddling with the blanket strings with his free arm. Nobody ever apologised to him, so even one as clumsy and awkward as this was a welcome change. Severus marvelled at his easy acceptance- they really had to teach him that he was worthy of respect- but at least this specific incidence would make the road ahead easier.

“That being said, we have examined your… home life,” he spat the words distastefully, as Privet Drive could scarcely be called a home, and Harry’s face darkened. “You don’t have to talk about it now, if you don’t wish to, but you have been removed from the Dursleys’ custody. Minerva and I found your parents will, which was sadly misplaced and ignored, and found that we were to take you if nobody else could. You have a godfather, but he is currently…”

“Currently what?” Harry asked, his excitement at being free of the Dursleys overshadowed by worry for this godfather he apparently had.

“There was a mistake, and he was arrested for something he didn’t do. The mistake became apparent last night, and we’re going to rectify it, but it’ll take some time and some paperwork, and a lot of red tape.”

“But you’ll get him out?” Harry prompted.

“Yes, Harry, we promise,” Severus reasserted. “He’ll probably need to recover from the experience, but I promise that you will be able to have a relationship with him, and someone will always be here to take care of you.”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled, “but can I ask a favour?”

“Yes,” Severus said, trying to hide his apprehension.

“You can just talk normally- I can still lipread just fine, and it looks kinda silly when you talk all slow and careful like that.”

The two women laughed again, even though they’d been doing the same thing.

“I- I believe I can manage that,” Severus agreed, a smile pulling at the corners of his mouth against his will. Then his expression grew more serious again. “We have to go teach our classes now, but I will just tell your friends you are feeling unwell, for the moment, although I believe Ms. Granger already is aware of what’s going on.”

“You can… you can tell Ron too,” Harry mumbled. “I don’t wanna keep secrets from him, especially if Hermione knows. They’re my first friends, and I don’t wanna lie to them now that there’s- well, there’s no reason to. The Dursleys can’t hurt me anymore.” He stuck his chin out stubbornly.

“Yes, Harry, that’s right,” Minerva praised. “You’re safe now.”

“Thanks- but if you could tell everyone else I’m sick?” he added, a little uncertainly.

“Yes, of course,” Snape agreed. “I’ll call Granger and Weasley into my office and explain the
situation, and the need for discretion.”

“And…” Harry raised his head again. “Can you please call them Ron and Hermione? They’re my friends…” he pleaded, his green eyes open and so, so vulnerable.

“If- if you wish,” Severus sighed, not quite able to believe how thoroughly the child had already wormed his way into his heart. “I will call Ron and Hermione into my office later.”

“Thanks,” Harry beamed, and Severus suddenly remembered the package and the letter in his hands. “And here- we found this in the Potter vault when we went to open the will. It’s from your parents. The little bottles are memories- you can use this to view them,” he told Harry as he handed him the box and Dumbledore’s pensieve, which he’d emptied, and the child’s eyes widened, and Severus felt a little guilty about dropping this on him so suddenly right before they had to leave, but his eyes were already reverently on the letter, everyone else in the room forgotten.

Severus and Minerva left to teach their classes, and Poppy patted Harry’s uncasted leg and looked at him so he could read her lips easily. “I’m going to give you a few minutes to read the letter- I’ll be in my office and you can call me to help you unload the memories,” she told him, and he smiled at her, the first tears he’d shed in years welling up in his emerald eyes.

He opened the letter with shaking hands, accidental magic keeping the envelope in perfect condition, so he could savour every part of his treasure that his parents had left him.

Harry, it read, We hope you are reading this for a laugh when you’re well into your thirties at a family dinner after growing up with us, laughing at us for being so sentimental, but if you’re not... well, we’re sorry darling. We did everything we could to stay with you and keep you safe, and we love you so much. We hope that Sirius and Remus (his boyfriend, although hopefully you don’t need this explanation) were able to raise you, but if not, I hope Minerva and Severus aren’t too strict-they’re good people, even if Sev is an A-class grumpus. Harry giggled- his mum had it in one. We’re very proud of you, and every day that you’ve been in our life has been an absolute joy of the most profound kind. I’m sure that Sirius or Minerva would have told you that James and I love Elton John and AC DC, and we hope you like them too. Harry gasped- he didn’t know anything by AC DC, but he had loved Elton John, when he was doing his chores home alone or locked in the cupboard for the weekend when the Dursleys were gone and Mrs. Figgs couldn’t watch him. The Dursleys had a grand piano, and Harry had taught himself to read music and play by ear the songs on the radio. Once he’d gone deaf, it had lost a lot of his joy, but he could still feel every verse of his old favourite, Tiny Dancer, and sometimes he would play something by Beethoven or Mozart (which was all the Dursleys had for sheet music, because they were so dreadfully normal) and try to console himself he could hear it as he called to memory the sound of the old notes and chords he’d taught himself. “Sorry I’ll never get to listen to AC DC, guys,” he whispered to the sky, and, watching from the veil, James and Lily felt their hearts break. That he would even feel the need to apologise… Harry, oblivious to his dead parents’ torrent of emotions (that hadn’t stopped for the last ten years, not since they’d screamed at a world that couldn’t hear them to save their son from the Dursleys), continued reading. We took you to a concert once, for AC DC, and you had tiny little converse that matched ours. It was so lovely. If Siri and Moony raised you, I’m sure you went to a lot more. I can’t picture either Severus or Minerva going to one, though… although I did drag Sev to a Kiss concert once, when we were fourteen- even painted his face. You may now use that as blackmail material. Harry giggled. Your father was a huge fan of David Bowie as well, and had he not met and fallen in love with me, I’m sure he would have tracked him down and tried to woo him. I myself, had I not met your father, would have preferred someone a little more polished- I do so wish Grace Kelly was in our year and not married to the Prince of Monaco, but I’m sure you’re dreadfully bored of listening to us rant about our raging bisexuality. “No,” Harry giggled again, and Lily desperately wished her son could hear the wonderful, joyful sound of his own laughter. “I
could never be bored of hearing about you guys.” Anyway, Fawn (that’s our nickname for you, in case you didn’t know. Your dad also called you Prongslet, and Siri calls you pup, but you’re my baby deer, even if you loved to toddle around the garden chatting with the snakes. Scared me right good the first time, because I didn’t think you’d be a parseltongue- the Potter line hadn’t seen one in a century. We hope you still have the snake we got you- her name was Nagini- but if you don’t, I’m sure she’ll make her way back to you one day. James bought her from Iran- she was a magical version of a Persian Horned Viper, and they live for a hundred years, easily, and are very hard to kill. She’s a bright, vibrant green, like your eyes, and she has two little horn-looking bits sticking out of her snout. Also still around somewhere should be our kneazle, Crookshanks, the grouchy old thing. He only liked you, little bastard. Oh, dear, I suppose I am using rather foul language in the event you’re still a child, but I’m sure you’ll hear worse from Sirius or Minnie. “I’ve certainly watched them say worse, well, not Sirius yet...” he told the ceiling, vowing to find his pets and bring them home one day. Anyway, I’m rambling, and James should be finished cooking dinner by now-Albalu Polow (sour cherry rice with chicken) just like his mum used to make. It’s been my favourite ever since I was pregnant with you- and you love stuffing fistfuls of it in your little mouth as well. I really do have to go now- you and Nagini, partners-in-crime, are about to get to the cake I’ve set aside for your birthday tomorrow. Love, mum and dad.

There was a little ink stain on the bottom of the page, presumably from where his mum had knocked the bottle over while she rushed to save her cake from a hungry snake and toddler, and Harry’s teardrops joined it as he carefully folded the letter away and put it on the bedside table as Poppy came to check on him, ready to show him how to view their memories.

“So you just pour them in like this,” she told him, “and then stick a finger in, and you’ll fall into the memories, but it won’t hurt. I’m sorry you won’t be able to hear their voices,” she told him, wiping away her own tear as she placed the bowl on his lap.

“It’s okay,” he said. “It’ll be enough just to see them.” Then he disappeared into the bowl.

“James,” memory Lily, a woman with Harry’s eyes and waist-length, dark red hair that fell loose in waves, was saying. “This is serious- no, don’t you start in with that pun again- we’re going to have a baby in the middle of a war.”

“I know,” James said, not bothering to try to stifle his joy. “But Lils- I don’t care if it isn’t ideal or how we planned it- it’s still a baby with YOU!” He picked her up and spun her around the living room of the old manor.

“Watch it,” Lily warned, “or I might throw up on you- this is a busy one.” James set her down, ear to her belly.

“Hello, my little snitch,” he spoke, his ear against Lily’s still flat belly, and Harry had to float into a rather awkward angle to read what his lips were saying. “Daddy’s so proud of you already- we used A LOT of protection, so you must be one stubborn little guy,” he laughed as Lily smacked him. “I’m gonna teach you to play quidditch, and speak farsi, and we’re going to play so many pranks on uncles Padfoot and Moony.” Lily jokingly told him not to be a bad influence, but she was already planning on winning the baby’s loyalty in a prank war against her husband. “And you’re gonna be AMAZING, because you have the best mummy in the whole wide world.”

“What should we name them?” asked Lily.

“Arash,” said James, “if it’s a girl, because she’ll be our bright arrow.”
“I think it’s a boy,” Lily told him, “I can just feel it.”

“Hami,” James said decisively. “He’ll be Hami.”

“You know it’ll just end up getting anglicized to Harry, right? I mean, as hard as we try- well, white people.”

“Lils, you’re a white people,” James chuckled.

“I’m a white person, James, honestly- it’s like your parents didn’t send you to grammar school, which I know they did.”

“Anyway,” her husband chuckled. “He’ll be our Hami, and we’ll obnoxiously correct anyone who says it wrong.”

“You know we’re probably gonna slip up and call him Hami half the time and Harry the other half, yeah? Poor kid’s gonna have an identity crisis.”

“It’s okay, luv,” James laughed. “Then he’ll be crazy, just like his parents.”

“I hate you so much,” Lily snorted and punched him in the arm.

“That little guy in there says differently,” James teased, pointing to her belly.

The scene changed, and Lily was suddenly very pregnant, her feet on James’ lap as he rubbed them for her. Then there was a wetness seeping into the couch, and Harry’s father looked up.

“Uh, Lils? I know you have trouble with bladder control these days, but really…”

“My water just broke, you toerag! The baby’s coming!”

James face took on a look of total panic. “But it’s two weeks early!”

“He’s my son- is it really such a surprise?” Lily quipped back, gripping James hand very tightly as the first contraction hit.

“But he’s my son too, and I’m always late- you think it’d balance out!” James cried out. “What if there’s something wrong?”

“He’s fine, I know it,” Lily reassured her husband, sighing- she knew he’d be the one to freak out. “Flopsy!” she called out, and a strange little creature with long ears and tennis ball eyes appeared.

“Is mistress be needing more peanut butter pickles?” the elf asked (Lily had weird cravings).

“Can you grab the overnight bag and call Remus and Sirius, please, luv- the baby is coming,” the redhead took a deep breath, hands on her belly.

“Flopsy be doing that,” the elf agreed. “Flopsy is so excited for birth of little master Hami.”

The scene changed again, to a clearly magical hospital room. Harry’s mum, flushed with success, held baby Hami/Harry, who slept peacefully against her, his messy head of curls sticking out of the blanket.
“He’s beautiful,” Jamesbreathed. “And he barely even cried.”

“Yeah,” said a tall man with shoulder-length dark hair and silver eyes. “Unlike you.”

“Shut up Siri,” his dad said, and Harry realised that was his godfather. “You were crying just as hard.”

“Was not.”

“You definitely were,” said a man with a scarred face, amber eyes, and sandy brown hair full of silver. “Sorry to break it to you, luv.” James laughed and kissed Lily, who was tired but triumphant.

Another scene, maybe a month later. Sirius held baby-him above his head, arms outstretched, mouthing something Harry couldn’t make out- it wasn’t English, then.

“Are you going to learn to change a diaper, Pads, or keep doing a bad Lion King reenactment with my son?” Lily laughed as Hami peed all over Sirius’ causing him to make a face.

“Should have learned to change the diaper,” he sighed.

Harry watched more memories flash before his eyes- him talking to his first snake, his English still developing but his parseltongue already perfect. His first words (mammy; Farsi for mummy)- if Harry strained, a few other buried phrases in his father’s mother tongue came into his head as well, and he held them close like his favourite songs, since he wouldn’t be able to learn the pronunciation as well without his hearing and wanted somewhere to start. He watched as his parents presented him with a hatchling snake, watching carefully as it bonded to him immediately, slithering up and down his baby arms and legs. He laughed and Crookshanks pouted in the corner and gave James and Lily dirty looks, no longer the sole object of Harry’s affection.

His first broom- a little toddler thing.

“He’s only thirteen months old!” Lilyprotested, wringing her hands as Nagini reared, ready to catch him if he fell of the broom, which only went three feet off the ground.

“Never too young to learn how to fly,” James laughed, setting him on the broom as he and Sirius argued over the best way to teach him.

“Hami’s my son!” James argued.

“And Hami- fuck it, I’m still botching that a year later, sorry” he sighed as James and Lily flinched at the pronunciation. “Harry’s my godson, so I think I know just as well!”

“Uh, guys,” Lily prodded, and they looked over. “He didn’t need either of you.” Baby Harry was already zooming around on his broom, peals of laughter that his older self couldn’t hear filling the yard.

“He’s a natural!” the two men cheered, and Remus, watching from a lawn chair, laughed and rolled his eyes.

The final memory appeared- it was Halloween, judging by the pumpkins and such around the little house, now their hideaway cottage instead of the manor.

Lilyrocked baby Hami in her arms, singing softly, and James sat at the piano. Harry realised with
a jolt that they were playing him Tiny Dancer, as Lily’s lips soundlessly mouthed the words, and Harry wanted more than anything to hear her voice singing his favourite song, and his father’s fingers hitting the keys.

“Lay me down in sheets of linen,” his mother sang. “You’ve had a busy day today.” His infant self drifted off, and Lily’s mouth made a laughing motion. “I’ll put this little one in his crib.”

“I’ll put this memory with the others,” James told her, as suddenly a crash rang through the house, and his parents traded panicked looks.

“Take Harry and run!” James ordered his wife, in the middle of pulling out the memory strand. It cut off abruptly there as it made its way completely into the jar it was already halfway housed in, and that was it.

Harry had a feeling that last one wasn’t supposed to be there, in the end, as it detailed their sweet final moments right before the trauma, and Harry shuddered as he heard the voice in his head this time, the memory coming back in full. Lily- his mother- screaming, the only sound he’d ever remember, her begging a blue-ish, slit-faced man with red eyes to spare him, him ordering her to step aside. He had his wish- he’d heard her voice in a long-forgotten memory, but it was so anguished. He cursed himself for wanting what he couldn’t have as he drifted off to sleep, tears running silently down his face and an empty bottle clutched in his small hands.
“Hey mate,” Ron said that evening as he stepped, a little unsure, into the hospital wing, and Harry waited- were his friends going to treat him differently now that they knew?

“Hey,” he said softly.

“I missed you last night- Malfoy snores,” Ron made a face, and Harry laughed.

“Don’t worry, mate- we’re still your friends- your best friends, if you’ll let us be,” the redhead said, picking up on Harry’s anxiety, and Hermione decided right then that if Harry was the Boy-Who-Lived, then Ron was the Boy-Who-Cared.

“I’d love that,” Harry smiled, and Ron very carefully reached to give him a hug.

“I’m not made of glass,” Harry rolled his eyes, hugging him tighter. “And that tie does not look good with your hair,” he teased, trying to lighten the mood as Ron’s worried eyes roamed over him.

“Hey!” Ron patted his hair. “I will have you know, Harry James Potter, that I am a Christmas tree- a very sexy Christmas tree!”

“Suuure,” Harry rolled his eyes.

“Hey, just because your green eyes have all the girls trapped already doesn’t mean you’re the only model of male beauty,” Ron teased. “I happen to be the most handsome ginger Slytherin in the school.”

“You’re the only ginger Slytherin in our school,” Hermione reminded him. Ron gave her a one-fingered sign that had Harry laughing again.

“All the BSL we’ve been working on, and that’s the only thing you’ve gotten right so far,” the black girl chided playfully, rolling her eyes.

“Hey- I think I’ve gotten a hand on some others,” he protested, turning to Harry and signing something at him.

“What?” Harry looked at him blankly- he’d learned sign language in the library at school, hiding from Dudley and his gang, but that was not a word he’d ever seen.

“Oh,” Ron’s cheeks heated up to match his hair. “That’s s’posed to be hello.”

“It’s really sweet that you’re trying for me,” Harry smiled at him once the giggles had faded. “But you don’t have to.”

“Of course I do!” Ron protested. “That’s what friends do- you shared your sweets with us on the train, Hermione nags us to death with good intentions, and I learn things that’ll help you out.”

“Ow!” he yelped as Hermione whacked his shoulder.

“Are you disturbing my patient?” Madame Pomfrey came in, looking at the two of them sternly.

“No ma’am- sorry,” Ron deferred.

“Well, it’s still time for you to go- Harry has to eat now, and you two have to go to dinner as well,” she told them, carrying a plate of shepherd's pie and a tray of potions to Harry’s bedside.
Over the next week, Harry found himself nearly smothered in Madame Pomfrey’s tender ministrations as she tended to his every need (and many needs he didn’t think he had, but she insisted he did, like bedtime stories and warm bubble baths). He was very grateful to her, but he was glad when Monday morning came around and she reluctantly agreed to let him go.

“Be careful, dear- don’t strain yourself in flying lessons,” she ordered him, checking him over one last time. “I’d really like to keep you longer, but I know you’re desperate not to fall behind, and I suppose it should be alright, as long as you take it easy…” she looked like she might change her mind soon, so Harry quickly gave her a tentative hug goodbye and hurried out as she shook her head.

Making his way to the pitch, Harry relished the smell of fresh air and the lack of pain- his back and chest were still a little tender, sure, and he was a tad sore, but this was the best he’d felt in a long time.

“Potter,” Draco Malfoy hurried up to him, tapping him on the shoulder. Harry jumped and turned around. “Er- I didn’t mean to startle you. Anyway, I wanted to… apologise,” he grit out, looking like the words physically pained him but determined to get them out nonetheless. “I suppose I wasn’t the best at trying to introduce myself, and that wasn’t right. I- I was mad that you’d ignored me in the robes shop- I didn’t realise you were deaf and couldn’t hear, me, so I was already kind of pissed by the time you got on the train.” Naturally, Harry’s lack of hearing had to be made public knowledge, but everything else, thankfully, was known only by Poppy, his guardians, Ron, and Hermione.

“Er- it’s okay. I probably should have told you at first, but I’m really embarrassed about it,” Harry scratched the back of his neck nervously.

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about,” Draco said strongly. “Hell, when I was seven, I went through a period where I just stopped talking, just because I felt like it. So my parents brought in a tutor to teach me BSL- I’m fluent, by the way, if you ever wanna talk.”

“Thanks,” Harry smiled crookedly, one corner of his mouth quirking upwards. “I’d like that. Hermione’s fluent too- and Ron’s trying- it could be like our secret language.”

“Ron, yeah…” Draco trailed off. “He’s actually pretty cool, I guess- he can play chess, I’ll give him that. And he’s a lot less irritating than his brothers.”

“That’s as close to a compliment as you get, huh?” Harry asked, eyes laughing.

“Yeah, pretty much,” Draco agreed easily. “So, friends?” he stuck his hand out again, his confident expression falling for a moment.

“Friends,” Harry confirmed, taking it. “Call me Harry.”

By then they’d made their way to the pitch, and a stern-looking woman with spiky grey hair and hawk-like eyes was waiting by a group of broomsticks that had seen better days. Petunia would never have let them in her house, though, and that was enough of a reason to make Harry fall absolutely in love with them, even if they weren’t magic flying tools.

“Line up!” she ordered them, and they all headed to a broom, looking for the ones with the most twigs.

“Okay, you’re going to hold your hand out perpendicular to your broom, and then, when I blow the whistle, you’re all going to yell ‘UP!’” she instructed.
Harry’s broom jumped right into his hand (he couldn’t hear the whistle, obviously, but when everybody else started waving their arms about and opening their mouths to yell, he figured that was his cue), but it was one of the few that did. Draco’s came up as well, and Ron’s, but Hermione’s and Neville’s just gave little flops and stayed on the ground.

“You gotta treat it like a naughty plant,” Harry told Neville, remembering from their conversation on the train how much the other boy loved herbology. “Just up!” his stern little voice rang out in the air as the broom jumped into his hand again.

“Up!” Neville tried again with a little more force, and this time his broom rose shakily into his hand.

“And Hermione,” Harry told his friend, “yell at that broom like you’re trying to get Ron to do his homework.” The girl laughed and tried again, and her broom, too, jumped into her hand.

“Alright,” Hooch said again, when they’d finally all managed it. “Now we’re going to work on our grips.” She went around adjusting them, and smiled at Harry when she told him he had the most natural grip she’d ever seen. He smiled brilliantly back. Draco was not so happy when he heard he’d been doing it wrong for years.

“Mother told father she should hire a tutor, but he was so convinced he could teach me himself,” the pale Slytherin gesticulated dramatically, and they all laughed so that eventually even an indignant Draco couldn’t help but joined.

Then it was time to go to the sky, and they managed to all get up without incident. Harry found he loved the freedom of being in the air, the wind tickling his hair. Even the chill working its way under his jumper couldn’t dampen his mood, and he had to keep himself from trying to swoop all about as Madame Hooch taught them basic commands.

Everything was going well until she’d set them off to have some free time in the air, descending to the ground herself to polish her own broom as she watched them. Neville still looked rather nervous, and a strong gust of wind caused him to jump sideways, and the broom slid out from under him as he fell, seventy-five feet towards the ground.

Harry, who was maybe ten feet away, saw the whole thing and jumped into action. He urged his broom down, using what was a dangerously steep incline for a beginner to get to his friend in time to catch him. He took off so strongly that his shoes fell off, but he paid no attention to his cold feet as he caught Neville just before he hit the ground, using his toes to grab hold of the little crystal ball that had fallen out of his pocket.

Neville was heavier than he was, and he felt his joints and the tender skin of his new scars strain against the pressure, but he was lucky enough to have a good bout of accidental magic help Neville onto the broom in front of him, and Harry kicked the little ball (a Remembrall, he’d learn later) up and caught it with his other hand before he put both arms around a the shaking Gryffindor, flying low to the ground until he reached the main lesson area, where he landed gently.

Harry of course didn’t realise the entire class, all four houses, was clapping for him until he stepped off the broom and saw their hands moving, and he blushed as they all cheered him on and Madame Hooch came up to him.

“That was incredibly brave and an excellent demonstration of superb flying skills- and catching the Remembrall with your foot while saving Mr. Longbottom- Charlie Weasley couldn’t have done it, and he’s the best seeker we’ve ever had. I am going to personally recommend that we bend the rules and let you join your house quidditch team, since they’re down a seeker anyway, and fifty points to Slytherin for helping a fellow student- from another house, no less. Are you sure you’ve never
flown before?"

“No ma’am,” Harry said respectfully. “I was raised by muggles.” Ron and Hermione crossed their
arms and thought hotly that raised was an overly-generous term for what those beasts done to their
best friend. Tried to kill, more like.

“Well,” Harry remembered suddenly. “I did have a kiddie broom when I was little, apparently, but I
haven’t flown for as long as I can remember.”

“Merlin’s balls- you’re a prodigy!” and then stern Madame Hooch actually picked him up and spun
him around, laughing gleefully. If any of the older students saw, they’d have thought she’d lost her
marbles.

“I’m going to go talk to your head of house right now,” she said resolutely, forgetting that there was
still half an hour of class as she practically skipped off towards the castle.

“So, do we just go now, or?” a Hufflepuff, Susan Bones, asked the rest of them.

“I’ve got a gobstones kit,” Terry Boot announced. “We could do that. Hey Harry, wanna play?” he
asked, turning to the class hero.

“Er, do you have to be able to hear?” Harry asked.

“Nope- no hearing required,” Terry told him cheerfully.

“Then sure,” Harry agreed, as the rest of the class lined up to take a turn afterwards.

“Awesome! And hey- you may be the best flyer the school has ever seen, but I’m gonna kick your
arse at gobstones,” the Ravenclaw jived good-naturedly.

“How about you teach me how to play, then kick my arse?” Harry giggled again, and all the girls
had to resist the urge to cuddle him like a puppy.

Minerva and Severus had just as eventful of a morning- they’d gotten up long before breakfast to
catch their portkey to the island of Azkaban, ready to visit Sirius and tell him they were working on
freeing him. Severus wasn’t exactly looking forward to it, and he’d tried to beg off going, but
Minerva reminded him that as Harry’s guardians, they all had to get along, so he’d sighed huffily and
crossed his arms the whole boat ride from the portkey drop off to the cold, dreary island, their
Patronuses kneeling at their feet. They headed to the visiting station and filled out the name of the
prisoner they wished to see, thankfully never having to come into contact with any dementors, as the
system sent a signal to the prisoner’s cell that the blind guards picked up on.

Sirius Black felt himself dragged out of his cell by cold, scabbed hands that seemed to burn through
his thin prison robes as a dementor dragged him out of his cell. He couldn’t help a whimper- had he
been sentenced to the kiss and not heard about it? He desperately wished that he could have seen his
godson one more time, and that one day he’d know that Padfood had loved him, and that he hadn’t
betrayed him, would never betray him.

His dramatic final monologue stopped suddenly when he was dropped into the visitor’s room,
shackles automatically clapping around his hands as the dementor glissaded outside the door, not
allowed to stay in and sadden the visitors with its presence. Sirius was perplexed- he never got
visitors, not once in ten years. His jaw almost dropped to the floor when he saw who it was.

“Minerva? Snivellus?!” he yelped, agape.
“I’ll forgive you the rude nickname, since you clearly look like you’re having a time of it,” Severus drawled, but inside he almost felt a stab of pity for his old enemy (feelings, eww) as he took in the long matted hair, the sunken eyes, and his pale skin stretched so tight over his once-handsome face.

“Why- why are you here?” Sirius croaked. “I…”

“We know you’re innocent,” Minerva cut in. “We just found out.”

“How?” Sirius asked, leaning forward as far as the shackles would let him.

“Harry,” Minerva explained. “He came to school deaf.” Sirius yelped like Padfoot as he felt a stab of sorrow for his poor godson- he’d never be able to take him to concerts like Lily and James had wanted.

“How?” he rasped, around a sob.

“His relatives,” Snape picked up with a snarl, unusually not directed at Sirius. “He was placed with the Dursleys.”

“What?!” Sirius forgot about the cuffs holding him to the table as he tried to jump up and his arms stretched painfully. Severus sighed and pulled a pain potion out of his robes, handing it to Minerva, who tipped it down Sirius’ throat.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but thanks Sniv- Severus,” he amended, grimacing as the cuffs chafed his wrists. “Now why was Harry with the Dursleys?”

“Dumbledore,” Minerva sighed, disappointed and angry. “He’d placed Harry there, insisted he was safe- when it became very clear he was not, we did some digging- gained access to the will, which had never been opened. It stated very clearly that you were innocent.”

“Have you found Peter, then?” Sirius asked hopefully. “That would save us a lot of time with the legal procedures.”

“Black, Peter Pettigrew is dead,” Severus said, feeling bad that Harry’s godfather clearly wasn’t as sane as he seemed.

“Don’t look at me like that- I’m not crazy,” Sirius insisted. “We were- oh, fuck, I’m already here, might as well,” he continued after a pause as he pondered giving up his secret. “We were illegal animagi.”

“I fucking knew it! I knew you were up to something!” Severus couldn’t help celebrating this little victory, but Minerva didn’t look at all surprised.

“I can’t believe you thought it was a secret from me,” she sighed, chuckling a bit. “Even if I hadn’t nudged you in the right direction, materials-wise, you weren’t subtle. So many deer jokes…” she rolled her eyes theatrically.

“But what does this have to do with Pettigrew?” Snape pulled them back on track.

“He didn’t die that night- they only found a finger, yeah?” Sirius asked, knowing very well he was right.

“That’s the story, yes,” Minerva confirmed.

“His animagus was a rat,” Sirius’ face was almost feral as he snarled. “Should have been obvious-
but I was sure that I’d be too big a target, being the first choice for who James would pick. I convinced them to switch. When I found… when I found them dead…” he sobbed, and Minerva put a gentle had on his shoulder. “I went to confront him. He blew up the whole street, cut off his own finger, and crawled into the sewer- I saw him! And it was so messed up, everything I’d done to try to protect James and Lily driving them straight to their deaths, that I just… I lost it. I was laughing like a madman, because I was so past gone with grief and rage I’d forgotten how to cry. Probably didn’t help my image…”

“Wait!” Severus jumped up so suddenly that it startled Sirius. “A rat with one toe missing- which one?”

“Uh, right pointer, why?”

“Scabbers!” the Slytherin head exclaimed, knocking his chair back.

“What?” Sirius was well and truly lost, and Minerva didn’t quite know what was going on either, truth be told.

“The rat- Ron Weasley’s rat! He’s missing one toe- I should know- he’s in my house, and he’s always got that damn rat on his shoulder in the common room!”

“There’s a Weasley in Slytherin?!” Sirius gasped, gobsmacked.

“Yes, and your godson too,” Severus interrupted hurriedly. “But that’s not what you should be taking away from that sentence. We have the rat right where we want him- come Minerva, let’s go,” he pulled her up and towards the door, eager to find the person who had really murdered Lily (and James, he supposed) and condemned Harry to a hellish childhood.

“We’ll be back soon, hopefully to get you out for good, Merlin help us,” Severus called back as he exited like his robes were on fire. “We’ve got a rat to trap.”

For the first time in ten years, Sirius Black’s face lit up in a genuine smile.
Harry was sitting in the common room with the other first year Slytherins, tongue sticking out the corner of his mouth as he pondered the next paragraph of his Herbology essay when Snape suddenly burst in, McGonagall on his tail. Realising the students were all eyeing him in apprehensive surprise, he slowed down and forced his face into a neutral expression.

“Ronald, hand me your rat,” their head of house ordered the redhead, who looked up at him in surprise.

“What- why?” he asked, a hand protectively over Scabbers.

“Just let Professor Snape see him for a moment, please,” Minerva prodded him, and Ron finally did so, a strange expression on his face as he handed over the squirming rat.

“Hominem Revilio,” Severus cast, still clutching the rat very tightly with his non-wand hand, and suddenly Scabbers was no more as a portly, very dirty, very naked man with grey-blonde hair and nine fingers was sitting on their rug, knocked onto his flabby arse.

“AHHHH!” Ron screamed, along with a number of the rest of them, but Harry was looking intently at the man, his squinting not related to a bad glasses prescription, as before, but rather the effort of dredging up a long-forgotten memory.

“Wormtail?” he asked, gobsmacked in his surprise. “What are you doing here, and why are you naked on my homework? I’ll have to start all over now!”

“Who the bloody hell is Wormtail and why the fuck have I been sleeping with a grown man for the past 4 years?!” Ron looked distinctly green, an odd contrast to his many freckles.

“This,” Minerva said, stunning him, “is Peter Pettigrew- he was the one who betrayed your parents, Harry, and he let your godfather take the fall for it.” The child’s eyes widened, and the tabby animagus wished there had been an easier way to break it to him, but it was really better to get it out all at once in this kind of situation.

Peter, stunned, couldn’t speak, and Pansy and Daphne, the first to get over their shock, made their way to the fireplace, throwing some floo powder in.

“Auror Department,” Daphne requested primly, raised to keep her composure in all sorts of situations. “Yes, hello,” she told the bald black man with the hoop in one ear who came to answer the call. “We have an emergency- there is a naked man in our common room, goes by the name of Peter Pettigrew.”

“What?” Auror Kingsley Shacklebolt was quite sure he must have heard wrong.

“There is a naked animagus in our common room, we said!” Pansy huffed. “So please come arrest him.”

Kingsley squinted suspiciously at the two girls. “Is this another one of Tonks’ pranks?” he asked. “Because I have a tonne of paperwork and now is not a great time.”

“It’s not a prank, Kingsley,” Severus came up to the floo. “It’s a long story- just please bring backup
and we’ll discuss him after you have him in custody.”

“Alright, I’m bringing Tonks and we’re coming through.” Severus resisted the urge to make a face at the mention of one of his most chaotic past potions students.

In the chaos that was occurring, Peter managed to wiggle out of the stunning spell, lunging for Harry with the goal of using him as a hostage. Unfortunately for him, Harry caught the movement out of the corner of his eye, and made a great leap, directing the momentum of all 56 pounds and four-foot-three inches of his tiny body towards his feet as he pounced on the man’s hand, grabbing a candlestick from the wall and bringing it down upon Pettigrew’s head, knocking him out.

“Wow,” Nymphadora Tonks came through the floo just in time to get a firsthand look at the glorious spectacle. “Pretty good for a lil’ pipsqueak.”

“Hey!” Harry protested, still brandishing his candelabra menacingly at the man who’d betrayed his parents. “I’m not a pipsqueak!”

“Oh- my apologies,” Tonks told him, trying not to laugh as they came to detain their suspect. “You’re Lily and James’, then?” she looked at him, wondering why he was so small when both of his parents had been fairly tall.

“Yeah,” Harry nodded, liking that she hadn’t made a big deal out of his being ‘Harry Potter.’

“Hey cuz,” Tonks turned to Malfoy, ruffling his hair. Draco gave her a funny look.

“I’ve never seen you before in my life,” he declared, grumpily fixing his hair.

“You can blame your da for that one, right git,” she mumbled. “Your mum still sent me birthday gifts and all, but she had to be sneaky about it.”

“Wait, you’re Aunt Andy’s kid?- you don’t look like her,” Draco was still looking dubiously at the auror.

“Here,” she said, screwing up her face as her skin turned lighter, her hair changed from bubblegum pink to white-blonde, and her eyes went from hazel to silver. “Better?”

“You’re a metamorphmagus!” Hermione gasped, excited to meet one in person.

“Yep, that’s me,” Tonks confirmed, pulling their suspect up off the floor as Kingsley blessedly spelled some clothing onto him.

“Well, we’ll get him back and get him processed, but first I need to know what the hell is going on,” Shacklebolt told the two professors.

“Sirius Black is innocent- we found some old paperwork that led us to suspect something was off, so we went to visit him in Azkaban,” all the wizard-raised children gasped at the name of the prison, and Hermione signed ‘wizards’ jail’ to Harry, who nodded. “He told us that he and his friends had been unregistered animagi, and that Peter was a rat who’d lost a finger in their confrontation- staged the whole thing,” Severus outlined succinctly.

“Always thought there was something funny ‘bout the whole thing,” Tonks sighed. “Cousin Siri was always so cool when I was little. This one, though-” she pointed at Pettigrew, “never much cared for him. Always something off about how squirrely he was- of course, no one listens to an eight-year-old.”
“You’re the conspiracy theorist of the department now, can you really blame them?” Kingsley teased his colleague, and Tonks smacked him.

“Hey, I was right, wasn’t I?” she bantered as they took their prisoner back through the floo.

“She’s… interesting,” Blaise commented blithely.

“You have no idea,” Severus groaned, putting his head in his hands as the memories of years of creative explosions flashed through his brain.

“Severus!” Madame Hooch suddenly came skidding through the open portrait hole (they hadn’t taken the time to close it in their headlong race to catch the rat). “I’ve found you a seeker!” She was panting and out of breath, and Harry had a feeling she’d been running around the castle since flying class ended an hour before.

“What are you on about, woman?” he looked at the quidditch-obsessed woman in confusion.

“Potter!” she exclaimed. “Best flyer I’ve ever seen—flies like the pros, I tell you!”

“How can you possibly tell after just one lesson?” Minerva joined in Severus’ bemusement.

All the first years except for Harry (who had shrunk back a little, uncomfortable with being the centre of attention) started talking at once, and Snape yelled over them to quiet down.

“Alright,” he turned to Harry, “could you please explain what happened earlier?”

“Oh, don’t ask him,” interrupted Hooch, “he’s far too modest.” She then proceeded to excitedly relate the events of the morning.

“Oh Merlin, you could have been killed,” Severus groaned. Harry studied his body language carefully, trying to see if he was in trouble.

“But Neville would have been killed,” he mumbled quietly, looking down.

Severus tapped him softly on the shoulder. “Keep your eyes on me, please, so you can understand me— you’re not in trouble, and you did a very brave thing, but you’ve got to be more careful, alright?”

“I’ll try,” Harry murmured. “But what else was I supposed to do?”

“You could let the adults take care of situations like that— even if Madame Hooch couldn’t fly there in time, she could have cast a cushioning charm— Neville might have been injured, but it would have been better than both of you getting injured. You were very lucky you’re a natural flyer, or that could have gone very badly,” Severus told him, trying not to come off as scolding him, but rather having a conversation.

“Alright,” Harry agreed, still looking like a kicked puppy.

“Good,” Severus nodded, trying not to let that face tug at his heartstrings. “Now, about the quidditch team…”

Flint took him out that evening after Charms (where they were still working on theory) to practice. It was too dark to bring the snitch out, but he threw golf balls every which way, and even on the subpar school broom, Harry caught them all.

“Wonderful!” Marcus praised, unusually excited. “We might actually have a chance at the house
cup this year- I can’t wait to see the look on Wood’s face when he realise we’re going to win again- he thought he had a chance this year because our old seeker is gone,” he slowed down, explaining. Harry, however, couldn’t catch any of it, as Flint was dancing around madly with his face to the sky.

“Uh, could you please look down and repeat that- I can’t read your lips when you’re looking up like that; you’re too tall.”

“Oh, right- sorry kiddo,” Flint ruffled his hair and repeated the statement.

“This Wood guy- is he your boyfriend? You seem really interested in him,” Harry said innocently.

“What- no!” Flint sputtered. “He- he’s my greatest enemy, the bane of my existence!”

“Alright then,” Harry shrugged, not wanting to contradict him.

“Well, you get your bum to dinner- Professor Snape made it very clear to me that you wouldn’t be allowed to play the first game unless you’ve gained ten pounds by then, so get to it!” the quidditch captain/prefect ordered, shooing him towards the castle.

Alright, Harry told himself sternly at dinner, putting more butter on his potatoes, ten pounds by November 3- you can do it. That’s only like, 16% of your body weight. He picked up his fork again, already feeling pretty full after finishing his small serving of chicken but determined to be able to play the first game.

“You okay?” Ron asked him, already on his third serving.

“Gotta gain ten pounds if I wanna play quidditch,” Harry explained, taking a deep breath before shoving another green bean in his mouth.

“The nutrient potions will help,” Hermione signed to him for the sake of privacy, checking to see that Draco wasn’t following her hands, since his friendship with Harry was still so new. “And your appetite will get better over time. Don’t push it, luv, or you’ll only get sick.” Harry shoved his still-full plate away with a relieved sigh.

Up at the head table, Severus traded concerned looks with Minerva.

“He’s doing better,” Poppy informed them. “That’s the most I’ve seen him eat since he got here.”

“Now that’s just sad,” Minerva pursed her lips in discontent. Harry, feeling eyes on him, looked behind them and met their eyes, at which point they forced themselves to smile at him (Severus’ looked more like a constipated grimace- but at least he was trying). The child looked unconvinced by their efforts, but he turned back to the table anyway, his eyes darting around rapidly as he tried to catch up on the conversation of his fellow students.

“Do you want me to teach you how to play wizard’s chess?” Ron asked him, and Harry was about to agree before a note appeared by his plate.

Harry,

Your old clothes are atrocious- threadbare, too large, and unfit for the Scottish autumn. Please report to my office after the meal to be measured for a new wardrobe.
“Do you think that’s supposed to be a reprimand, about my clothes?” Harry signed to Hermione as he showed the note to his friends.

“No, Harry- it wasn’t your fault. I think Professor Snape just has a hard time with expressing his emotions,” she signed back, and Ron studied their hands carefully, trying to pick something up.

“I guess I gotta take a rain-check on chess,” Harry spoke aloud to Ron, who nodded in understanding.

“That’s alright mate- make sure he gets you a couple warm jumpers- you’re always shivering.”

“I don’t wanna bother him,” Harry protested, and Ron resolved to go see the professor himself later, just to make sure Harry was getting everything he needed.

“Do you have a favourite colour, Harry?” Snape asked his ward later, as he spelled a tape measure to take Harry’s (pitifully small) measurements. When he got no answer, he mentally berated himself- he wasn’t looking at the child when he asked. Harry functioned so well it was easy to forget he was deaf. He stepped in front of him and asked again.

“Oh, uh…” Harry pondered, uncertain- nobody had ever asked him his favourite anything before, so he had to really think about it. “I… I don’t know, professor.”

“That’s alright, no need to look so nervous,” Severus tried to reassure him. “What about some nice greens, like your eyes? And some blues and greys, maybe, as well as a good thick cloak and some good jean trousers.”

“Er, you really don’t need to do this, professor… I don’t wanna make trouble,” Harry fiddled with the hem of one of Dudley’s old shirts, the one with the fewest blood stains.

“It’s no trouble at all, Po- Harry,” he corrected himself. “And I dare say it will be the opposite for the tailor, who’ll be glad for the business.”

“But I don’t wanna cost you money- I could give you my vault key?”

“Shhh,” Severus told him, softly lifting Harry’s chin so he was looking at his mouth again. “Let the adults take care of the money, alright?”

“Yes sir,” Harry deferred.

The next morning, Harry woke up to find a pair of warm joggers and a green jumper on his bed with another note.

_Harry,_

_The tailor is still working on your clothes, but I picked up a couple things in the interim. They may not fit perfectly, as it is hard to find clothing in your size, but they should be better than what you have now._

_SS_

Suppressing a smile, Harry took his clothes into the bathroom to change (the rest of the boys seemed fine changing in front of each other, but he was rather embarrassed of his scars). Thankfully, nobody had questioned the practice yet. The jumper was soft and warm, and he managed to tug the strings on
the joggers so they weren’t falling down constantly. He was excited for his first transfiguration class—he’d read up on the theory that he’d missed when he was in the hospital wing last week, and he was ready for their practical—turning matchsticks into needles. He was an early riser by nature (and being required to be up before the Dursleys to make their breakfast for his entire young life), so he was still the only one awake and, not wanting to disturb his roommates, lit his wand with a nonverbal *lumos* charm, prodding the brightness down a bit when he saw Draco groan and turn over in his sleep. He picked up his bag (which Snape had spelled with a feather-light charm because “you don’t need to be dragging around a school bag that weighs more than you, Potter” which he’d accompanied with an eye roll).

Breakfast didn’t even start for another 45 minutes, so he pulled out his Transfiguration book and started reviewing the theory for the next chapter—metal into glass. He read the chapter, but there were still twenty minutes until his roommates would even start to *wake up*, and he eyed one of the candlesticks curiously.

There was no *rule* against practicing magic in the common rooms, and he’d change it back when he was done, if he even got that far… he picked up the candlestick and looked at the incantation.

Accepting that there was no way he’d be able to pronounce it unless he saw someone do it first, he put the book down and pointed his wand at the tarnished silver, making a little figure-eight motion and willing it to turn to glass. To his surprise, it changed almost immediately, and he was admiring the clean transparency of his handiwork when Hermione plopped down beside him.

“Did you do that?” she asked him in awe, lighting one of the glass lamps so he could see her hands moving.

“Er, yeah, but I really just followed the book…”

“Still, that’s impressive- we’re not even learning that lesson until next week. Will you show me?”

“Of course- but first, can you help me sound out the incantation? - I couldn’t figure it out,” he admitted, blushing a little.

“You did it *nonverbally*? Harry, that’s amazing!” Hermione praised, and Harry blushed more, so that it was visible even in the dim light with his dark skin.

“I just couldn’t do it otherwise- if you were deaf, you’d be even better than me at it,” Harry protested.

“You’re too hard on yourself- it’s okay to be proud of your accomplishments. We’re Slytherins, after all,” she pointed out.

“So the incantation,” he deflected, still not too fond of talking about himself.

“Hyalus,” Hermione read. “Okay, so it’s H-Y, but said like hi, and then al, like *Albus Dumbledore*, and then *us*, like you and I.”

“Oh, that’s pretty easy, actually… I feel kind of silly now,” Harry mumbled.

“Don’t feel silly- Latin works differently than English, so it could easily be very different rules. Like, I looked up your name, for example, the one in *farsi*?”

Harry nodded and motioned for her to continue.

“So what we translate as an *H* in Hami actually sounds more like a *ghh*, but with more flem behind it,” she motioned, making a rasping motion in the back of her throat and rubbing it as she did so to
try to communicate to Harry what she was doing.

“I… I kinda remember how they said it, I think,” Harry thought very hard. “Even though I couldn’t hear the memories they left me, they kinda helped to jog some stuff.”

“That’s awesome, that you have some memories of your parents,” Hermione smiled. “Maybe you’ll remember your godfather, when you meet him.”

“I think… I think he used to bounce me around a lot, and he smelled like… like leather and motor oil…”

“Yuck,” Hermione made a face. Sure, she could change her own bike tires, but she couldn’t imagine wanting to smell like that all the time.

“No,” Harry giggled, “it was good on him, because he also wore this cologne that smelled like summer, too, and he laughed a lot, I think. I hope he still laughs a lot when he gets out…” he was silent for a moment before he looked at his friend again as she practiced the incantation for metal into glass. “Do you… how bad is Azkaban?” he asked tentatively.

“It’s nowhere I’d want to go, Harry,” she answered honestly. “But hey,” she patted his shoulder comfortingly when his face fell, “you lived in a really bad place too, but you’re gonna be okay. He’ll have people who’ll help him out, just like you have us.”

“Thanks Hermione,” Harry smiled shyly at her before he turned his candlestick easily back to metal.

“I think we should probably head down to breakfast- I wanna get there early so maybe I can try eating a little at the end again once my stomach settles.”

Harry had a small serving of oatmeal at the beginning of breakfast and then an egg towards the end, and he felt better than he would have if he tried to eat both at once- he probably wouldn’t have managed even half the egg otherwise. Hermione gave him an encouraging smile, and Ron grabbed a couple apples to put in his bag so he could offer them to Harry throughout the day.

“Transfiguration is one of the most difficult subjects you will learn at Hogwarts,” McGonagall reminded them, and she waved her wand so subtitles appeared above her head. Harry gasped a little, touched by the consideration. She gave him a discreet little smile and went back to her lecture.

“All right,” she wrapped up about fifteen minutes later as she passed out the matchsticks, “now you’re going to try it for yourselves, but remember- don’t be discouraged if you don’t manage it today.”

Harry looked at the needle- it was a lot smaller than the candlestick he worked with this morning, and the textbook gave the impression that wood to metal was one of the easiest types of transfigurations. He didn’t want to seem like a show-off, though, so he waited for a few moments before trying the spell, which yielded a perfect needle with a nice, rounded eye. Hermione wasn’t far behind him, and she and Harry each won ten points for Slytherin at the end of class for being the only ones to manage it.

“Can you help me, Hermione?” Ron asked during their study period, while Harry went to take his mid-morning potions in Snape’s office. “I’m having trouble with the wand motion for the transfiguration.”

“You need to snap your wrist as you draw the horizontal line,” she instructed, and his matchstick turned a little more silver the next time around. “But I was thinking- what if we set up a snack
A snack system?” Ron asked, scratching his elbow.

“Yeah—like, maybe I’d owl my parents for tupperware and we can put like, yoghurt or peanut butter in it and stuff, so Harry’s getting little bits of protein throughout the day,” she explained.

“Oh, and I could owl my mum and ask for the best spell to slice fruits and vegetables,” Ron exclaimed. “Then he could have stuff he could eat with one hand while we study or in class and stuff.”

“That’s a great idea, Ronald!” Hermione beamed at him. “Just don’t give him any celery—did you know you burn more calories eating it than you bring in?”

“I’m honestly more bothered by the texture,” Ron said, making a face (raw celery was one of very few foods that he wouldn’t eat). “But it’s fun to put it in a potion and see what happens—Fred and George made a firecracker out of a stalk once.”

“Your brothers concern me sometimes,” Hermione’s wild curls bounced as she shook her head.
Hermione’s dad sent her a wonderful collection of tupperware of all sizes, and Ron’s mum sent him a list of useful spells for slicing different fruits and vegetables. Time for the next stage of their plan.

“Professor?” Hermione asked, knocking timidly on the office door, still a bit wary of knocking on the man’s door for a non-emergency.

“Enter,” he called his standard greeting.

“I was wondering if you could help me with a spell?” Hermione asked him, and he looked at her curiously.

“I understand you’re one of the brightest witches of the year, so what is so complicated that you need me for?”

“Well,” Hermione said, “we’re trying to help Harry eat more by giving him lots of snacks, and I had my dad send me some containers to hold yoghurt and things, and I’m wondering if you could make the cooling charms I’ve put on them permanent, and maybe work it so that it draws on things from the kitchen when it gets empty?”

“That’s actually a clever idea, Ms. Granger—very Slytherin. Five points for the idea, and I can work those charms for you right now,” he told her, rather impressed.

“You know what’s even more Slytherin?” Hermione whispered conspiratorially. “Sometimes, if we put something light by Harry when he’s studying, he doesn’t even realise he’s eating and we can sneak in some extra calories.”

“I see why the hat put you in my house,” he raised an eyebrow at her. “Just make sure you don’t feed him so much that he only realises once he’s feeling sick.”

“I’ve done some research on portion sizes and such for correcting malnourishment,” Hermione told him proudly, “so I know when he’ll start feeling full even before he does— he gets so distracted when he’s reading, you see.”

“Ms. Granger, I’ve seen you in a common room, and I’m fairly certain that once you’ve started a book, a bomb couldn’t disturb you in the slightest, despite full use of all your senses,” the professor couldn’t help a low, silky chuckle from slipping out of his mouth.

“Takes one to know one,” Hermione pointed out primly.

“Very true, Ms. Granger, very true…”

Potions wasn’t a good class to feed Harry due to cross-contamination, nor was Herbology for the same reason, but Flitwick and McGonagall had no problem with snacking as long as it didn’t distract from the lesson, and Binns wouldn’t notice even if they’d brought in a cauldron and started cooking lamb vindaloo, so they had snack breaks in Charms, Transfiguration, History of Magic, and study hall.

Ron cut slices out of an apple, subtly placing more at the plate on Harry’s side, and Hermione drizzled a teaspoon of yoghurt over the slice before placing it in Harry’s left hand, which he always left outstretched while his right hand was practicing wand movements (a handy little quirk). It wasn’t until the third time they’d done snack break that Harry even realised it had been happening, as
now that he felt safe enough to let his guard down, he tended to retreat into his own little world when he was working on something and focus on only that (and the lack of sound in his life certainly made it even easier to do). When he’d realised they were taking care of him in their own nondescript little way, he hadn’t made a big deal out of it, understanding that it was just one of those little unspoken agreements between the three of them, but now his two friends would see a soft little smile on his face as he mechanically brought the yoghurt-dipped apples to his mouth.

“Ugh,” Ron sighed, stretching, as Harry finished his snack. “It’s been raining all week, so we haven’t even had flying classes, and I wanna stretch my legs. You guys in?”

“Sure,” Hermione agreed, making a final edit on her extra-credit essay for Binns class (she was the only one doing it; not even Draco could be bothered, however much his father wanted him to be top of the class). “I could use a walk.”

“Alright,” Harry agreed once Ron tapped him and repeated the question (in sign language this time, because he was slowly but surely improving, even if he did have to do a lot of finger-spelling) and he waved his wand one last time to return his chair to his original green (he’d been practicing colour charms).

They’d barely left the common room when they found Neville walking around looking confused. He lit up when he saw them.

“Hey guys!” he breathed a great sigh of relief. “Do you think you could help me get out of here? I’ve been trying to get back to Gryffindor tower for the last 35 minutes, but I somehow ended up in the complete opposite space…”

“Sure Nev- we’ll take you out of here,” Harry agreed. “And maybe we can even help you find Gryffindor tower. If not, at least we’ll all get lost together.”

“Yeah, I’ve never had that before…” Neville agreed shyly, smiling at them.

“Look at us and our merry band of misfits,” Hermione chuckled. “We’ve got a Slytherin Weasley, a Slytherin muggleborn, the century’s youngest seeker, and a herbologist with a terrible sense of direction.”

“I’m not a herbologist,” Neville objected, but Ron and Harry both gave him disbelieving looks.

“Mate, you’re the best in our year with plants,” Ron told him firmly, and the chubby blonde couldn’t help but smile.

Meanwhile, Filch was wandering around, looking for students out of bounds, when he saw the turbaned defence professor casting an unlocking charm on a door in the forbidden wing of the third floor corridor. He hummed quietly for his cat, who jumped out of a corridor, scaring the troublemaker off. Filch was looking on his overloaded key ring for the one that would re-lock the door when he heard giggling little voices coming down another hallway. Not wanting to be seen fiddling with a forbidden door and give anyone a reason to think he was up to something nefarious, he slinked out of sight, resolving to come back later and not really caring if any little brats died in the interim. He was long gone by the time a breeze from an open window blew the door open just a crack.

“Well, we’re well and truly lost,” Hermione said pleasantly, “but look- an open door. Maybe it’s an office and there’s a professor in there who could help us.” The padded cheerfully down the hallway, not bothering to be quiet, unaware they were in a place they were most certainly not supposed to be.
“Hello,” Harry called as he pushed the door open, and Hermione and Ron tried to grab him as they heard the soft growling that Harry couldn’t, but he was already in the room by then. Fearing the worst, they tiptoed softly in, a shaking Neville pushing forward to lead the way (Harry had saved his life, so no matter how scared he was, he was determined to help his friend). The sight of a terrifying, three-headed dog had them all gasping, but they saw Harry a moment later, scratching the place where his broad chest met his tummy (which was as high as he could reach).

“Who’s a good boy?” he crooned, as the dog’s back paw thumped joyfully. When the other three tried to step forward, however, he growled, putting a front paw protectively around his new friend.

“It’s okay,” he told the dog, feeling the growls rumbling through his belly. “These are my friends.” The dog eyed them warily with all three heads, and the middle one lost interest first, leaning down to lick Harry with an enormous tongue that covered his whole body in slobber.

“You can come pet him if you want,” Harry told his friends, not looking back- they’d come if they wanted. They did not want, apparently, as no one came up, and when he eventually turned his head a little, they were still keeping their distance.

“Aww, are you a little scary, big guy?” he asked the cerberus. “You’re a cute wittle scary guy, aren’t you?” The dog barked in confirmation, and Harry felt the room vibrate.

“You could probably use a walk, poor guy, huh?” the green-eyed boy asked him in sympathy. “It’s no fun to be locked up, is it?” Ron and Hermione traded dark looks, knowing that he spoke through experience.

“Uh, Harry…” Neville asked eventually, voice shaking before remembering he couldn’t hear him. If he wanted to get Harry’s attention, he’d have to go closer to the dog. Which he did not want to do.

“Here, I’ve got it,” Hermione said, casting a lumos charm and shining it on the ground until it caught Harry’s line of vision. He turned around.

“We should probably go now,” she reminded him. “Lunch is in twenty minutes.”

“Oh,” Harry sighed, remembering. He looked at the cerberus. “I’ve gotta go now, buddy…”

Three heads whinged piteously.

“Please don’t make this any harder than it has to be,” Harry told him, scratching his head. “Maybe I’ll talk to Hagrid, see if he can come take you for a walk- he loves animals. Maybe he’ll even let me come. I’m pretty sure you’re not supposed to be here.”

The dog whinged again, and his middle nose leaned down, bopping a wooden trapdoor and looking at Harry with knowing eyes.

“You gotta stay here and watch… something?” Harry picked up on the meaning, and all three heads nodded. “Do you know when you’ll be done?”

The dog shook his head no.

“Is it something dangerous?” the dog raised the front paw that wasn’t wrapped protectively around Harry, as if in a canine impression of a shrug.

“Is someone after it?” Harry asked again, and the dog made a series of broken yipping motions and stuck his ears out, flopping them around his head like a towel. A towel or…
“Is it a man with a big turban, who always stutters?” Harry had a lot of trouble following along in his class (it wasn’t too much of a handicap, grade wise, because he read the textbook and studied well), which struck him as odd, because normally stutterers repeated words, not singular sounds, and something about the man just didn’t seem right. The dog nodded again.

“Hmmmm… why isn’t the door locked, if you’re guarding something so important? I mean, three first years were able to just waltz back in here.” The three other first years traded disbelieving looks—their tiny deaf friend was having an intelligent conversation with a dog, a big, scary, mean dog with three heads.

The cerberus nosed Harry’s wand, then motioned to the door.

“He spelled it open?” Fluffy (although Harry didn’t yet know his name) nodded again. “And then he must have heard it and not had time to close it…” Fluffy barked once in confirmation.

Hermione shined her lumos again. “We really gotta go now,” she signed when he looked at her.

“Alright puppy— I’m gonna talk to my head of house and let him know somebody was sneaking around here, and maybe they can put a guard on the door for a little bit every day so you can go for a walk.” The dog reluctantly let him go.

“That was the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen,” Ron told them as they walked down to lunch, Hermione using a few drying charms on their smallest friend, who was still dripping slobber and starting to shiver.

“It wasn’t so odd,” Harry contradicted, but Hermione just rolled her eyes at him.

“It kind of was, Har.” She tossed her curls back and put an arm around him.

Severus had just finished teaching Harry’s potions class (and he definitely had his mother’s capacity for the subject, but Snape hated to think of what would have happened if he’d continued to treat the boy badly on top of him having a disability that could have made things harder were the professor not aware of it). He was finishing gathering all the homework into a pile to grade later when he noticed his ward over by the sink, scrubbing away at a cauldron, on tiptoes as he tried to reach the sink, his tongue sticking slightly out as he concentrated on a particularly tough spot.

“Harry,” he very gently tapped him on the shoulder, and was pleased to note that the boy didn’t jump as much as usual. “You don’t have to scrub cauldrons— that’s for students who get detention.”

“I know,” Harry told him, “but I wanted to talk to you about something, and I don’t really like doing nothing while I wait.”

“You could have gotten me immediately— is everything alright? Are you feeling quite well?”

“I’m fine, professor,” Harry assured as the man felt his forehead. “It’s just that I think Professor Quirrell might be up to something…”

Severus studied Harry intently. “You think so as well?”

“Yeah,” he nodded vigorously. “His stutter just seems really fake to me— normally I can lipread fine when people stutter, but with him it’s almost impossible, and then today we were walking around school, trying to help Neville find the Gryffindor tower except we only got more lost, and then we found this open door and thought it might have someone inside who could help us, so we went inside, but instead there was a big three-headed dog.”
Snape gasped. “Did he hurt you?” he asked, not bothering to keep the anxiety out of his voice, since Harry couldn’t hear it anyway (but he could read his body language, and he had to admit it was kind of nice to have someone worry about him).

Harry shook his head. “He was really nice. But we played this sort of game of doggy charades and I think Quirrell was trying to steal whatever he’s guarding.”

“If I didn’t already suspect that myself, I have to admit I’d find the idea a little far-fetched, but cerberus are very intelligent creatures nonetheless. I know you didn’t mean to wander in there, but I need you to stay away from that corridor from now on, alright? And I should go re-charm the door…”

“Hermione already did, sir… but if I may… I think that he’s really lonely, the poor puppy, and I was hoping that maybe someone could take him for a walk once a day while someone else guards the door?” He looked up hopefully.

Harry’s big green eyes were far more effective than they had any right to be, and Severus sighed and ran a hand through his hair. “It’s Hagrid’s beast, but I promise I’ll talk to him about it- what in Merlin’s name is in your hair?” he suddenly broke off as, after unable to resist the urge to ruffle Harry’s hair (he was trying to fix it, he told himself- that was all. Not affectionate or anything…), he felt the stiff, sticky substance in it.

“It’s slobber,” the boy said with a small smile. “From the cerberus. He was really nice.”

_Oh Merlin_, Snape thought a few minutes later after Severus had sent him off to shower, _we’ve got big Hagrid and tiny Hagrid- Morgana help me._

“Any word on my godfather?” Harry asked the professor later that night, as he gave him his pre-bed potions. Severus growled as he thought about it.

“Unfortunately, there seemed to be some misplaced paperwork for Peter’s trial, and thus Sirius Black is still in prison as they begin the process anew. Pettigrew is still in custody, of course, but until he is proven guilty, Black must stay in prison, unfortunately.”

“Can’t they just give him veritaserum?” Harry asked his guardian. “Sirius, I mean?”

“Unfortunately, the ministry is run largely by idiots,” Snape pinched the bridge of his nose. “But ten points to Slytherin for your independent study- that is a sixth year potion. But the new trial is scheduled for November first, and Amelia Bones, the head auror, is overseeing the paperwork herself, even though it is not her job, to determine that it doesn’t happen again. Only a few more weeks, and after ten years, that really isn’t that much time.”

“Alright,” Harry sighed. “Thanks for working so hard to get him out- I know you don’t really like him that much.”

“How did you know that?” Snape tensed- he was trying to keep his personal issues with the man out of the way of raising Harry, for the boy’s sake.

“Your body tenses whenever you talk about him, and you get frown lines around your eyes- I’m really good at reading body language, even when it’s really subtle, because I can’t hear tone. And it was really useful to be able to know what kind of mood the Dursleys were in as soon as they came in the door… sometimes it helped,” he offered tentatively, trying to be more open, because Poppy told him it would help.

“Oh, Harry…” Severus sighed again, awkwardly reaching out to rub his back softly. “I’m so sorry
about all this.”

“It’s okay,” Harry waved off his concerns. “I’m alright now, so it doesn’t really matter anymore.” As Severus watched Harry leave, the outline of his bony hips clearly visible in his new, well-fitting trousers, he thought that it most certainly did still matter.

Waking up on Halloween morning, the smell of pumpkin wafted throughout the castle, and Harry smiled – the richness of the aroma didn’t make him queasy like it would have a month ago. He went to his trunk and pulled out a wrapped package he’d ordered from Honeyduke’s.

“Morning guys,” he said cheerfully. “Happy Halloween!” Minerva had pulled him aside after Transfiguration a few days ago and told him that even though his parents had died that day, he should try his best to enjoy it, because they would have wanted him to be a kid and have a fun holiday.

“Happy H’ll’ween,” the others mumbled sleepily, as Harry opened his package.

“I got each of you guys a box of chocolate frogs,” he said, as he walked through the room dropping a box on each bed, with one left over for Hermione.

“Aww, thanks H’rry,” Draco yawned, as Crabbe and Goyle lazily shoved one in their mouths as they sat up in bed.

“Yeah, mate, this was really sweet. Sorry we didn’t get you anything…” Ron trailed off.

“It’s fine, Ron- I didn’t expect you to,” Harry said, not wanting his best friend to feel bad that he didn’t have a lot of spare money. “And you do a lot of stuff for me on a daily basis,” he said, smiling at the redhead.

“You’re the best,” Ron told him, trapping him in a hug. He towered over Harry, who only came up to his shoulders, so it felt like being completely ensconced in a safe embrace for Harry, who hugged him back tightly.

“No, you’re the best,” he mumbled.

“Can you to get all sappy with each other later?” Theo asked. “I hear they make pumpkin pancakes with heavy cream on Halloween.”

“Yum,” Ron said, repeating it in BSL for Harry, although he had to finger-spell pancakes.

“Will you split one with me?” he asked the redhead, thinking it would be too rich for him to handle a whole one.

“Alright- as long as you eat something else too, because half a pancake is not enough, pumpkin or no,” Ron told him sternly.

“You looked a lot like your mother just now,” Harry snorted, and Ron abashedly took his hands off his hips.

Harry gave Hermione her box of frogs at breakfast, and at his and Ron’s urging, she allowed herself just the one sweet at breakfast. Pulling out the card, she smiled and handed it to Ron.

“Happy Halloween,” she said cheekily, as Ron caught sight of the figure on the back and his jaw dropped.
“Agrippa!” he uttered, in absolute delighted shock. “I… I finally have Agrippa! But wait…” he deflated a bit and looked at Hermione. “This is really rare, are you sure you don’t wanna keep it?”

“I still have all my pokemon cards,” the girl laughed, “I’m not looking to start another collection- you keep it. That’s why I gave it to you.”

Ron’s hug was so enthusiastic it nearly knocked her off the bench.

“Swish and flick,” Hermione reminded Ron in charms, as he was still losing his mind in excitement over his new card.

“Oh right, sorry…” he tried again, but the feather only wobbled and stayed on the desk.

“Wingardium Leviosa!”


“Oh,” Harry paused from where he’d been making his feather float about and do loop-de-loops, “did I forget to say the spell out loud again?” To be honest, he didn’t even think the incantations half the time- he just didn’t need to, but he always tried to remember so he wouldn’t stand out too much, he was just having too much fun with his feather and forgot that day.”

Flitwick, who had been walking around watching their work, came up to him and squeaked joyfully at his excellent levitation. “Wonderful, Mr. Potter- ten points to Slytherin, and never be ashamed of your excellent nonverbal casting skills.”

“Thank you Professor,” Harry mumbled, feeling his cheeks heat up. Ron was seconds away from getting his feather into the air when Seamus caused an explosion with his, and they all had to evacuate the classroom to evade the smoke fumes.

“Gryffindors,” the redhead muttered under his breath, sounding far too much like Snape.

The Halloween feast was amazing- the food was delicious and their were dancing skeletons and flying licorice bats. Dumbledore made an odd speech that Harry couldn’t understand- his beard was not conducive to lip reading- but the others told him he was actually lucky in that situation.

Harry was just buttering his baked potato (and Ron was still staring at his Agrippa card) when Quirrell came running into the dungeons.

“T-t-roll in the d-dungeons, t-troll in the d-d-d-ungeons,” he cried, before fainting.

“What did he say?” Harry signed to Hermione as the room erupted in chaos.

“Troll in the dungeons,” Hermione repeated.

“Really?” Harry asked, skeptically… it didn’t quite seem right…

“Everyone back to your dormitories,” Dumbledore declared, and Hermione signed it for Harry.

“We live in the dungeons,” Harry pointed out.

“You’re awfully calm about this whole troll thing,” Ron stuttered, knees knocking together.

“I lived with three trolls for ten years,” Harry shrugged. “So, where are we supposed to go, then?”
“Slytherins follow the Hufflepuffs,” Severus ordered, and they all fell in line. Harry, unable to elbow his way to the front due to his height, ended up being at the back of the line, but luckily Ron and Hermione stayed with him.

Until Hermione was suddenly snatched by a disillusioned figure, silenced by a spell as she was dragged away.

“Professor!” Harry yelled, but was unable to be heard amongst the general chaos. He turned to Ron. “You go get Snape, I’ll go after Hermione.”

“It’s dangerous- I’ll follow Hermione, you get Snape,” Ron objected, but Harry shook his head.

“I’m faster,” he argued, “and we’re already losing her.” Then he took off, giving Ron no choice but to run for the professor.

Harry put a silencing charm on his feet and willed himself invisible, a feat of accidental magic that had worked when he was being chased by Dudley and his gang, although only occasionally. Luckily, he was well fed and in no pain here, so that alone made the spell easier as he ran faster and faster. But he couldn’t hear the other figure come up behind him, and he found himself knocked to the ground, his head spinning. He managed not to black out, but by the time he’d gotten back up, he’d lost sight of his friend.

But he remembered a spell he’d seen Professor Sprout use the week before while trying to find a particularly sneaky bowtruckle. “Point me Hermione,” he ordered his wand, holding the holly stick flat on his palm as it spun around, eventually leading him to a girl’s bathroom on the second floor. The door was locked from the outside, and Harry smelled an awful stench emanating from behind it- the troll was in the bathroom, and if his spell was correct, so was Hermione!

Harry’s alohomora charm was so powerful it blasted the lock right off the frame as Harry stumbled dizzily through the door, the bump on his head causing him to see stars. But Hermione was in the corner, gagged and stuck to the wall with some magical red bonds. Above her, her own wand was floating, pointing upward to the words painted on the wall in red paint: “MUDBLOODS DON’T BELONG IN SLYTHERIN!” Harry’s blood boiled, but they had bigger problems as the troll stumbled out of a stall, dragging his club, as he ambled towards Hermione.

“What would Ron do?” Hermione thought to herself, out of ideas. Then she did something very brave, and also very stupid.
“Oí, troll-breath!” she yelled, jumping on its smelly, slimy back and shoving her wand up his nose, banging her fists on his side, trying to steer him away from an unconscious, vulnerable Harry. He was just about to throw her off, when thankfully…

Ron ran towards the location of the banging noises, sure that was where he would find his friends. Snape was following him, but although Ron was certainly not as fast as Harry, who spent his whole life training via running from bullies, he was most definitely faster than his head of house, and he skidded to a stop just outside the destroyed bathroom in time to see one best friend lying on the floor (still breathing, Ron realised with immense relief, seeing the shallow rise and fall of his chest) and the other riding a troll like one of those muggle mechanical bulls his father was always talking about, and looking like she was about to fall off. What could he do?! Snape still hadn’t gotten there, and he had maybe seconds…

*What would Hermione do?* He asked himself, before being hit by a brilliant flash of inspiration as he remembered her helping him in lessons that morning.

“*Wingardium Leviosa!*” he yelled, swishing and flicking his wand at the trolls club, which rose and gave him a good clunk on the head, knocking him down. Thankfully, he fell away from Harry, and Hermione hopped off just in time, before pulling her wand from the trolls nostril and running to check on Harry.

Professor Snape arrived just in time to see all this occur in what felt like a year but was really less than a second before Minerva came running from the other direction.

“What on earth?” she gasped, hands clutching her chest as Severus ran over to run diagnostics on Harry.

“Just a concussion and some bruising,” he breathed a sigh of relief, turning to see Hermione’s hands and worryingly checking her over as well.

“This is a very dark binding spell,” he grit his teeth angrily before looking up and seeing what was written on the wall. “Oh Merlin…” he felt faint as he looked at Hermione again, prodding her wrists carefully to assess the damage.

“I’m afraid this is going to scar, Hermione,” he told her, barely keeping his fury in check. “Minerva, call Pomfrey. Ronald, tell me what happened.” Ron started in on the story, interrupted at various points by Hermione to fill in the bits he didn’t see, and by the time they’d finished, Severus looked graver than ever.

“So Harry’s head injury isn’t from the bathroom, then?” he asked, and Hermione shook her head no, said he’d looked dizzy and nauseous beforehand.

“And Harry was the one who blew the plumbing out?” he waved his wand over him again. “I’m incredibly surprised I’m not seeing magical exhaustion on this list, although it’s a good thing he’s so obviously powerful, Ms. Granger, or he wouldn’t have been able to free you from such a dark spell whilst concussed. And from now on, none of you shall go anywhere without a prefect or a staff member, not until we’ve found whoever’s done this.” Minerva came back with Pomfrey, who took in the scene and gasped. She ran first to Harry, then looked at Hermione.

“Oh Merlin!” Poppy gasped. “Is that…?”

“Yes,” Severus snarled. “It is.”

“Oh, I can’t believe- on a first year, too! When I get my hands on the one responsible…” She made
a strangling motion with her hands. “I will not be upholding my healer’s oath.” She then remembered she had patients to tend to, and she turned back to them, Hermione still shaking but conscious, Harry still worryingly out.

“I need stretchers,” she ordered her colleagues. “And one for Ronald as well- I’m taking no chances. All of you will spend at least tonight in my hospital wing, and with a guard outside the door.”

“I can’t believe I’m suggesting this,” Severus sighed, “but Harry and his friends accidentally ran into… Fluffy,” his lips curled at the name, “a couple weeks back, and he was unusually fond of Harry. I dare say we could switch out Hagrid and the cerberus for the night, and of course give Hagrid permission to detain intruders by any means necessary.”

So Minerva sent for Hagrid, and Severus accompanied his students to the hospital wing, levitating their stretchers (and pushing Ron bodily back down when he tried to sit up and cast a worried look at his friends). By the time Severus had put salve on Hermione’s wrists and bandaged them carefully, and Poppy had fixed the bump on Harry’s head and gotten him from concussed torpidity to exhausted sleep, Hagrid had dropped off Fluffy and gone to take his place guarding the trapdoor, carrying his crossbow and his pink umbrella and accompanied by Fang.

“I’ll stay here tonight as well,” Severus told his colleague as Fluffy curled up protectively at the end of Harry’s bed. “One of us needs to be there to wake Harry every four hours, and you need to sleep as well. We can take it in turns.”

“Thank you Severus,” Poppy said, exhausted- fixing head injuries was always delicate, tiring magic, and it was only harder when it was someone in Harry’s delicate condition. “Would you mind if I…”

“Yes, I’ll take the first shift- go sleep in your office. Do you need me to transfigure a bed for you?” Severus asked, seeing how tired she was.

“No, I’ve got a cot in there for situations like this. Just watch the children, and come wake me in a few hours.”

“Very well,” Severus agreed, having no intention of waking her before morning unless it was absolutely necessary- she’d done more than her fair share of all-nighters when he was a spy and had come back from bad meetings, staying with him to ensure that the cruciatus aftershock didn’t escalate into potential nerve damage.

“Thank you, professor,” Hermione’s tired voice rang out as she drifted off to sleep. “This may sound rather strange after everything that’s happened tonight, but I’m glad I was sorted into Slytherin.”

“Me too,” Ron agreed, still watching Harry as if afraid he’d disappear while he fought off the sleep trying to claim him. “Fred and George weren’t completely right when they said you’re a greasy old git. You’re just a bit greasy,” he said, the calming draught Poppy had given him making him rather loose-lipped.

“How very kind of you, Weasley,” he snarked as he followed Fluffy’s three heads, carefully watching every corner for a potential threat to his tiny little human. Yet he couldn’t hold back a slight smile as Ron, completely past the level of awareness needed to pick up on his sarcasm, merely said “you’re welcome, pr’fss’r,” as he finally lost the battle to the sandman.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

Quick note- in this Au!Verse, Harry isn't a horcrux, but there are still horcruxes- not relevent to *this* chapter, I just keep forgetting to tell you. Enjoy the chapter!
Love,
Des and Lils.

The morning light streamed into the hospital wing the next day as Severus, sitting by Harry’s bedside, read the morning paper announcing the beginning of the trial- a two day affair to judge both the veracity of Pettigrew’s guilt and Sirius’ innocence. Pomfrey still slept soundly in her office, and Harry, who was normally the first one up, was still curled up in a ball on his side in the bed, clutching a pillow as he slept on, his mouth open and his breathing just slightly noisy. He had been woken up three times last night, on top of the stress of the troll incident, so Severus couldn’t say he was surprised that he was still asleep even after sunrise. Weasley and Granger were still asleep as well, which was frankly unsurprising due to Granger’s traumatic kidnapping and subsequent injuries and Weasley’s tendency to sleep until he was awoken, however late that may be.

“Mmm, Draco, give it back, you great tall prat,” Harry mumbled in his sleep, before turning over. Severus rolled his eyes- his godson loved to tease his ward by holding quills or books above his head, which resulted in poor Harry trying and failing to reach high enough to reclaim them. Fluffy, still on full guard over the little Slytherin, cast a worried eye at him with his right head, but, seeing that he was only having a peaceful dream, resumed using all six eyes to scan the room for danger.

Speaking of Draco, the blonde came in his Slytherin robes, trailed by the rest of their roommates.

“Professor, we need to see Harry and Ron and Hermione- no one’s told us anyth- holyshitwhatisthatthing?!” he suddenly gasped, looking at fluffy.

“Relax, Draco, it’s just a guard-dog.” Severus told him, as fluffy warily examined the other first year Slytherins. They were soon joined by the girls, who had come to check on their friends as well and repeated the exact same exclamation of worry for their friends and indignation at being kept out of the loop, followed by terrified surprise towards Fluffy.

“Ronald will probably be back tonight, and Harry and Hermione will likely rejoin the student body tomorrow morning, but you need to leave now before you wake them. They’ve had a very trying night. Come back this evening if you wish to see them,” he instructed, knowing Poppy would probably throw a fit at such a large group of visitors but knowing that telling them to come back later would be the only way he’d get rid of them at all.

Daphne and Pansy, however, ignored him, stepping closer to Harry’s bed (the closest to the door) instead of away from it. “Aww, how precious,” Daphne cooed, her normally composed voice giving way to adoration as she carefully brushed a curl off of Harry’s scarred forehead.

“Hello, sleepy darling.” Pansy crooned softly, pulling the blanket up higher around his shoulders.

“Mm, Jaffa cakes,” Harry mumbled in his sleep. “Never had ‘em- didn’t wanna get hit.” Pansy’s fist clenched as she resolved to introduce Harry to the delightful snack immediately and destroy the lives
of whoever hurt him.

“He’s your age, Parkinson, not a child- please leave and let him rest before you wake him,” Severus reasserted, not wanting them to hear Harry say anything else in his sleep lest he say things that he’d be embarrassed about later.

“He can’t hear- we could all scream at the same time and he’d still keep sleeping,” she grumbled under her breath, but eventually followed the directions as she and the others headed to breakfast.

Harry woke around 8, blearily looking around as he tried to remember the events of the preceding night. When it came back to him after a moment, he shot up in bed in a panic, before clutching his head.

“Hermione and Ron!” he exclaimed anxiously as Fluffy came over and placed his three heads on Harry’s bed in concern (only the left could fit on Harry’s lap, so the other two just kind of overflowed onto the rest of the bed), trying to soothe the child’s distress the only way he knew how.

“Shhh,” Severus said, gently moving his chin so Harry could read his lips. “They’re fine- everything is going to be alright.”

“Did they… did they catch who hurt her?” Harry inquired, his eyes burning with green fire, angry at the people who would dare attack Hermione.

“Not yet, but we will,” his head of house promised. “You saved her life last night Harry- you did good.”

“What about her wrists?” his lower lip warbled.

“She’ll have some scarring, but the burns are already healing- just rest, Harry.”

“But wait- the quidditch match-”

“Is not for another two days, and if you rest as you are supposed to, you’ll be out by then,” the professor told him, lifting the blanket up to his chin.

Harry’s worry had woken Ron and Hermione, and the other two Slytherins were groggily rubbing their eyes as they came awake. Ron stood up to shuffle to the bathroom, but he hit his toe on the bedside table before he got very far, letting out a stream of expletives.

“Bloody fucking hell!” he swore.

“Language, Weasley,” Severus said tiredly as Poppy emerged from her office.

“You should have woken me,” she scolded the other adult as she shoved Ron back in bed and started casting three sets of diagnostic charms at once.

“I-”

“No excuses,” she interrupted. “Now go get some sleep- I’ll care for the children.”

“Very well, if you insist. I’ll send someone to relieve Hagrid on my way, so he can come collect the cerberus.” Fluffy whimpered and shuffled even closer to Harry, not wanting to leave him, and the boy patted the closest head to comfort him.

“Alright,” she said, her attention already back on the three Slytherins. “Mr. Weasley, I’ll be keeping you here for the rest of the day, but I think you’ll be good to return to your dormitories tonight.
Harry, Ms. Granger, I’ll probably let you go tomorrow.”

Harry sighed, but he hadn’t really expected anything better. Ron got up again, still needing to use the restroom, more desperately by this point.

“Ms. Granger, how are your wrists?” the medi-witch turned to the girl.

“They’re alright ma’am- a bit sore, but I’ll manage.”

“You’ll need to keep the bandages on for a week after I let you go, and have Professor Snape reapply the salve and change the wrappings once a day,” Madame Pomfrey informed her further, and Hermione nodded.

“And Harry,” she shook her head at him dismally. “Trouble rather seems to find you, doesn’t it?”

“I guess so,” he shrugged and then clutched his head again, which saved Poppy the trouble of asking him and receiving a timid “I’m fine” even though he clearly wasn’t (she rather had him pegged by now).

“Here,” she handed him a pain potion, “drink.”

“Thank you,” he told her gratefully as he took it and tried (and failed) not to grimace at the taste.

“Of course dear,” she pushed the hair off his forehead gently. “You’ll always be taken care of here.”

After breakfast, the three spent the rest of the day resting, denied any of their school supplies, but they were allowed to read the article about the beginning of Pettigrew’s trial.

“It looks like it’s going well for us so far,” Hermione put forth optimistically as they each read a copy of The Daily Prophet.

“What we really need to worry about is tomorrow,” Ron informed them. “Even if Pettigrew is proven guilty, that’s not a guarantee Sirius will be let off,” he sighed, knowing all too well about the incompetence of the ministry.

“That’s so stupid,” Harry growled, watching Ron’s lips and his tense posture.

“Welcome to the government, mate.”

“The muggle government isn’t exactly the greatest either,” Hermione pointed out. “Women still can’t inherit the throne even if they’re the oldest child if there’s a son in the family- I know it’s only a ceremonial position, but that’s still dumb.”

“Funny how the current queen’s been on the throne for like, forty years and hasn’t changed it yet,” Ron mused.

“Actually, it’s only been 39 years- 38 since her official coronation,” Hermione corrected, and Ron rolled his eyes fondly at her.

“Well, long as we’re here, I’m gonna take a nap,” Ron declared, finishing the article and fluffing his pillow before lying back. Harry was already asleep, the newspaper still lying open on his chest (Poppy had slipped a mild sleeping draught into his oatmeal, to be sure he rested).

He woke up in time for lunch, and then napped again until dinner, his headache feeling much better when he woke up. As he finished his plate (it was a small plate, granted, maybe about half of a normal serving size for a kid his age, but he’d managed it all, which both his two best friends and
Poppy counted a victory), the other Slytherins came in again, and Poppy looked at them sternly.

“What are you all doing here?” she asked them, although it sounded more like a scolding than a question. “My patients need rest, not a large group of noisy visitors.”

“I don’t mind the noise,” Harry piped up from where he could see her talking to the group, turning his bright emerald eyes on her beseechingly.

“Oh, alright,” she laughed a little, appreciating his sense of humour and unable to deny him this little thing that would make him so happy, even if she’d rather he rested some more. “Ten minutes,” she told the children, “and don’t excite my patients too much,” she ordered as a final warning before she went into her office again to start organising Harry and Hermione’s nighttime potions.

“So, you gotta tell us what happened,” Goyle began, “there’s all kinds of rumours goin’ around that you wrestled a troll!”

“Wrestled might be a bit of an overstatement,” Hermione sniffed. “It tried to kill us, but luckily Harry and Ron saved the day.”

“Oh, come on, you were clearly the hero,” Ron rolled his eyes at Hermione. “You held the troll off long enough to keep Harry safe.”

“Yeah, but Harry was the one who freed me from that awful spell, and I wouldn’t have been able to keep going if you hadn’t gotten there in time- and knocking the troll out with his own club? Genius- I wish I’d thought of it,” Mia praised.

“I… I actually just asked myself what you would have done…” Ron blushed brilliantly, his face almost the same shade of red as his hair.

“That’s hilarious- I asked myself what you would have done!” Hermione exclaimed.

“And you came up with jumping on the troll’s back?” Ron snorted, unsure whether to be offended or amused. “You know, that actually might have been my solution…”

“Uh, guys?” Daphne reminded them, “you’re still not making any sense to us.”

“Oh, right,” the three looked at each other and giggled. “So we were going to the Hufflepuff dorms, and suddenly an invisible someone came up and grabbed me, and then they took me to this bathroom and tied me up with this spell that made these burning manacles on my wrists to hold me to the wall, and then they gagged me. And there was this phrased painted over my head- Mudbloods don’t belong in Slytherin,” all the others gasped, and Draco, especially, sputtered.

“That’s just the most awful thing to say to a muggleborn,” he cried- “it’s disgusting- the dark lord used to call people that, that’s how bad it was.” He didn’t mention that his own father was one of the people who would use the term, nor that he himself had sometimes leaned towards those thinking patterns before Hogwarts, when he realised that Hermione, a muggleborn, was smarter than all of them put together.

“Really?” Hermione asked. “It- it just seems kind of stupid, almost- rather uncreative.”

“Put it this way,” Tracey told her. “Using that word here would be like someone calling you the n-word in the muggle world.”

“Ugh!” Hermione’s fists clenched at this, and she grimaced as the burns on her wrists protested. “That’s awful! Who could possibly have such a problem with me this early in the year?- no, don’t
answer that, I know people are horrible.” She sighed and tugged at a loose curl, and Pansy sat on the bed and began braiding it her hair back for her.

“So what happened after that?” Theo pulled them back on track.

“So then Harry came to rescue me while Ron went to get Professor Snape,” Hermione continued, since Harry was clearly content to just sit quietly in their company as he followed the conversation with his eyes. “And he blew out all the plumbing, and the force of the water was so strong it just completely… melted the spell away, and I was able to start distracting the troll. Another attacker had knocked him in the head beforehand, so then he fainted- Madame Pomfrey said it was a miracle Harry stayed conscious as long as he did, let alone managed such powerful magic.” Everyone looked over at Harry in amazement, and he blushed and hid his face, effectively cutting off anyone’s talking to him about it.

“So then Hermione just jumped on the troll’s back and then she stuck her wand up its nose!” Ron gesticulated wildly, wanting both to continue the story and turn the attention away from Harry so he would be more comfortable.

“That’s insane!” Greg grunted excitedly. “Bloody brilliant, but insane!”

“Yeah, I just kind of acted on an impulse- spells don’t work well against trolls, and I was just trying to hold off until Ron got help, and thankfully, he did, but really, Ron was the help,” she finished.

“That’s like… this is the best story of the year!” Draco proclaimed. “You’re gonna be Hogwarts legends… people will be talking about this for years!” He signed along with the statement, so Harry would have an easier time of it.

“I just wanna get out of here,” the raven-haired child muttered, crossing his arms over his fluffy pyjama top (Madame Pomfrey had charmed him some nice warm ones, since his low body weight meant he got cold easily).

“Tomorrow,” Hermione reminded him.

“Ron’s so lucky,” Harry wasn’t cheered by Hermione’s efforts to comfort him. “He gets to leave tonight- why can’t we leave tonight? It’s only twelve hours earlier, and we’d just be sleeping in our dorms anyway.”

“Oh, I think you’d rather be here,” Blaise made a face. “Vincent had beans with dinner.”

“Oh, bloody hell- quick, someone hit me over the head,” Ron muttered, and Vincent blushed a little at the teasing (but not enough to stop eating beans- he loved beans).

“Any word in the Evening Prophet about the trial,” Harry ignored Ron’s dramatics and signed to Draco.

“It’s looking like Peter will be guilty, but they haven’t reached a verdict yet- they’re going to wrap up the proceedings in the morning and then move on to Sirius’ trial,” his pale, long-fingered hands moved fluently, and he was suddenly gladder than ever he’d learned sign language. He’d almost decided just to stay silent- his father thought sign language was too muggle, which meant Draco only talked to his mother during that time period in his life- but every day the verbal barbs Lucius had thrown at him when Narcissa wasn’t in the room had gotten more cutting, so he’d eventually started speaking again just to make them stop.

“You okay?” Harry’s small brown hands flashed and cut through his maudlin thoughts, and he nodded tersely and put his father out of his mind.
“Care to include the rest of us on the conversation?” Tracey prodded the two.

“We were just talking about the trial,” Draco told her.

“Everyone is,” Daphne told them. “My parents wrote me a letter about it this morning. My mother was rather miffed that her book club wouldn’t focus on anything else- she hates anything that keeps her from talking about Mr. Darcy, to be honest. My father jokes that she loves Jane Austen novels more than she loves him.”

“I think Frankenstein would have been a better choice,” Harry piped up- he loved classic novels. The Dursleys had always gotten them for Dudley, and after he’d invariably thrown them away, Harry would dig them out of the trash and hide them under the loose floorboard in his cupboard. They had been the sole refuge in his sad life, and books most children turn up their noses at were priceless treasures for him. Even Dickens, which he sometimes had trouble understanding, had been a release, and he used to empathize with Oliver Twist and wish for a benefactor like Pip.

“Isn’t he that guy who just goes grrrrrr?” Ron asked, and Harry and Hermione both jumped in to explain that no, he’d actually been incredibly intelligent, and that his creator was the real monster.

“Mary Shelley was the original goth,” Mia sighed dreamily. “Such a boss.”

“I’ll have to tell my dad,” Ron mused. “He saw some muggle emo kids in the next village over once, and mum had to keep him from trying to brew his own eyeliner in her medicine cauldron.”


“What’s the deal between Malfoys and Weasleys, anyway?” Ron asked. “Like, did we woo away one of your pointy pale daughters a hundred years ago or something?”

“I will have you know we are quite attractive,” Draco harrumphed. “And no, we haven’t had any daughters in the past century. My father just said it’s because you’re…” he trailed off, not sure he should say the words.

“Blood traitors?” Ron finished. “Yeah- my dad said that Malfoys are a bunch of stuck-up blood purists, but you seem alright, at least after the first day of school. Maybe we can be the ones to end this stupid feud.”

“Oh, it’s not stupid,” Draco contradicted. “My father is a stuck-up blood purist, but my mother isn’t. I think she’d probably get along with yours.” When Ron looked at him a little dubiously, he raised his hands in a placating motion.

“No, really,” he reiterated. “It was a marriage contract, you know- all the old families do them. My mum threw a fit when they tried to pair her with my dad, but they didn’t really give her much choice. Now she has a bit of a reputation for being unstable- my father paid a lot in bribes to shut up those whispers.”

“I think I’d throw a fit if someone tried to force me to marry someone I didn’t love. I mean- I know some cultures still do arranged marriages, but the daughters at least have a choice now, usually. That’s different,” Hermione declared.

“Mr. Malfoy wanted to pair me and Draco up almost as soon as we were born,” Pansy informed them. “But even if my dad could have been persuaded, our mums threw a fit about it.”
“Yeah,” Draco said. “Mum still starts breaking things whenever Father suggests trying to start up the negotiations again.”

“And even if they did, I’d sooner be disowned before marrying you,” Pansy told her best friend.
“No, it’s not like that,” she said when some of the others looked at her as if that was a bit harsh. “I like girls, girls, and only girls.”

“So is the wizarding world not homophobic?” Harry asked the group.

“Not exactly,” Draco signed while simultaneously speaking aloud. “I mean, there’s an expectation in the old families to get married and have children, but everyone looks the other way if you’re a matador on the side, as long as you’ve a cow at home.”

“Lesbians, on the other hand, are considered to be disturbed succubi,” Daphne said.

“Stupid double standard,” Pansy huffed, crossing her arms.

“It’s always been that way,” Hermione sighed. “Historically, it’s been rather common for men to seek sexual pleasure via other men- the Roman armies, the pre-revolutionary French courts, even King James the first of England. But wives were supposed to stay in the home and look the other way- they couldn’t have relations with other women because they weren’t supposed to have sexual needs in the first place,” she lectured, stopping when she saw everyone staring at her. “What?” she asked, primly. “I read about it in a book once.”

“Your parents let you read that kind of stuff?” Pansy cried. “Lucky!”

“The rule in my house is that I can read any book in the house as long as I can reach the shelf,” Hermione said. “And my parents never said I couldn’t use a ladder.”

“It would have been a crime if the hat placed you in any other house,” Blaise declared solemnly.

Harry couldn’t wait to get out of the hospital wing the next morning, and Poppy found herself threatening to put a sticking charm on him if he wouldn’t stay still until she finished her examination. Hermione had politely told her to do Harry’s first, since he was so eager to leave, and he waited outside the door for his friend, smiling at her when she too, came out to walk with him to breakfast, and Poppy walked with them due to the safety concerns, with the perpetrators of the attack still being at large. Hermione took his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze as Ron came up, panting, to meet them at the end of the hallway.

“Sorry,” he said, putting his hands on his knees and wheezing a little, but making sure to keep his face towards Harry so his best friend could read his lips. “I wanted to meet you right when you got out, but I got a little lost.”

“It’s okay mate,” Harry told him, smiling at the consideration. “You could have just met us at breakfast, but we’re glad you’re here.” Ron grabbed his other hands as they all walked down to breakfast, swinging their arms.

When they entered the hall, Ron and Hermione gasped as the whole school started clapping and cheering for them, and when Harry caught on to what was happening (it took a little longer for him, obviously, since he couldn’t hear their reactions but had to cast his eyes around the room first), he also looked surprised.

“WHOO, THAT’S OUR BROTHER!” George and Fred whooped. “BEAT A TROLL WITH HIS OWN CLUB!”
“THAT WAS A DEFINITE SLYTHER-WIN!” a hufflepuff third year with golden-brown hair called out, as one of his friends slapped him on the arm.

“Enough with the puns, Cedric,” she said, rolling her eyes. Harry, who’s eyes had snagged on said Hufflepuffs (for some reason, Cedric made his tummy do an odd little flip-flop that had nothing to do with his sensitive digestive system), was able to lip-read the conversation even though his friends couldn’t hear it. Being deaf had its perks, sometimes.

“You coming, bro?” Ron tugged gently on his arm, while Hermione rolled her eyes with a knowing smile.

“Yeah,” Harry said, tearing his eyes away from the other boy.

“Any news with the trial?” Hermione asked Pansy without preamble as they sat down.

“Pettigrew’s guilty, and Sirius’ trial is starting,” she told them, handing Mia the newspaper.

“Good,” Hermione said. “Now they just have to see what’s right in front of their eyes and find Sirius innocent.”

“That’s harder than it should be for the ministry, though…” Pansy whispered into Hermione’s ear, close enough that Harry couldn’t lip-read, so the conversation wouldn’t worry him.

“Everything will be fine,” Hermione then said out loud, signing it as well and hoping Harry wasn’t paying enough attention to her to pick up on her slight anxiety, and that she was keeping it out of her body language well enough.

Sirius Black sat in the manacled chair the next morning, in front of the entire Wizengamot and sweating nervously. He knew his overall appearance didn’t help his case, but the boat that had been scheduled to pick him up from Azkaban and take him to the trial had been late both days, giving him no time for the shower and haircut he’d been hoping for. He wished his hands were free so he could fiddle with them nervously, but he couldn’t so he fidgeted instead as the judge came back into the room.

“Sirius Black, we have reviewed the evidence and your testimony, and it is the court’s decision that you were indeed, wrongly convicted, and we hereby clear you of all charges and restore to you all the rights, privileges, and capital due to you as the Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. In addition, this court awards you 100,000 galleons as restitution for your wrongful imprisonment (compared to the fortune of House Black, 100,000 galleons was a pittance, and it certainly wasn’t enough to make up for ten years in Azkaban in any case, but Sirius was so relieved to be free he didn’t care). We do, however, require that you register your animagus form before you leave here today, at which point your wand will be restored to you and you will be free to go.” The manacles swung free, and he was escorted to a side chamber, where an employee from the animagus registry was waiting (they really weren’t giving him any leeway on that requirement, even though he was starving and hadn’t seen the sun in ten years). He went through that process as quickly as he could, although the employee was agonisingly slow to record his markings and file the paperwork, and then he got his wand back from the front desk and high-tailed it out of there, ready to go watch his godson play his first quidditch game.

And who was waiting for him outside the Ministry building but Minerva McGonagall?

“Minnie!” he cheered, hugging her, and she didn’t comment on how filthy he was or scold him for the nickname, she was just so relieved he was out. It had seemed like there were so many obstacles to what should have been a simple process…
“Let’s go watch Harry play quidditch- I can’t believe I’m saying this, but Go Slytherin!” he exclaimed, giddy with relief and excitement.

“Not so fast, Sirius Black- I’ve rented out a room at The Leaky for the morning, and we’re going to get you a shower, a haircut, and a good meal before you go anywhere,” she scolded, and Padfoot couldn’t help but laugh- good old Minnie, more of a mother to him than his own ever was (her and Mrs. Potter, and Sirius hoped that he would be able to teach Harry faarsi like his dad had always wanted. His pronunciation was terrible, but he could at least read and write in it, and that would probably better anyway when teaching a deaf child a new language…).

Meanwhile, Harry was standing in Professor Snape’s office, giving him his best begging look.

“Please, Professor,” he pleaded. “I’m only half a pound short- and I’ve been eating really well, I have! I’ll gain more, and I’m so close- Flint will be so disappointed if I can’t play today…”

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed- he didn’t give a flying fuck what the prefect thought when it was the health of his ward that concerned him, but he did want Harry to be happy (damn these newfound emotions to hell) and he was rather close…

“Alright, fine,” he capitulated, and Harry cheered, pumping his fist in the air. “But if the game lasts any longer than two hours, I will pull you out.”

“Catch the snitch in two hours- I can do that,” Harry declared firmly to himself. “You got it! Oh, and professor?” an uncertain, frightened look came over his face, “can I please change in the dorms instead of the locker rooms? I don’t want anyone to… well, I don’t want them to see…”

“How about I glamour your scars?” Severus offered. “I can do it without you having to take your robes off, and that way nobody will question you as to why you didn’t change in the locker rooms. I’ll just take them off after the game.”

“How about you glamour your scars?” Harry reached out, and, surprising the potions master, gave him an enthusiastic hug around the middle. Severus patted him awkwardly back- he couldn’t remember being hugged properly since Lily was alive- Albus had tried a few times; but those made him more uncomfortable than anything.

“You’re… you’re welcome, Harry,” he looked down at the child’s face so he could see him speaking. “And Harry?” he asked, just before the child turned away and he lost both his chance and his courage.

The child looked up at him quizzically. “You may call me Severus, when we’re not in class…” he trailed off, and Harry gave him one last tentative, adorable smile.

“Thanks… Severus…” he said softly as he left.

Harry had to stop himself, in the locker room, from touching his smooth, unscarred skin in awe as he changed, as that would probably draw unwanted attention. He knew that it was just an illusion, and that as soon as the game was over and he was back in his school robes he would once more see the outline of his ribs (although not as prominent as when he had arrived at school, thankfully) and the ugly, raised lines of criss-crossing scars from belt buckles (and some from Marge’s dog chains or broken glass and sharp stones, courtesy of Dudley’s gang), but for now he allowed himself just a moment to think about what could have been as he pulled on his green seeker’s robes and grabbed his new Nimbus 2000, which Professor Snape (“Severus, he reminded himself. He asked you to call him Severus”) had presented him with yesterday, before sending him back to the dorm after his profuse exclamations of gratitude showed no signs of slowing down, even at the five-minute mark.
He watched Flint and Wood shake hands (and wondered how long it would be before someone found them snogging in the broom shed) and waved cheerfully to Fred and George as they all mounted their brooms, and Madame Hooch gave off a burst of coloured sparks from her wand at the same time she blew the whistle so Harry wouldn’t have to wait to see other students kicking off before he realised it was time.

He couldn’t hear the announcements, but Flint had pulled him aside in the locker room and told him not to worry about it- it would help keep his focus on the snitch, anyway, and that Hooch had given the team special permission to call a time-out if they needed to inform him of the score for any reason (he was the best flyer she’d seen her entire career; if he wanted an entire herd of abraxi to pull his broom, she would have given it to him). She and Severus had also worked together and created a charm that would cause his glasses to gently vibrate if there was a bludger coming at him, since he wouldn’t be able to hear the whooshing of the wind as it moved or the warnings of his teammates.

He didn’t think flying could get any better, but being on his new broom for the first time, he realised that it was more amazing than he’d ever imagined as he swooped and sped and loop-de-looped his way around the pitch, keeping an eye out for the snitch the whole time.

Everything was going well (even if the speed at which Harry flew and the tricks he performed in the air secretly made Severus very nervous) for the first half an hour, until Harry suddenly felt his broom give a strange buck. He inclined his head to the side as he pondered- was this a new security feature? Nope, definitely not, he deduced as the bucking got more violent, trying to dislodge him.

Nimbus 2000’s were not supposed to try to buck their riders off, and Harry was suddenly thankful, for the first time in his life, that he had plenty of practice keeping his balance while being knocked around as he held tightly to the broomstick with his hands and knees. His glasses vibrated at the worst possible time, seeing as he couldn’t control his broom to dodge the bludger, but luckily two Slytherin and two Gryffindor beaters had abandoned the game for a moment to chase it, and George Weasley managed to knock it away as Harry mumbled a weak “thank you.” He couldn’t see his lips to catch a response, but he didn’t think that was the biggest problem right now. His broom gave another buck as he, distracted from the bludger, was thrown off, gripping his broom handle with one gloved hand (Severus wouldn’t tell Harry this, but he’d had to custom-order gloves to fit his hands, as even the smallest size of gloves ran too large). By some sort of unspoken agreement, one Slytherin and one Gryffindor Beater flew below him, waiting to catch him if he fell, and the others went back to the game as Harry’s broom took him higher and higher. Fred (Harry didn’t know how he knew that the twin below him was Fred, he just did) flew up and tried to grab him and pull him down to safety, but the broom just jerked higher and higher, out of reach. Soon, the entire game was abandoned as every single player tried to catch the little seeker they all felt so protective of (even Marcus and Oliver set aside their rivalry for the moment, working together to create a strategy to try to corner the broom). But the closer they got and the more they tried, the more Harry’s broom bucked and the higher it went. Out of the corner of his eye, he caught Severus muttering something under his breath, and he realised that he was working on a counter-curse to try to stop whatever was wrong. He’d seen Severus’ magical capabilities, so he was sure that if he could just hold on a little longer...

Meanwhile, Hermione was watching the entire thing with fear as even Madam Hooch abandoned her position as referee to join the teams in trying to catch Harry, and she too, caught sight of Severus muttering a counter curse. She looked further, for whoever might be cursing Harry, and her eyes caught on…

Of course- Quirrell! “Stay here,” she whispered to Ron and Neville, who was sitting with them, his friendship with Harry more important to him than quidditch team affiliation. “I’ll be right back.” She swung quietly under the stands and crossed to where Quirrell was sitting, pulling out the jar she carried in an expanded pocket of her robes and conjuring some blue fire in it. Letting it loose, she
watched the hem of the man’s robes catch fire as he lost the rhythm of his whispered chant, and she quickly pulled the fire back in the jar and crept away before the DADA professor could see her.

Harry’s broom suddenly stopped bucking, so suddenly that the motion threw him off, and he fell, freely through the air, his heart catching in his throat as everyone scrambled to reach him. Finally, Fred managed to get an arm under his chest (and ouch, at that velocity, that was going to bruise) and fly him gently to the ground.

Unfortunately, that wasn’t his only problem as he tried and failed to catch his breath around the lump in his throat that was… not a normal lump.

“He’s choking!” one of the Slytherin chasers yelled, and Fred realised and thanked Merlin that his dad was so interested in muggles, as he’d insisted all his children learn how to do the heimlich maneuver. The snitch came shooting out of Harry’s throat, and despite being bruised, out of breath, and coming down from a terrifying experience, his hand automatically reached out to grab it before it could fly away again and create a hassle for everyone.

“He caught the snitch!” Sirius Black had finally eaten enough to satisfy Minnie and get to Hogwarts just in time to see Harry spit the snitch out and catch it again, and he ran towards his godson and swept him up in an enthusiastic, bone-crushing hug that hurt Harry’s chest but soothed his soul more as he inhaled the long-past but still-familiar scent of motor oil, leather, and summer-scented cologne.

“Padfoot!” he cried, as loudly as he could with his recently-snitched throat, hugging him back tightly. “I’m so glad you’re here.”
Harry continued hugging his godfather while the rest of the school looked on, and he never wanted to let go. He’d long since forgotten what it felt like to be held with so much love, and it was so amazing that he snuggled in deeper to Sirius’ chest. They were both far too thin, but he was warm and comfortable.

“You remember me, pup?” his godfather asked, burying his face in Harry’s messy curls as he swallowed back his anxiety- he could feel Harry’s ribs through his quidditch robes.

“He can’t hear you- you have to make sure he can see your face,” Marcus Flint reminded him as he helped Fred and George wrestle the bludgers into their box.

Harry moved so that his chin was on Padfoot’s shoulder, resting his cheek against his new silk robes.

“I missed you so much- Severus and Professor McGonagall found some old memories mum and dad left me, and you were there, and I remember when you used to swing me around and feed me sweets,” he murmured into the soft cloth, but was too comfortable to raise his head to see what Sirius had to say to that.

Sirius was rather surprised, to be honest- Sniv- Severus let Harry, James Potter’s son, call him by his first name? A lot must have changed while he’d been in Azkaban. He didn’t have time to ponder it further, as Madame Pomfrey came scurrying towards them.

“Good to have you back, Mr. Black- but I am afraid I’m going to need to take Harry from you for a moment- there was an incident with his broom and he fell a fair ways,” Poppy told him. Harry felt someone come up, turned around, saw it was the nurse, and petulantly snuggled further into Sirius.

“Not bad,” he mumbled. “But… I don’t think it’s fair that Slytherin wins- you were all trying to help me.” He looked at the assembled players of both teams.

“No, you guys won fair and square,” Katie Bell insisted, clapping a hand on Oliver’s shoulder to stop any potential protest. “We all chose to stop playing, and you guys were in the lead anyway- besides, that catch was damn impressive!”

“I- it was more an accident,” Harry stuttered, blushing.

“Not when you caught it coming back up,” Fred told him, patting him on the back.

“I’m coming with you,” Harry’s godfather insisted, leaving no room for dispute.

“I will accompany you all as well,” Severus still wasn’t exactly the world’s largest fan of Sirius Black, but Harry was still his responsibility and he wanted to ensure nothing was amiss.

“Don’t wanna go,” Harry mumbled, still being carried by Poppy. He didn’t bother to look up, sure he wouldn’t like the answer anyway.
“Does anyone know what Remus has been up to?” Sirius asked hesitantly- he had his godson back, now if he could just see his old boyfriend… if he’d still have him.

“Last I heard, he had a place on Knockturn Alley,” Snape said, and Poppy sighed as she sat Harry on the bed and pulled the curtains closed to examine Harry. Sirius almost tried to step closer so he could hold Harry’s hand and offer him comfort, but Severus pulled him back with a significant look. As much as he would have loved to argue with the man, he realised that this was more than just their childhood feud in play.

“Remus is on Knockturn, then?” Sirius ran his hand through his newly-cut hair and sighed sadly. He hated to think of his love having such a hard time.

“Yes- last I heard from Albus. I can’t even remember why he mentioned it. To be frank, I didn’t much want to know,” Severus said, trying not to come across the wrong way.

“Albus knew Remy was having a hard time, then- I wonder why he didn’t…”

“Same reason he never pushed for a trial for you- it interfered with his plans. The only reason he didn’t leave me to the same fate is that I was useful to him,” the potions master admitted bluntly.

“I- how did our lives end up like this? We were so full of potential, so sure we knew what we were doing.”

“Maybe you knew where you were going, but it was different for some of us,” Severus reminded him, just a little bitterly.

“Yeah, about that…” Sirius chewed his lip- how to even begin trying to bridge a gap like this?

“It- maybe it doesn’t matter anymore,” Severus almost couldn’t believe the words coming out of his mouth, but here they were. “We just have to make sure that Harry ends up in a better place than we were… and I dare say you suffered enough, or at least nearly.”

“Forgot what a smartarse you are,” Sirius rolled his eyes, but any further conversation was cut off as Poppy came out.

“Some pretty deep bruising and a few cracked ribs,” she answered preemptively as both men opened their mouths. “I’ll be keeping him overnight.”

“How’d he take that?” Severus quirked his lip just a little.

“He’s pouting with his head hidden, refusing to engage in conversation,” she chuckled. “Chipper as little bird except when he’s in here- then he’s a moody little snippet.”

“Professor!” Ron and Hermione suddenly skidded to a stop and then burst in. “It was Quirrell!” they both exclaimed, running up to tug on his robe and gesticulate wildly as they talked over each other.

“Shh- calm down and tell me, one at a time, what happened,” he instructed his snakes sternly.

“It was Quirrell- the one who cursed Harry’s broom!” Ron proclaimed. “We went to Dumbledore, but he said he wouldn’t get rid of him because we had no proof!” he clenched his fists tightly, and Hermione would have done the same thing if it weren’t for her bandaged wrists.

“I figured,” Severus sighed. “I’ve gone to him with my suspicions before, almost immediately after he was hired as defence professor, but he said the same thing- he’s not very prone to listening to any opinions but his own, that one.”
“Harry’s broom was cursed?!” Sirius paled.

“It was,” Hermione asserted, her eyes glinting a dangerous shade of bronze. “It was trying to buck him off- Professor Snape was performing the countercurse, luckily, or he would have fallen a lot farther a lot sooner.”

“It’s strange- Quirrell was never a very powerful wizard, but I was coming up against a lot of force trying to counter the spell. I don’t think I would have been able to, but he broke the chant suddenly- would you two have anything to do with that?” he turned to his students, raising an eyebrow.

Hermione straightened her back, squared her shoulders, and looked him in the eye. “It was me, Professor, so Ron shouldn’t get in any trouble.”

“I’m not about to punish you for saving a fellow student,” Severus said, “although taking the blame is so very… Gryffindor.” He pursed his lips. “Please tell me that the method that you used, at least, was befitting our house.”

“She set him on fire!” Ron declared proudly, puffing out his chest.

“Which spell?” Severus turned to Hermione.

“*Ignus*, in a jar.”

“Ten points to Slytherin- incredibly creative, as well as controllable, which is the most important thing when working with fire.” His mind flashed back to Seamus in- well, every potions class he’d had so far, really.

“How’s Harry?” Hermione switched gears, well familiar with the rules on spellfyre- she’d looked it up before she’d even attempted her little jar of flames.

In what was a coincidental overlap in timing, Harry called out “I’m bored!”

“I just had to let the bruise balm finish soaking,” Poppy came over and told him, “but now we can put your shirt back on and pull the screen back- and you’ve got some friends here to see you.”

“Ron! Mione!” Harry called cheerfully as he straightened his pyjama top, and the two discreetly exchanged concerned looks as they caught a flash of the curled end of a raised scar on his collarbone as he pulled the clothing into place.

“Hey Har,” Ron came up and squeezed his shoulder, delicately feeling around for the outline of the scar, which wasn’t hard to find. He pulled his hand away before Harry caught on, but he gave Hermione another dark look as she came to hold his hand.

“I’m sorry I’m stuck here on your first day being free,” Harry sighed, turning to his godfather.

“It’s not your fault, pup,” Sirius told him gently, stepping closer to Harry so he’d have an easier time lip-reading. “And hey- we’ll have plenty of time to catch up. I’m not going anywhere anytime soon.”

“Are you gonna be okay?” his godson asked him, worrying his hands, big green eyes scanning his face for the shadows of trauma.

“I’ll manage kiddo, don’t worry. I’ve thought about it, and I was thinking about going to see a mind healer so I’ll be in better condition to take care of you.” Sirius ruffled his hair.
Severus shot him a sidelong glance… so he was planning to take Harry back, then. He tried not to let the thought bother him- after all, he’d only had custody of him for two months. It shouldn’t be a big deal for him to give the child over to someone who had more of a claim, as well as a past relationship.

Harry saw Severus having an internal debate about something, looking like he could use a distraction. “Uh, Prof- Severus?” he asked softly.

“Yes, Harry?” the head of Slytherin shoved the niggling concerns to the back of his mind, in the little box where he put all his emotions.

“I actually had a question about a potion I read about in the library…”

Harry fell asleep after lunch, the potion Poppy gave him for his ribs making him tired, and Sirius got up from his seat at Harry’s bedside.

“You guys feel free to stay here,” he told Ron and Hermione. “I’ve just got to go send an owl.” He didn’t know Remy’s exact address, but luckily, Hogwarts owls were intelligent. “I’ll be back before he wakes up.”

“Alright- and if he doesn’t stay asleep as long as usual, I’ll let him know you’ll be back soon,” Mione agreed pleasantly, while Ron adjusted the curtains on the window above Harry so the light wouldn’t bother him and gently plucked his glasses off his face.

“Severus- why don’t you come with me? I need to borrow some quills and ink,” Sirius prompted the other man, tapping him on the shoulder from where he sat in a transfigured armchair a short ways away from Harry’s bed, grading papers.

“I’m sure you can find some somewhere without involving me,” he grumbled, making angry red edits on some poor Hufflepuff’s essay.

“Yes, but it would give me great satisfaction to steal them from you,” the dog animagus said with a significant look. “So why don’t you come with me anyway?”

“Fine,” Severus huffed, putting down the homework assignment, so mangled by red marks the original content was almost unreadable.

“I’m not going to just rip Harry away from you, you know,” Sirius told him earnestly as they headed towards the owlery.

“What makes you think it makes any difference to me?” the other man ground out as he brushed an invisible speck of dust off his robes.

“Cut the shite, Snape- I’ve seen the way you look at him, and frankly, it’s the only time I’ve ever seen you look human. Oh- don’t look at me like that- we may not have been the best to you in school, but you were never exactly a friendly flower,” Sirius rolled his eyes. “Anyway, I was twenty-one when I went to Azkaban, and that place isn’t exactly known for aiding emotional maturity. And he’s in Hogwarts now anyway, in your house, and if you want to put a room for him in your quarters and give him some of the love and affection those monsters never did, I’d be grateful- sure, you’re not the person I would have chosen to put in charge of my godson, but you’re doing alright so far, and the important thing for me is that Harry’s is happy. I’d like to have him during the summers, and at Christmas if he wants to come home, but I’m not going to ban you from my house if Harry wants to see you. I just want to do right by my godson, and as impossible as I might have thought it three months ago, so do you, apparently.”
“That’s… that means a lot, mutt,” Severus said as neutrally as possible.

“He could use all the love he can get,” Sirius tugged at a lock of his hair, now clean and soft from his shower that morning. “I think he might have been in a worse place than I was these last ten years, and I just… I don’t want him to hurt anymore. I didn’t want him to hurt in the first place. But I don’t know how to stop his pain- I don’t even know how to handle my own pain. Granted, you’re not the best with emotions either… hopefully Remy wants something to do with me- he’ll know how to help. For Harry, at least… it was a hard time when… when I left, and there was so much secrecy. I don’t know if he’ll want me back- hell, why am I even talking to you about this. We’re not friends or anything, even if we are co-parenting.”

“Black,” Severus cut him off, “I’ve seen you with that wolf of yours- you were stupidly, sickeningly in love. If you can’t make it work with him, then the rest of us are well and truly fucked when it comes to relationships. Now look- here’s the owlery, so you can stop fussing about it and find out.”

Severus crossed his arms over his chest.

“Merlin, I can’t believe I’m saying this, but thanks, you great git.”

Severus rolled his eyes. “You never even got the quills you made such a fuss over.”

Sirius twirled his newly-reclaimed wand. “Not a problem- wizards, remember?”

“Merlin, what have I gotten myself into?” Snape muttered under his breath as he walked away.

Sirius needn’t have worried, as Remus had been following the trial and waiting anxiously for a letter. He was worried Sirius wouldn’t forgive him for just losing trust like that- for believing he’d leave Lily and James, but the letter that came for him held no rebuke or antipathy. It was ten years of withheld emotion poured onto parchment, and Remus found himself holding back tears as he apparated to the Hogwarts gate after dark that night. He found his old lover waiting for him at the main entrance, leaning against the doorway in his old leather jacket and a pair of muggle jeans, a smirk on his face.

“Merlin, Remy, looks like it’s been ages since you’ve had a good meal.” Sirius’ tone was light, but his eyes were worried as they roved the werewolf’s tired form.

“Me? You’re skin and bones, you old dog.” Remus stepped forward apprehensively, but the other man pulled him into a tight hug, inhaling his scent.

“Our godson looks worse,” he sighed, “but that’s a long story. I’m so glad you wanted to see me.”

“Oh Pads- I’m the one who’s on shaky grounds here- I should have known you would never do something like that.” Remus rested his head against Sirius’ chest with a sigh.

“And we should have trusted you with our plans,” Sirius said earnestly. “We shouldn’t have doubted each other, but war is hell.”

“It cast a dark shadow over all of us,” Moony agreed, slowly and carefully bringing his hand up to Sirius’ shoulder, waiting for him to tell him to stop. He didn’t, but rather pulled Remus’ chin forward gently, leaning down until their lips were touching gently. It was slow and soft, a decade of apologies and ‘I missed you’s’ in one, and afterwards, in lieu of pulling away, they stayed face to face, foreheads touching gently and hands intertwined.

“How’s Harry?” Remus asked trepidatiously, remembering their earlier conversation.

“He was with the Dursleys, Rems.” Sirius frowned against his partner, and Remus would have
brought a calloused thumb up to smooth away the tension if he hadn’t been so horrified himself.

“Albus wouldn’t!” he cried, unwilling to accept the horrible reality. “I asked about Harry whenever I could afford the postage, and he always told me he was fine, he was happy.”

“Is it really that hard to believe, though? We looked up to him; he was our hero- but he left me to rot in Azkaban and you to barely scrape by, even though he’d gotten you into Hogwarts so you could have a better future.”

“Some future that turned out to be- alone, unhappy, both of us missing each other and missing Harry, keeping ourselves together because we told ourselves at least he was okay.” The twilight cast shadows on Remus’ wan face, the grey in his hair more prominent than ever.

“Do you think he wanted us like that, so we couldn’t check after his plans? I mean, I hate to make wild accusations, but I never even got a trial, and Poppy earlier, she said-” his voice broke. “She said one look into that house should have been enough to know he was being treated terribly-abused, Remus, our godson was abused, and Dumbledore never even checked. He lost his hearing because of those monsters.”

There were occasions, rare ones, when Remus felt the wolf rising to the surface when the moon was far from full, the beast inside him straining to be let out, to rip apart those who had dared rouse his anger by hurting his pack. This was his cub, and Albus Dumbledore had let him get hurt through his ignorance and arrogance. And however long it took, he would face the repercussions.

“Come on,” Sirius squeezed his hand, disrupting his maudlin thoughts. “Let’s go see him.”

By the time they’d gotten to the hospital wing, Ron and Hermione had been sent back to the dorm, and Severus had to go back as well, to take care of his vespertine duties as head of house. Poppy was in the back room sorting potions, so Harry was alone. Poppy had healed his ribs, but he was still rather sore.

Sirius and Remus found him clutching his side, clenching his teeth as he pulled himself off the bed.

“Hey, what are you doing pup? You should be in bed,” Sirius told him gently, concerned, lighting his wand so Harry could see his face.

“Had to use the bathroom,” he grit out, sweat beading on his forehead. “Didn’t wanna bother anyone.”

“Hey, shh, you’ll never be a bother to us. C’mere.” Sirius picked him up carefully and carried him to the lavatory. “Do you need me to go in with you?”

“No, I got it.” Harry said, face heating up in embarrassment.

“Okay prongslet- we’ll be right out here, okay?” That was when Harry looked up and saw Remus, hovering anxiously in the doorway.

“Uncle Moony?” he asked, cocking his head. “You came?”

“Course I did, cub. I asked about you all the time, but Dumbledore wouldn’t tell me where you were, only that you were safe. I wanted to see you when you got to school, but I didn’t want to intrude in your life.” Moony, too, lit his wand in front of his place.

“I missed you,” Harry said quietly. “I’ll be right out.”
“Take your time, pup- don’t hurt yourself.”

There was silence for a moment, then the sound of flushing and running water before Harry shuffled out again, and Sirius scooped him up in his arms and carried him back to bed, tucking him in softly before giving him a kiss on the forehead.

“You look tired, Uncle Moony- is everything alright?” Remus’ heart broke- here was Harry, so small, injured, scarred for life, and he was worried about this adult he hadn’t seen in then years.

“I’m fine, cub- everything’s all right now.”

Poppy let him out at noon the next day, a Sunday, and Harry then set about begging to be allowed to go see Sirius and Remus’ house.

“It hasn’t been cleaned or touched in years, pup- there’s just a cranky old house elf and a lot of dark artefacts. You wouldn’t like it very much, I don’t think- why don’t you see it when it’s all cleaned up and we have your room ready?”

“I get a room?!” Harry looked so surprised by this simple act of basic decency that Sirius felt a lump form in his throat.

“Course you do- what, did you think we’d make you sleep under the stairs?” Padfoot went to ruffle Harry’s hair in jest, but he stopped when he saw the way his godson had paled dramatically, his eyes like a baby deer caught in the headlights of a muggle car. Sirius and Remus felt bile rising up from their stomachs.

“Harry- did they… did the Dursleys…did they make you sleep under the stairs?” Harry could no longer bare to see the anger in his face, or the pity in his eyes, so he turned away, but slowly, nearly imperceptibly, he nodded. Sirius very carefully knelt down until he caught Harry’s eye.

“You know what, cub? If you wanna see the house, I think we could arrange that, and maybe we can bring Ron and Hermione too.” His godson looked up at him, big green eyes visible through fans of long dark lashes.

“Yeah?” he whispered, apprehensively.

“Of course- anything that’ll make you happy, alright? Now, do you have a book that teaches BSL?” Harry nodded- Severus had gotten several copies and placed them on the bookshelves in the common room.

“Good- why don’t you go grab one to bring to Uncle Moony and I so we can start learning, and while you do that, we’ll talk to old Sev, alright?” Harry nodded again and bustled off, more cheerfully this time, with Poppy escorting him, as per the agreement with Severus, as they still weren’t sure if it was safe for him and his friends to be walking about.

“You want to take him where?” Severus paled a little, knowing what kind of things Sirius’ parents had gotten into- the same things he himself had made the mistake of exploring.

“I know it’s not the best place, but Harry wanted to see it, and we’d bring Ron and Hermione and keep an eye on him the whole time. We- they made him sleep under the stairs, Severus, and we just wanna give him something he wants, for once. I mean, I’m technically his guardian, now that I’m out, but I know you’ve been working hard to take care of him and I’d really like to be able to reach an agreement on these kinds of things.” Sirius looked at him, grey eyes unusually open; he’d laid all his cards on the table and was waiting like he cared about the potion master’s opinion.
“Under the stairs?” Severus clenched his jaw so tightly he felt a vein pop in his forehead, a knot forming in his stomach and another in his shoulders. He forced himself to breathe deeply, before his muscles turned into a tight bundle of knotted cord.

“Yeah,” Remus let out a low growl, and for once Severus made no comment on the lupine characteristic.

“Oh Merlin- and I’ve heard him mention his cousin’s second bedroom… take him if he wants to go-just, be careful.”

“We will- he’s the most important thing in our life, you know,” Sirius said, and Remus squeezed his boyfriend’s hand, noticing how he’d used the word life, as in singular- they were back where they were supposed to be- with the other.

“I got the book, guys!” Harry was waiting for them when they stepped out of Severus’ office, proudly waving a copy of BSL for Beginners.

“Awesome, buddy- now why don’t you go get Ron and Hermione and we’ll floo over, alright? I’m just gonna go over first to make sure there’s nothing that is an immediate threat, and then Remus will bring you guys through,” Sirius told him.

Brandishing his wand, Sirius took a pinch of powder and stepped through the flames to his childhood abode (it wasn’t a home, just like it wasn’t much of a childhood). He looked around, tensing in preparation for anything that might jump or fly out at him, ready to scratch his eyes out or bite his neck or whatever else- this was a house full of black, evil magic that had been left alone for years. Who knew what had gravitated to it in the interim?

Senses on alert, he thanked Merlin that his parents, at least, didn’t hurt him enough to deprive him of his hearing as he followed a series of noises towards the hallway outside the kitchen.

“How goes in Kreacher’s home?” the voice was both raspy and squeaky, as well as very, very familiar, and Sirius suppressed a shudder at the sound of the old elf’s voice- his mother’s faithful little spy, he’d been. But Sirius took a deep breath and tiptoed to the source, which was of course the cupboard under the fucking stairs.

“Hey, Kreacher- it’s me- Sirius. I’m the master now, so why don’t you just come out, nice and slow, okay?”

“Mistress’ poor heart would be broken, it would, if she knew her blood traitor son ran the home, poor old mistress,” Kreacher mumbled under his breath but loud enough to be heard. Sirius took a deep breath to rein in his anger- now was not the time to be getting in a tiff with his elf, and he needed to get him out of the cupboard before Harry could come over.

“I know this is probably an adjustment for you, but I need you to get out of the cupboard, okay?” Sirius held his hands out placatingly, speaking as if to a spooked animal.

“Blood traitor master cannot be kicking Kreacher out of his home, he just cannot! Kreacher has served noble Black family for over a hundred years! Kreacher will not go!” the elf railed, pulling his ears as he stomped about.

“Kreacher, relax! I’m not going to kick you out, alright? I just want you to move your stuff out of the cupboard- my godson is coming over and he wouldn’t want to see you in the cupboard- he’s very compassionate and it would hurt him. You can take Regulus’ old bedroom, alright? Just for Merlin’s sake- get out of the cupboard!”
“Master- master is giving Kreacher Master Regulus’ old bedroom?” the elf asked, almost hopefully.

“Yeah- there’s more than enough room for everyone to have a bedroom, and I know you were always really close to Reg- you can do whatever you want with the room, just don’t leave out anything dark that could hurt somebody, alright?”

Kreacher looked at Sirius suspiciously, but with less outright hostility. “Alright,” he agreed, snapping his fingers as his meagre possessions moved upstairs to his new space.

“Oh, and Kreacher?” The elf looked back. “Can you do one more thing- banish this cupboard, would you? I don’t want us to have one- we don’t need it. Just a blank wall, please.”

“Very well… master,” Kreacher acquiesced, setting to the task, and Sirius did a quick scan of the rest of the house. Finding nothing more than a boggart or two, an infestation of doxies, a few dark artefacts, but none that would be an immediate problem, and a lot of dirt, he went back to the floo.

“You can come on through,” he said, sticking his head back to the Slytherin common room. Hermione and Harry, both new to the wizarding world, floo’ed with Ron and Remus, respectively.

“You is little master?” Kreacher immediately came up to Harry, inspecting him.

“Er, I’m sorry… I don’t understand. I’m deaf, see, and your lips are a bit hard to read. I’m sure I could learn, given time, but I’ve never tried on anyone but humans, and er, a goblin once. Pardon me…?”

“Kreacher, Kreacher the house elf,” he snapped his gnarled fingers, and the words appeared above his head, glowing. The elf, only a little shorter than Harry, stood up on tiptoes to peek inside his ear.

“Oh, hello… that tickles!” he suddenly exclaimed, giggling and stepping away from the creature.

“What is odd sound little master makes?” Kreacher cocked his head quizzically as the letters fizzled into being for Harry to read, and he realised that Kreacher’s life must have been rather similar to his own.

“Oh, that’s laughter,” he gave the elf a small smile and very softly reached out to tickle a long floppy ear.

“Eeek!” Kreacher let out a screechy little cackle before his face broke into a grin, ugly but happy nonetheless. Sirius mused to himself that he didn’t seem so bad this way.

“Ah, yes- Kreacher likes this laughter- it is nice.” He poked at Harry’s ribs and gave a disproving little frown. “But little master is too little. Little master sit,” he snapped his fingers to instantly clean an old, plush armchair before pushing Harry into it gently. “Kreacher go make little master something to eat, so little master has more energy for laughter.”

“By Merlin, you’re a miracle worker!” Remus told Harry with an incredulous expression as Ron and Hermione’s eyes followed the elf to the kitchen.

“He just needed someone to understand,” the green-eyed Iranian boy said with a knowing little smile as Kreacher came back with a plate of sandwiches. Sirius cast a subtle charm, just in case, and the food was indeed safe. He set the plate on Harry’s lap and sat back on his heels, watching Harry intently, as if ensuring he would eat.

Eyes still on the elf, Harry picked up the first sandwich and took a bite. “It’s good- thank you.” He grinned at Kreacher, who beamed.
“Good little master,” he patted his head.

“You can call me Harry,” Harry said, and Kreacher cocked his head again, trying to figure out this strange little human.

“O-kay,” he responded at last, the subtitles still flashing above his head. “Little master Harry.” Harry didn’t correct him—close enough for now.

Once Harry finished the first sandwich, he felt rather full, and Kreacher clucked his tongue as he took the plate back to the kitchen. “Not eat much, little master,” he muttered, no subtitles appearing. “Kreacher work on that.”

“It’ll be a nice place, once you get it all fixed up,” Ron commented, looking around, while Hermione asked Remus all sorts of questions about house elves, and he answered as honestly yet as delicately as he could, knowing it could be a touchy subject for muggleborns.

“It’s—yes, some people treat their elves like slaves, far too many, and reform is necessary, but unlike with enslaved people, immediate freedom isn’t exactly the solution. House elves are often very proud of what they do, and would view being freed or offered payment as an insult. It would be a distant goal, yes, but if you want to do something, I would start smaller,” he explained to the girl, and Ron, listening, thought Remus would make a good professor.

“Hmmm,” Hermione pondered, pulling a little muggle notepad out of her pocket. “Good place to start… good place to start…”

“Come,” Kreacher came back into the room and took Harry by the hand. “Kreacher give little master Harry tour of home.” He looked back dismissively at Sirius and Remus. “You can come too, Kreacher supposes. And little master Harry’s friends.” He brightened considerably at this, curiously examining Ron’s freckles and pulling back one of Hermione’s curls, watching it boing back into place.

The elf led them up the stairs, and they hadn’t gotten very far before a portrait on the wall started screaming at them.

“Mudbloods and traitors and half-breeds in my house! Kreacher, get them OUT!” the painting of Walburga Black threw invectives around as she screeched at the elf, and Kreacher stepped forward towards the painting and put a hand towards it, almost tenderly.

“Shh, Mistress—this is little Master Harry and his friends—they is good people,” he told her, fully expecting her to come around and quiet down. Sirius actually felt bad for him.

“Kreacher, cease this nonsense at once! There’s a mudblood and a blood traitor and a filthy little runt of a boy and I want them gone, along with the halfbreed and my useless son!” At the word boy falling from such nastily curled lips on such a horridly angry face, Harry flinched violently, stepping back and eyeing the portrait warily, as if expecting her to step out of the frame and start beating him at any moment.

Kreacher looked at the dark little boy trembling in the corner, then back at the portrait of the woman he’d considered a saint his whole life. He watched again as Hermione stepped forward to calm Harry, and heard Walburga redirect her stream of obscenities at the muggleborn. Scrunching his face, he made a decision and turned his body away so he wouldn’t have to see the look on Walburga’s face as he blasted her to pieces, then sat on the floor, breathing shakily.

Harry watched all this happen, and despite still feeling frightened, he stepped towards Kreacher,
uncertainly wrapping his arms around the huddled elf. “Shh, it’s okay,” he soothed, rubbing his wrinkled back gently. “You did the right thing; it’s gonna be okay.”

Kreacher’s sobbing slowed, but did not stop, and Harry did the only other thing he could think of by that point. Very softly, so quietly it was almost inaudible at first, he started singing one of the only songs he could remember hearing by heart and didn’t need sheet music to puzzle out.

“Hold me closer tiny dancer; count the headlights on the highway. Lay me down in sheets of linen; you had a busy day today-ay.” He continued his quiet, soothing song as he continued rubbing Kreacher’s back, gently pulling him a little closer as he finished each verse, until the little elf was in his lap as he slowly rocked back and forth.

“Did you know he could sing?” Hermione whispered to Ron, not entirely sure why she was keeping her voice lowered, as Harry was looking away—force of habit, she supposed.

“Not a bloody clue- kind of the last thing you’d expect in a deaf person, isn’t it?” Ron whispered back, straining to catch every word of the euphonic muggle tune.

Kreacher finally stopped sniffling, and Remus tactfully banished the splinters of Mrs. Black while he was still distracted by Harry’s melody. He had his other hand in Sirius’, both of them tearing up a bit—he’d remembered James and Lily’s favourite song, subconsciously held it close to his heart to hold him through the hell he grew up in.

“Better?” Harry asked gently as he finished the song, and Kreacher nodded, running the end of his dirty pillowcase over his drippy nose.

“Here,” Harry said, casting a quick _scourgify_ to launder the pillowcase, and Kreacher smiled at him again as the words _thank you_ materialised where Harry could see them.

“Speaking of cleaning,” Sirius turned to Remus, “we should probably get to it.”

“Yes,” Kreacher agreed. “We make this home now.” He conjured a bucket of soapy water and a number of rags, gently pulling away Harry’s hand as he reached for one.

“No,” he shook his head. “Little master Harry needs to relax. Kreacher get a book for you.”

He disappeared for a moment and came back with an old bound novel, and Sirius bit back a gasp as Harry gently ran a hand over the old yellowing pages of Regulus’ favourite novel as a child.


“Little master Harry is being welcome to anything, anything he likes,” the subtitles appeared as Kreacher reached up on tiptoes to pat Harry’s head fondly.

Theo and Blaise were playing chess, Crabbe and Goyle were working on a homework assignment that they’d pushed off to the last minute, and the girls were doing makeup in their dorm. Harry, Ron, and Hermione were with cousin Sirius and his boyfriend, and Draco didn’t really have anyone else he’d care to spend time with at the moment. He’d struck up some friendly acquaintances with a couple Hufflepuffs, but they were rather chatty and he was hoping for some quiet companionship.

Lacking that, he took his book— _Northanger Abbey_—a recommendation from Harry, out to a quiet spot outside and sat against the wall of the castle to read. He was at first somewhat disenchanted with Catherine, her naivety and joyful spirit clearly a product of a golden childhood and close-knit family life that made him feel somewhat bitter, deep in the pit of his stomach, but he had begun to
warm to her slightly by the time she got to the Abbey. Her sweet gentle spirit reminded him somewhat of Harry’s, even if he was nearly certain the two came from entirely different backgrounds.

The voices of a few other students, most likely older, drifted around the corner just as Cate was grabbing her candlestick to explore the secret passageway, her imagination running wild. For a single irritated moment, he envied Harry his ability to always have peace and quiet no matter his surroundings, only to immediately feel guilty for the thought- his friend had clearly lost much more than he gained. This only made him feel more irritated with whoever was talking for setting him on such an unpleasant train of thought. He was about to get up and find a new place to read when the unsettlingly loud voices said something that captured his attention.

“Bloody genius the idea was- too bad it didn’t work,” a male voice was saying, and Draco peeked carefully around the rounded wall of the tower he’d been leaning against. He recognised him- a seventh-year Slytherin by the name of Benson Hepburn.

“Well, how was I supposed to know that fucking Harry Potter was going to go rushing off to rescue the stupid mudblood- you’re the one who didn’t knock him out properly,” a girl in Ravenclaw robes spat back.

“Oh, don’t give me that shite, Larissa,” another boy, in Gryffindor robes, snapped. “I saw him drop, and I couldn’t very well stick around forever, could I?”

“Look, it was a good plan- and deciding to kidnap the mudblood and bind her in the troll bathroom was brilliant. I mean, we only heard Quirrell whisper about letting the troll in at the last minute- it would have worked, too, if it weren’t for the Potter brat. But even the dark lord wasn’t ready for him the first time. We’ll just have to formulate a better idea this time,” Benson the Slytherin spoke confidently.

“What do you mean, we?” Larissa the Ravenclaw snarled. “You and Romulus didn’t do any of the research or preparation last time- you always leave that to me.”

“Well, you are from the smart house, aren’t you?” Romulus the Gryffindor waved a hand dismissively. “You’re supposed to enjoy that stuff- besides, the kid’s deaf- how hard can it be to fuck up a deaf kid, if we focus only on him? Then we can go after the mudblood. Bad enough they let them in everywhere, but now in Slytherin… Salazar would be rolling in his grave if he knew.”

“Like you get to talk about what Salazar wants, Rommy,” Benson rolled his eyes. “You couldn’t even convince the hat to put you in Slytherin and uphold the pureblood traditions of our family.”

“Shut up- we’re not even that closely related. And I tried with that dumb piece of fabric- it’s clearly deranged. I mean, Harry Potter, a mudblood, and a Weasley in Slytherin in the same year- it’s gone bloody fucking mad.”

Draco had heard enough, and he backed up, trying to get out quietly. Unfortunately, he tripped over a rock, landing on his bum, and the skidding stones made a noise that they surely heard. He raised his wand, preparing for a fight, but the three didn’t even react. Then Draco realised- they’d come looking for him. They thought he’d go reporting to his father about the three ‘heroic’ students who attacked Hermione and Harry, which is why they were so careful to mention names and detail their plans. Well, they’d gravelly miscalculated, he thought as he forced himself to amble poshly away until he reached the entryway to the school, where he broke into a run. He was going right to Severus, and they were going to regret messing with his friends...
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

I know we’ve taken somewhat of a risk with Draco in this chapter, but I feel that it fits. I’ve seen some headcanons on tumblr that I expanded on, and I hope I’ve captured it well. The experience was very similar to my own, and this chapter, the end especially, was rather hard to write.

Sincerely,
Des and Lils

“Sev! Sev! Professor Snape!” Draco Malfoy came barrelling to his office and swerved to face him, panting, his normally-perfect hair in disarray and an open book with pages flapping wildly against his side.

“Draco, what in Merlin’s name is going on?” the professor lifted his head from his book (Nietzsche. He liked to read Nietzsche when he was in a mood, like when three of his snakes were off with Sirius Black doing Merlin-knows-what).

“I- I found the people! The ones who did the thing- thethingwithMiaandRonandHarry!”

“Merlin’s sake, child- calm down, breathe, and then tell me.” Draco flopped histrionically in a chair, his awkwardly-long limbs flopping over the side as his chest heaved and he huffed a sigh. Severus conjured a glass and used an augmenti charm to put some water into it for his godson, who guzzled it with none of his usual postured grace.

“I know who attacked Mia and Harry!” he insisted again, and this Severus looked at him intently.

“Who- wait, how?” Severus asked, wanting to be sure that he had a solid lead and not just the runaway mind of an eleven-year-old.

“I heard them talking- they were doing it really loud and they went into all this detail about their plans and I think they expected me to hear and report to my father or something so they’d get recognised or something- I don’t know how these weirdos think!” He waved his arms around like a windmill, and Severus would have smirked if the situation if it wasn’t so serious- weirdo was such a muggle word, probably picked up from Harry or some of those Hufflepuffs he had been talking with lately.

“Alright, do you know their names, or a description?” Severus had his hands clasped in front of him, giving Draco his full attention.

“There was a Gryffindor named Romulus, a Slytherin named Benson, and a Ravenclaw named Larissa- I wasn’t really paying any attention to their faces,” he admitted, looking down. He wasn’t very good with faces- well, some faces. Harry’s face… but in general, he could look at someone for an hour and immediately forget the colour of their eyes when they left.

“That’s alright Draco,” Severus put a hand on his shoulder. “What you did gather was very good- we’ll be able to go from there.”
“And… and they were older. And they were planning an attack on Harry next- they want him out of the way!” Draco gripped the arm of his chair very tightly and the other clutched Severus’ sleeve as he looked at him frantically.

“Shh, I’ll go get it taken care of right now, alright? I’m going to go get the other heads of houses and we’ll go to Dumbledore- do you think you’ll be okay to come with us?” Draco took a deep breath- he didn’t know Dumbledore, and he didn’t trust Dumbledore, but he could do this for his friends.

He adopted his stiff, composed posture again and pushed the irritating little strands of hair that were falling in his face back into their proper place as he followed in Severus’ shadow. He started chewing his lip anxiously before he realised he was doing it and spit it out- he knew better. Lucius’ voice rang in his head.

Sit up straight Draco, stop fidgeting- it’s unbecoming. Stop stuttering- you speak slowly and carefully or you don’t speak at all. You’ve been talking non-stop about that stupid book- for the love of Merlin, shut up!

“Draco?” Severus tapped his shoulder again, and he jumped.

“Oh, um- sorry. What do you need?” he straightened up.

“Filius and Minerva are in the staffroom, and I need you to wait right out here- okay?”

“Yes sir,” he nodded and adjusted his robes as the seam rubbed him the wrong way, and he rubbed the fabric between his thumb and forefinger as he waited for his head of house to come back out.

“Mr. Malfoy, you say you found the students who perpetrated the attack on Halloween?” Minerva asked, and he nodded.

“And there was one from each of our houses?” she motioned to her and the other two professors, and Draco nodded again.

“Romulus, Larissa, and Benson,” Severus said again- “do you know of those students?”

“Yes,” Minerva nodded. “I have a seventh-year named Romulus in my house. There have been a few general complaints from his dorm mates that he is, and I quote, ‘no fun,’ and he’s not often seen in the common room, come to think of it…”

“Larissa is similar- I try to foster a relationship with my students, but she’s always been very shifty and I’ve never been able to get her talk to me much,” Flitwick said.

“I try to keep tabs on any of my students with… radical tendencies,” Severus made a face, “but Benson Thompson has never been much of a blip on the radar, so to speak. He hasn’t gone about spouting things off, but if they were planning something like this, they would know that having their views out in the open would make it easier to trace.”

“It is very lucky that you came to us, Mr. Malfoy,” Minerva told him again, and Draco nodded once. “We will go seek out the students and bring them to the headmasters office so they have no chance to evade capture. Would you mind waiting outside the gargoyle statue? We will send Pomona with you so that you won’t be alone, considering the delicate situation.”

“Thank you.”

Luckily, Pomona Sprout picked up on Draco’s feelings and realised he wasn’t in the mood for conversation, so he just sat down to read, hidden in the shadow of one of the gargoyles until the
other three professors brought their students back. They looked around at each other, and then at Draco, who flinched back from their angry faces and curled in on himself a little more, clinging to Pomona’s side as they climbed the moving staircases (his father had always said that Malfoys stand tall and stand alone so as not to show fear, but there was enough for Draco to think about now without feeling exposed, and luckily Pomona didn’t seem to mind, gently patting the pale, shaking hands that clutched at her robes).

“Oh, hello children, what can I do for you?” Albus looked over his half-moon glasses, his expression somewhat unsettled as his eyes glanced along Severus and Minerva’s faces- the beginning of the year still hung thickly between them, like a fog of tension.

“We have found the perpetrators of the Halloween attack,” Severus announced gravely, and turned to Draco, asking him gently to explain what he had heard.

The seventh-years shot him venomous glares, but Professor Sprout kept her hand on Draco’s shoulder, steadying him as he explained, voice trembling a little, what he had heard. It certainly wasn’t a polished delivery, and he’d stumbled over his words or had to backtrack occasionally, but he managed to tell the story, adding also the part about Quirrell’s being responsible for the troll.

“Is this true?” Dumbledore turned to the three older students.

“You can’t prove anything,” Larissa ground out, glaring at Draco.

“Oh, but I’m afraid, Ms. Leigh, that we can- you made a confession earlier today, which I have already bottled and sent on to the aurors, who shall be arriving to arrest you as soon as they finish reviewing the evidence.” Severus, thinking ahead, had asked Draco’s permission and extracted the memory before flooing the auror department- he was taking no chances with ensuring the three received sufficient punishments.

“The aurors, Severus- surely that is unnecessary? They are children, after all, and I’m sure we can work something out amongst ourselves,” Albus broke in, and all four heads of house turned to glare at him.

“Allbus, they are of age and have seriously injured two other students- it was fortunate they weren’t killed! Not to mention that we have apparently a staff member that you hired going around releasing trolls in the castle!” Minerva’s nostrils flared dangerously.

“We have no proof but the word of our three trouble-makers that Quirinus let the troll in,” Dumbledore placated, “and even that was also filtered through young Malfoy here- we will leave him out of this for the moment.”

“But-” Filius squeaked, but they were interrupted by the arrival of Kingsley and Tonks.

“This is more I’ve seen of Hogwarts since I graduated,” the black man remarked as he and Tonks cuffed the three. “Obviously we’re looking at expulsion, but the prison sentence will have to be determined at trial.”

“We haven’t actually determined their status at Hogwarts as of yet,” Dumbledore began, but Auror Shacklebolt silenced him with an intimidating look.

“They are being expelled- this is out of your hands now,” he told the old man firmly, and he sighed but said no more.

“And Quirrell?” Snape asked the aurors, at which Kingsley tugged on his earring nervously. “Unfortunately, although we’re inclined to believe you, we don’t have enough evidence to arrest
him,” he lamented. “He has a clean record and we have only word-of-mouth, from three criminals no less. But we have put some measures in place- Tonks will explain while I take these three back for booking,” he said, and the remaining wizards and witches turned to the other auror.

“I’ve been assigned an undercover mission by Head Auror Bones,” she began as she screwed up her face, shrinking down to the size of a first year as her hair turned into shoulder-length black curls and her eyes a light brown. Her skin was light enough that nobody would look at her sideways (because, you know, racism…), and when she spoke, an American accent came out of her mouth.

“Casey Longmire,” she said cheerfully. “First year exchange student from Ilvermorny, sorted into Slytherin. Harry, Ron, Hermione, and Draco, obviously, will be aware of my new identity as their protector, but as far as anyone else knows, I’m just a non-threatening little yank from Albany, New York.”

Draco looked at his cousin, now the same height as him.

“I hardly think there’s need for interference from the ministry in Hogwarts business…” Dumbledore began, but Tonks turned to him, still with a smile on her cherubic little face.

“Sorry Dumbles- official order, signed by the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, Amelia Bones, saying that I have every right to be here, and that furthermore, for you to disclose my presence is a crime. Get a load of that!” she slapped the paper down. She wasn’t quite as fond of ‘get a load of that,’ as she was of ‘wotcher?’ but she needed an American, and, more importantly, less obviously Tonks catchphrase.

“Very well, Ms… Longmire, I shall escort you to your dormitory,” Severus said as he tried to keep his voice neutral and not make a face, despite that he would once again have Nymphadora Tonks in his classes, masquerading as a first year… oh Merlin, his worst nightmare was coming true.

“Why thank you, Professor Snade,” she smiled at him.

“It’s Professor Snape,” he pinched the bridge of his nose, wondering what the rules were on giving an undercover auror detention…

“Oh, my b,” she waved a hand flippantly, still in character.

Lovely, she spoke in Americanisms as well…

Severus took Tonks through the floo to Grimmauld place that night, which was already far cleaner and more airy and open, as furniture had been banished, rearranged, or conjured, and the heavy drapes had been removed, replaced with open linen curtains. Kreacher, back in his element, was a cleaning machine, and Harry, eventually, had been unable to sit around and watch without feeling uncomfortably awkward, so, although nobody else was happy about it, he was on his hands and knees scrubbing at a dusty baseboard, his tongue sticking out of the corner of his mouth in concentration.

“‘Lo Professor,” he greeted as he came through, and then, cocking his head, “Tonks? What are you doing here?”

“How’d you know it was me?” she groaned, worried about her cover.

“Don’t know,” Harry shrugged. “Just… did.” Growing up deaf in a abusive household, he’d learned to read people- their movements, their mannerisms, their body language, and he only needed to meet someone once before he had them pegged.
“We didn’t know,” Ron motioned to Hermione as they both nodded. “But what are you doing here?”

“This is ‘Casey Longmire,’” Severus made air quotes. “We have, while you were gone, found the attackers from Halloween, who have been arrested. Unfortunately, we are still stuck with Quirrell, so Tonks is going undercover as a transfer student to keep you safe.”

“It is very important that you three and Draco are the only ones who know my true identity,” the auror said, still with her American accent (metamorphmagi can change their voices as well-otherwise, how would she have been able to convincingly pass herself off as numerous teachers when she was a student?). “Therefore, you’ll have to act towards me as you would to any other student. My name is Casey, I’m from Albany, New York, and I just transferred here and was sorted into Slytherin. When I’m introduced in the Great Hall tonight, you all have to act like you don’t know me, okay?” Harry watched her lips very carefully, the American accent a little harder to lip-read along to.

“Alright,” all three eventually agreed, and Severus nodded at them. “Very well,” he said, “it is time that we go back to the castle for dinner, so Ms. Longmire can be sorted.” And so Harry can eat, he thought to himself, as the child gave Kreacher and his godfathers big hugs before they all went back through the floo into Severus’ office.

At dinner that night, the school was abuzz with the excitement of a new student, and everyone wanted to talk to ‘Casey.’ Luckily, the Slytherin prefects were there to keep order, sending stragglers from other tables back to their own dinner as Tonks talked to her fellow first years.

“What’s it like in New York?” Tracey asked. “Have you seen a show on Broadway?”

“Forget about it,” Tonks did a giggling impression of a heavy New York City accent as the others laughed along. “But no,” she said eventually, in all seriousness. “I haven’t gotten to do anything exciting like that- I was a foster kid. I’m only here because they tracked down a distant relative of mine who agreed to take me.” The aurors had decided that having Tonks masquerade as an orphan would make her seem less threatening to Quirrell, and Tonks was more than willing to play up the tragic backstory.

“Camping accident,” she said gravely, the most exciting story she’d been allowed to go with (because apparently ‘died alligator wrestling’ would ‘draw unnecessary attention.’) “RV went off a mountain road during a storm. I was with the babysitter.”

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that,” Daphne consoled, composed but with real sympathy in her voice.

“Oh, you know,” Tonks waved a hand again. “I managed alright. I’m excited though- never really had a lot of friends my own age, since I moved around a lot. I started making friends at Ilvermorny- was delighted to find out I was a witch, by the way- but they found Great-Uncle Simon before I’d really gotten to know any of them.”

“Well, I think you’ll like it here,” Tracey said. “Luckily, I’ve got an extra friendship bracelet- we all wear one. There were two extras, but then some awful blood-purists attacked Hermione and stole it from her. But Professor Snape charmed them all after that, so only the owner can take it off.” She handed Tonks another of the green bracelets with the silver charms, and she put it on, pretending to be fascinated as it shrank down to fit her.

“Magic is so cool,” she said, playing the part of a fascinated muggleborn. “There’s so much you can do with it!”
“So, what class are you looking forward to the most?” Hermione asked, in typical Hermione fashion.

“Oh, well I’d have to say charms- I hear our head of house teaches potions, which is unfortunate because I was absolutely terrible at in Ilvermorny,” she declared, secretly revelling in all the havoc she was about to create.

“Oh, I’m sure you’ll get better,” Millie told her encouragingly.

“Thanks, but I highly doubt it,” ‘Casey’ said, sighing dramatically. “I’m far too clumsy.” That part of Tonks, at least, had to stay in her character, as she couldn’t just stop tripping over everything everywhere. Trust her, she’d tried- many times.

“I’m sure Harry and Hermione could help you,” Pansy offered, unknowingly aiding their mission. “They’re really good at it, and Ron and Draco aren’t bad either. Draco would be better, of course, but he and Ron tend to get distracted making faces at each other.”

“That was one time, Pans,” the blonde declared with a pout. “All my other assignments have been O’s!”

“And all of Mia and Harry’s assignments have been O’s, hence you and Ron being ‘not bad,’” Blaise quipped as he ruffled his hair, which Draco grouchily set about fixing meticulously.

“You’re such a wanker,” Draco stuck his tongue out at him.

“Hey- what I do in the bathroom is my own business.”

“Ewww- stop!” Millie made a face. “You’re disgusting!”

“What did he say?” Harry, who had been in conversation with Millie, asked.

“You don’t want to know,” Pansy wrinkled her nose, and Harry shrugged.

“Ohay,” he went back to trying to finish his potatoes.

It was later in the dorms that Tonks realised that a bunch of eleven-year-olds were better at eyeliner than she was. Clearly, this was going to be a mutually beneficial arrangement…

The next day, Tonks put the next stage of her plan into motion, which relied on the fact that while Slytherin and Gryffindor first years had potions, Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs had DADA. She partnered up with Seamus, who would have ruined his potion anyway (or so she was told). While he stirred the bubbling cauldron, already fizzing and flaming, and added another porcupine quill—just the thing to send it over the edge. Shielding Seamus, she protected him from the oozing liquid, which caused her fair little face to erupt in boils.

“To the hospital wing, Ms. Longmire,” Severus sighed. She hopped off her stool, acknowledging a boil-less Seamus’ nod of thanks, and stepped outside the door, where she pulled out a properly-brewed boil cure from the pocket of her robes (they looked like school robes, they were actually undercover auror robes- with a full med kit in one expanded pocket) and drank it. From there, instead of going to Pomfrey’s, she looked around to make sure she was alone before casting a perfect disillusionment charm.

“Point me Quirrell’s office,” she whispered, slinking quietly as she followed the charm that would take her to where she needed to be. She cast another charm, to check for wards and protections. Hmm… nothing that a normal teacher wouldn’t use… he was really being careful about this. She dismantled them carefully, putting them back up as soon as she entered. Standard professor wards
were of the type where you could only enter with permission, but exiting didn’t trip anything, which was good in case she needed to make a quick getaway.

The man was really covering his tracks about whatever nefarious business he was most definitely up to. The room was full of the usual for a DADA professor- sneakoscopes, books, informational posters on dark creatures.

Werewolves, she read off of one of them, a dangerous, feral beast that grows teeth and fur monthly. She resisted the urge to rip it down- werewolves weren’t dangerous beasts that grew things monthly, they were only dangerous monthly. Stupid, stupid…

Still rifling carefully through papers, she noticed a lot of loose garlic bulbs. That seemed strange… to her detective senses, it was almost as if he’d planted it there because of the rumours, to further cover up whatever was really wrong with him. She shoved another failed pop quiz back onto the desk and began to walk away, but she tripped over the chair leg. As she went to catch herself, her hand brushed a panel on the side of the desk, and a secret drawer popped open.

Huh, she thought as she dusted herself off. Occasionally useful for something, this clumsiness thing…

In the drawer was an eclectic mix of medications, although why one would put them in a drawer, she couldn’t tell.

McGilly’s Potion Lotion- for extremely dry skin, she read off the first label, followed by a salve for… flesh fungus.

“Gross,” she whispered, shuddering, as she cast a scouring charm on her hands. Another bottle held eye drops- for infections caused by exposure to dark magic. Suspect, but again, not exactly criminal for a defence professor.

“Huh,” she mumbled as she pulled out another- “why would Quirrell need a medication for clearing small nasal passageways when he’s got such a big nose?” Her hand brushed one last phial, in the back dusty corner of the drawer.

“Unicorn blood,” she gasped as a final, silvery drop of the liquid spilled from the vial. “Why would he…” she sniffed it- definitely unicorn blood. It could be that he had a sample as part of his job, but if that were so, why take such pains to hide it? She carefully catalogued everything she’d found behind her occlumency shields, before putting off her false front of normal eleven-year-old thoughts.

She put everything back carefully, scouring the jars with a few spells that would get rid of any trace of her having been here. She re-applied her disillusion charm and tiptoed back out. Nothing technically illegal (and even if it had been, it couldn’t have been used to arrest him, because it would have been an illegal search), but definitely suspect. Curious, very curious…

“Hey guys,” she caught back up to her friends as they got out of potions, after dropping by Poppy to let her know that she had ‘come for a boil cure.’ (Poppy was included as well, as both a member of the staff and also because she would no doubt need her to cover for her at some point). “Snape go spare?”

“Nah, not really…” Pansy shrugged. “He just had this strange look on his face, like he was painfully constipated.”

“Here,” Hermione grabbed her by the arm. “I gotta go take Harry his snack before quidditch
“practice- come with me, Casey?”

“Yeah, sure,” Tonks put a look on her face as if she was pleasantly surprised to be included on an errand by her new friend, congratulating herself on her acting skills- if she ever got sick of the force, she could always go into muggle television…

“Hey,” Harry came out of the Slytherin common room (he’d been in Snape’s office, so the man could put glamos on his scars for the duration of the practice, as was their routine). “Thanks Mia!” He grabbed the container of carrots and hummus, kissing Hermione on the cheek and waving to Tonks as he scurried down to the field, opening the tupperware and starting to munch as he went.

“Severus!” Sirius’ head suddenly popped through the floo, startling Severus as his quill scratched across the notes he was making, ruining them.

“What, mutt?” he growled, tugging at a lock of his hair- he’d just washed the potions grease out, and now the ends of it were dripping in ink.

“I just wanted to know what you were planning on getting Harry for Christmas- so we don’t accidentally get him any of the same things.”

“What makes you think I was planning on getting him anything?”

“Relax, mate,” Sirius rolled his eyes. “No one’s accusing you of being a decent human being or having emotions or anything- it is just a bare-minimum requirement of raising a child- so you can tell me without admitting that you secretly care about him, don’t worry.”

“Well,” Severus harrumphed, “if you must know- I was planning on getting him some ingredients for a potion he’d found in a library book that he was interested in, some nice books, and maybe a fun strategy board game or two.”

“Okay, we won’t have a problem then,” Sirius made a face. “Seriously, books and strategy games?”

“He likes reading,” Severus said defensively.

“He has a very low threshold for what’s considered fun,” Sirius sniped back.

“You’re not going to goad me into it today, Black, so just go snog your wolf. I’m going to go wash the ink out of my hair- thank you for that, by the way.”

“You’re welcome,” Padfoot said cheerfully as he withdrew his head from the fireplace, ignoring the glare Severus sent his way.

“I’ll see you guys after Christmas,” Hermione told them as she packed the last of her things into her trunk as they all sat in the common room. “Shame that we booked that trip to the Alps for the same time you invited us to Grimmauld place, though,” she turned to Harry and Ron with a sigh.

“Yeah, that does kinda suck,” Ron agreed, “especially since my whole family will be there- my mum is dying to meet you.”

“At least Casey’s coming with us,” Harry said cheerfully, winking at Tonks.

“Shame that it’s your first Christmas with a relative and he’s busy, though,” Daphne patted her shoulder.
“Eh, that’s okay,” Tonks shrugged. “We’re not really that close yet- it’s more that he just takes care of me financially and gives me a place to live so I don’t have to move around all the time. And he’s had this business trip planned since before I came to stay with him.”

“Still, though…” Tracey put an arm around her. “At least you’ll be with Harry and the Weasleys though.”

“Yeah, Christmas with your godfather?” she turned to Harry. “I’m excited- I wonder what that’ll be like.” Of course, she’d spent Christmas with Sirius before, when she was very young, and she remembered well enough to know it was going to be insanely chaotic and fun.

“Probably insanely chaotic and fun,” Harry giggled, and Tonks gave him a strange look- how did he…?

“You have this habit of mouthing things when you’re thinking,” Harry whispered as he pulled her aside. “I can’t hear your thoughts or anything, don’t worry- I can’t hear anything,” he chuckled.

“I’ll have to work on that- could be compromising,” Tonks mouthed to him, and he shrugged.

“People don’t really spend a lot of time staring at your mouth unless they have no other option, trust me- plus, you get a lot of strange looks until you learn to be subtle about it.” He remembered all too well how angry it made the Dursleys when he looked like he was concentrating too hard as he lip read. ‘Look normal!’ they’d ordered, as they backhanded him.

“You okay?” Tonks asked. “You kinda zoned out there for a minute.”

“Oh yeah,” Harry said, “I’m fine. Just excited for Christmas, I guess.” He would get to eat Christmas dinner this year… at the table… with his family. He blinked back at the unfamiliar wetness in his eyes- he hadn’t cried in years; hadn’t been allowed to.

“Welcome home, pup,” Sirius swept him up in a big hug as soon as the train got to the station, hiking him up easily as Remus got his trunk and they started towards the floo.

“I’ll see you at Christmas!” Harry waved back towards Ron, as Sirius discreetly gave his godson a concerned look- he was already nearly back to his pre-Azkaban weight, Harry felt just as light as he had the day he’d watched him play his first quidditch game. Luckily Harry didn’t notice this, as he had his face buried comfortably in his godfather’s robes.

Suddenly, Narcissa came running up, dragging a confused-looking Draco by the hand.

“I need you to take him,” she told her cousin, without preamble. Sirius, who had been rather close to her before she’d been forced to marry Lucius, simply nodded and accepted it as necessary. Cissa also surreptitiously handed him a note while Draco’s back was turned and Harry still had his face in Sirius’ robes.

“I’ll floo you after the kids are asleep,” she whispered in his ear as Harry looked up and looked around, feeling the atmosphere of the group change.

“Alright darling,” Narcissa told her son. “Everything is fine- don’t worry. Something’s come up, is all. Have fun with your friends and your cousin Siri.”

“Okay mum,” he hugged her tightly. “I love you.”

“Love you too, dragon.” Leaning down so that only he could hear and Harry couldn’t read her lips, she whispered, “just be yourself- everything will be fine.”
Sirius took Draco and Harry to the house through the floo, handing them off to Remus and Kreacher. “How about you guys have a snack, and then Kreacher can show you to your rooms- Draco, you’ll have the guest room, but if you want something to make it feel a little more personal, just let us know, alright?”

“Okay,” Draco nodded, before giving Padfoot a shy smile.

“Everything alright?” Harry asked, and Sirius forced himself to relax as he ruffled Harry’s hair.

“We’re fine, Prongslet- just got a couple things to take care of. I’ll be down soon.”

Harry nodded too, although he didn’t look entirely convinced, and Sirius went up to the bedroom he shared with Remus, locking the door as he opened the note.

Dear Sirius, it began,

I know that this is a lot to ask after you’re coming back from such a hard time of your own, but I don’t know what else to do. I had to rush to the station just to manage things as it was. Lucius and I had a huge fight last night- that’s not news to you, I’m sure, but this was the worst yet- he raised his wand against me. Luckily, I am more magically capable than he is, or it could have ended very badly. But I can no longer in good conscience allow my son to be in that house, even if I never let him out of my sight. I know your house is well warded and the location unknown to my husband, and Draco already has a close friendship with Harry, so he will be safe there. I implore you, he must not go back to his father. If it comes to that, use whatever connections you have to gain custody of him, at least temporarily- you have a lot of leverage after being wrongly imprisoned.

I realise you are probably very confused, so I will go back. First of all, don’t worry about me- I’ll be staying with Andi and Ted while I begin the divorce proceedings- yes, Sirius gasped as he read, I know it will be an uphill battle, and that it is very rare in the wizarding world, but I can no longer tolerate these conditions. If it were just me, I am sure I could manage, but for my son - you see, the fight all began over Draco. As you may or may not have noticed, he is a little, well- he’s a bit awkward, not that there’s anything wrong with that. He had difficulty with social situations- they confuse him, and that has always displeased Lucius greatly, as he wanted him to ‘conform to the standards of pureblood society.’ I had been consulting a muggle doctor for quite some time about this, and we have come to the conclusion that he most probably has a mild form of asperger’s syndrome- this is a disorder on the autism spectrum. He’s high-functioning, so it often doesn’t seem obvious at first. It often comes across as him being ‘stuffy’ or ‘condescending’ but really, he’s just mimicking the behaviour of his father, which is the only model he’s had to go on. I know from his letters that he’s been becoming more comfortable at Hogwarts and starting to relax a bit, and I don’t want him to lose that progress. I am going to do everything I can to ensure a successful divorce, but I may need you to fight for custody, if the court tries to take him from me. I do not plan on abandoning him, believe me- he has been the sole joy in the dredge of this horrid life since my marriage, and I would do anything for him, including suffer it longer, if that would benefit him. But it will not, and I cannot stand by and watch Lucius break my child and his gentle, quiet spirit.

While he is with you, a few things to consider:

* He doesn’t have a natural compass in social situations- he copies the behaviour of those around him and does his best, so if he says something that may objectively seem a little odd, don’t comment on it- he’s doing his best.

* He has things he gets very excited about- the muggle doctor calls him ‘special interests’- that
include things such as quidditch, favourite books of his, and of course, dragons. He also love languages, so if you’re planning on teaching Harry farsi, I’m sure he would love that as well, if you’re amenable. Please let him talk about things that interest him, and show an interest- his excitement is endearing, and it would crush him when Lucius would be cruel or outright dismissive.

- He has sensory issues sometimes- he can only wear very soft clothing, as seams, tags, and certain fabrics make him very uncomfortable. He only uses Dove Baby shampoo, the lilac kind. I know it’s muggle- I would glamour the bottle when I lived with Lucius, and I would ask that you stock up immediately- I will reimburse you for whatever you spend, assuming I don’t end up a pauper in the divorce proceedings, in which case I must ask that you do it from the goodness of your heart, which I know is boundless. Also, Draco thinks, as does Lucius, that he uses McGily’s lilac shampoo- he’s not a good liar, part of his condition, so I never told him, and as this is going to be such an adjustment for him already I would prefer that you keep glamouring the bottle. Also, sometimes noise bothers him, and it often comes on suddenly- please make clear to him that anytime he feels overstimulated, he is free to go to his room. Lucius never allowed this when he was home, and it was the source of many fights on our end and a great deal of stress on Draco’s.

- Finally, and this is only possible, but good to know- if things get out of hand and the divorce proceedings go public despite my best efforts, or for any reason the coming storm gets to be enough to traumatise him, he may go non-verbal. He knows sign language, so he should at least be able to communicate with Harry if this is the case. It has only happened once in his life, and he thinks it is for no apparent reason. I performed a minor obliviation to ensure he believed this. It was my fault, really- Draco was seven, and we were all in the living room after dinner. One of our house elves, Dobby, was suffering from a particularly severe punishment Lucius had ordered him to give himself, and I had gone to check after him, believing that Draco would be alright with his father for a few minutes, as he had been fairly sedate that day. Unfortunately, Draco made the mistake of asking his father for a muggle book- Charlotte’s Web, as he had found me reading a muggle novel (I didn’t see him come in, I only found out as I was going through the memories after the incident) that I had been reading in secret and thus assumed it was alright. I cannot blame him for this. I can, and will, however, blame Lucius. He lost his temper and threw a glass vase at my son, which luckily he dodged, but he was terrified. I came back in to find him shaking in the corner, refusing to speak. I also erased Lucius’ memory of the incident, as well as of the cruciatus curse I performed on him thereafter, and I hoped that things would be able to stay somewhat calm. I hate leaving Draco alone, and after that especially I did very rarely, but it was unfortunately impossible for me to watch him every minute of every day. Thankfully, Dobby was willing to look after him secretly, at great personal risk, I might add, but even a house elf can only do so much. I wish dearly that he never had to leave my side at all, and I cannot tell you what a weight it is off my chest to know that he will be safe with you even when I cannot be there. Sirius... I... I know this is a difficult situation for all of us, and yet I cannot bring myself to regret my marriage, as it has given me Draco, who is, as I have mentioned, the single most important thing in my life. I never thought it was possible to love something so much, with such a fullness of being and heart and soul, and I will do anything to ensure he has the best life I can give him. Please take care of him; take care of my baby. I beg you.

Respectfully and sincerely yours,

Narcissa Black.
Draco and Harry were in the corner of the living room having an eager conversation in sign language while Tonks worked on some paperwork in the corner, a funny sight since she was still masquerading as an eleven-year-old. Remus was in the kitchen cooking breakfast with Kreacher (Harry had offered to do it, but they all insisted he just relax and enjoy himself) and Sirius was upstairs in the study slugging through a thick book on custody arrangements.

“My room is just so cool,” Harry’s hands enthused as Draco chuckled, smiling at him. Harry’s eyes had lit up like the Christmas tree in the other corner as he saw his new bedroom, with two of the walls in silver and the other two in green. Sirius and Remus had asked Severus about Harry’s favourite books and gotten posters to hang on the wall, and there was a shelf full of comics and graphic novels, as well as Harry’s favourite childhood classics. The duvet was green and covered in little snitches that moved around, and the lamp on the bedside table was shaped like a quidditch goal hoop, the chain ending in a quaffle that you pulled to turn it on. The closet was full of soft, comfortable clothing, both muggle and wizard, and there was a toy chest in one corner filled with age-appropriate toys like cars you could move around with your wand, lego kits, and a nice telescope he could use to look at the stars from the comfortable window seat by the bookshelf.

“You deserve a cool room,” Draco told him, their hands moving rapidly back and forth as they sat in their own little world.

“Aww, thanks.” Harry’s cheeks went a little pink as Remus called them in for breakfast, and Draco signed to Harry so he would know.

“You like eggs, cub?” Moony asked him, making a conscious effort to turn his face so that it was comfortably in Harry’s field of vision.

“I like everything- I’m not picky,” Harry told him cheerfully, before looking at the plate Remus handed him skeptically, almost certain there was no way he could finish it all.

No, I don’t suppose you would be, Remus thought to himself sadly, you were just trying to survive.

He noticed Harry staring at the food uncertainly as he picked up his fork.

“You don’t have to finish it all,” he tapped Harry on the shoulder and told him, and his godson nodded gratefully. Remus sighed as soon as Harry had looked away- it was an average sized portion for a boy his age, but he was looking at it like he’d been told to eat an entire feast by himself.

“Padfoot, luv- come on down!” Remus called his boyfriend again as Tonks and Draco loaded their own plates.

“I think I’m going to have to call Severus,” Siri groaned and ran a hand through his hair. Harry caught the movement out of the corner of his eye and looked at his godfather.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, concern in his big green eyes.

“Oh, it’s nothing Prongslet- I’ve just got a couple things I’ve gotta take care of as the Lord of an Ancient and Noble house, yada yada yada, and I just need a bit of advice.”

“Oh, okay,” Harry gave him a somewhat dubious look as he went back to his bacon, and Sirius couldn’t bite back a smile- he had the same ‘I don’t believe you’ face that his mother did.

“So, is there anything special you guys wanted to do today?” Remus asked the two boys as Harry
offered the other half of his plate to a still-hungry Tonks and started collecting dishes to put in the sink.

“No- I’m perfectly happy here, so you don’t need to go to any trouble,” Harry said shyly.

“You’re no trouble, pup,” Sirius said as Kreacher took the dishes out of his hands and he himself put Harry back in his chair.

“Why don’t I take you boys into muggle London for the day?” Remus asked. “I can take you to see the tower, and maybe if there’s no muggles around we’ll even catch sight of a ghost.”

“There are ghosts in the tour of London?” Harry inquired, excited. “Do you think we could meet Mary- the Scottish one?”

“Maybe- we’ll just have to see what we come across,” Remus smiled at Harry’s enthusiasm. “Now why don’t you boys go grab your coats? Tonks, do you wanna come too?”

The metamorphmagus looked up from another long scroll and nodded. “Yeah,” she pulled at a curl. “I could use a break from logging all this overtime.”

Once they’d all been dressed warmly and Sirius had pressed a bag of galleons and a muggle credit card into his partner’s hands.

“I don’t really need these,” Remus tried to hand back the galleons.

“Shh,” Sirius put a finger to the werewolf’s lips. “Let me take care of you.” They kissed chastely as Tonks enthusiastically threw the front door open.

“Oh,” Harry turned around and ran back up the stairs, coming back down with a pair of green earmuffs. “Here,” he told Draco, “in case it gets too loud.”

“How’d you know things get too loud for me sometimes?” Draco signed, cheeks burning a little bit.

“It’s your body language- sometimes when we’re in a busy place, you tense up a lot and seem really uncomfortable,” Harry’s hands answered. “And it’s winter, so nobody will look twice at someone wearing earmuffs.” He pulled his own green hat down further over his own ears, thinking idly that it was a little annoying that something that didn’t work still got so cold so easily.

“Thanks,” Draco said, touched by the gesture. Harry seemed to notice little things like that, things that nobody else but his mother really paid attention to, and he was touched by how far his friend was going to make things easier for him while she was gone.

“Don’t mention it,” Harry said aloud, grabbing his hand. “Now c’mon!” He dragged the blonde down the front steps by the hand, tongue out to catch the falling snowflakes.

“Hey,” Sirius called through Severus’ floo.

“I know you’re not the brightest, mutt, but Christmas is the day after tomorrow.” The potions master rolled his eyes.

“I know, but can you come through the floo anyway- I need some help with something.”

“Never thought I’d hear those words from you.” Severus took a moment to revel in the feeling.

“Yeah, yeah- just, it’s important- please?” Severus couldn’t remember a time when he’d seen Sirius look so, well, pardon the pun, but… serious.
“Alright, no need to get your collar all knotted up- I’m coming through.”

“Thanks,” Sirius put down his book as the man came through, and Severus looked at him- please, thank you, and Sirius Black reading a book in the same conversation- this couldn’t be good.

“This will explain a lot.” Sirius handed him Narcissa’s letter.

“Oh.” Severus’ face paled as his dark eyes tracked the parchment, and his shoulders sagged. “Of course- it makes sense, but to think Lucius…”

“You and I of all people should know that parents don’t always care for their children, and now the same thing is happening to our godsons.” Sirius slumped in his chair as Kreacher brought out tea without being asked.

“Thanks Kreach,” the lord patted the elf softly on the head as the creature returned a small smile.

“Is that the same elf?” Severus tracked his retreating figure.

“Yeah- Harry’s been good for him.” A fond look appeared on the dog animagus’ tired face (he’d been up all night).

Harry’s been good for a number of us, Severus allowed himself the admission, deep in the back of his mind, as he peered at the new photographs on the wall- the Marauders during their school years, Lily and James’ wedding, pictures of baby Harry, and a recent photograph of Harry with his arms around Ron and Hermione, Hedwig perched on his shoulder. There were some paintings as well, of the Hogwarts grounds, the last Quidditch world cup. He turned away from James’ smiling eyes, full of love for the fiery redhead in the A-line wedding dress.

“So, what do you have planned so far?” he changed the subject, trying to ignore Lily’s joyful emerald orbs, feeling like they were burning into his back.

“I was hoping to testify on Narcissa’s behalf during the divorce proceedings,” Sirius ran a hand through his hair, “but even with the weight I hold in the wizarding world at the moment, nobody really knows how it will go. I may have to try to seize custody of Draco, but I’m not sure how to do it without dragging him into the middle of something messy, and I can’t make much sense of all this jargon,” he held out the book.

“Mutt, you’re going about this the wrong way- like a Gryffindor, playing by the rules. We need to go after Lucius, bring him down from the inside,” Severus’ eyes glinted, flint sparking off of aphotic obsidian.

Harry’s eyes took in every detail of the opulent prison cell, the uneven brick wall of the tower sloping outside as he reached out to very carefully touch the dusty mantle of the fireplace. “The room is seeped in magic,” he breathed, feeling the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

“Excellent perception, Harry- it takes a close connection to your own core and the environment to pick up on things like that. Very advanced for a first year,” Remus came up beside him, and the little Slytherin read his lips with an abashed little smile and a kernel of pride blossoming in his chest.

After touring the tower itself, Remus took the children (and Tonks, disguised as a child) to a hole-in-the-wall Indian restaurant and picked up samosas and palak paneer to go before leading them to the Tower Hamlets Cemetery for a picnic, hoping to indulge Harry’s wish to see a ghost.

“So, do you boys have a favourite class so far?” Remus asked them as they settled on their picnic blanket, watching the wind rustle the barren branches of the trees.
“Potions,” Harry and Draco answered at the same time, before looking at each other and giggling
him. “I also like Transfiguration and charms,” Harry said, and Draco thought for a moment before
nodding.

“Those are fun classes, but I think I like charms better than transfiguration,” the blonde declared
decisively.

“I like potions too- I can create so much chaos,” Tonks grinned deviously as she reached for another
samosa.

“What do you do in those detentions he gives you?” Draco queried (Snape of course had to give
Tonks detentions so as not to seem suspicious).

“Paperwork and cataloguing my findings and such,” she told him as Remus put another warming
charm on the hot chai.

“That smells nice,” a thick Scottish brogue spilled out as a woman in a thick, kilted gown
materialised, carrying her head under her arms. Draco translated for Harry, since her lips were rather
transparent.

“Oh, er- I’d offer you some, but…”

“Ghosts can’t eat,” she finished for Harry, casting a longing look at the steaming tea and well-spiced
dishes. “Shame- in my day, even royalty wasn’t likely to get a hold of such exotic cuisine, or at least
not often.” Draco’s gloved hands kept moving as he translated for Harry, who looked at her.

“You’re Mary!” his eyes widened- he wasn’t quite used to getting things he wished for, since up
until Hogwarts the Dursleys made it their mission in life to go out of their way to give him the exact
opposite.

“I am Mary, Queen of Scots,” she agreed, putting her head back on her shoulders and curling her
legs under her as she sat stiffly on the ground. “You three,” she peered at the children, “carry the
blood of nobility.”

“This is the son of the late Lord Potter,” Remus introduced Harry, “and these two are first cousins
once removed of Lord Sirius Black.” He left out Draco’s Malfoy heritage, figuring it might be a
sensitive subject, with the way his father treated him.

“Potter,” Mary stroked the skirt of her desk. “I believe I met a Lord Potter, long ago. He visited the
French court when I was wed to my Francois. An old family, kept to themselves, mostly- everyone
was surprised to see him at my wedding. I was very flattered, of course. Never very traditional, that
lot- your grandmother was the third daughter of the shah of Iran, no?”

“Um, I’m not sure…” Harry trailed off as Draco translated for him.

“Yes,” Remus answered, making sure Harry could read his lips. “Her name was Elaheh, but she
went by Euphemia outside the home. Although Fleamont loved her Iranian heritage- he ordered
such beautiful things for her when from her motherland, and he had the house elves make all kinds of
Persian dishes. They met when Fleamont took a gap year after Hogwarts. As British nobility, he
was invited to the palace of the shah for dinner, where he met your mother. He barely spoke any
Faarsi at that point, but he tells me he tried to talk to her. Luckily, she spoke English perfectly and
took pity on him. They spent the entire night watching the moon and talking on a balcony in Tehran,
and he fell in love with her that night. Your father came along many years later, long after they had
given up hope for a child.”
“Their story is one of my favourites,” Mary sighed. “I spend a lot of time in the tour archives, drifting through old files as a gust of wind. How else to pass the time?”

“Do ghosts ever… move on?” Harry asked, wondering if his parents might be around somewhere, at the old cottage in Godric’s Hollow…

Remus saw the look on his face. “Most move on, Harry love- ghosts are usually those who are full of regret, or have left this world unfulfilled.” James and Lily had died protecting their son, believing he would have a happy childhood with him and Sirius…

“It was my son, for me,” Mary pulled her head back off and sat it in her lap, the weight of the world suddenly too heavy on her shoulders. “My son and my country, but mainly my son. I lost him when he was young, and the English poisoned him against me. He moved on- he had a number of devoted lovers and a reign of relative peace.”

“I’m sorry about that,” Harry told her, empathetically.

“Oh, it is not so bad, wee bairn,” she gave him a sad little smile. “There are people to watch, alternate stories to dream about. A ghost is just a shadow of what has been, so it makes perfect sense for me to chase shadows of what could have been.”

The words of the old queen kept Harry up that night, tossing and turning in his comfortable bed as her sad, diaphanous eyes seemed to watch him in the dark. For the first time in years, the silence of his world felt unnatural. Feeling fairly confident that Padfoot and Moony wouldn’t mind, he tied his dressing gown over his flannel pyjamas, unable to hear the padding of his slippered feet on the hardwood as he headed to the kitchen for a glass of water. His viridian eyes seemed to give off a light of their own in the blackness of the hallway, his eyes behind their glasses catching sight of a ray of light reflected on burnished metal that hadn’t been there when he’d gone to bed.

A grand old mirror, covered in dust but with cleaner spots in the shapes of fingerprints along the sides, as if someone had recently moved it. Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi, the inscription along the top read, and Harry jumped as he realised his wasn’t the only reflection. Even his own reflection was taller, healthier, and a man and a woman had their hands on his shoulders. The man had his skin tone, perhaps a shade darker, and hazel eyes set in his handsome face, and the woman had deep red waves, like the colour of blood against snow, although her skin wasn’t quite so pale as that, and her eyes and lips and chin mirrored Harry’s in shape, the eyes in colour. He recognised them immediately as his parents, but looking behind him, he was alone. Back in the mirror, his mother was whispering something in his ear. He couldn’t read her lips, but he laughed and beamed up at her, so the mirror-self had clearly heard her. Moony sat on the ground in front of him, his arm draped over a large black dog- Padfoot’s animagus form. Behind the happy little family spread a larger extended family- his grandfather, Fleamont, his messy hair just barely held in place by his homemade potion, his arm around Harry’s grandmother, who’s gleaming ebony hair curled at the ends but was almost completely hidden by a gauzy hijab in a brilliant red to match the ruby at her throat. Severus stood at the back, his arms crossed as Professor McGonagall rolled his eyes at him, his friends running in and out of the picture, giggling as they chased each other with coloured lights from their wands.

Harry felt tears prickling the back of his eyes, hot and salty, as he watched the family- his family. With difficulty, he looked at the inscription again. Erised- he cocked his head and looked at it again, at an angle, as the word seemed to change direction. Desire- this was just that, just what he wanted. But it wasn’t real. He tore his eyes away, Mary’s words ringing in his head. A ghost is just a shadow of what has been, chasing a shadow of what could have been. He turned his back decisively as he ascended the stairs again- he was no ghost.
His sleep was troubled that night, his mother’s arms reaching desperately for him as Vernon beat him, like he often did. But she couldn’t get to him- she was trapped behind the glass of the Mirror of Erised, and she met only the unforgiving wall of glass as she cried soundlessly. Eventually, Vernon tore the belt away from Harry’s bleeding form and smashed it into the mirror, which shattered, leaving not even the shadow of Lily to comfort her son as the large man in his cruelty picked up a pieced of the shattered glass before advancing on Harry again.

Harry woke up, sweating and screaming. He felt a calloused hand on his forehead as he realised with a pit in his stomach that he’d forgotten to set his silencing charm.

“Shh, it’s alright pup- just a nightmare,” Sirius’ lips soothed mutely as he pulled the mini-quaffle on the lamp so Harry could see them. “You’ll be just fine.”

“I… I’m sorry I woke you up,” Harry whispered as he forced down a sob, voice heaving.

“It’s alright Harry- I’ve been waiting ten years for you to wake me up.” He brushed Harry’s sweaty hair off his forehead and transformed into Padfoot, curling around his godson, who clutched his fur in his too-small hands, the heaving of his tiny chest slowly ceasing as he drifted off to sleep, this time more peacefully, with Padfoot’s warm breath panting in one of his defunct ears.

Harry woke up later than usual the next morning, but there were still bruise-coloured dark circles under his eyes. Padfoot pushed his warm, wet nose into Harry’s side, and was rewarded with a tired smile as he descended the stairs. He was surprised to find Severus in an armchair in the living room, reading The Daily Prophet.

“Where’d the mirror go?” Harry asked through a yawn so large his jaw made a cracking noise. The others had to wait until he finished before they could speak, so he was able to lipread properly.

“What mirror, Harry?” Severus asked, looking at Harry’s wan face in concern.

“The mirror that said Erised on it, the one that shows what you want- I went downstairs for a drink of water last night and found it- I hope that’s okay…” he looked uncertain, shuffling back and forth on his feet.

“Hey,” Sirius lifted Harry’s face again. “Of course it’s okay that you went for a drink, pup- this is your house. But the mirror, it shouldn’t have been there- I’ve never even seen it before.”

“It… it showed me my parents- they were here with all of us,” Harry’s voice cracked, and he cleared his throat, ashamed.

Sirius and Remus traded concerned looks, and Severus’ face paled. “Dumbledore,” he said to the other two adults when Harry’s face was turned away.

“Tonks- why don’t you turn back into an adult and take the boys out for ice cream?” Remus called into the kitchen.

“For breakfast?” Harry, who had been watching, asked incredulously.

“Of course buddy- you’ve earned a treat,” Sirius ruffled his hair, and one of his curls bounced straight up, refusing to be put back down.

“Let’s go get find some goodies,” Tonks said cheerfully, her hair long and purple and her eyes a vivid, electric blue. She took Harry and Draco each by a hand, ignoring Draco’s protests that he was too old (Harry was enjoying the affectionate contact and made no complaints).
“Well, we have to do something!” Sirius declared as soon as the door shut behind them. “Come on guys- let’s go confront the old bastard!”

“Slow down, mutt- we have no proof it was him, and we don’t want to exacerbate the situation when he is in charge of our children for nine months out of the year,” Severus reasoned.

“How can you be so calm about this- Dumbledore broke into my house and caused Harry emotional distress!” Sirius yelped, tearing his hands through his hair in frustration.

“I’m not calm about it- I’m just controlling my emotions so I can think logically about this,” Severus ground out.

“Fuck thinking logically!” Padfoot yelled, furious. “I actually care about Harry and won’t stand for this!”

“Don’t you dare imply that I don’t care about Harry!” Severus finally raised his voice, his anger causing him to let slip something he never planned to admit outside the sanctity of his mind.

“Well you sure have a funny way of showing it!” the dog animagus clenched his fists as the windows began to rattle slightly.

“I just don’t want to drag him into a mess where he ends up in the middle! Albus Dumbledore has the entire wizarding world eating out of palm of his hand- he’s a manipulative bastard, but he has layers of protection to prevent him from getting caught at these kinds of things. I have no sway- an ex-death eater who barely has any standing amongst his own colleagues, and you- well, you may be in a position of power, but you just got out of ten years in Azkaban. Do you want to go chasing after Dumbledore with nothing to back us up, risk having people question your sanity? You could lose Harry, risk Draco’s future!”

“You’re his godfather- you could take care of Draco, and Harry already cares about you anyway, you great git- stop pretending you know what’s best for me!”

“I- Lucius chose me as Draco’s godfather- Narcissa didn’t trust me at that time, and for a bloody good reason, too! I am in a tenuous position- you need to grow up and start thinking about someone other than yourself!” Severus growled, and Sirius felt his hackles raise.

“How dare you? In my house-”

“ENOUGH!” Remus’ voice finally cut through their argument with the force of a blade, the wolf rising in his eyes as he glared at them both. “For once in your goddamn lives, you have the same goal, and you need to try to get along! Dumbledore is the one we’re mad at right now, and we can’t let a difference of opinion ruin this tenuous truce we have, not when it’s so important. Sirius, Severus is right about our approach- we don’t have any proof, and if we want anything to stick, we have to lie low and gather intel. He was a spy, and he knows what he’s doing. And Severus- I realise none of us have the best past relationship, but we can’t just be yelling at each other. Both of you need to learn to get along- you were doing alright so far, and you need to remember that. Both of you want what is best for the boys, so you need to ignore your different opinions about how to do it and focus on the fact that we want to do it.”

“You’re right, Remy. Severus, I shouldn’t have accused you like that- I’m sorry. I know you care for Harry, and I appreciate that,” Sirius sighed, the words burning in his throat.

“And mutt- Sirius,” the potions master corrected, jaw clenched. “I appreciate how much effort you’ve been making to mature for the sake of my godson and yours- I know it can’t be easy for you
with… *everything else* on your mind.”

“You’re right- this isn’t easy for either of us, but it’s harder for Harry- well, harder for both of them, with everything that’s happened recently. We’re adults now, however terrifying the idea,” Sirius took a deep breath and exhaled as he relaxed his shoulders.

“I did not expect that to be so easy,” Remus admitted, looking surprised.

“Well, we’re no longer teenagers with bad haircuts,” Severus tried weakly for a joke, since the rest of the day was already so strange.

“Hey, I had a great haircut,” Sirius cracked a smile, and Severus rolled his eyes.

“Sure you did, mutt- *sure you did.*”
“Weasleys!” Harry cried gleefully as the large family of redheads poured through the floo, and he ran up to give Ron a big hug, and the taller Slytherin picked him up and spun him around in a circle as he hugged him tightly.

“Harry! I missed you!” Ron put him back down as Harry giggled dizzily, plopping down on the soft carpet.

“You two act like it’s been years since you’ve seen each other,” Severus rolled his eyes as he went to the kitchen to pour himself another black coffee.

“It feels like it,” Ron insisted as he looked Harry up and down, trying to gauge if he’d gained any weight since they left school (and not too happy to find that he hadn’t).

“Oh, how nice to see you again, dear,” Molly told him. As soon as her lips had stopped moving, Harry dove in to give her a hug as well, finding himself crushed against her ample bosom and very, very happy about all the affection.

“Goodness, where’s the kitchen?” she asked Kreacher. “I brought lard.”

“Ahhh, lard is good shortening for helping little master to be gaining weight. Come- Kreacher and Mistress red will be cooking now- Kreacher has a goose in the oven but Kreacher would love some help with the sides.”

“Look,” Ron signed for Harry, seeming much more confident than he had the week before. “I’ve gotten better.”

“Wow!” Harry’s green eyes widened in surprise. “How’d you do that so fast?”

“He’s been practicing almost non-stop since we got home,” Fred tapped Harry on the shoulder and told him. “I’ve never seen him work so hard at anything.”

“Aww, you didn’t have to…” Harry’s cheeks pinked, but Ron just told him to shut up and hugged him again.

“Hi Ginny,” Harry waved at the youngest Weasley, and she squeaked and hid back behind her mother.

“Hey- it’s okay, you can talk to me. I’m not so impressive- I think you’re taller than me actually, which is really unfair…”

Ginny giggled a little and stepped out from behind her mother. “Only a little,” she consoled him, her long red hair falling in her face. She huffed and pulled a strand away, irritated.

“Do you want me to braid that for you?” Harry asked her, and she looked at him curiously.

“You know how to do hair? Fred’s tried, but he’s no good at it.”

“Hey!” Fred exclaimed. “My braids are excellent, I’ll have you know.”
Ginny gave him an unimpressed look. “The last time you tried, it took me two hours to untangle.”

Harry laughed as he started dividing her hair, hands arranging it into a simple but polished French braid.

“How’d you learn to do that?” Bill Weasley (or, Harry was almost certain it was Bill, from Ron’s description) asked, stepping in front and leaning down so Harry could read his lips without having to angle his head away from Ginny’s hair.

“My aunt used to make me do her hair for parties and stuff,” Harry shrugged, smiling at Mrs. Weasley (she’d come out of the kitchen for a moment to grab some chocolate chips from her bag) offered him a ribbon to tie it off with.

Ron tensed at the mention of Harry’s relatives, clenching his fists and adding another reason to his list of why they were the worst people in the entire universe. Luckily, Harry was well in front of him and with his back turned, so Harry didn’t see, but his mother did, and she frowned as her suspicions were further confirmed.

“Can you do mine?” Bill asked, pulling the hair tie out of his ponytail and squatting down in front of Harry.

“If you want me too,” Harry let out a soft little giggle that made hearts melt as Ginny urged him to do two braids.

“Alright then, lil sis- two it is,” and Draco signed the conversation for Harry as he took the hair and divided it in further sections.

“Dashing,” George declared, looking at his oldest brother.

“Woo- sorry I’m late,” Charlie suddenly came tumbling through the floo, startling Harry. “There was a… situation- it’s mating season, a couple Fireballs got a little too adventurous- it was a whole thing.” His nose sported a bit of soot on the end, and Molly reached up and rubbed at it vigorously with a handkerchief before heading back to the kitchen.

“Clearly it’s not dependent on age, then,” Harry told Ron as they remembered the first day of school, laughing nostalgically.

“We’ve got plenty of room for you guys,” Sirius told the red headed family. “Fred and George, you can take the last guest room to the right on the third floor, Percy, you can share the one next to it with Bill and Charlie, Molly and Arthur, you guys can take the guest suite on the left, Ron can stay with Harry, and Ginny- you get the little attic nook on the fourth floor. Don’t worry- we don’t have any ghouls or anything.”

“We have a ghoul,” Ginny informed him. “He’s not very exciting, so I’ve named him Percy.”

“Mum!” Percy turned to their parents (between her and Kreacher, they’d prepared the meal in a matter of time, and now it was just a matter of letting it cook), and Molly gave Ginny a half-hearted effort at a stern look while Arthur hid a laugh.

“What does a ghoul look like?” Harry asked, intrigued.

“Er, kinda lumpy and vaguely humanoid, I guess,” Ron shrugged.

“Eloquent, Weasel, eloquent.” Draco spoke his first words since everyone had arrived.

“Thank you Draco,” Ron smiled cheekily at him, and the blonde rolled his eyes.
“Wait till you see what I got you for Christmas!” Harry said eagerly- Tonks and Remus had taken them to Diagon Alley earlier that day while Severus and Sirius pulled a few strings, talked to a few connections, and began digging up anything they could that would help Narcissa in the divorce.

“What’d you get me?” Draco asked him, hands repeating the same question he’d already tried four times.

“You’ll find out tomorrow and not a second sooner,” Harry’s hands repeated the same answer yet again.

“But I wanna know now!” the blonde whinged. Harry laughed and rolled his eyes. He’d already sent Hermione the books he’d gotten her (Useful Charms for Muggleborns and Hogwarts, a History, centennial anniversary edition, plus a Slytherin scarf), so they should be there by tomorrow, and Hedwig should be back in time for Christmas dinner. For Ron he’d gotten new quidditch gloves and the book Flying with the Canons, and for Draco, he’d gotten a wand holster, covered in grey silk and sporting a modified notice me not charm so it wouldn’t irritate his sensitive skin. He’d also found some special socks, knitted seamlessly in the round, since he noticed that his friend was always tugging at the seam on the front of the toes, trying to keep it from slipping around and bothering him inside his shoes.

For Kreacher, he’d found a self-kneading breadboard, and for Remus, he’d owl-ordered a honeydukes chocolate bar the size of the kitchen table (the advertisement said it was a year’s supply, but Harry gave it a month with Uncle Moony). For Severus, he’d found some rare bottled siren song in an upscale apothecary. Sirius had been the most difficult, as it had involved a lot of research and some writing letters, but he’d managed to track his old flying motorbike that he spoke so fondly of, following a paper trail that took him through estate sales, second-hand car shops, and a national incident in France when it was accidentally purchased by a muggle that took five obliviators two weeks to handle. Eventually, he tracked it to a warlock with a mid-life crisis in Germany, who’d agreed to let him buy it back. Harry tried to offer him money for it, but all the man wanted was an autograph. Although it made him a little uncomfortable, he’d agreed for the sake of his godfather.

“Dinner!” Kreacher called eventually, and Ron and Draco both started signing to Harry at the same time, bringing a laugh out of all three of them.

“It all looks amazing,” Bill commented as they sat down.

“Smells amazing too,” Charlie agreed.

“What’s this?” Arthur asked, picking up a circular object that Kreacher had forgotten to take off the mantle of the kitchen fireplace.

“Oh, sorry- that’s my yoyo,” Draco explained, taking it back. “I got it in Muggle London the other day.”

“And what is the function of this… yoyo?” he asked eagerly, and Draco let it go to the end of it’s string and jerked it back up.

“Fascinating,” the Weasley father proclaimed, eyes shining.

“And you can do tricks with it!” Draco demonstrated by throwing it out and pulling it back across the ground, ecstatic now that he was somewhere he was allowed to indulge his curiosity over muggle things.

“Truly marvellous! Do you have anything else?” Arthur asked Draco.
“Well, Harry and Tonks taught me how to use the payphone on the corner yesterday,” he proclaimed proudly.

“Is it anything like the fellytone?” Arthur breathed, almost reverently.

“It’s like a fellytone, except you have to pay to use it,” Draco instructed, confidently.

“Uh, guys?” Harry had been confused for a moment, trying to read their lips and unsure of what they were talking about, but he managed to put context clues together and realised that strange word he couldn’t quite work out was supposed to be telephone, and he was trying not to laugh too hard. “It’s called a telephone.”

“Tel-e-fooone,” they both repeated, testing the weight of the word in their mouths.

“They even have mobile ones, that you can walk around and talk to someone with,” Harry further instructed them, enjoying the way their eyes widened comically.

“That’s so much more advanced than the floo system,” Arthur said in awe. “You can’t move your fireplace.”

“That you can’t,” Sirius agreed with a laugh as they passed the potatoes around.

“So you get to spend all day with muggle things?” the blonde Slytherin asked Mr. Weasley enthusiastically, and Sirius and Severus both made a mental note that it looked like muggle things were becoming another of his special interests.

“Yep,” the genial, balding man nodded. “I un-enchant things wizards illegally mess with.”

“Like what?”

“Oh- last year, we had a walking stick that kept dancing out of reach and tripping anyone who used it. Luckily, we were able to track it down fairly easily, as it had a very distinct paisley pattern.”

“Wait- green paisleys?” Draco asked, paling.

“Yes,” Arthur confirmed, looking at the child in concern. “How did you know?”

“My father had a walking stick like that, and I liked to play with it when I was younger- I would pretend I was a mountain climber who visited dragon nests- but it went missing last year. Why would he do something like that?” He went quiet and put his hands in his lap, casting his eyes down. Severus and Sirius looked at each other- more evidence for the trial.

“It was Lucius, then? We never could find the owner- they’d hidden their trace well, and it wasn’t exactly the top priority of the auror department to help us, since there was that huge string of robberies on Diagon around that time.” Mr. Weasley looked at the still-silent child, who looked uncomfortable- he knew his father wasn’t exactly a nice person, but messing with muggles for fun? What… what if he hadn’t been imperiused when he served the dark lord, like the papers claimed.

“Hey, you okay?” Harry signed to him, and Draco nodded unconvincingly.

“Oh, Mr. Weasley- have you ever seen a wind-up toy?” Harry asked, but his eyes were on his friend.

“No, I can’t say I have,” Arthur caught on to what he was trying to do and silently commended Harry for his empathy.

“May I please be excused for a moment?” Harry asked Sirius and Remus. “I’m full.”
“Of course pup, but you don’t want to try to eat a little more when you get back?” Remus looked anxiously at the plate—still over half-full.

“It’s really rich,” Harry admitted quietly, and Severus held a hand up to still the anxious inquiries of the other two men before he motioned to Harry that he could go up the stairs and get what he wanted from the toy chest.

“This is why he’s on nutrient potions,” he told them when Harry turned away. “Don’t try to push it, or he’ll only get sick and lose what he’s managed to finish so far.” None of this managed to calm Draco down, who was now sharing worried looks with Ron, but still otherwise withdrawing into himself.

“Look!” Harry called as he brought down one of those clacking teeth wind-up toys that you got in gumball machines (Sirius had a collection, and he of course decided to start one for Harry as well). He rotated the handle as the plastic dentures *clickety-clacked* their way towards Draco and Arthur, and the blonde couldn’t help a little laugh as they ran out of kinetic energy and fell frontwards into his potatoes.

“Why does it want your gravy?” Ginny, sitting between Draco and her father, giggled as she poked at the toy. “It doesn’t have a stomach to put it in!”

“Good one,” the blonde finally spoke, and Ginny picked the teeth up out of his plate and licked them clean before putting them in her own mouth and making silly faces.

“Oi Gin,” Ron snorted. “That’s a messed up mouth right there—you’ll have to go see Hermione’s parents— they’re dentists.”

“That’s like a teeth healer,” Draco explained to Arthur, who nodded along, pretending he hadn’t already known *that* little piece of information.

“Don’t set the silencing charm, mate—I want to be able to wake you up if you have a nightmare,” Ron lit his wand so Harry could see his lips moving as they crawled into bed that night.

“You… *you know*?” Harry mumbled, embarrassed.

“I… I had a feeling, and then one night I woke up to go to the bathroom and saw you screaming, but I couldn’t hear anything, so I figured you put the charm up. It’s okay, Har— you don’t need to feel ashamed. If I went through *half* of what you went through, I’d be such a mess I don’t think I’d be able to get out of bed. I’ll never think less of you, I promise. I… I know this sounds kind of sappy, but I love you, Harry. The only difference between you and the brothers I grew up with is that you’re not a redhead,” his best friend said sincerely, and Harry could see in his blue eyes, reflecting the wand light, that he meant every word.

“Th— thanks Ron. I love you too—bro,” Harry let out a long, shaky breath of relief, and Ron pulled the blanket over both of them and pressed his own feet to Harry’s cold toes to warm them as they drifted off to sleep.

“Ho ho ho,” Severus Snape groused the next morning, dressed as father Christmas, although he wouldn’t convince even the most gullible child, his suit being far too large and his expression far too dour, which contrasted sharply with the cheery noise the bell on his hat made when he moved.

“What in Merlin’s name…?” Charlie couldn’t say anything else, as he was laughing too hard.

“Those two *dogs*,” the potions master pointed towards Sirius and Remus, “got me drunk enough that I thought a game of exploding snap with Ms. Tonks would be a *good* idea.”
“Hey- I was drunk too,” Tonks, who looked like an adult today due to the presence of those not aware of her cover, told them. “And I put my neck out there too, you know.”

“What did she bet?” Ron asked, rubbing his eyes, which were full of tears, he was laughing so hard at the sight of their head of house posing as father Christmas.

“I would have had to look like Minister Fudge for the day,” she shuddered. “Frightening.”

“Hey- where’s that girl, Casey?” Fred asked suddenly. “Wasn’t she supposed to be here?”

“Her uncle came back early from his business trip,” Harry smoothly recited the rehearsed explanation (Tonks’ tiny firstie body didn’t have any alcohol tolerance, and she wasn’t going to sit through another Christmas without eggnog and firewhiskey- she’d done that enough growing up).

“Oh, that’s nice,” George and his twin clearly didn’t buy it (although only Harry could read the little bit of doubt that leaked into their body language), but they thankfully decided that there must be a good reason and that this was something serious that they shouldn’t interfere with (unusual for them, yes, but they wouldn’t go about messing in things when there was clearly more at stake than a good joke).

“Wow, that’s a lot of presents!” there was finally enough of a break in the conversation that Harry felt he could look at the tree without missing anything, and he gasped.

“Oh, Harry, this is lovely,” Mrs. Weasley looked at the warm, hand-knit shawl (he’d sent a similar one to Minerva. “I knit presents for everyone every year, but I’ve never had anyone knit me anything! Wherever did you learn?”

“My aunt,” he said. Petunia used to make him knit all her contributions to the church charity drive, and if anyone else in the church had donated more that year… well, things didn’t go well for him. Ron and his mother traded another concerned look, but they dropped the subject.

“Well, you have such talent for it,” Molly said decisively, looking at the uniform box stitching and the neatly-trimmed fringe. “I couldn’t knit like this until I was married.”

“Oh, I think you’re being modest- your knitting is lovely,” Harry beamed at her, his thin form lost within his warm, baggy Weasley sweater, green with a silver H. Ron also got a Slytherin-coloured sweater that year, and he was beyond delighted to finally have one that wasn’t maroon. Sirius, well aware of Molly’s tendency to give sweaters, had sent her some extra money so she could buy cashmere yarn for Draco’s, so he could participate in the tradition without having his sensory issues aggravated.

“I love mine,” Draco declared, the turtleneck making him look adorable, as it was just a little too high on the collar, so it gave the impression of an actual turtle only half-out of his shell. His mother had tried to knit him things, but the traditional pureblood pastimes of needlecrafts were not her forte. Nevertheless, he had all of her half-finished, messily stitched projects stored away in a chest in his...
room, at the back of the closet, and Dobby had put a charm on it so that Lucius was less likely to notice. But it was nice to have something handmade that he could actually wear. (In Narcissa’s defence - besides the fact that she was a fantastic mum in general, she could make a mean torte).

“Yeah- between my mum’s sweater and those nice socks Harry got you, you won’t get too cold down there in the dungeons,” Ginny piped up, her hair in another perfect braid, courtesy of Harry.

“It would be a lot colder down there, but Severus re-applies the heating charms a lot,” the green eyed teen told her.

“Shh, Harry- nobody’s supposed to know he has a heart,” Draco said out loud, so they could all enjoy the joke at the man’s expense (a common theme for the day, it seemed).

“I’d give you detention, but what’s the point?” Severus sighed dramatically. “Life has lost all meaning.”

“You’re such a drama queen,” Remus rolled his eyes, and Snape gave him a dirty look but didn’t say anything.

“Eat your chocolate bar,” Severus snipped, and Remus rolled his eyes again but did as instructed (after all, it wasn’t a difficult task).

“What’s this?” Harry asked suddenly, a pile of slippery, transparent fabric coming out of a wrapped package.

“It was your father’s invisibility cloak, Prongslet,” Sirius said. “I reclaimed it from Dumbledore, who had been borrowing it for far too long.

“This was my father’s?” Harry whispered incredulously, eyes misting, and Snape couldn’t even kindle the usual stab of bitterness that came when he people talked about James Potter.

“You can have so much fun with that!” George beamed. “We can show you all the secret passageways and-”

“Thanks guys, but I don’t wanna bring this to Hogwarts in case it gets lost- I don’t have much of my dad’s,” Harry said quietly, looking uncertain and afraid of disappointing his two friends but determined nonetheless. “I’m gonna go but it in a safe place in my room.”

“That’s okay, Harrykins, we understand. All the more reason to master the disillusionment charm,” Fred teased, both to lighten the mood and let the first year know they weren’t upset with him, since he looked so nervous about disagreeing with them.

“Thanks guys,” Harry ran up to stow the cloak away before they finished opening gifts, and Severus resisted the urge to call him back and tell him to bring it. He won’t have any reason to need it, he assured himself. Nothing’s going to happen to him.

While Harry was up there, he also grabbed Sirius’ gift- the box with the shrunken motorcycle in it, carrying it down for his godfather.

“You gotta open this one outside,” he informed him, and everyone followed the two as they made their way to the back yard.

“Oh fuck,” Sirius whispered, voice emotional as he pulled the toy-sized motorcycle out of the box and followed the engorge me directions on the card. Nobody even scolded the dog animagus for his language as tears welled up in his eyes. “Pup, how did you get this?”
“I took cocaine, like Sherlock Holmes.” Everyone who knew what cocaine was chuckled and rolled their eyes.

“You have your mother’s sense of humour- she was sarcastic and sassy too,” Sirius pulled his godson into a big hug and they couldn’t talk for a bit as Harry buried his face in Padfoot’s robes.

“We have one more surprise for you, Harry,” Remus said when Harry finally looked up at them.

“Another surprise- you guys have done so much already!”

“Well, this one will be useful as well as awesome,” Sirius enthused. “Hagrid, we’re ready for you!”

“Happy Christmas, Harry!” the large man boomed, Fluffy next to him on a leash wearing a very large vest that said Registered Service Dog.

“Fluffy?!” Harry exclaimed, running up to throw his arms as far around the dog’s broad chest as it would go. “He… you’re giving him to me?”

“Yep- we sent him off to a special trainor, and his vest is charmed so that ter muggles, he just looks like a regular rottweiler, and so that he can shrink ter fit in smaller spaces,” Hagrid said proudly.

“But what about…?” Harry waved vaguely, referring whatever Fluffy was supposed to guard.

“Oh- the breeder was lookin’ ter get rid a another one, and so I took him in- and we put another guard on the door for an hour twice a day so I can take him for a walk,” Hagrid explained, and the twins realised that this must be whatever had been on the door in the forbidden third-floor corridor. Seeing the devious, excited looks they traded, Hagrid blanched. “I should not have said that.”

“We’ve set a dog bed up for him in the common room- a very large dog bed,” Severus thankfully distracted the attention away from Hagrid’s blunder as Harry continued petting Fluffy, getting great wet kisses. “But for now- let’s go inside. It’s freezing.”

“This is the best day ever!” Harry enthused as his dog followed him inside, shrinking temporarily to fit in the doorway before taking his full size again in the entryway as Harry leaned happily against his side, listening to Hagrid explain that Fluffy was now trained to bump him with one of his noses whenever someone was trying to get his attention or a noise like the bell for the end of class (an actual bell, in the case of Hogwarts, or rather, many, located in shadowy alcoves across the castle and charmed to ring at certain intervals).

“It took ten years, but things are finally as they should be,” Remus said, arm around Sirius as they watched their godson tenderly.

Despite the warmth and joy of the occasion, Severus couldn’t help but feel a little bitter on behalf of Harry. They should have always been like this; he should have always been happy.
Chapter 11

“Okay, so we’ve got a cerberus that sleeps in the common room and follows Harry around like a docile puppy and not a terrifying three-headed beast- that’s a totally normal thing to happen,” Pansy shook her head, somehow not at all surprised as Fluffy lay on his giant dog bed in his special nook of the common room, looking around for anyone trying to get Harry’s attention.

“So what do you think he was guarding before?” Daphne asked casually as they sat working on homework, colourful little bubbles emerging from the ends of Theo, Blaise, and Ron’s wands as they procrastinated on their astronomy homework.

“Dunno,” the redhead answered, as Hermione popped his green and silver bubbles with her quill, gesturing to the empty parchment lying atop Ron’s open textbook.

“Could it have been that thing that the Gringotts robber tried to take?” Harry suddenly put forth. “I remember reading about it- because the robbery happened on my birthday. I asked Hagrid about it, since he’d picked something up for Dumbledore that day when he took me, but his lips are hard enough to read normally because of his beard, so I couldn’t figure out what he was saying since he was all nervous and stuttering.”

“Hmm- how big was the package?” Draco signed, and Harry held up his hands to demonstrate the width and height of the grubby little parcel.

“Well lots of things could be that big,” Ron sighed, throwing his head back.

“Size isn’t really a great indicator in general- pretty much any other clue would be more useful,” Pansy sighed and ran a hand through her hair.

“Maybe it sings and I just didn’t realise it,” Harry quipped, and she rolled her eyes at him.

“Maybe it was telling me what it was the whole time and I had no idea,” he continued, laughing. “Maybe it even had a little guitar in there, telling me all the secrets of the universe. Maybe that’s why it’s so valuable.”

“I don’t know about anything that does that, unless it’s a magic mirror,” Blaise said. “But nobody would go to all that trouble to steal one of those- they’re so annoying, trying to talk your ear off.”

“That’s such a strange expression,” Harry mused. “The physical presence of your ear isn’t always linked to your ability to hear. I mean, look at these useless things.” He twinged one of his own.

“They’re not completely useless,” Tracey argued. “I mean- look at how adorable,” she cooed, tickling one. Harry giggled, a precious, joyful sound, as he tried to pull away from the onslaught.

“Oh, and they’re ticklish too!” Daphne smiled softly. “See, I think these are very useful, even if you can’t hear with them.”

“Stop it! Stop it!” Harry shrieked, trying to escape the affectionate attentions as Pansy joined them, reaching for Harry’s skinny little belly as he tried in vain to bat her hands away. “I’m under attack!” he cried. “Help me, someone!”

“Aww,” Hermione wished she had a camera so she could take a picture of the scene, Harry trying to catch his breath between high-pitched bouts of laughter that filled the common room with its mirthful sound, enjoyed by all but the person making them.
“Alright, that’s enough,” Ron waded through to rescue his best friend, who was trying to catch his breath as he curled into a little ball, trying to protect his ticklish torso (which didn’t work, because his sides were ticklish as well). “Let him breathe.”

“Thanks,” Harry gasped as he tried in vain to put his hair back into some semblance of order. “Animals.” He looked at the girls, who were looking at him like they’d do just about anything to hear his sweet little giggle again.

“Maybe we should go say hi to Hagrid,” Hermione said the next day as, trailed by Fluffy in his service vest, they walked across the grounds after lunch. “See if we can get any more information about that package- a little simple curiosity never hurt anyone,” she signed along with the statement so Harry didn’t have to watch her as closely.

“It did kill the cat though,” he teased her (funny that people thought she was a goody-two-shoes, when she would be more than happy to sneakily break all the rules in the name of gathering knowledge).

“But satisfaction brought it back,” Hermione quoted the lesser-known part of the expression.

“Huh, I’ve never ‘heard’ that part,” Harry made air quotes around the word ‘heard’ like he always did, and his friends didn’t even bother to roll their eyes at this point.

“Monsters he lived with would discourage curiosity,” Ron muttered furiously under his breath, head down so Harry wouldn’t be able to read his lips, should he look over at that moment.

“So,” Hermione didn’t acknowledge Ron’s statement at all, not wanting to cue Harry in on their anger and make him uncomfortable, “I’m thinking we don’t let Hagrid know that Harry couldn’t lip read anything he said, so maybe he’ll let something slip.”

“Hey, remember on the train, when you said you wanted to be in Gryffindor?” Ron teased her.

“I was young and naive, give me a break,” Hermione rolled her eyes. “And to be fair, Gryffindor is the house everybody praises up and down, so is it any surprise that muggleborns coming into the wizarding world think it’s the best place to be?”

“That’s a good point,” Ron acknowledged. “I’ve never thought of it that way- but like, nobody really says anything exciting or praises Hufflepuff in the papers or in any of the popular books and stuff, so I guess it would make sense that people who are trying to fit into a world they just discovered would gravitate towards the house that seems like it has the most to offer.”

“Propaganda,” Hermione nodded sagely, and Harry might have been paying attention to their conversation if he wasn’t a few feet away, smiling goofily and staring cross-eyed at a butterfly that landed on his nose.

“That’s such a fun-sounding word for such an upsetting concept,” Ron sighed. “It’d be like finding out that the word sassafras was code for some awful disease.”

“Your mind is so wonderfully random,” Hermione laughed. “But I think I get what you’re saying.” She turned to Fluffy. “Get our little butterfly-chaser, please- we’re almost there.” The cerberus went and prodded Harry with his leftmost nose, and he finally looked up and realised they were in front of their friend’s hut as the butterfly fluttered away.

“I never like knocking on doors by myself, because I never know if they’re saying come in or not,” Harry sighed.
“Yeah, and I suppose knock-knock jokes aren’t too much fun either,” Ron sympathised, and Harry batted him playfully on the arm.

“You’re not the only one who can make terrible jokes,” the redhead laughed, as Harry protested that ‘his jokes were funny, thank you very much!’

“You boys would never get anything done if I wasn’t around,” Hermione signed, somehow managing to make exasperation come through in a language with no spoken tones.

“Harry’s lucky- he can just close his eyes and all your nagging goes away,” Ron grumbled, but there was fondness in his voice. Hermione didn’t get to respond, however, as Hagrid finally came to the door.

“Back Fang, back!” he ordered, mopping his brow.

“Hi Hagrid,” Hermione greeted. “We were hoping to ask you some questions about-”

“Now’s not really a great time,” he grunted, sounding nervous. Harry, however, who couldn’t hear any of this conversation, had naturally gravitated towards the heat emanating from inside the hut, despite it’s unbearable warmth for anyone else. Ron somehow wasn’t surprised, since he’d had to ask for three extra blankets from their head of house just so his friend stopped shivering in the middle of the night.

“Harry, where ya goin?” Hagrid called, before slapping his forehead so hard that it made Hermione cringe, although he didn’t seem to feel it. “Fluffy, go get Harry.” Fluffy shrank down to fit in the doorway, but instead of collecting his master, he decided that he also liked the warmth and curled up at Harry’s feet as the first year plopped down in front of the fireplace.

“Hey, what’s this?” he suddenly asked, as he caught sight of the black ovular object resting in the flames.

“Bloody Hell, that’s a dragon egg!” Ron gasped, shooting an incredulous look at Hagrid. “What the fuck are you thinking- you could get in so much trouble!”

The groundskeeper didn’t have time to respond, as just then the egg cracked down the middle, and Harry, still cuddling his dog and oblivious to the argument going on behind him, watched in fascination as a little dragon clawed its way out, spreading out wings twice the length of its body and poking curiously at Harry.

“He speaks parseltongue!” he cried. “And I can lip read it, or at least that’s what it feels like! That’s so cool!” Then he started hissing at the dragon, who apparently liked what he had to say, as it hopped up onto his shoulder and curled its leathery wings around his body as he settled in comfortably. Fluffy sniffed the thing, and, apparently deciding it was no threat to his little human, went back to lounging on the rug.

“I suppose it would make sense that dragons speak parseltongue, since they are technically part of the serpent family,” Hermione said sagely, carefully stepping closer to look at the fascinating creature. Hagrid smiled at the sight of his two children getting along so well (the dragon and Harry- he of course had massive protective instincts for the little boy).

“Awww, look at Norbert gettin’ along with Harry,” he sniffed, overcome with emotion and blowing his nose into a hankerchief the size of a baby blanket.

“Am I the only sane one?!” Ron gesticulated wildly. “There is a dragon in here- and the hut is made of wood!” he cried, as Hermione asked Harry in sign language if Norbert would let him pet
her, and Harry hissed the question at the dragon, who gave his consent.

“Well we can’t get rid of him now,” Hermione said. “Not when he’s already so close to Harry.”

“Hermione, it is illegal to have a dragon as a pet,” Ron told her, and Hagrid shuffled his feet a little guiltily.

“Well, I know, but I think…” Hermione trailed off, waving her wand in a complicated motion for a spell that she had definitely learned through independent study. “Aha- just as I suspected! The dragon has bonded with Harry, which of course circumvents any legal trouble, as any bonded dragon, no matter under what circumstances the bond occurred in, is of course allowed to stay with their wizard, as separating them will cause profound depression leading to death for the creature.”

“Awww, we don’t want Norbert to die!” Hagrid cried, as Ron mechanically moved his hands to explain the entire insane situation to Harry.

“See, look,” Hermione pointed to a little lightning bolt that appeared on Norbert’s left hind leg. “He’s got a bond brand- anyone who sees it will know that he belongs to Harry and be required to yield to the laws of magic.”

“How did you know about all that- my brother works on a dragon reserve and I didn’t even know that!” Ron gaped at his friend with disbelief and something akin to awe.

“So, confession time- I saw Hagrid in the library looking at books around dragons, so I did some independent research. I suggested coming down today because I wanted to try to deal with the situation before it got out of hand, and because I was really curious to see a dragon egg in person, I’ll admit.”

“Every time I think you can’t get any more brilliant, you do,” Ron shook his head in a daze as he gaped at Hermione, and Harry smiled brilliantly as Norbert moved from his shoulder to his head, curling up for a nap. Fluffy saw Harry’s eyes drooping as well, and propped himself up behind Harry so he could let himself drift off without disturbing his draconian friend.

Severus of course had to be informed of Harry’s new dragon, but he just put his head in his hands and sighed- of course. It was agreed that Hagrid would take care of Norbert in his hut, since they couldn’t bring him into the castle, but as long as the dragon could feel Harry’s presence through their bond and knew that he was safe and content, he was quite alright. And Harry came down to visit as often as he could, of course. By the time he was a month old, the dragon was half the size of Hagrid’s hut, which was much larger than Norwegian Ridgebacks normally grew by that age. When Ron commented on this, Hermione watched their best friend showering the dragon with hugs and kisses and made a comment about how it must be a ‘Clifford the big red dog’ type situation, which then led to a full half-hour of her explaining the muggle story to Ron.

It was one one such evening in early March (by which time Norbert was twice the size of Hagrid’s hut, and Ron wrote to Charlie, whose reserve began planning to send him on a research trip to study the phenomenon- the growth rate was totally unprecedented).

“So when’s Charlie get here?” Harry asked, sliding off Norbert’s back from where they’d just come back from a short flight around the immediate area surrounding Hagrid’s hut (his friends were too nervous to allow him to go any farther without one of them, even though it was totally irrational to think that Harry would be any safer with them than he would with a giant, fire-breathing dragon).

“Next Thursday,” Ron signed, giving Norbert a slightly-nervous pat on the nose (he knew that he wouldn’t hurt him, since he was a friend of Harry’s, but his Slytherin self-preservation instincts were
still screaming at him not to go near the giant dragon—that was such a Gryffindor thing).

“That’s gonna be so much fun!” Harry enthused, as Norbert went off to find something to eat (Hagrid noticed that the acromantula population had been thinning out a bit, but even he had to admit they were getting a little overpopulated, and Norbert didn’t try to eat any centaurs, so that was really all he could wish for).

“I love you, mate, but you’re crazy,” Ron shook his head incredulously as he signed to Harry.

“We’ll both be crazy together, then,” Hagrid, who had been learning sign language since Harry had such a hard time reading his lips (the large man had offered to shave his beard, but Harry looked horrified at the idea, saying that it just wouldn’t be right to have a Hagrid without his beard), beamed brilliantly as Harry congratulated him on his improving fluency.

“Snape’s right, mate— you’re like him in miniature,” Ron shook his head again, as their head of house, as if summoned by his name, came down to the hut.

“You children should get back to the castle before too long,” he told them, and then turned to the half-giant. “I have to go into the forest to gather some ingredients— will you accompany me?” He made the mistake of asking this where Harry could read his lips, and the eleven-year-old bounced up and down on the balls of his feet.

“Oh, are you gathering the moonshade flower?” he asked eagerly.

“Yes I am, and ten points to Slytherin for knowing it only grows during the new moon,” Severus praised, trying not to sound too pleased with his ward.

“Can I come? Pleeease!” he begged, and neither Hagrid nor Severus could say no to his begging green eyes, so wide and innocent despite the fact that he’d already gone through more than many adults suffer in a lifetime.

“Oh, alright,” Snape didn’t even try to dissuade him, knowing full well by now that he was as stubborn as his mother had been when he wanted to be. “But stick close to us.”

“We’re coming too,” Ron and Hermione said resolutely, determined to be there to protect Harry if needed. The potions master just sighed and ran his hands through his hair, and they were getting ready to set off when Draco came running, waving a tupperware.

“Harry, you forgot the peanut butter for your apple slices!” he yelled, before taking in the scene.

“Oh, are we gathering moonshade? I wanna come!”

How did I become a nanny? Severus groaned to himself, but said nothing as his godson came up to join his friends as they all clustered tightly together, four sets of hands signing too rapidly for anyone else to keep up.
“Alright, everyone needs to stick together,” Severus ordered them all, signing along in the fading light so Harry would be sure not to miss his instructions. “The moonshade is about a twenty minute walk into the forest.”

“Okay,” Harry agreed genially, Fluffy following him closely, shrinking down to better fit along the narrow forest path.

“What’s going on in the common room?” Hermione asked Draco, who rolled his eyes.

“The usual- Crabbe and Goyle playing with my baseball and smashing stuff because they’re terrible at it, Blaise is forcing Theo to play chess with him since Ron’s not in the common room, and the girls are playing a very violent game of uno.”

“Figures,” Ron rolled his eyes. “They scare me sometimes- when Tracey put a draw four down on top of Millie’s draw four, I thought Pansy was finally going to kill us all.”

“Oh, they’re even more beautiful than I thought they’d be,” Harry stopped reading their lips and extinguished his wand light, as the moonshade flowers were highly sensitive to light. “Wow.” He stepped forward softly, almost reverently, as he watched the pale silver flowers gleam in the darkness.

“Pretty,” Draco agreed, not looking entirely at the flowers.

“It almost feels wrong to pick them,” Ron agreed, as Hermione informed them that it was, in fact, good for the plant, as it allowed the flowers to grow back in greater plenty during the next new moon.

Harry had already picked up an acorn top, and, concentrating intently, engorged it before transfiguring the material to a strong wooden basket. He picked each flower gently, tenderly, layering it in the basket with careful fingers.

“So what all can you use these for?” Ron asked Hermione as they picked their own flowers.

“Well, the most famous use is wolfsbane- the new moon is, of course, the polar opposite of the full moon, which helps balance the behaviour of the werewolf and connect it to the more human side of its mind. The actual wolf’s bane, oraconite, serves more to counteract the acidity of the moonshade.”

“Fascinating, isn’t it?” Draco agreed, looking for the flowers with the most evenly-sized petals for his own collection.

Harry, over in his own silent little area, was thinking that it was truly amazing that a flower that grew in the middle of the darkest night of the month could smell like the first dewdrops of a summer morning. It was too dark for him to see his friends’ lips, or even their hands, but the temporary lack of communication was worth it to see the rare plant shining in the night, opening its flowers to the black sky. He was finishing with one cluster, again charming his basket to be a little larger to hold the ever-increasing bounty, when he caught sight of a silvery liquid shining on the ground between the bushes.

“Uh, Professor?” he called, anxiously. The liquid was beautiful, like clustered starlight, but there was something sinister about its being here.
“Yes Harry,” he very tentatively put his hand on the child’s shoulder, but he still jumped higher than he had in a while when the man came up behind him.

“Look,” he told him, pointing at the silver.

“Unicorn blood,” he wasn’t sure why he whispered, since Harry couldn’t hear either way, but it felt like it fit with the solemnity of the occasion.

“Hagrid!” he called loudly. “We have a situation.” The large man stepped surprisingly softly across the mossy ground, the other three children tiptoeing behind him.

“Bloody hell,” he swore, “the thing- it’s back.”

“What thing?” Ron asked, voice raspy as he tried to wet his mouth by swallowing.

“There’s summat been attacking the unicorns,” he rasped, voice gruff with fury. “Lately it’s been stoppin’, but there’s clearly a trail here.” He pointed at the small puddles of blood, like moonlight-coloured stones across the forest floor.

“It’s not safe here anymore.” Severus regretted his decision to allow the children to come along, but there was nothing to be done now- whatever was out here needed both adults to handle, and they couldn’t send the children back alone.

“The unicorn is hurt!” Harry’s remark made sense in the context of the conversation, which was a bit of luck combined with the fact that he knew they’d be debating going back and leaving whatever danger was out there to ravage the forest.

“Stay close, everyone, and don’t try to confront it, even if we’re having trouble,” the potions master said, gripping Harry’s shoulders and casting a lumos so bright that Harry would have no trouble reading his lips. “If things start to go downhill, run to the castle and find Minerva.” Fluffy grew as much as the pathway would allow and positioned himself protectively in front of the children, his hackles raised.

They followed the path, just the wandlight and the shining unicorn’s blood to light their way.

Everyone else jumped at every crunching twig, every rustle of the branches in the trees, menacing in the darkness. Harry was like a spring wound tightly coiled, unable to rely on his hearing to aid him in the darkness. His heart was pounding and his eyes never staying in one spot as he searched for danger, and thusly he was the first one to catch the glinting, conical light of the unicorn horn, sticking up at a forty-five degree angle as the creature groaned in pain, gleaming flanks heaving as a hooded figure drained the precious fluid from the wound on its rump.

Harry felt his heart seize as his eyes behind their thin, gold-rimmed glasses took in every vivid detail of the beautiful animal’s suffering. It was exquisite in a gut-wrenching kind of way, like the final scene of a sad movie or the final crescendo of Mozart’s Requiem Mass in D Minor.

The hooded figure turned, the sweet innocence of its blood turned cloying, tainted by the abhorrence of the monster before them. Harry felt the power in his core reverberate, syncing with the ancient magic of the forest as every fibre of his being told him that this couldn’t continue, that letting this paradigm of innocence die to resuscitate this monstrous leech.

He then did something that was very brave, and also very stupid. Ducking under Fluffy’s protective paw, he rushed forward, wand out and rage burning in his eyes, the normally soft emerald roaring like Greek fire, and the forest floor shook a little, a blood red leaf falling from a tree above them, fluttering to land at the hem of the creature’s dark robes. The very air seemed to crackle with magic,
and the figure ducked to avoid the child as he sank to his knees in front of the unicorn, laying his wand to the side and putting his dark hands on the wound on its flank, ignoring the silver blood slipping through his fingers like mercury in a thermometer. He almost appeared to glow faintly, and afterwards no one could say whether it was a trick of the light or their imaginations. But unmistakably real was the trail of blood on the ground rising, gathering around Harry and the unicorn and swirling around them in a cyclone of glinting silver, faster and faster as the impurities of the forest floor and the dark creature’s touch were spun away, the tangible threads of black slime flung far away as the blood poured back into the body of the unicorn.

It was a breathtaking moment, and nobody could say whether time stood still or a lifetime fit into a single moment as the wound closed, skin knitting together and fur growing back as if the injury had never been, and the unicorn’s breathing deepened as it withdrew from the edge of the void, back into the safety of a peaceful sleep. The ethereal glow retreated from the two as Harry slumped, collapsing against the luminous splendor of the slumbering unicorn. The spell broke as Severus rushed forward, looking for a pulse on the little Slytherin and sighing in relief when he found it.

Sometime during the past few moments, their villain had fled back into the forest, but it was only now that they noticed. Snape picked up Harry, and Hagrid carefully lifted the unicorn so he could take it back to his hut and ensure that it would be alright. Fluffy’s right head nudged Harry’s chaotic curls anxiously, and Draco wrung his hands together and danced from foot to foot.

“I need to get him to the hospital wing,” the head of Slytherin said, and it was at that moment that a great black dragon flapped into the clearing. His eyes were full of apprehension, and it was clear he’d gotten there as quickly as he possibly could, his great sides heaving as his tail batted trees aside to create a place to land.

“Hagrid, take the children back to your hut and keep them until I come to collect them. I need to travel as lightly as possible, and Norbert is already tired.” Harry’s friends clearly didn’t like that, but they understood the necessity as they nodded.

The norwegian ridgeback squatted to allow Severus to mount, Harry cradled softly in his arms, and with a great roar he shot into the sky again, not stopping when they reached the entrance to the castle but continuing along to the turret that held the hospital wing, he dug his claws into the shingles on the roof, and Severus climbed carefully down, casting an unlocking charm on the window and climbing through, startling Poppy as she hustled about her final duties of the night.

“What on earth?” she gasped, clutching her heart as she rushed towards the child, and Severus, too emotionally wrought from the events of the night, wordlessly pulled the memory out of his mind, the silver rope curling into the pensieve he’d summoned from Poppy’s office. She allowed herself to be sucked in, and came out looking distinctly shaken.

“He should be okay, right?- we’re just looking at magical exhaustion, yes?” he tried not to let his voice rise in pitch, but he had honestly never seen anything like what had just happened in the forest.

“No,” Poppy shook her head. “There’s no magical exhaustion.”

“How is that possible?” Severus shook his head in disbelief, and if Poppy hadn’t been incredibly surprised as well, she would have been offended when the man cast the diagnostic charm himself.

“He’s physically exhausted, yes, but his magic has suffered no unnatural levels of strain. He… he somehow tuned into the magic of the forest and the grounds, channeling it through himself. It’s a very rare ability that is nearly impossible to accomplish by the most talented of warlocks, even with years of training and on a small scale. That Harry, an eleven-year-old with only a few months of training, had managed to channel the magic of the entire Hogwarts grounds- well, theoretically, the
ability to channel that much power into himself, sync it with the frequency of his own core, use it in a
deliberate way, and not spontaneously combust was… well, it was… superhuman, almost.” Poppy
shakily collapsed onto one of the beds.

“What… how do we treat him?” Severus reminded her.

“He just needs rest,” Madame Pomfrey told him. “He’s likely to sleep for a few days, but do you
realise what this means, Severus?”

“We’re… we’re looking at another Merlin, essentially,” Severus looked at the sleeping boy, curled
up on his side, a smear of soil on his nose and his eyelashes fluttering as he breathed deeply. The
head of house carefully pulled a twig out of his haphazard mess of curls, pondering how this child,
who had suffered so much and looked so completely innocuous, harmless, so innocent in his sleep,
could have so much power at his disposal. Dumbledore had a theory about his mother’s love saving
him, but so many mothers had died protecting their children in the war, from muggles who had no
idea what was happening but clutched their babies in trembling arms as the grotesque-looking
monster spoke the last words they would ever hear while pointing a polished stick at them, to witches
like Lily who had gone down fighting, their final moments devoted to whatever needed to be done to
give their child the greatest chance of survival. What if… what if Harry had tuned in to the magic of
Godric’s Hollow that night, wrapping the magic around himself to survive, essentially forming a wall
of power that no mere wizard could hope to break through. The resulting impact could have been
what shattered the dark lord.

It was only a theory, yes, but… it made sense. If the blood protection really worked the way
Dumbledore said it should, then it should have kept him safe from all threats, including inside the
house. While Petunia, theoretically, may have been able to hurt the boy, because the blood of Lily
flowed through her veins (as warped as it was by the woman’s repugnant essence), her blithering oaf
of a husband shouldn’t have been able to touch him. Lily Potter had died a hero, yes, and her
sacrifice had given Harry time, but without the power that the child held, he would not have
survived.

“Are you thinking the same thing I am?” the nurse asked as she tucked the blankets around Harry,
cast cleaning charms on him, and transfigured his clothes into fluffy pyjamas.

“I believe so. The diagnostic charms have told us that his core is unusually large, but…”

“It’s nothing compared to having this kind of ability to channel magical energy on this magnitude,”
Poppy nodded in agreement.

“We cannot tell Dumbledore,” Severus declared firmly. “He’s never been able to channel more than
the ambient magic in his office, and even then only to increase the power of his spells. What Harry
did tonight… there is no spell that can purify the blood of a unicorn, put it back where it belongs, and
bring it back from the brink of death. That was pure, raw power.”

“What do you think he would do with this information?” Poppy worried her lip.

“I had something as insignificant as a mid-level position in the death eaters and a few potions skills
that would allow me to spy, can you imagine how he would try to use this sort of power?” Severus
ran a hand through his hair, non-greasy after his shower earlier in the evening.

“I… I’m not sure I want to.” Poppy’s eyes were sad as she looked down at the sleeping child,
unaware that he had been dragged into something larger than he could possibly imagine.
Chapter 13

The injured unicorn and the empty phial of unicorn blood that Tonks had found a few months before was enough to make the connection that the hooded figure was more than likely Quirrell- but why would Quirrell be using unicorn’s blood? She’d consulted Kingsley, and they were thinking that it had something to do with whatever was hidden in the school and had been in the vault at Gringotts that someone tried to rob. Maybe Quirrell had even been behind the robbery, although it didn’t make sense how he’d managed to pull something like that off- he wasn’t very impressive, magically. They were definitely missing something, some crucial piece of information, but they weren’t making any headway with what.

They’d tried to subpoena the information about what was in the hidden third floor corridor, but Dumbledore must have pulled some strings to keep them from getting it, as even Head Auror Bone’s efforts to obtain the subpoena were met with naught but the typical nonsense about how the evidence was ‘too circumstantial to justify the invasion of privacy.’

In the meantime, Dumbledore was doing some snooping of his own. The wards connected to the security crystals in his office told him that there had been a massive surge of magic in the forest the night before- it wasn’t malicious, in fact it was pure light magic, but he needed to know what it had been and where it had come from.

It… there was something familiar about the surge, and he stroked his long white beard as he tried to figure it out. As his eyes roved the room, they caught on a particular crystal in the corner- the one that told him how the wards on Privet Drive were holding up, as well as tracking Harry’s incidents of accidental magic (as long as they were performed within the wards or the surrounding area, which conveniently stretched as far as the primary school). Ah!- that was it then. Somehow, impossibly, that surge of magic had come from Harry. He scrolled through some papers on his desk- another part of being headmaster was knowing which students were in the hospital wing and when, and the updating system was automatic. He hadn’t gotten much time to look at the notice when it came in the night before, but now- yes, Harry was in the hospital wing. Interesting, then… this he ought to check up on.

“Hello Poppy,” he greeted genially, twinkle in his eyes as he smiled at her. “I’ve come to inquire after young Harry, as I’ve heard he was in the hospital wing.”

“He is here, yes, and he’ll be quite alright,” she told him stiffly, thankful she had put him in the back and drawn the curtains around his bed.

“That’s nice to hear,” he nodded. “Although I’m certainly curious as to what happened to him.” He kept his tone light, giving the nurse a doddering smile.

“He’s just suffering some minor fatigue, as is not uncommon for someone recovering from long-term malnutrition and abuse,” her eyes had a hard glint as she looked at him, and he knew that she knew what he was up to. “Why are you so interested? - you never come to check in on my patients unless I call you to notify you of a matter of importance.”

“Just concerned- I am aware that Harry was… different… than we were expecting.”

“You mean that he’s a Slytherin, that he’s deaf, or that he’s shy and withdrawn?” Poppy raised an eyebrow at him, unimpressed and impatient with this line of questioning. “Because I’m quite certain you’re aware that what he’s gone through instills in children a certain sense of cunning and self-preservation, as well as an introverted personality. And well, you know why he’s deaf.”
“My dear Poppy, I had no intentions of implying anything was wrong with him- I was just hoping to check in on one of my students. Especially as I knew that he and his friends were in the forest with Severus last night.”

“And how did you know that?” she looked sternly over the tops of her reading glasses.

“Part of my duties as headmaster, knowing where the students are,” Dumbledore hummed under his breath as he finished the sentence, still adopting the stance that this was a friendly little visit.

“It’s your disproportionate level of attention to this specific student that makes me wonder a bit- where was that attention when he was being clearly abused?” Poppy clenched her fists, her angry eyes boring a hole into Dumbledore’s crooked nose.

“I… that was a failure on my part, I will admit, assuming that just because the wards stood that he was doing well-” he swallowed around a dry lump in his throat; they were getting farther away from where he wanted to be in the conversation.

“It was more than a failure!” Poppy spat, before he could continue. “This is his life we’re talking about, and I don’t see how you get to adopt a stance of concern and look excessively closely into his life now, when he’s safe. You have no right to any more information- he is suffering a minor ailment and will be fine in a few days- now get out of my hospital.”

Albus left, trying to work out another way to get the information. Poppy, unsettled by the conversation, went to check on her patient. She pulled back the curtain to look at him, and she was surprised to find a little grey kitten curled up against the sleeping child. She wasn’t sure exactly where it had come from- probably one of the student’s pets had had a litter recently- but it certainly seemed attached to the little Slytherin, its soft little wet nose buried in Harry’s neck.

“You certainly seem to be running up quite the collection, huh little one?” she chuckled as she tried to push a stray curl back into place, only for it to bounce back. “I’ll be back to check on you in an hour, alright? Then we’ll try to wake you long enough to get some potions and a bit to eat in you.” Predictably, he didn’t respond with anything except a gentle snore, and she leaned down to kiss his cheek before she pulled the curtains again.

“Albus pay a visit?” Severus came in later, just after Poppy had finished getting a bit of food into a very sleepy Harry, along with his normal potions regimes.

“Of course he did,” Poppy rolled her eyes. “He was clearly fishing for information about what happened in the forest, but I managed to send him away.”

“Good,” Severus pulled the curtain aside to look at his ward, and merely sighed when he saw the kitten. “New pet?”

“It showed up while Harry was asleep, and as you can see, he seems rather attached to it.” The little grey ball of fluff was wrapped in Harry’s arms, snoozing on his chest he cuddled it closely.

“Should I be expecting the entire Slytherin first year class now that the school day has ended?” The nurse laughed as an the gaggle of children did indeed come running down the hall, accompanied by Neville Longbottom from Gryffindor.

“He’s sleeping,” she told them with a stern look, “and probably will be for most of the next couple of days. That was quite a lot of effort he expended, bringing a unicorn back from the brink of death.”

“So we can’t see him?” Draco’s face fell a bit, and Poppy sighed.
“Alright, but just for a minute.” She pulled the curtain back again, and Hermione and Ron both felt their heart seize up with the force of their protective instincts- he looked so innocent and vulnerable in this state, like all his troubles had stayed in the waking world and finally given him a bit of peace.

“He’s just so precious,” Pansy cooed. “How do you all keep from staring at him all night?” She looked at the Slytherin boys, who all gave her strange looks.

“Because that would be creepy,” Blaise bit out sarcastically, rolling his eyes.

“Oh, come on- he’s holding a kitten, for Merlin’s sake- you can’t tell me that it’s not like watching a baby, where you just wanna pinch his little cheeks.” He had finally gained a little weight (although not enough, unfortunately) so he had a little bit of cheek to pinch, at least.

“Oh,” Draco hadn’t even noticed the kitten until then, as he’d been watching Harry’s face, and the way his long eyelashes fluttered against his cheeks as he dreamed. “Where’d that come from?”

“Probably a loose kneazle running around, decided it wanted a new owner,” Ron shrugged- he knew from his brothers that that kind of thing happened all the time at Hogwarts. They came and they had babies, because, well, how would they stop them? His father had told him that in the muggle world, people ‘fixed’ their cats and dogs, but in the wizarding world the best they had was spells that you had to keep updating. When children took their pets to Hogwarts, the spells usually didn’t get updated, because many children forgot or just didn’t have the skills. But Hogwarts had space and mice enough for all of them, so it wasn’t really an issue.

“Well, I’m sure none of you mind Harry having another pet- it won’t take up nearly as much room as his service animal, anyway,” Poppy waved a hand dismissively. “Anyway, Harry’s already eaten, but it’s nearly dinner time for the rest of you, so get!” She ordered, shooing them away amongst choruses of grumbles and complaints (that she ignored).

“Will he be this exhausted every time he channels ambient magic?” Severus asked- it really wasn’t a common phenomenon, and unheard of in one so young and on such a large scale (for those two factors could be combined was mind-boggling) and he wanted to hear her medical opinion on it.

“It is unlikely- it’s just like regular magic, or exercise- the more he does it, the stronger he’ll get. Plus, for anyone to heal a unicorn would be tiring, so I wouldn’t be too concerned. He will, however, need someone to guide him so he doesn’t find himself accidentally doing too much.”

“And how are we supposed to do that?” Severus groaned and tugged his hands through his hair. “The only person we know who can channel at all is Dumbledore, and even if we trusted him, which we most certainly do not, his skills are a drop in the ocean compared to Harry’s, so how would he teach him?”

“Severus- you’re a smart man. I’m sure you’ll figure something out. And potions, of course, is a subject composed entirely of ambient magical ingredients- you don’t channel them, of course, but perhaps that will give you some idea of where to start. And Harry, for whatever reason, seems rather fond of you, so simply having an adult he trusts there to offer support will indubitably go a long way in helping him understand his own magic- he’s smart, and I doubt you’ll really have to do too much teaching, per se. Seeing as Merlin’s the only wizard I’ve ever heard of who would actually have this sort of experience, and he’s been dead for centuries, I’m supposing this is mostly guess work.”

“Lovely, because as a potions master I love guesswork,” he glared at her. “My profession practically depends on it.”

“Oh, do shut up,” she rolled her eyes at him. “Welcome to raising a child- it’s all guesswork, in one
way or another.”

The head of Slytherin stalked away to tend to his other duties, looking distinctly green.

Harry didn’t really remember waking up to eat or take his potions, he was so groggy during those times, so when he came to full awareness three days later, he was a bit confused before the events of the forest came back to him.

“The unicorn!” he cried, anxiously, and the new kitten crawled into his lap to comfort him. His fingers went to stroke it automatically, even though he had no idea where it came from.

“Is fine- Hagrid just turned it loose into the forest yesterday, good as new- you saved its life.”

“I did?” Harry wasn’t quite sure how he’d done it, to be honest. He’d just known something had to be done, and he’d just… reacted.

“You did- and speaking of which, it came to our attention that you weren’t using traditional magic to do so.”

“What do you mean?” Harry’s fingers clutched the kitten’s fur anxiously, and it tiptoed up to his shoulder to lick his nose with its rough little tongue.

“It’s not a bad thing dear- just relax,” she reminded him, wishing he could hear the tone of her voice- it often did wonders with nervous students. But her body language was calming as well, so the little Slytherin let out a breath slowly.

“Essentially, you have a rare ability to connect not only to your own magic, but to the magic around you as well. Some places have more ambient magic than others, but almost anywhere in the world at least has a little- this means that you can do more, and that you also have an intuitive sense that enables you to do magic that isn’t necessarily taught- there was no formula to what you did in the forest, no spell that would have done the same thing, and yet the exertion for your own core was no more than what would occur in a normal day of classes. We don’t really know much about it- it’s rare and anyone who can do it at all can usually only work on a small scale. Severus is going to help you figure out how to hone this ability, so you won’t be so tired every time you use it,” she explained to him, and his eyes went wide with surprise. She was glad she’d left out the bit about just how powerful he really was, as being told that there hasn’t been a wizard like you since the time of Merlin would be overwhelming for any child, let alone Harry, who was rather shy and still trying to adjust to all these recent changes.

“He’ll help me then- we’ll figure out what I’m doing?” Harry’s wide green eyes looked up at her, and there was already so much more tension in his form than there had been when he’d first woken up.

“Yes, little one- don’t worry,” Poppy assured him, and a little pout came onto his face like it always did when she called him ‘little one’ but she’d distracted him from some of his anxiety, which was her intention. “And in the meantime- you will still be learning just like everybody else, there’s just an additional element to explore.”

“Er, alright then,” he agreed, and he looked down at the kneazle kitten again. “Wha- where did this kitten come from?”

“We don’t know, but it found its way to you, so you may keep it, if you like.”

“Really?” his face lit up in excitement, and he picked up his new pet, looking her over (it became clear rather quickly that it was a her, now that she was no longer cuddled so tightly to Harry that you
“Of course, Harry- I promise you that I will always tell you the truth,” she reminded him, trying to subtly reinforce the idea, since he (understandably) had been given very few reasons to trust adults thus far in his young life. “Do you know what you want to name her?”

“Hmmmm,” Harry looked her over. “Any ideas, girl?” The kitten mewed, but he couldn’t hear it. They seemed to come to an understanding, however, as he nodded assuredly. “Yes- her name is Charcoal.”

“Lovely,” Poppy agreed, pushing a lock of messy hair behind Harry’s ear. “Now, how about I give you a quick check-over and then you can head to your common room?”

“Hey guys,” Harry greeted once she’d let him go (after far too many diagnostic spells, in his opinion). “What are you doing?” The other first years were huddled around a large book and a chocolate frog card, frowning in concentration.

“I’d checked out this book earlier in the semester for a little light reading,” Hermione motioned to the dense tome, and Ron rolled his eyes fondly, mouthing light reading? Harry bit back a giggle. “But I never got around to reading it in its entirety, and there were some other things I wanted to try, so I returned it to the library. But then it shows up on my bed, along with a chocolate frog card for Nicholas Flamel. It’s strange- I don’t know who was in our room or how they got this stuff there, but they’re obviously telling us to look into Nicholas Flamel, and then we find that he was the creator of the Philosopher’s stone.”

“And let me guess? The stone is about this big?” Harry indicated the dimensions of the package from Gringotts, Charcoal on his shoulder watching his hands move curiously.

“Yes, exactly.” Hermione nodded. “So that must be what Fluffy was guarding.” The service cerberus lifted his middle head at the mention of his name, but, sensing that no one was calling him, he went back to affectionately nuzzling Harry, who he’d missed very much while he was sleeping in hospital, while the right head sniffed Charcoal inquisitively.

“Funny, isn’t it- after we’ve stopped looking after whatever was in that corridor because we got busy with other things, this hint just shows up. You think that it would be good that we’ve stopped looking- the teachers made it pretty clear we shouldn’t go there,” Tracey chewed a lock of her chestnut hair as she mused.

“It’s kind of weird that they made such a big deal of it being ‘out of bounds’ though,” Ron suddenly realised. “I mean, that’s just a good way to get every curious Gryffindor in the school looking after it. A challenge, really. And then the answer shows up when we’ve lost interest- it can’t be coincidence.”

“It makes sense, too, with the thing in the forest,” Draco shuddered a bit at the memory but kept talking nonetheless. “Unicorn blood can keep you alive even if you’re on the brink of death, but nobody would use it unless they had something better coming. So, whoever was in the forest is going after the stone. And maybe they can’t get to it by themselves, for some reason, so they want us to figure it out and go after it, out of curiosity or whatnot.”

Quirrell’s after the stone, then, Tonks thought to herself. But he couldn’t have been the one who wanted them to know what it was, as that would compromise his own mission. So who- no… her blood ran cold in her first year’s body. Dumbledore wouldn’t- he’s a bit mad, and certainly too lenient, but pushing kids towards dangerous missions... I need to go write Kingsley.
“I nearly forgot!” she exclaimed out loud, adopting again her ‘Casey’ persona. “I’m supposed to write my Great-Uncle Simon today to let him know how I did on the Transfiguration quiz.”

“Alright- do you need one of us to go with you to the owelry?” Daphne asked her friend politely.

“No, that’s okay- I’ll probably do a bit of exploring on the way back, and I don’t want to hold you up. Save me some snacks if we have girls’ night.”

“No guarantees with this one,” the blonde with the perfect, ice-blue eyes jabbed a thumb at Pansy, who shrugged unapologetically.

“So we’re going to mind our business and stay away from the stone, right?” Harry asked. “I’ve had enough trouble for awhile.”

“Oh yes- I have no desire to go tramping after some stone of immortality that a unicorn-biting madman is after.” Hermione rolled her eyes. “And honestly, money is nice, but I think it’s been kept away from the public for a reason- imagine if everyone could have all the gold they could want- the inflation rate would be unfathomable.”

“Immortality might be kinda nice, though, doncha think?” Theodore studied his fingernails, as if the discussion of unlimited life and assets was really not quite so interesting.

“Ugh, the idea of making it through an average human lifetime gives me anxiety,” Blaise made a face. “Doing it forever seems rather overrated.”

“Immortality is such a Gryffindor idea,” Pansy rolled her eyes. “Those idiots never think ahead- it’d be all fun and games for them until everyone they love is dead and they’re bored out of their minds watching history repeat itself.”

“Yeah, I know everybody expects me to be chasing adventure or whatever because I’m ‘Harry Potter,’” Harry wrinkled his nose in disgust, “but I’m really just trying to go to school, here. But we’re agreed- no more trouble?”

“No more trouble,” the other Slytherins echoed. Unfortunately, they hadn’t yet learned that while Harry never went looking for trouble, trouble always found him, and them by association.
Hey guys- second to last chapter of the first book in the Emerald series! For those of you who read my other rewrite AU, sorry it's been a couple of days since I've updated Prince- it's been a busy couple days and I didn't have time to work on both. But this is a 6000 word monstrosity of a chapter, and I plan to get back on prince ASAP- tomorrow's the last day I have to help my mom with the twins (my dad ran away for the week to play with his boats and do some race thingy in Texas, because apparently he's great at *making* children but not so great at responsibility, but he'll be back shortly, and my mom pays me to help her out, which is more than she needs to do, but I digress...) Anyway, there's a pretty cool tumblr headcanon that I've incorporated into the latter bit of this chapter, which can be found here. Anyway, enjoy!

https://lullabyknell.tumblr.com/post/145497647373/ginevravweasley-ginevravweasley-listen

The next few months were relatively calm, just a few months of homework, quidditch, and studying for exams (Hermione of course had them preparing early). The only real change in routine were his lessons channeling magic with Snape. It wasn’t exactly simple, with so little knowledge of what they were doing or a pathway to follow, but they were making some progress.

“Do you feel anything now?” Severus asked as he set a jar of boomslang skin in front of Harry.

“Er, I’m not sure- I think so, but it feels a little different than tuning into the forest, because the forest is full of magic that’s always like, recharging, if that makes sense? And there’s magic in the boomslang skin, but it’s a set amount, because the snake already shed it. So I think I could do something with it, but there’s not much here compared to the rest of the room, even,” Harry kept one eye on his professor so he could read his lips, closing the other and picturing his core, threads of magic joining him to the area around him.

“Do you think you could light this stick on fire?” Severus set a piece of wood in front of him, one of the smaller pieces of wood he gave students to light the fires under their cauldrons. “With the magic from the skin, but not using your core?”

“Yeah… I- I think so,” Harry settled deeper into his own magic again, visualizing the boomslang skin, the thread of magic leading to his own core. He imagined tugging it, pushing it towards the wood and instructing it to light. It did, and the skin crumbled into dust.

“That was good, Harry, that was good,” Severus told him.

“I don’t think I liked doing it,” Harry shook his head. “It felt like taking something. See, if I do this, ” he pulled some loose magic from the stones and put the fire out, “then it’s pulling from an area that constantly gets recharged- the loose magic from the potions seeps into the stone, and it’s constantly getting replaced, so it’s not like I’m hurting anything. And the forest and the land makes its own magic, like a living entity. But this skin- its finite, it has only a small amount of magic, and when it’s gone, it’s just gone. Living things recharge, but this- it just doesn’t, and I feel like I’m taking something. Like, what if I- what if I took magic from a living person , but I took too much, so
much that they couldn’t recharge. I don’t like feeling like I’ve destroyed something, even if its dead, because this skin is part of a boomslang and I feel like I’ve stolen something from it.”

“Harry, you’re not the type of person who would destroy anything- you don’t have a problem using potions ingredients, yes?” Severus reasoned.

“Well yes, but then it’s going into something larger, and the extra magic that we use making it goes back into the environment. But look- all we have is dust,” he pointed at the ash from the wood and the dust where the skin used to be, sighing.

“This isn’t about the skin, is it?” Severus asked him, squatting down. “You’re worried you’re going to get drunk on power, do things you shouldn’t, aren’t you?” Harry averted his eyes, and there was a tense silence for a moment that felt so much longer, but eventually, he gave a nearly-imperceptible nod.

“Pull from me,” Severus said suddenly, and Harry looked at him like he was insane.

“What?” The first year was sure he’d read the man’s lips wrong, and Severus signed it.

“Tune into my magic- take enough to light a lumos in your hands. I trust you, and you’ll see that it’s okay.” The professor took the chair across from Harry, sitting and waiting patiently.

“I… I don’t want to- what if I hurt you? If… taking a wizard’s core is like taking his life force.”

“Just- just look at it. If you want to get over this fear, you need to face it, but the fact that you’re so afraid in the first place means you would never misuse this power,” Severus spoke gently, far more gently than he usually did, even with his ward (he didn’t want to make Harry feel uncomfortable by coddling him, and additionally, emotions were still somewhat difficult for him).

“O-kay,” Harry didn’t want to disobey the man, so he took a deep breath and looked into his own core again. He zoned in deeper, feeling around for the most concentrated presence in the room, which happened to be Severus. He imagined tiptoeing across it like a tightrope walker, and then he was immersed in the presence of the head of Slytherin. His magic was powerful, concentrated, but controlled. He knew exactly how much power was at his disposal and how much to expend at one time. Harry found that he was right, however- he had no desire to take anything, not when there was a whole world of nature that he was connected to, that was willing to give it. He was about to light the lumos, comfortable that he would take only what he needed and not feel the desire for any more, when he felt a foreign presence. While Severus’ magic was fairly grey (which didn’t mean anything; it’s not what kind of magic you use but how you use it), there was a foreign presence there, a smaller thread that most certainly didn’t belong to him, and Harry could feel how unwanted it was, the disdain and regret that the man felt towards it. Without thinking, he gave it a sharp tug, and it went spiralling out, back into the environment, dissipating to where such magic dwelled- in the realms of death, deep underground, back into the souls it had been ripped from. It didn’t belong here, and now it wasn’t.

Severus Snape gasped as he felt a burning sensation in his arm, and the mark burned dark for a moment before it was gone, a black, oily substance visible for a single moment. Then it was… gone. No more- not there.

“What just happened?” for the first time since Lily’s death, his voice was shaking. He had lost his composure, but not in anger- he felt… emotional.

“You didn’t want it there.” Harry shrugged. “I know it wasn’t the assignment, but…” He suddenly looked nervous, wondering if he had misjudged the situation and done the wrong thing.
He didn’t wonder very long, as he was taken aback by the feeling of arms around him. The professor seemed a bit awkward, as if he didn’t quite know what he was doing, and Harry was a bit uncertain as well— he still wasn’t used to being hugged, and although it was getting easier with Ron and Hermione and even Draco (who himself was a bit awkward with affection), he didn’t receive regular hugs from any adult except Poppy, when he went for his checkups.

Severus felt bumbling, foolish, but he hadn’t really thought about what he was doing— he’d experienced this sudden rush of gratitude and warmth and affection towards the child, and then they were… hugging. And he was somewhat stiffly patting the child’s scarred back, and Harry looked surprised but then put his arms around the teacher’s middle as well, somewhat mechanically.

“Er, so it’s okay then?” Harry coughed, and Severus pulled away so the child could see his face. Against all his natural instincts, he felt himself smiling, widely and genuinely.

“It’s more than okay, Harry— thank you.” Harry could tell that his voice was barely audible from the almost-reverent way his lips move as he spoke, and he gave a crooked little smile back.

“It’s no problem,” he shrugged modestly. “Er- am I allowed to go now? There’s only two months until exams, now, so…”

“Go, silly child,” Severus rolled his eyes. “And tell Hermione to stop making more of her.”

The next couple of months flew by pretty quickly as Harry continually gained more control over his magical connection. He was able to tune into the ambient magic in the environment fairly easily, although it was still quite the work of concentration to tune into Severus’ magic, and he wouldn’t be able to do it in the middle of a fight. Quidditch was going well as well— Slytherin won their match against Ravenclaw (Harry caught the snitch in a record-breaking five minutes, and stayed easily on his broom as well, with nobody trying to curse him off of it), and Gryffindor against Hufflepuff, and so the red and gold would be facing off against the green and silver at the end of June.

“Has anyone seen Charcoal?” Harry asked one morning in late June, after exams were over and done, looking under pillows in the common room, in her favourite spot by the fireplace, and behind bookshelves and cabinets.

“How are we supposed to answer that if he won’t lift his head long enough for us to tell him anything?” Daphne asked as Harry started pulling books out of his bag, wondering if his kitten might have hidden in there.

“She was there when I went to bed last night, but she was gone when I woke up!” Harry continued, distraught, calling her name.

“Wait!” Draco yelled out, patting Harry on the shoulder so he’d look at him. “I hear something.” The other Slytherins quieted down and listened in, and they heard the faint sound of mewing.

“Is it Charcoal? Does she sound distressed?” Harry asked anxiously.

“I don’t know; I barely understand people,” Draco signed, but he grabbed Harry’s hand and began leading him towards the sound. Fluffy looked up with his left head, preparing to come with him, but Harry waved a hand dismissively.

“It’s alright buddy— just continue with your nap. I made it along without a service dog for the past 6 years, so I’ll be fine.” Fluffy gave him a worried look but acquiesced, and Ron and Hermione followed Harry and Draco.

“The rest of you guys stay here,” Hermione instructed quietly. “Too much noise might scare her
Harry continued towards the noise of his kitten, led by Draco, and they didn’t even notice when their search led them into the forbidden third floor corridor.

“Why isn’t she responding to my voice? She usually comes,” Harry worried his lips, and Draco wasn’t able to answer, one hand in Harry’s and his face turned towards the front as he followed Charcoal’s meows, so he just kept pulling him forward.

“Maybe she’s gotten stuck somewhere, or she wants to show us something,” Ron tried to soothe his best friend, but then they caught sight of the little kitten. She was being levitated by an unseen force. Whatever they were, Harry couldn’t feel their magic in the immediate area (he had gotten to the point where he could tune nearly thoughtlessly into a radius of about ten metres). Desperate to save his pet, he lurched forward to grab her, which ended up leading him through a door that popped open right as Harry got close to it. Hermione and Ron, closest to where Harry was at the moment, reached for him and tried to tug him back, but were only dragged into the room as well. The door slammed shut behind them, and no amount of tugging from either end could get it open.

“Can you pull it out or redirect it- whatever is keeping us in here?” Hermione asked with her hands, and Harry tugged at the threads a bit anxiously.

“It’s really complex and volatile- I don’t know what it would do and I don’t wanna risk it,” Harry answered, shaking his head.

“I’ll go get Sev!” Draco yelled across to them, and the noise woke the previously-unnoticed creature behind them. They were in the room with the trapdoor, with Fluffy’s brother. At least Charcoal had been released from… whatever had been holding her.

“Good dog,” Harry soothed, stepping forward, and the cerberus ceased its growling, melting into Harry’s affection just like Fluffy had (and the dog seemed to like Charcoal as well, who cuddled right up against his side). “I think you can come forward, guys- if we’re stuck in here, maybe there’s a way out at the other end. At the very least, I don’t think it’s a great idea to be sitting ducks in a room with dangerous wards and not a lot of space to run from anything.”

“That’s a good point,” Hermione agreed, taking a tentative step forward. The cerberus growled, still not making any aggressive moves towards Harry but clearly not extending the same courtesy to the other two, as he growled when they came forward, despite Harry’s assurances.

“He’s not going to let us near him,” Ron groaned, “but I don’t want to stay here.”

“What should we do,” Harry wondered, scrunching the ears on the left head as it leaned in and the other two growled at his best friends.

“Wait- music!” Hermione realised. “In the original myth, Orpheus sang to the Cerberus, and it let him pass. Harry, try singing to it!”

“Why me?” Harry’s cheeks burned. “Deaf, remember?”

“You sing beautifully,” she told him with an eye roll, “we heard you with Kreacher- it’s amazing. You’ll be fine.”

“Well I wasn’t really thinking about it then, and now I’m all self-conscious. And the stakes are a lot higher.” Ron smirked fondly despite the situation- only Harry would get stage fright in front of a dog.
“It’ll be okay mate, I promise— we wouldn’t judge you for anything, and the dog already loves you,”
the redhead reminded him.

“Okay,” Harry agreed with a sigh, voice shaking a little as he eased into the first verse of *Tiny Dancer*, but it gradually gained volume and confidence, and by the time he got to the chorus, the dog was fast asleep. He kept singing as Ron and Hermione tiptoed cautiously forward, and just to be safe he was the one to move a large paw off of the trap door. They decided to leave the kitten there, since she was napping peacefully with her hell-beast friend. It was dark, and even a lumos didn’t reveal much except for some sort of greenery, so at least it wasn’t a straight shot to the ground.

“I’ll go first,” Harry sang the words instead of said them, but Hermione grabbed him and pulled him back before he could jump in.

“No,” she signed sternly. “You’re the smallest one of us, and thus easier to break.” She jumped in before anyone had any chance to object, and after a moment she called up. “I think it’s safe!”

Ron grabbed hold of Harry and jumped as well, his greater-than-average height useful as it allowed him to curl protectively around his friend. They landed in the vines, and it was only then that they realised it was already climbing up their legs. Hermione had worn thick trousers today, so it had taken her a while to notice, but Ron in his shorts had realised immediately. He held Harry as high above him as he could, and the Iranian boy tried to tune in to the plant so he could try to disable it wandlessly, but it was hard to focus with Ron’s arms shaking as he tried to hold him up and the plants tickling around him. His wand was in his robes, and he couldn’t reach it the way he was positioned.

“Ugh, I wish Neville was here- he’d know what to do,” Hermione groaned, and Ron looked at her.

“You’re the second-best in the class, Mione, you got this!” he called, panting as he tried to pull both himself and Harry free, and she gasped as a plant tugged one of her tight curls.

“Devil’s snare!” she called. “It hates light- we need a- a match or something!!”

“ARE YOU A WITCH OR NOT?!” Ron yelled, breaking into her panicked reverie and mentally apologising to Harry as he flinched at the sudden intake of air and violent exhalation he could feel from Ron’s chest (he couldn’t hear anything that had been happening, so the lack of a solution *also* had him on edge. He’d just managed to get the vines to start withdrawing a *little*, but the fear he’d felt had caused him to lose his concentration, and they quickly regained their ground)- he hadn’t meant to scare him, but one of the vines was shoving its way into Hermione’s left ear, so he’d had to yell to make himself heard.

“Right!” Hermione remembered, casting an *incendio*, and the vines shrank away rapidly. So rapidly, in fact, that it was only a lucky burst of accidental magic from Harry that kept them from hitting the hard floor jarringly.

“O-kay,” Ron let out a shaky breath, leading the way forward. They found their way into a large room full of… *insects*?

“They’re keys!” Ron and Hermione said at the same time, hearing the metal clanking noise.

“So one of them must fit into that door,” Mia realised, as Harry squinted, trying to follow the movement of their lips in the dim light.

“Oh, brooms!” he called, catching sight of three broomsticks behind his friends. This, combined with the pieces of the conversation he’d managed to catch, led him to the proper conclusion.
“It must be that big one, with the bent wing!” His seeker instincts honed in on the key, and he was on his broom, key in his hand before the others had even managed to mount theirs. He flew to the door, shoving it in, and all the other keys instantly fell still, silent in the air.

“Alright, through we go,” Hermione took a deep breath, the scars on her wrist showing in the light coming from the next passage.

“Smells like it was a troll,” Ron wrinkled his nose, looking worriedly at Hermione, who was trembling just a little. He reached out and squeezed her hand, and she smiled at him gratefully.

“It’s dead- pretty violent.” Harry called back, unable to hear what they had been talking about but figuring rightly that Hermione had been nervous.

The next room had Ron’s eyes lighting up, despite the seriousness of the situation. It was a chess set- a human sized chess set.

“We have to play our way across the room,” Ron realised, although because he was a Slytherin, he at least took an experimental step forward to see if it wouldn’t let them pass (it wouldn’t; a group of pawns gathered to block their way).

“Hermione, you take the rook, Harry, you’re the king (he wanted to keep Harry in a safe position, and the king never moved far and wasn’t taken unless you lost- and he wouldn’t let that happen). I’ll be the knight.” Nobody questioned him- this was Ron at peak Slytherin- strategy, calculated risks, willing to do what was needed to win. This is what the hat was talking about, when it said that Ron would be prepared to stand next to his friends in battle.

The game began well, and Ron cautiously put a pawn in a position to get taken, after it had taken a bishop first. It was smashed to pieces, and the three all gulped. Harry might not have been able to hear the crash, but he could feel it reverberate throughout the chamber.

“Yes,” he realised eventually. “It’s the only way. Hermione, Harry- I’m going to have to get taken. After that, Hermione, you take the queen, and the game will be won.”

“Ron, no!” she yelled, and Harry realised what he was about to do only has he stepped forward and put himself in position to be captured. The opposing queen came for him, ready to deck him, and Harry’s whole world stopped- this was his brother. Faster than he ever had, he tuned in, feeling for the magic that made the queen move and think and attack. He jerked it all out, throwing it back into the environment, and she was pulverized- blown to a fine dust. Ron was fine- he took a shaky breath- Ron was fine. The other chess pieces turned to them, their stoic marble faces the same but the air of tension in the room giving the impression that something had happened that they had no idea how to handle. Mustering every inch of his pathetic height, Harry glared at the pieces.

“You want some?!” he called out a challenge, and they all backed away- they would have won anyway, after all.

“Come on!” Harry pulled both of his friends into the next room, not even looking back to see their responses to what just happened.

As soon as they stepped through, two walls of dark fire sprang up- one in front and one behind. They were stuck here. But there were seven bottles in a row on a table in the centre, and they all stepped forward- this seemed like the solution, or at least a step towards it.

_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 onwards, 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.

This was the riddle on a parchment in the centre, and Hermione practically glowed with hope, her dark eyes gleaming with confidence, and Harry was again struck with the image of a celestial bronze warship, like The Argo from ancient Greek mythology.

“A riddle,” she exclaimed. “Our head of house really knows what he’s doing- many of the greatest wizards in the world haven’t an ounce of logic- they’d be stuck here forever!”

“No need to sound so excited about the idea,” Ron grumbled, but Hermione already had a wrinkle of concentration enhancing her dark features, one hand absentmindedly scrunching a section of her bushy hair against her head as she chewed her lip.

“Okay!” she spoke so suddenly that it shocked Ron, while Harry watched her lips eagerly, wanting to hear every detail of the process that her brilliant brain had made such short work of. “Since the giant bottle is not poison and it is a twin to the second from the left, we know these two are nettle wine.” She pointed to the second and sixth bottles. “Therefore two of the poisons are to the left of these, or the fourth and fifth bottles. The ones at each end are different and since we know the left end is poison, both nettle wines have been found, and it will not help you move onwards, the rightmost bottle sends you back. This leaves 2 bottles and we know the dwarf is not poison, so the third one must be the one that lets you go forward. Finally, the remaining, or fourth, bottle must be the third poison.”

“Brilliant!” Her friends congratulated her, patting her on the back. “But there’s only enough in each bottle for one person.”

“I’ll go forward,” Harry clenched his fists, and the air around him seemed to crackle with magical energy. “I want to look him in the eyes and ask him why- why he would hurt something so beautiful for something so pointless.” However protective his friends were, not even they could refute him.
“Harry- be careful,” Hermione rushed forward to hug him. “Ron- you should go back. I’ll wait here.”

“No,” Ron shook his head resolutely. “You’re the brightest witch here, and I’m proud of you. You’re the best one to go get help. I’ll be here when Harry succeeds, and we’ll see you soon.”

“I may be bright, but Ron, so are you- and more importantly, you’re kind.” She hugged him tightly enough that he exhaled in a *whoosh*, and he smiled at her. “Books and cleverness are all well and good, but you and Harry- you care so much, and you understand friendship and kindness and empathy- things I’m still learning, and I’m delighted to be learning from you two.” She signed along in the dim light, and both of her boys had tears in their eyes.

“We love you two, Mia,” Harry rushed at her, her chin resting on top of his head as he gave her a final squeeze before they all separated.

“We’ll see you soon,” Ron agreed. “Snakes always make their way back to the nest.”

“Actually, they tend to go their own way once they’re old enough to take care of themselves, but I see your point.” She laughed, but there was tension in her eyes as they watched Harry go through first.

“I’ll see you back there- just go,” Ron ordered as he shuffled nervously from foot to foot, and she was about to muster the courage to tear herself away when they heard a crash and a grunt from Harry.

“Harry!” they cried, even though they knew he couldn’t hear them. Ron felt his heart seize, and then heat rushed to his face. He felt it flow through his whole body, and where it should have been boiling, it was warm and comfortable.

Wizards and witches, pure as they might be, were full of creature blood- most fairly faint these days, of course, but still there. Malfoys had veela blood, accounting for their pointy features and pale, fragile beauty. Xenophilius Lovegood was convinced his wife was at least half fey, and although she insisted she had never known her own mother, there was a lightness to her step and a whimsy in her eyes that spoke of sunbeams and light, playful magic. The same things he saw in his daughter, who skipped like she was walking on air and saw things others couldn’t Just being around her made the world seem wider, things that he had only ever believed possible, but without any proof, became faintly visible, like a mirage as he held her hand and they meandered along stone paths to clear streams.

Ron, well- Ron was half Prewett. His mother had been the third child in the Prewett family, and he was the sixth son of the third child. Prewett’s were full of fire- born of fire, their distant ancestors elementals of the raging flames. Mostly, this only showed in the way their hair coloured, the way their faces heat up when they were angry and the way Ginny and her mother both smoked about the ears when they were furious enough.

But Ron- well, as much as Ron felt he was just the last son, a leftover doomed to hand-me-down clothes and hand-me-down affection, he was special in the world of fire elementals and their descendants (and special to his family regardless, but we all have insecurities and thus cannot begrudge Ron his own). In the depths of the earth’s core, where the first of them emerged, so many years ago, both three and six were significant in the arithmancy of the magic that created them. Ron was the sixth son of the third daughter, and fire magic that had normally long ago faded out had converged in him more strongly than it had in his family in centuries. The lore of the creatures had long ago faded to just that- stories that Molly would tell her children, just as her own mother had told her, but it wasn’t *lore* in Ron.
Although it wasn’t nearly at the level of a true elemental, it was something, and it rose to the occasion, boiling through his veins like lava, protecting him as he stepped fearlessly through the wall of black fire. He had channeled the power in his time of need, full of protective instinct that roared like the fire within. There wasn’t enough fire to call it forward at will, but there was enough for this.

“We’re fine!” He yelled back to Hermione. “Just go get Snape- tell him we’re in here with Quirrell!” There was a crash as the sound of Ron’s feet dodging a strike came through, and Hermione drank her own potion and headed back, not wanting to waste another second.

“Oh, a Weasley,” Quirrell gave him a dismissive once over. “I was just telling your friend Harry how you must be surprised to find that it wasn’t Snape here.”

“Wow, you’re really out of the loop, aren’t you?” Ron was still steaming, and he cocked an eyebrow at the man. “We know our head of house well enough to know it wasn’t him, thank you, although I’d like to know what you’re doing with unicorn blood.” Quirinus looked surprised that they’d made that connection, but Ron wasn’t finished.

“Oh, and Harry can’t read your lips when you’ve tied him up on his back, dumbo,” he rolled his eyes, and Quirrell waved his wand to tie him up as well, turning back to the mirror (the mirror Harry had told him about finding in Grimmauld Place, Ron realised suddenly). He hadn’t looked to make sure the ropes stayed, however, and they simply crumbled right off of him, black and burnt.

“Some weird shite happened back there,” he signed to Harry as he stepped towards him, as quietly as he could, “and I think I’m still hot to touch you- I don’t even know fully myself, but I’ll try to explain later. Stay still, and don’t let my hands touch your skin,” he punctuated the sharp motions of his signing, before carefully putting a finger on each of the ropes on Harry’s wrists, and then his ankles.

“What do we do now?” he asked Ron with his hands, while Quirrell was still absorbed in the mirror. “You’re the chessmaster- I’m just ready to knock some heads together.” His normally gentle spirit was still furious on behalf of the unicorn.

Before Ron could come up with a plan, a voice from Quirrell’s turban hissed. “Use the boy,” it ordered, and Harry could feel it the same way he could the voice of the sorting hat in his head. He turned to ask Ron about it, but his best friend had already picked up what happened.

“Snake,” he said, which was the closest sign language could get to parseltongue, and Harry nodded- so it wasn’t just a lipreading thing then, but a mental bond. Which still didn’t explain why a snake would be in Quirrell’s turban, of all things.

It was explained when the man began to unwrap his turban, and a face appeared- on the back of Quirrell’s head. It had glowing red eyes and slits for nostrils, and Harry shivered- this was… this was an abomination, and he didn’t like it. Hated it, in fact.

He hated it even more when he realised what it was…

“Voldemort,” he snarled.

“That’s right, young Potter. It’s Lord Voldemort, and I need you to bring me the stone. If you do what I have for you willingly, I’ll let you join me and live.”

“Excuse me, but you don’t look like Remus Lupin- as in, you can’t be fucking serious.” He gave the two-faced man some intense side-eye, and despite the situation, Ron couldn’t hold back a snort, lying on the ground and pretending he was still tied up.

“Fine then,” Voldemort barked. “Be that way.” Quirrell walked backwards towards him, which
would have been oddly comedic if the git didn’t then grab his arm. Harry didn’t like that- Vernon used to grab him like that, and Petunia used to grab him like that. Even Dudley used to grab him like that, and he didn’t want to be grabbed like that ever again.

“NO!” he screamed, his voice filling the chamber, he himself the only one who couldn’t hear it, as both Quirrellmort and Ron gripped their ears at the sound. “DON’T TOUCH ME!”

Ron heard the pain in his best friend’s voice and launched into action. Please don’t be gone, he begged the fire in his belly. I know you don’t come around too much, but I need you to stay a little longer. He felt the dying spark rekindle again, and he pushed all the heat towards his hand as he bit back his repulsion and grabbed Voldemort’s face, the rotting flesh where it met Quirrell’s steaming as he pushed the fire up a notch.

“Master!” Quirrell cried. “It hurts!”

“Then shake him off, you wuss!” Harry, however, didn’t give him the chance to hurt his best friend- he latched onto the man’s magic, disgusting as it was, as tired as he was, and as hard as it was to keep himself positioned there in the heat of the moment. He grabbed at where Voldemort’s essence met Quirrell’s jerking and tugging and pulling it apart, and Ron continued to hold on, the smell of smoking, burning flesh filling the room.

The combined force of their onslaught was too much for the man and his… parasite, and there was a horrid screeching that Ron would later describe to him in horrifyingly vivid detail, making Harry glad he didn’t hear it, as Volde-site was torn from Quirrell, who crumbled to ash.

“Oi, that was tiring,” Ron mumbled as the fire finally went back.

“Tell me about it,” Harry agreed, looking into the mirror as his family and friends, living and dead, stared back at him. “What was the point of this dumb thing anyway?” he asked, feeling slightly bitter as he forced his eyes away again and turned so that he could no longer see the mirror. He buried his face in Ron’s robe, his back to the mirror as he collapsed, exhausted, into his best friend’s lap. “We never even saw the stupid stone.”

“Adults are mad,” Ron agreed with a yawn, even though Harry couldn’t hear him.

When Severus and Minerva got there five minutes later, let by Hermione, they found two peacefully sleeping boys cuddled together next to the dust of what used to be an incompetent but still human-ish defence teacher, the mirror of Erised the backdrop of the scene. As Severus picked Harry up and turned to go back the other way, he was surprised to see in the mirror only the sight in front of him, the little boy curled snoring against his chest, the sleeve that had fallen down baring his unmarked right arm. He stared for a moment, wondering if this was really the mirror he thought it was. He looked at the inscription again, and then down at Harry, and then up at the mirror, and then down at Harry.

“Oh,” he said faintly, as the implications hit him.

From beyond the veil, Lily smiled at her old friend. “Good job, you old bat, good job.” James put an arm around her, and they watched their son together, as the last man they would have expected to see only his own reflection in the mirror of Erised carried him back to Poppy’s and tucked him into bed.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Well, we’ve done it! End of the first book in the Quiet Emerald Series! Yay!
Love,
Des and Lils

“How are they?” Severus asked Poppy anxiously.

“For the third time, Severus, I don’t know yet- now would you stop badgering me and let me do my job?!” the nurse snapped at him as she ran her wand over Harry.

Minerva stood in the corner of the room, watching the Slytherins anxiously. To be honest, she’d been fairly certain that both of them were going to be in her house, so she’d already gotten attached to them, felt responsible for them by the time they showed up, even though they didn’t end up being little lions. And Hermione was a very smart girl who reminded Minnie a lot of herself as a child, so she felt protective of her as well. Hermione, thankfully, was awake and conscious, the moonlight shining through the windows in such a way as to draw attention to the scars on her wrists as she gesticulated while explaining what had happened.

“And then Ron just… walked through the fire. I don’t understand it- it’s almost like he was an elemental, but they don’t even exist anymore, or if they do we haven’t seen one in centuries.”

“That would explain his elevated body temperature- he’s at 42 degrees, but it doesn’t seem like it’s harming him,” Poppy shook her head in bewilderment. “Besides the temperature, it just seems like exhaustion, but a few days’ rest and he’ll be fine. Same for Harry, although I regret to inform you that he definitely won’t be playing the last quidditch game.”

“That doesn’t matter- as long as he’s alright,” Severus let out a sigh of relief and ran his hand through his hair, and Poppy was a bit taken aback by his honesty, although she supposed that the situation had forced him to square up against some feelings.

“Oh, thank goodness you called!” Molly Weasley cried, bustling in with her husband in tow and Sirius and Remus behind them. “Is he doing alright- are our boys doing alright?!”

“They’ll both be fine, Molly dear, don’t worry.” The look on Molly’s face told Poppy that not worrying about her children was physically impossible for her.

“We ran into Dumbledore on our way in,” Remus clenched his fists, “he was coming back from being at the ministry for something, which is probably why Quirrell felt calm enough to strike in the first place. We sent him on his way.” The look on his face and his boyfriend’s clearly showed that it had not been a friendly conversation.

“Thank you for that- it would really make everything more difficult if he was snooping around while these children are resting- Hermione, dear, I think I’ll have you stay the night as well, just to be safe,” Poppy added as an aside, and Mia nodded obediently and hopped on the bed to Ron’s right side.

“So, what exactly happened?” Sirius asked, one hand softly rubbing Harry’s scalp as his godson
slept, curled up on his side, his mouth open slightly and pillow clutched against his chest- he looked angelic, really.

“The best we can figure from Draco- who I sent to bed as soon as we heard they were safe,” Minerva said (she’d taken him back to his common room once they got the two boys to the hospital wing), “is that Quirrell lured them all to the forbidden corridor by kidnapping Harry’s kitten, and then locked the door behind the three of them, which meant Draco went to get help. He was very anxious- however, had a panic attack, poor bean, all worried about his friends. By the time I’d gotten him taken care of and we got back to the door and dismantled the wards, Hermione was waiting to take us down through the trials.”

“We’d gotten past the devil’s snare alright, thanks to Ron helping me keep calm, and then Harry made short work of the keys. Ron played us across the giant chess set, but he had to sacrifice himself, and thank Merlin Harry managed to channel into the magic and blow the attacking queen to bits, or it would have been awful! And then there was the riddle, which was brilliant, by the way, professor- it really had me thinking for a bit.”

“I’m sure it took you all of five minutes,” Severus rolled his eyes at her, but there was no malice behind the action.

“Well, I was raised in a house full of brain-teasers, so I really can’t take all the credit,” she said, but she was smiling widely and blushing despite herself, clearly proud to be receiving such a compliment.

“So anyway- then Harry insisted on going forward, and so he took that potion, and Ron insisted I go back and get help, but then we heard this crash, and we were so worried about Harry, and then Ron- he just- it was amazing really, I couldn’t believe it, didn’t know it was even possible- he’d just walked right through the fire, no potion.”

The assembled adults gasped, and Molly and Arthur both traded shocked looks.

“Dear,” Mr. Weasley cleared his throat, “wasn’t there a fire elemental or two in your family tree, long ago?”

“Why, that’s what I’ve heard, but for Ron to have inherited enough of it to pull of something like that- it’s just… oh Merlin, he must be even more talented than we thought he was,” Molly put a hand over her heart as she looked at her sleeping son.

“He really is quite good as a wizard- it is a very difficult thing, to go through classes with a hand-me-down wand,” Minerva shook her head solemnly. “Neville Longbottom in my house is doing it as well, although I’m afraid he hasn’t had as much luck as your Ronald.”

“I… we know it’s hard, and we’ve been saving all year so we could get him a wand that fits better,” Molly said guiltily. “It’s just- there were some unexpected expenses this year, and Percy insisted that he needed an owl, and we wouldn’t have had enough money for a wand for Ron anyway, and we knew he could manage, but we do feel bad…”

“No one’s blaming you, Molly,” Minerva assured. “We know you do the best you can for your children. I was simply stating that it speaks well to Ronald’s prowess, is all.”

“Yes, and if you have any trouble with being able to get supplies in the future, please let the heads of houses know- I realise that the Ministry recently cut funding and salaries to Arthur’s department. From what I understand, at least- I keep up a fairly regular correspondence with Narcissa, and she was drafting angry letters to the ministry for months about it until recently, with the divorce
proceedings keeping her busy,” Severus added.

“Yes,” Arthur ran a hand through his thinning hair. “It’s been a bit difficult on both ends- we’re a necessary department, as well, and now there’s only two of us, and they’ve taken our overtime. Getting harder to make ends meet, although I don’t like to complain- just glad I’m not one of those poor witches that got let go. Three of them, all women- makes you wonder about the state of things, really…”

“We’ll make sure Ginerva has everything she needs, and that Ronald gets a new wand, at least- the work Arthur does is important for our community, and if the ministry doesn’t see that, at least let us help you,” Poppy put a hand over Molly’s, and she sighed.

“Thank you- it means a lot to us, to have such supportive friends.”

“It’s very hard, to make an honest living in the wizarding world,” Remus agreed. “Professors and aurors and a few other departments are about the only things you can do that don’t involve corruption, and even that is hard enough to get into, and of course they’re cutting salaries for them—Amelia had to fight tooth and nail just to get Tonks approved to go undercover- the ministry was very reluctant to approve all the overtime. And it’s a good thing she was there, really- she was doing quite a job on the investigation. Shame they pulled her out just this morning, of all things, or we might not have gotten into quite the mess this became.”

“And despite her significant lack of resources or ministry cooperation, she had three thick case files on Quirrell and his past, and all the shady doings that she’s found- a few on Dumbledore, actually, as well, and how he’s been running things, if I understand correctly,” Severus’ eyes narrowed as he realised something.

“Wait, you say he was coming back from the ministry?” Snape turned to Remus and Sirius, who nodded.

“We weren’t informed he was even gone for the day,” Minerva caught on, and the adults shared a look.

“You don’t think…”

“Oh, that is absolutely what happened,” Sirius growled, his silver eyes looking a little feral. “She was probably finding other cases of negligence, like what happened with Harry, and so he went and pulled his fucking strings in the Wizengamot and made her mission seem ‘unnecessary,’” he made air quotes with sharp, savage motions, “so that she would stop snooping around, which of course endangered our children.” His boyfriend might be the wolf, but right now they were both looking ready to tear someone apart.

“Fluffy,” Harry sniffed in his sleep, and Severus put a hand on his forehead, talking softly to him, even though his rational brain told him it would make no difference.

“We’ll go get him- shh, child.” He turned to Sirius. “You’re good with dogs, yes, mutt?”

“Where are you going with this?” Sirius cast a suspicious eye on the man.

“The Slytherin password is ‘emerald’. Fluffy’s on a large dog bed by the fireplace- would you bring him here?”

“Why do I have to do it?” the head of the Black family crossed his arms in front of his chest.

“Because you’re good with other members of the species, and I have to stay here and help get
Harry’s evening potions into him, which is a somewhat more difficult job when he’s in a deep sleep like this,” Severus pointed out, and although Poppy would have been perfectly capable of doing it herself, she allowed him his transparent farce so he could stay with his student, although she did roll her eyes at him when Sirius had reluctantly turned away to go get the cerberus.

Sirius not only brought Fluffy, but also Charcoal, who had made her way back to the common room in that secret way cats have of getting anywhere they want to be, regardless of things like doors and passwords and such. He, Severus, and Remus managed to each sleep in chairs around Harry’s bed without fighting with each other (or rather, Sirius and Severus managed not to fight with each other), although by day three, the cricks in their necks were making them rather cranky. Arthur couldn’t afford to take any time off work, but Molly sat by Ron’s bedside, knitting to pass the time. She kept a nervous Draco occupied with keeping her yarn straight so he’d have something to do with his hands, a fact which he greatly appreciated.

Without their star seeker, Slytherin had to use their rather lackluster reserve, and Wood was seen walking around on cloud nine, delighted to win the house cup for the first time since he’d been on the team. Marcus, on the other hand, was not so happy, but he knew to keep that particular fact from Harry, because Severus had pulled him aside after the match and made it very clear to him.

“Stupid mirror,” Harry huffed sleepily on the third morning, before starting to wake up. Ron, who had awoken not long before, was sitting up in his own bed, Hermione at the foot of it, as they looked at their friend.

“Sleep well, little one?” Poppy asked gently as soon as he was awake enough to read her lips, and he just yawned crankily. She ruffled his hair and went to get the breakfast trays for her two patients. She’d finally managed to force Severus and his godfathers to go home and shower, for the love of Merlin, he’ll still be here when you get back!, so they weren’t there yet, but the Head of Slytherin had the honour of being the first to return, since he didn’t have to leave the castle to shower and change.

“Are you alright, Harry?” he asked immediately upon seeing him awake, and Harry nodded, feeling oddly touched by the evident worry in the man’s face.

“M’fine,” he mumbled, hands stroking Charcoal as Fluffy also butt one head up to check on him. “But… Ron- did we- did we kill a man?”

“I burnt the piss out of him, but I don’t think you really did anything you should feel bad about,” the redhead told him, and his mother was so happy to see him awake she didn’t even scold him for his language.

“Neither one of you did anything wrong- it was in self-defence, and to be honest Quirinus condemned himself to death the moment he agreed to host the dark lord in his own body,” Severus reassured them. “Although, if you continue to be troubled by this or have anything else bothering you concerning this or any other situation, you know where my office is.”

“Thank you professor,” Ron told him, before noticing all the candy on their bedside tables and reaching for a frog.

“Seems like every Slytherin in your year and a few from other houses brought you treats,” Poppy chuckled. “Your twin brothers tried to bring you both a toilet seat, but they saw your mother sitting by your bedside and turned right around.”

“You’ve been here the whole time, mum?” Ron looked at her, a bit surprised.
Of course I have, dear- you’re my son, and I was worried about you. I’m also very proud, although I hope next year there won’t be any danger that comes looking for you.” Molly smoothed his hair back and felt his forehead- he’d been running hot for a couple of days now, and his temperature seemed to settle around just a degree above average. She’d have to ponder the implications later.

“I hope so too, mum- this was a little more excitement than I was looking for, to be honest.” They both laughed, although Molly’s was more of a nervous chuckle. Something wasn’t right about this whole situation, she could feel it in her bones.

“Somebody’s hungry, finally,” Poppy laughed as she came to collect the breakfast trays and found a blessedly empty bowl of oatmeal in front of Harry, who was sporting a milk mustache on his upper lip. He smiled sheepishly at her as Severus pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped the child’s face.

“Mmmph, Sev!” he complained, pulling away, before realising the nickname had slipped out. He looked nervously at the professor, but he only quirked one eyebrow, a tiny little smile tugging at one corner of his mouth, and Harry beamed at him.

“Pup, you’re awake!” Sirius and Remus emerged through the floo, hair still dripping, and the potions master sighed.

“There goes our quiet morning,” he muttered, and the dog animagus clapped a hand good-naturedly against his shoulder.

“Aww come on- you know you love us!” he teased, and Severus gave him an unimpressed look.

“I tolerate you- perhaps even feel the occasional modicum of gratitude towards Lupin for keeping you under control, but I most certainly do not love either of you.”

“Do you love me?” Harry asked cheekily, not expecting an answer.

“Yes,” Severus answered simply, with no other emotional ornamentation, and Harry’s emerald eyes went wide as saucers for a moment before he just sat there, stock-still.

“I think you broke him,” Sirius laughed, poking his unresponsive godson on the shoulder. Severus didn’t think it was so funny, as it was clearly a shock for the child to hear the words ‘I love you’ at all, even after an entire year of hearing them from the people closest to him.

“I love you too,” Harry whispered, but he still didn’t look up, sitting primly in the bed staring at his lap.

“Why don’t you both get some rest now, and I’ll let you go before the feast, alright?” Poppy lifted his chin so he could read her lips, and he nodded, laying back with no fuss, which was rather unusual for him.

“Well, you’ve certainly made him more compliant than he normally is under my care,” the medwitch smiled at her colleague, and it was easy to tell she was proud of him for taking such a big step.

“Quit grinning like a loon, you sappy woman- I’m going to go make some last-minute preparations for the end of the year. Call me over the floo when he awakens,” he pointed to his ward, who was already snoring peacefully again.

“Awww, look who cares,” Ron called after him, and Severus turned around, hands on hips.

“Five points from Slytherin for your disrespect, Mr. Weasley,” he scolded. “But 100 to you three for
your incredible acts of cunning and loyalty to each other down under the school," he added quietly, almost inaudibly, as he turned to leave again.

“Well, I think that about does it- we’re gonna win the house cup,” Ron looked at the point hourglass, which had Slytherin easily 150 points in the lead.

“Yes, yes, you’ve done very well- now get some rest. And you two,” she turned to Hermione and Draco. “Go play outside, get some fresh air- I’ve been very lenient, allowing you to stay in here, but now you really must leave them to their rest, and it’s not good for you to spend this much time cooped up in here worrying anyway.”

The two of them spent the rest of the afternoon down by Hagrid’s hut, playing in the stream, and Harry and Ron were resting, so it came as quite of a surprise to all four of them when they got to the Great Hall and found it decked out in Gryffindor colours.

“What the bloody hell happened here?” Ron cried, indignant, as he sat down with their friends.

“From what I heard,” said Neville, who was eating with them, “Dumbledore’s been giving out points to Gryffindors for random things all day. We just topped you guys when he gave Percy points for doing his ‘prefect duties’ by taking George and Fred’s filibuster fireworks.”

“No fair!” the redhead crossed his arms in front of his chest, while also silently vowing to join forces with the twins for a prank war on Percy that summer. “He can’t just do that! We took down a bloody villain!”

“Welcome to being a Slytherin,” Marcus sighed as he passed the potatoes. “Why do you think we isolate ourselves so much? If we don’t have loyalty within, we wouldn’t have anything with that hobnob running the show.” He jabbed a finger at Dumbledore.

“Slytherins always get in more trouble for doing the same shite than Gryffindors do,” Pansy added, as she added more green beans to her plate and glared venomously at the headmaster. “Look- even McGonagall thinks that was low!” Indeed, Minerva was giving her boss a dissatisfied sideways look- they were children, for Merlin’s sake, and this was supposed to be a friendly competition!

“Wonder what it would have been like if we’d been Gryffindors,” Harry mused, looking at his friends.

Ron snorted as he bit into a roll. “Yeah,” he said with his mouth full, “like that would ever happen.”