Cunning and Ambition - Book Three

by MinaAndChao

Summary

Harry Potter's Third Year is approaching. The past comes back to haunt Hogwarts, and as usual Harry is in the center of it all. A Slytherin!Harry AU.

(This book is completed, but Book 6 was abandoned)
Home Sweet Home

The bed that belonged - only in the loosest sense possible - to Harry James Potter at Number Four, Privet Drive was not comfortable in the least. The mattress had been bought nearly two years ago at a garage sale for the lowest possible price. On it was a scratchy but serviceable blanket, a pillow that was missing the majority of it’s stuffing, and one very tired twelve year old boy.

Despite how uncomfortable the bed was over all, it was the best thing Harry had experienced all day.

Precautions, in the form of spells and threats, and been put against his relatives to keep them from physically attacking him, but that didn’t stop them from working him to the bone, or from spewing whatever foul things came to mind while he did the work. He had heard the word ‘freak’ be used more times in the past 6 days than he had in the past year. And that was one of the nicer words they had levied at him.

The clothes he had chosen to wear probably hadn’t helped his case. Normally he wore his cousin’s old castoffs, which looked ridiculous on him, but meant that they couldn’t be mocked without casting that judgment on Dudley. This year, however, the precautions, mixed with the knowledge of the message it would send, made him choose the fancier clothes he had obtained from the Malfoys.

Apparently dressing nicely meant that his relations felt the need to speak their opinions on their views on the possibility of his sexuality. Behind ‘freak’, ‘nancy boy’ and ‘pouf’ were the most common things he was called.

But it didn’t matter, as Harry had been telling himself. This day was the last full day he would be spending with his relations, and then his sacrifice for his mother’s protection would be complete. It certainly felt like someone was cutting out his heart. Very slowly, at that.

Harry curled over on his side and ignored the way his back protested the movement. Rather than bother to try to use the pillow, which was only slightly higher than the bed, he grabbed it in his arms and squeezed it.

Just tonight, and a little bit of tomorrow, he told himself. And then he would be home.

With that thought in mind, Harry was able to drift off to sleep.

The next day began early for him. Around 6 AM, earlier than even he, a bona fide morning person, was comfortable with, his Aunt Petunia pounded on the door. “Wake up, Freak! You have things to do before those... things come and get you.”

It wasn’t worth it to try and explain again to her that the Malfoys were in fact people and not strange items. She hadn’t listened all the times before when he tried. Apparently that shade of hair just wasn’t natural, and therefore they could not possibly be human. Instead, Harry rolled out of bed and stumbled down the stairs.

On the table in the kitchen was his list of chores for the day. He glanced at it and barely contained his groan. The list was just slightly shorter than yesterdays, and he wondered if they would try to prevent him from leaving if he didn’t get them all done in time.

For a long moment, he considered simply not doing any of them. It’s not like the Malfoys were going to sit around and wait for him to do them, nor could he be given the typical punishments for not completing them. He wouldn’t be around long enough for them to starve him, and the protections would save him from whatever physical chastisement Uncle Vernon could dish out.
But the memory of the verbal onslaught he had suffered thus far this summer made him head out the back door to start. If that was what they said when he was doing what they wanted, he really didn’t want to hear what they said when he angered them.

The first task of the day was taking care of the garden - weeding, mowing the grass, watering everything that needed it (and stealing a sip from the hose while he did so). After he washed Uncle Vernon’s car, making sure it shined the way he liked it. Once that was completed, he went inside and made breakfast for the Dursleys and cleaned up afterward.

The rest of the morning was spent washing the windows and doing the laundry. After that he was tasked with cleaning up the living room - dusting, vacuuming, cleaning up the trash that Dudley left behind him like a trail of disgusting bread crumbs.

That was where things started to get problematic.

Dudley had taken up residence in that room, joined by his friend Piers Polkiss. The two of them had been watching the telly, but quickly found Harry to be the more interesting entertainment. “Enjoying the cleaning, nancy boy?” Dudley called, something like glee in his voice. “I’m sure everything is far too messy, and the colours must clash awfully.” His voice was nasally, and he let one thick hand go limp at the wrist, flapping it about as he talked. Piers burst into snickers.

“Leave it, Dudley.” Harry replied, voice going dangerous. He did his best to copy his professor’s tone, as the man was the most intimidating person Harry had ever met. It was enough to make Piers stop, but Dudley was far too used to having the power to let something like words stop him.

The hand flopped even more violently. “Leave it, Dudley!” He parroted, voice high and girly. “I just can’t take it!” He voice went back to normal as he sneered. “You would think you’d be stronger than that, Potter, considering the way you must take it up the arse.”

Something about the knowledge that the Malfoys would be there any minute gave Harry the courage - or the blind stupidity - to whirl around and hurl the duster at Dudley’s head. It made contact with a dull crack, and the large boy jerked back more from surprise than the impact. The movement made him put all of his weight onto the arm of the couch, which gave a groan like a dying animal before giving up altogether, breaking off with a sharp crack.

There was a long moment where all three boys stared at the broken couch, before Dudley whirled his head around, blonde hair flying in all direction and eyes narrowed in anger. “Oh, you’ll be paying for that, Potter.” He stood and took one lumbering step towards Harry, waiting for the fear to appear on the smaller boy’s face.

It never came.

Instead a cleared throat made Piers and Dudley spin around, and Harry’s heart to skip a beat.

Draco Malfoy, in full blown Malfoy Heir mode, despite the Muggle clothes he wore, looked down his nose at Dudley. “And why would Harry be doing that?” He sneered, lip curling in distaste. “From what I saw, it was you who broke the sofa.”

Red flooded Dudley’s face, anger making the boy’s face twist. It was the first time Dudley Dursley had been blamed for something in years. “Who the hell are you?” He demanded.

“That’s Draco Malfoy.” Harry told him blandly, putting the slightest amount of emphasis on the boy’s last name. A bit of pink dusted his cheeks as well, and his heart seemed to have decided to run wild on him. Harry decided it had to be the adrenaline. After all, in a few minutes he was going to
be free.

The name rung the right bells in Dudley’s head, because all that colour drained out of the boy’s face, and he tried to say something, but whatever it was got lost in his fearful stuttering. He grabbed a very confused Piers by the shirt and dashed out the back door, slamming it behind him.

For a moment, Harry and Draco both stared at the door with amusement, before they turned to grin at each other. “What are you waiting for, a written invitation?” Draco asked, arching an eyebrow. “Let’s go get your things so we can leave this awful little place.”

Harry didn’t need to be told again and dashed up the stairs. As he turned down the hall, he caught Lucius and Narcissa also entering the house. He shot them a quick wave before bursting into his room, grabbing the already packed trunk and empty owl cage, and ran back out.

When Harry reached the bottom of the stairs with his things, a house-elf he had never seen was waiting. It took his things and disappeared with a crack, Harry stared at the spot a moment. “I thought you weren’t allowed to use magic.”

Narcissa nodded her head. “Correct. We weren’t allowed to use magic.”

Harry grinned a little at her before turning to look at the empty house. His aunt was shopping and his uncle was at work and Dudley had fled. Harry stared at the family portrait of the Dursley family that greeted everyone who set foot in the house. He approached the frame before taking hold of it and tilted it at an angle, leaving it off centre. It wasn’t damaging, and it wasn’t permanent, but it was satisfying.

“Come along, dear, we want to take you to a nice restaurant for an early supper.”

Harry joined the others as they made their way down the sidewalk of Privet Drive. He took a moment to enjoy the absurdity of it before joining them as they rounded the corner. After a small bit of walking they reached an empty patch of land that was being developed and made their way down a hill. Once they were out of sight the four of them joined hands and Apparated.

They reappeared in an alley and Narcissa’s mouth folded into an unpleasant line when she realized she was standing in a puddle. She shook off her boots before the hodgepodge family slipped into the flow of people seamlessly. They walked for about two blocks before ducking into a small restaurant.

When they went down the steps into the restaurant, they paused between two doorways and Harry watched in curiosity as the Malfoys slipped off their shoes and slipped on a pair of sandals that were handed to them in a wrapped package. Harry waited a moment before doing the same.

The restaurant was modestly decorated, mostly with art and fabric on the walls. They were led to two different tables, Lucius and Narcissa took the table across a small partition and Harry and Draco took it on the other side. He didn’t understand why they didn’t have a larger table until he realized all the tables were set up for two, unless there was a party of six or more. Harry tucked himself into the corner of the booth against the wall and took his menu with a grateful smile. A cursory glance over the items told him the restaurant was Japanese and that the items for dinner were more than he was sure his aunt and uncle paid for their wedding dinner. Guests included.

“Draco, what are you having? Your father and I are both getting the black cod specialty plate. Do you want that?”

Draco made a face behind his menu which Harry smiled at. “I didn’t like it last time. Let me read.”

Harry had long since learned to ignore the price when he went out for the Malfoys, even if he usually
ended up ordering the cheapest thing on the menu, out of respect, it was hard to ignore the idea of sixty pounds a plate. He had never heard of some of the fish on the menu and he had no idea what a sashimi was, but he would give everything a try. It was his untoward policy when it came to food.

“Harry, what are you having?”

“I think I’m going to get some beef.”

“Good choice,” Narcissa approved. “They have lovely beef.”

“Can I get yellowtail?”

“Draco, why are you asking?”

Draco peered over his menu and over the divide at his mother with a smile. “An attempt to be polite?”

Narcissa narrowed her eyes at her son. “You’re not getting sake with your food.”

“But--”

“You aren’t fifteen. We had this conversation already, no alcohol until you’re fifteen.”

“Fine. I’m getting the duck specialty plate.”

They placed their order and were quickly given their drinks - hot sake for both Lucius and Narcissa while Harry was happy with a soda, and he managed to elbow Draco into getting one too. When their soup arrived, Harry studied it curiously - he had never seen a soup with an egg in it before. He watched as Draco picked up his bowl and stirred the egg into the broth with his chopsticks before plucking out the white cubes of something Harry didn’t recognize with ease. Harry eyed the chopsticks with trepidation. Whenever the Dursleys had ordered Chinese they always received the complimentary chopsticks, but never used them. Harry had no idea how they worked. And considering he hadn’t gotten a spoon with his bowl, he was going to have to learn quickly.

Picking up his chopsticks, Harry stirred in the egg and lifted his bowl. Instead of attempting usage right away, Harry sipped from the bowl, figuring he could drink the broth and then simply slide the food up the rim of the bowl without issue. The technique worked and Harry was pleased with his rather calm way of getting over his lack of understanding. After their bowls were taken away, they were given their plates with sushi and thinly sliced fish, which Harry quickly learned was sashimi. Harry watched how Draco held his chopsticks before he mimicked the hold and picked up his first piece of sushi. It was a little wobbly at first but he managed, because the sushi was firm and large, which made it easy to hold. The sashimi, however, was a whole other problem.

“I seem...” Harry started, frowning when the sashimi slipped from his chopsticks again. He tried to pick it up, only to have it fall. “To be having an issue.”

“It’s because you’re tense.” Draco placed a hand on his arm and rubbed lightly until Harry relaxed. “Now try.”

Harry tried again and failed. He scowled down at the innocent sliced fish. He blinked when he felt Draco’s hand slide over his own. The angle was slightly awkward since they were sitting across the table from one another, but Draco managed to guide him into picking up the sashimi and lead it up to his mouth. Harry gave an embarrassed but grateful smile when Draco dropped his hand and returned to his own food. Harry returned to his slippery attempts at eating.
Finally their main course arrived and Harry watched as they sliced his beef into thin, supposedly easy to eat strips and rested it along the bed of rice and vegetables. This was going to be a nightmare. Draco tucked into his duck happily and Harry dove into tackling his food. He thought he was doing alright until the chopsticks slid and his beef dropped unceremoniously to the plate.

“Would it be rude to just ask for a fork?”

Draco gave a soft laugh. “You’re just giving up to easily.” Draco’s eyes went to the bamboo divider between their table and his parents’ table. He leaned forward a little. “This is technically considered rude in Japanese culture but...” Draco picked up his chopsticks and wiped them with his napkin before stretching slightly across the table. He snatched hold of the piece of a waygu beef that was eluding Harry and held it aloft in the air. “Well..?”

“Well what? What do you want me to do with it?”

Draco rolled his eyes. “Eat it.”

Harry turned pink and he could feel the tips of his ears burning, but he slid forward a little and took the bite. He sat back and mumbled a quiet thank you before picking up his chopsticks, feeling ready to try again. Draco merely gave a half nod and took a few bites from his own plate. Harry watched him a moment with an odd sort of smile before returning to eating his food with slow, careful precision.

Soon enough they finished and Apparated to Malfoy Manor. Harry couldn’t stop a grin from forming at the sight of the foyer. After a moment of looking around, he aimed that smile at Draco. “It’s good to be home.” He stated, voice and eyes warm.

Draco’s answer smile was just as gentle.

“Your things should be in your room, Harry. I imagine you’d like to unpack.” Narcissa spoke up, her eyes switching from one boy to the other as their exchange continued.

A pair of nods was her answer, and they made their way up the stairs into Harry’s room. His trunk was sitting on the bed, and the cage set up neatly by the window. Draco slid onto the bed next to it and clicked it open. He didn’t take anything out, instead gazing around the room. “We should really do something with this place.”

Green eyes gazed at him in confusion. “What do you mean?”

Kicking his feet slightly, Draco made a grand gesture around the room. “This place is still so guest room-ish. There’s nothing personal here at all. It’s your room now - has been for a while. We should make it look like it belongs to you.”

The idea of a room he got to help decorate for himself was a foreign one, and it took Harry a few seconds to process the idea. “It’s no big deal, really. The room is fine the way it is. No sense going to the trouble of changing it around when I’m so used to the way it is.”

Snorting, Draco shot him the familiar you-are-so-Muggle-raised look. “You’re not being serious, right? Trouble? All it would take is a quick charm to change to walls, and the House-elves can change the furniture around faster than it takes to ask them for the switch.”

Harry gave a little half-shrug. “Like I said, I’m really used to the room like this. It’s fine.”

A groan came from the blonde, and he grabbed the back of Harry’s shirt and tugged him backwards until they were laying side by side on the bed, arms just barely brushing. Some little part of Harry
noticed that Draco was very warm, which was stupid. Of course Draco was warm. He’d spent enough time pressed against the other boy or with his head in the Malfoy heir’s lap to know that. For some reason, the knowledge of all that contact now made his cheeks turn pink.

“Close your eyes.”

Casting a sideways glance, Harry gave him an odd look. “What?”

The impact of Draco’s shoe on his shin shut him up. “We’re doing a mental exercise. Now close your eyes before I stick them shut.”

Harry cast one last look at Draco before shutting his eyes. “Alright, now what.”

“Picture a room. Right now it’s got nothing in it. But you know that it’s your room, and you can do whatever you’d like with it. What colour are the walls?”

For a moment, Harry considered fighting this game. It really didn’t matter what the room looked like. But Draco was just going to push until he got what he wanted, so in the long run it was simply easier to cave. “Gold. A dark gold.”

Smugness came off Draco in waves, and Harry thought about returning the favor and kicking him, but didn’t want to break the strange atmosphere that was developing. “Alright. Now the floor.”

Sighing and relaxing back, Harry’s voice softened somewhat, till he sounded almost drowsy. “It’s carpeting. Not quite white - just a bit of yellow, like cream.”

Draco nodded, and the motions of it made the bed move slightly beneath them. “What does the furniture look like?”

“A light wood. Shorter - none of them are very tall. To make it easier for me to get what’s in it.”

A chuckle escaped Draco. “And the bed?”

Harry’s head flopped sideways a bit, but he kept his eyes closed. “The same wood. Like the ones in the Slytherin dorms. Those curtains, especially. The covers are slick, and a deep green.”

At that point, Harry expected Draco to say something like ‘no that wasn’t so hard, was it?’. But instead there were a few minutes of silence, before the blond spoke, voice soft. “Wanna try something else.” Harry made a soft noise of agreement. “My parents taught me this ages ago. They said it helped make emotions easier to control, and some magics used it.” He took a deep long breath. “Think of a place, It doesn’t have to be real, if you want. But it needs to be kind of big, with room for a lot of detail.”

Harry gave a little hum, and thought for a moment, trying to think of places he knew. The Manor would be nice, but he wasn’t sure he could recall it with enough detail. What place did he know best? Privet Drive was out of the question, obviously. The next best place was Hogwarts, and the area he knew best was the dorms, and the surrounding corridors. “Okay.” He responded.

There was the slight swish of the covers as Draco nodded. “Imagine that place as specifically as you can. If it’s outside, think of the weather. If it’s inside, thing of all the little items lying around. Got it?”

It took a minute before Harry had a reasonably accurate mental picture of the Slytherin dorms. “Yeah, got it.”
“Now, try to match up your thoughts to the different places. Put the your secrets in the places where no one can get to them. If there are books, put memories of learning in there. That sort of idea. And just sort through them. Organizing, I suppose.”

They were both silent after that, and Harry started to pick through his memories, deciding where they should go. Memories of laying about with Pansy and Draco got stuffed into the seats. The Dursleys got hidden away in his trunk by his bed. Working with the professor became the windows.

Slowly the little world he had created became sharper, like it was becoming more real. And as he hid his memories around, he became more comfortable. Slowly, he began to relax, more and more...

The feeling of someone shaking his shoulder was jarring, and Harry nearly jumped out of his skin. The light of the room had changed, now the last bits of light before the sun set. And that wasn’t all that was different. The room he was in was like the one he’d described earlier to Draco.

Blinking, Harry slowly sat up, adjusting his glasses on the way. It wasn’t identical to the one he’d imagined, obviously - the furniture had a different shape to it, and the colours were just slightly off. But it was close enough to make him wonder if he was dreaming.

Then he saw Draco’s smug expression, and knew he wasn’t.

Narcissa smiled at him from the doorway, and pocketed her wand. She smiled warmly at him but didn’t speak. After a moment she slipped out the door, with the air of someone who was quite pleased with herself.

A warm pressure on his shoulder released, and Harry realized that Draco hadn’t let go from when he’d woken him. “You can thank me later.” The blonde told him, still smug. “Anything you want changed? Now that Mother has left.” He rolled his eyes.

Shaking his head, Harry gazed around the room. “No, it’s perfect. And I can thank you now, though it really was unnecessary.”

“Don’t be a prat.” Draco returned. “It very much was. Now, you look ready to collapse again. No doubt those Muggles overworked you for that week you were in their clutches. Have a nice night.” He left, casting one last smile over his shoulder.

Harry could only blink after him, before sliding back down and under the blankets.

One day he was going to be used to all this. But for now, the warmth of his room sent him back to sleep.
Harry woke to the sound of talking down the hall. Usually the house was quiet, but a glance at his clock, which was darting about his head, told him he had slept in until almost ten thirty. He stretched and scratched the back of his head. Today he made a note to write a letter to Ron congratulating him on winning that trip to Egypt with his family. He had seen the picture in the paper three days previous. Harry pulled on his glasses and made his way into the hall. Narcissa and Lucius were standing outside of their bedroom door, both holding a coffee and both looking a little worse for wear. He hoped they weren’t having a couple fight, that would be sad.

“Morning.” Harry greeted them quietly.

Lucius looked over, his grip on the newspaper in his fist tightened a little and he gave a small smile. “Good morning. Did you happen to get struck by lightning?"

Harry rose a hand and touched curiously at his hair. He smiled a little before rubbing at his eye sleepily. “Is Draco up?”

“Yes dear, he’s in his room. He woke up about an hour ago but I told him to let you sleep.” Narcissa gestured towards Draco’s door with her mug occupied hands.

Harry turned and shuffled his way to Draco’s door. He tried the knob and turned when he felt it contact his palm. Sometimes Draco warded his door. He opened it and stepped inside, shutting the door behind him. Draco was on his bed, headphones over his ears, listening to the Walkman Harry had given him last Christmas and reading, sprawled out on his stomach, back to the door. Harry smiled to himself at the opportunity and ran at the bed before leaping on it. He landed next to Draco who let out a rather undignified shriek and threw himself onto the floor.

“You prat! What was that for?”

“Fun?”

Draco glowered before climbing back into his bed and stretched out next to Harry. “Nice sleep?”

“Best. I always sleep well here. The bed is like a cloud.”

Draco snickered before placing his things aside. “Well, now that you’ve slept through most of the morning, care to get something to eat? I could smell muffins this morning.”

“That sounds heavenly.”

They reentered the hall and Harry found it had been emptied. However when they passed Lucius and Narcissa’s bedroom, the door was surprisingly open. Harry glanced inside curiously as he walked by, but saw nothing more than two easy chairs by a fireplace and the edge of a bed. They reached the dining room and a tray of warm banana muffins were waiting for them and Harry broke his open and spread jam over it before taking a bite and sinking happily into his chair.

“Banana is my favourite.”

“I like it, but I love blueberry, or lemon poppyseed.”

Harry nodded approvingly at Draco’s choices and reached for a second muffin as he swallowed down his first in practically four bites. His cheeks were filled when Narcissa joined them at the table.
She smiled at them but it didn’t reach her eyes as she took her usual seat.

“Good morning, Mother.”

“Morning, Draco.” Narcissa took a long sip of her coffee. “Your father and I have decided we’re going to spend the rest of the summer in France.”

Draco gave a happy cry but Harry wasn’t sure how to respond. Admittedly, he was happy and excited, because he had never seen France before. Then again, he hadn’t seen a lot of things. But the announcement didn’t exactly sit right with him. When Narcissa looked at him however, he smiled at her around his chocolate milk and she seemed to relax and smiled back, albeit slowly. Harry watched as she rose from her chair and wandered off towards the stairs. She seemed dazed, almost, and he couldn’t help but feel a little nervous and concerned. If Narcissa Malfoy was shaken, it couldn’t have been good. He turned to Draco, who was now eating a plum happily, and looked to the stairs where Narcissa slipped around the bend and then looked to his muffin.

Something was wrong.

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“Draco, we’re leaving in fifteen minutes and you still haven’t packed?”

“Too many options. This is France. I have to pack wisely.”

Harry rolled his eyes and sat on Draco’s bed. He watched as Draco walked back into his closet and heard him muttering to himself as he looked. “I have a knit vest in here somewhere... It’s blue... Where is it?” There was a lot of shuffling before several items of clothes floated out of Draco’s closet, folded themselves neatly and dropped into an open trunk. Harry watched, sprawling on his stomach and laying his head on his arms as Draco packed. He had to guess there were over a hundred outfit combinations and at least fifteen pairs of shoes in a suitcase that looked like it could barely hold a thing.

“Draco, you’re not going to wear half these things. Why are you packing them.”

“You’ve got to be prepared. What if a monsoon hits?”

“I don’t think France gets monsoons.”

“Snow?”

“In August?”

“I’m just being prepared.”

“You’re being insane.”

Draco glowered as he trooped back into the room, his arms full of toiletry items that he dumped unceremoniously in the suitcase. “How do you know that I won’t wear everything I’ve packed.”

“You’ve packed for at least a school year, we’re going to be there for maybe forty days. Even if I helped and wore some of the things you packed more than once, there would still be things left untouched.”

Draco made a motion with his hand that looked dismissive before he dropped in a series of books and then zipped up the suitcase and poked it with his wand. Harry followed after his friend, who
was following after his trunk. Everybody’s things were sitting by the Floo. Narcissa was giving instructions to the House-elves as Lucius was tossing their things into the green flames. One everything was secured, Harry watched as Lucius tucked his braided hair into the collar of his robes before pulling his cloak hood over his head and then stepped into the Floo. He spoke out the name of their hotel and vanished in a flare of green flames. Harry watched as the other two Malfoys prepared for the long Floo trip and watched as Narcissa even fitted something similar to a Muggle medical mask over her face before she vanished. Draco went next and Harry stepped in last, calling out the destination and dropping the powder. He tucked in his elbows, managed to suck in a deep breath and shut his eyes before the world began to spin.

It felt like an eternity before Harry tumbled out of the grate, making a sick moan as he stumbled to his feet. His whole body felt like jelly and he vowed that he would talk them into taking the train back so he could make it to school in one piece. They were in the lobby of a hotel. There was a witch wearing a floppy conical hat that was royal purple in colour and matched the rest of her uniform robes. Harry grinned when he realized it was a magical hotel.

He thought he would never get over his love of magic.

They grouped before heading towards the desk where the perky witch waved them over. “Salut! Bienvenue à L’Hôtel Baton D’Or. Je m’appelle Giselle, est-ce que je peux vous aider?”

Harry blinked at the sudden onslaught of French and looked to Narcissa, who nudged Lucius forward. Lucius approached the desk and quietly, quickly spoke to the woman in flawless French. Harry wondered where Lucius had learned the language before remembering that Lucius’ family was French and that he had moved to London when he was a child. Draco had told him once. It wasn’t long before they were taking the lift, which Harry quickly learned also went side to side as well as back and forth and up and down. They reached their floor, the eighteenth, rather quickly, and entered their room. Or rather, rooms. Lucius and Narcissa had one and Harry and Draco had one, both of the rooms were connected by a door as well as having separate entrances from the hall.

Harry ran to the window and threw the curtain open, expecting to see the Eiffel Tower. He wilted a little when he didn’t. “Shame.”

“Don’t worry,” Draco said, sitting down on his bed. “The brochure says the room moves. I’m sure we’ll see it at some point, we’re right downtown.”

“The room... I love magic.”

Draco grinned over at Harry and watched as Harry released his clock. The snitch twitched happily before zooming off. It would explore the new space before lazily taking laps around the room. Harry dropped down on his bed and looked to Draco.

“What should we do first?”

“Depends on what you want to see; Muggle Paris or Wizarding Paris?”

“Both. Anything! Everything!”

Draco laughed. “Alright, calm down before you have Kneazles, we’ll talk to my parents and figure out the rules for this trip.”

Harry nodded eagerly and bounced off his bed. “Let’s go.”

They went to the door connecting their rooms and Harry raised his hand to knock. Draco, however, simply grabbed the handle and barged in. For a moment Harry simply blinked after him, before
Once they entered the other room, they say Narcissa and Lucius standing in the middle of the room, talking in intense, low voices. When they spotted the boys they nearly jumped apart, stopping their conversation mid-sentence. “Is there something you need?” Narcissa asked, tucking a stray blond hair behind her ear and looking just a little bit too collected.

“We were trying to figure out the plan for the trip.” Draco told them, his voice light, but Harry caught the glint of calculation behind it. So he’d noticed their odd behavior too. Probably earlier than Harry had, since they were his parents.

Narcissa sat down on the king sized bed and patted it invitingly. Draco and Harry sat down, and she enchanted the complimentary map they had been given to open to it’s full extent and float in front of them, like the directories in public areas. “Any preferences?” She asked, voice still just a bit too cheery. Her eyes darted to Lucius, whose face was blank.

Harry leaned forward, tracing roads with his gaze. He was, for the most part, utterly unfamiliar with the city. “Can we go to the top of the Eiffel Tower?” He asked when he spotted it. It wasn’t hard - this particular map must have been made with tourists in mind, and there were little lines of colour and tiny blurbs of information surrounding it.

A hand grabbed the back of his robes and pulled him back slightly, and Harry realized he’d been blocking Draco’s view. Grinning apologetically, he moved so their shoulders met. The hand lingered for just a moment before dropping. “We’ll certainly have to, since it’s your first time.”

Nodding, Harry went back to looking at the map. “Where is Wizarding Paris?” A point on the map began flashing red and blue, which made it difficult to read the text. “Notre Dame? That big church?” He gave a little snort. “I don’t think the Muggles would like that a lot.”

With a wave of Narcissa’s hand, the map folded itself up and then reopened. It now showed a close up of Notre Dame. “The Muggles tend to build their places of religion over places of high magical power. Either those places just call to them, or it’s their way of trying to control it.” She shrugged, the motion dismissive. “Also, religious places like this one, especially the older ones, are far more likely to be kept up with and to remain standing, which means we don’t have to move around often.”

Feeling a little bit silly for asking when the answer was so simple, Harry nodded and bit his lower lip. “So what’s in Wizarding Paris?”

“Lots of stuff.” Draco answered. “It’s bigger than Diagon Alley, so it’s not all just shops. There’s an amusement park in there, and a few places to see shows and such.”

Spotting the look of awe on Harry’s face, Narcissa smiled at him, looking actually pleased instead of like she was putting on a show. “Would you like to go there tomorrow, Harry?”

The nod Harry made was almost violent. “Please!” He paused. “But can we do the tower soon?”

“Certainly.” Narcissa glanced at the window, which to Harry’s surprise was getting dark. “I believe we lost some time in the trip. An hour, to be precise. Do your best to fall asleep soon. I imagine the travel probably tired you out, and we’ll have a long day ahead.” She made motions towards the doors.

The dismissal was clear and the boys hopped off the bed and out the door. Once it closed, they could hear the sounds of hushed speaking for just a moment before a silencing charm went up. Harry glanced at Draco, who was frowning at the door. “What do you suppose is going on?” He
asked the blonde quietly.

Shrugging, Draco returned his gaze. “I don’t know. This is strange behavior for them. But I don’t think it’s good.”

They shared a long gaze, the beginnings of fright churning in both stomachs, before Harry turned away and grabbed his trunk, pulling out pajamas. He could unpack tomorrow. Behind him he could hear the sounds of Draco getting ready for bed as well.

His nightly ritual finished, Harry slid into bed and murmured his good-night to Draco, who answered just as quietly. Just as Narcissa had predicted, once he got comfortable exhaustion hit, and he was able to drift off to sleep.

Thunder crashed. Each time it seemed to get louder, closer, and every time it made Harry jump. The rain was pouring down, making everything slippery and reflective. He was surrounded by windows. Behind them were white shapes, like masks. None of them reacted to his fear. They only watched as he ran down the narrow path.

It was becoming darker, nearly to the point that Harry couldn’t see at all. He kept running. The masked faces seemed to shift, like they were waiting for something. Thunder again. This time it seemed to shake his bones. Harry tripped, landing on the wet ground. His glasses fell away from him. No matter how he twisted, he couldn’t find them again.

The masks seemed even worse with his blurry vision. Their shapes twisted like the mirrors were warped.

Harry struggled to his feet and started running again. There was an end to the path in sight. Only when he reached it did he realize it wasn’t a end. It was another window. Behind it were the Malfoys. None of them looked at him. All three were facing away, limp.

There was red. There was a lot of red. On them, on the floor, and the window.

On Harry.

The window reflected his own scared face. It also showed movement behind him and crazed dark eyes.

Harry turned. There was a flash of metal.

Only years of experience at the Dursleys kept Harry from screaming out loud as he jolted awake. His breathing was heavy, coming in short pants. His gazed around, looking for something to calm him, but the unfamiliar room had nothing that was comforting to him.

But it did have someone, Harry realized.

Before he’d thought the idea through, Harry slipped out of his bed and crawled onto Draco’s. The other boy grumbled, the sleepy sound achingly familiar, and Harry flopped down next to him, something like his normal mental state returning. “What’dya want?” Draco muttered, confused eyes darting from Harry to the clock on the wall, the light of the window just enough for him to see by.

As calm washed over Harry, so did embarrassment. His eyes were wild and sweat made his hair stick up even more than usual. He must have looked ridiculous. “I... uh... Nightmare, sorry. I’ll just... Sorry to wake you up, it was stupid—”

“Shut up for a second. You had a nightmare?”
Cheeks burning, Harry nodded.

Draco sighed, and then reached out with one arm to grab Harry around the waist, dragging him down until he was laying next to Draco. “Stay here then, if it makes you feel better.” He yawned wide enough that Harry could have counted his teeth. “Don’t want to hear you whining that you’re tired tomorrow.”

It took Harry a moment to process that Draco hadn’t mocked him for his childishness. Honestly, it had just been a nightmare. It wasn’t like he had never had one of those before. But being near Draco really did help, and so he started to settle down. His efforts were interrupted when he was kicked in the back.

The blanket below him was tugged until Harry squirmed and let Draco drag it out from under him. “Move, you prat.” The blonde mumbled. Finally, Harry just stood back up so that Draco could whip the covers open. “Get in here before I get cold.”

It took a few minutes of squirming before both boys found a place they were comfortable. After that, it was easy to fall asleep.

Harry woke the next morning to Narcissa’s voice. He stretched, feeling warm and languid and burrowed his face closer into the source of warmth. Draco was still making soft, slightly wheezy breaths in his sleep and Harry found the noise comforting. He was curled with his head under the covers and with his head wedged between Draco’s arms and body, like he had wrapped the other boy around himself.

Harry didn’t want to move. He had been dreaming about flying over the Black Lake, doing whirls and loops on his broom. However he also had to go to the bathroom. He tugged himself away from Draco slowly. The blonde murmured sleepily and clutched for Harry with a slumbering hand before he rolled onto his stomach and muttered something about raspberries. When Harry turned, the first thing he realized was that the curtains were thrown wide and the sun was glaring in through the window to the point it was almost blinding. He shielded his eyes and fumbled for his glasses before putting them on. As his vision righted itself Harry noticed the view from the window had indeed changed. He noted it with soft amusement before making his way to the bathroom.

After finishing up, Harry strode around the room while brushing his teeth. He noticed that the adjoining door was wide open, although they had shut it the previous night. Harry felt his cheeks heat slightly at the realization that at some point Draco’s parents had seen them fast asleep while curled around each other. Harry didn’t have much to go on, but he was pretty sure that normal boys didn’t do that with their friends.

Making his way into the bathroom, Harry spat and rinsed his mouth.

Then again, when had he ever been normal?

“G’moning.” He greeted through the door, running his hand through the stick-uppy hair on the back of his head. He was sure he looked a mess.

“Morning, Harry. Tea?”

“Please.”

Harry sank into a chair at the small, round table in Lucius and Narcissa’s room. Lucius was quietly reading the paper. It wasn’t the Prophet, he realized, as it was all in French. Harry tugged over a section that was folded when he saw the photo on it move viciously. He unfolded it and peered
down at the black and white photo on the page. The man in the picture looked haggard, definitely like he had seen better days. He was screaming, his eyes and hair wild and he was chained while wearing drab robes. He was also holding a name-card, except it was outfitted with runes and numbers instead.

“Someone who got done in for doing Dark magic?” Harry asked as he blew on his tea and sipped it slowly.

Narcissa snatched the paper up and away. “Something like that.” She folded it crisply and set it under the tea tray. “You needn’t worry about such things. Let the Aurors and Wizengamot take care of this.”

Harry didn’t know what those things were, but he gave a distracted nod. His eyes turned to the folded paper and he drained his tea quickly. He couldn’t figure out why but something irked him. He pushed the feeling away, however, and stood from his spot at the table before moving to take a shower. He’d have to go on a hunt for the *Prophet* later.

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“Wow! Look at this view!” Harry excitedly burst forward after stepping off the lift at the top of the Eiffel Tower and ran to an observation railing. He pushed up on his toes to see over the banister and cursed his still short height. He wondered if he was going to forever be cursed at 5’4. He pressed his feet into the interlocking slats and pulled himself up for a better look.

“Harry,” Narcissa’s voice was sharp and calm behind him. “We do not climb onto the railings of three hundred foot tall structures unless we wish to be scraped off the pavement.”

Harry lowered himself back down, huffing, before spotting an observation platform not too far off. He walked over to it and climbed on the sturdy, secured steps and looked at the view. A few moments later he felt Draco wriggle in beside him.

“It’s amazing, innit? You feel like you can see all the way back to England.”

Harry turned to look at his friend a moment before looking back out at the view. “It’s definitely spectacular.”

As they stood there and looked around, Harry watched people take photos and felt himself sink slightly. He would have loved to take pictures. He wished he had remembered to buy a camera.

“Harry, you look sullen all of a sudden. Are you alright? Are you having vertigo? Do you need to sit?”

Harry shook his head at all of Narcissa’s motherly, prodding questions and tossed a look back out over Paris. “I just wish I had a camera.”

“Oh!” Narcissa pulled open her handbag and with a sharp look around to make sure people were distracted, stuck her arm in past her elbow and rooted around. After a minute she pulled out an old fashioned looking camera with a large flashbulb. “You wish is my command, Mr. Potter.”

A grin split Harry’s face and he let Narcissa take his and Draco’s photo before he took Lucius and Narcissa’s and snapped a few of the view. He was careful not to drop it.

“How about you keep hold of that, Harry? You can be our trip photographer.”

Harry nodded and settled the heavy looking camera about his neck as they started off towards the lift.
Next stop, Wizarding Paris!

It was a fairly short distance to Notre Dame, and something in Harry’s awed expression must have convinced the Malfoys to walk it. When they arrived, instead of heading toward the main entrance, they branched off, following signs to Crypte Archéologique de Notre-Dame.

Before the crypt itself was a series of booths advertising the entrance fee and various passes that could be bought. A small corridor that looked unused, or perhaps belonging to some sort of administration branched off, and the group calmly slipped down it. They were paid no mind, and Harry thought there must be some sort of charm to keep the Muggles from noticing.

The hall took a sharp turn, and they ended up in front of a desk. A man was sitting behind it, looking rather bored. Narcissa pulled out her wand, and he barely looked before handing them a set of passes and waving them through.

After that was an exit that led them right in front of the crypt entrance. Security barely seemed to notice them, and they were able to slip in with the groups that were entering.

They followed the tour group for about five minutes, Harry in awe of the ruins and the Malfoys barely seemed to aware of them at all. When they passed by a bit that looked like a doorway, but ended just a few feet in, Narcissa grabbed Harry’s shoulder and Lucius stepped into it. Muggles passed, but none of them looked twice at the odd group.

After tapping out a quick pattern on the brick, Lucius stepped through the wall. It simply let him pass, much like the entrance to King’s Cross. Narcissa followed him, her hand on Harry’s shoulder not loosening as she dragged him behind her, and Draco trailed after.

The location inside the crypts had made Harry blink at surprise at the bright sunlight. His mouth dropped open and he glanced at Draco, who arched an eyebrow at him. The smaller boy gestured at the open sky and the blond gave a little ‘oh’ of understanding. “It’s just a charm, sort of like the one on the Great Hall. It has to be reapplied ever so often, though - they don’t know how the Founders managed to make that one permanent.”

Harry’s nod of understanding faded again into awe. He felt like he had the first time he entered Diagon Alley. Everyone here wore robes, but many of them were a bit strange to his eye, and Harry realized they were probably popular styles here. The chatter around him was mostly in French, but Harry also caught a few voices speaking English, German, Spanish - or maybe Italian, he was rubbish at telling them apart - and a few more than he couldn’t identify off the top of his head. It was probably easier for wizards to travel, Harry realized, what with Floo, Apparition and flying. The idea that they could make a day trip of Rome made his head spin a bit.

“Let’s do the amusement park first!” Draco declared, pointing towards where the top of a what looked like a Ferris Wheel could be seen over the buildings. Narcissa and Lucius shot him amused glances before the cool public Malfoy facade fell back into place. Draco, however, was unrepentant. The boy grabbed Harry’s arm and started tugging him in that direction. “Usually it’s just me.” He murmured in Harry’s ear. “And Mother and Father can’t be seen doing something so childish. I don’t think they’d want to if they could, anyway. So either we skip it or I have to go alone.” Draco sped up at that point, and therefore missed the frown that crossed Harry’s face. It was one thing if they didn’t want to do those rides, but the idea that Draco had to miss out because of the mask the Malfoys felt they had to wear twisted at his heart.

Speeding up a bit, but careful not to let the Malfoy parents out of sight, Harry asked, “What first, then?”
The grin Draco shot was just a little bit feral. “You’ve never been on a magical roller coaster ride before. I think that should be our first.”

The lines weren’t as bad as Harry had thought - Dudley always complained about having to wait when he went to the local park. But the ones here only had a few people, and he wasn’t sure if it was because of the small Wizarding population or if Dudley had simply been a brat about any waiting at all.

Within fifteen minutes they were being settled into place, and Harry ignored the disdainful look Draco adopted as he dropped down into the seat. It was a bit dirty, but the ride was public. The seat belts wrapped themselves around the boys on their own, tightening so that they were snug but not uncomfortable.

And then they were off.

There was a set of rails for the ride, but it seemed more like a guideline than a rule. The coaster wriggled like a snake as it made it’s way up, up, up. For a moment it paused and then it dropped, far faster than it should have had just gravity been affecting it.

Harry let out a whoop, grinning ear to ear. He glanced sideways and laughed at the sight of Draco’s normally perfect hair standing straight up. The blonde misinterpreted the source of his amusement and smiled in a way that showed all his teeth before leaning forward against the force of the ride.

The coaster rocked from side to side, doing loops when it pleased. The screams of the passengers got steadily louder as the speed only increased. All too soon, it came to a slow halt, and the seat belts let them go. Only Quidditch training kept Harry and Draco on their feet as they got off. Not every passenger had that advantage, however - one girl stumbled backward and ended up in a undignified tangle in front of her companion, who was having trouble stopping laughing at her long enough to help her up.

Invigorated, the boys tried near every ride the park had to offer. There was a version of bumper cars where the cars send each other flying at high speeds, a series of slides that sent one tumbling into the air before another caught the rider, a swing ride that seemed pleasant until someone yawned or acted sleepy and then would spun the riders around at crazy angles and speeds, and a variety more.

The last one they choose before lunch was the Ferris Wheel itself. The baskets weren’t actually attached to the wheel, and with a little effort could be swung to one side or the other, within a couple of meters. At first the boys amused themselves by going back and forth as fast as they could make it go, but quickly tired of that, instead taking in the view. “Over there is the theatre. Usually they have shows in French, but they have these things that go in your ear so you can understand them. They’re shaped like fish for some reason. Last time we came I asked the clerk why, but he just laughed.”

Draco gave a little shrug.

“How many times have you been here?” Harry asked.

Draco paused to think about it. “I’ve been to Paris seven times so far. We’ve come to France itself nine times, I think, but I don’t remember all of them. A couple were when I was a toddler.”

A little huff escaped Harry. “It seems so weird to think of traveling around like that.” He kicked his dangling feet. “Back...before, when I was in, you know, my cupboard, I would imagine going places like Paris or New York City. But they were just dreams, you know? The idea that I’m here is... It’s just weird.”

Pressure on his side made him look at Draco, who was smiling. His eyes, however, were serious.
“Well, I would get used to it, because you have no choice now. You’ll just have to come along with us when we travel. Next year we might be going to New York City. You’ll just have to suffer.”

Smiling, Harry pressed against him. “Prat. I’ll just have to endure, I guess.” His dramatic sigh made Draco snicker, which set Harry off.

“If you would please exit.” An accented voice asked, and Harry and Draco collected themselves long enough to notice that they were at ground level and their booth had let them go. The ride attendant gave them a knowing look, and Harry blushed a bit without really being sure why. They climbed out and let the next pair - two girls who were holding hands - through, before making their way to the distinctive grouping of Malfoy blonde.

They had played several games and Harry won Draco a stuffed Chinese Fireball and in return Draco had won Harry a ludicrously overstuffed bear that was almost as large as Harry and a shade of neon pink. Harry named it Juniper and spent the rest of the afternoon with it 'piggybacking’ him. After they had worn out their welcome they made their way back to the hotel.

Harry dropped onto his bed, kicking his new stuffed bed-mate aside and watched as Draco set his dragon - Augustus - in one of the chairs. Harry realized for the first time that the cabinet in the corner of the room had opening doors and not just drawers. Curious he climbed off his bed and made his way over. He opened the doors and grinned widely. A telly!

“Draco look, there’s a telly!”

Draco raced over and peered at it over Harry’s shoulder. “Guess they must have them for the Muggle-borns.”

“Let’s find something.” Harry turned it on and picked up the remote before sitting on the bed. He flicked through the channels, most of which were in French before he settled as the channel switched to the Disney version of Alice in Wonderland. One time when he had been ill and staying with a sitter since both Mrs. Figg and his Aunt Marge had been ill, he had been allowed to watch it. He looked over at Draco before patting the bed beside himself and then shifting to lay on his stomach.

Draco laid out beside him, easily throwing one leg over Harry’s as he rested his head on a pillow he dragged over. Harry got his own pillow and settled in happily. The movie had just begun and Draco watched the screen with amusement. “This will make the time pass quickly.”

Harry nodded a little. “Maybe you can convince your parents to get one?”

Draco’s nose crinkled in distaste. “I don’t know if I’d want one.”

Harry hummed a little and settled in. He wriggled a bit and drew his body away from Draco’s. He kicked his leg until Draco moved the foot that was on top of it. He ignored the strange look with a mumbled ‘too hot’ before curling onto his side. He knew that the room had a cooling charm in it, and he had been grateful for it when he first stepped in after being outdoors, but for some reason, his body was on fire.

Harry ignored the strange feelings and focused on the movie.

They spent the next few days visiting museums and looking at expensive art. Harry enjoyed it even though he was sure some people would find it boring. After their first week they received a long distance owl from Pansy, who said her family would be there for a week during the second week of August. Harry was practically bursting with excitement.

If they weren’t out sight seeing, then Harry and Draco would read in their rooms, sometimes practice
Harry had a feeling Draco put up with it for his benefit, since the Malfoy would often simply spend his evenings stretched out in bed reading, while Harry would watch silly cartoons or make up dialogue to French movies he couldn’t understand.

Whatever the case was, Harry was grateful, it let him relax and it almost made him feel normal. Made him feel like “just Harry”. Like perhaps he had once had a functional childhood. Harry never said anything, but he was pretty sure Draco knew how he felt. He had caught his silvery-blue eyes looking over the edges of his book every so often. Usually when he was having a laughing fit.

It felt good.

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Harry made his way to the front desk in the lobby. Draco was still sleeping and he wasn’t so bold to go barging into Lucius and Narcissa’s room. The perky attendant wizard smiled over at him with a “salut!” Harry made his way to the counter.

“Good morning.”

“Good morning, how can I help you?”

“Er...” Harry fidgeted a little at the sunny smile and almost sing-song accent. “D’you have a copy of the Daily Prophet?”

“Indeed we do!” The wizard ducked below the side of the desk and handed Harry a twined up copy. Harry patted his pockets for the seven knuts before he was waved off with a smile.

Harry boarded the lift and punched in the floor number. He held fast to the railing as the elevator jerked backwards hard before jiggering to the right and shot upward. He unwrapped the newspaper and peered at the cover page. The man he had seen in the French paper was on the cover in the same snarling photograph. SEARCH FOR ESCAPED PRISONER SIRIUS BLACK ONGOING see page three for details. Harry flipped open the pages as he got off on his floor. He did not enter the room but paced outside the door nervously before finally beginning to read.

Sirius Black, noted Death Eater, escaped from a high security cell early morning on July the 5th, 1993. Black, imprisoned for life on war crimes associated with You-Know-Who is the first known person to escape from Azkaban.... Harry lowered the paper, ignoring the rest of the article. He folded it and stared back at the cover and the crazed escaped convict.

Objective complete, Harry gave the password to unlock the door to their room. By the time he returned, Draco was awake, blinking in sleepy confusion at Harry’s empty bed. “Where were you?” He asked.

Sitting himself down on Draco’s bed, Harry replied “Trying to figure out what’s going on with your parents. Last time I saw the French version of the Prophet in their room, Narcissa snatched it up before I could really get a look. So I went to the lobby to see if they had a copy.” He handed it to Draco with a flourish.

He waited a moment for Draco to take in the headlines and picture, watching a little line of concentration appear between his brows. Draco would probably hate the wrinkle if he knew about it, and train himself out of it. Harry kept his mouth shut. “Do you think this is what you mother and father were trying to keep from us?” He asked, tapping lightly on Sirius Black’s snarling face.

“That depends. What does Sirius Black have to do with us?” Draco asked. He paused. “Well,
other than being a Death Eater. And related.”

Harry blinked at him. “You need more than that?”

Waving his hand dismissively, Draco replied, “Well, it doesn’t really make sense for him to come after any of us. When someone breaks out of prison, the smart thing to do is to lay low until most people lose interest. If everyone is on high alert then it just makes for a higher chance that he’ll be caught.”

A snort escaped Harry. “Yeah, because this guy looks like the picture of mental health.” He flipped to page three, where Black still snarled, but from a different angle. “Besides, why would your parents bring us all the way to France if there wasn’t a reason to be afraid of him?”

“Because that’s what parents are supposed to do. Overreact and be worried.” Draco shrugged. “What does it say he did, anyway?”

Smirking, Harry glanced sideways at him. “You don’t know? Hm, normally you’re so on top of these things.”

The foot Draco planted on his back sent Harry tumbling off the bed. “Shove off. I know that you don’t know either.” He grabbed the paper and started scanning it. “It doesn’t say, other than just ‘Death Eater’.”

Harry climbed back onto the bed. “I guess for most people that’s good enough.”

Something flashed in Draco’s eyes, and Harry glanced away, discomforted. He tended to forget that the Malfoys had a Dark reputation, unless forcibly reminded by someone like Ron.

As he was trying to figure out something to say, the doorknob to the connecting room began to turn. Moving with the speed of someone with a secret, Draco stuffed the paper under a pillow and the two of them turned to face the Telly, which was luckily playing an old cartoon.

Narcissa poked her head in, and gave the boys the now familiar everything-is-just-fine smile. “Are you boys getting ready for today?”

“Draco just woke up.” Harry informed her, with the air of letting her in on a big conspiracy. In response, Draco shoved him again, thought not as hard this time. The blonde dragged himself out of bed and into the bathroom. “Ready for what?”

The smile became a little more genuine. “I believe you have been looking forward to going out to Versailles? Today looks like wonderful weather to do so.”

That made Harry perk up. “Really? Wicked! Oh, I should make sure the camera has film.” He grabbed it off the table and began fiddling with it.

“Just make sure Draco doesn’t dally for too long, if you would.” With that Narcissa went back into the other room. Harry froze, waiting a few seconds to be sure she wasn’t coming back, before grabbing the newspaper from under the pillow and stuffing it into one of the drawers.

It was best to keep the elder Malfoys in the dark about their knowledge, for the moment. They could wait for the best possible time to confront them.

In the end Harry did have to basically drag Draco out of the bathroom, as the kept working on his hair, growing more frustrated with every minute. He didn’t come out until Harry assured him that his hair looked fantastic, just like always, at which point Draco preened and swaggered out, looking
pleased with himself. In all probability, he had just wanted the compliment. Harry rolled his eyes, but gave the other boy a fond look when his back was turned.

Once they were all set, and Harry had the camera hanging from his neck, the extended family headed out.

They arrived in Versailles after a trip on public transit, which left Narcissa muttering and Lucius glowering, but it made Harry pleased. He enjoyed the feeling of self-sufficiency that came with taking buses and trains and the fact that traveling that way did not turn his insides into mashed potatoes. When they finally arrived, Harry stared up at the great building from the distance across the lawn. It was magnificent and sprawling, white amongst the dark backdrop of blue sky and lush greenery. He bounced excitedly on the balls of his feet as he took in the wide view before snapping a few pictures.

After a walk up the arching stairs, they were inside and paid their dues and were handed pamphlets. The first place they visited was the Chapel located off the main courtyard, it was filled with people praying and crowding for photographs, so they didn’t linger long. Afterward they moved to the Gallery and examined the priceless art on the walls. Draco complained softly that they were boring because they didn’t move, but Harry liked them. They were a piece of history and a great accomplishment done without magic. As far as he knew, anyway.

Once they finished on the first floor, they moved up the sprawling staircase and rounded into the War Room. They took their time in reading the plaques and studying the history before they advanced into the next section and Harry stopped short.

“Wow.”

It was an understatement. In the largest possible way. The hallway was filled with natural light that flooded in from arching, polished window filled doors that overlooked the gardens. The light shimmered through the large, crystal chandeliers causing prisms of coloured light to dance over the polished marble floors and off the gilded, wide mirrors. Harry was completely and utterly awestruck. He felt like he couldn’t breathe of the place would be disturbed and the wonder would be lost. He let out a slow, wavering breath. And then another. And another.

Slowly the magnificence faded into the background and he was finally able to move. He started down the hall, his eyes unsure of where to look. Wanting to look at everything all at once: the gilded gold, the large statues, even the sprawling paintings on the ceiling were breathtaking. He gulped in a breath, suddenly feeling very queasy and lowered his head and took in a few shaking breaths.

“Are you okay?”

Harry nodded at Draco’s question and quietly, gratefully leaned into Draco’s body when his friend came up beside him. “Just feel really dizzy.”

Narcissa clucked her tongue and he felt her hand smooth over his shoulder and down his back, rubbing in gentle circles. “Vertigo. You’re just overstimulated. Come on, we’ll get you some air.”

Harry managed a shameful smile as he was lead back down the stairs and into the courtyard. He sat down at the picnic bench and leaned heavily against in as Draco sat down beside him and Narcissa and Lucius walked off to find something to drink and something light to eat. Feeling foolish, Harry pulled off his glasses and rubbed the back of his neck. “I made a real spectacle of myself, didn’t I?”

“No worse than my first time. I fell over and knocked over a statue. Luckily Mother managed to
mend it before there was a fuss.”

That made Harry feel a little better and by the time Narcissa and Lucius arrived with juice and some pastries and yogurt, Harry’s shoulders had stopped slumping. He ate his food quietly, the simple smoothness helped ease his stomach and the fruit in the yogurt boosted his energy. He wasn’t sure if he was ready to try the Hall of Mirrors, again, so he simply sat and nursed his peach juice.

“How about we walk around the gardens for the rest of the afternoon and perhaps visit the smaller buildings on the property?” Lucius suggested, his voice low.

Harry nodded once he felt up to it. “That sounds good.”

After they rested and finished their things, they set off for the gardens. Draco draped an arm around Harry’s shoulder. “Birthday soon. I’ve got you the best present in the world.”

Harry snickered and arched a brow. “Is that so? Better than being told I’m a wizard?”

Draco pouted a moment. “Well... no. The best thing after that.”

Harry bumped his hip against Draco’s purposely, making the other stumble a little. “So pretentious. Just let me enjoy the walk and then you can fill my head with your birthday prattle.”

Draco sniffed and stuck his nose in the air. “Fine. Be that way.”

Harry shoved hard at Draco as they passed a fountain. The other body stumbled violently and almost fell in. Harry laughed before taking off at top speed. Draco growled and set chase as Harry rounded his way around a group of people and darted off into the labyrinth.


Harry woke on his birthday to the sound of the shower running. The Wireless in the bathroom was on high which meant that Draco was in a good mood. It was unusual for Draco to wake up before him, but not so unusual that Harry was going to be sending off any owls. The door to the adjoining room was open, but when Harry glanced inside to wish Lucius and Narcissa a good morning, he found it empty.

Making his way to the table set with breakfast, Harry sat down and pulled off the cover keeping his food warm. Crepes with cream and fresh berries greeted him along with sliced fruit and a bowl of porridge. Harry tucked in happily.

“Good morning,” Draco greeted as he exited the bathroom. Harry shook his head at the sight of steam billowing out the door and wondered if there would be any hot water left. “Happy Birthday!”

“Thanks. We have crepes this morning.”

Draco dropped down in his seat across from Harry and looked at his own breakfast. He had gotten grain cereal instead of porridge. Harry studied Draco a moment as he took a bite of his food. It was rare that he saw Draco when he was “less-than-perfect” so to speak. But Draco was in a pair of comfortably loose jeans and a polo shirt and his hair was still dripping slightly from his shower, curling at the tips and waving from the roots, and combed messily. Harry had never seen Draco without his hair done before. Even if he had to brush his teeth or go to the bathroom, Draco had refused to let him in until his hair was at least dried. He didn’t even know that Draco’s hair wasn’t bone straight.

“I like your hair.”

“Sod off, I didn’t want to wait to eat.”

“I mean it. I like your hair. It makes you look less severe.” Harry didn’t know why, but he kind of wanted to put his fingers through Draco’s hair and feel the soft curl of it. Probably because it would annoy him so much. He knew better, though. Draco was notoriously for hexing someone who so much as breathed on his hair.

“Oh... Well... thanks.”

Harry nodded and tried to ignore the satisfaction of noticing that Draco’s face had gone pink and splotchy, the way it tended to when he was embarrassed. “Anytime.”

They ate in a comfortable silence and once Harry had his fill he graciously offered Draco the bathroom to finish his morning ordeal. As Draco finished, Harry read quietly, humming along to a song he recognized on the Wireless. Definitely a Weird Sisters song. Just as he was getting everything ready, Narcissa poked her head into the room to let him know she and Lucius were back and they both wished him a Happy Birthday.

Harry grinned as he passed Draco on the way to the bathroom. He dropped off his things and started the shower and let it warm. He brushed his teeth while the shower heated to almost scalding before he climbed in. It wasn’t until Harry started washing his hair that he realized that Draco hadn’t straightened his hair once he had dried it. Feeling smug and satisfied, Harry ducked under the spray to rinse the lather from his hair.

After showering, Harry emerged from the bathroom feeling fresh and clean. He heard voices from
the adjoining room and noticed Draco wasn’t in their bedroom so he slipped into the other room without hesitation. Draco was prodding at a gift wrapped in emerald green paper and Harry guessed it was the “most amazing” gift Draco had gotten him. It was rather large and boxy looking. Now Harry was intrigued.

“Draco seems rather intent on you opening your gift now, Harry. Of course it is entirely your choice.”

Harry smiled at Narcissa’s pragmatic announcement and squatted next to Draco and the large... thing. Whatever it was it was in a box about three feet long a foot wide and at least five feet deep.

“Go on.” Draco nudged him with a knee. “Open it.”

Knowing better than to argue with Draco, Harry sat flat on the floor and with a low grunt of exertion, tugged the large box of a thing towards him. Once it was comfortably settled between his legs, Harry peeled off the wrapping paper. Strangely, as he peeled, Harry heard quiet murmuring in his ear. His brow creased until the last of the paper fell away and the murmuring was no longer a mystery.

“You bought me a snake?”

Draco smiled proudly. “I’ve bought you an Oroboros!” Draco’s voice was excited and he gestured grandly to the snake in the tank, which rose it’s head lazily from the branch it was resting on. “They’re magical snakes. He’ll grow to maybe fifteen feet. And they’re said to be able to help in casting - you let them wrap about your arm and bite their tails and then it’s like a... conductor of energy.”

Harry laughed softly and put his hands on the tank, watching as the snake nudged against the glass. “Brilliant.”

“They are poisonous, however,” Narcissa’s voice warned. “But they can be trained to keep their venom in if they accidentally bite a person. We still don’t know why Draco was so insistent on buying you it.”

Harry took the lid off the tank and carefully stuck his hand inside, letting the snake smell him. “I’m a Parselmouth.”

Lucius’ brows raised and he looked to Draco who offered up a shrug. “Really?”

Harry didn’t give a verbal reply but he nodded and giggled quietly when the snake started creeping up his arm. He looked at it as it moved. It was strong, but not too heavy, and just over a foot long. “What am I going to name you, hm?”

The snake glided up to his shoulder and nudged under his chin and hissed contentedly. “I have no name. I am yours to do with as you wish. I am here to help you. Here to learn from you.”

Harry stroked his hand down the back of the snake’s head. “Are you male or female? Your voice is too mixed for me to tell.”

“Male.”

It took a bit of effort but Harry managed to rewire his brain. “He’s male. He doesn’t have a name yet.”

Narcissa was watching him with muted fascination. “I think we have an encyclopedia if you’d like
Harry gave a nod and offered her up a smile before moving the snake back into the tank and ignored the annoyed hiss it earned him. Once he had gotten used to the snake he would let it free. However, with the look he was getting, Harry figured it best to let the snake wrap around his body as it wished. He took the large, heavy book and set out on find a name, leaving the rest of his gifts untouched.

His first task was figuring out what an Oroboros was, exactly. He flipped open the book and turned to the right page, skimming the passages. *The Oroboros is a breed of snake, commonly used in alchemy. They are capable of storing energy in their bodies. The older, and therefore larger, the Oroboros, the more power it can contain. This energy is absorbed from the environment in which the snake is contained. The energy is released when it bites its own tail, and adds to whatever it is touching at the time. Most commonly they are used with cauldrons, but other objects of power or even the owners themselves the encyclopedia informed him. According to Muggles, and in symbolic-based disciplines like Divination they are used to reflect endlessness, and eternal cycles, much like the phoenix.* After that it listed a few related topics, and Harry began flipping through them, trying to find a name.

“Ananta,” He finally mumbled to himself, and then turned his head down at a slightly awkward angle to address the snake. “*Do you like the name Ananta?*”

The snake raised it’s head from where it had been drowsing against the skin of his neck. “*What does that name mean?*” He asked.

A rolling hissing noise, almost akin to a chuckle came from the snake. “*That is appropriate. I approve. From now on, I shall be known as Ananta.*” With that declaration it went back to curling up so he looked like a bizarre necklace.

“Ananta it is, then.” He looked up to see Draco looking expectant, and Narcissa and Lucius still looking fascinated, though the latter looked somewhat off-kilter as well. “It the name of the King of Nagas in Hindu religion. Well, to be more accurate it’s part of his name. ‘Ananta-Shesha’ is the full version, but Ananta means ‘endless’, so it seemed appropriate…” He trailed off, realizing he was babbling. “Draco, thank you! This is an amazing present.”

Setting the book down, Harry quickly whispered a warning about not biting people without permission to Ananta, who gave a tiny hiss of agreement, he launched himself at Draco, wrapping the other boy in an enthusiastic hug. Draco was unprepared and they both tipped onto the floor, laughing.

“If you two are finished?” Lucius drawled, voice edged with amusement. Harry and Draco picked themselves up sheepishly, and Harry turned back to his other gifts. There was no present from Pansy, since she would be arriving the next day anyway. From Hermione Harry got a book about unusual potions. Ron sent him his usual package of sweets, and Neville sent him a book as well, this one on plant ingredients, with a note tucked into the front about combining their talents at some point to try and increase both their grades. Harry’s grade in Herbology was around average, and the boy’s attempts to sound Slytherin in the letter were beyond amusing, so he made a mental note to send the other boy an agreement before Hogwarts started.

*Apprenticeship: A Guide to Advanced Magickal Learning* was his book from Snape, which Harry spent a minute grinning at. So far as he knew, the professor had never hinted that he was interested in such a commitment to anyone else. Such courses of study were also rigorous, and the fact that Snape was recommending it as high praise indeed.
The last gift he opened was from the Malfoys. It turned about to be a set of various art supplies - paints, oils, and inks. He looked up at them in askance, and Narcissa smiled down at him. “Draco mentioned that you always draw on your rough drafts for class. We figured this was a better place for you to put your talents to use.” Harry coloured slightly at the implied admonishment, and then glanced sideways at Draco, surprised the other boy had noticed. He had certainly never said anything about it. The blonde wasn’t meeting his eyes, however, so Harry looked back at Narcissa and Lucius. “Thank you very much!”

“You’re welcome. Oh, and since you’ve being so enthusiastic about that camera, perhaps you could keep it as well. No one else has a particular passion for it.” Narcissa responded, and Lucius gave him a fond nod.

Harry grinned at them, glancing back at the room where the camera was paint. “Thank you!” He got another set of nods and smiles in return.

Between him and Draco they were able to haul all his presents back to their room in one go. They didn’t have any plans for today, other than going out to dinner later, so they spent the day investigating his gifts. Harry mentioned Neville’s offer to Draco, and then left him alone so the blonde’s desire for better grades overcame his reluctance to deal with Gryffindors. He spent the time in between trying to get a feel for the different art supplies. The pencils and inks he was fairly comfortable with, but the brushes and such were going to take more work.

Later they carefully apparated to Montparnasse and had dinner at Le Ciel de Paris, the view from which was spectacular. Harry ended up in the seat closest to the window, and kept craning around to look out. Unfortunately, it was too early to see the city light up, but it was still beautiful.

After, they went back to the hotel, and the boys spent their time just relaxing on Draco’s bed. Harry ended up being the translator for a conversation between Ananta, who seemed amused by the idea of a conversation, and Draco, who was fascinated by the fact that he could have a conversation with a snake. He also seemed to quite like the sound of Parselmouth, now that it wasn’t being used against Harry, and kept getting the brunette to teach him phrases with varying degrees of success.

Eventually they both tired, and Harry crawled slightly reluctantly into his own bed. He tried to coax Ananta into the specially charmed rock on his bedside table, but the Oroboros was having none of it.

“You are warmer than the rock.” He informed Harry, with a tone of finality.

Harry let the serpent slither around him to settle back on his neck, even as he argued, “I cannot control my movements when I sleep. I do not wish to harm you.”

That got him a little headbutt to his chin. “It will take more than that to do me harm. Do not think me so weak.” And really, there was no way he could argue that. Instead he settled down, muttering a sleepy ‘Good-night’ to Draco, which was returned, and drifted off.

Harry woke up the next morning to the feel of a hand shaking his shoulder. He batted it away in annoyance before it shook harder. Finally he opened his eyes and blinked up through the blur at Narcissa, who pressed his glasses into his hand. Harry sat up slowly and pulled them on, stretching and yawning.

“Pansy will be here in about twenty minutes. I thought you’d rather I wake you than she launch herself into your bed.”

Harry grinned and nodded his head in thanks before watching as Narcissa moved to wake Draco. Harry stretched his arms over his head and blinked at the feeling of something heavy against his waist. He pushed his sheet down and pull up his loose shirt and blinked down at the sight of Ananta
coiled tightly about his waist. That was certainly one way to avoid being crushed.

The snake stirred and Harry shivered at the feeling of him tightening reflexively into the heat before the slow side of him unraveled and slipped down into the sheets. Draco was mumbling sleepily, half-awake with his eyes closed and Harry looked at his new pet before jerking his head in Draco’s direction. The snake swiveled before lashing his tongue out and glided over the bed, and then making his way across the floor and into Draco’s bed.

Draco’s eyes slowly opened and he lifted the covers to peer under them. “Why is your ruddy snake with me?”

“Because I’m awake and therefore my bed is cooling.”

Draco made an annoyed sound but didn’t move. Instead he rolled onto his stomach and Harry watched as the covers moved and Ananta curled into a ball atop Draco’s back. Tossing off the covers, Harry washed up, changed and dressed. He watched as Draco finally stumbled out of bed, leaving Ananta hissing in annoyance at the sudden chill before the snake finally moved to the heated rock to bask.

Harry was sure he was never going to get him back into the tank. It would certainly make living in the dorm more interesting. He was halfway through breakfast when there was a knock on the door. He opened it to the shining face of Pansy in surprisingly low key dress. She wrapped herself around him and he backed into the room slowly as she kicked the door shut behind him.

“It is I, your favourite person in the world!”

Harry just rolled his eyes and accepted Pansy’s kiss on the cheek without fuss. She traipsed over to the table and sat down before snatching up a piece of bacon off it and chewing on it. Harry studied her. Her hair had grown longer, and she had traded the cute bob for a long plait. She was also wearing trousers, which he didn't think he'd ever seen her in before.

She let him finish his food while she chattered on and on about what she had done so far that summer and how everyone in London was terrified of Sirius Black. That had made Harry pause in eating his eggs.

“They haven’t caught him yet?”

Pansy shook her head. “He even managed to slip past the Dementors. They’re these guards of Azkaban, nasty business. That’s why people are so afraid. No one’s ever escaped from Azkaban before and he’s a raving murderous lunatic.”

Harry swallowed a piece of toast “Thanks Pansy, that makes me feel safe.”

“What makes you feel safe?” Draco asked, flitting past Pansy and dropping a kiss on top of her head before taking his seat and eating.

“The fact there’s a raving murderous psychopath tromping through London and the Ministry hasn’t done boo.”

“Oh. That.”

“I hope he won’t think to come after you, Draco. He is your cousin after all.” Pansy frowned in worry. “You don’t think he’d try to get into the Manor do you?”

“Why would he? He’s not after me, he’s after...” Draco trailed off and lowered his eyes before
taking long gulps of his grapefruit juice.

Harry huffed out a breath. “He’s after me, isn’t he?”

Pansy took Harry’s hand and patted it gently. “It’s the foremost theory. But he’d never think you were in France. Right brilliant move Draco’s parents made! I bet he’s skulking all around Godric’s Hollow and the like looking for you.”

Harry frowned. The thought wasn’t exactly comforting. But no one outside of Hogwarts really knew he was close with Draco. And no one except for Dumbledore, Professor Snape and his friends knew he stayed with Draco’s family, so he was sure he would be safe. He just hoped that Hogwarts could fend off a man who had managed to escape the foremost secure Wizarding prison.

“So!” Pansy said brightly, her attempt to change the mood clear. “What shall we do today?”

Draco took a bite of his ham. “Harry still hasn’t seen the *Arc de Triomphe.*”

“Wonderful! We’ll go and see that and we’ll walk around the Seine and buy silly Muggle trinkets, how does that sound?”

Harry relaxed at the idea of something simple. He smiled at Pansy. “Wonderful.”

“But first!” Pansy stood and went over to her things. She knelt down in front of her trunk and put both of her arms in, before bending in half and rummaging around inside. Her voice was muffled when she spoke. “Where did I put it?” Something inside thudded hard. “Lumos!” After a minute or two she straightened up, pulling out a wrapped, bright blue gift and dropped it down in front of Harry.

Harry stared at it a minute. It was about the same size as Draco’s gift, except it was taller instead of longer. He unwrapped it and spent a long minute looking at it. It was a small wooden cabinet. “Thanks? What is it?”

“It’s a chill chest! You can put your drinks and snacks inside of it and it keeps them cool.”

Harry looked up from it and looked to her. “You bought this for yourself, didn’t you? You want me to keep your snacks cold so you don’t have to sneak into the kitchens.”

Pansy waved an airy hand. “Nonsense. Every practical witch and wizard needs one of these.”

Harry stood from his seat and wrapped his arms around her. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.” Pansy backed away and brushed a stray hair from her face. “I hope you don’t mind. I marked a shelf for myself.”

Harry smirked at her. “Of course you did.”

Pansy just shrugged and sat in his lap when he sat down and stole a piece of his toast. She chewed on it slowly. “That’s what you love most about me. My proactive ambition.”

Harry wrapped an arm around her waist in a casual, relaxed move and took a bite of his eggs. “Of course, dear.”

They spent another few minutes chatting before Narcissa and Lucius collected them, and they set out. The Arc itself was beautiful, and bigger than Harry had expected. He brought his camera with him, per usual, and Pansy gleefully took on the role of model, posing in stranger ways with every
After, the elder Malfoys gave them free range, with the instructions that they be back in an hour. They promptly got three agreements, and Pansy, Draco and Harry set out. From there it was a simple dodge of traffic (and two sets of wrinkled noses at the smell of gasoline) to get to the stores around them.

They walked into the first gift shop they came across and started browsing. Harry stayed a step back from his friends, looking forward to their reactions, and ready to intervene if they started to seem a little too strange to the Muggles around them.

They ended up in the clothing section first. Neither seemed particularly interested in the t-shirts, to Harry’s disappointment, but the accessories were a hit.

Pansy instantly started on the berets, finding a hot pink one and shoving it unceremoniously onto her head. Her hair was not prepared for the onslaught, and her plait lost a few stands in the process. “’Ow do I look?” She asked, using her most horrendous French accent. The boys cracked up, even as Harry glanced around, hoping they hadn’t offended someone too terribly.

The beret somehow ended up on Harry’s head as the other two continued browsing. Draco picked up with a dark green neckerchief and a silver beret of his own, and started quietly trying out the Parseltongue phrases Harry had taught him, no matter how many times Pansy sulked about not being able to understand it. She ended up with red baseball cap, further ruining her braid, making exaggerated complaints about the tacky colours.

Eventually they grew bored of that, and Pansy put back the hat. Draco returned his scarf, but kept the beret, and Harry completely forgot he had one on in the first place. They made their way around, first to the bags, and then onto the stuffed animals. They had stuffed Eiffel Towers, which all three found hilarious and somewhat insane, and Pansy kept sneaking one into Draco’s bag, slipping it in with more skill each time.

Once Draco removed the stuffie for the final time, they went to the more miscellaneous section, upon Harry’s insistence. “I have to get at least one tacky souvenir.” He told Draco. “You can’t go on a trip abroad without getting something. It’s just not right.”

Draco muttered something about having heard no such rule, thank you very much, but Pansy backed Harry, if only to enjoy the Malfoy Heir’s suffering, and that was that. There were an insane number of snow globes, mugs, and tiny figurines. “What do you think? The mug or the Christmas ornament?” He asked the two, holding up one of each.

“Why not get both?” Pansy pointed out, looking amused at Harry’s obvious excitement. Green eyes widened, and Harry blinked at each item in turn. “Hadn’t thought of that?” Harry shook his head. The other two rolled their eyes at him.

In the end, Harry ended up with a mug with the French flag and a globe with the Arc in it. They went up to purchase his things, as well as the beret Draco was still wearing, who had decided he quite liked the style of them. The clerk kept looking up at the top of Harry’s head until he realized he was still wearing the hot pink beret. He whipped it off, feeling his cheeks heat up, and marched off to put it away. In the end he grabbed onto a solid black one, figuring Draco would appreciate not being the only one with one. He’d just tell everyone the blonde had inspired him to get his own. He’d like being made out to be a trendsetter.

There were still a few minutes before they had to meet up with Draco’s parents, so they found a bench and proceeded to loiter in the manner only teenagers can.
“What electives are you guys signing up for?” Pansy asked.

Flopping back, Harry shrugged. “I was thinking Care of Magical Creatures.”

A snort escaped Pansy. “Why would you want to take that? Seems like a dangerous mess to me.”

Harry shrugged. “At least it’s something outside. Most of the classes at Hogwarts spend their entire curriculum in stuffy books. I don’t know about you two, but I like fresh air now and again.” Pansy nodded at that, looking thoughtful.

“I was going to do Divination and Ancient Runes.” Draco put in, kicking at a stray pebble. “They both sound pretty interesting.” He eyed Harry shrewdly. “I’m hoping I can convince you not to take that dreadful class.” He got a deadpan look in response. Draco sighed, sounding very put upon. “If they don’t overlap, I suppose I’ll have to take that as well.”

Kicking out at Draco’s foot, Harry rolled his eyes. “You would think Ancient Runes, Mr. Languages you. First Parseltongue, now this.”

“French, too.”

Eyebrow arched, Harry turned to look at him. “Really? You haven’t spoken a word of it all trip.”

One shoulder jerked in a lazy shrug. “Why should I? Most of the shop owners and such speak English, and when they do Father speaks to them. I’m not perfect, so I’d rather keep my mouth shut than mess up.”

That was so utterly Draco that Harry could only grin. “Divination doesn’t sound too bad. It’d be nice to have a bit of forewarning before things go pear-shaped.”

Scoffing, Pansy folded her arms dramatically. “Most people, myself included, think Divination is a load of lies. I’ll be taking Ancient Runes and Arithmancy, and maybe Care of Magical Creatures. Outside does sound nice.”

“All the hard ones? Have fun with that.” Draco arched an elegant eyebrow at her.

“Oh, I will. Unlike you two, apparently, I have some ambition, and I’d like classes that’ll actually help me in the future.” She huffed at him in mocking contempt, which cracked the two boys up. “Alright, calm yourselves. We’ve got to get going before your parents come looking for us.”

They made their way back to the Arc, where they met up with Narcissa and Lucius. The group had lunch at one of the local restaurants before heading back to the hotel to spend the rest of the day relaxing.

The next few days went by fairly quickly. They went on long walks or talked about classes. Speculated on things to come and played a lot of games. On the second to last day their letters for Hogwarts were waiting in the lobby and they read off them for their textbooks. Harry had decided for Divination, Care of Magical Creatures and Muggle Studies and as such, they were on his required reading list.

“Tomorrow we’ll go shopping. We can pick up your books here. Perhaps even cheaper than in Diagon Alley. They’ll also have different texts if you’re interested.”

Harry looked over at Narcissa and nodded his head. “That sounds good to me.”

“What does he call you?” Pansy asked, looking over Ananta’s head to Harry as she watched him.
play with a rat they had bought him.

“Nothing. He doesn’t call me anything. Snakes don’t really use names or titles.” Harry grinned when the snake chomped down hard on the rat before slowly beginning to swallow it.

“He doesn’t even call you by name?”

Harry shrugged. “What did you expect, he’s not exactly verse in language. Most of the time he talks about sunlight and how tasty rabbits are.”

Pansy laughed again and watched as the snake moved off into a sunny corner to digest his meal. She stretched out on Harry’s bed and splayed out. “Harry, do you ever think about the future?”

“What, like after Hogwarts? Not really. Why, d’you?”

“Mnmhm.” Pansy rolled onto her stomach. “I think about how I’d like to be bonded and where I’d like to live. I think about where I’d want to work.” She sucked on her teeth in thought and rested her chin on her upturned palms as she propped up her elbows. “I think I’d like to be a Hit Witch.”

“A what?”

“It’s like the police,” Draco drawled slowly, looking over his book. “They capture Wizarding people doing illegal activities. They’re different from Aurors; they’re the ones who go after especially bad ones, like You-Know-Who.”

“What about you, Draco, do you think about the future?”

Draco closed his book with a loud snap. “I’m going to be bonded when I turn twenty-eight, I’m going to have two children - one girl and one boy - I will move away from the Manor and perhaps live in Scotland, and I’m going to become a Apothecarian, or possibly a Wandmaker. Or, if I’m capable, work for the Wizangamot.”

Harry rose a brow when Draco reopened his book and resumed reading. “Well... Who are you going to bond?”

Draco peered over the pages of his book and looked at Harry for a long moment before looking away. He was silent for a time before he looked to his book and turned the page. “Whomever I deem fit.”

“Well...” Pansy rolled onto her back and stared up at the ceiling again as Harry spread out beside her. She rested her head on his chest and he carded his fingers through her hair. “I’m going to travel the world after I graduate. My bonding ceremony is going to be extravagant. I’ve always wanted to do it on the Winter Solstice and I won’t have children but I will have pets. Lots of pets. An abraxas and some kneazles and owls and a iguana and a...”

Harry let his eyes droop as he drifted off to sleep, his mind swirling with thoughts of the future and what it was going to hold.
The rest of their vacation passed by in a blur. They ended up returning to Malfoy Manor a scant week before term started, and they owl-ordered their textbooks rather than run the risk of appearing in Diagon Alley.

The boys gave thought to confronting the elder Malfoys about their knowledge of Sirius Black, but in the end it seemed best not to push it. They had really made no secret of what they were talking about with Pansy, and it wasn’t as if they had asked her to keep quiet on her knowledge. Not that doing so would have stopped Pansy for more than five minutes, of course. But the closer they came to school starting, the tenser both parents got, and the idea of jumping them with questions just left a bad taste in their mouths.

More trouble came from the fact that Lucius making off to the Ministry, and came back looking more irritated each time, grumbling about the Minister’s ineptitude. That had raised their curiosity, but the tense expression on Lucius’ face didn’t exactly welcome questions. Whatever it was, they would no doubt find out soon enough.

September first finally rolled around, and the extended family made their way to Platform 9 ¾. All the families there were unusually tense, and while it was it’s usual level of noise, the hubbub had a razor edge to it. More than one person kept glancing at Harry, not because of his celebrity, but because might as well have had a target on his back.

Harry never thought he would miss the glances to his scar, but in comparison to this it was a vast improvement.

It took nearly 10 minutes to get Narcissa to let go of the boys. Her face stayed perfectly serene through it all, but her hands simply refused to let go of their shoulders until the last call whistle sounded. The good-byes were as tense as the rest of the week had been, and it was nearly a relief to get onto the Hogwarts Express.

The train itself was slightly less rambunctious than normal, but it would take more than an escaped murderer to quiet such a huge group of teenagers. The biggest difference was that most of the compartment doors stayed firmly closed with the windows blocked, which made finding empty ones or friends difficult.

Thankfully they were saved from having to check every door by Pansy peeking her head out of one and waving them in. “Come on, then. It took you two long enough.”

“It’s not like you had a sign up or anything.” Draco pointed out, but logic had little bearing on Pansy’s opinions, and she stuck her nose up at him in response.

Along with Pansy, Millicent and Blaise were already seated in the compartment, as well as what looked like a sleeping lump. The lump had a suitcase, which was labeled R.J.L. The boy was in the middle of telling a story from his own vacation, which apparently involved two attractive ladies, a bottle of tanning lotion, and a heavily shedding cat. Pansy was giggling in the appropriate places, but Millicent just looked bored. She perked up upon their arrival. “Ah, if it isn’t our famous target himself. Oh, and Draco too, I suppose.”

Draco glared at her, but Harry let out a little chuckle. After all the stress over Sirius Black, it was kind of nice to see someone treating it so lightly. He seated himself next to her, across from the lump. “Well, I don’t have to worry any longer, do I? He’d take one look at you and take his
chances with the dementors.” Harry teased.

That earned him a punch on the shoulder, which would probably bruise quite nicely later, but for Millicent it was practically a love tap. “Well, in that case I’d better avoid you. Wouldn’t want to interrupt the crazed murder from getting his hands on you.” The lump shifted, but after a moment stilled, and the students carried on. Millicent’s expression became just slightly softer. “How have you been this summer.”

Giving a little shrug, Harry replied, “It was fun. Spent it out of the country, actually.”

“Smart move;” Blaise commented, apparently done with his story. Pansy was still chuckling, but it was a fake, girl sound that made Harry have to resist the urge to roll his eyes. “No sense taking chances.”

“That was the idea.” Draco told him, managing to look down his nose at Blaise, despite being a good two inches shorter. Their dorm-mate had clearly had a growth spurt over the summer. After a while he broke off the look, instead leaning forward to gaze past the black boy at the lump. “And who is this?”

Millicent gave a little smirk. “Oh, we figured you of all people would know!” She batted her eyes, which on her just looked scary. She glanced at the lump, and when she detected no movement, continued. “Dunno, actually. Figured he was the new Defense Against the Dark Arts professor. Unless someone else retired, obviously.”

Tilting his head at the lump, Draco said, “That makes sense. If he was security I don’t think he’d be sleeping. Well, I’d hope he wouldn’t be. Reporting people is so tedious.” That earned him a round of snickers, and the probably-professor was quickly forgotten as they started to chat amongst themselves.

It was a particularly miserable day outside, and darkness quickly settled. Without the sun, the temperature seemed to drop. “Did someone mess up the cooling charms?” Pansy grumbled, as she rubbed her hands together.

“Must have been a strong one.” Millicent returned, eying the hallways.

As she spoke, the train started to slow, and the sound of metal on metal rang out. “We can’t be there yet.” Draco said, a nervous frown crossing his face.

Blaise’s expression matched Draco’s. “Do you think-?” Whatever they were supposed to be thinking got caught off when an odd feeling washed over the group. Harry’s good cheer from returning to Hogwarts drained away as if it had never existed at all. In fact, the very idea of happiness felt far away, like it had been apart of another lifetime entirely. Beside him, Millicent tensed up like she wanted to spring at the cause of the feeling, and Harry caught Draco’s wide, frightened eyes from across the compartment.

None of them spoke, overcome, and suddenly the compartment door burst open. Some... thing was standing in the doorway. It made a raspy sound, like the last breath before passing away and it surveyed the terrified students.

Grey seemed to be seeping in at the edges of Harry’s sight, and he blinked rapidly to fight it. The nervous sounds of his fellow Slytherins died away, to be replaced with a woman screaming. The noise sounded tiny, as though the woman was standing at the other end of a tunnel. Ice seemed to be forming in his chest, and Harry closed his eyes, taking one quick, panicked breath after another. The grey was everywhere now, and growing a darker colour as he watched...
The next thing Harry became aware of was the press of something warm and solid above him, and someone’s voice snapping angrily. As awareness trickled back into him, Harry realized it was Draco who was snarling and practically laying on top of him, and raised a sleepy hand to slap gently at the other boy’s side. “Shu’dap, too loud.” He slurred.

The commotion in the compartment sent silent, and the weight of Draco slid off of him, to be replaced by a hand on his cheek. “Harry?” The Malfoy Heir’s voice sounded near hysterical, but Harry wasn’t awake enough to deal with it. Instead he pressed his head against the hand, the warmth of it soothing after that strange cold. “C’mon, Harry, you’ve got to get up.”

That earned Draco a low groan, but Harry blinked his eyes open and slowly sat up. He was surrounded by the Slytherins, and the lump, now revealed to be a ragged looking man with faint scars on his face, was a few feet away, hands held up in a calming gesture. Harry thought he knew who Draco had been snapping at.

“Are you alright?” The man asked gently, and Harry eyed him warily. “Here, I imagine you feel awful. Try this.” R.J.L. the Lump pulled out a hunk of chocolate and unwrapped it before handing it to Harry. “Trust me, you’ll feel better. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I think I need to have a few words with the conductor.” He left, leaving the still shook up students to their compartment.

Harry carefully licked the chocolate, testing the taste of it. It seemed fine, and the flavour of it was comforting, so he took a larger bite. The effects of that thing seemed to improve. “What the bloody hell was that?” He asked, letting out a shaky breath.

“A dementor.” Millicent informed him, as she grabbed him by the sides and dragged him into his seat. He gave her a weak grin in thanks.

Glancing back at the compartment door, he gave a low whistle. “Merlin, no wonder Black wanted to escape. Those things are murder.”

A slightly hysterical snort escaped Pansy. “Worse. They suck out your soul.”

There was silence for a moment, as that sunk in. “What?” He nearly shrieked.

“Just... can we not talk about it? We’ll fill you in later, Harry.” Draco sounded half strangled. Harry leaned back and slowly nodded. He could wait.

Finally, the train started back up, and it was a very subdued set of Slytherins that made their way to Hogwarts.

They finally arrived at Hogwarts and the new students were sorted. Harry was feeling queasy, but he knew he had to at least stick through until after dinner. As soon as he had the chance he was going to curl up in bed, pull the covers over his head and sleep. After the sorting was over, Dumbledore introduced Hagrid as their new Care of Magical Creatures professor, to which Harry clapped loudly, and introduced the R.J.L. professor - Remus Lupin - as their new Defence Against the Dark Arts professor. Harry clapped politely but watched as Snape didn’t even raise a hand.

“And now...” Dumbledore began, his voice sounding unnervingly serious. “Some news for you all. As always I must stress that the Forbidden Forest is out of bounds except for those accompanied by a teacher. Once again Mr. Filch would like me to remind students that charms are not allowed to be used in the hallway. Most importantly, however, is a new security protocol put in place this year. As asked for by the Minstry of Magic, Hogwarts will play host to dementors. They will not be allowed inside the school and they will be harmless if left alone. They are posted at the boundaries of the grounds and it is imperative that you take great caution. They will not differentiate from the
one they seek and those that get in their way.” Dumbledore paused a moment as students murmured amongst themselves. “With all that, I say to you - bon appetite.”

Harry picked at his meal, not feeling very hungry but forced food down his throat anyway. He didn’t think it was possible, but the news of extra security made him more nervous. He pushed his plate away half-finished and simply drank water and picked at his bread. Draco smiled at him sympathetically from across the table and he smiled back when the other boy’s knee nudged against his own. It was strange how such a simple move could make him feel safe. If they weren’t at school, Harry would have asked if he could sleep in Draco’s bed that night, but he knew their four posters weren’t exactly prime for sharing. Especially since they were growing.

They got to their dorm a little under an hour later and Harry laughed at Blaise’s screech. “There’s a bloody snake in here and it’s loose!”

Harry climbed into his bed and felt some of the tension slide from his body as Ananta slid up his leg and slowly draped over his shoulder. “He’s mine. His name is Ananta. Draco got him for me.”

“Oh?” Blaise’s brows rose and he looked to Draco. “You did?”

Draco shrugged and watched as Harry fed Ananta a piece of chicken he had smuggled from the dinner. “It’s an Oroboros. Why not give him a tool he could use?”

Blaise stared at Draco with a deadpan expression. “Uh-huh.” He changed quickly and climbed into his bed. “Just a tool?”

Draco glowered at Blaise. “Yes.”

Blaise nodded slowly but had a smile on his face that said he was thinking was clearly not so innocent. Draco shot another glare at Blaise before changing while muttering to himself and every so often shooting dirty looks at the dark skinned boy. Meanwhile Harry was obliviously half-asleep in his own bed, sleepily muttering to Ananta in Parseltongue. After he was changed Draco peered at Harry a moment before crossing the room and removing his glasses before folding them up and closing the curtains round Harry’s bed with a fond smile.

“Innocent present my left foot,” Blaise shot over the edge of his magazine.

“Blaise, I swear to everything I hold dear that if you do not shut up I will hurt you.”

Blaise sighed heavily and watched as Draco climbed into the bed next to his. The other boys were happily reconnecting in the Common Room. Blaise finally lowered his magazine. “You like him, don’t you?”

His answer was a pillow to the face thrown with an alarmingly high amount of strength. Blaise picked up the pillow and lobbed it lightly back into Draco’s bed where the other was sitting with his arms firmly crossed over his chest.

“I’m sure he’ll realize his luck soon enough.”

Draco rolled onto his side, his back to Blaise. “Shut up, Zabini. Some of us want to sleep.”

The room was quiet for a long moment.

“Draco and Harry sitting in a tree, S-N-O- ow!”

Draco’s laugh was far too smug.
Harry wished he’d brought a scarf or something. The air in the Divination classroom was thick with smoke. He was fairly certain that the smoke was from incense, but he really couldn’t be certain. He didn’t think Dumbledore would allow the professor to drug the students, but he’d hired Quirrell and Lockhart - clearly his standards were lax to begin with.

The classroom itself was kind of nice. It didn’t really seem like a place of learning at all. Instead it was rather like one of those tea shops where people read poetry and everyone snapped after instead of clapping. Instead of desks there were little round tables that fit three or four, with dainty little chairs with gigantic, colourful cushions. The curtains were all closed, which was disappointing, considering the view from where they were would probably be great. Instead the room was lit by lanterns, all of which were covered by scarves, which probably had magic to thank for not having caught fire. It gave the room a dim, vague look, and combined with the heavy air made Harry want to go to sleep. Along the shelves were various implements for the craft - feathers, kettles, candles, cards and a messily stacked bunch of crystal balls.

It was five minutes into class, and the professor still hadn’t shown up. Normally Slytherins tended to be on their best behavior on the first day - a good first impression can get one through a few bad ones later - but the apparent lack of supervision lead them to start chattering.

Just as mumblings of ‘Where is she?’ started to go around, a misty, slightly spooky voice spoke out dramatically from the shadows. “Welcome. It’s a pleasure to meet all of you in the physical world.”

A strange woman, draped in colourful, over-sized shawls and audibly jangling with beads stepped out. She was near skeletal, and Harry had a fleeting moment of worry that her thin limbs would simply snap under the weight of her clothes. Her thick glasses made her eyes look huge, and she kept blinking at them, which made the impression worse.

“Sit, sit! Take a seat, my children.” Most of them had already helped themselves to their seats, but the one or two who had dallied to look around or stretch quickly found a chair. “Welcome to Divination.” She announced it like they had won the lottery. Well, it was Divination. Maybe they would win the lottery later. “I am your guide into the mystic realm, Professor Trelawney. Depending on the strength of your Inner Eyes, you may have seen me before.”

Draco coughed into his hand. “Or we might have seen you around the school.”

The professor must have heard him, because she swiveled to look at him, bulbous eyes blinking even more rapidly and shawls moving in a slow wave around her. “I doubt that any of you have seen the physical me. I tend to avoid the main school. The chaos clouds my Sight.” She brought a dramatic hand up and touched delicately at her forehead. Harry wished she did have a third eye. That would have been interesting.

No one said anything to that, despite how she looked around, ask if expecting someone to faint in excitement. “You have chosen to study a noble and incredibly useful, but very difficult magical art. I feel I must warn you now that you maybe not possess the necessary skills for this course. If you do not have the Sight to begin with, there will be very little that I can teach you.” She trailed off dramatically, tone vaguely mournful. The class stared at her, deadpan. “This is a course in which books will be able to tell you little. Instead, you must use your judgment and skills to find your way through the foggy paths.

Trelawney’s eyes seemed to gleam as they passed around the students. She settled on Blaise, and a look of concern flashed onto her face. She took a few, shaky steps towards him. “My boy, is your step-father well?”
A bark of harsh laughter escaped Blaise. Trelawney looked taken back. “Oh, no, go on. I’m sure he’s just fine.” The boy drawled, one eyebrow making a path towards his hair line.

For a moment Trelawney blinked at him, but then she nodded and patted his head. “Sometimes my eye sees things that may be confusing to you, my dear boy. Just be vigilant.” She patted him on the shoulder. Blaise did his best to to squirm away.

“We will be covering the basics of Divination in this year. First will be devoted to the ancient method of reading tea-leaves. Next we will delve into palmistry.” She froze, suddenly, and turned to look at Millicent, who looked ready to fall asleep. “My dear, beware of round things in the near future.”
The girl blinked sleepily at her, then gave an shrug. Again, Trelawney looked put out by the lack of reaction.

There was silence as the professor took a few deep breaths of the thick air, and Harry wondered again about the nature of it. “In second term, we will begin with fire omens, and then progress with crystal balls. Unfortunately, in February classes will be interrupted by a nasty case of the flu. I myself will loose my voice.” Oh, very clever. They’d have cases of the flu during flu season? Harry was impressed. And a symptom that only she could identify. Very nice. “Around Easter, some soul from this castle will be lost forever.”

That got the attention of the class. Even if the rest of her announcements were crok, that was a much more serious allegation. Trelawney looked much more energetic, now that she was in the spotlight. “My dear, would you pass the largest silver teapot?” She asked Draco.

The Malfoy Heir gave her a long, dry stare. The face off lasted for a few moments, before Draco rose gracefully out of his seat and took a huge teapot of the shelf and handed it to her, expression cool. Trelawney ignored it. “Thank you, dear boy. Just so you know - stay on your guard for the rest of the day.” Grey eyes met her dead on, expression blank. Finally she moved on.

“Please divide yourselves into pairs. Get yourselves a cup and I will fill it. Do not drink all of it, please. Leave the dregs. Swirls those three times with your left and and then turn it onto your saucer and wait for the liquid to drain. Afterward, please give it to your partner so they may read it. Page five of your texts is where you will find the guide for the patterns.

One by one the class got their cups, then their tea. The liquid was hot, which didn’t help the foggy feeling of the room. Draco and Harry followed the instructions for draining the last bits of tea before trading off.

“Let’s see,” Harry murmured to himself. “That big looks like a shark, which means... danger of death. Oh, that’s not good, is it?” His voice may have been heavily tinged with irony. “And... That looks kind of like an angel... or maybe a fairy? Let’s go with angel, first. That’s success in romance. So maybe that ‘whoever you see fit’ will show up? And a fairy is joy and enchantment, or financial loss.”

Draco snorted as he spun Harry’s cup around lightly, careful not to ruin the shapes at the bottom. “Let’s go with angel, then.” His cheeks coloured just the slightest bit, and he ducked his head down. “Yours looks like maybe a lion?” He flipped through his own book. “That means prosperity through powerful friends. Well, we know that’s right.” He preened.

That earned him a snort from Harry. “Yeah, your Inner Eye is probably as reliable as my normal ones. Without the glasses that is.” Draco rolled his eyes, and Harry grinned. Trelawney suddenly snapped in their direction and made her way over.
“Do let me see.” She made grabbing motions at the teacup, which Draco handed over. Trelawney twisted it so it was upside down from how Draco had been looking. “Hm... Oh, dear, the owl.” She made tutting noises with her tongue. “Misfortune, sickness. Keep a sharp eye out.” Another twist. “Oh, the saw. Strangers will be a problem for you. It may be best to keep to yourself for a while. And...” She gave a loud gasp and set the teacup on the table with a loud click, before stumbling away, skeletal hand pressed again her heart. “My boy... you have the Grim!”

Whispers broke out, and every eye in the room swiveled to Harry. He fought the urge to slip down in his seat.

Trelawney wasn’t done. “Oh, the Grim! The spectral dog. It haunts the churchyards, it is the worst omen there is! My boy, you have been marked for death.”

The class was going nuts, and Harry wasn’t sure if it was because of belief in the superstition or because of the entertaining show.

A pale hand reached out and snatched the cup up, and Draco looked back into it, calm as you please. “I’m going to stick with the lion, I think. See, it’s got all that spiking around it’s neck.” He tilted it towards the professor, expression bland. She didn’t look at the tea leaves, and instead frowned at him.

Slowly, she shook her head and patted Draco’s hand. “Oh, I’d thought so from the beginning. You don’t seem to have much aura to you at all, poor lad. There may be a limit to your ability to succeed here.”

Draco looked like he was trying to figure out if that was a threat or not, but Harry got into the game as well. He took the cup from the blood and squinted a bit, tilting his head sideways. “If you look at it this way I guess I could see it being the Grim. But, if you look at it from the left, it looks a bit more like a bear.” He glanced at Draco. “What is a bear?”


“A bit late then, isn't it? We just got done with that.”

The professor refused to be daunted by their act, though the class had calmed. Instead she shook her head sadly. “Denial does not stop the inevitable, children. Now, I believe you should go spend your remaining time wisely. Class dismissed.” She waved her hand at the door, which opened slowly.

The students filled out, chatting excitedly. For the most part they simply seemed entertained, though they did give Harry and Draco wide birth. The blonde still looked very stiff, and Harry patted his shoulder. There was really no sense in letting it get to them. They still had all year at least to go.

After a quick stop to gather their books they were tromping across the grounds towards Hagrid’s for Care of Magical Creatures. Harry spotted Ron and Neville not far off fighting with their funny books. Harry’s had nearly bitten his leg off so he kept it firmly bound.

“Heya. Thanks for the presents. Good summer?”

Neville nodded, his face pink as he finally threw down the book on a rock and sat on it. “Brilliant.”

“You already know how mine went. You got my owls, I trust?”

Harry nodded his head. He had gotten the owls. A little late and out of order, but he had enjoyed reading about Ron’s adventures in Egypt. He smiled at Hagrid who was looking eager and wearing a tie, no doubt trying to impress.
“If you’ll open your books to page seventeen - you’ll need to stroke the spine o’course.”

Harry turned his book in his hands and stroked down the spine with his fingers. He felt the book shiver and coo before he opened it. He beamed and watched Draco who stroked down the spine of his book with his middle and forefinger - had he always worn that ring? - and then opened his book.

“Right, now follow me!”

They were led through the Forest into a clearing. Several students gasped and whispered amongst themselves and Harry stared at the creature. It was large. Larger than a horse. And it had the backend of the horse but the front of it was like a great eagle. The creature reared back nervously and clawed at the air with it’s talons. Hagrid hushed the beast and tossed it a lump of something.

“This is Buckbeak! He’s a Hippogriff he is. Now who wants to come ‘p here an’ say hullo?”

Everyone backed away into a giant ball and Harry couldn’t help but shrink into Draco as the blonde grabbed him strongly about the waist. Harry knew Draco hated the class and it wasn’t due to tedium or anything, Harry knew that Draco was afraid of most giant creatures. He never said why, but Harry knew at this very moment that Draco would rather be staring down a wand than approach the Hippogriff.

“Come on, don’t be shy!”

Harry swallowed nervously. He had to prove that this thing wasn’t dangerous. He’d show Draco that not all things were scary. He took a shaky step forward and gulped down a breath. “I-I’ll do it.”

“Harry, no!”

Harry looked over his shoulder at Draco and smiled reassuringly. “I’ll be fine.”

“Stop it right now with that bloody Gryffindor courage and get back here.”

Harry advanced slowly, his heart pounding and Hagrid clapped a bit before ambling over to Harry and bending down. “Right. What you want to remember is that Hippogriffs are very proud creatures. So you’re going to approach him slowly and bow. Make sure you bow nice and low.”

Harry nodded his head and stooped his posture. He was moving so slowly he ought to have been crawling. He watched and froze when Buckbeak jolted and backed away a little. He waited before trying again and bowed. The elegant hybrid assessed him before bowing back and Harry straightened while some people gave a smattering of applause. With Hagrid’s guidance Harry approached and stretched his arm out. Buckbeak gave a huff of breath before Harry’s hand slowly contacted his beak and ventured up to tangle in his feathers.

“Would you like to ride ‘im?”

Harry backed away slowly and shook his head. “No. No thank you.”

Hagrid gave a nod but it was a sad one. “How’m I doing me first day?”

Harry looked up at him and gave a genuine smile. “Brilliant. Professor.”

Hagrid grinned and slapped Harry on the back before turning back to the class. “Right, whose next?”
Draco’s mouth was twisted up and Harry frowned. Draco was about to do something stupid. He watched as Draco passed off his bag to Pansy before stalking forward in agitation.

“I bet this thing isn’t so dangerous. It’s probably a great big stupid lump.”

Harry groaned. Draco was trying to prove something, but to who he couldn’t tell. For all Harry knew Draco was trying to talk himself out of being scared. “Draco, Draco stop. You’re going to --”

Buckbeak reared in fear and let out a screech, his front limbs lashing out. Harry cringed at the scream Draco gave as he fell on the ground, his robe ripped and a nasty looking gash on his arm.

“It’s killed me!”

And here came the hysterical dramatics. “Draco, you’re fine.”

“My arms going to be lopped off!”

Harry looked to Hagrid, who looked just as unimpressed. “We should take him to Madame Pomfrey.”

Hagrid nodded and tossed a dead rabbit off for Buckbeak to chase and hauled up Draco. He dismissed the class and Harry and Pansy trailed after him as Draco simpered about the searing, agonizing pain and Pansy rolled her eyes unsympathetically.

It took about fifteen minutes in total for Madame Pomfrey to see Draco’s wound, access the damage, and to patch it up with a charm and a potion. It took an hour for Draco to stop whining about it long enough for Pansy and Harry to get a word in edgewise.

“Oh, buck up.” She told him unsympathetically. “I’ll play it up in public, if you like, but I don’t want to hear it in private as well.

A dramatic sniff came from the boy. “You don’t understand! It hurts so much!”

Rolling her eyes, Pansy shot him a dry look. “No, it does not. Pomfrey fixed you right up. I’ve seen paper cuts take longer to heal.

That earned her a glare. “There’s no way you can tell if I’m hurting or not, Pansy. Don’t you dare try.” He cast a dramatic, wide-eyed look at Harry, who gave a blank stare back. He didn’t think he could talk to Draco without snapping.

Pansy looked like she wanted to shake the blonde. “Than ask Pomfrey for more potion instead of going on about it!”

She was ignored. “They’ll probably have to amputate it. My magic might be affected as well.” He heaved a great sigh.

That was it.

“Shut up, Draco.” Harry almost didn’t recognize his own voice, it was so cold. The boy visibly started and his gaze shot to him. Normally the look in his grey eyes would have been enough to stop him, but some strange rage was bubbling in him. How could Draco keep whining about a scratch that was instantly healed up? When Harry had broken his arm as a child, he’d been stuffed into his cupboard and told to quick carrying on.

A bit of him felt bad about all this, but the majority of him just could not stand Draco’s attitude.
Anger was starting to reflect back at him in Draco’s expression. “How could you not care that I’m hurt?” The boy demanded, face reddening.

Harry resisted the urge to scream at him. “Because you’re not.” His voice came out short and clipped. “I know hurt, Draco. It could have been much worse, because you were being a jackass. If you keep carrying on, then your Father is going to have to respond, if only to justify your dramatics. And then they’ll do something like fire Hagrid or put down Buckbeak. I will not see someone suffer because you couldn’t follow a simple direction.”

For a second it looked like Draco was going to keep arguing, but then he sighed and looked down, and then away, posture cool. Harry nearly snarled at his back. Damn his pride!

Pansy glanced between both boys, looking torn. The tension in the air became tense, before Harry shook his head. “Tell me when you’re ready to talk sense.” Again, his voice was that deep, angry tone that didn’t sound like himself. Turning on his heel, Harry started to walk out, pace calm but posture rigid.

“Wait,” Draco called, right before Harry made it to the doors. “I won’t carry on. Are you happy?”

Letting out a long breath, Harry replied, “No, I’m not. Because you still don’t get it. Your actions have consequences, Draco.”

A groan came from the bed. “That’s not it, okay? Merlin, stop acting like a Gryffindor already and get down from your high horse. I get it. I won’t get Hagrid fired or anything. I like the great oaf.” He huffed. “I just... I didn’t want you to look at me and think ‘Oh, he’s such a coward. Couldn’t even face the Hippogriff’. And I learned by bloody lesson, alright? I got slashed for it, too. The least you could do is show me a little sympathy.”

Harry turned back around. “What? That is the st-” He cut himself off and shook his head. That wouldn’t help. He made his way back to the bed and sat in one of the chairs next to it. Casting a quick glance at Pansy, he whipped off his robes and unbuttoned the first three buttons on his uniform shirt. Tugging at the now loose collar, he got his shoulder free. “See that?” He traced the white scar that traced from the top-most part of the shoulder and traveled down his back. “This is from where my cousin grabbed my arm and dragged me along the gravel of the street. I don’t know what it was that cut me - maybe a rock, maybe some glass. But whatever it was, it sliced me up. The scar goes down past my shoulder blade. When I got home, Aunt Petunia scolded me for getting my shirt dirty and had my do all the laundry before I could go to the bathroom to clean it up.” He dragged the shirt back up and started to redo the buttons. “So forgive me if I’m not entirely sympathetic.”

“Oh,” Was Draco’s response, as he continued to stare at the scar, even as it was covered. “I…” He trailed off and rubbed at the now perfect skin on her arm. “Okay. Sorry. Sometimes I sort of...forget, you know? You usually don’t....”

Resisting the urge to give a bitter chuckle, Harry shrugged. “Make a big deal about it? No, I try not to. I’m trying to forget, so I guess I shouldn’t be angry when you do. It’s just annoying to see you whine on and on about something like that, is all.”

For a long moment there was silence, and then Pansy launched herself at Harry, clinging to him. He blinked for a moment, before realizing he had never actually told her any of the stuff about the Dursleys. What she knew, she’d figured out from what he didn’t say, and the way the Malfoys had sort of taken him in. “Hey, I’m okay.” He told her, awkwardly patting her back. She wasn’t crying, but she wasn’t letting go, either.

He cast a panicked look to Draco, whose expression had fallen into a much more normal expression
of enjoying Harry’s discomfort. “No help from me. You just told a dramatic, emotional story. Now you get to reap the benefits.”

“You call this a benefit?” Harry grumbled, and patted her again. Pansy shook slightly, and he wasn’t sure if it was because of emotions or because she was laughing at him. He wasn’t sure he wanted to know. “Can we finish up soon? We have Defense Against the Dark Arts next.”

Draco rolled his shoulder experimentally before nodding. “Yeah, alright. Pomfrey said I could go anytime.”

This time Harry was sure the shaking was laughter. “And you were still carrying on? You are incorrigible.” Pansy’s muffled voice came. “Harry, I am overcome with emotion. Carry me to class.”

“And you call me incorrigible!”
Fear Itself

Harry stared hard at the wardrobe in the teacher’s lounge. It was rattling quite fiercely. He looked around the room. The plush, mismatched furniture was pressed against a wall and Professor Lupin was standing next to the moving cabinet.

“Could anyone tell me what’s in here?”

“That’s a boggart, I think, sir.”

“Very good, Ms. Bulstrode. And do you know what a boggart looks like?”

The group of third years looked amongst each other before they all shook their heads in the teacher’s direction.

“That’s because no one has seen a boggart’s shape. When we are exposed to a boggart it takes on the form of our deepest, greatest fear. Boggarts are fond of dark, dank places such as wardrobes, under sinks, in pantries and under stairs. There is a simple, sure-fire way of banishing them. Repeat after me - Riddikulus!”

There was a pause before the students repeated, slightly out of sync. He motioned for them to do so again. They did, much louder.

“Wonderful! Absolutely wonderful. Now, this charm will transform the boggart into something you find amusing. After doing so the only way to truly defeat it is laughter. So... Shall we give it a try? Mr. Zabini, how about you? Come, come.”

Blaise broke from the group and stood before the cabinet, which was trembling violently. “Yes, Professor?”

“What scares you, Mr. Zabini?”

“I’m not all that fond of vampires, sir.”

“Ah yes, quite a common fear. Well, how about picturing the vampire with false teeth, hm? They’ll fall out and smash on the floor.”

Blaise gave the teacher a wary look before nodding his head. “Alright.”

“Wand at the ready! And...”

The door to the wardrobe clicked open and two pale, almost translucent hands emerged from the blackness. Slowly a long black haired woman stepped out, her face was gaunt and her eyes dark and soulless. Her mouth was a gaping maw filled with razor teeth and Blaise backed away slowly.

“Now, Mr. Zabini!”

Blaise gripped his wand tight and parried with it. “Riddikulus!”

The vampire reared back, her hands clapping over her mouth as her fangs fell to the floor as a set of dentures. She whimpered and kept one hand clapped over her mouth as she took chase but her fangs kept skittering away. The class burst into laughter.

“Excellent work! Form a line. Good good, next please!”
A girl in front of Pansy stepped after Blaise and the boggart burst into smoke, writhing as it transformed. A large spider slammed down into the floor and she shrieked. Closing her eyes she turned away and waved her wand. “Riddikulus!” The spider rolled over and over before turning into a turtle stuck on its back.

Pansy advanced and the boggart started transforming again. It finally settled into a giant snarling dog. She drew in a shaking breath as the dog drooled and slashed with conviction. “Riddikulus!” The dog gave a startled yelp before it changed into a stuffed chihuahua.

There was a boy in front of Draco who stepped forward. The boggart exploded into black smoke and it wrapped around the boy who let out a pitiful whimper and thrashed. He struggled for a long moment, sounding utterly terrified before there came a cry of ‘riddikulus!’ A flash of light shot out and the blackness became a shining, technicolour disco ball.

Harry shoved Draco forward eagerly. The boy scowled but stepped forward. Harry half expected it to turn into Buckbeak or maybe a werewolf. Instead a woman with very golden yellow hair in wide, bulky curls appeared. She was wearing horrid eggplant shaded robes and had horn-rimmed glasses. She held a quill in her hand and brandished it like a weapon. Harry had no idea who she was but heard someone behind him murmur - “isn’t that Skeeter?”. Draco took a deep breath and flicked his wrist. “Riddikulus!” In a puff of smoke the woman turned into a raggedy looking voodoo doll and dropped to the floor.

Harry stepped up next. His heart was pounding. He had so much to fear. What if it turned into his uncle? What if it turned into Voldemort? The doll rattled and exploded into smoke again. The smoke writhed and Harry could hear hissing and saw the blackness slowly turning into a robe. He rose his wand as the air began to cool and the chill settled deep into his bones before Lupin dove in front of him. Harry had just caught the glimpse of a dementor before it shifted into something round and white and Lupin flicked his wrist and it turned into a balloon.

“Well then...” Lupin turned to face the class. “I think we’ve done quite enough for today.” He flicked his wand at the cabinet and it locked with a click and he smiled in a disarming manner. “Please read the first chapter of your books and give me a half a roll of parchment on the history of the boggart for next class.”

Everyone shuffled out, talking excitedly. Harry slipped next to Pansy and Draco before turning at a hand on his shoulder. “May I talk to you, Mr. Potter?”

Harry looked to Pansy and Draco. “I’ll see you back at Common Room.”

The two nodded and departed with the rest of the class and Lupin squeezed a hand against Harry’s shoulder. “Come on, we’ll have a cuppa.”

The walk back to Lupin’s office was silent but not overly awkward. Lupin’s office was sparsely but tastefully decorated. Harry glanced at some of the posters before poking at a moving lunar calendar before he could stop himself. He sat when Lupin set down a mug of darjeeling and took the cup and added in sugar before he took a sip.

“How are you?”

“Fine, sir. I never got to thank you for your help on the train.” Harry tapped his fingers against the side of his cup. “I was worried my boggart was going to be... you know...”

“Me too, as you could see. However, it says something about you, young man, that your boggart is nothing more than fear. If you wish, I could show you the spell to repel dementors.”
Harry smiled widely. “I’d like that, sir. I’d like that very much.”

Lupin tilted his head and stared at Harry, his expression funny for a moment. “When you smile... Your eyes light up. It reminds me so of your mother.”

Harry blinked in astonishment and put his cup aside. “Sir?”

“I went to school with her. I was friends with her and your father... Your mother... she...” Lupin let out a slow sigh. “She was an amazing witch. You may look like your father, but your eyes are your mother’s and if the claims are to be believed, you inherited her smarts too.”

Harry flushed but pushed the feeling away. “Thank you, sir. I thought... perhaps...” He shifted, trying to think of the way to word his thoughts. “That some would see me dishonouring her by being in Slytherin. But I’ve come to love my House.”

Lupin’s mouth twisted a moment and he stood. He crossed the room and put a hand on Harry’s shoulder. “You would never dishonour them.” His hand squeezed. “Your father may have been bitter at first, but he loved you, Harry. He would have learned to live with it.”

Harry’s face fell a moment and he steepled his hands. “And my mother?”

“Oh, Lily would have loved you no matter what. You could have been a squib and she would love you all the same.”

That made Harry’s heart warm. Knowing that his mother would have approved. Knowing that she would never have pushed him aside. It ached deep in his gut that his father would have found fault with it, but he tried to swallow the feeling. He stood slowly. “Well, if you’ll excuse me. I have extra Potions with Professor Snape.”

“Ah, of course. Potions was never my strongest subject either.”

Harry gave an airy laugh as he shouldered his bag. “You misunderstand me, sir. I’m taking advanced specialty sessions.”

Lupin’s brow rose and he gave a soft chuckle. He clapped his hand on Harry’s shoulder once more. “Well, don’t work yourself too hard. There’s more to life than books. And those are some words I never thought I’d ever say.”

Harry nodded his head again and brushed his hair from his eyes before slipping from the room. Lupin stared at the door as it closed behind him. With a sigh and a shake of his head he sat behind his desk and let out a laugh. He twirled his wand between his long, nimble fingers. “A Slytherin.”

With a thoughtful frown, Harry made his way down to the dungeons. The door to Professor Snape’s office was open, so he let himself in. The man gave him a vague wave, not looking up from what he was working on. That wasn’t terribly unusual. Snape tended to put all his focus on one thing, and not leave it alone until he was done. He started to set up, taking out his book and the basic supplies, and then waited for him to finish.

In the waiting period, he mused about what Professor Lupin had said. He had been friends with Harry’s father... Truthfully, Harry hadn’t given as much consideration to the man as he had his mother. That was mostly because he had a connection to her through Snape, more than because of any sort of preference on his part. But now that he thought about it, he felt a bit guilty. Shouldn’t he be just as interested in his father? He had the man’s invisibility cloak, and the photo album showed that he looked very similar to him, and that was all he had.
The shuffling of papers startled him out of his thoughts, and Snape stood. “Did you have a good summer, Mr. Potter?”

“Yes, sir.” Harry replied, a small smile appearing on his face. “France was lovely. And thank you for the present, as well. It certainly something to take into consideration.” A thought struck him, and he bit his bottom lip. He didn’t want to have to send Ananta back to the Manor, but it really wasn’t a good idea to have no one but the other boys aware of his presence - what if one of them startled Ananta, and he bit them? Damn his morals, anyway. “Speaking of presents, one of them was a snake from Draco. I know that’s not on the list of approved pets, but there’s that one Gryffindor with the tarantula, and I can at least control Ananta, so I don’t think it should really be a problem.” He finished with a winsome smile, trying his best to copy the one Pansy used to get out of trouble for her gossiping.

Snape didn’t look surprised that there was a snake in the dorms. In face, he looked amused at Harry’s babbling more than anything. “I believe in your case we can make an exception. As you said, you do have superior means of controlling it. Even if that was not the case, I would be able to give permission, due to the Ouroboros’ ability to work with potions.”

The boy began nodding, before freezing and looking up. “I didn’t mention that he was an Ouroboros.” He trailed off. “Did you have something to do with Draco’s gift choice, sir?”

A glint in the man’s dark eyes spoke of approval, and Harry realized that he had thrown that out there on purpose, to see if he would catch it. Of course he did. Professor Snape was not usually so loose lipped. “I suppose I may have mentioned to Mr. Malfoy about the existence of snakes that are capable of assisting in potions or spell casting.” He seemed pleased with himself, if Harry’s admittedly still rudimentary ability to read his professor was accurate.

“Thank you.” He finally said, and the professor nodded at him. Snape told him the page number, and they got down to work.

The potion was more tricky than what they’d worked on previously, and Harry knew he should be concentrating harder, but the conversation between him and Professor Lupin kept popping up in his mind. What had his parents been like as students? Either of them? Snape always seemed too... raw, almost, when it came to his schooldays for Harry to dare ask anything. The promise of someone who knew them, but seemed almost like he wanted to talk about them was almost too much to bear.

“Mr. Potter,” The professor snapped out, and Harry jerked back into reality. His cuts had become horribly uneven, and the juice was leaking everywhere. He snatched his hands away from the mess, startled, and he heard Snape banish the mess. Silence reigned for a moment, before the man spoke again. “Do you mind explaining to me why your work has slipped to the point it was before we began these lessons?” His voice was silky, and Harry was reminded of the time in First Year when he had turned on him. The boy had to resist the urge to shiver.

Swallowing, he let his hands settle back at his side and gazed at the now empty cauldron, rather than the professor. “Sorry, sir. I’m having a little trouble focusing.”

There was silence again, and he chanced a glance up. Snape was staring down at him, one eyebrow arched, waiting for an explanation. “I was just in Defense Against the Dark Arts, and Professor Lupin asked me to stay behind. He wanted to talk to me.”

“And you did not, I hope.”

Surprised, Harry blinked at him. Why would he hope that? That would be very disrespectful to a professor. “No, sir. He offered to teach me the spell to defend against dementors, since I... I have a
strong reaction to them. And then he mentioned that he knew my parents.” A dash of awe infected his voice, and Snape visibly stiffened.

A low hiss escaped the man. “You will not be going to those lessons.” His voice was tight and strained, like a bit of thread that had been yanked until it was starting to wear in the middle. Harry stared at him, eyes wide. “But, sir-”

“Do not argue with me!” Snape snapped, dark eyes bright with an almost frightening passion. The vague memory of his first night at Hogwarts, where the man had warned him about using his celebrity status flashed through Harry’s eyes. He’d had the same look then.

Steeling his courage, Harry replied, “I need those lessons, professor!”

The man’s expression didn’t change at all. “Then I will teach you. You are already beyond your peers in Potions. Using these sessions for another purpose would not negatively affect you. I am aware of the spell to which he refers, and an environment in which you are comfortable would be better suited for learning it. Also, I do not trust how the man planned to test you on the charm.”

The accusations were starting to seem more and more unfair, and he wondered what Snape had against Lupin. “My boggart is a dementor. He was probably going to use that.” Harry defended.

Temper flashed across the potions professor’s face, and Harry resisted the urge to take a step back. No more defending Lupin, then. “Fine. Be here at the usual time this weekend and we will begin training.”

Harry nodded quickly and dashed out, disturbed. What was going on between those two?

~*~

A few days passed and things were eerily quiet. Harry spent time wandering the halls of the castle rather than staying in the Common Room where he felt stifled by the stares. The previous night he had found the trophy room and had learned that his father, there on the plaque, was once a chaser for Gryffindor. He had also learned that his mother was Head Girl of her year and he stared at the photos, which showed smiling faces waving out and the observer. In some ways, the cases were like a yearbook, snapshots of lives gone by. There was a snapshot of Head Boy and Head Girl of his parents last year and he saw their faces shining out from the frames in their Gryffindor robes. It made him feel self-conscious and he felt like he needed to tuck away the Slytherin green and silver from their animated eyes.

Harry decided not to visit the trophy room again.

Now Harry was walking aimlessly. It was just after dinner so large groups of students were milling about. He was debating on going up to Gryffindor Tower and loitering outside until someone could fetch Ron. He felt like playing chess with someone who didn’t use the same opening move every time. He started up the stairs with a determined look, ignoring the way some younger students shot him puzzled looks and the mutter of “‘what is a Slytherin doing round here?’”. They were common enough already.

He was on the fourth floor stairs when he spotted Hermione and ran over to her. “Heya. Ron around?”

“He went up a little bit before me. Want to say hello?”

Harry nodded his head and he followed her through the winding, moving staircases. It was unusual, and probably against the rules, but sometimes Hermione sneaked him into the Tower. He never
stayed long, just a quick pop in to say hello, and it was almost always close to light’s out so he would never get caught, but it was nice. Their Common Room was so different from Slytherin’s severe black leather, hard wood, strict lines and chilly floors. It was filled with ancient chairs that would swallow you up and large roaring fires and a view over the lake that made Harry jealous.

“What’s all this?”

Hermione’s voice snapped Harry out of his thoughts and he noticed the pile up of people outside of the portrait into the Gryffindor Common Room. The painting was mauled and the Fat Lady gone. Everyone was talking and Percy was shoving his way through with Filch, McGonagall and Dumbledore close behind. Dumbledore stopped in front of the portrait and stroked over the tattered canvas.

“Has anyone seen the Fat Lady?”

Several shaken heads was his answer and Harry swallowed thickly. What could have done this? A dementor? An angry student? He froze when McGonagall’s eyes settled on him. She studied him for a long moment before merely giving him a nod and moving her eyes to the paintings all around the walls. The people inside them were whispering and some were crying.

“Headmaster, here she is.”

Dumbledore moved to where Filch was pointing and peered into a painting. The Fat Lady was ducked behind a pillar, sobbing wildly. “My Lady, what on earth happened?”

“Eyes like fire. Soul ask dark as his name. He tried to get inside and I refused! He was a wild man, Headmaster!”

Dumbledore shushed her gently. “Who?”

“Sirius Black!”

Harry stiffened at the name, his stomach churning. He looked to Hermione who squeezed his arm. He nodded to her before turning tail and running down the spiral staircase as fast as he could towards the dungeons. He reached the entrance to the Common Room and gulped in air, his whole body shaking. Sirius Black was in the castle? Why had he attacked Gryffindor House? Harry slid down the wall and pressed his shaking hands to his face. The murderer must have thought he, as the Boy-Who-Lived and the so called Savior of the Wizarding World, would be sorted into Gryffindor.

Too many questions.

Harry felt like he couldn’t breathe. He pushed himself up and forced himself to stand straight. He swallowed down the bile threatening to rise in his throat and attempted to make his voice even. “Nocturnal.”

He fumbled his way into the Common Room and almost instantly felt Pansy’s familiar arms wrap around him. “Harry! Harry, what’s happened? The Head Boy and Girl told us to stay in the House. The teachers aren’t saying anything. Did a dementor get in? We should get you some chocolate!”

Harry let Pansy guide him down to the and looked up at her. She was still prattling on and he reached up a clammy hand and pressed it over her mouth. “Shhhhh.”

Pansy made a muffled squeak before she pulled away from the hand and slid down against him. She rubbed slow circles in his back. “It’ll be alright, Harry.”
After a long moment a slab of chocolate was shoved wordlessly under his nose and Harry jolted back in shock before looking to Draco, who was holding out the chocolate. Harry broke off a piece and took a small bite. They sat in silence as the others of their House chattered about. About fifteen minutes later the wall opened and Snape walked in, flanked on either side of him was the Head Boy and Head Girl.

“You each have ten minutes to get ready for bed. You are to change quickly and quietly and return back here as soon as you have done so. Go now.”

After everyone scrambled off to get changed they returned to the Common Room in a variety of sleepwear. Snape nodded once.

“Come with me.”

They walked through the corridors in a two single file lines until reaching the Great Hall. There were beds set up in place of where their tables were and the Gryffindor and Hufflepuff sections were already filled. Students were sitting or laying in the cots, chattering, some were reading. Harry climbed into a cot that was squished about the middle of the line. Pansy took his left and Draco took his right. Harry sat for a moment before lifting the very bottom of his shirt to peer down at Ananta who was securely wound about his waist.

He peered around a moment, looking for people who were paying attention before he lowered his voice. “All of these people here are friends. You are not to harm them.”

Ananta hissed and slid up his chest before peeking out of the neckline of his shirt and moving lazily about his shoulders. “Understood, child.”

“Mr. Potter...”

Harry rose his eyes to Snape, who was peering down at him, his eyes fixated on the snake. Snape shifted in place and folded his arms into the sleeves of his robes. “Yes, sir?”

“I do not recall saying you could bring your pet.”

“I...” Harry looked down a moment. “He makes me feel safe, sir.”

Snape’s mouth twisted. “Very well. See that the snake does no harm to anyone.”

“I’ve already done so, sir. And his name is Ananta.”

Snape’s brow rose and his mouth twitched but the expression was unreadable. He nodded his head again. “Go to sleep, Mr. Potter.”

~*~

No sign of Black was found, and the school returned to mostly normal, though it seemed like the escaped felon was all everyone could talk about. The other students had taken to avoiding him as well, despite the fact that it hadn’t been his house Black had tried to break into. Harry had thought everyone’s strange reaction to the Grim had been bad, but this was one step below how they’d treated him when he was supposed to be The Heir of Slytherin.

The students bustled into Defense Against the Dark Arts. It seemed that most of his peers were either responding well to Professor Lupin’s teaching method, or the idea that Sirius Black might try to break into their dorms was a sufficient motivator. Either way, this class probably had the most turned in homework and the highest average grade of the Slytherins. Well, besides Potions.
On the subject of Potions, it was not Professor Lupin at the front of the classroom. Instead it was Snape, who was leaning against the desk, lips pursed and eyes dark.

“Professor!” Harry blurted, luckily not too loudly. The man heard him anyway, and he spared a quick nod to him before going back to surveying the classroom.

Everyone took their seats, and Snape closed the blinds to the class with a flick of his wand. Another flick made writing and diagrams appear on the board. “Turn to page 394.” He told them, voice clipped.

Obediently, the Slytherins got out their books, with just a bit of grumblings, since the class had been remarkably hands on so far. Whispering broke out as well, as the latest rumors about Lupin were traded about, to see if anyone knew why he was absent.

Snape held up his hand, and the room went quiet. “Professor Lupin is ill. I will be taking his place for the next few days.” Harry gazed down at his lap, trying to disguise his worry. Snape wouldn’t want to see him carrying about the other professor, but he really could help it. Madame Pomfrey could fix up near anything in a night or less, as she had proven not too long ago with Draco. The idea that whatever Lupin had could take days was frightening.

Gesturing to the board, he drawled, “As Professor Lupin has not left any records of what he has been teaching- Ms. Bulstrode?”

Millicent’s hand was calmly raised, and her face was blank. “Sir, we have just finished studying grindy-lows. So far he has been teaching in order of the book, so I don’t think we’re at 394 as of yet.” Her voice was just as emotionless as her face, which was her version of being a smartass. A few students, such as Pansy, had to cover their mouths to stop snickering.

Irritation spilled into Snape’s expression, and he regarded her coolly. “I was simply commenting on how your professor seemed to lack organizational skills.” Harry had to resist the urge to point out what an improvement he had been. “Now, today we will begin studying werewolves.”

He began to lecture, and Pansy leaned over to hiss, “Werewolves? Why werewolves?” Her voice had just the edge of panic, and he couldn’t blame her. If his worst fear was dogs, he’d hate the idea as well. And it really was an odd topic choice, but who wanted to argue with an already irate Snape?

As the professor got into the differences between a real wolf and a werewolf, Harry pondered his choice. It was really a jump, especially since the man knew how far ahead in the text that was. It was strange for the man to do anything without a reason...

Whatever it was that had motivated the idea, Harry couldn’t fathom. Especially as they were set to take notes from the book. Between the three of them, they managed to pass notes fairly discretely, and questions of werewolves and professors slipped from his mind.

~*~

Two days later was the Gryffindor-Slytherin Quidditch match. The weather was absolutely awful. Harry was reminded of the time he’d seen a monsoon on the telly. Flint kept glaring at Draco, and pointed out that if he’d had the foresight to play up his injury they might have been able to switch with another team. That had made Harry snap at the Captain, which was so rare that it shut him up for a while.

Slipping on the goggles the Malfoys had gotten him last year, and reminding himself to give Narcissa
The storm seemed impossibly worse from the air. Between the buckets of rain and heavy wind, Harry couldn’t fathom how he was supposed to find the Snitch. It was a nightmare. As he searched, he tried to keep an eye out on his friends as well. When he passed close enough to the stand he could see Pansy and Blaise sitting very close indeed (probably Pansy’s manipulations), holding a sign for the team. Draco passed by him once or twice, his robes clinging to him in a way that made him seem scarily skinny. Millicent he only caught once as she flew by. It was just as hard to see the Bludgers in this mess as it was the snitch, and it was making her job exceedingly difficult.

Finally, Harry saw a glint of metal. It was heading upward and he followed after. He couldn’t even see the other Seeker in the storm, and had no idea if he was closer to it or not. After following after it for a few moments, he lost it again when a particularly strong gust nearly threw him from his broom.

That was when he saw it.

The top of the stands were empty of people, since the wind was at it’s worst there. Instead there was a great, block dog. It stared at him, almost uncanny in it’s intensity, and Harry froze.

It was the Grim.

Lightening flashed brightly enough that Harry couldn’t see for a moment. When he managed to refocus, the dog was gone.

Utterly unnerved, Harry shook himself and turned around, wanting this game to finish as soon as possible. As if answering his desperation, he caught sight of the glint of metal again, this time even higher. Without a moment’s hesitation, Harry darted after it.

Maybe the wind had caught it oddly, or maybe the rain had messed with the magic, but the snitch was going far higher than Harry had ever chased it before. He was nearing the bottom of the clouds, and he really didn’t fancy trying to breathe any higher than this.

But then the bottom of his stomach dropped out, and the adrenaline of the match abruptly left him. Cold and grey invaded him, and Harry abandoned the race for the snitch, instead fleeing downward, trying to make it to land before he could pass out again.

His vision darkened, and his grip on the broom grew slack before he stopped being aware of it at all. The woman’s screams filled his ears again, and then nothing.
Harry woke with a groan. He opened his eyes slowly and looked around as the blurry faces of his friends swam into his vision, along with the now familiar sight of the Hospital Wing. He grunted and pushed himself up a bit. “Bugger me.”

Amongst the snickers Harry heard a clucking tongue. “Language, Mr. Potter.”

Harry rubbed the side of his head. “What happened?” He decided to ignore Madame Pomfrey’s admonishment for now.

“Dementors...” Pansy’s voice was soft and off to his right. Harry opened his eyes again and looked to her. “Three of them flew into the match. Professor Dumbledore is furious. You fell over a hundred feet, Harry. Luckily Professor Snape and Professor Dumbledore cast charms to catch you.”

“And the match?”

“Gryffindor won seconds after you were on the ground.” Millicent didn’t look pleased to be delivering the news.

Blaise and Draco were off to the side holding something in a bundle and Harry’s brows furrowed.

“We... Well... When you fell your broom sort of...” Blaise cleared his throat. “Careened into the Whomping Willow and...” The bundle fell open and a pile of wood and bristles fell into his lap. Harry gave a muted groan and pulled his shattered broom closer.

“S’alright. We don’t have another match until after Christmas. I’ll buy a new one.”

“Off with the lot of you. Mr. Potter needs his rest.”

The others shot him a few looks and Harry waved. He laid back down and pushed his glasses off to the side of the bed before closing his eyes and falling asleep.

When Harry woke the next day he was actually glad that it was a weekend. He was discharged from the Hospital just in time for lunch and made his way to the Great Hall to meet with the others. He was just starting his pudding when a note was dropped on him by a dark grey screech owl. He peered at the owl as it settled on a basket for a moment before taking flight once again and picked up the note and unrolled it.

*Your defensive lessons begin today after lunch. The same room you first saw the boggart. Bring your snake.* - S. Snape.

Rolling his eyes, Harry took a bite of his pudding before mixing it in with his potatoes and peas and took a bite once more. He looked up at the Head Table, Snape’s chair was unoccupied but next to it sat Lupin, who looked like he had seen better days. He was slumped over, pale, gaunt and peaky.
He was nursing a drink and a bowl of soup and Harry felt sorry for him. He only hoped that whatever was making the Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher sick would go away soon. When the teacher looked his way Harry offered a smile and a wave, both of which were returned, if a little weakly.

Harry finished the rest of his lunch quickly before returning to gather Ananta, who was more than a little excited to finally be put to work and not simply laze about eating mice. Harry wondered if he should bother with his outer robes, if he was going to need closeness with his snake... Harry decided to leave them on for now and if need be remove them later. Making sure he had pocketed his wand and with his snake draped about his shoulders Harry set off for the teacher’s lounge.

When Harry arrived he found Snape sitting in one of the wing-backed chairs reading from a scroll and enjoying a cup of tea. Snape looked up lazily and nodded his head in greeting.

“Ready to get started?”

Harry nodded his head. “As ever, sir. May I... I mean... In the books I’ve been reading, it says that the Ouroboros needs as little obstruction as possible. I was wondering then, if it was alright if I could simply do the lesson in my shirt and trousers.”

Snape studied him a moment. “If you must.”

Harry quietly removed his robes and pulled off his vest. He loosened his tie and stroked his snake. “You know what to do.”

The snake glided round his neck before slipping down his arm. He curled over his upper arm from his shoulder to just above his elbow before craning up to bite at his tail. Harry smiled before wrapping his hand around his wand and twirled it lazily as he felt an odd sort of heat build up right down to the tips of his fingers.

“Ready when you are, sir.”

Snape took a deep breath, before launching into lecture mode. “The way to defend oneself against a dementor is known as the Patronus Charm. It creates an animal specific to the user to defend them against the threat. The animal is representative of the person the caster finds most comforting. This can change over time. Often, they become the reflection of a spouse or lover as the person ages.”

He held out his own wand. “The incantation is ‘Expecto Patronum’.”

He waited while Harry practiced the word, correcting him once, before the boy could speak it with ease. “The spell requires that you think of a powerful positive memory. This is the basis for the force that will repel them. Keep in mind that his charm will not destroy or kill them - it will only drive a dementor off. Also note that this is a very powerful charm, far beyond even O.W.L. standards. Do not be terribly discouraged if you do not get it on your first try.” Harry nodded slowly, but determination coursed through him. He was not going to let the dementors make him feel so terrible anymore.

Giving a quick nod, Snape made his way over to a trunk. It rattled in an ominous and familiar way, and Harry couldn’t resist a nervous swallow.

With a quick movement of his wand, the trunk opened, and Snape took a few steps back so that Harry was the clear victim. A dementor rose, and immediately the grey appeared in Harry’s vision. It was so close that he could feel himself falter already.

“‘Expecto Patronum’!” Harry snarled, focusing on his first flight. The memory seemed to slip away
the more he focused on it. He felt warmth spark down his wand, but before he could focus and work with it, his knees started to buckle.

Sounding far away, Snape growled out, “‘Riddikulus’.” The dementor turned into one of the cheesy Muggle skeleton Halloween decorations. It shook once before falling back into the trunk, which slammed shut.

Slowly, Harry’s vision became more clear, and he looked up to see a hunk of chocolate being shoved into his face. “Thanks,” He muttered, taking it and tossing the chunk into his mouth, chewing a bit more vigorously than necessary.

“I did tell you not to be surprised when it didn’t work.”

Harry simply shrugged, not comforted by that in the least. “Can we go again.”

Dark eyes narrowed, but he nodded. “If you feel up to it.”

He didn’t really feel up to it, but he nodded back and stood. This time he got his memory ready beforehand. He choose fooling around with Pansy and Draco in the souvenir shop, concentrating on Pansy’s goofy faces and Draco’s free smile.

The boggart was released again, and the effects of a dementor washed over him. Harry jerked his wand toward the creature and practically snarled, “‘Expecto Patronum!’” This time the faintest wisps of what might of been steam trailed from the tip of it. Even as the remembered fondness of the memory trailed away, Harry repeated the spell, not allowing himself to falter. No more white came, and this time the sound of screaming filled his ears. He had the feeling of falling backward, and then impact.

Suddenly the feeling was gone, replaced by vicious snarling. He looked up to see Snape pointing his wand at the boggart, which had morphed into a huge, snarling dog-like beast that Harry had seen in his textbook not long ago.

It was a werewolf.

A spell had the werewolf change into a tiny dog, which yapped viciously. Another flick sent it into the trunk, which again snapped shut.

As Snape turned to look at him, Harry couldn’t resist asking, “Is that why you had us study werewolves?”

The man froze, and his gaze became less worried and more irate, but Harry’s mouth seemed to be running on it’s own. “What was wrong with Professor Lupin, anyway? He looked okay last I saw him, but that was a long time to spend in the Hospital Wing.”

“That’s none of your concern.” Snape’s voice was low and dangerous. “When did you last see him? Have you been meeting with him?”

Harry stared at him. “What? No! I saw him in class. What is your problem with him? He seems like a nice enough guy, and he knew my father.”

A bitter chuckle slipped from Snape’s lips. “I’m very aware of that, Mr. Potter.” His voice was ironic to the point of being condescending, and Harry bristled.

“I just don’t understand why I’m not supposed to spend any time with the person who could tell me about him. He’s my father!”
Making a noise like a snarl, Snape dropped down in a crouch next to Harry. “Your father was a bullying toe-rag who you are better without. You will listen to me when I tell you that you are not to have any deals with that- with Lupin. Do you understand?”

“No, I don’t!” Harry jumped to his feet. “My father was not like that. He was a good man, and he loved him.” His voice was that of a much younger child, told stories of unemployment and alcoholism.

Snape’s voice dropped to something like a purr. “But he was, Mr. Potter. He was an arrogant, self-serving, worthless thing, and if you cannot see past your own nose and take the word of those who are trying to help you than you are no better.”

Hurt clawed up in Harry’s throat, and he clenched his fists at his side. “Do you really think that?” He closed his eyes, waiting for the answer, hoping he’d take it back, that his father was a good man, that he was someone worthwhile...

“I do.”

Without a word, Harry spun around and darted out the door. He rubbed fiercely at his eyes, scrubbing away the beginnings of tears. He was a long run to the dungeons, and by the time he made it Harry was completely out of breath, and felt to bitter about that exchange.

He could hear the greeting from Pansy and Draco has he barreled down the passageway, but ignored them. Instead he made his way up the stairs to his dorm and slipped into his bed.

Harry spelled the curtains locked closed and cast a silencing spell. The he preformed a charm to block out the light from the world and curled into his pillow. No full tears came. Instead he stayed there, in the dark little room he had created, unable to be reached by the outside world, and listened to the silence like he had as a child.

It was better than hearing more abuse.

~*~

A week passed in a strange mixture of too fast and too slow. Pansy and Draco had tried to talk to Harry about what had happened but he would silence them with withering glares or simply jerk away from their attempted touches. He was barely sleeping. All his dreams were filled with a jumbled mess of black dogs, dementors, a disappointed, angry Snape, his uncle and his parents.

Harry spent the time awake sketching in the notebooks Narcissa and Lucius had gotten him. He would draw whatever came to mind. Sometimes he would draw Ananta or things thrown about the room. Other times he would draw things with dark, angry smuges and heavy lines. Blurs and whirls and curlicues he couldn’t quiet understand but that burst from him in a fit of rage and sadness.

Blaise woke up early the Monday after The Incident to find Harry curled on his side in Draco’s bed, a pillow hugged protectively in his arms. Draco looked exhausted and Blaise figured he hadn’t slept at all that night. Draco was holding Harry against him lightly, his angular chin tucked against Harry’s shoulder, an arm locked around Harry’s waist. Blaise watched for a long while until Draco finally lifted his gaze.

“He couldn’t sleep.”

“You look like hell.”

Draco’s smile was bitter and sad and he carded his fingers through Harry’s hair. “He needs the sleep more than me right now.”
Blaise rolled his eyes and muttered something about being 'an emotional Hufflepuff' before pushing out of his bed. He looked through his things before handing a slim vial to Draco. “Pepper Up. So you don’t look like a dog’s breakfast all day.”

Draco took the vial and curled his hand around it. “Thanks, Blaise.”

Blaise grunted. “M going to shower. Nott wakes up in fifteen, best be looking proper by then.”

Draco nodded his head and watched as Blaise left. He moved slowly and unstoppered the potion before drinking it in one go. He felt better within moments even if he ignored the annoying feeling of steam coming from his ears. He lightly shook Harry and stroked over his cheek with the back of his hand.

Harry stirred. “Morning.”

“Morning. The showers are free if you’d like some hot water.”

Harry nodded sleepily and rubbed under one eye with his hand. “Thanks, Draco. For doing this. I know it’s rather odd.”

“You’re my friend. I’m sure you’d do the same for me.”

“I would.”

Draco watched Harry leave before rolling over and pulling his pillow over his head to muffle a scream.

The day was rather uneventful. Unless of course you counted the argument without arguing that Harry and Snape had for the duration of double potions. Draco had never seen Harry leave the classroom so quickly. He and Pansy shared a look as they finally realized just how bad things were. When the two arrived in the Common Room, however, their chance to talk to Harry was stifled by the fact that sitting at the table with him was Neville Longbottom.

“What’re you two doing?”

“Neville’s helping me with herbology.” Harry didn’t look up from his book as he wrote something down.

“And Harry’s going to help me with potions.”

Harry stiffened slightly. “Not today, Neville.”

Neville’s face fell a moment. “I suppose that makes sense. One subject at a time.”

Harry ‘hmmm’ed for a long moment before looking over at Neville with a faint smile. Pansy and Draco looked at Neville as Harry looked away again before Pansy sat down, smiling serenely. “So, how about you tell me what’s been happening with you.”

Neville looked taken aback and he smiled sheepishly. “Well, my gran’s been after me. Says I’m not doing too good in Charms, but Hermione’s been helping. She’s good like that. She’s so helpful. It’s nice to have friends that are willing to help you out. Anyway…” Neville turned to look at Harry when Harry turned the page of his book before looking back at Pansy. “Ron and Hermione are fighting.”

Pansy’s brow arched and a slow smile spread over her face. She folded her hands on the tabletop
and leaned towards Neville. “Oh, really?”

“Yes. Hermione got a cat this year and Ron’s concerned about Scabbers - that’s his rat - and Ron swears that Crookshanks - that’s the cat - is going to eat Scabbers. So all they do now is fight about it.”

Pansy wilted a little. That didn’t make for very good gossip! “Oh.”

“But Percy’s been acting strange lately too.”

Pansy’s brow lifted. “Do tell.”

“Well, it’s just... Ginny and he are doing that thing where you talk with your eyes. And he keeps getting this look. Seamus has a bet running with Dean who has a bet running with Lee Jordan who has a bet running with the twins that Percy’s snogging a teacher.”


“Three-to-one says it’s Professor Vector. But Pavarti Patil thinks he’s having an affair with someone in the Ministry.”

Pansy’s brows lifted and did an interesting hula. She had no idea that Gryffindors could be so... underhanded. “Why don’t people think he’s just seeing a student?”

“Because he’s acting really suspicious. Unless... It could be a Slytherin, I suppose. No offense.”

Pansy waved her hand. “None taken. Unless... what if he’s seeing a first year?”

“Pans! That’s sick!” Draco tugged on her plait and kissed her temple. “It’s why I love you so much.”

Pansy sighed dreamily. “Oh, blackmail... You give me a reason to get up in the morning.”

Neville flushed darkly and looked over at Harry, who was completely absorbed in his homework. He looked to Pansy before jerking his head towards Harry discreetly with a questioning look. Pansy licked her lips and mouthed “Snape” and Neville shuddered.

“Heya, Harry?”

Harry looked up from his work and blinked at Neville. “Yeah?”

“Got plans for Hogsmede?”

“Dunno. Why? Want to hang out?”

“Might be a good idea. Clear your head, get away from all this... stuff.”

Harry gave a distracted nod. “‘Kay.”

Pansy rolled her eyes at him before tugging on Neville’s arm. “What do you think is wrong with Professor Lupin?”

~*~

Smoothing out the rather crumpled permission form, Harry shared a small smile with Pansy and Draco as the line of Third Years slowly shortened. Professor Snape was taking the ones for their
house, looking wildly out of place in the fresh white snow on the grounds.

Already, he was feeling better than he had for a while. The idea of getting out of the castle, and farther away from the everyday reminders of his fight with the professor made him feel lighter. He hadn’t yet decided if he was going to talk to Lupin about the charm. Part of him wanted to march right up to the man and start talking to him, if only to spite Snape. Another, more sensible, part of him wanted to wait and make sure he actually wanted to be alone with the man before commit himself to that. He wasn’t about to jump into something just because he was angry.

The knowledge that there were dementors just outside of the school was helping make his decision for him.

First Pansy and then Draco handed their forms to Snape, who took them without looking. Next was Harry, who practically tossed it into the man’s hand before started to walk away. “Mr. Potter, what is this?” Came the drawling voice, and Harry steeled himself before turning around.

“My permission slip form.”

The smart answer made Snape’s eyes narrow. “And, do tell me, what were the instructions for permission? If you bothered to read them, that it.”

Bristling, Harry glared. “To get it signed by our guardians, sir”

A small, cruel smile played at Snape’s lips. “I was unaware that you had been formally adopted by the Malfoys.”

Harry’s heart dropped in his chest. He could see where this was going. “Well, I haven’t been, but-”

“Did you imagine the rules did not apply to you?” There was almost a vicious glee in the professor’s voice as he waved at Harry. “Do you think you are above simple things like paperwork?”

The unfairness of Snape’s words felt like a hot poker in Harry’s stomach. “You know that I wasn’t with my guardians. And you know why as well.” He didn’t dare say more than that in public, but met the man’s eyes with his own, green sparking like embers in a fire.

Looking away, Snape turned to the next person in line. “As I understand it, you had a week to obtain a signature before leaving with your friends. If you were irresponsible enough not to get it then, then be it on your head.” He took Nott’s form, who pushed past Harry, not looking up at the exchange. He hadn’t spoken to Harry all year, but the emotions churning through him made him want to curse the other boy.

“Mr. Malfoy, Ms. Parkinson.” Draco and Pansy both jumped, startled to be addressed. “Do you have a reason for loitering?”

Draco opened his mouth, no doubt to say something that would get him in trouble, but Harry shook his head. “Just go, guys. I’ll be fine. Maybe I’ll go speak to Professor Lupin about those extra lessons.”

He could feel Snape’s glare on the back of his neck. “Well, now that we have Mr. Potter’s permission.” The professor drawled, voice edged with venom. “Get back in the castle, Mr. Potter. You’re getting in the way of the children who have everything in order.”

Not even bothering to look at the man, Harry stalked back, head held high. It was only after he was out of sight that he started running, breathing heavily.
He hated this.

He hated this.

Slowly, Harry came to a stop, mind running fast. It would still be a while before the carriages left. Maybe he could sneak it?

A plan forming, Harry dashed to the dungeons and grabbed his cloak. He pulled it on and made his way out the castle, towards gates of Hogwarts. Before he could get far, two pairs of arms grabbed him and dragged him backward.

“Lemme go!” He snarled, breaking away from the grips of Fred and George Weasley. They eyed him curiously as he whipped of the cloak, but didn’t ask where he’d gotten his. Instead they shared a dramatic look.

The twin on the left, who Harry decided to mentally name Fred if only for convenience, sighed. “Heard that argument with Snape, mate.”

Possibly-George snorted. “Whole castle probably did.”

“We love to watch someone go toe to toe with the bat.”

“Does our hearts, good, it does.”

They both placed one hand of their hearts and smiled. Harry gave them a deadpan look. “And you maybe ruined my ability to leave with everyone else to tell me this?”


Fred pressed a dramatic hand to his forehead. “Get in the way of mischief making? We couldn’t!”

At the end of his rope, Harry snapped, “Then what do you want?”

“Testy, testy.”

“We’re here to help you, Harry.”

They stayed in silence for a moment, while Harry waited for them to explain, and they looked like they wanted him to burst into thankful tears. “And?” The boy ground out, teeth gritting.

George shook his head. “Ah, youth. So impatient.”

Pressing head shoulders against his brother’s, Fred nodded mournfully, before whipping out a piece of paper from his pocket. “This is the key to all your answers.”

Another bout of silence, before Harry gave them a dry look. “Pull the other one.”

“No, really! Watch!”

Both twins pulled out their wands and intoned together, “I solemnly swear that I’m up to no good.”

The piece of paper seemed to bloom ink, and Harry was uncomfortably reminded of Tom Riddle’s diary. Words deep appear, but not in the sharp hand writing of a young Lord Voldemort. Instead it looked almost like a seal or logo, declaring the paper The Marauder’s Map. The paper opened, and instead of being blank it now showed a map of the school, complete with little markers for the people in the castle.
This time the twins got their reaction. “Brilliant.” Harry breathed, and then gazed up at them. “You two made this?”

Twin head shakes answered him. “Nah, nicked it from Filch’s office in our first year.”

“Nasty time figuring out the password, I’ll tell you.”

As the daze of such impressive magic left him, Harry narrowed his eyes. “How does this help me, exactly?”

George grinned. “Spoken like a true Slytherin.” He pointed to a few passageways that trailed away from the castle. “These lead to Hogsmede.”

Oh. Well, that was perfect. “All of them?”

A shrug came from Fred. “So far as we can tell. One of them,” He pointed, “has been caved in. These,” another set of jabs, “are watched by Filch. And there’s the one that’s under the Whomping Willow. Can’t imagine anyone’s crazy enough to try that one. But this one leads straight to Honeydukes.”

Leaning backwards and closing his eyes mournfully, Fred shoved it into Harry’s hands. “Hurts to part with it, it does, but anything to get one over Snape, we always say.”

“It’s been the secret of our success.” Agreed George. “But, we’ve got it mostly memorized by this point, and judging by your own resources,” he nodded meaningfully at the bunched invisibility cloak, “You’re in a grand position to do more than we can with it.”

Whipping his wand back out, Fred looked at Harry seriously. “Now, don’t forget to wipe it when you’re done. You do that by tapping it again and saying ‘Mischief Managed’.” George helpfully demonstrated, giving his wand an unnecessary flourish.

For a moment Harry was very quiet, before softly murmuring, “Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, mate.”

“And we’ll see you in Honeydukes.”

They shot a set of grins at him and the sauntered off. Harry stared down at the again blank paper in his hands and a grin of his own slowly grew on his face.

He was up to no good. He swore it.

~*~

Not much more than half an hour later found Harry pushing his way up into the cellar of Honeydukes. There were crates all around, and he stayed very, very still for a few minutes, waiting to see if he had alerted anyone to his presence. There was no sound but the footsteps and voices of children above, so Harry made his way out and into the main part of the store.

He had no basis for comparison, but Harry didn’t see how a Muggle shop could come close. The candies were wildly colourful, and each was labeled with their name and description. Parts of the displays were floating and spinning around, and Harry made his way around, not even bothering to be silent in the chaos of the students.

Things like ice mice, blood pops, chocolate frogs... the list went on and on. And they were slowly
but surely disappearing in a more metaphorical sense as students grabbed boxes and rushed to the
counter. Hogsmede weekends were probably the highlights of the year.

A flash of familiar white-blonde hair caught Harry’s attention, and he made his way over. Pansy and
Draco were standing by a huge stack of Honeydukes’ Finest Chocolate, arguing softly.

“This one has the best selection.” Pansy insisted, holding up a box.

A stubborn expression had stuck itself on Draco’s face. “That’s the one the Weasel gets him for
Christmas. I am not going to give him something that plebeian.”

Sneaking up so he was just behind the other boy for maximum scare factor, Harry said in his driest
voice, “You think you can get away calling Ron that just because I’m not supposed to be around?”

Both jumped about, and Pansy actually let out a high-pitched shriek and dropped the box of
chocolate. “Harry!” Draco hissed, and he turned around, unaware that he was literally an inch away
from the other boy.

Colour rose on Harry’s cheeks, and he took a quiet step back before Draco could tell. He
swallowed, mouth suddenly dry, before replying, “Draco!” He returned in an identical tone.

The blonde lashed out with his foot and managed to catch Harry in the shin. He cursed, ignoring the
other two’s laughter. “Serves you right.” Pansy informed him. “And now that you’re here, you can
prove to Draco that I am right as always. Which chocolate do you want?”

“Let him buy it. It’s not like we have to bring it to him special anymore.”

That made Harry’s smile slip a bit, before triumph brought it back in full. Who needed permission
now, Snape? “I can’t exactly go and buy it now, can I? I might be seen. Anyway, the one Pansy
picked out is great.”

She made a superior noise and Draco rolled his eyes at him. “C’mon, go pay then, and then we can
show Harry Hogsmede.”

The group of them spent the next while pointing the main attractions at the village. Despite the
temptation, they didn’t go into Zonko’s - too much chance there was a product that could reveal him.
In the end they wound up in Three Broomsticks. Pansy and Draco got an odd look for ordering
three butterbeers, but they simply stared back in full brat mode until the drinks arrived.

They managed to keep up a conversation without looking like they had a third person. They had
picked their spot specifically so that it was in a dark corner and out of the way. That ended up
coming hugely in handy when a group, including McGonagall, Hagrid, Flitwick and oddly enough
Minister Fudge came in. Harry dropped below the table before he had even fully thought out the
desire to hide, and Pansy whipped out her wand and dragged a Christmas tree to hide them before
anyone noticed their presence.

From under the table, covered in a light layer of butterbeer and clasping his now empty mug to his
chest, Harry watched as the sets of legs sat themselves at a table, only to be joined a moment’s later
by the high heels and turquoise robes of the owner of the pub, one Madam Rosmerta. She passed
out a set of drinks and sat down with them.

Harry’s heart pounded in his throat, and he set down the mug as quietly as he could before it fell with
what was sure to be a noisy clatter from his numbing fingers. What had they been thinking? Of
course the professors might like to stop for a drink as well. Christmas was nearly around, and no
doubt they were looking forward to relaxing a bit. He didn’t dare try to sneak away to Honeydukes
so long as they sat so close...

Over at the table, Madam Rosmerta asked Fudge what he was doing in Hogsmeade, a question Harry had to admit he was similarly curious about.

“Why, what else but Sirius Black?”

Harry was suddenly a lot less interested in leaving. Next to him, Pansy’s leg was nearly shaking with excitement. This was sure to be enough gossip to last her to Easter.

The Minister of Magic continued. “I daresay you’ve heard about what happened at the school around Halloween?” The pub owner admitted as much, and McGonagall grumbled about the loose lips of Hagrid, which made Harry’s lips twitch just slightly.

“Surely he’s gone now?”

“I’m afraid we’re quite certain he’s still around.” Fudge replied, voice clipped.

There was the squeak of a chair as Madame Rosmerta shifted. “But the dementors have been searching everywhere twice. It’s been scaring all my customers away, Minister. Awful for business.”

This time it was the Minister who sounded uncomfortable. “Nothing for it, I’m afraid. We can’t let Black get away. They’re in a right snit, actually. Dumbledore won’t let them on the grounds.

McGonagall huffed. “Of course not! We can’t allow those dreadful horrors float about. How are we supposed to teach and the children supposed to learn in those conditions?”

Flitwick voiced his agreement, and Fudge murmured reassuringly at them.

“Never understood it myself.” Rosmerta sighed. “That of all people to go Dark, it was Sirius Black. I thought he might have a bit of a drinking problem by now, but never something like this.”

Voice going gruff, Fudge told her, “You don’t know the half of it. He did something far worse.”

Now Madame Rosmerta sounded incredulous. “Worse than killing all those Muggles?”

A sigh escaped Fudge. “Remember how he was in school? Who his best friends were?”

“Of course,” She replied. “It was right rare to see those two apart, wasn’t it? Quite the duo, Sirius Black and James Potter.”

Suddenly, Harry felt quite faint. He was glad he had put down his cup.

“Right,” McGonagall said, voice clipped. “Ringleaders of that little group of theirs. Bright lads, worst pair of troublemakers-”

A chuckle came from Hagrid. “Those Weasley twins give ‘em a righ’ run fer their money.”

Fudge made a confirming noise. “They trusted each other more than anyone else. At the Potter wedding, he was their Best Man. Godfather to their son, too. Poor Harry has no idea, of course.”

_Not anymore_, Harry thought numbly.

“Oh, the poor boy,” Madame Rosmerta mumbled. “It’d tear him apart, I wager.”
Dropping his voice to the point their eavesdroppers could barely hear, he shook his head. “It’s even worse than that. Not many people know this, but the Potters knew You-Know-Who was going to be after them. Dumbledore had spies, you see. He got tipped off, and Lily and James went straight into hiding. Tough job, getting away from You-Know-Who, so they found their best chance was the Fidelius Charm.”

Madame Rosmerta murmured something, sounding confused. Flitwick cleared his throat and slipped into the tone Harry was familiar with from class. “Very complex spell. It magically conceals the secret into a single, living soul. That person becomes the Secret-Keeper, and unless someone is told the secret by the keeper, it becomes impossible to find. They could have their face pressed against the window and not realize it.”

A gasp of understand came from Madam Rosmerta. “And Black as their Secret-Keeper.”

“Naturally,” McGonagall replied, voice low. “James Potter said that Black would rather die than reveal their secrets. Even turned down Dumbledore’s offer to be the Secret-Keeper. He knew there had to be a traitor, you see. Too much information had been getting out. It had to be someone. But James insisted, and well…” She trailed off, “And then he had to run for it, now that he’d shown his true colours—”

Hagrid suddenly growled out something. It was a moment before Harry was able to follow what he was saying. “I musta bin teh last ter see him! He was at the Potters when I wen’ ter fetch Harry for Dumbledore. Poor little thing, he was... Then comes Sirius Black, on tha motorcycle of his. I hadn’ the slightest tha he was the Secret-Keeper, and it never occurred ter me tha’ he was anythin’ but broken up about Lily an’ James. I comforted him! The murderin’ traitor!” The last was practically roared, and it was a while before he could continue.

“He wanted ter take Harry, but I told him I had me orders from Dumbeldore. He argued, but he gave in and told me ter take his motorbike. Shoulda known somethin’ was fishy righ’ then. Black loved that thing, and he was jus’ givin’ it ter me?” He swallowed heavily. “What if I had given Harry ter him?” His shudder made the whole table shake. “Prolly woulda thrown him straight into the ocean. Once a wizard goes Dark Side, I tell you what...”

There was a long silence, until finally Madam Rosmerta spoke. “But the Ministry caught him the next day, didn’t they?”

A sigh came from Fudge. “If only. No, we were beat to it by Peter Pettigrew. He was another of their friends - little round thing, not quite up there with the rest of them. He hero-worshiped Black and James Potter. Must have driven him mad with grief...”

Something like a sniffle escaped McGonagall, and Fudge’s voice became softer. “There, there, Professor. He died a valiant death, in the end, like a true Gryffindor. The eyewitnesses - all Muggles, we had to wipe their memories after, said he cornered Black, sobbing about the Potters and demanding how he could have done such a thing. And then he was gone. Blown to smithereens.

At that point McGonagall blew her nose. “What was he thinking....poor, stupid boy... he was always rubbish at dueling...”

“If I had been the one ter see Black, Iwoulda done the same thing. Never mind wands. I’d’ve gone at him with my bare hands.” Hagrid’s voice had descended back into growls.

Tone going sharp, Flitwick leaned forward, his legs swinging softly. “I’m glad you didn’t, Hagrid. No one but trained hit wizards would have stood a chance against him. I was Junior Minister in the Department of Magical Catastrophes then, and I was one of the first there. Awful thing to see. I still
have dreams. There was a crater in the middle of the street, all the way down to the sewers. Bodies everywhere. They never found more than a finger of Pettigrew. Black was just standing there, laughing...”

Flitwick stopped talking, as silence settled on them. Finally, Madam Rosmerta sighed. “Is it true he’s mad?”

Shifting, the Minister’s spoke slowly. “I wish I could say so. We had thought that for a while, but he eventually calmed down. At one point we were doing an inspection of Azkaban, and he seemed so normal. It was down right eerie, I tell you. Asked about the paper, calm as you please. Said he missed the crossword. The dementors somehow seemed to have less effect on him, so they started putting them on guard 24/7.”

Again there was silence, before Madam Rosmerta asked, “What is he going to do now? He’s not planning to rejoin You-Know-Who, is he?”

“I’m sure that’s his plan. That’s why we’ve got stop him now. You-Know-Who on his own is bad enough, but with a faithful servant like Black with him? I shudder to think.”

They continued to chat for a few moments before they finally got up and moved.

“Harry?”

One hand snuck down and patted down on Harry’s shoulder. He didn’t react at all.

“D-do you want us to go with you through the tunnel?” Pansy asked quietly.

Shaking his head, and then realizing that was a waste, he replied, “No, I’ll make it. It’ll be suspicious if you don’t go back that way. I’ll... I have to go.”

He ran the entire way back through the passages to Hogwarts, and ended up in the dorms before Pansy and Draco arrived back. He sat down in one of the couches and stared at the fireplace, deeply conflicted.

Why had no one told him any of this? How could no one have mentioned that James and Lily Potter died because Harry’s Godfather betrayed them?

It wasn’t long before Draco and Pansy returned, but he wouldn’t speak to them. Instead he went up to the dorm and curled up in his bed. Eventually he grabbed the photo album from his trunk and flipped through until he found their wedding photo.

The smiling, handsome face of Sirius Black looked up at him.

Funny. Harry would never had pegged him as a murderous traitor.

He threw the book on the ground and curled into a little ball. He’d thought he’d been angry at Snape, but now that emotion seemed so small and far away. True rage clawed at him, and he pressed his face into his pillow and bit back a snarl.

He hated Sirius Black.

He hated Sirius Black.

And Harry was going to be the one to kill him.
A few days later Harry stood outside Professor Lupin’s door, stepping from foot to foot nervously. He had already finished his homework and the restless itch to do something was nagging at him. Finally he raised his fist and knocked. Less than a minute later Lupin answered, looking in far better health.

“Ah! Harry! Come in, come in, tea?”

“No, thank you, sir.”

Harry shifted again as he stood by the chair and watched as Lupin sipped his tea. “Sir... I was wondering if you could help me with the patronus charm.”

“I’d be delighted to. I was under the impression that Professor Sna--” He watched the way Harry’s eyes fell and how he looked to the side. “Ah. Well. Say no more. Professor Dumbledore has asked me to do away with it. I suppose it would do some good to help you with your magic before then. When would you like to start?”

“Now?”

Lupin gave a low laugh. “It’s late, Harry. Less than an hour until curfew.”

“You could write me a pass, couldn’t you? I mean I’m working on my magic, not snogging in the halls.”

Lupin watched him for a long moment before draining his tea. “If you think you’re ready.”

Harry watched as Lupin pocketed several wrappers of chocolate before they slipped out and down towards the lounge, which would no doubt be empty for the night. The walk was silent for the most part.

“Professor... His boggart is kind of funny.”

“Is it now? Well, boggarts are deeply personal things. Perhaps it is a deep rooted issue from his past.”

Harry pursed his lips as they waited on a staircase. “I don’t think so. It seemed rather childish to me.”

They advanced when they staircase slid into place. “It isn’t the dark, is it?”


Lupin offered a thin smile. “Nothing, Harry. It’s just...” Lupin shook his head. “Nothing for you to trouble your head about. Come along, we have a boggart to defeat.”

They entered the lounge and Lupin lit the room with a flick of his wand. Harry took a deep breath. He felt strange. The last time he had done this he had Ananta with him, but now he was alone. He flourished his wand and closed his eyes and focused on his memory. It wasn’t even a memory - but he hoped it soon would be - Sirius Black killed by his own hands. He took a deep breath again to center himself.
“I’m ready.”

Lupin released the boggart. Harry gripped his wand tighter as the spectral figure of the dementor advanced. He clung to the fantasy like a life line. “Expecto Patronum!” He expected the fine silver mist to shoot from his wand. Harry gulped in air as ice gripped deep inside of him and he stabbed again with his wand. “E-expec...” He wavered on his feet before dropping like a stone.

Lupin banished the boggart quickly and knelt down beside Harry with a wedge of chocolate. “Extra dark.”

Harry bit off a corner of the square with a faint smile. “I’m never going to get it right.”

“It has to be a happy memory, Harry. Not just a good one, not just a mediocre one. The best memory you can think of.”

Harry hissed through his teeth. No wonder it hadn’t worked. He scrubbed a hand over his face. “I don’t exactly have many of those, sir. Perhaps... Perhaps you could give me an example.”

Lupin opened his mouth to reply before closing it and looking away as he coloured a deep red. “I think not, Harry.”

“Why not, sir.”

Lupin cleared his throat. “My choice of memory is rather.... adult. And therefore should most definitely not be shared with a third year student.”

Harry blushed darkly and looked away. “Oh.” He nibbled on the chocolate and thought for a moment. “I think I have one. If I could try again?”

Lupin nodded and stood before offering his hand. Harry took it and stood. He gripped his wand and closed his eyes. “Let the memory fill you, Harry. Until you feel it from the roots of your hair to the tips of your toes. Let yourself smell it, taste it... Be that memory.”

Harry nodded, almost drowsily. He let his mind wander to the sight of Narcissa Malfoy standing on the Dursley’s front step. He thought about the way her arms felt holding him. Her smell of talcum powder and mint... “Go.”

The dementor burst out. Harry stood firm. Finally he attacked with his wand. “Expecto Patronum!” There it was! The coil of fine silver-white mist, almost like a ribbon spouted from his wand. It kept flowing until there was a glowing silver dome over him. He let out a laugh as he watched the dementor lunge at the barrier but was unable to get through. His heart sped up and pride welled up inside of him.

He wished Snape could have seen this.

The feeling inside him faltered and the shield collapsed. The dementor surged at him. Sucking in air as if through a straw. Harry wavered before the thing was cast aside and the door latched firmly. Harry wilted.

“Well done!” Harry gave a tired smile and took the chocolate when it was pressed into his hand. “Well done, indeed.”

“Thank you, sir.”

“Well, I’d best write you that note. Two minutes after curfew is still after curfew.”
Harry blinked. The hour had gone by that fast? “But, I thought you needed to get rid of the boggart...”

“I can do that just fine without you. I’ve banished boggarts from kitchen cupboards since my first home. You’d best get off to bed.” Lupin handed him a pass, properly filled out and signed. “You’d have done your parents proud. Especially Lily, she was damned and determined to learned hers just as quickly.”

Harry smiled faintly. “What was it? Professor Snape said they take the shape of an animal.”

“Your mother’s? Ah. A doe. Lovely thing too, with wide, merciful and soulful eyes, a lovely rounded snout and a bushy, pert tail. Loved detail, your mother.”

Harry’s stomach felt warm and weak and he smiled up at the professor. “I wonder what mine will be.”

“You’ll find out soon enough. Now, off to bed.”

Harry nodded and gathered his things. He saw Lupin regarding the wardrobe as he left with some trepidation. Feeling lighter than he had in days, perhaps weeks, Harry headed off to the Common Room. He was humming quietly under his breath as he passed the Great Hall.

“Out after lights-out, Mr. Potter, how quaint. Yet another quality you’ve inherited from your father, I see. A complete lack of respect for the rules.”

Harry turned at Snape’s voice as the joy in his body began to burn into embittered rage. “I have a pass, sir.”

“Did it ever occur to you that Sirius Black would not care if you had a pass?”

Harry’s hands clenched. “Last I heard, he was spotted in Tibet. Sir.”

Snape studied him a moment before he shoved his hand out for the pass. Harry handed it to him. Snape’s eyes went to the paper and his mouth set into an even harder line. “And what, exactly, were you studying with Professor Lupin?”

“Patronus charm, sir.”

Snape’s eyes snapped up to Harry’s face and for a moment Harry swore he could see shock and pain before it was masked over. “How delightful. Any success?”

Harry considered lying, thinking it might protect Snape’s feelings before he recalled the way Snape had spoken to him before. “Quite. Sir.”

Snape thrust the pass into his pockets. “Leave. Before I deduct points for loitering.”

Harry paused at the steps leading down into the dungeons. He watched as Snape moved up the grand staircase. He bit his lip before finally giving in. “I wish you would have seen it, sir.”

Snape froze on the stairs and leaned over the railing. “You have thirty seconds to leave my sight before I take action against you being out of bed.”

Harry’s cheeks heated and he scrambled down the steps before kicking at the loose brick. “Belladonna.”

Snape listened to the wall close up, the sound echoing through the empty halls. He watched the
snow against the ink black sky. He leaned against the railing at the top of the stairs briefly. “I wish I could have, too.”

~*~

The next day found Harry sulking at the breakfast table as the other students prepared to take the Hogwarts Express for the winter holidays. He had been told in no uncertain terms that the school was more secure, much to his distaste. Draco sat beside him, tucking into his own breakfast. He seemed remarkably cheerful for someone who was missing out on spending Christmas with him family, all for Harry's 'safety'.

In all likelihood, his attitude was there to try and make Harry feel better, which just made him feel guilty, and therefore even more irritable.

“Don’t do anything stupid.” Pansy told him, voice flat, as she prepared to follow the other students to the carriages.

Waving an airy hand at her, Harry gave a shrug. “No matter what you two say about me, I’m not a Gryffindor. I have no plans to go running headfirst into Black’s paws, okay?” Of course he didn’t. Black was going to come for him. Harry just had to be ready.

Pansy looked skeptical, but she kissed first him and then Draco on the cheek and then made her way out, spotting Blaise and attaching herself to his side.

After breakfast, they made a quick stop at Hagrid’s, who fed them tea and talked about the various animals he was keeping for Care of Magical Creatures. Buckbeak was fine, though he glared at Draco when they passed. Hagrid insisted that he needed more space to roam about, rather than being stuck on his tether, but the huge man’s pleas had been vetoed by the school governors, which Harry privately thought was probably for the best.

In better news, the disgusting, boring flobberworms they had been working on in class were dead.

After seeing Hagrid, Harry had to admit he did feel better. But the idea of being here, rather than Malfoy Manor still itched at him. His rage at Black couldn’t really burn any hotter, but it was just another check mark against the man.

The castle was at least lovely when it was set up for Christmas. Glimmering spots of light lit the dungeon hallways, and the Great Hall looked more like a painting than an actual room, as the enchanted ceiling showed the softly falling now, the floating candles shed warm light over everything, and huge Christmas trees towered over the tables.

When Christmas Eve rolled around, Draco and Harry did their best to keep up with the Malfoys’ traditions. The blonde, who had managed to keep remarkably calm for the holidays, was somewhat stiff when he sat down in front of the tree to pick out a present. Harry sat down next to him, pressing their sides together.

“Hey, Draco?”

“Yes?”

Harry leaned against him and rested his head on the slightly taller boy’s shoulder. “Thanks.”

The snort Draco let out ruffled Harry’s hair. “For what? You haven’t opened the present from me.”

Shaking his head, Harry responded, “Not that. You didn’t need to stay here. I wouldn’t have blamed
you if you went home like Pansy did.”

“The only reason Pansy didn’t stay was because her parents wouldn’t let her.” Draco told him. “She didn’t want to taunt you with might-have-beens, which is downright kind for her. Don’t tell her I told you, though. I don’t want to see her revenge.” He paused. “Besides, that week without you at the Manor? Boring like nothing else. It made Binns’ class seem exciting.”

Nodding a bit, Harry let a small smile curve his lips, before reaching forward and snatching up one of the presents stacked beneath the tree. They had to be a bit careful, as some of the gifts were for the Fifth Year who had stuck around as well. The tag said it was from Draco, and Harry unwrapped it eagerly.

Inside was a thick looking dark green robe. The inside of it was lined with soft looking fur, and on the inside, right over the heart, was a little pocket, sown with such tiny stitches that it was almost invisible.

Harry slipped it on, and felt the warming charms built in kick in. Reaching into that pocket, he found a pair of matching mittens.

Shrugging it back off and placing it carefully back in the box, Harry wrapped Draco in a hug. “Thank you! We’ll have to go running around so I’ll get some use out of it.”

Draco drawled out, “You’re welcome.” He sounded very pleased with himself. Then he grabbed the square package from Harry and tore into it with his usual gusto.

His present was a custom made journal. It was bound in leather, but the outside was coloured to look silver, with a black dragon with familiar grey eyes prowling on the front. The dragon wasn’t a animated picture, or the kind of drawing popular for printing. Draco gazed at Harry, who had gone red.

“I found a place that lets you turn drawings and pictures and stuff into other things, like, well, journals. The dragon is enchanted to protect the keyhole from anyone but you.”

For a moment, Draco blinked at him, and then back at the journal. “You drew this?” Harry nodded. “Brilliant! Thank you, Harry.” He returned the hug, and then fished the key out from the packaging. The dragon gave Draco a side look, like it wasn’t sure of him, but didn’t interfere with him opening it.

They stayed up a bit later, drinking hot chocolate on Draco’s bed. Right before Harry dozed off, Draco asked, “Harry?”

“Yeah?”

“I know you said you wouldn’t, but... don’t do anything with Black, okay? The dementors are awful, and even without them Azakaban is terrible. That’s all he deserves.”

Harry let out a low grumble. “Dementors don’t affect him, remember? He doesn’t hear Mum screaming. ‘Not Harry! Not Harry!’” Draco went stiff beside him, but Harry wasn’t really aware enough to figure out what that meant. He yawned and burrowed into the nice warmth beside him. “I’m not going after him, but if he comes after me I have the right to take care of him.” Was the last thing he said before falling into the arms of Morpheus.

Harry woke up the morning with Draco wrapped around him, making quiet snoring noises in his ear. He burrowed back into Draco, smiling lazily, not really feeling like moving quite yet, even if it was Christmas. He had one of the best sleeps since his fight with Snape and the whole debacle with
finding out who Black was. He felt Draco shift before there was a sudden rush of cool air against him as Draco rolled over onto his stomach. Harry climbed out of bed.

He pulled on his dressing gown and knotted it firmly before picking up a package from his trunk. It was Snape’s present. They may have had a fight, but Christmas was Christmas, which meant even if someone was your worst enemy you had to treat them fair. He had gotten Snape a day planner which simply grew thicker as time went on, adding new years but never shedding the old. Harry had spent a long time on his drawing for Snape’s cover. Unlike with Draco’s, Harry did Snape’s in charcoal, taking time to smudge the lines perfectly.

He had drawn a doe.

Lupin’s words reminded him of his first year Christmas present to Snape. The card with the deer on it and how moved, without words, Snape had been. He pulled on his slippers - fuzzy and bright orange, a gift from Fred and George - and made his way to the hallway, gift in hand. He took a deep breath before following the long hall down to Snape’s office. He rose a hand to knock before letting it fall.

This had to be the stupidest, noblest thing he had ever done. More than the Stone. More than the Chamber. He swallowed and pushed the door open. The room was empty and cold and Harry stole a look to where he usually practiced his work, before looking to the desk where Snape usually graded. He inched inside before finally making his way up to the door that led further into Snape’s chambers.

Crouching down, Harry leaned the wrapped gift against the door before leaving the room as quickly as he could. Once back in the Common Room, Harry moved to the tree, which had far fewer gifts underneath it, and sifted through the presents.

Snape hadn’t gotten him anything.

Harry stamped down the feeling of sadness and betrayal and instead pulled over a gift from Hermione. He unwrapped it and smiled at the book on caring for magical serpents.

“Getting started without me, eh?” Harry looked over at Draco’s voice and watched the other boy stumble as he rubbed his eyes and yawned. Draco fell into place beside him. “Well, don’t let me keep you.”

“You need to open one of yours.”

Draco plucked one out of the pile. It was from Pansy. He unwrapped it and snorted. “Finally gave up making me things.” He stroked his fingers over the new chess set all the same. “She must’ve noticed my other one’s been falling to bits.”

Harry hummed before opening his gift from Pansy. “Look like she loves me more than you. I got a quilt.”

“Bully for you then. Here, it’s from my parents.”

Harry opened it as Draco opened a bottle of butterbeer from Blaise and opened the card. *Harry, after the incident during Quidditch, we thought you may need a new broom. Simply pick out the one you’d like and let us know. Dearly, Narcissa and Lucius.*

“Oh, I hope that’s for me!” Draco pulled over a large, odd shaped package. He frowned down at the tag before shoving it towards Harry.
Harry examined the tag. It didn’t say who it was from. He opened it cautiously before his eyes widened. “A Firebolt?”

“Wow!” Draco frowned at Harry’s look. “What’s the matter?”

“I think I should send it off to get examined. It doesn’t say who it’s from. Maybe it’s cursed from Black.”

“Or maybe it’s from Professor Snape.”

Harry ignored the way the thought made his stomach twist and shook his head. “Seems a bit steep for a teacher’s salary.”

“Well, we’ll floo my parents later.”

Harry nodded before following after Draco as the other dragged him to breakfast.

Breakfast ended up being at a one central table, since there weren’t enough students to other with filling up the huge house sections. Dumbledore, McGonagall, Snape, Sprout and Flitwick were there, which was about what Harry had suspected. Filch was also at the table, minus his customary jacket, as well as a set of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw first years, who looked utterly terrified of the idea of dining so close to the professors and Headmaster.

The only two seats next to each other remaining were next to Snape, so Harry gulped and took the seat farthest away from the potions professor. If he man had gotten his gift, then he didn’t appreciate it, because he sent one dark look at Harry before proceeding to ignore him entirely.

Finally, the Fifth Year from their house made an appearance, and the table filled with goodies.

Dumbledore gleefully started passing out Christmas crackers, looking remarkably child-like for a man whose beard rivaled Harry in length. He offered his own end to Snape, who looked rather like he’d be anywhere else, before reluctantly grabbing it and pulling. A huge, ridiculous fluffy hat with floppy dog ears appeared on Snape’s head. He glowered at it, looking very intimidating indeed, and snatched it off and pushed toward the Headmaster, who traded it out for his own flashing red and white one with a pleased expression.

The feast had just begun in earnest when the doors flew open and in drifted a green-sequined Professor Trelawney, looking more like she was floating than walking. At first Harry entertained the idea that she had died and not realized, like Professor Binns, but upon realizing that she was in fact solid, proceeded to imagine the tiny, furious steps it must have taken to look like that.

She murmured something about seeing herself come to take her meal, as Dumbledore conjured a chair out of air for her. Her eyes roamed over the table before she took her seat, murmuring something about twelve and thirteen and unlucky.

McGonagall snapped at her to stop muttering and offered her some tripe with a gleam in her eye. Harry wondered what, exactly, tripe was. The only person at the table who had any of the substance was the Gryffindor Head of House.

Ignoring her, Trelawney fixed her big, bug-like eyes on Dumbeldore. “Where has Professor Lupin gotten to?”

A sad sigh escaped Dumbeldore, and Harry noticed Snape tense. “He’s feeling ill again, poor man. A pity it had to happen on Christmas Day.”
“Shouldn’t you already know that, Sybil?” McGonagall pointed out, voice edged.

Trelawney regarded her with dislike. It was the coldest expression Harry had ever seen her make. “Of course. But one cannot advertise the fact that they are all knowing. It makes those around them feel inferior.” She placed just the slightest emphasis on inferior, and McGonagall visibly bristled. “I frequently act as though I am not gifted with the Sight so as not to confuse and scare others.”

Voice dry as a desert, McGonagall replied, “That explains a lot.”

Harry choked on his food and hid his smile in his napkin. Draco patted him on the back, making over the top worried comments and hiding his own smirk in the process. Most of the professor’s ignored them, but he though he caught an approving glint in McGonagall’s eyes. Apparently anyone who disliked Divination was good in her book.

Her tone going sharp, Trelawney whirled to look at her. “If you must know, I’ve seen that he will not be with us for long. When I tried to do a reading for him, the poor man practically ran from me.”

“Imagine that.”

Finally, Dumbledore stepped in. “I doubt highly that Professor Lupin is in any grave danger. You did provide his potion for him, correct?” He glanced at Snape, who glowered but nodded. “Good, good. He should be fine then, I suspect. Ah, Darek, if you would hand me some chipolatas?”

The First Year in question went bright red and handed the plate to Dumbledore with shaky hands.

Conversation effectively ended, the dinner went on. It was slightly awkward, as whenever Harry required something that was closer to Snape than himself, he had to whisper it to Draco, who would then ask for it in his stead.

Finally, the meal wrapped up with no further instances, though Trelawney started muttering again when Draco and Harry rose, and they made their way to the Slytherin Common Room.

After a bit of fuss, they were able to get to Draco’s mirror, when Floo Powder turned out to be near impossible to get their hands on in such short notice. After a minute or so, Narcissa’s face swam into view.

“Hello, boys. Happy Christmas.”

Draco relayed their day as Harry went to dig out the broom, which he had stashed under his bed and kept a good distance from. When he got back to the Mirror, a little line of tension had appeared in between Narcissa’s brows. It was a bit startling to realize where Draco had inherited the expression from.

After having Harry twist it around several times in front of the mirror, she sighed. “You were right to contact us. This is remarkably suspicious. If you send it with Hedwig and Titan, I believe they should be able to carry it to us without a problem, and we’ll have it tested.”

Biting his bottom lip, Harry groaned but nodded. “Alright, I will. You don’t think it’ll hurt Hedwig, do you?”

Shaking her head, Narcissa replied, “You two already held it when opening it, correct? Then it’s probably fine to transport.”

Draco looked even more reluctant than Harry, but they agreed and sent it off.
Doing the sensible thing sucked sometimes.
Chapter Notes

Some lines have been lifted from the third book by necessity. Those are in italics.

Harry walked into the library with a few books for Divination under his arm. He had been slacking off in the class. Half of it was boredom while the other half was Trelawney’s complete inability to teach. He passed a few tables before spotting Hermione, Ron and Neville at one and strode over to it.

“Wotcher, Ron.”

Ron looked away from Hermione, his face taking on a perplexed expression before he nodded. “Oh nothing, we’re just talking about how I’m marked for death.”

“Care to explain, mate?”

“Sirius Black broke into Gryffindor Tower again. Attacked Ron with a knife.” Hermione’s face was grim.

“It isn’t me!”

Ron snorted. “Spoken like a true Slytherin.”

Harry beamed. “Thanks.” Then he realized what he had said and frowned a bit. “Are you okay, Ron?”

“Luckily. I made it out of there by the skin of my nose.” Ron shuddered hard and looked back to his books. “I just don’t know why he’d attack me. I mean, no offense, I thought he’d be after you.”

Harry nodded slowly. “Me too, to be honest. After all, he’s a murderous Death Eater lunatic.”

Neville heaved out a sigh and looked away. He looked paler than usual. “Can we not talk about this?”

Everyone at the table gave solemn nods and Harry idly flicked through the pages of his Divination text book. They were all clearly trying to think of something to change the subject.

“Harry, you did really well in Potions today. Your Babbling Beverage was perfect.”

Hermione’s compliment was thin but it made Harry smile. “Thanks, Hermione. At least someone thought so.”

“It’s right strange. Professor Snape liked you, did you spit into his pumpkin juice?”

“Charming, Ronald. I’m sure if Harry wanted to tell us he would have.”

Harry grunted and flipped the page of his Divination text a little too forcefully and made it tear slightly. “Let’s just say that between being told the Grim is after me, trying to beat off dementors with a ten foot stick, and a few other things, I didn’t have time to put up with Snape’s strange...
personality.’
Hermione’s frown deepened. ‘That’s sad, really. He’s your Head of House. He let you have an
Ouroboros, didn’t he?’

Harry’s brow rose. ‘How’d you know about that?’

‘Millicent. She says you love the quote ‘pathetic excuse for a pet’ end quote.’

Harry laughed a little. ‘Sounds like her, alright.’ He pushed out of the chair and lifted the books. ‘I
better go. I got some books to help me “entice my Inner Eye” so I’d best be on that.’

Ron sniggered. ‘Good luck with that.’

Harry nodded his head and patted Ron’s shoulder as he passed him. ‘Try not to get killed.’

Ron shot him a look which made Harry laugh before he headed out of the Library and back to the
Common Room.

Obviously, his attempts to get in touch with the seventh dimension, or whatever it was, failed
horribly. Harry was huddled under his covers reading off the Marauder’s Map with a faint note of
boredom. He watched as Snape paced in his quarters, before he looked to see Flich troop past the
Headmaster’s office. Harry was just about to unspell the Map and go to bed when he caught
something out of the corner of his eye. Running through a fifth floor corridor, plain as could be:
Peter Pettigrew. Harry stared at the Map as he shot up in bed, gawking. But Pettigrew was dead.
Wasn’t he? Harry jammed his feet into his shoes before taking off.

He had to find out. He was careful to avoid teachers and Filch as he made his way through the
castle. He pointed his wand at the map and chewed on his lip. Pettigrew was in this hallway.
Harry’s heart pounding and his breathing came quick. He spun in place, shining his wand as far as
he could to see him.

He was coming closer.

Closer.

Harry jolted back as he rounded to see a suit of armor. He gulped in a breath and looked down to
the Map. Severus Snape. Harry’s eyes widened as he realized how close Snape was.

“Mischief Managed.” He watched as the link evaporated from the parchment and shoved it into his
sleeping trouser pockets. He gave his wand a shake. “Nox.”

Harry sunk beside the suit of armor and clapped his hands over his mouth. He had really made a
mess of things. Now Snape would really think little of him. He could hear the familiar sounds of the
other’s footfalls and closed his eyes. Maybe if he wished hard enough the wall would swallow him
up.

He was doomed.

A murmur of ‘lumos’ made him jump, and a pair of dark, angry eyes peered out at him, reflecting the
light back oddly. ‘Mr. Potter. It would seem that once again you believe yourself above the rules.’

Well, shit.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I couldn’t sleep.” Harry told him, the words falling from his lips before he could
stop them. “Nightmares, again. Having a murderer out for you in the castle tends to do that. Then again, that’s really nothing new. I suppose I should be used to it.” He let out a bitter chuckle.

For a moment Snape didn’t seem to know how to respond, but then he collected himself. “Your delusions of grandeur aside, you do not have the right to be out of your dorms. Especially if there are murders about.” The last was spoken mockingly, as though Harry was a child with a silly fear.

Another bitter chuckle came from him, mostly because it seemed to really knock the professor off balance. “Yes, sure. I’m delusional. Dramatic. That’s what you tell yourself, right? That everything I’ve told you is the ravings of a teenager, and you needn’t worry about it at all.”

Snape’s hand gripped his wand more tightly and lowered a bit, casting strange shadows onto his face. His lips drew back into a snarl. “I assure you, Mr. Potter, that I do not think of you at all, at night or otherwise. Even if I was so inclined to torture myself, it would not change the fact that you are out of bounds.”

There was a malicious pause, as Snape seemed to be picking up steam, and Harry had no idea out to derail him. “Just like your father - strutting around like he owned the place. A little bit of Quidditch talent and he thought he could stamp all over everyone else.” He trailed off meaningfully, eying Harry, and rage bubbled back up in him.

“Shut up about him.”

A dangerous glint entered Snape’s eyes. “What did you say to me?”

Harry was not about to be dissuaded. “I said to shut up. My father stood up to Voldemort.” Snape hissed at him for the name, but he barreled forward. “He was a brave man. You can’t even say that, can you? Your worst fear is a big old dog?” Harry matched his most vicious grin, a part of him very pleased to get to turn that expression around. Another part of him was wincing at every cutting word. He’d hoped, in the back of his mind, that his present would change Snape’s behavior, if only to make him less vicious.

Apparently not.

Growling, Snape jabbed his wand against Harry’s chest. “Your father was more a coward than I could ever be, Potter. He and his little gang set up *pranks.*” the way he said the word made it sound like attacks. “Four on one. Very brave. A true Gryffindor. How about the time he and Sirius Black tried to set me up to be killed by a werewolf?” His tone went deceptively light, and Harry went very pale. “Oh, he backed down, but not before letting me get good and scared. Said I deserved it.”

Harry shook his head slowly, eyes wide and horrified, which seemed to egg Snape on. “Yes, doesn’t seem so perfect now, does he? Don’t get any ideas about that, either. He stopped it to save his own skin. Had he and Black succeeded, I would have died, and they would have been expelled. They should have been expelled anyway, but...” He trailed off.

For a moment, Harry felt like the world was bucking under his feet. His father couldn’t have... wouldn’t have... he was a good man...

The professor didn’t stop for his paradigm shift. “Turn out your pockets, Potter.”

Somehow, the fact that Snape had dropped the ‘Mr’ made the rest of his emotional turmoil sharper, and he shoved out the contents of his pockets into Snape’s hand. It was just a quill and a spare bit of parchment to the man. He hoped.

Unfortunately, that was the thing Snape zeroed in on. “Very old piece of parchment you have here.
What on earth could you be using it for?”

“I was going to go find a place to draw,” He forced out, watching his professor’s face. The little part of him that hoped to remind the professor of his gift curled into a quiet ball. Not even a flicker. “Didn’t want to use a good piece of parchment for some practice stuff...”

Face hard, Snape glared at Harry. “Do not lie to me.” He tapped his wand against the map. “Reveal yourself! I, Professor Snape, demand you yield the information within!”

As though an invisible quill was scratching along the surface, words appeared. Harry was once again reminded of the journal, and wondered exactly what magics had gone into making that map.

“Mr. Mooney presents his compliments to Professor Snape, and begs him to keep his abnormally large nose out of other people’s business.”

Harry and Snape both froze, and the boy tried to back father into the wall. He was in so much trouble.

“Mr. Prongs agrees with Mr. Mooney and would like to add that Professor Snape is an ugly git.”

Cursing the makers of the map as hard as he could, Harry closed his eyes and missed the next set of insults. He really didn’t want to know.

There was a long moment where Snape should have reacted, but there was nothing from the man. Harry ducked his head down, expecting a blow at any moment.

“What seems to be the problem here, gentlemen?” Came the gentle voice of Professor Lupin, and Harry could have fainted in relief. He cracked his eyes open to see that Snape was glaring at the Defense Against the Dark Arts professor with more ire than he’d ever focused on Harry.

Snape’s sneer reached new heights as he thrust the paper towards Lupin, who arched his eyebrows at it. “Clearly there is Dark Magic involved in the making of this.”

A chuckle came from Lupin, and he folded the map in his hands. “It looks more like a Zonko’s product to me. It probably insults the person trying to use it.” He shrugged.

Expression becoming even more fierce, Snape took a step forward. “I doubt he got that particular product from a shop. In fact, it seems more likely he got it straight from the manufacturers.” Harry recognized a hint when he heard one, but he couldn’t imagine at what Snape was getting at.

“From one of these characters? Harry, do you know Mr. Wormtail and the rest?” Harry shook his head, and got a glare for his troubles. “See, probably something one of his friends got him from Zonko’s. Surely not something to get worked up about. Ah, and, while you’re up and about anyway... Mr. Potter, I wanted a word about your latest essay. If you wouldn’t mind coming with me?”

The professor turned around and started back the way he’d came and Harry followed after, casting one last glance back. Professor Snape glared at the both of them, a small ring of light creating a little island in the dark just for him.

It was a short distance before Professor Lupin whirled around at him, face stern. “I don’t want to hear any explanations. I happen to know that this map - yes, I know it’s a map - got taken by Mr. Filch years ago. I am astounded that you did not turn it in, especially with the break-ins we’ve had. You will not be getting this back, Harry.”
Harry nodded. That was obvious enough. There were more things that he could get out of this, however. “What was Snape saying, about the manufacturers?”

Sighing, the professor indicated the map. “I’ve met the makers of this map. The would have found luring you out of the school with it highly amusing. This was extremely foolhardy of you, Harry. To go wandering about when you know Sirius Black could be about... I cannot imagine what was going through your head. Now, off with you. Don’t expect me to cover for you again.”

With a nod, Harry made his way back to the dungeons without meeting anyone else. He crawled into bed, exhausted more emotionally than physically.

How had he managed to mangle up everything so utterly?

~*~

The next morning Harry’s Firebolt was delivered discreetly with a note that the Firebolt was top of the line and untouched. Along with it were a new set of riding gloves and a pair of sturdy dragon hide boots. Harry carefully stowed everything under his bed and took up his potions books so he could go help Neville. He managed the long trek up to the Gryffindor Tower even if he was out of breath by the time he reached the top and his legs were aching. Eight and a half floors at a sprint was murder. He smiled at the Fat Lady who glowered at him and frowned deeply when she spotted his tie.

“This is the Gryffindor Tower. You’ve no place here.”

Harry blew out a breath and gritted his teeth. “I’m tutoring Neville Longbottom in Potions.”

She eyed him suspiciously. “Do you know the password, Mr. Potter?”

Harry opened his mouth to question how she knew who he was before he remembered the paintings were worse than Pansy when it came to gossip. He nodded his head. “Yes ma’am. It’s tempus fugit.”

“Very good.”

The portrait swung open and Harry braced his arms on the small wall and pushed himself over. He spotted Neville, Ron, Hermione and two others he couldn’t quite recall at a table and made his way over. Ron and Hermione were in the throes of a rather bad looking argument.

“Potter? What are you doing here?” It was one of the boys Harry didn’t recognize.

“I gave him the password, Seamus.” Neville answered quietly.

“And how long have you been doing that then? How do we know he didn’t sell off the password to Sirius Black?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Why would I go through all that trouble just to have him terrorize some stupid Gryffindors. He was in your House you know?”

Seamus’ mouth snapped shut. “That isn’t true.”

“It’s true, Seamus. He was commended for Gryffindor’s dueling club.”

Seamus’ eyes turned to look at Hermione before he shoved away from the table. “Well. I’ll let you have your nice little inter-House discussion.” He stalked away from the table and the other boy,
whose name Harry remembered was Dean took off after Seamus with a rushed apology.

Harry slumped into his seat before looking to Hermione and Ron. “What’s gotten you two in such a tizzy?”

“Her bloody cat has eaten my rat!”

“He did not! Your rat just ran off. Couldn’t stand a diet of Every Flavour Beans I suspect.”

Neville looked at Harry with a sympathetic smile. “They’ve been like this since last time we saw you.”

“How do you know it was Hermione’s cat, Ron? Did you see the cat with Scabbers’ carcass?”

“Well, no but --”

“Have you seen bits of Scabbers scattered over?”

“No. That’s disgusting, why would --”

“So you’ve no proof?”

“Her ruddy cat was always after Scabbers. Chasing him in circles, making him hide in my pockets.”

“That’s what cats do, Ron. I’m sure he’ll turn up. If not, I’ll buy you a new rat.”

Ron scowled but didn’t say anything further. Hermione finally took a look at his books before pulling them over. “These aren’t on the reading list.”

“No, they’re personal books. Professor Snape gave them to me.”

Hermione leafed through some of the pages, her nose crinkled at the sight of the margins of some of the pages filled with loopy, cramped writing. “That’s very disrespectful to the books, Harry.”

“Well, seeing as the books are mine, I don’t see the problem. Besides, if you have a problem with it, take it up with Professor Snape, it was his suggestion. He does the same to some of his books when attempting to modify a potion.”

“You don’t mean...” Hermione read some of the notes, seeing how some words in the the book had been scratched out with different instructions written over top. “You modify the recipes?”

“Course. How else are you going to make a new potion or make an old one better?”

Hermione’s mouth made a moue of distaste before she flipped a few more pages. She stopped and splayed her fingers over two pages. “Harry, this is a strong poison antidote. You’ve made this?”

Harry nodded his head silently. It had been the last thing he and Snape had worked on together and he quickly locked the sinking feeling away. “Well. We were going to work on the Invigoration Elixir weren’t we?”

Neville nodded his head and pulled his book over and open. Harry tried not to smile as he noticed Hermione pull out some parchment and a quill from her bag. He opened his own book.

“Alright, the first modification you’re going to make is instead of three billywig stings you’re going to use five...”
Divination was proving to be as annoying as ever, as Trelawney had Draco and Blaise pass out crystal balls. When the Malfoy heir got back, he was looking slightly disheveled and very irritated. She seemed to prefer using him for manual labor, which would have been enough to make Draco dislike her. But the fact that she kept targeting Harry to predict his end in a variety of terribly ways seemed to bring out a protective instinct in the boy, and each class only added to his disdain of her.

Blaise also sat down at their table. He had never forgiven her for bringing up his home life, even in such an oblique manner. While most of the class was at least wary of the professor’s predictions, Harry, Draco and Blaise had formed their own little group. For the most part, their primary purpose in the class was to act as a peanut gallery, or at least give off a constant feel of disbelief.

“Ruddy old bat. We’re not even supposed to be on crystal balls yet.”

Snorting, Blaise leaned his head on his palm. “Hey, at least it’s not palmistry anymore. It was getting quite tedious hearing her go on about Harry’s hands.”

“Your life line is chained!” Harry’s voice dropped into Trelawney’s customary soft tone.

“The ominous line...” Blaise picked up the joke, taking on a fair impression of her shocked voice. “...It is so clear!” He tutted loudly, and Harry bit his lip to keep from laughing.

Whirling on Draco, Harry regarded him over his glasses and grabbed the boy’s hand, swirling his fingers over the palm, “And you, Mr. Malfoy... The sun line? Scandal in your future, I suspect.”

Draco’s lips twitched just as Trelawney began. “Good day, students!” Many of their classmates looked downright excited, and Harry rolled his eyes just to try and balance them out.

“I have decided to introduce the crystal balls a bit early. The spirits tell me that they will feature heavily in your examination.” She told them, eyes wide.

Disguising his snort as a cough, Blaise ducked his head. “Yeah, the spirits. I’m sure. Does she not realize we know who sets the exam?”

Making a vague gesture at the rest of the class, and being careful to not include Millicent, who was doing her best to appear like she wasn’t listening to them, Draco murmured, “You might need to remind them.”

If Trelawney heard their comments she was doing an admirable job of ignoring them. She turned a bit so that the shadows hid half her face, and Harry thought that if Wizards had movies, she would have been an amazing director.

Her tone going even dreamier, she continued, “This art is a particularly difficult one, I’m afraid. I do not expect you to See anything when you gaze into them for the first time. We shall begin the class with some exercises to relax the conscious mind and external eyes,” Blaise started to cross and uncross his eyes rapidly, smiling serenely at Trelawney. Harry snorted loud enough that she shot them a quick look before ignoring them. “In doing so you will bring your Inner Eye and subconscious forward. If anyone in here is particularly gifted, perhaps someone will See before the end of class.”

After half an hour of picking a spot on the wall or each other and slowly relaxing their eyes (or, in the case of Draco, Harry and Blaise, slowly making more and more ridiculous faces, dignity be damned), the were unleashed onto the crystal balls. It was really only the idea that they were from high society that kept the three from making ball jokes.
Really, there was no way to look into them without seeming kind of foolish. The more he stared into the misty depths, the more he thought the entire exercise was a waste of time. Draco kept throwing glares at his own ball, like he was willing it to burst into mystic flames, while Blaise was trying to find the best reflection on his to fix his hair.

“Have you seen anything?” Harry asked them in a low voice.

Waving his hand at the table, Draco drawled, “That this table probably hasn’t been cleaned in ages, for one.”

Blaise smirked at his reflection. “At least these have a use. My hair looks great.”

“Only because the reflection is warped.” Harry told him dryly, and forced himself not to jump when the boy kicked him under the table.

In the front of the classroom, Trelaweny flapped her arms about. “Would anyone like my help interpreting what they have seen?

“Wait!” Blaise suddenly burst out. “I think I see something! From the future!”

Trelawney was either the ultimate optimist or the most gullible person in Hogwarts, because she flitted over excitedly. “And what do you see, my boy?”

He took a deep, dramatic breath, like he was shaken from what he’d seen. Harry hid his smirk behind his own crystal ball. “It... from tonight, I think. There’s so much...” He gulped.

Trelawney leaned forward so that her necklaces rested on the table. “What is it?”

“Fog.”

Harry and Draco couldn’t resist cracking up at that, and the professor straightened up, looking affronted. Millicent was looking away from them, biting her bottom lip like she was about to smile, and the girl next to her glared fiercely at the group of them, along with a few others in the class.

For a moment, temper flashed across her face, and then Trelawney sunk to her knees beside Harry’s orb, eyes wide in wonder. “I think I see something!”

Tapping a finger against his own ball, Draco mouthed, ‘Of course she does’. Harry bit his lip to keep from laughing again.

“My dear...” Her voice went breathy again. “It’s here, as plain as I have ever Seen before... going towards you, poor boy, it’s the Gr-”

Harry snorted, interrupting her. “Lemme guess, the Grim?”

She regarded him seriously. “You see it to?” She started to tut, but Harry cut her off by pushing his ball away from him.

“No, you just need new material. This is the same song and dance you’ve been pulling all year. I looked up the Grim, you realize. I was supposed to be dead shortly after the first sighting, but it’s been months and I’m fine.”

Regarding him with a solemn gaze, Trelawney shook her head sadly. “It saddens me to see such denial.”

Beside Harry, Draco gave a furious hiss. “Would you find a new victim for the rest of the day, at
least? Your incessant lies are growing tiresome.”

Looking as cross as Harry had ever seen her, minus whenever she and McGonagall were forced to be together, she frowned at Draco. “Five points from Slytherin.” She said, voice sharp.

“Oh, threaten and take away points. Lovely.”

Trelawney’s eyes looked strange when she focused, Harry decided. “My boy, I think you should take a walk for a while and cool down.” It was the most sensible think she’d ever said, so far as Harry could tell.

Standing, Draco smirked at her. “It might be a permanent walk.” With that he grabbed his things and stormed out. He glanced back at Harry, who shot a helpless look at him, before storming out.

The girl beside Millicent gave a dramatic gasp, flapping her hands like she was hyperventilating. “It was true!” She cried, and the class turned to look at her. “The professor said someone would leave before Easter! She said it way back in the beginning.”

Trelawney looked very pleased with herself indeed.

“So she manages to drive someone out by Easter every year, then.” Blaise said, voice matter of fact. Harry bit his lip. He wasn’t sure if it was in disappointment that Draco was gone or amusement. Maybe it was both.

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“Now listen, you lot.” Flint snapped at the team as they suited up. He pointedly didn’t look at Millicent, whose one deference to her gender was to change facing the opposite direction. “Chasers, you better be on top fucking form this time. Due to Potter’s little fall before, we’re behind on points. Forty, to be exact.”

Snorting, Harry made a dismissive flapping gesture at the Captain. “It wasn’t my fault.”

A nod came from the huge boy. “Oh, I know. I’d take it out on the dementors if I could.” Harry believed it. “But the fact is that you fell, and then Gryffindor caught the snitch. They’ve got knocked out by Hufflepuff, though, so now I want you all to go out there and play the best damn game you’ll have in your life. This is my last year here, and if I don’t get to hold the cup this time, I will make a goblet out of your skins. Got it?”

‘Yes, sir!” The team replied, and Harry shot off a military style salute.

He really shouldn’t have, because that put Flint’s focus on him. “Potter. If you manage not to catch the Snitch while on a Firebolt, I fully expect you to take a dive off of it. That goes double if you catch the Snitch before we’ve got fifty points up. You got me?”

Swallowing, Harry nodded. “Good lad. Now let’s go carve us up some badgers!”

The best part of going against Hufflepuffs was that they, while occasionally competitive, tended not to be vicious about it. Had this game been against Gryffindor, Harry would been wise to skip classes for the past couple of days to make sure he stayed safe. Instead, as he passed the other team, the Seeker gave him a cheerful smile and a wave. Cedric Diggory, if Harry remembered correctly. And he hoped he did - the Fifth Year seemed quite nice. His smile, especially...
“Good luck.”

Realizing that he had been staring, Harry waved at him a bit harder than was necessary and blushed. He mouthed ‘you too’ back, and got another smile for his trouble.

And he also got an elbow, courtesy of Draco. “Don’t fraternize with the enemy!” He snapped. Judging by the wild look in his grey eyes, it really wasn’t worth it to argue. Instead Harry shrugged and hopped onto his room as the Captain’s shook hands.

The weather was perfect for a game. The air was still, there was plenty of light, but it sun was hidden behind a light layer of clouds. While that would make it a bit more difficult to catch the Snitch, since there wasn’t likely to be a bright glint, it would be the best conditions for the Chasers.

He stayed above the crowd, mostly keeping track of the score. Half of his attention remained on Cedric, making sure the boy hadn’t spotted the elusive ball.

Draco was mostly running interference, as the junior most member, but as Harry watched he grabbed the Quaffle as it passed between two of the Hufflepuff Chaser and immediately spun to lob it at the leftmost hoop. It sailed through before the Keeper could stop it, and the Slytherin section went wild as Lee Jordan announced the score as ‘20-0’.

Harry added his own cheers to the noise, even as he swiveled around. The slight movement of the snitch caught his eye, and he had to fight every instinct he had to avoid ducking after it. Instead he cast his attention to Cedric, whose hair was falling in his face just a bit. He was facing in the wrong direction, and Harry relaxed.

Another two goals were made by Slytherin, and Hufflepuff was starting to get antsy. Suddenly, Cedric whirled around and started flying swiftly. Looking ahead of him, Harry saw the Snitch and dashed after.

On his Firebolt, it took no time at all to catch up with the older boy and was soon even with him.

“Sorry, Harry. Let’s see what happens when we tie, huh?” Cedric shouted over the wind blowing past them.

Shaking his head, Harry yelled back, “No, I’m sorry. But Slytherins don’t do ties!” With that he pressed sideways against the other boy. He felt nicely solid, and Harry almost hated to do this. Steeling himself, he jerked harder to the left, pushing them both gently away from the snitches path.

Slytherin went nuts and Hufflepuff started booing, but the Snitch quickly disappeared again. Harry turned to shrug at Cedric, smiling sheepishly. The other boy shook his head, but he looked amused rather than angry.

A loud cheer went up, and Harry looked down. The Hufflepuff Keeper was frowning furiously and throwing the Quaffle to one of their Chasers, as Lee Jordan called out, “Slytherin leads, 50-0! If they get the Snitch now, they have the cup!”

Harry spun, heart pounding in his throat. Now Cedric was watching him, but he refused to focus on that, instead searching frantically for the golden little ball.

Movement caught his eye, and Harry was barreling in that direction before the idea had fully taken form. Cedric was so far behind him he didn’t stand a chance of stopping him.

Just as he reached out for his prize, Lee Jordan’s voice interrupted him. “Hufflepuff scores! The score is 50-10!”
With a heavy jerk, Harry pulled away from the Snitch, flinging himself upward. He nearly lost his grip, but managed to turn his movement into a spin.

The stands were growing more and more frantic, and Harry caught sight of Draco, face red from exertion and eyes bright, before he twisted back to keep track of Cedric.

It was another five tense minutes before another call came out from Jordan. “Slytherin scores again!” Harry didn’t even bother listening to the rest, spinning just in time to see Cedric’s eyes widen. Following his gaze, Harry caught the blur of movement was dashed after it.

Again, Cedric was too far away to stop him, but this time there was no score to stop him. Harry’s fingers closed around the tiny ball, and an almighty howl went out from the stands.

Before he could make to the ground, Harry was swarmed by his teammates. Millicent got to him first, abandoning her bat in order to wrap an arm around him. Next was Draco, and within moments he was surrounded by his thrilled teammates.

Before he was carted away by the excited Slytherins, Harry thought he caught sight of Professor Snape’s face.

He looked proud.

That feeling was just as good as catching the Snitch, in Harry’s opinion.
All too soon it was exam week, and the students fell into their studies with vigour. Nearly all of the examinations had some way in which they were devilishly difficult. But the Transfiguration exam, which was turning a teapot into a tortoise, had been especially harsh. Pansy, Draco and Harry discussed their results in low voices as they made their way to the Care of Magical Creatures final.

“It’s shell looked like it was made of porcelain.” Pansy moaned softly.

Draco scoffed. “Mine fell over when it’s legs snapped. I think you’re probably better off.”

Stuffing his hands in his pocket, Harry shrugged. “My turtle started whistling after a few minutes. I’m terrified to think what it looked like on the inside.”

When they reached Hagrid’s hut, the huge man was barely paying attention to them. He kept looking over at Buckbeak, who was looking a bit antsy. He set them into groups and gave them each a new flobberworm (to the class’ collective disgust) and told them to keep the creatures alive for an hour.

The creatures did best when left to their own devices, and so the three Slytherins made themselves comfortable as they talked.

“Good show, Harry.” Pansy told him. “I’m glad we took this class. Disgusting, gross, icky worms aside, this is the best exam ever.”

He shrugged. “Better than Divination is going to be, anyway. There’s no way I’m not going to fail that one.”

Snorting, Draco poked at the worm with his foot. “Who cares about that class? I’d rather be taking Muggle Studies.”

Pansy eyed him. “Wow, you hate it that much?”

Strangely enough, Draco coloured a bit at that. “Well, yes, I do hate it that much. But Muggle Studies might not be that bad. I mean, I hear you spend the class watching more of those films and listening to music some days. And a lot of it is just learning the money and such, which isn’t hard.”

He shrugged. “Like I said, better than Divination.”

Grinning, Harry pressed the back of his hand against Draco’s. The blonde glanced at him, but Harry didn’t elaborate.

Next was Defense Against the Dark Arts, which involved what basically amounted to an obstacle course. This one actually proved a bit fun as they ran about, dealing with a few of the more harmless creatures. The final bit was the most difficult, and involved jumping in a small enclosed space with a boggart. When the familiar dementor appeared, Harry simply grinned at it and turned it into a human figure wearing a black sheet with eye holes cut out.

All too soon, the Divination final came up on them. Draco ended up skipping his exam period. “I have two electives already. Between Care of Magical Creatures and Ancient Runes, I can just drop it. I was serious when I said it was a permanent walk.”

And so Harry was alone when he made the trek to Trelawney’s tower. She insisted on seeing each student individually. Most of them had their copy of Unfogging the Future but neither Harry, Blaise or Millicent bothered. Instead they played cards until they were called.
One after the other, students went in then out of the room. After each exam, the students refused to tell what the exam had been like.

“She said I would have an accident if I told anyone!” One girl told them, face pale.

Millicent sounded reluctantly admiring. “Finally graduated into threats, has she? Not bad.”

Quite a few students took a step away from her after that announcement.

First Blaise, then Millicent were called up. They came out, rolling their eyes and looking frustrated, muttering about making things up.

It was not helping to calm Harry.

Finally, it was his turn.

Inside the room, the air was even thicker than normal, and all the windows and torches were covered. The fire blazed, and the temperature of the room made it feel like a sauna. Harry started coughing as he made his way towards Trelawney and the ball set up on the table.

“Hello, my dear.” She greeted, the fire glinting oddly off her glasses. “Please, gaze into the ball. Do take your time, and then tell me what you see within...”

Leaning forward, Harry peered into the orb without much hope. As he’d expected, there was nothing but white fog. At this point, he best option was lying, and quickly.

He let his eyes go wide, and then regretted it when whatever was in the air made them sting. “I see a dark shape...” He breathed.

Trelawney leaned forward herself, eyes wide. “Quickly, what does it resemble to you?”

Okay, knowing her tendency for dark predictions, something frightening was probably best. Something that could be a huge phobia...

Oh.

“It looks almost dog-like... a great, hulking thing...”

Behind her glasses, Trelawney’s eyes lit up, and she whispered, “The Gri-”

He cut her off with a shake of his head. No way. He was not giving her that opening. “Not the Grim.” She looked disapproving at his tone, so he continued on. “It’s on two legs, now. I-I think it’s a werewolf!”

That got her attention. “What is it doing?” She asked.

Casting his mind back to the Defense Against the Dark Arts lesson with Snape, Harry said, “It’s growling. I think. It looks angry. Oh, now it’s pouncing! On...” He paused, trying to thinking of something symbolic. And then a better idea hit him. “It’s attacking the Grim!”

“What else, my dear? Does it fight back?”

Why not? “I think so. It looks like it. Oh, it’s going indistinct now. I think I’ve lost my connection.”

He had to resist the urge to make a dial tone noise.

Trelawney gazed at him considering. “Perhaps if you’d payed more attention in class, you would
have been able to see the prediction to it’s conclusion.” Harry valiantly resisted the urge to roll his
eyes. “But... perhaps there is something I can teach you. Alright, run along then.”

Relieved at both getting to leave and probably not failing, Harry jumped up. He grabbed his bag and
turned to go, but a low, guttural voice interrupted him.

“IT WILL HAPPEN TONIGHT.”

He turned around to stare at Trelawney, who was sitting like a statue in her chair, back straight as a
rod and eyes unfocused.

“Excuse me?”

But the professor didn’t seem to hear him at all. She jerked a bit, and Harry wondered if she was
having a seizure or something. Her eyes started to track back and forth rapidly, like she was
dreaming with her eyes open.

Before he could try to get her to the Hospital Wing, or at least try to contact someone, her mouth
opened, and that strange voice came from her.

“THE DARK LORD LIES ALONE AND FRIENDLESS, ABANDONED BY HIS FOLLOWERS. HIS SERVANT HAS BEEN CHAINED THESE TWELVE YEARS. TONIGHT, BEFORE MIDNIGHT... THE SERVANT WILL BREAK FREE AND SET OUT TO REJOIN HIS MASTER. THE DARK LORD WILL RISE AGAIN WITH HIS SERVANT’S AID, GREATER AND MORE TERRIBLE THAN EVER HE WAS. TONIGHT... BEFORE MIDNIGHT... THE SERVANT... WILL SET OUT... TO REJOIN... HIS MASTER...”

Trelawney went limp for a moment, before she made a sort of grumble and slowly moved around a
bit. Then her head jerked up, and Harry stumbled back.

She blinked sleepily at him. “So sorry about that. The heat of the day, the incense... must have dozed
off for a moment.”

Harry simply started at her.

Slowly, he came back to himself. “You... what was all that? The... servant... and rising...” The
professor looked at him like he was the one who just had a fit of crazy.

“I believe I’m not the only one who dozed a bit. Don’t worry about it, dear. Happens to the best of
us.” She waved a hand. “Now, I’m sure you have other things you need to get to. Off you go.”

Turning around, Harry made his way down the ladder and back to the dungeons. He found Pansy
and Draco sitting next to each other and flopped down so he was lying across Pansy and resting his
head on Draco’s lap.

Above him, his face blocked by a book, Draco snorted. “The exam was that bad?”

Shaking his head, Harry replied, “Not really. I made up some stuff and I think she bought it.” Draco
snorted. “But after... she did this really weird thing.”

Pansy patted his knee, not looking up from her magazine. “From what you’ve said, weird is normal
for her.”

“Yeah, well, this was weird for her.”
“Oh?”

Harry opened his mouth to tell them, but then clicked it shut. How exactly was he supposed to describe that fit of insanity? “I’ll tell you when I’ve processed it a bit more.” He finally said, and the other two shrugged and excepted that.

Now that there was time and distance separating him and the examination, Harry was starting to think he had dreamed it. Slowly, he relaxed, enjoying the presence of his friends.

After dinner the three of them made their way down to Hagrid’s to get their grades for their exams. Buckbeak was laying in the setting sunlight, cleaning his feathers amongst the cabbages. Hagrid let them inside and rooted through his stack of papers to find their grades. He pulled one out finally and cleared his throat.

“Okay.... Malfoy, Malfoy... Ah! You go’ an EE.” He tracked his fingers down the parchment. “Yeh as well, Pansy, and yeh too, Harry. I woulda given yers an O, but yeh’re watchin’ the clouds and natterin’ away.”

Draco opened his mouth to protest but finally closed it and nodded his head. He didn’t look pleased, but he knew when to quit. “Thank you.”

“O’ ‘course! Yeh did well on all yer essays.”

They sat in silence for a while drinking tea and nibbling on rock cakes before Pansy pushed herself up. “Well, I’m tired. Hard day of essays and tests. I should go to bed.”

“Yeah.” Harry gulped down the last of his tea before standing up himself. “Goodnight, Hagrid.”

“G’nite.”

The three of them made their way across the field when Pansy gave a rather undignified screech and dove behind Draco. “Rat!”

Harry rolled his eyes and approached the rat, which squeaked and ran at his shoe. He peered down at it before crouching down. “It’s Ron’s rat.” He laughed. “I told him it’d turn up!” He scooped the rat up. “Thing probably got tired of being Crookshanks’ play toy.” Scabbers’ claws dug into his wrist and Harry shook his hand wildly, cursing softly and sending the rat flying.

Draco eyed it for a long moment before curling his lip in distaste and plucking the rat up by the tail and extending his arm away from him as far as possible. “Let’s go deliver the rat to Weasley, before I catch the Plague.”

Pansy let out another short cry and Harry whirled on her. “What now, another rat? Or perhaps you saw a butterfly?”

Pansy’s head shook frantically and she whined high in her throat and pointed a trembling finger behind Draco. Harry turned slowly, his eyes widening at the sight of the black dog he had seen and he backed up slowly. Draco was making quiet pleading noises as the dog encroached on them slowly. The dog reared back and sprang. He caught hold of Draco’s arm and Harry dove for him but the dog was too quick and darted with a jerk under the Whomping Willow, pulling the blonde along. Harry fell back and stared.

Shit.

“Draco!” Pansy ran for the hole in the earth and Harry pushed her back.
“It’s the Willow, Pansy. Don’t be daft.”

Pansy mewed quietly before she drew in a deep breath. She straightened out and nodded. “Right. Do the smart thing.” She withdrew her wand from her robes and pointed it at the tree. “Immobulius!”

“I was thinking of getting a teacher but -- ow!” Harry jerked forward as Pansy grabbed a fistful of his hair and yanked him towards the tree.

“We’ve got to save Draco.”

Before Harry could protest that this would likely get them killed and that no one would ever find their bodies, they were underneath the massive, vicious tree. Harry shook himself when he was released and prodded at his tender scalp.

“I’ve been a bad influence on you.”

“Shush!” Pansy flicked her wand and cast a quiet ‘lumos’.

Harry did the same. “Wonder where this leads...” He chewed on his lip before he stood straight. Remembering Fred and George pointing out a passage way under the Whomping Willow on the Map, he lifted his wand higher. “I know where we’re going, come on.”

“Where?”

“Shrieking Shack.”

“How do you know that?”

“Long story.”

Pansy shot him a look but didn’t say anything further as they made their way through the cramped, slick tunnel towards their one way destination. They ended up in the Shack’s basement and slowly worked their way up the stairs, their hands clasped together in fright, Harry inching just slightly before Pansy.

“We’re going to die here. Oh, Morgana.”

“You’re the one who wanted to save Draco.”

“Rethinking that plan right about now.”

They made their way up the final set of stairs, which creaked dangerously underfoot and the whole house seemed to sway with each gust of wind. Harry tried to breathe as slow and deep as he could as he pushed open the door to the only room on the floor. Draco was curled up in the corner next to an overturned chair. His arm looked a mess, the robes mangled and soaked through with blood, which almost glowed on the white of his skin.

Pansy gasped and ran for Draco, falling beside him. “Are you alright?”

“Harry, it’s a trap. It’s him, he’s an Animagus!”

Harry spun at the fright in Draco’s voice to see where he was looking. The door to the room was pushed away with a dirty looking hand and Harry held back a moan of fear at the sight of the man in all the wanted posters. He looked even more crazed in person. Harry had thought the sight of Sirius Black would rise the urge to kill within him. Make him want to lash out with unending fury. Instead it only terrified him and his legs turned to rubber. He fell back as he backed away from the murderer
of his parents and stumbled over the chair Draco was hunched beside and landed splayed on the floor.

His eyes searched the room frantically and he clasped his wand tighter in his shaky, sweating hand.

They were trapped.
Before he could react, Black lashed out with Draco’s wand, croaking, “Expelliarmus!”

Pansy and Harry’s wands flew from their grasps, and Harry let out a snarl of rage that made Pansy take a step away from him. “You bastard.” He growled.

The convict blinked at him, as though surprised by the reaction. His eyes darted down to the crest on Harry’s chest and back to his face and cocked his head. “Never thought that... a Slytherin, huh? How did that...? And hanging around with a Malfoy... I wonder what Lily and James have thought.” He sounded honestly curious, and just slightly shocked. Harry’s eyes narrowed into little slits of green fireworks.

His own voice took on the dangerous grumble he’d learned from Snape over the past few months, as he took a step forward, ignoring Pansy’s distressed hiss. “I guess we’ll never know, will we? You made sure of that.”

Black took a step back to match Harry’s and he shook his head like a wet dog. “No, no, I-”

Fury bubbled up in him, and Harry snorted disdainfully. “What, can’t admit to it? Even after all these years? We all know, Black. It was all your fault. And you’re going to pay for it.” He last he growled out, and the bright blue eyes of the convict looked strangely hurt by the words.

Finally, the man pointed his wand at Harry’s chest. “Stop! Don’t come any closer. I can-”

A sneer, again copied from Snape, twisted Harry’s face. “What, you’ll kill me too? Preparing to finish the job for your precious Master?”

“No! Just shut up! Would you-” He cut off and shook his head again, before glancing between Harry and Draco. “You did come after him... I had hoped, despite... Slytherin... But you came for him, and not for a teacher.” Something like a smile curled up on his face. “Your father would have done the same thing for me. Very brave of you.”

The comment about his father sent Harry over the edge, and he would have launched himself at Black if Pansy hadn’t grabbed the back of his robes. “Harry, stop it!”

Meanwhile, Draco was struggling to sit up, his face going paler than normal, but his eyes bright. “Stay away from him, you miserable cur.” His voice came out with all the regal tones of Draco at his brattiest. “You don’t deserve to be anywhere near him. And I will kill you if you touch him.”

Now Black was staring at him in astonishment. “But... a Malfoy...” He twisted the wand from Harry to Draco, and Pansy again had to hold the brunette back. “Lay back, before you hurt yourself.”

“You shouldn’t be worrying about the state of my health. Worry about your own when I get my hands on you.”
A wicked grin appeared on Black’s face at that. “Oh, there’s only going to be one murder tonight.”

Harry snarled at him. “Why, found it too disdainful last time, with all those poor Muggles? Or when you blasted Pettigrew into bits? I guess Azkaban did manage to get to you after all. Not enough, obviously-”

He was cut off when Pansy tugged harder on his robes. “Shut up, Harry! Don’t anger the homicidal maniac!”

“Why shouldn’t I? He killed my parents! He’s the reason I had to stay at the Dursley’s for ten years!”

With that Harry yanked free and tackled Black. The fact that he was a skinny little thirteen year old and the man was fully grown and much taller than him despite his stay in prison and what did he think he was doing passed through Harry’s head, but it was blown away in by the burning need to do as much damage to Black as possible.

Maybe it was shock, or maybe his reflexes had been dulled by his time in prison and on the run, but Black didn’t react in time to stop Harry from slamming into him.

They ended up in a tangle on the floor. Harry aimed his punches to places where he remembered had hurt him more than others - the kidneys, his stomach. They were the places Dudley used to go for. This man was the reason he had been sent there in the first place. Every bit of pain he’d suffered should be reflected right back at the bastard. It was only fair, right?

Black planted his hand on Harry’s face, pushing him away in a surprisingly gentle way, but Harry was having none of it. He sunk his teeth into the man’s thumb, and the convict let out a howl of pain and lashed out with his legs, sending Harry tumbling, but not before he was able to grab his wand from Black’s pocket.

Sitting up, Black twisted towards Harry, but was interrupted when Pansy kicked him full in the face, sending him back down, holding his now bleeding nose. When the girl turned to check on Harry, he grabbed her leg and practically threw her into Harry, sending the two toppling over onto Draco, who let out half of a shriek of pain before cutting it off with a stubborn look.

As Harry turned to check on him, a creaking noise near them made everyone freeze. Footsteps. “HELP! WE’RE UPSTAIRS! IT’S SIRIUS BLACK! COME QUICKLY!” Pansy shrieked at an impressive volume.

Black jolted up and twisted, looking for an escape, but there was no way out of the room other than the single door.

Gripping his wand, Harry pointed it at the convict, his grin vicious. “It’s over, you bastard!” Black raised his own wand, frowning severely.

The door burst open, and there was Professor Lupin. His face was pale and haggard as he glanced between the three students, Harry’s pointed wand, and Black. Lupin raised his wand, eyes narrowed.

“Expelliarmus!”

Harry’s wand flew from his hand into Lupin’s palm. He gaped at the empty air in front of him, then at the professor. The man walked over to Black, face thoughtful.

Voice very quiet, Lupin asked, “Where is he?”
The students stared at the two, and betrayal slowly bled into Harry.

Was every adult he thought he could trust going to turn on him? Were the Malfoys next?

Black’s face was blank as he studied Lupin, but slowly he nodded, a gleam appearing in his eyes. He raised his hand and pointed it at Draco.

The Malfoy heir gulped and tried to scoot back, but his leg gave out on him and he hissed in pain. Harry moved so he was half blocking the other boy, glaring furiously as the ache in his chest turned into the much easier to deal with rage.

“But...” Lupin paused, considering. “Why did he never show up before? He’s been silent for years. Unless he...” Understanding of some sort seemed to come to his eyes, which seemed almost amber in the light. He was looking past Black now, at answers no one else in the room could see. “You... Without telling me... was he...? You switched?”

Now Harry could tell that the strange glimmer in Black’s eyes was hope. The convict moved his head in a nod.

Before any of the students could react to the events, Lupin lowered his wand and reached out with one hand. Black took it and was hauled up before the two men embraced warmly.

This had to be what shock felt like, Harry realized. He felt almost like he was on that roller coaster in Paris. Like he’d left his stomach back somewhere on the rails.

“No.” He said, his voice flat. “No no no. No.” His head started to shake, against his will, as his mind made connections he’d rather have not made.

Black leading Professor Snape to the werewolf.

Snape’s hatred of Professor Lupin.

His sick days.

The lunar calendar in his room.

And now this.

“You bastard. You utter bastard. I trusted you. How could I- How could you?” Ducking his head down, Harry ran both hands through his hair as he tried to process. A bitter laugh, that sounded just as wrong from him as the strange tone Trelawney had used for her prediction, fell from his lips. “How did I not get it? It’s obvious, isn’t it?”

Lupin was starting to look a bit frightened as he stared at Harry. Pansy reached up and placed a hand on Harry’s shoulder, and Draco looked worried from where he was still sprawled out. Harry ignored his friends and stared at Lupin’s eyes.

“It’s not what you think.” He said.


Pansy froze next to him, and Draco struggled to sit up more. “He’s a what?”

Lupin looked surprisingly calm. “Not bad, Harry. Though I would like to think that I am trustworthy, but I suppose that’s a matter of opinion. But, before you say it, I have not been with
Sirius since the beginning.”

Snorting, Draco eyed him with suspicion. “Oh, Sirius now, is it? Yeah, we believe you. Why not? You’re just a werewolf that hugged a convicted murderer. Nothing suspicious or circumspect at all.”

With a sigh, Lupin reached into Black’s pocket with the sort of comfortable movement that came from years of knowing one another. He pulled out Draco and Pansy’s wands and threw them to the children. Draco caught his own, shifting his grip on Scabbers, who he was still somehow holding, and Harry grabbed his and Pansy’s before handing it to her.

“There. You’re all armed. Will you please listen?”

“I dunno. I think we should deliver you to the dementors. You can tell them your clever little story.” Pansy drawled.

Groaning a bit, Lupin seemed to decide to ignore her, instead turning to Harry. “It was on the map, you see-”

He was cut off by a hiss from Harry. “I gave you the map. I gave you the map.” Then he paused. “How do you know how to work it?”


“You- you’re... Then Black is...”

“Padfoot.” The convict told him, voice fond, as though he was thinking of a particularly warm memory. Harry wished it had been eaten away by the dementors.

Lupin waved his hand again, this time to cut them off. “Right, right. But, then I saw a name on here that shouldn’t have shown up. It was impossible, I thought. But the map has never malfunctioned before.”

“That you know of.” Draco put in, but he was ignored.

Something about that rang bells in Harry’s head, and he narrowed his eyes at them. “Who, then?”

“Peter Pettigrew.” Lupin said seriously.

Pansy let out a little hiss. “He’s mad, isn’t he? The werewolf transformations have completely addled his brains.”

The professor looked a little hurt by this, and frowned. Instead, Black took up the conversation. “No. Peter was never dead. He just faked it, and went into hiding as his Animagus form. A rat.”

As one, they all turned to look at the creature that Draco was still holding in a one handed grip.

Before any of the students could come to grips with that little bit of insanity, Black lunged forward at Draco. The boy howled with pain as the man’s weight pressed against his leg, and Scabbers slipped free from his grasp.

The rat made a break for it, but Black dove after him, jarring Draco again in the process, and grabbed him by the tail. He held the frantically struggling rodent up, eyes wild. “Do it, Remus. Do it now.”

“Not yet.”
“What?” Black whirled on him. “But he-”

Lupin shook his head. “I’m sorry, but not yet. First we need the truth, Sirius. I don’t fully understand yet, and if nothing else, Harry deserves the truth.”

The convict snarled at the rodent, but nodded slightly. By this point, Draco had recovered somewhat from the pain and groaned lowly. “We’re going to die at the hands of two madmen, over a rat they think is a dead man. What a way to go.”

Black rolled his eyes at him. “Oh, stop being so dramatic. You’re Lucius’ kid, aren’t you? He was a little drama queen as well.”

Snarling, Harry glared and opened his mouth before Draco could respond. “Don’t you dare insult Draco, or Mr. Malfoy!”

Looking taken aback, Black glanced at Lupin and mouthed ‘Mr. Malfoy?’ The professor shrugged. “We’re not mad. Well, Remus isn’t. I never killed Pettigrew, though Merlin I tried. Little bastard got away that time, didn’t he?” He jerked the rat around again, who gave a piercing squeal.

Sounding exasperated, Pansy snapped, “That’s Ron Weasley’s pet! His name is Scabbers. How could it be Pettigrew? Besides, if he was an Animagus, he’d be on the registry.”

Black snorted. “Like I was? Please. Why would we tell anyone we’d become Animagi? That would be a wonderful advantage, lost. Really, and you call yourselves Slytherins?” Pansy glared at him.

“That doesn’t change anything.” Harry spat. “You still sold my parents out to Voldemort!”

After flinching, Black shook his head. “That’s just it - I didn’t! I wasn’t their Secret Keeper. Peter was!” Again, he jerked the rat. It seemed to cheer him up a bit. “We thought I’d be too obvious. Who would think little Peter was their Secret Keeper. But then he went and stabbed them right in the back. After we’d trusted you!” He directed this to Scabbers, who squeaked even louder.

“Prove it!” Harry demanded, eyes blazing.

“I would also be interested in seeing that.”

In the doorway stood Professor Snape. Contrary to his words, he looked very much like he’d rather be attacking Lupin and Black. His wand was pointed straight at Professor Lupin’s heart.

“Professor Snape!” Harry couldn’t resist the tiny bit of hope that made its way into his voice.

“Shut up, Potter.” The man returned, not even looking at Harry. The boy jerked back a bit at the words.

But the professor only had eyes for Lupin, and his gaze was dark and foreboding. “I’ve just been to your office, Lupin. You hadn’t taken you potions yet - very responsible, that. And what was lying open on your desk but an enchanted map. I saw you running down to this passageway. I told the Headmaster he shouldn’t have trusted you, but he’s always been a soft heart when it came to your little group. To think you’d have the nerve to come back here of all places…” He trailed off, and Black snorted lightly.

Lupin held up his hands placating. “Severus, this isn’t what you think. You’re making a mistake.”
Shaking his head, Snape took a step forward. “I don’t think I am.” Suddenly, he turned his gaze on Harry. “And have you been in on this as well? All that time spent in his office...”

The accusation was so completely unfair that Harry could only gape at him, heart clenching.

A snarl from Black got Snape’s attention, and he grabbed the wand from Lupin’s hand and pointed it at the dark man. “Don’t you dare talk to my Godson that way.”

Harry gazed at him in surprise, even as Snape’s expression twisted into something cruel. “And what a wonderful Godfather you’ve been. Shall I tell you about what has been happening to him while you were gone?”

Biting his lip so hard he tasted blood, Harry shook his head in mute horror. Snape either didn’t see him or didn’t care as he faced down Black. The convict returned the look with equal hatred.

“Professor,” Pansy ventured, gazing at Harry for a moment. “Can we at least find out what they know? We can take them in later - first let’s find out the truth. Or at least let them fail, and then see how they react. Please.”

Something about the Slytherin nature of the plan must have appealed to Snape, because he arched a challenging eyebrow at Black and Lupin. “Oh, go on then. Let’s see you try to charm your way out of this one.” He looked like he fully expected this to blow up in Black’s face.

Black narrowed his eyes at him, but his desire to get at the rat outweighed his hatred of Snape, because he held the rat up to eye height. “Look, he’s even still missing the finger. The little traitor.”

“Spare me your stalling and get on with it.” Snape drawled, but his eyes narrowed at the words.

Together, Lupin and Black tapped their wands against Scabbers. 

Who became a little man.

Snape let out a shocked noise and took a step back. Pettigrew glanced around, clearly scared out of his wits, before he lunged at Harry. Lupin and Black both raised their wands, but Snape was faster, snapping out a spell that had Pettigrew wrapped in conjured rope before he could touch the frightened boy.

The little man hit the floor and twisted so he was looking up at the three men.

“Hello, Peter,” said Lupin, in a calm voice that was somehow the most frightening thing Harry had ever heard from the man.

Practically vibrating from fear, Pettigrew stared up at him with wide eyes. “Remus- Remus, you can’t believe him. My old friend, you know me...”

Black looked like he wanted to tear the smaller man apart with his bare hands. “We thought we did. That was a lie, wasn’t it?”
Ignoring him, Pettigrew continued, “He tried to kill me, Remus! He came after me, and now he’s going to try again. He killed Lily and James, and now he wants to take me out. I knew he’d come for me, so I hid! Who knows what tricks The Dark Lord taught him.”

Black let out a bark of laughter at the same time Lupin’s eyes narrowed. “The Dark Lord, Peter?” He commented, voice still frighteningly calm. “Really, Voldemort, teach me?” He narrowed his eyes at the man’s flinch. “And don’t try that, Peter. You’re not running from me. You’re running from him and his followers. I heard things in Azkaban, you know. He died on your information. They want their revenge on you, of course. They do think you’re dead, but if they found out—”

The man let out a squeak of fear. “I don’t know what you’re... You don’t believe this...” He trailed off at the cool look on Lupin’s face.

Before the interrogation could continue, Snape made a choked off noise. He was glaring at Pettigrew with a wild sort of anger, and Harry knew the man was regarding him with the same boiling rage he was.

This was the man who was responsible for Lily Potter’s death.

Severus snapped up his wand, and Pettigrew started floating in his bonds, struggling. Black made an angry noise, but stopped at the look in Snape’s face. “We can continue this little reunion at the castle, with the Headmaster, I believe.”

Black made an strange jerking motion with his wand. “No! He’s not going to make it there. I’ll kill him, right as soon as he’s finished explaining.”

“Don’t!” Harry cut in then, his eyes almost molten as he gazed at Pettigrew. “Too easy... it’s too easy by half. I want him in Azkaban. I want him to get a cell surrounded by dementors. I want him to suffer...” He trailed off, his voice going soft and deadly.

For a moment, Black looked like he would argue, but instead he gave a jerky nod. “Yeah... yeah, okay. That...That sounds good.” He gazed at Harry. “Slytherin... I can see that.”

Stalking to the door, Snape made a dark noise. “Well, now that we’re all decided.” He drawled, before he paused and then gave another flick of his wand. Draco’s leg jerked as it became splinted, and he gave a hiss of pain before settling. Pansy wrapped an arm around him and they managed to get him on his feet with minimal trouble.

“Potter, with me.” Snape shot off as he made his way out, closely followed by Black. Harry followed after, and then Pansy and Draco. Professor Lupin took the rear, keeping a close eye on the two students in front of him.

Twisting, Black held out his hand to Harry. “Never mind that overgrown bat. Come here and talk with me, would you?” Snape looked back to shoot him a warning glare, but Harry ignored that, instead moving so he was beside his... Godfather.

Assuming this all worked out.

That was a big assumption.

As they made their way downstairs and to the tunnel, Black clapped a hand on Harry’s shoulders. “You know what this means? Turning Wormtail in, I mean.”

“You’ll be free,” Harry responded, happy for the man in a distant sort of way. It was awful that an innocent had maybe ended with the dementors, but it really didn’t seem to directly affect him.
Black nodded. “That’s right. And uh... you know... if anything happened to your parents... I was supposed to look after you.”

Going stiff, Harry stared at him. “What?” In the dark of the tunnel, Harry could just barely make out Snape giving a violent twitch.

“I mean-” Black cut himself off with a cough. “You just said before... ‘The Dursleys’, you know. Sounded like you don’t really like them. And you could stay with me, no problem - I knew you when you were a baby, you see.”

That was a strange thought, and Harry swallowed. “That’s nice of you, really... But I don’t really stay with them much anymore. I have a home at Malfoy Manor.”

Black snorted. “Oh, please. I meant a real home.”

A glare was directed his way. “The Manor is my home, thank you.”

Backtracking, Black shrugged and held up his hands in a helpless gesture. “Okay! I just know how those big, scary places can get, is all.”

Harry frowned, but was able to accept that. “Okay. I suppose maybe I could visit or something. But first, let’s get him settled.” He jerked his hands out towards Pettigrew and Snape, who were now more visible as they approached the end of the tunnel.

Harry watched as Snape prodded the Pettigrew lump forward with a jab of his wand before exiting the tunnel. Harry pulled himself out next, he looked at Snape’s face a long moment for any discernible signs of emotion but found nothing pleasant. He bottled up the sadness and crouched down to help Pansy get Draco out of the tunnel and watched as the other boy eased himself onto a rock.

Black had his face lifted up to the sky, his eyes closed. No doubt enjoying the smell of fresh air. He looked softened and weary in the light of the moon, almost broken. Harry studied his face for a long moment, wondering what so long in such a place had done to him. He looked up at the sky himself, his eyes tracking over the stars and passed the full moon. The sky was so clear. He hoped wherever Black ended up had a sky like this.

Wait a second... full moon?

Harry whirled in place, his eyes wide. “Professor!”

Snape levelled a gaze at him before looking to Harry’s arm which was jutted upward. Realization dawned on him and he looked at Pansy and Draco, who were almost dozing on the rock.

“Parkinson. Get Mr. Malfoy inside as quickly as you can and then find Headmaster Dumbledore. Tell him Lupin’s forgotten his potion. Go now!” He paused a moment, but only a moment.

“Potter, you as well.”

Pansy was already half dragging the yelping Draco towards the castle as fast as she could. Harry looked to Lupin, who looked like he was about to be sick. He was sweaty profusely and breathing hard.

“Potter, go!”

Harry strode after Pansy before he stopped mid-stride and stared at the place next to Snape. “What happened to Pettigrew?”
Snape’s head jerked to the side and Harry caught a quick flash of fur running through the dark grass towards the Forbidden Forest. Before he stopped to think about it, Harry was off and running after the rat that was the man who betrayed his parents.

“You’re his professor. I may loathe your very being, but you can keep him safe. I’ll deal with Remus.”

Snape watched as Black vanished and in his place was a snarling black dog. Lupin was making choked grunts that were starting to clip into growls and down-like fur was creeping over his flesh. Snape suppressed the urge to shudder before he tossed a glance to Pansy and Draco, who were almost at the stairs despite their impediment.

Snape ran for the woods.
Harry could barely think he was so blinded by rage. He pressed his mouth into a thin line and leaped over a fallen tree. He saw a flash of dusty brown in front of him as Pettigrew darted through a shaft of light and slashed with his wand. The curse missed and instead sent a rock soaring. Harry made a throaty noise of anger before firing again. He had never known he could feel such strong emotion before.

“I’ll tear you apart with my hands, you coward!”

Harry darted left and something snagged and he hit the ground with force. He choked in a breath and exhaled slowly, smelling grass, dead leaves and dirt. He had bit the inside of his mouth on impact and spat when he pushed himself up before scrambling blindly for the rat.

He had to find him. He had to exonerate Black and throw Pettigrew in so deep not even the vermin wanted him. He had to do it for himself and for his mother and his father and for Snape. Because maybe then it would be worth it. Somehow, in some twisted way, shoving Pettigrew in a box would make it all better.

Would make it stop hurting.

Make her stop screaming.

He slide down an incline and gulped in air. He veered left when he heard the faintest of squeaks and cast a wide hex at the ground. He entered a clearing and swallowed as he heard the long, lone howl of Lupin’s other self. He shivered and rubbed his hands over his arms.

Suddenly it was so cold.

“What kind of a foolish move were you playing, you impudent brat?”

Harry turned, too numb to even attempt surprise at the fact Snape had found him. “Had to catch him. He just...” Harry shrugged and rubbed his arms harder, shaking. “S’cold.”

“It’s likely you’re in shock.”

Harry huffed out a laugh before his brows pinched together at the sight of his breath misting in the air. He exhaled again, longer and more forcefully. That wasn’t good. He watched Snape as the other watched his breath puff out in little clouds and he turned his eyes upwards.

“They must have caught his magical signature. They’ve no doubt called in reinforcements. We’re near the boundary, they’ll be on us soon. We must move.”

Harry licked his lips, feeling weight sag into him. “Why’re you mad at me?”

“Potter, I really don’t think that now is the time to be having such a discussion.”
Harry’s eyes fluttered, he swayed on his feet. “Tired.”

Snape clenched his teeth before he drew in a icy breath and flourished his wand. A jet of silver erupted from his wand and Harry watched through half-open eyes, stumbling to lean heavily on Snape as it slowly formed from a shapeless mass into a doe. Harry jerked a little in Snape’s arms as some of the pressure on him lessened.

But his mother’s...

…Oh.

He opened his mouth to say something but a strong hand with an even stronger pull yanked him straight and moved him forward. Harry stumbled, feeling out of sorts in his body, but did his best so as to make it that he wasn’t an utter dead weight to Snape.

“You... You must’ve...”

“Not now, Potter. I’m trying to concentrate.”

Harry watched Snape’s face as they journeyed their way back towards the castle and aid. His face was a mask, but Harry had never seen Snape’s eyes seem so unguarded before. His tongue was moving in a slur before he could stop it. “Are you thinking about her?”

Snape’s mouth twisted and his eyes hardened. Almost instantly the glow of the patronus flickered like a dying picture on an old television before it faded completely. Harry dropped hard at the sudden oppressive weight and Snape sagged beside him.

“S’too much.”

“Potter!” Snape grabbed his shoulder and shook roughly. “Concentrate! I can’t do this alone. I need your help, there are too many. You’ve cast a shielding patronus, do it again!”

“Why’re... What’d we do?”

Snape looked like he wanted to curse in frustration before looking up at the sky. He winced as he saw the spectral shapes descending, almost en masse it seemed, upon them. “They no doubt think we’re in the way. You heard Professor Dumbledore, if you get between the and the one they seek, they will not think twice.”

Harry managed a hollow, choked laugh. “Lucky for us then.” He oozed down onto the forest floor and let his head tip back. He watched as some dementors darted about, no doubt on the hunt for Black, while a nest of what had to be at least fifteen were circling over head like vultures.

“Potter. Concentrate. We’ll make it out of here if you use that blasted head of yours. Focus! You cast the charm before, you can do it again.”

“You weren’t there to see it.”

“I am here now.” Snape picked Harry up and set him on his feet. “Close your eyes. Find the happiest memory you have. Just the moment; everything about it. Hold onto it. Do you have it?”

Harry nodded slowly. “Yes.”

Snape cast a quick glance over head. He really didn’t have time for this. He could feel the phantom ache in his arm but squeezed his eyes shut and focused. There were more and they were closer.
“Let it sink into you. Let yourself sink into it. It is everything you are and will ever be and have ever been. Let the feeling build inside of you until it aches. And then...”

Harry moved his arm minutely but in a fiercely powerful gesture. When he spoke it was in an even, calm voice, even almost low. Confident. “*Expecto Patronum.*”

The light burst from his wand and shot through the darkness like a light down a dark well. There was a sudden explosion of light that radiated forward in waves and enveloped them completely. Then it darted swiftly through the dark, almost at a gallop. It was so bright and the feeling so calming it was almost fatiguing. It circled them twice before darting off into the darkness again.

Snape watched, utterly enraptured as the dementors were driven away in wave after wave of encompassing brightness. The patronus trotted over still far too bright in the darkness and Snape let his eyes run over it. It was of good size, and strong stature - a hyena. A spotted one to be exact. He couldn’t help but arch a curious brow. He looked to Harry’s face.

The boy’s eyes were still closed but he had the calmest look over him Snape had ever seen. He wasn’t quite smiling, but there was a promise of one and tears wet his face. The light of the patronus flickered before vanishing and Harry collapsed.

Snape stayed by him, unmoving, until Dumbledore arrived.

~*~

Harry was out of it for the rest of the night, but woke up around his normal time, feeling a bit shaky most mostly alright. When he woke up, he found Snape asleep in one of the bed side chairs, brows furrowed even in sleep.

Taking a moment to study the man, Harry noticed how he seemed even paler than normal, and his arms were wrapped in his robes, like he’d fallen asleep in the middle of ranting at someone.

Before he could figure out the cause, Pomfrey and Dumbledore entered silently through the doors. She looked surprised to see him awake, but hustled over and started casting diagnostic spells in a low tone.

“I don’t know what you were doing out there, Mr. Potter, but I do hope you learned your lesson. You came in here with a serious case of magical exhaustion, you know.” She tutted.

Eyeing her, Harry responded, “But I’m okay now.”

The woman huffed, but nodded reluctantly. “I suppose so.”

Harry twisted out from under the covers and sat on the edge of the bed. Glancing at the Headmaster, he asked, “What do you know about last night?”

A motion from Dumbledore made Pomfrey purse her lips but disappear into her office. Then he sat down with a light groan. “You’ll forgive an old man for resting his bones, I hope.” He said, before casting a quick spell, smiling softly. “However, I don’t think Professor Snape will forgive us for interrupting his rest, so let’s keep this quiet.”

The Headmaster paused, seeming to gather his thoughts. Finally, Harry spoke, trying to hurry the man up. “What happened to Sirius Black?”

Something like a smile came to Dumbledore’s eyes. “It would seem that he managed to escape somehow. A pity, as the Minister seemed quite upset about having to send the dementors away
without a prisoner to take with them.” Despite his words, the man’s tone was light, and almost conversational. “In unrelated news, Buckbeak the Hippogriff has gone missing. Hagrid is of course devastated, but believes that he escaped do to lack the proper room to exercise.”

Harry had to duck his head to hide his smile. “Oh, that’s too bad, sir.” His voice matched the Headmaster’s. “What about Draco and Pansy? Are they alright?”

Pointing to a bed in the back that was separated by privacy curtains, he replied, “Both are just fine, don’t worry. They threw quite the fit when they arrived in the castle, I assure you. While that was the reason we were able to find you and Professor Snape quickly, it also encouraged Poppy to slip Mr. Malfoy a Dreamless Sleep Potion so that she could fix his leg.”

This time Harry didn’t bother to try and hide his smile. It slipped as a thought struck him. “And what about Professor Lupin?”

For the first time, Dumbeldore looked serious as he spoke. “He is deeply ashamed of having forgotten to take his potion. Unfortunately, do to the commotion Mr. Malfoy and Ms. Parkinson made, his condition came to light. I do believe he will be handing in his resignation in a few days, before the parents of the students are given much time to react.”

Biting his lip, Harry nodded slowly. The man had been a wonderful teacher, and he was going to miss that. Not to mention the link to his parents.

As though the thought of his mother had called to him, Professor Snape began to stir. Harry watched him with wide eyes. The man seemed to come awake all at once. One moment he was twitching, still mostly asleep, and the next he was up and alert. It was uncanny.

“S-sir.” Harry greeted warily, chancing a small smile.

The anger he’d seen in the Professor’s eyes for the past few months seemed very muted, as though dwarfed by last night’s experience. The man tracked his eyes over Harry’s blanket covered body, like he was looking for injuries, before returning to his face. He gave a short nod. “Mr. Potter.”

Harry never would have thought that title before his name could make his heart jump.

After watching them for a moment with twinkling blue eyes, Dumbledore stood. “I believe now would be a good time for me to take my leave.”

“Um…” The Headmaster looked back to see Harry regarding him with a considering gaze. “Sir. Theoretically... how could an innocent man end up in Azkaban? I’m aware of at least one potion that compels the truth. Couldn’t they use it at his trial.”

Looking grave, Dumbledore met Harry’s gaze. “Theoretically, that innocent man might not have gotten a trial at all.”

Green eyes went wide at that, and Harry glanced past the elderly wizard as his mind worked that out. After a moment, he nodded slowly. “One more question. Whose job was it to make sure he got a trial? I’m sure someone is supposed to be keeping a look out for human rights.”

“A number of people must have failed that theoretical man, I’m afraid.” Dumbledore told him, the twinkle going out of his eye completely. “Good day, gentlemen.” With that, he took his leave.

Once Dumbledore left, Pomfrey came back. After fussing at both of them, she really had no reason with them to keep them. Draco wasn’t due to wake up for a while, so Harry had no desire to stick around. Especially since he hadn’t even begun to pack.
Harry and Snape walked side by side on the way down, and an awkward silence followed them to
the dungeons. Finally, they passed the door to Snape’s office, and he cleared his throat to catch
Harry’s attention. “If you would join me for a moment, Mr. Potter?”

Shrugging a bit, Harry followed him in, feeling trepidation crawling in his stomach. The man sat
himself down at his desk with a sigh and motion for Harry to take the familiar seat across from him.

Once he was seated, Snape regarded him seriously. He took a deep breath, and spoke. “I’m curious
- what memory did you use to make that patronus?” It sounded like he had meant to say something
else, but the question knocked Harry off guard.

Harry looked away and shifted uncomfortably in place. “It...” He looked around the room,
everywhere but at Snape. “I don’t even think it’s real.”

Snape’s brows rose but he didn’t say anything, instead made a ‘go on’ kind of gesture.

Harry forced out a breath. “I hear her screaming when they’re around...” He bit his lip and stared
hard at the wall to his right. “A shrill sort of desperate cry of my name. It’s always there. Like a
warning or a plea to hold on. I usually push it away to try and focus on something else; anything that
could make me feel safe and protected. This time, I gave in to it. And...” He shook his head and the
faintest, almost self-deprecating smile crossed his face. “It’s stupid.”

“No, it is not. Whatever it was, it... it worked.”

“I heard her. Maybe I imagined it, but it was before the screaming. It was this warmth, this feeling
of being held. Of hearing her heart beating in this soothing, sleepy way. She was singing
something, the words were muffled but... I could see her eyes. Wider and greener than mine, and
these soft red curls of hair were touching my face and fell over me like a blanket... Then it stopped
and she was talking and her arms weren’t cradling and soft anymore. They were painful and her
heart was pounding and she screamed my name and...” He shook himself as he swallowed. “And
all I could remember was the same feeling when Narcissa held me last Christmas and it just built up
inside of me and it was hurting and it had to go away so I just pushed. And there was this calming,
most amazing feeling...” He looked at the ground and scuffed his shoe on the floor. “I told you it
was stupid.”

Silence followed his confession, and when he looked up, Snape’s eyes looked darker than normal,
like they were wet. Slowly, the man closed them and leaned back. His voice was calm when he
spoke, but it was the same sort of artificial calm that Narcissa had used over the summer. “And thus
your patronus is a mixture of the two. Interesting.”

“Sir...” He trailed off, feeling a bit foolish at the question. “I... wasn’t really paying attention to
what I was casting, so much as the memory. W-would you mind telling me what my patronus is?”

That got him a stare, as Snape realized he’d had his eyes closed while casting. “A hyena. From
what I understand, they are matriarchal, and have aspects of both warmth in the form of humor and
viciousness when required. It is... appropriate, for a mixture of Lily and Narcissa Malfoy.” Harry
considered this, his gaze slipping away from the professor.

Another long pause followed that statement, as Harry just stared down at the pile of papers on
Snape’s desk. Finally, the man said, “I believe... that I may have overreacted to your defense of
Lupin. I...” He swallowed. “I apologize, Harry.”

Feeling uncomfortable and warmed at the same time, Harry shrugged and didn’t look up. “I
understand why you did, sir. And I really didn’t make it easier, did I? I kept... throwing it in your
face. I didn’t know why you were acting that way, and then you said that stuff about my dad…” He
finally looked up at Snape. “It’s just... when I was growing up, my Aunt told me that Mum and Dad
had been lazy layabouts, and that Dad was an alcoholic and things like that. And then I came here,
and for the first time it seemed like they were people I could have been proud of, you know? So...
when you…” He shook his head. “Never mind. It’s stupid, okay? What ever he did or didn’t do
doesn’t really matter, since, well..” He trailed off awkwardly. Really, how was he supposed to end
that?

“Harry,” Snape began, voice very serious and slightly strained. “Your father, however he was as a
child... He grew up to be the man who sacrificed his life for you. If nothing else, you can choose to
be proud of that.”

Emotion clogged Harry’s throat, and he nodded rather than try to talk around it.

Time passed as Harry struggled to collect himself. Finally, he was able to choke out, “Thank you,
sir.” That could not have been easy for the man to say. Snape just tilted his head in
acknowledgement.

After another moment, Harry stood up. “I really do need to pack, sir. Thanks for telling me... all of
this.” He paused, and then couldn’t resist asking, “Um, before I go... about the journal. Did you
throw it out?”

The professor glanced at him. “Which journal are you referring to?”

“The one from Christmas.” Snape just blinked at him. “You don’t know? But I left it at against the
do-“ Harry broke up and stared at the door to the man’s quarters, feeling rather like an idiot. “It
swings out, doesn’t it?”

He didn’t get a reaction from the man for that, so Harry tracked a path between the door and a
slightly elevated cabinet. Falling to his knees beside it, he reached under and felt the edges of a
wrapped package.

Resisting the urge to smack his head against the edge of the cabinet, he dragged it out and placed it
on the desk of a confused looking Snape. “Happy Christmas, sir.” His voice was tinged with
sarcasm.

Making quick work of the now rather crinkled paper, the man revealed the sketched journal cover.
The doe on it was contentedly nibbling at a bit of grass, but froze upon spotting Snape. It reared up,
kicking it’s front hooves in greeting, before turning back to it’s meal.

“How did you find something like this?” Snape asked, rubbing spidery fingers down the leather
cover.

Shrugging awkwardly, Harry told him, “I drew it, and a company put it on the planner.”

The professor froze for a long moment. “And you tried to give it to me months ago.”

A bit of colour marked Harry’s cheeks. “Yeah. Kind of stupid of me to put it there, huh? I know
it’s not really professional quality or anything, but I thought you’d like it.”

Cracking open the journal, Snape flipped through the pages, stopping when he saw writing. In the
first Saturday after the winter holidays, Harry had written his own name in at the usual time.

“Merlin.” He breathed, staring at it.

Harry craned his neck to see what Snape was looking at, and then went a deeper colour of read.
“Kinda presumptuous of me, wasn’t it? I mean, this was right after that stuff before Hogsmeade.”
He gave a self-deprecating sort of laugh and looked down at his shoes. “I guess it was my way of apologizing, sort of? I dunno, rather thick of me, to be honest—”

Before he’d even realized the man had moved, two hands were cradling either side of his face and made him look up. Snape searched his expression intently, before he dragged the boy forward to tuck him into his arms.

“I’m sorry,” Snape murmured, resting his chin on the top of Harry’s head. “I’m so sorry.”

At first, Harry was awkward and tense in the embrace, but slowly curled into it, hands coming up almost on their own to take handfuls of the man’s robes, clutching like they were a lifeline. He sniffled, the emotions of the day and yesterday catching to him.

They stayed like that for a long moment, before Harry took a step away, rubbing at his reddened eyes. He hadn’t quite started crying, but it was far closer to it than he liked. A hand on the top of his hand made him pause, and he looked up at Snape. “Wait here.” The man directed, and Harry nodded.

Snape slipped passed him and into his quarters. After a moment, he returned with a package of his own, this one unwrapped. Harry blinked at it.

“I purchased this for you before our fight.”

Harry opened up the box and blinked down. Inside was a messenger bag, made of high quality looking leather. On the clasps were his initials. He gave a low whistle at it and ran his hand over the material.

“Open the front most pocket.” Snape directed.

Doing so, he found it was not made for books. Instead it was heated and soft. Confused, he glanced up at the professor. “As your bond with your snake becomes stronger, it would be good practice to bring him with you to classes. Now, open the side pocket.”

That pocket was small and tightly sealed. He opened it, and found a framed picture of little girl with red hair, looking around eleven. She smiled and waved cheerfully. In the background, Harry could see the edges of Hogwarts.

He stared at that picture for a long moment, barely able to breathe. Finally, he looked up. “Thank you, sir.” If his voice was slightly hoarse than Snape was nice enough to ignore it.

Instead, he cleared his throat, looking slightly awkward. “If you wish, you could refer to me as Severus. During our sessions and talks, that is. I have to insist on ‘Professor’ in public, obviously.”

Stunned, Harry blinked for a moment. “Okay, si-Severus. Oh, Merlin, that’s strange to say.”

Something like a smile twitched at Sn-Severus’s lips. “Thank you.”

The man nodded, then directed to the door with a gesture. “I believe you said you had packing to do?”

“Oh, right.” He slipped on the bag, running his fingers over the slight bulge the frame made in the side pocket, and smiled at the man. “Thanks again.”

“Yes, yes, enough with the gratitude.” Severus told him, looking both fond and exasperated.
Smiling morphing into a grin, Harry waved. “Alright. Bye then, Pro-Severus. Oh, that’s going to take a while.” He murmured the last to himself as he slipped out, but heard what sounded like a chuckle before he closed the door.

When he entered the passageway, Harry thought the feeling in his chest was enough to make a patronus strong enough to defend Azkaban.

He made his way into the Common Room where people were relaxing and playing, and things were thrown about. Harry said hello to a few people before heading up to his dorm. He slid his potions books almost reverently into the bag Snape had given him before watching as Ananta curled up happily inside the special pocket just for him with a hiss of joy. Harry, Draco and Ananta had made the deal that the snake would stay at the Malfoy’s for the week Harry was at the Dursleys. Sitting on his bed, Harry pulled out the photo of his mother and stared down at it.

She was twirling around, arms over her head and laughing and Harry realized she was facing the lake, making the photographer face towards the castle. He watched as she stopped and started waving again animatedly before brushing her hair from her face and saying something to someone out of frame. He wondered who she was talking to. He nearly dropped the picture when he felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up with a jerk. Pansy smiled down at him and slid onto his bed, curling one leg under her knee as she sat.

“Is that your mum?”

“Yeah. Professor Snape gave it to me. They knew each other when they went to school here.”

Pansy nodded her head and looked down at the frame. She was no doubt looking at the Gryffindor details on her uniform. “I bet they were great friends.”

Harry nodded his head and watched as she walked out of frame before sliding the picture back into his bag. “Where’s Draco?”

“She’s the one who’s supposed to be whingeing.”

“Whinging as always. Madame Pomfrey wants to run more diagnostics and he was throwing fits so I left.”

Harry grinned at her. She twirled a lock of her hair in her fingers and looked over at him when he studied her. They said nothing but Pansy shifted and slid against Harry, rubbing their shoulders together as she rested her head against his.

“Draco’s parents are trying to get tickets to the Quidditch World Cup final match. It’s being held in Britain this year. Draco wanted it to be a surprise, so try to act it when he tells you.”

Harry laughed gently before pressing his lips to her temple and stood. He waved his wand when as he turned to his bed. “Pack.”

Pansy gave him a lopsided grin. “When’d you learn that one?”

“I saw some Sixth Years using it. Seemed much handier.”

Pansy ducked her head as a pair of shoes whizzed past her. “Where are you going?”

“To say goodbye to Professor Lupin, it seems someone was rather vocal about his condition.”

Pansy gave an unapologetic shrug. “I figured it would be the quickest way to save you. Well, I think I’ll go and tell Daphne Greengrass that her new haircut makes her look like a troll.”
Ignoring her petty attempts at bullying, Harry made his way towards Lupin’s office. When he arrived he saw almost all of it was packed. Lupin’s back was to the door. “Hello, Harry.”

“Hullo, sir.”

“I saw you coming.”

Harry looked to Lupin’s desk to see the Map open. He gave a small nod. “I’m sorry that you need to go. You were a brilliant teacher. I learned loads from you.”

“That’s lovely to hear, Harry.” Lupin turned, his skin was pallid, but otherwise he looked well. He offered up a smile as he rested his hip against the desk. “Rumor tells that Sirius Black made a daring escape.”

Harry made a quiet noise and nodded. “So I’ve heard. Well, hopefully all that mess will be sorted soon.”

“I do hope so.” Lupin gave a flick of his wand and his trunks vanished with a quiet pop. “Well, I’m sure you have other goodbyes to say. Do keep in touch. And remember...” Lupin rose his wand and Harry’s eyes couldn’t help but follow it. “Mischief Managed.” Lupin pushed himself away from the desk with his foot. “Now, I must, unfortunately, make my leave before a fuss is made.”

Harry offered the man a handshake and a light embrace before watching him walk out. His eyes drifted to the desk, where the Map sat innocently. A smile spread over Harry’s face as he picked it up.

He couldn’t wait for next year.

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