Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

by DeetsViBre

Summary

This is a story about people, feelings and corruption. This is most definitely a story about magic, because there is a lot more to the world of magic than just silly wand waving. When Harry decides to start making choices independent from Dumbledore's influence he discovers much more than he expected. Perspective changes everything. It can also make things weird. Cover Art

NOTICE: This story is discontinued- it might come back someday...
Weird Day

Chapter Notes

AN- So I have overhauled my account and removed all of my stories but two. I'm sorry to those still reading White Lies but it will probably end up discontinued. To anyone reading this on a site that's not then disregard the above information.

Thank you to my Betaminijaxter

Warning- This story contains Domestic Violence!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 1

Weird Day

Tan hands pressed down on the soft top soil surrounding the delicate young sprout, being careful not to damage the fragile stem. Harry looked down at the small plant and contemplated how much it resembled Italian parsley.

It was a hot muggy day on Privet Drive, and the air was heavy with moisture that pressed down on Harry's mind, it was a thick film of condensation that settled onto his thoughts making them fuzzy...
and slow. He stared at the little green plant as it swayed in the light breeze, when suddenly there was a shadow cast over him. Harry looked up at his cousin; normally having the larger (now much more in shape) boy looming over him would be followed by unpleasant events, but Dudley held two glasses of lemonade with a nervous smile on his face.

"It's a rather hot day…" Dudley exclaimed lamely.

Harry nodded, he felt rather disconnected and wasn't sure what would fall from his lips if he tried to speak. He accepted the cold glass that was handed to him and took a long swig. The cool beverage helped Harry recover his wits, he turned around to thank his cousin and found the other boy sitting in a lawn chair. When had he set that up?

Dudley leaned forward and examined the small herb garden that Harry was planting with a critical eye.

"So what's that?" He pointed at the last sprout Harry had lovingly surrounded with dirt.

"ehhhhh… ermmm…" Harry found himself making odd unintelligible noises. He had not recovered enough wit to come up with a good lie.

"Oh, don't worry I won't tell mum. When you got back from buying the plants I saw one of the cards. It wasn't a plant I thought went into an herb garden," Dudley reassured.

Harry sighed and sat back with his hands on the ground behind him. This summer Aunt Petunia had gotten it in her head that she wanted an herb garden, some bollocks about it being healthier and trendy. So of course it became Harry's job to plant one. She left it to her nephew to buy the plants from the local market. So Harry bought herbs, just not the ones that his Aunt probably wanted. What harm could come from Dudley knowing more? He already knew they were the wrong plants and hadn't told his mum.

"That's mugwort."

Dudley nodded, "Is it a magic-y plant?"

Harry smiled. It was odd, ever since Sirius died, he never felt like smiling except for when his cousin showed his new uncharacteristic interest in magic.
"Sort of... It is used in potions but is also edible just by itself. Muggles consider it a weed." Harry found a sick joy in planting a "weed" in his aunt's garden.

The conversation continued for a few minutes. Dudley asked questions about potions, he was very interested in magic that could be done without a wand. Harry worked while his cousin talked, and when Dudley's voice moved to his left side, Harry was surprised to find his cousin on the ground helping him plant.

Harry gave Dudley a puzzled look.

"What? I have been slowing you down with my chatting and if you're not finished when dad gets home he won't be happy." Dudley looked a bit pale at the idea of his dad being unhappy.

"What's it to you if Vernon's unhappy with me?"

"Well you know, he blames you for the attack last summer..."

Dudley looked down at his work and stayed suspiciously quiet. Harry stopped working and looked closely at him; he was pale and a bit sweaty.

"Dud... is Vernon bothering you?"

Dudley seemed to focus on his planting with a laser precision, "Never mind you."

Harry decided to let the topic drop. No reason to push his cousin if he didn't want to talk about it. He understood that sentiment very well. Harry was about to voice his understanding when a wave of dizziness washed over him, it felt like a breeze fluttered through his mind and wiped away all his thoughts. He swayed for a moment but then steadied himself. Dudley didn't seem to notice and started asking questions again.

"So... Potions is like chemistry?"

Harry glanced at Dudley, "Sort of, I guess."
Dudley nodded, "Does that mean that… m.. mu…. Muggles? That how you say it?" Harry nodded. "Well can Muggles make them?"

Harry stopped working for a moment to think, he reached up and scratched his nose leaving a dirt smudge.

"I don't think so… when you brew a potion there are a bunch of rules about stirring and how to prepare ingredients." Harry collected his thoughts for a moment, Dudley sat back for what he assumed was a bit of a lesson.

"See I have a friend who is muggle-born, means both her parents have no magic."

Dudley sat up straight, "that can happen?"

Harry nodded "Yeah, but I will get back to that. So my friend looked up a bunch of stuff about muggles and magic. She learned that all the stuff you do while making a potion is like a ritual that infuses the potion with some of the maker's magic, plus the magic that is naturally in some ingredients. Together it creates the potion." He was surprised he could recall so much information with such clarity.

Dudley pondered this for a moment, "so if there is magic in the potion then will it work on muggles?"

The answer popped right into Harry's head, he could recall the sound of Hermione's voice as she told him. "Yes and no. See, any potion that is meant to have a short term effect like basic healing potions and such, will probably work on a muggle because it only uses the magic in the potion. Any potion that has a long term effect will run out of magic but then supplements it with a bit of the wizard's magic, like draught of living death that keeps the user in a sleeping death like state."

Dudley's face took on a look of intense concentration, "So you're saying that some potions will work and ones that are meant to last a long time or work for a long time will just stop working on a muggle. Like for those potions the magic is a catalyst?"

Harry's eyes became wide, Dudley sounded… smart. "I reckon that's about right, where did you learn words like catalyst?"
Dudley became slightly red, "been studying… I might need a plan B, you know… if boxing doesn't work out. Dad thinks I'm being a pansy."

A large smile lit up Harry's face, "well, I think it's brilliant."

Dudley smiled back, both of them turned to their work.

Harry was slowly realizing that his cousin was able to pull him out of his depressed mood because he was like a representation of hope. For the last week Harry had been moping around and feeling sorry for himself, but then there was Dudley everyday being less afraid, less prejudice and really trying to improve himself. Harry was still very guilty and very sad, but having his cousin trying to understand him and making up for all the bad years was… uplifting. He hoped Sirius was watching him and smiling, his godfather had always wanted to shake off all the pure blood mentality and right here in his godson's home, was progress.

Harry felt another blanket of fuzzy thoughts descend over his mind as he continued planting, but it was only a few minutes later when his quiet was broken by a strange sound. It was like someone was trying to hold back laughter or…

Harry glanced at Dudley, he wasn't crying but his eyes were glassy and a bit red. He seemed to be trying very hard not to make any sound. Harry reached out awkwardly and placed his hand on his cousin's arm. Dudley turned towards him.

"Sorry," he mumbled.

"It's OK… do you want to… I don't know, talk about it?" Harry mumbled back. This was new territory for them, but who did Dudley really have to talk to? His family was… his family... and his friends were not very genuine.

"It's just… I was hoping you could help me by making a potion that would make dad nicer." Dudley turned completely red. "But then you told me about how it won't last on a muggle so… it doesn't matter."

Harry was confused, why would Dudder's want Vernon to be nicer, he was only mean to Harry.
"Why…?" Harry wasn't sure how to word his question but Dudley seemed to understand and suddenly burst with a flood of words.

"BECAUSE!" He yelled but stopped when he realized how loud he was "Because…," He hissed. "He's mean to you; he's mean to anything different, not just magic. But… but I KNOW you saved me from those Dementy things and that makes you OK in my book, BUT he thinks it's all your fault! AND because he's mean to me about wanting to be smarter… and because… because mum told me about Aunt Lily after the Dementy attack and… dad overheard… and..." Dudley was unable to get the words out, he was thoroughly upset.

Harry was shocked, he could feel the blood draining from his face. "What did he do to your mum?"

Dudley shook his head and took a deep breath, "just forget it Harry, there's nothing we can do right now…"

Harry's expression was hard, he didn't love his aunt but he didn't want anything bad to happen to her. Vernon's only redeeming quality was that he loved his wife and son, but his love was apparently conditional. When he had first gotten home for summer Vernon had knocked him around a bit rougher than usual but Harry assumed it was because his "crazy criminal" godfather was gone. That night he heard his Aunt and Uncle arguing. It was odd since they almost never argued because Petunia just submitted. The next morning his aunt had a bruise on her arm and one on her collar bone. Harry had suspicions but couldn't figure out what would cause Vernon to turn on his wife.

"There is something we can do; just because we can't use a long term potion doesn't mean we can't use short term ones… a lot of them." Harry made eye contact with Dudley, who smiled back.

The curtains of the kitchen window facing the back yard shifted, the movement caught Harry’s eye. He peeked over just in time to see his aunt turn away.

---

The sun was just touching the horizon when Harry and Dudley stood to look at the herb garden they had planted. The sinking sun created a halo of liquid light that bloomed over the fence and surrounded the house. If Harry hadn't grown up here, he would think it was a pleasant place to live.

"I better get inside and clean up before dad gets home," Dudley grimaced as he spoke.
Harry nodded, he watched his cousin slip into the house.

The sun was still shining pale orange light, enough to give the neat backyard an almost other worldly glow. Harry sat down where he stood on the slightly damp grass, and he thought for a moment about how unpleasant the wet spots on his pants would be, but couldn't bring himself to care. He let the calm atmosphere clear his thoughts, the fuzzy wool blanket over his mind lifted a bit and he felt the sting in his heart that he tried to ignore. Only when he was alone and unoccupied did he feel it so acutely.

Sirius was gone, and he was never coming back. The death of someone you love should be literally world ending, and sky shattering, something should be different. Harry glanced around the yard and looked down at the grass between his legs. The world was still turning and the sky was above his head, he reached down and ripped up some of the well-manicured lawn. Throwing the blades into the air and watching them fall, as everything eventually did, brought a odd sort of clarity. Nothing was going to be any different, the war wasn't going to stop and he wasn't going to leave the Dursley's. Sirius might as well have died the day his parents did, his existence was negligible... all it did was hurt Harry.

He curled his fist around another section of the lawn and squeezed, his knuckles became white and his palm stung. Anger, boiling water right under the surface of his skin, coursed through Harry. Sirius surviving his parents made no real difference, it didn't stop Peter, Voldemort still came back, Cedric died… all his existence did was give Harry hope and then rip it away. It flew through the veil with his godfather's body! Hot, liquid frustration rose up and threatened to spill from Harry's eyes, so he squeezed them shut and forced himself to breathe. He wasn't mad at Sirius for trying to be there for him, he was mad at the universe for being affected so little by someone who changed so much for Harry emotionally. His arrival and then his death impacted Harry, shattering him, leaving him made of sharp broken glass.

Harry let go of the grass and turned his hand palm up, little crescent indents were fading quickly from his skin. Nothing he did seemed to make a difference, but if Harry was being honest with himself he wasn't really doing anything at all. He just let life sweep him along and reacted. Maybe he should try and find a way to change the game, start small…

Harry stood up and brushed his pants off. He would have to think about this a bit more, maybe if he was lucky an opportunity would present itself and Harry would take it rather than averting his eyes. Being a reactionary person was getting him nowhere, time to try something new.

The sound of a car pulling into the driveway caused Harry to shuffle his feet and slip through the back door and up the stairs. Once he was at the top, he heard the front door open and close, there was a crash and a pound like something was just kicked and hit a wall. "WHAT in the BLOODY
HELL is that doing by the door?! IT'S IN MY WAY!

There was some movement and shuffling and then the soft mumbling of words between his aunt and uncle. His aunt's voice was becoming more shrill, a tone she normally only took with Harry. Not being able to resist Harry crept down the stairs until he was close enough to hear talking from the living room while staying out of sight. Harry's breathing was shallow and every part of his body was taut with tension and just a hint of the metallic sting of fear.

"You didn't let Dudley go around with the freak again today did you?!" Vernon's voice was rising. "Don't look away from me while I talk to you!"

A shuddering breath, like someone trying to keep down panic was audible before Petunia responded.

"NO! Of course not."

Vernon's heavy footfalls indicated he had closed the distance between himself and his wife, heavy breaths were the only sound for a moment. Then a light thud like someone being pressed into a wall. "You better not have, I won't have MY son becoming like that BOY, or like YOU."

Another thud punctuated his sentence.

Vernon stomped back to the front door, luckily he didn't bother looking up the stairwell. He ripped his coat violently off the rack and stormed back out of the house.

The sound of the car peeling out of the driveway and down the street faded; it was replaced with soft hiccupping sobs. A shuffling sound informed Harry that his cousin was sitting on the step right above him. Harry didn't even notice his approach. Dudley looked into Harry's eyes, "He's apparently been like this since last summer, we were away at school and mum was alone with him."

Harry felt his chest constrict as his cousin slid past him and down the stairs. He could hear mumbled reassurances and stifled cries. Harry slid to his feet quietly and walked down the stairs with all the stealth he learned as a child in this house. When he rounded the corner to the space between the foyer and the living room, he saw the shattered remains of a wooden shoe tree that had been by the front door. The splintered wood was piled below a dent in the opposing wall. Harry felt his anger below his skin, so much like how he felt last year. He didn't love his aunt but she
didn't deserve to be terrorized. He moved until he could see around the couch. His aunt was sitting on the floor by the TV like she had be unable to stand any longer and just let herself slide down the wall. Her face was covered by both her hands as she cried, she leaned to the side into Dudley’s chest. Dudley was kneeling on the floor besides his mother with his arms wrapped around her shoulders. There was nothing he could really do besides hold her until she calmed.

Harry felt very out of place; this was a family crisis, but he wasn't really a part of this family. He stood awkwardly, he felt like he was watching something he shouldn't be, he was invading a private moment. Harry had never been very good at comforting others and crying women were even harder for him. Anger and sadness swirled in his mind as he watched.

Dudley looked up at Harry after a few minutes. Their eyes met and Harry felt his anger become hotter and his chest constrict tighter, his torso felt like a pressure cooker. His cousin's eyes were glassy and pleading, he slowly shook his head. Harry gave a stiff nod and turned to quietly go upstairs. He knew Dudley would be up there with him after his aunt Petunia was calmed.

It was almost 30 minutes later when Harry heard any sound of life in the house. There was a thud repeating over and over like someone was slowly dragging something heavy up the stairs. Harry went to the hallway and saw Dudley struggling to drag a trunk to the landing, he was halfway up and breathing hard. After a moment of confusion Harry recognized the trunk as his own Hogwarts trunk, the realization took a moment to sink in, he scrambled to help his cousin with the burden. Harry scooted past Dudley to get behind the trunk and push up. Once they were on level ground each boy took a side and carried it to Harry's room. When the door closed both boys started talking at once.

"What are you-"

"Mum let me-"

Harry stopped and let Dudley speak first, he was probably trying to answer Harry's question while he was asking. Dudley recognized the silence as his cue.

"It took me a while but I convinced mum that you can and will help and she unlocked the cupboard and let me take your things. I know you can't use your wand during break but I thought… maybe." Dudley trailed off not really sure what he was asking for.

Harry didn't respond, he walked over to the trunk and flipped the top up. He rustled around inside until he pulled out his first year potions book. Having all of his supplies in the trunk since his first year is what made it so heavy, he had no place else to store his things. Harry shook that depressing
thought out of his mind and began flipping through the manual.

Dudley stood nervously behind the smaller boy, he shifted from one foot to another and rubbed his hands together. "I… umm, Harry?"

Harry looked over his shoulder.

"Just don't hurt him please," Dudley pleaded.

Harry felt a momentary dizziness flow through his mind, for a brief moment his cousin request seemed idiotic, why wouldn't they hurt Vernon? He was a bully and a brute, then as fast as it came over him the feeling left. Harry gave Dudley a reassuring nod, as he mentally told himself it was normal to want to hurt people who have hurt you… right?

Yes, well no time to contemplate that thought, Harry rebuked himself as he came to the page of the textbook he was looking for. He held the book out to Dudley who took it with cautious movements. The larger boy read over the potion description and gave a small nod.

"This should do," He whispered. His round face was very pale and his eyes were bright.

Harry assumed that using magic was still rather off putting to the boy. He was also probably upset it had come down to this last resort with his father. Harry wasn't sure it was the right thing to do, he could hear Ron in his head telling him to do it, the magic hater deserved it and the irony was hilarious. On his other shoulder, Hermione was telling him it wasn't moral to dose people with potions without their consent, that it was manipulation. Harry hoped that the potion he chose to use would be a good middle ground.

Harry took the book back from Dudley and began looking over the ingredients. It was a water based potion, that's a relief. Harry looked over his oil base supply and saw it was very low. He pulled out his standard size 2 pewter cauldron and a set of forty small glass vial about the size of his little finger and laid them out neatly. He looked back at the book and made a note of the ingredients he had in his potion kit. He pulled out the last of his golden root and chopped it finely with his silver potion knife, he placed the root on a square of parchment and put it to the side.

Harry was glad this was an easy first year potion, otherwise he would be worried about poisoning his uncle. He pulled out his last rose quartz crystal and ground it into a fine powder and put that aside on paper as well. Next was morning dew, Harry had plenty of that. He took out a vial and put
it aside. The last ingredient was burn hazel… Harry tried to remember what that was.

Dudley was once again shifting nervously, when Harry stopped moving it seemed to unsettle him.

"Ah!" Harry exclaimed as he remembered.

Dudley, startled by the outburst, became even whiter.

"Sorry Dud, I just remembered that burn hazel is also called nettle."

Dudley's blank face told Harry he needed to explain.

"Nettle is the one of the plants we put out back, it's the one with the prickly texture you complained about."

Dudley nodded then took off out the door to get the plant. It was only moments before he was back panting and holding out a few leaves. While Harry prepared the nettle he told Dudley to get a liter of water. By the time the water arrived Harry had the leaves prepared and on their own square of paper.

Both boys sat in silence as they waited for the water to boil, they were using Harry's portable self-lighting potion burner. Once the water was at the appropriate temperature Harry pulled out his glass stirrer and began. This was a very simple potion and would take only thirty minutes. Harry was stirring fifteen times clockwise when a faint glow went from his fingers, down the rod he was using and into the potion. On the fifteenth revolution the potion turned a bright sunny yellow like it was supposed to. Harry knew his magic and the magic in the ingredients was the reason all the stuff he put in the potion could become one cohesive, smooth liquid of a color that made little sense, but he was always in a crowded potion class and never really paid attention. Here in the dim, quiet bedroom, he could see the subtle glow of magic and feel it working. For the first time, Harry felt like he understood why some people loved potions. It wasn't a wand movement and some words that forced magic to be what you wanted, it was a soft coercion, while whispering sweet nothings to the magic until you convinced it that it wanted to be a part of the potion all along. Harry definitely understood why so many Slytherins excelled at potions and why no matter how hard Hermione tried to do everything perfectly her potions came out just a tad lighter or darker than they were supposed to. There really was a touch to making potions that some people had and some people didn't. Harry wondered if he had it, and if it was how he had made it this far when everything in class was against him.
Harry reached for the last ingredient, the morning dew. He read the instructions that told him to pour the dew directly into the middle of the potion. Harry thought for a moment about what reason there was behind the instruction but decided that he could experiment later and did as the book said. The potion turned a softer slightly transparent yellow like it was supposed to. Harry imagined there was an even more pleasant yellow it could be if the recipe was tweaked by a master.

"OK." Harry said as he put the glass bottle of dew back. He turned off the burner and started to clean up. "Now we wait for it to cool."

Dudley nodded, and for the first time since Harry started brewing the larger boy sat down. He crossed his leg on the other side of the cauldron. Harry thought about how surreal it was to be sitting here brewing with his cousin watching and being generally OK with all of it, odd how time changes everything.

When the potion was only steaming a little bit, Harry pulled out his ladle and began scooping and pouring the thin liquid into the small glass vials. Dudley watched with rapt attention, and after Harry finished and capped the third vial Dudley asked if he could help. Harry reached into his kit, took out his secondary ladle, and handed it to the other boy. Together, they soon had all forty small vials filled with corks in the top. Harry reached into his kit one more time and pulled out a small brass bowl and turned on the portable burner and placed the bowl over it. He dropped what looked to Dudley like a couple of chunks of wax into the bowl and waited, occasionally poking the chunks until they were melted.

"What now?" Dudley asked.

"Well we want this potion to last, so we are sealing the bottles."

Dudley nodded. Once the wax was a smooth liquid Harry pulled out a box with slots in it the same size as the vials. He picked up a vial and demonstrated dipping the top of it in the wax until where the cork met the glass was covered, then he let some wax drip off and put it in the box where the slots held the vial upright so it could dry. Dudley repeated the process with Harry until all the vial were sealed. Harry closed the box with a heavy hand, "I hope this works" he muttered.

"Me too," Dudley whispered.

"Hey, it's not that big a deal, it's just a simple Cheering Potion. If it doesn't work it won't hurt Vernon. Because he is a muggle, it should wear off after about 12 hours. So, we put it in his breakfast and dinner, or evening tea would be better, then see what happens." Harry sounded much more confident than he felt.
"What happens after we run out?" Dudley sounded worried.

"Well, I'm hoping after a whole summer of being cheered and thinking everything's OK artificially, he might just start actually thinking like that..." Again Harry put more confidence in his voice than he felt.

Harry wasn't sure if anything he said was true or if what he was doing was right, but he couldn't see any other option. He didn't want to admit it to Dudley, but he was afraid of what Vernon would do if he kept at Petunia the way he was. According to his cousin, it had been getting worse and worse, and his mum would call him at school upset. The only other option would be if Petunia and Vernon separated. Harry highly doubted that would happen, Petunia wasn't strong enough and Vernon would just terrorize her into silence. Eventually, Dudley would have to take matters into his own hands and Harry wasn't sure how that would end... so, this potion was it. Last chance.

Harry picked up the wood box and placed it on his lap. The clinking of vials inside settled down and Harry counted them. There would be enough in half a vial for about twelve-ish hours. The book said it would last that long on its own and twenty-four with the user's magic. So for a muggle it was twelve hours. Harry looked up from the box to his cousin. "So, now that I made this, will you tell me what's really going on?"

Dudley's eyes became wide. "I told you, Dad overheard mum talking about-"

"No." Harry cut him off, "it can't just be about my mum."

Dudley's face became tight, he looked at the box in Harry's lap and sighed.

"If I tell you, promise you won't tell anyone?"

Harry nodded, "I promise"

Dudley took a deep breath and let it out, "She really was talking about your mum. I told her that you and magic couldn't be all bad because you saved me. Mum told me about aunt Lily... she told me lots of stories. She sounded nice." Dudley let a small smile slip onto his face.
Harry smiled back.

"Then while mum was talking she seemed to be thinking about something. She looked like she was struggling. Then, she told me that since I didn't hate magic anymore, that she would tell me something she never told anyone… she said that she was a squib. I asked what that was and she explained. That's when dad burst in and… well, you know." Dudley had a pained look on his face. He met his cousin's green eyes with a determined expression, "I want you to know something, and mum would never say this to you directly, so I will. She told me that when you saved my life, she felt like maybe it was aunt Lily letting her know it was time for her to let go of her anger. That maybe you were sent to her for that reason. Now you are helping us again, so… yeah, that's all."

Harry was shocked, his aunt wasn't completely normal after all, and she was forgiving her sister. She probably saw lots of thing other people didn't, just like Ms. Figg. Maybe she had hoped when she was younger that she might be a witch too, and when she wasn't… well Harry didn't forgive Petunia, but he definitely understood her better. It also explained why she had been somewhat nice to him this summer. She still gave him a ton of chores, but he had found it odd he only got the ones he liked, such as cooking or gardening. Now that he thought about it she might have been doing it as a cover so Vernon wouldn't think she was going easy on him.

Dudley was twisting his hands in his shirt and looked nervous. Harry thought he might want to ask something and was about to invite him to speak when he burst all of a sudden, "you don't think I could be one, do you?!"

Harry raised an eyebrow, "a squib?"

Dudley nodded.

"When the dementor attacked you did you see anything?"

Dudley shook his head negative, "no, just felt like… felt..."

"Yeah they feel like that for me too, but if you couldn't see it then you aren't a squib." Harry explained.

It was late when they finished talking, both boys got ready for bed. Dudley checked on his mum and she was sleeping, Harry put the potion box under the loose floorboard and climbed into bed. He rolled over, switched his lamp off and looked into the darkness of the room.
"Weird day…” he muttered before drifting to sleep.

---

"On this day in history: people related to you whose names you do not know performed actions that were never recorded."

-Night Vale

AN- This is the bottom of the page, there is no more past this. Nothing after this sentence. Thanks for reading. Let me know what you think.

2/13/2017

Readjusted.

The greatest feat any human accomplishes in their life is readjusting. During extreme circumstances humans are endlessly adaptable.

Chapter End Notes

"On this day in history: people related to you whose names you do not know performed actions that were never recorded."

-Night Vale

AN- This is the bottom of the page, there is no more past this. Nothing after this sentence. Thanks for reading. Let me know what you think.

2/13/2017

Readjusted.
AN- So I am updating again because the beginning of this story is kinda slow. I want people to be drawn in so I thought I would put the next part up in hopes of getting you all hooked! It will be awhile before any of the new magic is brought up, but it will be cool I promise. Just don't expect updates this fast all the time, or I will run out of pre-written story.

Thanks to those who reviewed already! I was happy to only get positive reviews and some constructive comments, let's keep up this trend!

Thank you to my Betaminijaxter

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 2

Door to Escape Through

The next morning Harry woke up to the sound of Aunt Petunia calling for him. Still half asleep, he ignored her until she began to pound on the door. Harry jolted upright

"I'm up!" He yelled to the pounding, and it stopped.
It took a few minutes of eye rubbing and stumbling around his room for Harry to remember the events of last night. A sharp stab of anxiety cleared the sleep from his mind as he finished pulling his pants up. He ran to the door, swung it open and stopped just in time to remember the potion. He almost tripped over his own feet trying to turn around. Harry pried up the floor board, flipped open the box and grabbed one vial, and made sure it was safe in his pants pocket. He went down to the kitchen, where only Petunia and Vernon were present.

"ABOUT TIME, BOY." Vernon was at the table looking pale with dark circles under his eyes.

"Sorry, sir," Harry mumbled as he moved to take over the eggs from his aunt, who remained quiet. She gave him a considering look and then went to the fridge. Harry had never seen that expression directed at him by his aunt before. He glanced around the kitchen so he could covertly look at Vernon and then back at his aunt, she was studiously looking in the fridge ignoring him. Harry shrugged.

"Vernon, dear, why don't you take the day off and rest? You look dreadful." Petunia said softly when she turned around.

Vernon's face twisted into something unrecognizable, "I. AM. FINE." He ground out from behind his teeth, giving his wife a glare equivalent of a slap to the face.

Petunia quickly turned back to what she was doing in the refrigerator.

"BOY, get me coffee!"

Harry moved to comply. Relief flew through him; the cheering potion tasted like sugar, so it would blend with the drink. The coffee pot was on the far end of the counter nearest to Vernon's chair, and as Harry approached, the man looked like he wanted to reach out and strangle his nephew. Harry grabbed a mug and moved slightly away from his Uncle, not only were his eyes scary but he smelled of whisky and something unwashed. After pouring the coffee, he scooted even farther away from Vernon and made like he was adding sugar. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the vial, he broke the seal and popped the top off. Just as Harry was about to pour the contents into the mug, he saw his aunt look directly at him, and their eyes met. Petunia was pale and worried her hands, Harry was sure she would squeal but there was no backing out now. He continued to look right at her as he poured half the vial into the coffee. He put the cork back in, then slipped it into his pocket, and Petunia looked away to put some bacon on the fryer. She didn’t say a word.
Harry felt… unsettled. Dudley didn't know what potion they were making until they were making it, so Petunia couldn't know what was in the vial. She had caught her "delinquent" nephew putting an unknown magical potion in her husband's drink, and had just turned away. What had been going on while he and Dudley were away at school? Harry pushed down the growing ball of unease and served his Uncle the coffee.

Harry was shoved to the side the moment the cup hit the table. He almost fell over his sock clad feet but managed to stay upright.

Vernon gripped around the mug with his big meaty hands, ignoring the handle. He raised the cup to his mouth and stopped.

"Well, BOY? Are you going to finish my breakfast or not!!"

Harry jumped, he hadn't realized he was standing there staring. He scurried back to the pan of eggs just in time to see Petunia turning back to the bacon. It was odd to cook with his aunt and not, for his aunt but Harry tried to ignore the feeling and listened for the sounds of drinking. Petunia seemed to be doing the very same thing next to him.

It was a tense minute before a slurping sound announced that Vernon had begun to drink the coffee. Harry looked over his shoulder at his Uncle and Petunia turned around completely.

Vernon noticed the other two looking at him again, "What is it now?" he groused.

Harry looked back at the eggs. Another few minutes of slurping and Vernon could be heard mumbling, "t's good coffee."

Breakfast was done and being plated when Vernon stood abruptly causing the other two occupants of the room to startle.

"I think I am under the weather; you were right Pet. I am going to call out of work and go back to bed."

Petunia gave a small nod.
"Do you mind bringing my breakfast up later?" he asked.

"No… no, I don't mind," she stuttered back.

Vernon was walking out of the kitchen as Dudley was entering, looking like he had just rolled out of bed. Vernon reached up and ruffled his son's hair as he passed by, "morning, Dudders."

Dudley was frozen in shock as his Father continued to the stairs and ascended.

Everyone in the kitchen was still and silent until they heard the master bedroom door close. Harry let his shoulders sag, and Dudley was moving across the kitchen to his mother. Petunia raised a shaking hand to her mouth, her eyes were bright and glassy and her breathing was becoming harsh.

"It’s OK mum… it's OK," Dudley whispered reassuringly as he patted her arm.

"I… I just… I didn't know," Petunia stuttered through her shaking fingers.

Harry moved in front of his aunt, "you didn't know what I was giving him, did you? For all you knew he could have dropped dead."

She nodded, tears spilling over her eyes and clinging to her lashes. For the first time, Harry thought she looked kind of pretty, in a very sad and tortured way.

"What has been going on here while Dudley and I were gone, that you would be willing to let me use magic? That would push you as far as possibly killing him?" Harry leaned a bit forward as he spoke.

Petunia just sobbed and shook her head. Dudley gave his cousin a warning look that told him not to push it. Harry sighed and dropped the question. After a few minutes of standing awkwardly while Petunia calmed down, Dudley started talking.

"It's OK, mum. The potion Harry gave him is called a… umm Cheering potion?" He looked at Harry who nodded.
Dudley continued, "It doesn't make him forget, it just makes him happy and willing to overlook things that normally upset him. Harry made a bunch of it and said he thinks after a while the effect might become permanent…"

Petunia looked at Harry in a way she never had before, with gratitude. She also seemed unsure and confused. "Thank you, Harry… you didn't… you owed me nothing."

Harry opened his mouth, but found no words waiting behind his lips. His Aunt seemed to understand, and didn't say anything more about it.

"What if it's not permanent?" She asked instead.

"We will have to figure it out when the time comes. But if anything happens, go to Miss. Figg, she will have a way to contact me." Harry punctuated his sentence by holding up his finger to signal he needed a moment. He turned and went up to his bedroom. When he came back down he held the wooden box with the rest of the potion in it.

He opened the box and held it out to his aunt, "this is all I could make, and each vial is one day, half in the morning and half with dinner." He held the box out a little more and Petunia took it with great care. Harry reached into his pocket and took out the half used potion and slipped it back into the box and closed the lid. "You can keep the box, I needed to get a new one anyway. Had this one since I was eleven."

Petunia held the box to her chest gently and smiled a small smile.

"Well… if that's all I think I'm going to go back upstairs." Harry swung his arms a bit as he spoke, unsure of what to do or say at this point, he turned and left.

On his way out he could hear his aunt talking to her son. Whispered words about relief and regret floated up the stairs behind Harry. He understood how his aunt felt, she was willing to do anything to fix the situation, even let a wizard that hated her husband give him an unknown potion. Harry had been willing to endanger his friends to save Sirius and ended up becoming a murderer, not with his own hands, but Harry knew it was mostly his fault that Sirius died. His fault, because he didn't have the correct information, because Snape wasn't teaching him and Dumbledore was keeping him in the dark… It didn't completely excuse Harry's actions, but he felt righteous anger over the fact that they led him down the path of being a killer. Harry wanted to find redemption but he didn't know where to look. One thing was for sure, he needed to make his own choices without
Dumbledore keeping things from him or influencing his thoughts. The old man had a way of saying things just right so that Harry did what he wanted.

Harry felt dizzy as he laid back on his bed. The ceiling spun and wavered in front of his eyes as an unnatural coldness swept through his mind. It washed away his guilt and sadness. An icy clarity invaded his thoughts like an infection. Harry knew with almost complete certainty that he needed to leave. He needed to be someplace else, someplace where he could expand his independance over the summer. The problem was, without magic he didn't know how he was going to get as far as the end of the street without being caught. The night bus wasn't wouldn't work, last time he was still found after using it.

Harry made a list of things he had at his disposal and obstacles to overcome. He didn't have spells because of the trace on his wand, but he did have potions and his cloak… but was it enough? He wrote to Dumbledore every two days because he was instructed to and honestly would do anything to keep the old man away from him. Harry was almost positive that there was a way for the Headmaster to know where Hedwig was coming from when she delivered her letters and he knew that all his mail was inspected, so he couldn't ask for help from anyone. He was also pretty sure there was always an Order member outside the house, disillusioned. Sometimes he saw the distortion they caused when they moved around.

He needed a way to leave without anyone knowing so that they won't look for him… Was there something that he was forgetting, something they wouldn't expect?

There was a light rapping on bedroom door, he sat up as Dudley peeked through the crack he had opened. Seeing Harry sitting up and awake he entered entirely and closed the door behind him. As Harry looked at his cousin a clear tone rang through his head like a brass bell.

Dudley... He had Dudley.

Harry looked his cousin over with hard calculating eyes. Dudley was becoming uncomfortable as silent moments passed.

"Ummm… Harry?" He whispered.

Harry snapped out of his thoughts, his eyes cleared and focused on his cousin's face. "Yes, Dudley?"
"I was ummm, I was going to go to the store for mum and was wondering if you needed anything?"
Dudley wrung his hands as he spoke.

Harry's eyes widened a bit, this was new. His cousin was being nice before, but now he seemed to
be trying to anticipate Harry's needs. He felt the clarity of his thoughts slipping away and his mind
became muddled again. Harry clung to the clarity for dear life, he felt a plan forming and needed it
to solidify before it slipped from his mind.

After a few more moments of silence, in which Dudley looked even more nervous, Harry felt the
puzzle pieces fall into place.

"You feel like you owe me more now, because of your father and you feel more obligation because
I helped your mum. When it had only been saving you from the dementor, you were only paying
one debt." Harry felt a bit of a drawl curl the end of his word. He sounded like Malfoy… heh.

Dudley shifted on his feet, he was clutching the bottom of his shirt now. Harry realized that his
demeanor was upsetting his cousin. He took a deep breath and let the coldness float away forcing
his normal warmth to blanket his mind.

"What if I told you that I had a favor that would only be a minor inconvenience for the summer and
then I would call us even?" Harry leaned forward in an inviting manner as he spoke, letting a lazy
smile drift over his face.

Dudley visibly relaxed when Harry went back to normal, he raised an eyebrow. "Really? I would
help, whatever you need."

Harry nodded, "Go to the store Dud, I will fill you in when you get back. I need a bit to get things
ready. While you're out pick up some note paper."

Dudley left in a rush, he seemed eager to get back and help Harry.

---

Harry took a nap while he waited for his cousin. He figured the strange dizziness that has been
plaguing him lately was probably due to poor sleep. All summer his dreams were filled with
images of people who had died or been hurt because of the war. Sometimes he would wake up, and
not be able to go back to sleep.

His sleep was sound while he waited for Dudley. Harry slept so deeply he had trouble pulling himself awake to answer the knocking at his door. Once he managed to pry his eyes open he rolled out of bed in a fashion only obtainable by a teenager. He stumbled to the door and swung it open.

"Hey, Dud…"

Dudley stood nervously in the hall, Harry didn't move to let his cousin in. His brain was so fuzzy, he was wondering why the larger boy was standing in the hallway. An entire sixty seconds passed before enough fog cleared from Harry's mind, and he scrambled to let Dudley in.

"Sorry! I just woke up, and… well, I'm slow in the morning." Harry gave his lame excuse as he walked back to the bed and sat down.

Dudley nodded even if he was still a bit confused, "Might want to try coffee for that."

Harry felt himself flush a bit. The irritating wooly blanket was once again draped over his thoughts, making them heavy and hard to grasp… What was wrong with him?

Both boys moved farther into the room. Harry sat on his bed and Dudley took the rickety old desk chair.

"So, what's this plan of yours?"

Harry took a deep breath and tried to push through his fog addled brain to grasp his plan firmly. The harder he pushed the dizzier he became. Then like a rubber band snapping on his wrist Harry felt everything become clear and the dizziness left. He locked eyes with his cousin. Dudley visibly tensed as Harry focused his hard gaze on him.

Harry nodded when Dudley focused back on his gaze and seemed to be ready to start. "Did you get the paper I asked for?"

Dudley nodded and held up a plastic bag.
"Good, put it on the desk."

Dudley complied.

Harry sat up a bit straighter, "I have two tasks for you, one will be something you will have to do every couple of days and the other is a one-time deal." He went over to his trunk and pulled out a couple of bottles of ink, 3 quills and an old potions essay. He handed all of it to Dudley.

"I need you to practice copying my handwriting," Harry stated plainly.

Dudley looked at the supplies and back to his cousin, "Why?"

Harry reached up and rubbed his eyes under his glasses.

"Dumbledore has me writing him every couple of days. As long as he doesn't think anything's wrong he probably won't use any magical means to identify the writer."

Dudley let the words roll about in his head for a moment, then his eyes became wide as their meaning sunk in.

"You're leaving!?" he all but bellowed.

Harry shushed him with a small glare for good measure. "Don't yell it for everyone to hear! There is always at least one person watching this house!"

Dudley slapped his hand over his mouth. His eyes narrowed as he comprehended the situation, that his home was under surveillance.

"Yes, I'm leaving, but not right away. I plan on going in about a month, the day before my birthday."
"Why wait so long?" Dudley mumbled between his fingers.

"Well…" Harry wondered if it was a good idea to give away so much information, but then again, he just lost Sirius due to a lack of information. "Did anyone ever tell you about the wards over this house?"

Dudley shook his head.

Harry dropped his head into his hands. "Of course not… that would be just too honest for the old man."

He lifted his head, "There are wards over this house, and over you and your family, based on the blood relation between me and your mother. They are there to protect you from all sorts of bad things. I am staying here for the month so they can charge up. It's like a battery. Also gives you time to learn my hand writing."

Harry waited for his cousin's reaction, and what he got was a surprise.

Dudley flushed a bit, "So the ward things protect us from dark things? Like the dementors? Or… the guy who did in your parents?"

Harry nodded slowly.

"Well umm…” Dudley looked at the floor, "Thanks for that then… for you know… not leaving us defenseless."

Harry gave a small smile "No prob Dud, I wouldn't leave you to get killed."

The cousins smiled at each other for a moment, then Harry's eyes became hard once more and the warmth was gone.

"OK, so here's the plan."
Both boys leaned forward to organize the break out.

"You are going to write to my Headmaster every two days; I will leave Hedwig for you, and I will give you a bunch of pre-written letters. All you have to do, is fill in a bit about current events at the end, and it should be enough to fool him. Then on the night I leave, I will need you to break into Mrs. Figg's house for me." Harry leaned back.

"Wait, what!?" Dudley slapped his hand over his mouth again.

"You still have the lock picking kit from your bad guy days, right?" Harry asked.

Dudley nodded, "But stealing wasn't a part of the deal… I don't want to get arrested."

"No! No…" Harry laughed a bit. "We won't be taking anything, it will actually be better if there was no sign of us being there. See, Ms. Figg is a squib, so I can use her fireplace to go where I need to be."

Dudley relaxed, "So you just need me to open the door, and then re-lock it?"

Harry smirked, "you're catching on. You see, I can't use magic or the ministry will know."

His cousin made an 'Oh' of understanding.

"So what about being seen? Won't the people watching you wonder why you aren't outside ever?"

Harry was surprised at his Dudley’s astuteness.. Now that he thought about it, Dudley had always been fairly sly and perceptive. How else would he have been such a terrible bully for all those years, while all the adults of the neighborhood thought he was a perfect prince?

"Well, that's a favor I have to ask of your mum. I want to stage a fight. I need to think of something that would happen outside that would cause Aunt Petunia to ground me for the rest of the summer."
Dudley pondered for a moment, "Could you stage accidental magic?"

This suggestion caught Harry off guard. It wasn't a bad idea... how to do it though. Harry hopped off his bed and began sifting through all his school books in his trunk. He pulled out his third year potion text and began flipping through it. When he found the page he was looking for he held it up.

"I have all the stuff I need to make this. I only have to find a way to fake the magic burst."

Dudley leaned forward to read the description of the potion. It was a magical household weed killer.

Harry smirked at his cousin's surprised face "I can pour some of this on the garden, and then your mum can ground me, and have something to complain to the neighbors about."

Dudley looked impressed but his eyes held doubt, "How are you going to make the magic go off? Potions don't count right? Or the ministry would have gotten mad over the potion we made for my dad."

Harry nodded "Yeah I think brewing magic is too subtle, and it can't be a small bit of magic or I would have gotten a letter from the ministry every time I cracked a glass when I was mad."

Dudley sounded weary as he asked, "Can they tell what spell you use with your wand?"

Harry sighed. "Yeah, they can, but as far as I know they can't tell what was done with accidental magic, only that magic was expended... hmmm." Harry went back to his bed and flopped onto his back.

"I'm going to go practice using a quill while you think. Let me know if there is anything I can do."

Harry nodded and then draped his arm over his eyes. He heard Dudley get up, and the door creaking closed with a light snap at the end. Harry sighed again, could he really pull this off? Well, no time like the present to start trying. He rolled off the bed and began reading his text books. He began with potions year one, and moved forward through the subjects. He read some parts carefully over and over, while others he skimmed. Anything that looked useful, he put a scrap of paper in the pages to mark.
Harry spent the next week doing this, until he had at least glanced at every table of contents in every book. Even his copy of Quidditch Through the Ages... just in case.

**

After a week and a half of research, Harry only found one possibility for his plan. There were many mentions in his charms and transfiguration books about wandless magic done with intention. Something that few people are able to do. Harry thought he might have the ability to do this but couldn't practice to find out, and he didn't want to rely on something in the heat of the moment that might not work. Harry was beginning to lose hope. He really couldn't think of anything else that would cause his Aunt to ground him for so long that was believable.

Without any other books to research, Harry thought his plan might be coming to an abrupt halt. It was kind of crazy to begin with. Did he really think he could escape from under the Headmaster's nose and stay hidden? Was it really worth it? The only place he could think of to go was Grimmauld Place, and Harry wasn't certain that it was still under protection, or if Dumbledore was watching it. He also wasn't sure he wanted to be there... with Sirius's things. He was banking on the fact that without an owner the house wouldn't be safe even with the fidelius charm and no one would be there. But there was still the chance that he could floo in and be right in the middle of an order meeting.

Harry started picking up the books that were scattered around his floor and desk, with a pile of five of them he walked over to his trunk to dump them in. There was nothing more he could do. The thud of the books toppling into the trunk felt like someone pounding on his head for being thick enough to think this would work. He heaved a sigh and leaned over the open trunk gazing at the books for a moment more, feeling freedom slipping away. His freedom was like that folded paper at the bottom of his trunk, a strong gust and it's gone... wait... Harry pulled his mind out of his depressing teenage angst. That folded paper wasn't something Harry remembered packing. It was made of a thick, smooth, expensive paper that he didn't own. He reached for it but his hand hesitated right before touching the unknown paper, memories of the end of the triwizard tournament flashed through his mind. Harry grabbed a clean sock and shoved his hand into it before scooping up the paper.

The stationery was thick and stiff, definitely expensive like he had thought on first glance. With a quick flick of his wrist, Harry shook the paper open and gazed at the spidery scrawl. It looked very familiar. It wasn't the Headmaster's writing, and Harry had looked at his Hogwarts letter enough when he was young to know. Something about the writing rang a bell but he couldn't place it and he found that looking at it made him slightly irritated. After getting past the hand writing, Harry read the actual contents of the letter, but it wasn't a letter at all; it was a recipe. The instructions were titled "Life's Light" and it had a list of ingredients, then it had the instructions. At the very bottom there was a warning scribbled in a cramped version of the above handwriting. Harry's eyes widened to a comical size when he read the warning.
Warning: dropping or spilling this potion in anyway will cause a magical discharge that could be dangerous, handle with care.

Harry stopped, wondering where the paper had come from. Maybe it was Hermione's or one of his dorm mates, it didn't really matter because it solved his problem. He glanced over rest of the paper. He had everything that was needed and it didn't look too complicated. He slowly touched it with his bare finger and was relieved when it didn't turn out to be a portkey. Harry ripped the sock off and grasped the crisp paper with both hands holding it out at arm's length, smiling. After looking it over one more time to be sure, he bounced on his heels and laughed out loud. He didn't have to abandon his plan after all.

Harry jogged over to his door and into the hall, "DUDLEY!" he yelled as he made his way to the stairs. The closer he got, the more excited he became and the faster he moved. Halfway down the stairs his uncle's hulking form came into view at the bottom and Harry was too close to stop in time. His attempt to slow himself only caused him to pitch forward, his uncle pressed himself to the wall to avoid a collision. As Harry flew by, Vernon reached out and grabbed the back of his nephew's shirt effectively saving him from falling face first into the floor. Harry felt himself being set right, and the hand left his shirt; he nervously looked at his Uncle.

"Watch your step, boy! Almost took me down with you." Vernon said in an almost friendly tone. He reached out and Harry flinched away expecting a blow. His heart almost stopped when Vernon patted him on the head and then threw him a half smile before making his way up the stairs.

Harry stood frozen in shock, he didn't even dare to breathe until he heard a door open and shut on the second floor. All of the air left his lungs in a whoosh as Harry let his body relax. He looked up the stairs after his Uncle… maybe they were giving him a little too much cheering potion? ...Nah. He shrugged the event off and continued to the kitchen. He found his cousin sitting at the table eating lunch.

Harry scrambled into the chair across from Dudley and thrust the paper at him. "Look Dud, found this in my trunk. Solves everything!"

Dudley rubbed his hands clean on his pants before taking the offered paper and reading it over. "You know Harry, this doesn't mean much to me."

Harry smiled, his aunt put a plate of lunch in front of him but he didn't pay much mind to it. She had been quietly attentive since he gave her the potion for Vernon.
"Look at the warning on the bottom."

Dudley's eyes widened just as comically as Harry's had, "See, it's perfect."

Both boys turned to look at Petunia while she washed the dishes, she glanced back at them. Dudley turned and whispered to his cousin, "When should we ask mum to help?" They both looked at her again.

She slowly put the dish she was washing down in the sink and watched them. They continued to whisper about how to approach the subject while glancing at her. Petunia was beginning to look nervous. The fourth time they turned to whisper and then stared at her, she huffed. Ripping her yellow, rubber dish gloves off, she put her hands on her hips and faced them. "Just WHAT are you two whispering about? You keep looking over here."

Dudley smiled at his mum while Harry flinched a bit at the familiar screeching tone that used to mean he was in trouble.

"Well…" Dudley began, but faltered when he didn't have the right words.

Harry picked up, "You see aunt Petunia, I am looking for a way to spend the summer elsewhere without the Headmaster finding out, and I need your help."

Petunia looked shocked and then horrified. Harry was taken aback by her expression but then the pieces fell into place. "Oh! No, Aunt Petunia, don't worry about the wards, I'm staying long enough for them to be reset."

Petunia visibly relaxed, but not completely.

"You knew about the wards, mum?!!" Dudley exclaimed.

Petunia looked right at Harry, "you TOLD him about the wards?!!" she half screeched.

Harry looked rightfully ashamed and rubbed the back of his head. "Ummm, yes?"
His Aunt seemed to deflate at the direct answer.

"It's OK, mum. I'm glad I know. I don't like being left in the dark." He smirked at Harry when he said the last part.

"Oh, Diddykins, I didn't mean to lie to you. We just didn't want to scare you, but I guess you are all grown up now and can handle it," Petunia sighed.

Dudley ignored Harry's snort/cough at his mum's nickname and smiled at her. "Yeah, mum, I can handle it."

"So what's this plan you boys cooked up, and I better not get into trouble with that old goat you call a Headmaster." Petunia directed the last part at Harry.

The boys explained the plan to her, she looked unhappy about her garden being ruined but conceded that she owed Harry and also seemed to like the idea of getting back at Dumbledore without him knowing. They glossed over the bit about Dudley breaking into Old Figg's house and focused on how they were going to keep the Order from finding out he was gone. Petunia threw in some suggestions, such as her yelling at, or for, him loud enough for the Order guard to hear.

Harry was pleasantly surprised that his Aunt was so easy to convince. She didn't seem happy about helping, but she acted civil enough for this to work.

Things just kept getting weirder and weirder.

**

"When is a door not a door? That's a great question. We've made some adjustments during the night.

Good luck leaving the house."
AN- And here we are again, funny meeting you here at the bottom of the page. We'll see you next time, please review!

1/15/2017

Corrected

I stand corrected at the end of my chapter, two years after the fact.

Chapter End Notes

"When is a door not a door? That's a great question. We've made some adjustments during the night.

Good luck leaving the house."

-Night Vale

AN- And here we are again, funny meeting you here at the bottom of the page. We'll see you next time, please review!

1/15/2017

Corrected
AN- TIME JUMP! Yeah, I was tempted to write the entire month at the Dursley's but after I finished everything up to Harry's escape I realize going back and adding it was crazy. Would have been forever long. So… stuff happened and more bonding was done, blah blah blah.

I know I said I wasn't going to update so soon… but I have no self-control…BUT there will be no update this weekend. It's a long weekend for me so I am going to relax!

*Thank you anonymous reviewer who pointed out the error in my summary. Saved my life. Literally'.

*Thank you to the first reviewer of this chapter who pointed out a second error in the summary… I swear I fixed that one… but this is what happens when you get old. Don't grow up kids.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 3

Sunlight and Vegetation
There were only three days before his birthday, and Harry was starting to doubt his plan. He was preparing to brew Life's Light and he knew he could pull it off, but he was worried about the risk he was taking by going to Grimmauld Place. Even if he was just passing through to obscure his trail, he still didn't know where his final destination was going to be. He also didn't know for sure if the Order was still using the old place. There was a lot of guess work in the plan, and the closer it came to executing it, the more he worried.

Harry sat in front of his caldron with everything ready for the potion but couldn't bring himself to start, he was fretting away while organizing and reorganizing the ingredients.

A sudden knock at his door made Harry jump and almost knock over his ingredients. He assumed it was Dudley and called for him to enter, his cousin had asked if he could join and watch the potion being brewed. Dudley opened the door just enough to slide through the crack. He sat down on the other side of the cauldron, and looked at Harry's pensive face.

"You ok, Cus?" Dudley asked, trying to sound relaxed.

Harry looked at him and opened his mouth to respond, but was cut short by a huge brown barn owl that swooped in through the open window and landed on his shoulder. For a moment, Harry wondered how such a large bird got through the small window, but let it slip from his mind when he saw the letter, it was from Dumbledore. He removed the bird burden and gestured to Hedwig's currently empty perch. The owl flew over and hunkered down for a rest.

Harry opened the letter and began reading. The tension from a moment before drained away as Dudley watched. Harry looked up and smiled. "Nothing is wrong at all Dud, everything is good." He handed the letter over for Dudley to read.

_Dear Harry_,

_I am very sorry to write to you with nothing but dismal news; I know you were very much hoping to be taken from your aunt's house on your birthday. Unfortunately, because of the untimely demise of your godfather, Grimmauld Place is no longer safe. There is ancient and powerful magic on homes of old families, and it is possible for it to interfere with the fidelius charm. Until the house is put in the hands of a new, proper owner both legally and magically, we are not willing to take the risk. Our people will be using a different location for our club meetings for an unknown amount of time. I deeply apologize. I will see you three days before the term starts to bring you to the Will Reading of Sirius Orion Black on Friday, August 27th; be ready at 8AM._

_Yours_,

_Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore_
Dudley looked up after finishing, "He was rather formal..."

Harry nodded and he felt his expression become hard, "He's been writing like that all summer, he
used to not put his titles in and would write more casually, but we had a falling out at the end of the
year... I may have broken some things of his, while in his office"

Dudley pressed his lips together to contain his questions. Harry's discomfort with the topic was
unsettling and so Dudley changed the subject, "so, you were worried someone would come for you
on your birthday?"

Harry barked a laugh that startled Dudley, and smiled apologetically.

"Someone coming for me on my birthday was the one thing I felt safe wagering wouldn't happen,"
Harry explained.

"I was worried that they were still using my god father's old house for their 'Club'. It's where I plan
to go first and I was just hoping that they had cleared out. Now I have confirmation."

Harry also wondered about the new owner of the house; Sirius's will was supposed to be read at
the end of August right before school started, which he felt was odd, why were they waiting so
long? He was sure Dumbledore was trying to twist things so that he could get the house under his
control.

"Well, that's good, now what's this potion you're making?"

Dudley's words snapped Harry from this thoughts. He felt momentarily relieved that the topic
moved away from the Headmaster and his godfather.
"Well it's something I have never made before but it looks very simple. From what I can see it isn't a potion so much as it's a way of collecting an ingredient. It is a method of collecting concentrated sunlight for potions. Kinda like a magical version of sunlight."

"What kind of potion needs something like that?" Dudley asked.

"I have no idea," Harry answered honestly.

Dudley watched intently as Harry brewed the Potion and they both watched in fascination as every ingredient became one with the liquid. The small amount of oil base that was used to begin the process was dwindling with every step Harry completed.

"I really hope this is what it's supposed to look like." Harry glanced at the description on the paper and sighed. He reached over and grabbed the next ingredient, the dried and powdered sunflower petals shifted on their paper holder as he tipped it into the caldron. A wispy smoke rose up, and it was misted sunlight.

"Here we go…" Harry muttered to himself as he followed the final stirring instructions. Three times counter clockwise.

Every stroke of the glass stirring rod pulled a bit of soft glowing magic from Harry's hands. When the magic met and mixed with the potion, it became more transparent and the amount of potion diminished. With the third and final stroke Harry feared there would be no potion left, but there was. Exactly one tablespoon of perfectly clear liquid sat, domed, in the middle of the caldron. It was more pure than water and sparked like liquid crystal. Harry took his glass potion ladle out of his kit along with a vial half the size of the ones used for Vernon's potion and made of crystal, it was really more of a flacon.

Harry remembered being surprised to find the pretty little vial in his fifth year potion kit; he had never ended up using it and wondered if the apothecary put it in the kit just to boost the price. Now he was glad he had it, since this potion required a crystal container.

With as much care as he was capable of, Harry slowly scooped the potion from the bottom of the caldron. It filled the ladle and domed over the edge a bit, the consistency of the final product was similar to mercury. Harry handed the crystal vial to Dudley who took the delicate stopper out and held it steady. The potion slipped into the vial in a way that reminded Harry of Jell-O being sucked into a mouth. Dudley put the stopper into the vial slowly and handed it to his cousin. For a moment, they both admired it.
The vial was tear shaped with a flat bottom for it to rest on, the curved sides of the crystal were slightly faceted causing it to sparkle and reflect light in all directions. The stopper was an upside down tear half the size of the container with a small carved cylinder attached to the tip that created a perfect seal when slipped into the mouth of the vial. Harry thought it might be the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. The light was dancing inside the potion creating rainbows that were reflecting off the crystal. creating a fascinating display.

"Harry, the sun."

Dudley brought Harry’s attention to the window. He looked out and saw the sun was just about to touch the horizon. As the instructions directed, the potion was completed within 30 minutes of the sunset. Both boys moved to the open window and Harry placed the vial right in the middle of the window ledge. They took a seat on the floor and watched.

When the sun made contact with the horizon, the bottom became liquid as the heat lines rolled like waves of the ocean. Harry felt the breath leave him when the potion began to glow. The light was soft and slightly yellow, as it formed a halo. The glow became brighter and the boys could see small, bright specks forming like dust motes, and being pulled to the center of the vial. Each tendril of light swirled once around the crystal before sinking into the potion.

When Harry had thought the potion in the flacon was the most beautiful thing, he had been wrong. The collection of sunlight into magic transpiring before his eyes was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

"Whoa…" Dudley breathed when the light collection reached its peak, causing sparkles so bright they were almost blinding.

"Yeah…” Harry breathed back. Words were not necessary.

When the sun slipped away completely, and the faint light of the potion was the only thing left illuminating the room, Harry blinked to break the spell of the moment. He stood up to retrieve his creation. He wrapped his fingers around the crystal, and was not surprised to find it warm. The heat flowed up his arm and made him feel a bit giddy.

Harry held it out to his cousin, "Here Dud, feel this."
Dudley reached out and grasped the vial, when his hand curled around it, his face lit up with a silly smile, "Wow, this is awesome."

Dudley opened his hand Harry placed his own over the flacon so they were both touching it. The boys grinned at each other and then Harry pocketed the potion. In that brief moment Harry felt true affection for his cousin. He thought he might understand the bonds of blood a little better and maybe Dudley wasn't as afraid of magic.

"Tomorrow's the day," Dudley stated.

Harry nodded.

"Tomorrow," he agreed.

Harry woke as the sun began to spill over his neighbors' rooftops. He opened his eyes moments before the light broke into the darkness of his room. He spent a moment watching the dust motes and thinking on the experience of the night before. The potion was on his bedside, he smiled at it. If an Order guard saw the light show caused by creating the potion Harry hoped they would just think it was some muggle electronic and let it go.

Harry rolled out of bed with an exaggerated huff. He pulled on his oldest trousers and a ratty tee shirt that was three sizes too big. He put the Maud's Common Weed Remover in his pocket alongside the Life's Light and went out into the hallway.

In the kitchen, he met his aunt and uncle. Vernon was sitting at the table with a vague smile on his face. Petunia was at the stove putting food on plates. Harry sat at the table across from his uncle, Vernon directed his smile at his Nephew.

"Good morning, Harry," He greeted.

Harry faltered while pouring his orange juice. His Uncle just called him by name… maybe they should lower the dose of cheering potion…

Petunia arrived at the table, she set down two plates of breakfast and the pulled a cloth from her apron to clean the spilt juice. When she began cleaning Vernon reached out and covered her hand with his.
"I got this, Pet, you go and get yourself some breakfast."

Petunia smiled and flushed lightly. "OK," she agreed.

Vernon proceeded to clean the mess, and Harry forgot about the Cheering potion.

Breakfast went smoothly. When Harry was about halfway through with his meal Dudley made his appearance and tucked into his own food. For all intents and purposes it was a normal morning in the Dursley household, if a bit more pleasant than usual for Harry.

Like every morning since coming back to Privet Drive, Harry finished eating and proceeded to the back yard to work on the garden.

The sun climbed high into the sky, the air was warmed and the ground dried after the morning dew. Harry went into the shed to get a pair of gloves and a trowel. He came back to the herb garden and started weeding. Under his breath he was counting the minutes, and exactly twenty minutes after he had begun his work Aunt Petunia came out the back door just as planned. She walked over and stood behind her nephew with a sneer on her face, that wouldn’t have been out of place for her last summer. She leered at the job he was doing and crossed her arms.

"Boy!" Petunia screeched just like she used to.

Harry jumped pretending to be surprised, he twisted around to look up at his aunt.

"Yes, Aunt Petunia?" He sneered back.

"Don't talk to me with that attitude, boy! Look at what you are doing; you are pulling out my precious herbs!" Petunia pointed at what was obviously a large weed.

Harry looked at the limp ragweed his aunt was pointing at, and had to hold in a smirk that threatened to slip onto his face.

"Aunt Petunia, that's ragweed. I thought you would want that removed since Uncle Vernon is so allergic."
"Are you telling me that I'm wrong?" Petunia's voice became low and dangerous as she let her face twist into something ugly.

"Well..." Harry made a snide face.

His aunt uncrossed her arms and clenched her fist at her sides, to an outsider is would seem like her anger was reaching its peak but Harry could tell she was preparing herself for what she had to say.

"Don't you talk to me like that! You are just like your mother, after she went to that SCHOOL," the last word was spat like a curse. "She thought she knew everything, but where did that get her, huh?!

Petunia leaned in closer, her face was still twisted in disgust as she hissed, "DEAD! That's where!"

At his close proximity Harry could see the sheen of tears in his aunt's eyes. Since the summer started Harry had seen his aunt with old photo albums, she would flip through them slowly, and every once in awhile she would reach out and stroke a photo with a nostalgic expression. Later he learned from Dudley that the pictures were of Lily. His chest became tight, but he had to push through and finish the act.

"DON'T TALK ABOUT MY MUM LIKE THAT!" Harry bellowed as he jumped to his feet. He felt kind of silly and wondered if he had really been the angry brat he was acting like now.

Petunia took a step back in feigned surprise.

"DON'T yell at me, BOY!" She yelled back in an imitation of Vernon.

Harry pulled his hands out of his pocket to show his clenched fists. In each hand he had a vial with the stopper loosened.

"Then DON'T talk about my MUM!" He swung his arms wildly like he was in a fit of hysterical anger. The stoppers came out of the vials at the same time. The weed killer was flung behind him into the garden while the Life's Light was scattered into the air to his right, away from his aunt.
The Maud's Common Weed Remover did its job the instant it hit the plants. One by one, in quick succession they withered and began to literally fade away. Petunia screeched her best screech and pointed at her garden.

"MY PLANTS!" She yelled.

Before Harry could react to his aunt, the Life's Light kicked in. There was a high keening sound like from a defibrillator about to discharge and then a flash so blinding that it burned through Harry's eyelids, followed by a wash of warmth that soothed the pain. Thick shimmering motes of sparkly dust twisted through the air in the back yard. During the chaos Harry shoved both vials into his pocket but he didn't have time to look for the stoppers.

Harry opened his eyes and looked right at his very shocked aunt. They both opened their mouth to say something but were cut short when an eagle owl swooped down and dropped a very official looking letter at Harry's feet. Again, aunt Petunia tried to speak so she could finish this ridiculous act, as the shimmering dust began to settle on the barren yard. There was a rumble like a small tremor and from the ground and all the plants Harry remove shot back up. They were four times their previous size and loomed like a jungle. They grew so fast that Harry jumped back in true surprise and almost toppled over his aunt. Together, they stood and stared at the wild garden.

"You didn't tell me about this part…" Petunia hissed at her nephew under her breath.

"I didn't know it was going to happen…" Harry whispered back.

Once again, Petunia squared herself to finish the act when another eagle owl flew in dropping another official letter, this time on Harry's head. Both aunt and nephew waited to make sure there were no more surprises. Petunia's hair was wild and frizzy from the flurry of activity; she looked from Harry, to the letters, to the garden and then back to Harry.

"You. are. GROUNDED!" With that, she turned and stormed back into the house. As Harry watched her go, he saw Dudley through the kitchen window. He was laughing so hard he was crying; he had been watching the entire show.

Vernon turned to his wife when she came into the kitchen muttering about being dragged into crazy schemes. She blew past her husband when he spoke, "maybe you were a bit hard on the boy, I'm sure he didn't mean-" he cut himself short when Petunia turned her harried glare on him.
"Can it, Vernon," She snapped.

Vernon meekly sank back into his chair, "Yes, dear."

Petunia blinked away her irritation, and stared at her husband, "maybe we are giving him too much…" she muttered to herself and wandered away.

Harry stood in place for a solid minute after his aunt stormed away, everything went even better than he expected, barring the giant plant surprise. He could hear the muttering of the neighbors as they flowed out of their homes to see what the commotion was. He bent down to pick up his ministry warnings when there was a loud CRACK to his right. He looked over to see three people walking into the backyard from the side of the house. In the lead was Dumbledore, followed by Snape, and Tonks was scurrying after them with a half panicked look on her face.

Harry felt his throat go dry when he saw the two men. He hadn't seen the Headmaster since he trashed his office and Snape always made him feel uncomfortable. His anger bubble up when he looked back at Dumbledore; he needed to calm down. With a quick glance he could see Dudley's face pressed up to the window still spying. Somehow having his cousin watching as if this was some sort of fantasy sitcom made Harry feel less nervous and angry.

"Hello, sir," Harry greeted calmly. His eyes were fixed on the ground. No matter what he couldn't make direct eye contact with either men or he might give his plan away.

"Hello, Mr. Potter," The Headmaster replied neutrally.

Harry was a bit surprised, but since Dumbledore was so formal in his letters he probably should have expected this. He was about to explain the situation in his defense, when Tonk's voice broke in.

"It was accidental, sir! I was the member on guard and I saw it all! His Aunt was yelling at him and then BOOM!" Tonks threw her arms in the air miming an explosion, her neon pink hair flew about in her haste to explain. She ran back and forth rambling about the events and swinging her arms.

Harry looked up from under his lashes at the Headmaster, keeping his gaze firmly on the man's nose. Behind him Snape was sneering as he turned to survey the yard.

"Ahhh," Dumbledore made an understanding sound, "In that case I will need these." He reached out and plunked the Ministry letters from Harry's hand. "We will get this all sorted out, I'm sure
Severus has something in his handy potions pack to fix this mess and Tonks can take care of the muggle neighbors. No need to call the magical reversal teams," He reassured.

Snape snorted bitterly.

When her name was mentioned Tonks quit her impression of an explosion and jumped to attention. She gave a salute and scampered off to complete her task. Harry had to bite his lip to hold in the smile that threatened to form due to her antics.

"I'm really sorry sir, it's just with… Sirius and everything, I sometimes lose control easier when I'm… upset." Harry felt dirty throwing his godfathers' name in there, but was relieved when Dumbledore's face softened even more.

"It's quite all right, Harry." He said softly.

Harry felt his entire body relax at the tone, "thank you, sir."

Dumbledore smiled lightly, "it is nothing, my boy."

The plants around the group began to shrink; Harry looked over at the Potions Master who was spraying something from an old fashioned pump spray bottle. He turned back around when he felt a hand on his shoulder; the Headmaster was leading him back to the house.

"Why don't we go inside and talk to your family?" Dumbledore suggested.

Harry nodded solemnly, "I think I'm going to be grounded for the rest of the summer, my aunt was very upset."

Dumbledore just patted his shoulder kindly, and led him through the back door.

Snape walked around the perimeter of the yard spraying his formula. It was a mix of shrinking potion and a stunting potion of his own design. He kept a bored and irritated expression fixed onto his face while he worked.
The air was heavy with the crisp smell of magic and something else familiar. The something else was what caught his attention. It had a warmth that smelled like the sun felt on your skin. No one else present would recognize the scent, and it was causing a stirring suspicion in his gut.

As he walked once more around the yard to make sure all the plants were normal sized his eyes caught a glittering in the grass. He walked over and stooped down to investigate. He reached out and plucked the glittering something from the ground and held it up. His eyes narrowed on the crystal stopper. The suspicion in his gut solidified into a solid rock in his stomach. He turned from the yard and began walking to the house, slipping the stopper into his robe pocket as he went.

Dumbledore and Harry walked into the shade of the kitchen. Dudley was still by the window, he played his part by covering his bum and backing into the corner. Vernon was seated at the table, and he looked up when the two entered.

Dumbledore turned to him and smiled. "Hello, I was wondering if we could talk about the events that just occurred outside your home."

Vernon gave a half smile, he looked nervous. "I would talk to my wife about that, but be careful," He leaned forward as if to tell a secret and whispered, "she's quite upset you know."

Dumbledore smiled pleasantly, not looking at all concerned about the man's odd behavior. "Certainly, we will just see ourselves to the living room then."

Vernon nodded and made a gesture for them to move along.

Harry and the Headmaster entered the living room to find a very stern looking Petunia sitting on the couch with her arms crossed. Harry had to applaud his aunt’s performance. He put his head down and tried to look like he was ashamed.

"Well boy, what do you have to say for yourself?” Her tone was cold.

Both adults looked at Harry, he raised his head.

"I'm sorry, aunt Petunia."

Dumbledore smiled, "Well there we go, all better."
"All better?" Petunia hissed, "ALL BETTER?!" she jumped to her feet as she yelled.

The Headmaster startled, and took a step back. His face was a mixture of surprise and indignation from being yelled at. "Petunia, I'm sure you understand that it was an accident," He tried to sooth.

"I want him in his room for the rest of the summer and OUT of MY hair!" Her gaze was hard and steady. Harry noted she looked right at the old coot's forehead. He had warned her not to make eye contact.

"Well, that seems a bit excessive," Dumbledore muttered offhandedly.

Petunia stood her ground and everything was silent for a moment.

"I don't mind sir, I just want everything to calm down," Harry said quietly.

Dumbledore looked down at him and sighed. "Alright, he will be in his room for the remainder of the summer, if that is what you wish."

Petunia nodded, "I didn't need your permission to ground him in the first place," she spat.

Snape walked into the obscenely clean kitchen and curled his lip. In the corner was Potter's cousin, cowering and hiding his bottom. At the table was the walrus. He turned and looked at Vernon who gave him a vague smile. Snape glared at the man with narrowed eyes, he felt something wasn't right. He moved closer to Vernon to investigate, but raised voices from the next room made him hurry away to find out what was happening. When he entered the room it was just in time to hear Potter's sentence of grounding for the summer.

Petunia saw him first, the color drained from her face. He looked her in the eye and she looked at a space over his shoulder. She pulled herself together and gave a curt nod, "Severus."

Severus felt the rock of suspicion growing larger when the woman wouldn't meet his eyes, but he nodded back politely.

"Petunia," he greeted.
Harry looked between his Potions Professor and his aunt. Apparently they had previously met… small world.

The room fell into a tense silence. Petunia was wringing her hands, while glancing at Snape every second or two, Dumbledore seemed perfectly fine, Harry fidgeted nervously, and Snape was looking anywhere but at the occupants of the room.

"Does anyone fancy some tea?" Petunia offered hesitantly.

"Oh, no, my dear. Thank you, but we must really be going," Dumbledore politely declined, in a manner that suggested that he had only just realized he wasn't alone.

Everyone moved back into the kitchen, so that the wizards could depart the same way they came. The Headmaster turned to Harry. "Nymphadora will finish sorting out your neighbors, and then she will resume her post for the remainder of the day."

Harry nodded in understanding.

Snape said nothing; he threw a bitter sneer at the room in general and then swept out the door behind Dumbledore. Vernon absently waved them goodbye.

Everyone in the kitchen stood very still until there was a loud crack that declared them home free.

Dudley immediately began to laugh in a nervous and slightly hysterical way. Harry looked at him huddled in the corner with his hands still covering his bum and burst out laughing as well, even Petunia let out a few stunted chuckles of relief.

The laughing trickled to a stop and left behind it an awkward quiet. No one seemed to know what to do.

Then Vernon chimed in. "What so funny?" he asked, genuinely curious.
Everyone laughed again; when they calmed down, Harry thanked his aunt and cousin and retreated to his room to finish preparing.

"Make like a tree and slowly, imperceptibly, stalk humans before striking one day when no one else is looking."

-Night Vale

AN- Stop scrolling, it's over. Let me know what you think! I always look forward to your comments.

2/18/2027

Revisited

Chapter End Notes

"Make like a tree and slowly, imperceptibly, stalk humans before striking one day when no one else is looking."

-Night Vale

AN- Stop scrolling, it's over. Let me know what you think! I always look forward to your comments.

2/18/2027

Revisited
What is a Picture Worth?

Chapter Notes

AN- Oh man this chapter… sorry in advance about the weird perspective changes. And the possible really bad editing… and for the chapter in general. There were things I had to get in there but they didn't fit quite right… I hope you like it because I don't.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 4

What is a Picture Worth?

Tomorrow was the day before Harry's birthday; it was also when he planned on leaving under the cover of night. He was rushing around his room packing everything he thought he might need.

Harry probably didn't need to rush, he still had plenty of time, but he felt like he was burning with energy after the performance they had pulled off. He was filled with turmoil, guilt and excitement. There was a strange thrill to being so sneaky and getting away with it.

Harry slowed down when his adrenaline began to dip. He continued to calmly pack his clothes away on top of his well-organized books, but the thrill of being in control for the first time in his
life was still thrumming through him. He wondered if there was more to what the sorting hat said to him his first year than he was willing to admit. He knew on some level that Dumbledore was right, and it really was our choices that shaped us… but what if there was some inherent aspects of ourselves that our choices couldn’t change? Maybe he should let those aspects rise to the surface, because no one said that you couldn’t be sneaky and still be brave or good.

Harry wondered if he was just trying to justify his actions to himself, and he considered what Sirius would say if he knew what Harry had done. Would he be proud of a well played prank, or would he condemn Harry for using Slytherin tactics?

A wave of dizziness, stronger than all the rest thus far, overcame Harry so suddenly that he almost fell back onto his bum. As the nauseating, spinning slipped away, it dragged with it all the doubt and all of the worry. If there was some part of him that was objectively sneaky and gave him an advantage, then he should use it and not feel bad about who he was. The certainty that followed through Harry filled him with confidence, and he was certain in his actions.

As time passed, he felt the clarity fading like it always did, replaced by fog and woolen blankets between his ears, but this time the certainty stayed with him. He finished packing and snapped his trunk shut with finality. Now he had nothing left to do but wait.

The next day crept by slower than any day in Harry’s life. For a moment, he wondered if he was doing some sort of accidental magic that caused time to slow, but there were no ministry letters being dropped on his head.

With nothing to do, because it was still too early to start pulling his plan together, Harry wandered around his room. Dudley was out with his friends; he needed a pretense to leave the house so that he could grab Harry some provisions and a few other things they needed.

There was a knock on the door, and Harry wondered who would come to his room besides Dudley. When he opened the door to find his Aunt standing in the hall, he was surprised. Petunia looked uncomfortable and was clutching a book to her chest.

Harry moved to the side and gestured for her to come in, she moved into the middle of the room, and resumed her uncomfortable stance. Harry sat on his bed and waited for her to speak. She shifted her weight back and forth, and opened her mouth to begin only to stop. As her breathing became heavier, Harry had begun to worry. Then she opened her mouth again and her breath hitched. Suddenly, she walked over to him and thrust the book into his hands and left just as abruptly.

His Aunt definitely had had something to say, but she hadn’t seemed able to get the words out.

Harry looked down at the book in his hands; it was an old photo album.
The album was bound in heavy brown leather with a faded gold frame painted about a half an inch from the edge. The sides of the cover were worn from overuse, and there were traces of stickers and glitter that had peeled off with time. Harry realized that this was probably an album from when his aunt was a young girl; his heart jumped and then clenched painfully.

Slowly, with an air of reverence and respect for the history of his family, Harry opened the front cover. A folded piece of notebook paper slid off the first page, Harry grabbed it before it could fall to the floor. It was a new page, a letter that his aunt had probably written before she had come to his room.

Harry,

I know that we have not had the best relationship. I wasn't a very good guardian and I took out my anger on you for things you can't control. I can't say that I love you or that we will ever get along, but I can say I am sorry for how I raised you. I don't expect your forgiveness and I'm not sure I deserve it. Your mother was very dear to me before the rift formed between us, and I blamed magic. I always thought that if I were a witch or if Lily were not a witch, then I could have had my sister back. What I didn't realize was that I lost her due to my own actions. It took me many years to understand that it was my fault, and many more to accept it. You helped me accept it by aiding me when no one would have blamed you for ignoring my plight. You have a lot of your mother in you.

Petunia

Harry set the note down on his bed with a shaky hand. He looked back at the first page of the album through the blur of unshed tears. Long ago he accepted his aunt would never love him or even care. After that letter he wasn't sure how he felt, besides a little sad.

The pages of the photo book were paper with small corner tabs that held the pictures in place. The first pages didn't hold an image, it held another page of paper. This paper was much older and becoming yellow around the sides, it was a thicker stationery paper with little flowers around the edges. In blue ballpoint pen was childish writing:

Petunia and Lily

Sisters 4 Ever
Below that was an unsteady signature that read *Petunia Evans*. Next was another almost illegible signature of a much younger child that said *Lily Evans*. Harry felt his eyes burn with more tears as he ran his fingers over his mother name. Her young writing was much more indented than her sister's, he could imagine her writing with her hand closed around the pen in a fist and making every mark with purpose.

His mother and aunt had really been close; had even signed this little contract. Suddenly, his aunt's anger and bitterness was much sadder than before. She must have been very lonely. Harry carefully turned the page to the first photo. In a field of flowers by a shallow creek sat a small five year old redhead girl. Next to her with an arm around her sister's shoulders was Petunia with a yellow bow in her brown hair. Both girls were smiling.

Harry turned another page; they were in the same flowery area, but this time Lily was on an old swing and her sister was pushing her. Many of the following pictures were the same, in them they had built forts and made flower crowns. Then, after many pictures, Harry turned the page and found three children in the photo. The third child was a boy the same age as Lily but with long black hair framing a pale face and dark eyes. Harry recognized him immediately as Professor Snape.

Harry was very shocked. He knew that his aunt and Snape had met before from their reactions yesterday, but some part of him had just assumed they met when they were older. Here, in his hands, was proof that Snape was more involved than he thought. With every intention of investigating further, Harry filed this fact in the back of his mind.

Continuing forward with the photos, Harry looked at many pictures of the three children smiling and playing together. As the pictures flipped by the children began to change. The first difference was Snape, as he seemed to become more and more straight faced. He was only smiling in photos when he was interacting with Lily and his clothes were becoming more ragged and dirty. The second difference was Petunia; there were some photos where she was happy, but more and more she faded into the background frowning. In one of the last pictures, Snape was putting a flower crown on Lily's head, and they were smiling at one another. In the background, slightly fuzzy, stood Petunia with a pinched face that was very familiar to Harry.

The last picture caused Harry's eyes to burn and well up; he let a few tears slip down his face and didn't wipe them away. He didn't expect to have such an emotional reaction, but even without knowing who was in the picture it was very sad. It spoke volumes about separation and jealousy, and about drifting apart from people you love without meaning to. Harry thought about how he had not received a single letter from his friends this summer. He knew it was the Headmaster's doing, but it felt very similar to the emotions represented in the photo. He and his friends might start to drift apart against their will, but Harry was determined not to let that happen; when he got back to school he was going to make sure of it somehow. For right now, he accepted that since communication was not possible, he just had to have faith that his friends would be there for him,
and swore to himself he'd be there for them.

He stood up and gently wiped his tears away with one hand while holding the album with his other. He went to his door and grasped the handle. After a calming breath, he opened the door and went to the living room, where Petunia sat, expecting him. She was in the middle of the couch with a cup of tea in her hand, a tea service on the low table and the curtains were drawn closed. She was using her fine china that was usually reserved for Vernon's clients.

Harry moved forward and took the armchair on her right, she shifted so that she was angled toward him. After fixing himself a cup of tea, he looked up to his aunt's face for the first time. Her eyes were red rimmed and held a deep uncertainty along with a bit of hope. Harry looked at her for a moment and then simply nodded. Petunia let out a short breath and nodded back.

Harry laid the book out on the coffee table and opened it to the last picture. He watched as his aunt's face tightened and she bit her bottom lip the same way Harry did when he was nervous or upset. They sat in silence while Harry let Petunia have a moment to gather herself.

"I'm sure you're wondering about the boy..." she finally said.

Harry gave a slight nod, "That's Professor Snape, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's Severus. He lived only a couple of houses down and behind us when I was a child." Petunia folded her hands in her lap with a faraway look in her eyes. "The spot where the pictures were taken was mine and Lily's special spot. One day when we arrived there, Severus was sitting alone on the swing; that's how we met. We all became friends, but then Lily and he seemed to form some kind of bond. At the time I didn't know what it was, but after both of them got letters I figured out that they knew they had magic before they started school. They never told me and started going there to meet without me."

Harry could see that this conversation was hurting his aunt, so he let it drop after she finished speaking. Words seemed unnecessary. Harry had wanted confirmation that the boy in the picture was Snape, but now it seemed cruel to have brought the photo to her. Petunia obviously knew he would figure it out when she gave him the album, but Harry couldn’t leave it alone until he knew for sure.

They sat together in a strained silence and continued to drink their tea.
Eventually, the front door opened and Dudley ambled in. He saw Harry with his mother and was understandably surprised, he came into the room and took the other arm chair.

"Everything is set to move forward Harry, the old wagon is in the garage," He reported.

Harry took a long sip of tea and smiled, "Good, let's wait an hour and then get started."

Petunia looked at the boys for a moment. Harry looked back thoughtfully, and wondered how things could have been if there hadn't been any jealousy between sisters, or if Vernon hadn't fed Petunia so much anger.

Petunia picked up the album and held it out to Harry, and he gave her a confused look. She smiled.

"Keep it," she said. Her hands were shaking slightly as she offered the album.

Harry smiled back and accepted the gift. He let his fingers play over a half torn unicorn sticker.

"Thanks."

An hour later, Dudley and Harry could be found heaving a large trunk down the stairs. Each of them were lifting a side of the trunk as they walked to the door that led to the garage from the house. Dudley rested the trunk on his knee and opened the door. With one last burst of effort, they reached the old red wagon and set the load down in it.

Dudley wiped his brow and commented, "it's good my mum kept this old thing."

Harry laughed, "Yeah, I never thought I would be using it to escape a crazy old wizard who's trying to control my life."

Dudley chuckled, "I never thought I would be helping you to escape a crazy old wizard using this old thing when I was pretending it was a trolley."

Harry smirked at the image as he opened his trunk and pulled out his invisibility cloak. He threw it over the trunk and tucked the edges into the wagon so that none of it was hanging out and the wagon looked empty.
After walking around to make sure everything was in order Harry put his hands on his hips, "OK, looks good."

Dudley took that as his cue and began pulling the wagon to the door leading outside. Harry went back into his room to wait.

Dudley walked across the street trying to look casual. It was much harder to pull the wagon like it was empty when it wasn't, but he tried his best. He made it to the sidewalk outside of Mrs. Figg's house and looked around to see if anyone was watching.

With no one in sight he scuttled around to the back of the house.

Out of sight, Dudley went to a large bush that was next to the back door and carefully tipped the wagon over. He pulled the cloak off and, as quickly as he could, pushed the trunk behind the bush. Then he put the wagon right, and shoved the cloak into his pocket. He looked around once more before going over to garden, where he picked the ugliest, fattest, little naked angel statue and tipped it into the wagon. With his new alibi in tow, he ambled back around to the front and began making his way to the park to meet his gang. Earlier that day while hanging out with his boys, he had bet them he could steal a lawn ornament from old Figg's collection.

Unknown to Dudley there was someone watching him very closely. From the side of number four Tonks watched him under the disillusionment charm. She felt her heart speed up when Dudley walked to old Figg's house, hoping something exciting would happen. She was happy to keep an eye on Harry, but this guard duty was boring. When Harry did accidental magic it was the most interesting thing that'd happened. Not only was it boring, but she did it a lot. You-know-who was keeping a low profile, and the only other Order members that were free enough to take guard duty often were Diggle and Mundungus. Diggle took an even share of guard times and they only let Mundungus take a one a week, because no one trusted the crook.

Tonks watched as Dudley pulled the wagon to the side of the house and then around to the back where Figg kept a garden. She was tempted to follow him and see what he was up to but she was worried about leaving number four protected.

Tonks was about to go investigate what Dudley was doing when he came back around the house with an ugly lawn ornament in the wagon. She let out a long sigh of disappointment. The little hooligan was just stealing people's lawn decorations… how anticlimactic.

Harry waited nervously for two hours before his cousin came back to the house. Dudley burst into
his room without even knocking, a huge grin on his face.

"THAT was AWESOME!" He exclaimed.

Harry relaxed and began laughing, only Dudley would be so excited about stealing for a secret mission.

"Seriously! I feel like a secret agent or something." Dudley put his hands together to form a gun shape and began creeping around the room humming his own theme music.

Harry laughed so hard he couldn't breathe.

"Oh…man!" Harry gasped for air, "Dud... Stop!" he laughed again, "I can't breathe!"

Dudley stopped playing around, he reached into his pocket and took the cloak out. "This thing is bloody brilliant." He handed it back to Harry.

"Yeah, it was my dad's; the Headmaster gave it back to me my first year." Harry looked at the cloak as he let the liquid like fabric slid through his fingers and over his hands with a small smile.

"Why would your Headmaster give a first… wait, it was your dad's and you let me use it?" Dudley's eyes were wide and all playfulness was gone. Harry looked back up to his cousin with an earnest expression, and his smile widened.

"Well, yeah, you're not the same person from when we were kids. We're on the same side now, right?"

Dudley's chest seemed to swell with pride; he gave a curt nod. "Same side," he agreed.

Harry had never thought that his cousin would ever feel pride because Harry trusted him, but things sure had changed. After spending so much time together this summer, Harry should have noticed the dynamic shift.
Silence fell over the room. Both boys were embarrassed about their semi-emotional display; Harry continued to play with the fabric of his cloak and Dudley scuffed his shoe into the wood floors.

"Well…” Dudley began, breaking the tension. "Don't you think it's weird that the headmaster of your school gave you something that makes it so easy to break rules? I mean, if I had one, I would get away with so much at my school."

Harry paused; he honestly never really thought about it. It did seem odd that he was given the cloak.

"I hadn't thought about it much, but now that you mention it, it is odd." He looked down at the cloak again with suspicious eyes. He sighed, folded it up and put it on his bed.

"Hey, Harry?" Dudley sounded hesitant.

"Yeah?" Harry turned around from placing the cloak down.

"Do… do you mind if I hang out in here until you leave?" Dudley's eyes were on the ground.

"Sure, I don't mind. But why? Don't you have plans with your friends?" Harry asked with an honest tone so his cousin didn't feel like he was being excused.

Dudley was scuffing the floor with his shoe again, but he looked up at Harry. "It's just that… when I hang with you I can just sorta be me. When I'm with the other guys, I have to be 'Big D' and act like 'the boss', or they might not like me."

Harry plopped down on the floor next to his bed, "well, you're welcome to be 'just Dudley' here."

Dudley got a silly smile on his face and sat down across from his cousin, "also, you always seem to be doing something interesting."

Harry chuckled. "I guess that's true, this summer at least." He reached under his bed and pulled out a knapsack of things he had packed, but that he hadn't wanted to leave in his trunk; it now included the album his Aunt gave him. "Want to see some wizarding pictures?" he asked as he pulled out the
album Hagrid had given him on his 11th birthday.

Dudley nodded and scooted closer.

They looked at pictures together and talked until dinner. Aunt Petunia brought the food up to them so they didn't blow Harry's grounded cover. She also brought up individually sized treacle tarts for dessert. The one she placed in front of Harry had a single lit candle in it. She didn't say anything about it, she just stood by the door giving her nephew a pointed look. Harry leaned down while keeping eye contact and blew the candle out. Petunia gave a tight smile and left.

For the rest of the evening, they played games that Dudley got from his room; all the games that Harry had wanted to play as a kid, but couldn't. It was easily one of the best birthdays he had ever had, even if it was a day early.

Harry looked at the digital clock on his bedside table. It was glowing red and telling him it was 11:55 PM. He had decided to wait until after his birthday presents came to leave so that he could take them with him. He wasn't sure if the wards of Grimmauld Place would allow the owls to find him. He stood up, walked to the window and opened it. Harry really hoped that Dumbledore let his friends send gifts, even if they couldn't write to him.

Dudley also stood when the time was noted. "I will be right back," he informed Harry.

Harry sat on his bed to wait.

When Dudley came back, he had his hands behind his back, and was walking so that Harry couldn't see what he was holding.

"What have ya got there, Dud?" Harry asked with a smirk.

Dudley turned redder than Harry had ever seen; he stopped when he got to the bed, and held out a poorly wrapped box. Harry looked at it in slight surprise. When Dudley had come in, he had thought it might have been a present he was hiding, but he wasn't ready for it to be true.

"I know, I'm pants at wrapping…" Dudley muttered.

Harry shook himself from his daze and realized he had been staring at the sloppy present. "No! No… Sorry, I was just surprised." He took the present and put it on the bed and gestured for Dudley to join him.
Both boys were sitting facing each other, and they absently noted that it was 11:58 PM.

"So, what's supposed to happen at midnight?" Dudley asked.

Harry smiled secretively, "You'll see."

When the time turned to midnight, Dudley jumped in surprise as the sound of many wings could be heard out the window. Then, all at once, four owls came fluttering into the room and settled on the bed. Dudley lowered his arms that he had shielded his face with. His breathing was evening out when he realized the owls were docile, all except the one that was still flying in circles around them.

Harry began removing the bird's burdens. One bird was very old and looked tired, that was the one that was relieved first and it went to Hedwig's perch.

"That's Errol, he's the old post owl for the Weasley's, the red headed family." Harry answered Dudley's silent question.

Next, Harry was removing the package from a large barn owl, then from his own white owl. He reached up and with lighting fast reflexes he snatched the last owl, out of the air. The little owl struggled while Harry removed its package and then took off as soon as he was released.

"That's Pig, short for Pigwidgeon… he's Ron's," Harry explained.

"Why would anyone ever want that?" Dudley asked while watching the little fluff ball zip around.

"It was a gift… from my godfather." Harry pushed down any evidence of sadness and Dudley let the topic drop.

Harry looked at his presents and sighed in irritation, all of them had rips in the paper that showed they had been tampered with. Of course, he couldn't even get birthday presents without them first being checked by the Order. Harry reached for the first present, it was the one Dudley gave him. His cousin looked like a ball of nerves. Under the messy wrapping was a nice small oak box. Harry opened the box and found something he didn't expect. Inside was the gold watch that he
remembered Dudley getting on his 11th birthday.

Dudley reached forward and took the box. He removed the watch and held it up. "I didn't have much pocket money this summer, but I remembered I had this, and it doesn't fit my wrist, honestly never did. It's real gold and… well, since you are going off on your own… my dad says a real man has a watch… it's not electronic, it's all mechanical, so it should work at your school, and…" Dudley's rambling trailed off nervously.

Harry took the watch back and put it on, it fit him perfectly. "I love it, Dud. It will be good to have a watch." He looked at the clock to get the time and began winding the watch up. A light ticking told him it was working.

Dudley blushed again and handed the box back. "M'glad you like it…" he mumbled.

"Want to see what else I got?" Harry asked, moving on so that his cousin didn't get too embarrassed.

His present from Hermione had come with Hedwig, it was predictably, books. There was one on advanced defense, but surprisingly, there was one very old one named "Beginning Guide to Defense: For the Young and Brave". Harry arched a brow at the title, it was a little novice for him.

Dudley handed over the card that came with the books and Harry read it out loud.

**Dear Harry,**

I can't say much and you know why. What I can tell you is everyone is ok and I am with our friends for a few days. I sent some Books on Defense for you so you could get some studying in. The second Book was one that I had a lot of trouble getting my hands on because they don't print it anymore. I wasn't so sure about the Book, but after I read it I came to the conclusion that you would find a lot of use for it. I thought it might help you understand the basics better, and maybe it would give you some perspective.

Love, Hermione

*P.S. Look up Golpalott's Third Law, I think it will be important for next year's potion class.*
"Well that was cryptic..." Dudley said bluntly.

Harry just stared at the note, "you think so?"

Dudley nodded, "that part about perspective and the ending of the note seem out of place."

Harry furrowed his brow in thought, it would seem out of place for someone who didn't know Hermione.

For someone who did know her and was just glancing at the letter to sensor it, such as Dumbledore, it would seem like a very Hermione note. On the other hand Harry knew Hermione better than the Headmaster and was reading the note more carefully.

"Well, whatever she's trying to tell me it's got to do with the second book she sent me," Harry concluded.

Together they read over the letter again and then they looked up Golpalott's Third Law in Harry's potion books. The law was about creating antidotes. Dudley also pointed out that the word book was in the letter three times and each time it was capitalized inappropriately. Harry was silently impressed with his cousin for noticing that.

"Wait..." Harry's mind whirled as the dizziness fell over him and was swept away leaving refreshing clarity once more. "So let's say Hermione did something to the book, so, in a way it's been 'poisoned'"

Dudley caught on quickly, "and the Third law is about antidotes."

Harry cracked a smile, "the word book is emphasized three times... so either there is a third book or the word book is the key." He held the book out in front of himself. "Doesn't hurt to try."

Harry concentrated on the cover, he took a calming breath and said, "Book, Book, Book."

Before their eyes the cover dissolved away to show a different but equally old book titled, "Beginning Guide to the Dark: For the Young and Ambitious". 
To say that Harry was surprised that Hermione of all people sent him a book on the Dark was an understatement, but he assumed that's what the “perspective” part of the letter was about. For a moment, he wondered how she had done the spell during summer to hide the book, but then he remembered she had said she was with their "friends". Most likely, the twins had helped her.

"Why'd she send you a book on Dark stuff?" Dudley asked.

Harry shrugged, "Guess I've got to read it to find out."

The rest of the presents were less exciting. Ron sent him candy as well as refills for his quidditch maintenance kit, Mrs. Weasley sent him a cake, and Hagrid sent some rock cakes as usual. Then, there was Dumbledore's present that came with the same school owl as Hagrid's; it was just a pair of socks, with little animated brooms and snitches on them.

"Your Headmaster’s really is off his rocker…” Dudley's opinion of the old wizard was solidified by the present.

Harry packed away all his new things, and after quickly eating a piece of the cake, he gave the rest to Dudley. He called Hedwig over and she flew to his arm.

"It's almost time, girl," He commented as he stroked her feathers. The owl had been briefed on what was going to happen, but didn't seem too pleased about it. "Remember, I need you to do as Dudley says, and if he needs to send me a letter you can bring it to me. Otherwise, please bring everything to Dudley, and on September first come to Hogwarts."

Hedwig glared at Harry and nipped him hard on the hand, before she flew over to Dudley and settled resentfully on his shoulder. Dudley sat frozen and nervous about the bird being on him. He very slowly reached up, and stroked her chest feathers softly. Hedwig fluffed up a bit before settling down with a coo. Dudley smiled at the bird.

"I am allowed to have a pet at school, but Dad always said no. It was the one thing I couldn't get my way on," he lamented. Harry didn't respond, since Dudley seemed to be musing to himself. After a moment of silence, he looked at Harry to let him know he was ready.

"Let's get moving." Harry was trying to sound confident, but his clarity of mind was slipping away, and he was worried about being caught.
Dudley looked sure of himself, and rose from the bed first. He gently set Hedwig on her perch and went to the bedroom door, "Let's do this." He grinned at his action movie line imitation. Harry relaxed in the lighter mood his cousin was creating; he pulled his cloak out and wrapped it around himself.

As Harry exited the room he noticed for the first time that there were no extra locks on the door and the cat flap was gone. He wasn't sure when it happened, but his Uncle had changed his door out for a new one. Harry relaxed even more, he felt better about Uncle Vernon's chances of staying nice.

Dudley walked through the hall and down the stairs casually while Harry followed invisible. When they got to the door, they quickly and quietly slipped out.

Mundungus sat up from his hiding place in the front bushes and watched the Dursley boy sneak out of his house. He looked around and saw that the kid was alone which meant Potter was still his room. He sat back and waited for whatever entertainment might come from the kid's antics.

Dudley looked up and down the street, and at all the windows facing him to make sure no one was peeking out. He scuttled across the pavement and up Ms. Figg's front lawn. He stopped in front of the main entrance and crouched to the level of the door knob.

Mundungus watched closely as the boy took out a small leather pouch and from the punch pulled some oddly shaped metal tools. The boy seemed to insert the tools into the lock and was twisting them in different ways. Mundungus was surprised when the front door of Old Figg's house swung open.

"Atta boy," he whispered with an oily smirk. He didn't know what those tools were, but he thought he should get some and learn to use them in cases where he was restricted from using magic, like if there were alerting wards. No wizard would think of being robbed the muggle way.

**

Dudley whipped the sweat from his brow when he felt the lock tumble open, and he let the door swing inward as he stood up. He walked inside and felt Harry follow. Once the door was closed again Harry took off his cloak and looked around the funny smelling house, the cats were all rushing to the boys for attention and they had to carefully step over them.

Harry went to the back door and slid it open, he was very relieved when he saw his trunk still hidden behind the bush and pulled it into the living room. He slid the door shut and locked it, then
turned to Dudley.

"Well, this is it," Dudley said awkwardly.

Harry nodded, "Write to me, ok? Just make sure you sound like me when you do."

Dudley let a small smile slip onto his face, "Won't it be weird to get a letter that sounds like you wrote it?"

Harry chuckled, "Just keep it vague."

Dudley nodded.

Harry looked through the knick knacks on the mantle until he located the small container of floo powder he knew had to be there. He stepped into the fireplace with his trunk and held his hand of powder up.

"Take care, Dud."

Dudley raised his hand in goodbye, "you too, Harry."

Harry threw the powder down and yelled his destination, and in a flash of green fire, he was gone.

After the shock of seeing flashy magic, Dudley felt a little lonely as he stood in a house that wasn't his, then he, too, turned and left. He remembered to lock the door behind him before he went home.

"We have nothing to speak about. There never was. Words are an unnecessary trouble. Expression is time wasting away. Any communication is just a yelp in the darkness. I am speaking now but I am saying nothing. I am just making noises, and, as it happens, they are organized in words and you should not draw meaning from this."

-Night Vale

AN- I do love see all of you here. I used to be confused about why you kept scrolling down, but
now I find I look forward to these meetings.

Chapter End Notes

"We have nothing to speak about. There never was. Words are an unnecessary trouble. Expression is time wasting away. Any communication is just a yelp in the darkness. I am speaking now but I am saying nothing. I am just making noises, and, as it happens, they are organized in words and you should not draw meaning from this."

-Night Vale

AN- I do love see all of you here. I used to be confused about why you kept scrolling down, but now I find I look forward to these meetings.

2/20/2017

Revise
The ballroom floor gleamed in the light that streamed through the windows of the high ceiling. It shimmered with sweat and blood that mixed pink and smeared over the cool tiles. Golden dust motes swirled and twisted in the air. The bright specks danced to the damp floor. Long after the curse was lifted the boy's body arched and contorted in spasms. The sound of his uncontrolled grunts and moans echoed in the cavernous room.

The boy was alone now. They took their jeers and laughs when they left. His hot, damp body
shivered and twitched on the hard marble floor. His face was a mess of tears, sweat and blood, but even through the lingering pain he wished he could clean up. He wanted to fix his disheveled hair and straighten his clothes that were twisted around his thin frame. He was broken, bent in all the wrong directions and twitching. He compulsively writhed on the floor, as his body rebelling against him.

A long, low creak of the heavy oak door announced the entrance of a second person. The convulsions of the boy's body prevented him from turning his head to look, but the soft clicking of boots on the stone floor indicated the newcomer was moving closer. A cool hand was placed on his burning forehead. He clenched his red teeth, his mouth filled with coppery blood. He twitched and struggled to pull away from the unknown person, until they spoke.

"Hush, now…" the deep voice whispered soothingly.

The boy stilled for a moment, and then his twisting and struggling renewed; he needed to look at the man. He needed to talk to him, to tell him not to let her see him like this. His mother had seen enough and he didn't want to hurt her further. More tears came, and the boy was only able to make a choking sound around the tight muscles of his throat.

The feeling of a feather light charm washed over the boy's body and he was easily lifted from the cold floor and into warm arms.

"Be calm now," the man said, and then, as if reading the boy's mind, he whispered, "I assure you I will not allow your mother to see you like this, Draco."

Harry landed on his knees in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place, he was finally alone. It was dark, and dustier than the first time he had come to this house. It was obvious that no one had been here since the end of last year, and Kreacher was working at Hogwarts, not that he cleaned all that much anyway. Harry stood up from the kneeling position and pulled his trunk from the fireplace. For a moment he thought he felt a tingling sensation, as if magic rushed over his skin. Maybe there were still wards from the Order and they were scanning him? Harry hoped he was wrong, he was in too deep to leave now.

He looked around the abandoned room.

The unused stove made Harry's heart clench, the metal teapot was still on the burner where it was always warm and ready to make tea when the Order was here. He turned to the empty table, and his eyes widened. Many of the chairs were pushed back or tipped on their side as if everyone who had been at the table left in a panicked rush. After Sirius died, no one ever came back; everything
was the way it had been just before the Ministry attack.

When he had fire called to check on Sirius only Kreacher had been in the kitchen. More order members must have come in while Harry was in the forbidden forest with Umbridge. The empty cups indicated they were going to have a meeting before the news of the battle reached them. Harry turned back to the stove and lifted the pot, his suspicions were confirmed when water sloshed inside. He felt his eyes burn with tears. He didn't want to cry, but his mind was filled with images of Sirius sitting with the Order members, talking, laughing, and waiting for his tea when the news came. He could imagine the surprise and worry tinted with an edge of excitement that must have rushed through the man when he was told about the battle. But who had told them?

Harry slumped into the chair that was normally Sirius's seat and leaned forward over the empty china. The only people who knew about his false vision were the DA members that went with him and Snape. Sharp surprise cut through Harry, he was so mad at Snape for always fighting with Sirius and goading him, but in the end he came to the house to see if Sirius was safe. Harry let his head fall forward into his hands, he was facing down at the tea cup. Tears hung from his lashes threatening to fall. He had been wrong. When he yelled at Snape that "the enemy has Padfoot", he had thought the man dismissed his warning, but he didn't. Snape had come here, he was the only one who could have. He came to see if his childhood rival was alright. Then he must have gone back to Hogwarts to find Harry missing because he was in the forbidden forest with Hermione and Umbridge.

One tear broke loose from his lashes' hold and fell into the cup, it slipped down the side to rest at the bottom. Harry stared at the trail of dust the tear had cleaned away. He felt so stupid, more stupid now than he did when he had first realized he had been tricked. So many people had been working to help him that night, and he somehow had still bollocksed it up. Snape had probably thought Harry would be held by Umbridge and her stupid squad long enough for him to check on Sirius.

Harry sat up and wiped his face; he couldn't feel sorry for himself right now. He had to pull it together and check out the house, to make sure it was really empty. He stood up and walked to the drawing room where people normally would have lounged. On a table next to the couch, where Sirius had always read, was another tea cup. This one was half full and next to a book that was sitting open to the last page that was being read. Harry walked over to the cup and cringed; it had a layer of something fuzzy growing on the top. He sat in the seat Sirius would have occupied, and stared at the coffee table. He looked back at the book and smirked at the dog eared pages, his godfather had bad manners. The reminder of Sirius only made cold sadness fill his chest. He was starting to wonder if coming here was a bad idea. He wasn't sure if he could handle it if he kept running into things like this; it would have been easier if someone had come back and cleaned up.

The magical tingling scan was happening again but slower; Harry sat up straight as an arrow. It felt like someone was running feathers from the top of his head downward. It took almost a full minute for that sensation to stop, Harry was very still, and waited for something to happen. He felt stupid again, because he just now realized that the house could have transferred ownership to a less direct
member of the Black family, like Narcissa Malfoy or... Bellatrix Lestrange.

Suddenly, there was a bright flash, and Harry whipped his wand out while he threw himself to the floor. No spells came, and there wasn't any yelling or taunting. Slowly, Harry lifted his head and took a quick look around; if anyone had been watching they probably would have found the entire thing comical.

Once he was sure that there was no hidden enemy, Harry stood up and scanned the room more thoroughly. Floating in midair was a scroll; it wasn't glowing or sparkling, just floating. It looked as though it were suspended from fishing line. Harry approached it and waved his hand over the top but found no string. He went to do the same under the scroll, but the moment his hand was beneath it, the scroll plopped down onto his palm.

"Huh… weird," muttered Harry to himself.

Still unsure of how safe it was, Harry unrolled the scroll with caution. Of all the things that it could have been, he wasn't expecting what he read. The scroll turned out be the deed to the house, and from what he was reading it seemed to be a magical deed. Apparently Sirius had be an impromptu owner through legal means only, but this paper was what the magical owner signed. It plainly stated that by signing the deed, Harry would own the house, and it would be bound to him magically. The last line just had a cryptic sentence that said "The true master will know all the secrets of the manor." This confused Harry since the house wasn't a manor, it was big but it certainly wasn't that big. He sat down on the couch bewildered. Sirius must have had this deed appear for him when he first came back here but his name wasn't anywhere on the scroll. The last person who had signed it was Sirius's father, if he remembered the name from the tapestry correctly. He scanned the long bottom of the deed and looked at all the Black names dating back to when the house was built, there was even one signature that was bigger than the others and ended in a flourish. The paper must get longer to accommodate all the signatures.

Harry assumed that Sirius refused to sign the paper because he didn't want to be bound to the house that he hated all his life. Dumbledore had said something about reading Sirius's magical will sometime at the end of the month before school started… Harry felt a short dizzy spell come and go, then all the pieces began to fall in place, slowly, as clarity settled over him. Harry was supposed to become the next legal owner of the house so that Dumbledore could move the order back in; but the Headmaster didn't want Harry coming here without him, because he didn't want him to find the magical deed. Sirius's magical will probably left the house to Harry and Dumbledore wanted to be there to manipulate things to his liking. It would have been easy for Dumbledore to convince Harry to sign the legal deed over, right there at the Will reading. If Harry had signed the house away then the magical deed would never have appeared. By pushing the Will reading back so far it kept Harry from coming here. Everything was set up so Harry wouldn't get complete control of the house.
Harry wasn't sure if everything he was assuming was true, but it did seem to be the most likely situation. All his pent up anger at Dumbledore felt even more justified. He wouldn't turn on the man… yet, but he really had to work on making his choices independently of his influence and find out more information than the Headmaster was giving. For a moment Harry missed Sirius more than he had since he died; he wished he had a guiding adult in his life.

Looking back down at the magical deed, Harry made what might be his very first independent choice since meeting Dumbledore. It probably wasn't a good idea to do something out of spite, but at that moment he didn't care.

Harry looked around for a quill. As if responding to his decision to sign the deed, one appeared with a flash, floating in front of him. He plucked it from the air and added his full name to the bottom of the scroll with all the others and dated it. Harry watched in fascination as the date he wrote shifted over and made room behind 'Potter' for the sir name 'Black' that appeared in his own hand writing. Before he could process the information, the deed rolled itself up and puffed away to wherever it had come from. Possibly filing itself with Gringotts or the Ministry?

Harry jumped when loud overlapping noises came from all around him, sounds of doors unlocking, walls shifting and stone grinding. The entire floor was shaking so hard Harry couldn't have stood up if he wanted to. He watched in shock and a little fear as the walls moved and the room became bigger. The once lavish, but now decrepit decorations repaired themselves, and decorations that weren't there before were appearing from the walls and floor.

When it was over Harry was standing in a very different house, or more like a manor. He had always assumed that pure blood family manors would be on a large estate like the Malfoys. Apparently some families really did value secrecy. This must be what the deed meant by 'all the secrets' being revealed. The house still had a darker theme, dark rich wood floors and furniture, but it was more… cozy, maybe? It was no longer moth eaten and dirty, as well as significantly bigger.

With an excited thrill that curled up from his toes, Harry explored the different floors. He ran to the very top floor all they way back down to the basement. He noticed that the lay out was essentially the same, but with added rooms, and all the secret passages made themselves known to him.

When Harry walked into the library, he was shocked by the size of it. He felt like he was in an Ivy League University main library, like he had seen on the telly. As soon as he reached the middle of the main room, a small spot on the floor began to glow, and then another one appeared, and another, until there was a trail of small glowing dots leading him farther into the library. Harry shrugged and began to follow the dots; the house seemed to have accepted him as the owner, so he didn't think anything bad would happen. He bobbed and weaved through the stacks while following the light trail. When he reached an ancient looking bookshelf that was out of place compared to the other large shiny oak ones, the light stopped. The bookshelf was smaller than the others, pressed flat against the wall and made of a wood that was so dark it was almost black. It
was intricately carved with black phoenixes, though you could only tell they were phoenixes if you looked closely, most people would probably think they were ornate ravens.

Harry wasn't sure what to do, so he stood in front of the bookcase for a minute before he decided he might as well explore it. He reached out and ran his hand down one of the carved birds and snapped his limb back when the bird moved under his fingers. It didn't hurt him, but he hadn't expected the wood to move. Harry reminded himself that he was the owner of the house and was led here, so he should be safe. He reached out again and tried not to cringe when the bird moved, but it was hard. A shiver ran down his spine when not just the one he touched moved, but they all started to shift. Slowly, each carved bird turned until they were all looking at him. Harry thought he might wet himself, when in unison, their eyes flashed silver. Harry took his hand off the bookcase as it smoothly slid to the side, revealing a doorway into a much smaller private library.

Heart pounding, he walked in; it was half a study and half library. There was a large dark wood desk to one side, and bookshelves lining the walls. Some of the space on the shelves held different relics rather than books. Harry skimmed the titles around him and realized there were almost no recently written books. No one had added to the collection since before Sirius's parents died.

The books were organized chronologically by when they were written and the topic of every book was the nature of magic. Harry moved to the section with some of the oldest books, he ran his fingers gently over the spines as he walked along the shelves. His fingers stopped when they landed on a book he had seen before. It was a first edition of the book that Hermione had just sent him. He pulled the book out and flipped it to the first page. He felt his brows slowly rising to meet his hairline as he read the introduction. The book was about Dark intentions and Light intentions. The entire book was advocating that Magic was pure and without bias. People who used Dark Magic didn't get addicted to the magic; they got addicted to the power. Harry had always thought that there was Light and Dark Magic, and if you did Dark Magic it somehow tainted you, therefore good people never used it.

Harry closed the book and continued to read titles. He realized that there were a lot of books about Light intentions in the older sections and that they lessened as the books got newer. Most of the older Light magic books said the same thing about magic being pure and not having an alignment. As the books became newer and the Ministry rose to power they began to talk more and more about Dark magic being inherently bad and corrupting good people just because they used it. One book opened with a page about how the Ministry needed to be able to put restrictions on magic to keep the people safe.

Harry understood the need to restrict spells because they could hurt someone, but some of these books were saying that the Ministry restricted the spells because the use of them created evil in the souls of the caster. There were copies of propaganda posters and other similar things claiming that Dark magic was the source of evil in humans and that without it people would be inherently good.
Harry put down the poster of a skull eating a butterfly that said "DARK DESTROYS" from 1805 and paused to think for a moment. He went back to some of the older books from before the Ministry started classifying Dark as evil and grabbed one he had been flipping through before. He opened it to the table of contents and found the section he was looking for, he flipped to the correct page and began to read. The book listed minor Dark Charms and named the Stupefy charm as Dark. Harry glanced back at the other book that said Dark magic, no matter how minor, tainted the soul and laughed a bit.

"Well my soul must be black by now if that were true," He muttered to himself.

Harry had never stopped to consider magic itself, he found that he just believed that Dark was bad and Light was good. Now after flipping through a few books through history, he was thinking that maybe the Ministry had been building an image that suited them for the last couple hundred years. The only thing he couldn't figure out was why this room existed in the Black family library. From what Harry had heard, the Black family wasn't just Dark, they were evil. He stood up and looked around, his eyes caught a tapestry that was hanging above the desk. It was a large rendition of the Black Family crest, but it was slightly different. Where there was normally a skull at the very top, it was replaced by a silver and black cat like eye. The hand holding the rapier was still there and the three birds were in the same spot. The bird that had been ravens the last time Harry saw the crest were the same ravenish black phoenixes that were carved in the bookcase. Harry was beginning to think that the Black family had always been Dark, but became evil when Voldemort came to power. His suspicions were confirmed when he looked at the family motto, where it normally said "Toujours pur" (Always Pure) this older crest said "Verum Magia, Toujours pur" (True Magic, Always Pure).

Harry moved to the desk and sat in the chair that was positioned for guests. At some point the motto had been changed to be about blood purity, when it was most likely originally about the base neutrality of magic. The Black family was just a group that traditionally used Dark Magic, not people that believed in evil. They probably did have rather strict views on blood purity, but not radical ones like the Death Eaters. When Harry came to this conclusion, he felt the same tingle of magic he did when the deed had appeared. It felt like the house was agreeing with him; a warm tickle. It felt happy to have purged of evil through Harry's ownership.

Harry put his head face down on the desk. He was emotionally communicating with a bloody house… what had he gotten himself into? He sat back up but kept his eyes closed, he remembered Dumbledore saying houses of Ancient Families had very deep and complicated magic like Hogwarts, he figured Grimmauld Place could feel on some level.

Through his closed lids Harry saw a flash of light and groaned... what now? He opened his eyes. On the desk there was a very large tome, entitled VERUM HEREDITAS. Harry picked the book up as he stood, and as put it under his arm, he decided that he needed a break from all the discoveries. He left the small room, and heard the bookcase door slide shut behind him. He decided he was going to look around the house a bit more, and then he would read the book Hermione sent him. After those two tasks were complete, he would try to discover why the house
gave him this giant book. He was curious, because it looked very old, possibly the oldest book there.

Harry walked the entire house. The most obvious changes he noticed were that all things related to the later generations of the Black family were gone, as if the house had swallowed them up, maybe similarly to how it had spit out the other decorations. Mrs. Black's portrait was gone- Harry felt great satisfaction when he thought of her screaming as the walls ate the portrait- Along with the paintings, every instance of a family tree that had members blown off was also gone. There was only one tapestry with the family line on it and it was the one used as a record. All the House Elves heads and troll legs were gone as well. Harry felt rather sick about the House Elves head because all of them must have died and been mounted in the last couple of generations of Blacks. That was a lot of Elves to go through in such a short time. Harry also discovered that the house was much bigger than he first thought, it had a bathroom for every bedroom, not just the master suite. When he got back to the drawing room he favored out of the three now available, he flopped onto the couch and pulled out his book from Hermione.

For the rest of the night, Harry read. He learned more from the book about conceptual magic than he had learned in his entire time at Hogwarts, and it was only a beginner's guide. He learned that the old magic definition of Dark was rather broad, as it included any magic that used human ingredients, even if it was just spit. Also, any shield that could stop healing charms was considered Dark, even if it stopped other spells that Light shields didn't. What really shocked Harry was that there were healing spells that were considered Dark because if they are used to many times in a row without resting it could damage or kill the user. However, the healing spells were amazing! They could cure cancer in a minute, they could heal a massive injury very fast without almost any bed rest. This was part of the reason Hermione sent the book, Harry was sure of it.

The one aspect of Dark magic the book mentioned that confused Harry was the animal category, apparently a spell was "Dark" if a live animal was used, even if the animal was not harmed. Harry wasn't sure why it was Dark if the animal was not hurt or killed. He shrugged and closed the book. Harry understood the line between Light and Dark magic much better, they were really just different not better or worse. One had more risk for sure, but that was the caster's choice, in his opinion. Real Light and Dark Magics were not the same as the ministry categories. The ministry classified 'Stupefy' as Light, when it was originally considered a Dark spell, based on its ability to cause heart damage if used excessively on a person.

Harry closed the book; he had read the entire thing. As he picked up the large tome that had appeared earlier, he looked at his watch and back at the book. It was 4 AM, Harry put the book back down and decided it was time for bed.

Draco sat alone in his room. He still twitched every once in awhile. Severus had told him that it would eventually stop, but that it might take a few hours, and he was lucky that he wasn't left alone on the floor long enough for permanent damage to set in.

Things had not been going very well since his father was taken to Azkaban. The Dark Lord pretty
much moved into the manor, and Draco was his new favorite toy. Because of his father's failures, he got the pleasant job of bearing all of the punishment. The worst part was his mother; she was brought to the meetings to watch her son be tortured, and then taken back to her room. She wasn't allowed to talk to Draco or check on him. They were kept completely separate. It was only a matter of time before the Dark Lord marked Draco, and then it was over.

He was so angry at Potter for putting his father in prison, but he was just as angry at his father for getting the family into this mess in the first place. The battle for dominance between his two sources of anger was tearing Draco apart. He didn't know what to do. Severus kept telling him it would get better, but he didn't see how that was possible until school started. By the time he was on his way to Hogwarts, he would be marked, and then the school would only be a temporary retreat.

Draco leaned forward on his bed and let his head rest on his silk sheets; he groaned in frustration when his muscles twitched again. He couldn't keep going like this. There was another meeting the day after tomorrow, and rumor had it that there was an assignment that Draco was going to have to complete when he went back to school. He could only imagine how unpleasant it was going to be.

The next morning when Harry woke up, he couldn't remember where he was for a moment, but then everything came back and he smiled. He was on his own, in his own house. He got up and stretched. He had taken the master bedroom; the house had redecorated it in silver, black, and grey. Apparently these were the original Black Family colors. He walked to his connected bathroom and got ready for the day.

The kitchen still had the preservation charms intact from when the Order had used it, so there was food left from before they had cleared out. Harry grabbed some milk and cereal and ate quickly. He was interested in the book from last night, and wanted to start it as soon as possible. He smirked to himself when he thought about how proud Hermione would because of all reading he was doing.

Harry took a tea service with him into the blue drawing room. He had named the room last night because it was the only one of the three drawing rooms that was mostly blue. He sat down where he had read before and put the service on the low table in front of him. He picked up his tea and took a sip and turned to set it on the end table to his right. He stopped, the fuzz filled cup that Sirius had left on the table was still there. All the other disturbed furniture and china had been put away when the house unlocked but this cup hadn't moved. Harry stared at it a moment, his eyes bright, then he leaned forward and put his cup on the coffee table.

Harry shivered when the house's magic washed over him in a comforting way. He shrugged it off and reached forward for the Verum Heredita book. The room spun for a moment, then his thoughts became very clear, He shook his head and looked back to the book. When he opened it to the first page, he realized it was handwritten; the date at the top said 1790 and it read somewhat like a journal. He noticed that the first few pages of the book were not as old as the rest, as if they were added later.

Today the New Ministry finally went too far. They have done something that will change the course
Harry took another sip of tea, when he had opened the book he didn't expect to be faced with such a heavy topic. He shrugged and read more.

The public believes the Ministry will be putting a powerful blanket spell over all of our people. The spell will mark every child born until they turn seventeen. It will tell the ministry every instance of magic used by the child until the trace it removed when they "come of age". This is the only information announced publicly, but I am one of the few, along with some other powerful family heads, that knows the truth. This spell is a cover for something much more devious; over the next fifty years the spell will slowly dampen the Inheritance that every magical person is supposed to go through when they turn sixteen. The ministry is oppressing the masses for their personal gain. They have also declared Dark Magic evil, and have expanded the definition of Dark to include almost all of the inheritance magic.

The worst part, I can't believe I am writing this at all, but the worst part is that the spell they are weaving will follow the people it is cast on and be passed down to any child born here. Any child born with even one parent with the curse will also bear the effects of the spell no matter where they live.

The spell will suppress a child's inheritance; they will receive only half their magical boost, and all Bloodline Magics will be null. There will no longer be inherent abilities in our people. Wizarding Britain had the highest number of Inherent blood lines, as well as the strongest. When this spell fully takes effect, there will be almost none of them left.

I am already working with the heads of the other ancient families to come up with a solution, but we will unfortunately not be able to spread the information outside of our families in fear of government action. However, in some fashion we must preserve our heritage.

At the end of the page was a list of families that were part of the movement to break the curse. Harry recognized many names including Malfoy. But the name that made his heart race and his anger rise was Dumbledore. The Headmaster’s family knew the information in this book, and from what Harry had read so far it seemed really important. It was just another thing he was kept in the dark about. Harry looked back down at the page and saw a note scribbled at the bottom in more rushed handwriting.

Today the Heads of the main families will come together. We will erect wards on all our family homes to prevent at least the effects of the Magic trace while on our property. The others will be here soon.

Harry felt his heart jump, maybe he would risk trying magic to see if the wards still existed. But first, he needed to look through this information in case the ministry tried to find him.
After flipping through more of the book, Harry discovered that they did find a way to break the curse, but it was dangerous and sometimes the child they used it on would die. It was a potion with a ritual that involved candles; the potion didn't look hard to brew, but needed many very rare ingredients. The ritual also took hours to work and was very painful. It literally burned the trace and the curse from the affected magical core. Harry shivered.

The rest of the book was a record, the pages were brittle and dated back to the beginning of the Black family. It was every member's inheritance, the date it happened, and what "gifts" the child had. There were more death dates on the sixteenth year of a child's life then there should have been. The dangers of the curse removal seemed to have greatly affected the family. Harry move on from the grim topic to a section that talked about signs that will help a parents figure out what gift their child might have. Harry's eyes widened when he read that being a parselmouth was one of the signs. It was a rare gift that appeared at birth, and signified any one of the listed inheritance gifts. Harry cringed when he realized many of the gifts were abilities that allowed the wizard to manipulate other people in some way.

The thing that interested him the most was that parselmouths got a larger than normal magical boost when they went through their inheritance. That was something Harry might be willing to risk his life for. He also realized that many of the families that were listed on the first page had Death Eaters in them now. Voldemort more than likely knew about all of this and already unlocked his inheritance, that's why he was so powerful. All the pure blood families have their inheritance, which was why they tended to be more talented later in life than other wizards and witches, it's one of the ways they keep people believing that they are superior to muggleborns and half-bloods. Since they are almost all Death Eaters it's also how a minority group like them could instill fear and push down the entire magical community.

Harry slumped back into the couch with wide eyes. The book said that the curse followed the person no matter where they went and affected their children, so for years it had been spreading like a virus around the world. Without even knowing it, the Ministry created an open door for evil wizards like Voldemort to just prance through. And for what? Power, control, money? Harry felt sick. He kept reading as he pushed the bile down, he found out that all the magic listed in the book was called core magic. It was deeper than spells done with a wand. There was ceremony and tradition, and respect for power and for magic itself. There was an entire section in the book about old family traditions to honor magic.

The magic that was currently common was called Surface Magic, it was cast with the magic on the surface of the core that leaked into the body. Using only that magic made it almost impossible to tap into a wizards true potential.

The Ministry banned all core magic and labeled it Dark, claiming it was dangerous if overused or mishandled. The Ministry wanted anything too powerful to be restrained. They claimed that all magic done without a wand, besides potions, was Dark and illegal since it tapped into the core.
With their virus spreading, the other governments didn't need to make bans like this. For the last three hundred years wizards had been slowly losing inherent abilities and power every generation, and since Britain had the highest concentration of that type of talent, they were almost all gone.

He looked back at the page about types of inheritances, and went over the list again, maybe he could figure out what type Voldemort had. There was one gift that makes a wizard able to control Magic by speaking to it in parseltongue. There was only one record of it, and the wizard accidentally died from his powers. Harry dismissed that idea, because Voldemort would either be dead because of his arrogance or a god. There were a few others that fit a bit better, the one that scared Harry the most was the ability to persuade people to do what you want with parseltongue or just your magic. The person will think it was their own choice, unless removed from the user's presence for a long period of time.

Harry swallowed hard and turned the page back to the potion instructions for breaking the curse. He couldn't bring himself to read more about what awful power Voldemort might have. The potion was something he could make if he had the ingredients; there was a lab someplace in this huge house. The thought of finding it again made Harry very tired.

He closed the book and set it on the table. He needed to contact Hermione, she needed to know about all this. He couldn't put all the pieces together himself, he heaved a sigh and turned to his half cup of cold tea… he needed to test the wards, it was now or never.

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out his wand. He tapped the tea cup and muttered the spell to warm it up, and the tea bellowed with steam. He sat still as stone and waited for a ministry owl, none came.

"Fucking hell! That's how Malfoy stays ahead!" Harry felt angry that he hadn't known about this advantage, as it was just one more thing he could have been doing to raise his chances of survival that Dumbledore didn't mention at all. He wasn't ready to declare war on the old man yet, but he was close.

*TAP TAP TAP*

Harry almost jumped out of his skin when he heard the sound. He whipped around to the window, and sighed in relief when he saw Hedwig. For a moment, he had thought it was the Ministry. He went to the window, slid it open, and the white owl hopped onto his arm with a happy hoot.

"I'm glad to see you, too, girl," Harry whispered while stroking her feathers. He sat on the couch and took the small note from her leg.
Dear Friend,

Just wanted to let you know I sent off the letter to you asked me to send this morning and nothing bad happened. So, when Hedwig came back, I sent her to you with this note. It's not as fast as phones or anything, but the owl mail is kinda cool.

Harry smiled as he read the note, even without a name he knew it was Dudley. "See girl, he's not so bad."

Hedwig gave an indignant hoot but she didn't bite him which Harry took as a good sign. Maybe she was warming up to Dudley. Harry patted her head and chuckled.

"I know, he's not me."

Hedwig rubbed her head into his hand. Harry transferred her to his shoulder and went to his room to find some paper and a quill. He found a scrap at the bottom of his trunk, and sat at the desk in his room. He felt silly when he saw a stack of expensive paper with the original Black seal sitting on the desk. Harry disregarded the paper, because it would be bad if the letter was intercepted with that family seal on it.

"I am a Potter, anyway..." he muttered to the house in an irritated tone. He must be losing his mind because he was talking to a house...

There was a shimmer of light over the stationary, and when Harry looked back at it, the Potter seal was in the opposite corner of the paper from the Black seal. Maybe he wasn't crazy, but this was still weird...

Harry scribbled a note letting Dudley know he was fine on the scrap paper. He also told his cousin he did the right thing by covering up information and names in the letter, he tried to be as vague as possible. He looked around the desk and found a stick of black wax. He folded the paper closed and heated the wax with his wand. The only wax seal on the table also had the Black family crest on it, so Harry let it dry without any markings. He went back to the drawing room and opened the window, he handed Hedwig the letter. She glared at him, but took it resentfully. Harry chuckled as she flew away to deliver his message.

Now he just had to figure out how to contact Hermione. He was certain that all mail to her and Ron was being scanned by someone. The letters between him and Dudley were going to be suspicious enough, even if they had no names or real information in them. They might let some weird note like the one Dudley sent slip by, but he needed to tell her where he was somehow so she could get
here. He was sure the old wards on the house were active and that he could let anyone he wanted through, but he wasn't sure if the fidelius charm was still working. If it was working, then Harry assumed he was the secret keeper, and anyone that knew the secret before was knocked out of the loop as the spell reset. Unfortunately, Harry had no idea how to check for that.

With a sigh, Harry decided to work on some other plans. He figured he could look for the potions lab and start to learn some of the old spells in the books he found. He was sure some of the spells haven't been used in a long time and might come in handy. He laughed when he thought about everyone's reaction to idea of Harry Potter learning Dark Magic.

Things were shifting slowly in Harry's mind. He was beginning to look at the world differently, it was happening so slowly he almost didn't notice. There are so many secrets and conspiracies, and Harry was sure he had many more shocking revelations to come. He was slowly beginning to realize that people only saw what they wanted, because they only looked where they wanted. Maybe it was a lack of imagination, or maybe it was subconsciously deliberate.

Harry was done looking in the same place; he was going to explore with an open mind.

Everything was getting weirder and weirder.

"It's really a lack of imagination that makes children check under the bed. Like the monster couldn't be floating invisibly just above you?"

-Night Vale

AN- there could be more invisible story just below this author's note… but there's not. Of course if I also can't see... it could be there. Though that would mean I didn't write it… unless there's more than one of me… I have to think on this, thanks for stopping by.

2/24/2017

Amended
"It's really a lack of imagination that makes children check under the bed. Like the monster couldn't be floating invisibly just above you?"

-Night Vale

AN- there could be more invisible story just below this author's note… but there's not. Of course if I also can't see... it could be there. Though that would mean I didn't write it… unless there's more than one of me… I have to think on this, thanks for stopping by.

2/24/2017

Amended
The potions lab was bigger than Harry had imagined. It was in the basement, off of a hallway outside of the kitchen. After exploring he realized that the kitchen wasn't for "polite" company to dine in; instead there was a grand dining room that appeared when the house opened. It had never occurred to Harry that the kitchen wasn't where people ate. The lab and a few other rooms that seemed to be for training in magics of different types, had also appeared when the house unlocked. Everything Harry needed for the curse removal potion was in the lab, but there was only enough
left for one person. Harry had hoped he could make more in case he needed it, but in the end it might have been for the best, it was risky and he didn't want any of his friends getting killed over this.

A week had passed since Harry came to Grimmauld Place; he only worked on his spells a few times, but in that time he mastered two spells. One was the shield charm, that was Dark because it shielded healing magic, the other was a healing charm that was like a song in Gaelic. The song spell healed even the worst trauma, but it was dangerous to use too many times in a row. He felt good about his progress, even if it wasn't as much as he would have liked. He also didn't have anyone to practice on, so he wasn't sure how good he was. The training made him very tired, like the magic was hard to pull on. He assumed the curse was causing this problem.

Harry stirred the curse removal potion slowly, making sure to take extra care with his movements, he was nearing the end of the process and only had one shot.

He wasn't sure he was going to use it while he was here, even if he did get Hermione to come to the house, he didn't think it was safe to do it with just the two of them. The counter to the curse also had a small ritual to go along with it. Much of his time was spent practicing the symbols he would have to draw to create the array he would need. He also needed to make some candles with his own blood in them, but he wasn't sure how he felt about that. There was apparently a lot of magic in candle making, but it was one of those magics that was outlawed and forgotten by many. There were a lot of obstacles in his way.

Harry contemplated what he had read in the big book he found, while he worked. There was more about the gifts people inherited, and he learned that not all gifts were special abilities that were unique to a certain person. Those gifts were actually very rare and normally the child was born with part of the gift active, like parselmouths. Many gifts were talents. Children would already have an interest in the magic, before they were 16, if they knew it existed. If they didn't know about it they would be drawn to related objects and magics. So if someone's gift was a natural ability for candle magic, that meant that their magic was more easily molded with candle magic than other people's. They would have an easier time making successful candles and the outcome would be more powerful. This caused them to feel drawn to the practice.

Harry only tried to make the blood candles once so far, and all he got was a hot mess, he kind of wished he had the natural gift for it. It was a calming practice that could do many things that regular spell casting couldn't. Burning candles of the right types at the right times could even help with mental health, which is a field that modern magic had trouble fixing. The Permanent Ward at Mungo’s spoke volumes about this failing. There was also an entire form of communication that was lost because the art was restricted. Harry read about how owls only came into use when people stopped having the gift of candle magic, that meant that their magic was more easily molded with candle magic than other people's. They would have an easier time making successful candles and the outcome would be more powerful. This caused them to feel drawn to the practice.
The Black family was known for having candle magic, there was an entire industry at one point based on selling the candles. The reason purity was important was because the families didn't want the abilities to leave their bloodline and they wanted to bring more abilities into their family. Back then, it was OK for an old family to bring in a muggleborn as long as they could control them and if they tied them to the family. From what he read, there was something important about having variety in blood, and that made muggleborns with no attachments almost sought after to marry into the family, but Harry couldn't figure it out. All he knew was that the purity concept was twisted in the last couple hundred years and then the final twist was Voldemort. Before the concept of mudbloods existed the only problem with muggleborns was the watering down of traditions. That was what the Gryffindor/Slytherin conflict was based on. In olden times it was actually very rare for pure blood families to marry into each other because then the Gift of their bloodline might make it into the other competing family.

Harry finished the potion with a final turn of the 24 karat gold rod and the potion turned a very calming blue that shimmered gold. Harry turned off the burner and while he waited for the potion to cool, he turned to another project. He had a candle magic book opened to a page about Floo candles. Apparently, the candles were the main source of the Black family fortune. Unfortunately, without a person gifted in candle making, the product could only transport small notes. When the gift faded away, plain floo powder became more popular because it was able to do more, and then the candle magic was banned. Harry learned that floo powder was not something that wizards made, it was something they harvested. The entire history of its invention was fabricated by Ignatia Wildsmith and her family, and they had kept it a secret, so only a few other high powered families knew about the farce. Floo powder was produced by a magical plant that has a defense mechanism that allows it to teleport when there was a forest fire. The Wildsmith family didn't want people to grow their own so they lied, but the Black family had an alliance with them through marriage. Through the alliance the Black family got a supply of powder for the candles they made.

Harry was disturbed by the amount of manipulations he was finding out about. He was glad that the ministry and the pureblood families were almost always at war on some level, because if they ever completely worked together everyone would be doomed. Harry remembered learning about Nazi Germany; if that could happen in a country that big, then the Wizarding World would be easy to control.

Harry carefully opened the molds for his two candles; this was his third attempt at making the floo candles this week. He knew they would be nothing special, but they would get the job done. He gave a cry of joy when his candles didn't fall apart or turn into a puddle of black goo that tried to eat through the table this time. He set them upright and went back to bottle his potion. Luckily, there was no special container requirements for the potion, so he put it all in one flask and sealed it closed. He only had one more thing to do. He reached for a bottle of gold liquid. He had no idea how it was made or what it was made of; all he knew was that it is important to the candles. He took a calligraphy brush and dipped it into the gold paint. On one deep green candle he wrote his own name carefully and clearly. On the other candle he wrote Hermione's first and last name in the same manner. Now all he had to do was wait for Hedwig. Every two days Dudley would send a letter to Dumbledore and then wait for something bad to happen. When everything was quiet, he would send Harry a note with just the word "OK" on it after Hedwig returned.
Harry took his two candles to the Blue Drawing room and wondered if he should test them. He wanted to make sure they worked, but he was also worried that if the mail was intercepted it would look odd that he sent his friend an already used candle as a gift. He wasn't worried about anyone knowing what the candles were, unless Dumbledore saw them, but he was betting the old man was too busy to check the mail personally.

As he sat waiting for his owl, he tried to concentrate on the house. He read in some of the family books that by inviting Hermione as his guest, the wards would let her through and in his letter he was going to write the address, in case the fidelius charm really did reset.

'ummm… house?' he thought… feeling stupid. When he got a response of magic fluttering over his skin he relaxed. "I am inviting a guest, as owner of this manor. I am allowing Hermione Granger into my home." He said out loud. He couldn't say what it was that was different, but he knew it worked. The house sent him a reassurance and he smiled. Maybe he was getting the hang of this.

Tapping on the window had Harry rushing to greet his owl. He stroked her feathers and whispered that he had a job for her. She hooted proudly and Harry smiled. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a short letter he wrote days ago when he thought that making the candles was going to be easy. He rolled Hermione's candle in paper and sealed it closed. He attached the letter and the candle to Hedwig, and instructed her to return to Dudley when she was done.

Hedwig gave a resigned hoot and left out the window.

Harry waited nervously.

Ooo

Hermione Granger sat on her bed while she worked on her summer assignments. She would normally have been done by this point in the summer, but she was not her usual self. She had been upset and confused since the beginning of the summer, when she found a rare book that made her question all her own views. She continued to become more upset when she was told not to write to Harry, with the exception of his birthday, also every letter she got from Ron had been open and resealed. She was angry, and from the tone in Ron's letters he was mad as well. This was worse than before fifth year, and she didn't see an end to it. It was a violation of her rights.

Normally Hermione would be all for safety and authority, but she couldn't have a private conversation with Ron, and Harry was grieving from a huge loss, and she couldn't even send him anything! She was instructed not to talk to him about Sirius at all, and she was only allowed to send one short letter and a present. She was happy she managed to find a way around that, and she
hoped Harry got her message that not everything was as it seemed.

Never in her entire life had Hermione felt so unsettled. She put her homework down, and started pacing the room. Every time she tried to concentrate, she would end up thinking about everything she learned. It was August 7th; there was still a little more than three weeks left before the term started, and she felt like there had to be something she could do besides send Harry a book that might just confuse him more. She didn't even know what she thought anymore about anything and just wanted to have her friends to talk to.

Just as Hermione's pacing was going to reach critical speed, there was a tapping at her bedroom window. She looked up and saw Hedwig, her heart broke at the sight of the white owl. At the beginning of the summer, Harry would send her letters but she wasn't allowed to respond. The first time she tried, she knew the order took her letter when Harry wrote again asking why she didn't write back. After a couple a weeks, Hedwig stopped coming, and Hermione began to fall into a depression. It wasn't until she read, The Beginner's Guide to the Dark, that she had her fight renewed.

When she opened the window, Hedwig went right to her shoulder. She removed the package and letter. Hedwig didn't wait to get attention or a treat she just flew right out the window. Hermione scowled when she saw her mail had been tampered with again. Ignoring the blatant disregard for her privacy, she opened the package first and smiled when she saw a beautiful green candle with her name painted on it in gold paint that sparkled. She looked at the candle for a long moment; the gold paint seemed to sparkle with its own light... She shook her head and opened the letter.

Dear, Hermione

I have been missing you and Ron all summer, I don't really know what to say. I have been sending you both letters for weeks but have not gotten any response, I can only hope that there is a good reason you are not writing back. I had thought I would at least get the vague letters I got last summer. It's terrible here with the Dursley's... and I really want someone I can talk to. I know it will sound silly and corny but I made you that candle and I made one for myself. Tonight at 8PM, please light yours, and I will light mine. It will help me feel less alone.

Harry

P.S. Loved the book you sent.

As she read the letter, Hermione felt her eyes tear up, at first, she felt terrible that she couldn't be there for Harry when he needed her. He was always so independent, now he finally asked for
comfort and no one was there for him. When she got to the part about the candle she felt her eyebrows lift, she agreed with Harry, it was silly and corny. It was not very Harry Potter like of him. She looked at postscript of the letter and then the candle she had set on her desk.

"What are you up to, Harry?" she muttered.

There had to be more to this then he was saying in the letter; he knew their mail was being watched. Harry was probably being clever, and doing something like she did with the birthday present. Hermione felt a devious smile slip onto her face; anyone who saw the smile would think it was very out of place, but she couldn't help it. She knew that Harry had a sneaky side, and she secretly hoped it would come through like it had over their years of misadventures.

Ooo

Harry looked at his gold watch, it was 7:59 PM. He pulled out the real letter he had wrote for Hermione and prayed she was with her candle like he told her to be. For the candles to work, only the senders candle had to be lit, as the receivers will light when the message came through, but he had told her to light hers so that she would be near it at the right time.

When the clock turned 8, he lit his candle, then he leaned forward and said Hermione's first and last name into the flame. He felt a huge relief when the flame turned green. He quickly put his letter in the flame, and he felt it get sucked from his fingers as the fire flared up and then settled back to normal candle size.

Almost five minutes passed before anything happened. Harry was sitting and nervously bouncing his knee. His heart jumped when his candle flared up and a small scrap of notebook paper popped out, it was slightly singed and smoking. He plucked it out of the air and unfolded it. The one phrase written on it that made his heart swell and his eyes burn. Harry jumped up from the couch and sprinted to the kitchen.

The paper was left forgotten on the couch, face up, with the words "On my way."

Ooo

Hermione sat at her desk, the entire surface was cleared off... just in case, she didn't want her papers and books damaged. The candle stood in the middle, a solitary pillar of hope. It was two minutes until 8PM and Hermione had already lit her candle... just in case.
She wiggled in her chair with nerves, "come on Harry… come on." She whispered over and over. She felt like she could will something to happen with the amount of pent up energy she was battling.

She squeaked with surprise and fright, almost falling off her chair when the candle flame suddenly shot up emerald green and spit out a heavy letter on thick stationary. She scrabbled for the letter, it was sealed with black wax that had some variation of the Black Family crest pressed into it. She quickly broke the seal and was relieved to find Harry's scribble on the pages. When she unfolded the bottom half of the letter, a small packet of folded paper fell out. She picked it up and felt it, there was some type of powder in it. She read the letter.

**Dear Hermione,**

*I have a lot to say, and not enough paper. The candle I made is limited and I think with both this letter and the packet I am going to be pushing the limit. I am at 12 Grimmauld Place and am safe. I need you to come here, I read the book you sent me and I have other books that say more on the topic. I have found something big and need someone to help me sort it out. Since Grimmauld Place is supposed to be locked, I am hoping that the order never disconnect your Floo from this one. It is a shot in the dark, but I think all I need to do is invite you over, and the wards should let you through. Come as soon as you can, there is floo powder in the packet. To send a reply, just tell the candle my name and put your note into the flame.*****

*Let no one see you leave.*

*Harry*

Hermione put the letter down and picked up the packet, it had a pinch of floo powder just like the note said. She reached for her bookshelf and grabbed a spiral notebook and a pen. She ripped an uneven scrap from the notebook and scribbled that she was on her way. She hesitantly leaned forward and said Harry's first and last name, then the flame turned green, and she let it suck the note from her hand. In less than a second flat, she was out of her chair and running; she skidded around the corner of her upstairs hallway and stumbled down the stairs. Her parents were out to a movie, so she had a couple hours free. She went to every window on her first floor and pulled the blinds and curtains shut.

She went to the fireplace in her father's den, she was almost positive the Order had left it connected to headquarters. She opened the Floo and grabbed some newspaper. After balling it up, she tossed it in and grabbed a match. Striking the match, she threw it on the paper and waited a second for it to catch. She threw the powder in and yelled her destination. The moment the flames turned green, she threw herself into the fireplace.
Harry stood panting in the basement kitchen of the house, and his eyes lit up when the fireplace turned green. He opened his arms and sprinted to the hearth. Like himself, Hermione was terrible at landing, and if she was in a rush he didn't want her to fall.

It turned out to be a good idea, because his friend came out of the green flames like she was shot from a cannon. Harry caught her, and they both fell to the ground.

"OH, HARRY! I am so sorry! I didn't want to not write you, and I'm so glad you sent that candle! I… I… I'm so MAD at the Order, and confused, and I just wanted to talk to you and Ron!"

Hermione was clutching the front of Harry's shirt while laying on top of him. She was half yelling in anger, and half apologizing. When she was done ranting, she sat and caught her breath.

Harry sat up during the whole ordeal, and brought Hermione into a sitting position as well. He just hugged her while she calmed down. When she was done, she pulled back and blushed. She scrambled to her feet, and took a step back. "Sorry…" she mumbled.

Harry stood up as well and laughed. "I'm glad you're here, Hermione." He smiled at her.

She got over her embarrassment quickly, and verbally assaulted him about the candle.

"What is it made of? Does it have floo powder in it? Why did you say it had a limit? Can you make more of them?" She was being led by Harry back to the blue drawing room while she talked.

When they got to the couch, she sat down and looked around.

"Is this place different?" she asked.

Harry was laughing again. He expected the questions about the candle, but he didn't bother to answer them. "Yeah, I have signed the magical deed. Apparently, that means I get access to the whole house. Sirius never signed the deed because he hated this place."

They were both silent for a moment as the mention of Sirius floated by.
Harry picked up Verum Hereditas and handed it to Hermione. "This should answer all of your questions."

Hermione looked at the book with wide eyes, "Did you read all of this?"

Harry smirked, "Not all of it, but a bunch of it."

Hermione put the book in her lap, "Harry, what's going on?"

Harry leaned back on the couch. "Honestly, a lot of the answers are in the book, but, in short… I left my relatives house because I wanted some freedom. I wanted to figure some things out. I didn't plan on staying here, but after what I found, I needed to stay. It should be safe because of the deed."

Harry leaned forward and rested his elbows on his knees. "I was upset with everything, and felt like Dumbledore was taking too much control. The idea to leave might have been a bit immature and impulsive, but after coming here and reading the book you sent and the one you're holding, I think it was the right move." He threw her a cocky smirk, "I also managed to get away without anyone knowing, and have it all covered so they won't look for me."

Hermione nodded; it was a lot to take in. She looked at him like she needed to trust him, because she didn't feel like she could trust anyone else at the moment, Harry could relate... She was exploding on the inside; Harry could see she wanted to know all the details of what was going on, but she held back and he appreciated it.

Harry pulled his wand out and cast a tempus charm. "How much time have you got?"

Hermione looked at the time. "I have to go soon, but I can come back every day while my parents are at work." She stared at the magical numbers glowing in the air. "Wait! How are you doing magic without getting in trouble?!"

Harry put his hands behind his head, one hand was still holding his wand and wiggling it around. "There are really old wards on houses of ancient families that let underage kids use magic. That's how Malfoy and the other pure blood kids do so well in school on practicals."
Hermione leapt to her feet. "WHAT?! Are you serious?... I... I don't even know where to…" She was breathing heavily, and her cheeks were flushed with anger. "I don't know where to begin on just how underhanded and... UGH!"

For the first time in their friendship, Harry saw Hermione without words. He watched as she deflated.

"I will be back in the morning," she sighed. "Can I take this with me?" She held up the book.

"Yeah, let me know what you think. I will be up by 9AM," He replied.

She nodded, and went back to the kitchen to floo home.

Ooo

Narcissa Malfoy sat at her vanity; she had just changed into her night dress. She slowly brushed her white blonde locks as she thought about the events of the next day. She had been very careful to present a certain type of attitude up front. Her home currently hosted the Dark Lord, and while she understood that it was a great honor, she found it distasteful. She knew the Dark Lord was eyeing her son for recruitment, and so far she has been able to keep that day at bay, but tomorrow's meeting would be the final push, and she wasn't sure what she was going to do. Her husband was currently in Azkaban, and Voldemort was going to take her son. Her stomach rolled as she thought about the awful things they did to Draco, and she felt her skin crawl as she remembered the last meeting. It had been the worst torture by far; she could still feel the fingers in her hair. For the first time she had lost her composure, she had tried to run to her son, and reached out as a hand grabbed her hair and pulled her back. She screamed and twisted on the floor as her son writhed and vomited. She flopped on the floor like a hooked fish on shore. She had struggled so hard against the hand that she had thought it might be ripped out.

Then the hand was removed from her hair, and strong arms encircled her waist. Much gentler than the previous captor, this man held her close as she struggled. He leaned forward and whispered reassurance "I will retrieve him when everyone is gone, and I will take care of this," the deep voice soothed.

Narcissa put her hair brush down on the vanity and looked at herself in the mirror. Her hand slowly reached out to touch her reflection as hopelessness rose up in her chest… what was she going to do?
A spark of magic shot through her chest. It had been years since the magic deep in her core was disturbed by anyone but herself. She quickly pulled open the top drawer of her table and felt around for the thick book. Many green candles rolled back and forth as she searched, then she gripped the leather covered tome and pulled it out. The cover was green and soft, with bright gold letters. She opened it, and flipped to the last page with writing; there it was… a new name, two new names, actually. Both names were definitely not who she would have expected.

There might be some hope after all.

Ooo

The next morning, Harry sat at the kitchen table and ate the last of the cereal. He wasn't sure what he was going to do for food after this; maybe he could ask Hermione to bring food. He contemplated the various ways he could get food while staring at the green candle in the middle of the table. He brought the candle everywhere with him, in case Hermione needed to contact him. Speaking of his friend, it was almost time for her to arrive. He was hoping she read enough of the book to help him figure a few things out, and maybe they could talk about getting Ron in on all of this as well. Harry smiled as he thought of his goofy redheaded friend. It would be nice to have Ron around. Hermione was helpful and smart, but not very good at lightening the mood.

The fireplace flashed green, and Hermione stumbled out with a scowl. She hated flooing just as much as Harry did. She smiled warmly at him as she walked over and hefted a large plastic shopping bag onto the table.

"What's all this?" asked Harry around a mouth full of cereal.

Hermione wrinkled her nose at his lack of manners, but answered without commenting. "I brought you some food, we need to find a more permanent way to maintain the stock in the future, but for now this will do."

Harry reached for the bag and began going through the supplies. It was pretty normal stuff; more cereal, bread, milk, juice, and other staples. Hermione pulled Harry from his food organization by taking out the book he lent her and putting it on the table with a bang. She blushed, obviously not having meant to make such a loud noise.

"Sorry, it's heavy," she mumbled.
"Did you find anything in the book?" Harry leaned forward with interest.

Hermione perked up and smiled the way she always did when she was excited about research, "I can see why you wanted me to read it rather than explaining everything! The information about the ministry corruption alone was amazing. Considering how the ministry is run now, I'm not all that surprised there was more corruption, but still…” she trailed off for a moment, her face took on a sad and worried expression.

"What is it, Hermione?" Harry tried to sound calming.

Hermione squeezed her eyes shut for a moment and when she opened them there was a hard glint of determination. "I don't think that everything is as it seems with the Light side, specifically Dumbledore." She flinched back as if Harry was going to go off on her like he would have last year.

Harry dropped his spoon into his bowl with a splash of milk. He was expecting a hard battle with Hermione on the topic of Dumbledore. He never expect her to be the one to bring up the issue first and agree with him. Harry opened his mouth to say something but no words came out, he was just so shocked that Hermione was doubting authority.

"Oh Harry, don't be mad," Hermione looked nervous.

'I'm not mad… just." Harry took a moment to clear his mind, "I'm surprised that you of all people are doubting someone like Dumbledore –OUCH" Harry grabbed his arm where Hermione reached over and smacked him.

"I grew up, I understand now that adults aren't foolproof. After this summer, and what he put me through when I had to ignore your letters, I'm mad and doubtful." She looked at Harry with eyes pleading for him to understand.

Harry relaxed, "I agree with you."

It was Hermione's turn to be shocked, "You do?"

Harry nodded, "Yes, he has done more than separate me from you and Ron; he kept things from me that could have saved Sirius… he also kept all the things in that book from me." He pointed to
Verum Hereditas and became quiet for a moment.

Hermione looked down sadly; she looked like she had something to say, but waited for Harry to continue.

"He didn't tell me that it was a prophecy that Voldemort was after in the ministry, he didn't tell me exactly why it was so important I learn Occlumency…” Harry fought back tears, he took a deep breath and kept talking. "He didn't tell me what the full prophecy said until after Sirius…”

Hermione's shocked gasp was followed by a thick silence.

"You know the whole prophecy?" she asked in a whisper.

Harry nodded, "Yeah, I don't want to talk about it right now. But it does say that only I can end this war."

"Oh, no!" Hermione leaned over the table and hugged her friend. Harry hugged back for a moment.

"He also didn't tell me about any of the inheritance stuff, and he knows, because his family was listed in that book, and I can’t imagine they didn’t pass that information down." Harry was angry as he spoke and stood up. "You know how useful it could be if he had told me? I could have trained, and been ready to have the curse removed. I could have a chance!"

Hermione quietly agreed, "I think he's afraid of you."

That statement caused Harry to plop back down in his chair, "Wha?" he said dumbly.

Hermione took a deep breath, and blurted everything out before Harry could interrupt. "I think he knows that your gift will be powerful, any of the gifts listed under parslemouth are amazing. I think he put you with your relatives to make you easy to control. That's why he separated us last summer and this summer, it’s also why he didn't tell you about any of the inheritance stuff. He's scared of you, of what you can become…"

Harry just stared at his friend in shock; it all really made sense.
"I think he doesn't want you to be powerful, I think he has some other need of you, and you have to be agreeable. I just can't think of what he wants." Hermione finished. Harry saw the calculating gleam in her eyes. She had put a lot of thought into this. She always did before making a big choice.

"You're right, it makes sense. We can't tell him anything about any of this, can we?" Harry whispered.

Hermione shook her head,"No…"

Harry felt like his entire world was flipping over, he thought finding out all the stuff about the Black family had been shocking but this… his leader, his mentor, had betrayed him, and it hurt. He didn't think Dumbledore was evil, exactly, but the man didn't seem to see any solution but his own. "He thinks he's the only one with the solution, no one else can do it," he said out loud.

Hermione nodded. "He might be right, but we won't know that until we have more information."

There was a long silence of contemplation.

Harry understood, but until they had the information, they would assume there was more than one way.

He stood up, "Come with me, I have more to show you." He walked out of the kitchen, with Hermione following and carrying the large tome.

Just as Harry expected, Hermione freaked out when they entered the library.

"It's bigger than Hogwart's!" She yelled, hyperventilating, and Harry had to reach out and grab the arm holding the book so she wouldn't wander off.

"You can explore it later, I have something better to show you," Harry chuckled at his friend.

Hermione gave him an incredulous look, "What could be better than this?" she waved around with her free arm to emphasize, while Harry practically dragged her to the back of the room.
When they approached the black phoenix bookcase, Hermione had calmed down enough to look confused. "What's this? Are they crows? No… they're phoenixes?" She was mumbling to herself, while walking around to get a better look.

Harry reached out, and put his hand on one of the birds. Hermione squeaked and jumped back, when all the carved birds slowly turned to look at Harry. Their eyes flashed silver like last time, and the bookcase moved. Harry led Hermione into the small private study. She stood still, and looked around with wide eyes. Her gaze fell on the Black seal above the desk.

"That's the original seal that was in the book, so it's true; only the later generations that followed Voldemort were really bad." She seemed to be talking to herself, and Harry made a sound of agreement as he collected some books. He went over to her and held them out.

"These are books I have looked through, the parts I thought you needed to know are marked. There's some stuff about muggleborns and purebloods you will find interesting, as well as a book on candle magic." Harry jumped a bit when Hermione pulled the books from him so fast he almost fell over. She sat on the floor right where she had been standing and began to read.

He laughed while he continued, "I also need your help to figure out if the fidelius charm is still on the house, and who the secret keeper is."

"Oh that's easy; it is still on the house, and you are the keeper." she answered shortly while flipping through the books in her lap.

"How can you be so sure?" Harry asked while he sat down on the floor across from her.

Hermione sighed, she shut the book she was reading with exasperated movements. She obviously didn't appreciate being interrupted. "Well as you know, you are the head of the Black Family and owner of the house. The fidelius charm cannot be broken unless the keeper dies, and Dumbledore's not dead, BUT the charm cannot be kept on an Ancient families house without the head's approval, so the keeper status automatically transfers to the head in situations like this. Sirius… passed, and now there's a new head who has not given permission for the charm. That's why Dumbledore hasn't brought anyone back here, he knows all this." She finished her speech with a very un-Hermione like smirk. Something about this whole 'no authority' thing was giving her a mischievous edge.

"Woah… wait. Head of the Black family? I just own this house," Harry had his hands up in a defensive position.

Hermione grabbed Verum Hereditas and flipped it to the end of the register that listed family members and their gifts. She held it up for Harry to read. He leaned forward and saw at the very
bottom Sirius's name with his title, Head of the family, his gift was blank because he was kicked out before his curse had been removed, and his status was deceased. Harry felt irritated that Sirius never told him about the inheritances; either he didn't know, because of his disowned status, and families didn't tell their kids until it was time; or Dumbledore had gotten to him. He hoped it was the former; it made sense, and it was a highly guarded secret.

Hermione huffed, "look below Sirius's name."

Harry was startled out of his musing by the command, and did as he was told. His breath caught, and his chest tightened in surprise. At the very bottom of the list was his name, Harry James Potter Black. His gift was blank, but his title was "Family Head". He was Lord Black…

"WHAT?" He yelled.

"I thought you knew, that you saw it. You are the Head, because Sirius made you his heir, and because he passed away and there was no other heir listed who was male and of age, you got the title a year early. It's a common exception, getting a title at sixteen in situations like this."

Hermione looked sheepish, she had thought he would notice his own name.

Harry just sat silent, he couldn't believe it.

Hermione extrapolated, "Well... think of it this way, if you weren't listed by Sirius, then it would have fallen to Draco Malfoy, and he would be Lord Black right now."

Harry shivered, "Yeah, better me than him. By the way, how do you know all this stuff?"

Hermione smirked that strange new smile of hers and leaned back a bit. "What? You think me of all people would enter a whole new society and not read everything about the culture I could find?" She raised an eyebrow in a cheeky manner that made Harry laugh.

"You know, I kinda like this new 'Adult-Free' Hermione," Harry smirked back.

Hermione looked sullen for a moment, "Yeah, well… any adult that forces me to abandon a
grieving friend, isn't an adult I need.” She looked up and gave a watery smile. "This doesn't mean that I have thrown all authority out the window, we just have to determine the good eggs from the bad," she tried to make her tone light.

Harry reached out and put his hand over hers. "I didn't doubt you for a second," he smiled warmly.

She smiled back gratefully.

Ooo

Later that day, Harry and Hermione had relocated to the blue drawing room. There were still a couple of hours left until she had to go home. Harry had shown her around the new parts of the house, and now they sat with a pile of books that Hermione was taking with her. She had blown right through the parts of the books Harry had marked for her in less than half the time it had taken him. She said she needed to go home and look at some of her books before she committed to any theories about muggleborns and the blood variance that one book spoke about.

After she finished the candle magic book, she insisted she needed a closer look at the candle. She was babbling about how the magic worked similar to potions, and there were probably people who have a similar gifts in potions. That potions talent takes a lot of concentration, and so is normally paired with a mind magic talent.

She held the floo candle and was examining it, holding it up to her eye level as she explained her thoughts on the topic.

"I wonder if someone has the inventory. Maybe it's in the house somewhere," she continued to talk as she turned the candle around.

Harry perked up at that, "Inventory?" he asked.

"Oh for goodness sake, did you only read the parts you needed to make the candle? Honestly..." Hermione sighed.

Harry gave her a sheepish smile, "Yeah, I did…"
Hermione let out a bigger sigh, "It says in the book that the Black family kept a list called, simply, 'The Inventory'. It was created by one of the first to have candle magic and make a business out of it. It keeps track of floo candles and their owners. There were records of other candles, but the floo candles were the most important." She took a moment to compose her words. "Like the records at Hogwarts, The Inventory is self-updating, and because candle magic was almost only found in the Black line, it was rather simple to make a book that automatically listed every candle and the owner, since the name had to be magically bound to the candle for it to work. The book was bound to the family members with candle magic."

Harry gulped. "So, you're saying that every time a candle is made with a new name, it appears in the book? Like it's connected to some kinda network?"

Hermione nodded. "Not only that," she continued, "it also lets the keeper know when someone's candle has run out, and if they need a new one. Only question is, where is The Inventory now?"

As if to answer Hermione's inquiry, the wick of the candle she was holding flared bright green. Because she held it sideways, the note popped out and shot over the table and onto the floor. Both teenagers were breathing heavy from the scare, and neither made a move to go get the paper.

"Did you make another candle besides the one I have?" Hermione asked quietly.

Harry slowly shook his head negative while keeping his eyes on the folded note. "No," he breathed nervously.

"Well, I guess it's safe to assume that The Inventory is not in this house…" Hermione said weakly.

Ooo

"Whisper a dangerous secret to someone you care about. Now they have the power to destroy you, but they won't. This is what love is."

-Night Vale

A/N- I have begun to worry about things outside of myself. Things unrelated to you. Maybe, this is why we have our rendezvous here at the bottom of the page.
"Whisper a dangerous secret to someone you care about. Now they have the power to destroy you, but they won't. This is what love is."

-Night Vale

A/N- I have begun to worry about things outside of myself. Things unrelated to you. Maybe, this is why we have our rendezvous here at the bottom of the page.

3/2/2017

Reworked
Was not a spy, was not a chair

Chapter Notes

AN- Science! I am not an expert. The little bit of science in this chapter has been simplified and might not be the most accurate, but it gets the idea across.

THANKS! To all of my lovely readers! Your reviews really keep me going, so please leave your thoughts and comments after every chapter.

Harry and Hermione are friends. Let not read too much into this chapter.

The Links to the High Res Version of the 2 cover pictures is in my Profile, along with an ongoing update on how.

Many pages I have written and how many I have posted.

Thank you to my Beta minijaxter

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 7
Was not a spy, was not a chair

Ooo

Narcissa sat at her vanity; she looked in the mirror blankly, her face was a mess. Her tears pulled her mascara down her pale cheeks, the trails long dry, were a reminder of of her own helplessness.

They had marked her son. He was taken from her, but she couldn't do anything to stop it. She had just sat there and watched.

The Dark Lord had given her son an "honored" task, Draco was to kill Albus Dumbledore. Narcissa felt a sob straining in her throat, but she held it down, she needed to be strong. Slowly, she began to clean herself up with a tissue. Draco was strong and clever, with her help he would survive. The only good thing that came from the situation, is that she was now allowed to see her son whenever she wanted; he was "leashed" so there was no longer a risk in letting her be near him. On the other hand, the Dark lord seemed to have become fond of Narcissa. The more he tormented her son in front of her, the more he seemed to regard her as an amusing pet. It was disgusting.

Narcissa finished pulling herself together and stood, composing her face into a blank expression. She had to meet Severus at Spinner's End, he was a good man even though he ended up a Death Eater, and she was hoping he might help.

The moment her son was marked as a servant of the Dark Lord, he had also been marked for death. Narcissa wasn't fooled by the reassuring words the Dark Lord spun for her. He claimed that Draco could clear his father's debt by completing his task, but she knew that that was a lie. Draco would be killed one way or another as payment for Lucius's mistakes. This was all a game to him.

She looked down at the note on her vanity, the yellow parchment stark against the white wood. She contemplated destroying the paper and putting her faith in her son's godfather. She had written the note while at the peak of her hysteria and wasn't sure if it was a good idea in hindsight, but her son's life was on the line and not even one avenue would be left unexplored. Narcissa was prepared to do anything to save Draco.

With determination she flicked her wand to light her Floo candle, and leaned over to whisper the name of her desired recipient. She let the note be pulled from her fingers, and then without looking back she swept from the room to find her sister. Bellatrix was assigned as her escort by the Dark Lord; he never let her leave the manor unaccompanied.
Harry let his hand hover directly over the note; he wasn't sure if he should touch it. Hermione sat nervously on the couch ringing her hands. Harry hadn't expected this, but what did he expect? He was in a magical talking house hiding from two powerful wizards in a war of good versus evil… honestly why was he ever surprised when things took a turn?

"Harry, do you know if Portkeys or other items affected by magic can come through the candles?" Hermione was pale.

Harry pulled his hand back, "I don't know, but I just remembered something."

Hermione sat up straighter, "What's that?"

Harry smirked, "I'm a wizard." He pulled out his wand and levitated the note to the coffee table in front of the couch. Hermione laughed a bit while flicking her own wand causing the note to unfold and lay flat. They both leaned over the paper and read.

*Harry Potter,*

*It has been recently brought to my attention that you or someone you know has created a Floo candle and connected it to the network. I am writing you to ensure you know this is a secure line of communication. I am a prisoner of the Dark Lord and he has taken someone very close to me into his service against their will. There are things in the magical community that are very important, that you may not be aware of. I cannot in a single letter explain everything but there is one thing you should know. The Dark Lord has a special ability; he can persuade those he speaks to, making them think they want things they do not. There is a secret purpose to the Dark Mark. It not only distinguishes his servants and summons them, it also amplifies his power. The extent of the amplifications is unknown to me. Understand that many of his followers chose the life of a Death Eater but there are others that did not. Some are only being influenced by the Dark Lord's gift, so when they are away from him, his influence becomes weaker and they can fight back. I need you to keep in mind that not everything is as it seems once you are back at Hogwarts.*

*A Friend*

Harry finished reading and looked over at the moldy teacup to his right, Sirius's words from the summer before fifth year echoed in his mind.
'Imagine that Voldemort's powerful now. You don't know who his supporters are, you don't know who's working for him and who isn't; you know he can control people so that they do terrible things without being able to stop themselves...'

Harry could clearly remember his Godfathers haunted eyes as he described the First War.

Hermione turned towards Harry as she finished reading the letter, "I guess that answers the question about where the Inventory is, or more like where it's not."

Harry nodded slowly as he drifted back from his memory, "Yeah, this letter let on more information than it seems to on the surface."

Hermione looked back at the letter, "You're right, this letter tells us what we need to know about Voldemort's gift, and tells us that we may have allies in his ranks, if we can counter his power. It also lets us know that your assumption about the Death Eaters having their gifts unlocked was true. He obviously unlocked his own, and so we should assume his Death Eaters' as well."

Harry's eyebrows went up, "Yes, that's exactly what I meant," he said, taking credit for her observation.

Hermione smiled, "I'm sure it is." She placated.

Harry sighed and ran his hands through his hair causing it to stand on end, "There's no name, so we can't respond. This is definitely a Slytherin writing. Do you think we can trust them?"

Hermione face became contemplative, "I am going to say yes, with a grain of salt. This information is too important to disregard as fake. I can't really see an advantage to us believing this type of fake information, unless Voldemort thinks we are dumb enough to run up to Death Eaters and ask if they are possibly on our side but under magical mind control."

Harry burst out laughing,"You know..." he heaved a breath, "he might think that!" He laughed so hard he felt tears in his eyes and Hermione's laughter joined his.

They both leaned back on the couch to catch their breath, then Hermione looked over at Harry and became serious.
"You know, Harry, with Voldemort having this type of power it's not going to be easy. You might have to... you know. Lift the curse off yourself."

Harry turned his head to look at her, still smiling, "I know, I already made the potion, but I'm having trouble with the runes and candles side of it. Could you take it home and look it over?"

Hermione sat up, "Yeah, I will, Should have known you already started the process, reckless as you are."

"If Voldemort did it to himself it can't be that dangerous," Harry defended.

"Maybe, but all those deaths on the list after the curse started are worrying," Hermione opened the Verum tome, to the page she was talking about. Harry looked at the birth and death dates of the pages after the curse. He already noticed the increase in deaths at the age of sixteen and he understood why she worried. Harry reached out and started flipping the pages to more current dates.

"Look, as time passes less and less people in the family died at sixteen," He pointed out.

Right around the time Voldemort first rose to power, the deaths stop almost all together, only one cousin out of all of the Black Family members died in the last sixty years. He was the son of Phineas Black, whom had been blown off the old tapestry.

Harry went and got his notes, he took her silence as agreement that it was almost time for her to leave. He handed them to her along with the book.

"I want to make plans for when we do the ceremony; I know you won't tell any professors but I want to find a way to make it as safe as possible."

Hermione reached out and put her hand on Harry's arm, "I hate that you seem to always end up having to do dangerous things."

Harry put his hand over hers, "I have a plan, so don't worry; I will fill you in later. I know I will be
OK, because I have friends like you, who are smart enough to make sure I don't mess up a rune and turn myself into a monkey or something."

Hermione gave a weak smile. "Thanks, now what are we going to do about the mystery note?"

Harry looked down at the parchment that was still magically flattened to the table, he shrugged. 

"Not sure there is anything we can do. We can't respond, we can't prove it's telling the truth right now, and we can't trace it without research- Plus," Harry motioned to the notes she was holding, "we have other things to focus on."

Hermione looked like she wanted to argue for a moment, but she refrained, "I will see you tomorrow."

Harry nodded and watched her go. He was glad she was going along with this, it made him wonder if there was another reason she was so upset with the Order. He stumbled as he left the blue drawing room; a dizzy spell came and passed, and his mind felt clearer. He would have to ask Hermione about that… He sighed, and turned to go train for a while.

Ooo

Severus Snape stood in the middle of the Headmaster of Hogwart's office. The Headmaster himself was sitting at his desk and giving his potions master a very level stare. Severus was glaring back, his eyes plainly said he didn't agree with Dumbledore. They had been like this for about five minutes. The Headmaster had both his hands on his desk, his good hand was covering his blackened one. Severus had both his hands behind his back and was standing as tall as he possibly could.

"I refuse," Snape drawled out in a low, dangerous tone.

Dumbledore gave a pleasant smile in response but said nothing.

"You cannot expect me to go along with any of this! You are an insane old man!" Severus had to reel in the desire to stomp his foot like a petulant child.
The Headmaster continued to be silent, his smile widened and his eyes twinkled.

Severus looked about ready to blow; he took a deep breath, "You cannot just expect me to do as you say, when what you are telling me goes against everything I have pledged to fight."

Dumbledore allowed his face to become serious, a sadness crept into his eyes.

"I understand that Severus, I really do," he said quietly as he stood from his chair, "but you are the only one who can be in your position, and it is very important that you stay there. You have certain gifts that allow you to do what you do, and the Light cannot survive with you. Myself on the other hand..." Dumbledore looked down at his useless hand as he finished; his point was clear.

Severus let his shoulders sag, something that he did in front of very few people. He knew that the Headmaster was correct, he was going to meet with Narcissa and he was certain that she wanted to enlist his help to save Draco. He knew Narcissa would do anything to save her son, and Dumbledore was aware of that as well. Severus had informed the Headmaster of Draco's task, and was then told to do whatever it takes to keep his place as spy. Severus knew for sure what was going to happen; that infuriating, unhinged woman told him during tea last week, but he couldn't say that to Dumbledore.

Severus couldn't tell Dumbledore many things. He held his feelings close to his chest like a hand of cards, how would his leader understand? Severus was a man who wasn't a Death Eater, because he spied for Dumbledore, so without Dumbledore, what was he? Not a Death Eater, but not a spy.

Without a word, Severus left for his meeting.

Ooo

Harry woke later than he expected, his entire body aching from his training. He had used one of the larger basement rooms to get some cardio in, and then went straight to learning new spells. He stared at his black and silver canopy, his mind felt like it was submerged in honey. This was honestly the worst his mind had felt since the dizzy spells had begun. He needed to talk to Hermione about it when she got here. He let his mind wander since it was hard to focus; he wasn't sure if he fell back to sleep or not, but soon he was being startled to awareness by a voice calling his name.

"HARRY!" Hermione yelled, she sounded close. Her voice wasn't panicked, so Harry assumed he fell back asleep, then she had arrived and was looking for him.
"I'm in here!" he yelled back as he sat up. He was glad he put on a real set of sleep clothes, and not just pants.

The door to his room creaked open slowly and Hermione hesitantly poked her head of bushy hair through the opening. She let out a relieved breath when she saw him clothed and sitting on the bed. "What are you doing still in bed?" she asked.

Harry leaned back so his hands were supporting his weight, "Sorry, I slept in... I'm not feeling quite right."

Hermione sat on the edge of the bed and leaned closer to look at him. "You are a bit pale, I expect it's the side effects."

Harry leaned back against the headboard in surprise, "Side effects?! Of what?"

"HONESTLY!" Hermione threw her hands up startling Harry. "I am so glad you were only here for a couple of days without me because otherwise you would be dead, you're like a sad puppy sometimes."

Harry pressed himself as flat to the wood of the backboard as he could. Hermione was upset and he didn't want to get punched, like Malfoy, as she continued to rant.

"I mean, if you died over something as stupid as not reading a book all the way through, where would that leave the war? The Wizarding World would panic!" Hermione heaved a breath and let it out slowly. Her attempt to remain calm only made her scarier.

"If you had read the entire Verum book, you would know that people with strong Inheritances have side effects when their magic's natural inclinations clash with the curse. It's very mild for most and it's shrugged off as weird teenager behavior."

Harry nodded in understanding obediently. Hermione deflated a bit. "Sorry, between you and Ron I feel like a disaster is going to happen, because you tried to brew a potion without reading the instructions or something... I just worry," She trailed off a moment before collecting her thoughts.

"Harry, if someone's Inheritance is too strong, the curse could prove dangerous if not removed. The reason I'm OK with you taking the risk of undoing the curse is because not undoing it could be..."
worse. You could become a gibbering fool, insane." Hermione looked like she might become upset again.

Harry relaxed a bit, "No matter how much adult authority you lack, you are still the same Hermione all around," He smiled, happy she was still the same careful girl. She was right, between him and Ron they needed her. Harry knew what he needed to do, and now was the time. He leaned forward and took Hermione's hands in his. She looked up into his eyes surprised by the sudden contact.

"Harry?" she questioned lightly.

Harry could feel her hands shaking. His expression as probably scaring her, but he couldn't help it. What he had to tell her was hard. "Hermione… you are one of the closest friends I have ever had. I trust you more than I trust anyone else in the world."

Hermione's face crumpled in on itself, she gasped in a sobbing breath. "Oh, Harry! You are my closest friend!" She knew he wasn't done talking, but the words felt necessary. There was fear deep in her eyes, fear of what he would say next.

"Hermione, I need to tell you what was in the prophecy," Harry kept his gaze locked with hers.

Hermione shook her head as a couple of tears trickled down, "No Harry, you don't have to tell me… not if you don't want to," She argued.

Harry cut in quickly before she could take her rebuttal further. "I want you to know. I will tell Ron too, when I feel it's right."

Hermione waited quietly, she seemed barely able to contain her tears.

Harry took a deep breath and repeated the words that sealed his future.

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches… Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies… and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not… and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives… The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies…"

Hermione lost her composure at the end. She let a strangled sound slip from her lips and cried.
Through her stunted breaths she managed to speak. "You will take this curse off, Harry," it was a statement, and an order.

She huffed a calming breath, looked Harry right in the eye and said clearly, "You will have power he knows not, and I will be with you. I will follow you, and you won't be alone. You will win this war." Her eyes were hard and held a fierceness, only a strong and angry woman could possess. Nothing else on the topic needed to be said. She knew him well enough to understand he thought he had to do this himself. On the other hand, he knew he couldn't stop the perfect storm that was a determined Hermione Granger.

Harry didn't have the words to respond to the strong and moving statement. He simply nodded and squeezed her hands, while hoping his eyes conveyed his gratitude. They apparently succeeded, because Hermione smiled and nodded back.

Harry decided to quell other concerns. "Don't worry about the curse removal; with you helping, it will be fine. When I get to school, I will do the ritual where we will have a medical wing right in the castle," he reassured.

Hermione nodded slightly. "Yes, it will be fine. You're right." She forced a smile and said. "It will be fine. Even if I have to find fate and beat it into submission."

Harry couldn't stop the bubbling laughter that poured from him. That last statement was so very Hermione. She laughed with him, and they both relaxed a bit. Harry quickly removed his hands when he realized he was still holding hers and cleared his throat.

"Come on, go down stairs and let me get dressed," Harry shooed a giggling Hermione out of his room.

Ooo

Harry entered the kitchen, and he found Hermione pouring over the runes for the curse removal; she had them on dozens of papers spread over the table. Somehow, his five pages of notes had multiplied many times over. He quietly walked up behind her and leaned over the table to get a better look. His eyes widened. His simple arrays and arithmancy had transformed into one of the most intricate works of... well, anything he had ever seen.

"Holy crap."
Hermione jumped, "Harry you scared me! I didn't hear you come in."

"Well I wouldn't think so, it takes all my brain power just to look at this thing." Harry was still staring at the papers as he spoke. He was more glad now than ever that he had contacted her. If he had used his own runes he might have blown up Hogwarts.

He looked over to Hermione when the rustling of paper suddenly stopped. She was very pale and leaning heavily on the table. Her breathing was heavy, and she was slightly sweaty.

"Hermione, are you ok?!" Harry quickly helped her into a chair. She gave a slight nod. "I will be fine. I just didn't feel well all of a sudden."

"You didn't look good at all, please just rest." Harry got her a glass of water and took the seat next to her.

"This is great!" Hermione smiled, she was still pale but looked less tired.

Harry gave her a puzzled look, "Almost passing out is great?"

"No, but this means that I might have a strong inheritance. I have always liked runes, but have never really been challenged before this project. There was a gift in Verum about written magic." Hermione gave a brilliant smile. Even though she was still very pale, she looked happier than he had ever seen her. Her hair was a mess being held together with a quill and she had a quill behind each ear, but she looked thrilled to be working on what she probably considered a great magical rediscovery. She sat up straighter as her composure returned. "I am worried that if the side effects go on for an extended period of time, that they may cause mental problems." She muttered, half to herself and half to Harry. Harry made a mental note to find a way to make more potion for more curse removals.

Hermione's eyes lit up, and she jumped from her chair. She scrambled to her bag and pulled a book out. "I can't believe I almost forgot! Here, this book will explain about the blood variance that was mentioned in the other books." She shoved a muggle biology and genetics book into his hands and then turned back to her work on the table. Harry looked at the book and shrugged. He wasn't going to get her to explain while she was working because she was in some weird disjointed work mode, so he might as well try and figure out what she found.

Harry leaned back in his chair and opened the book to the first marked section.
Severus sat in the staff room, but he wasn't alone. Sybil Trelawney sat across from him at the table. He had just returned from his meeting with Narcissa. His information was correct and she did make him take a vow to help her son.

He was frustrated, he reported to the Headmaster and didn't get any reaction out of him except to be offered candy. That old man was going to be the end of him... well, Severus was going to be the end of the old man, but that was neither here nor there.

He looked at the infuriating woman across from him; she smiled. He threw his meanest glare and only received another smile. It was a little known fact that he and Sybil had tea almost weekly.

Most of the staff that knew, just waved it off as an odd habit of a greasy dungeon bat.

Severus glared harder and Sybil smiled wider.

"Lunatic woman, don't you have anything to say?"

Sybil took a sip of tea, "Nothing much, you greasy bat."

Severus sighed. He was hoping she might have something to say about the recent events with Narcissa and the vow, but apparently he wasn't going to get anything from her this week. He shifted to stand up but paused when Sybil put her tea cup down with more force than normal. He looked up at her and she stared back with strangely blank eyes.

Severus leaned forward and Sybil did as well. She moved her head so she could whisper in Snape's ear with a low, monotone voice that only came forth when she was making a prediction.

"He will come prepared, he will come in a pair. Where we all eat, is where his fate he will meet."
Severus sat back and pondered the words. He wasn't sure exactly what that poem meant but he was almost sure it had to do with Potter. Ninety percent of what the crazy women spouted was about that irritating boy. He stood and regarded Sybil, she was slowly coming out of her trance. When her eyes cleaned and focused on him he nodded.

"Thank you, Sybil. I will take my leave."

Trelawney gave a vague smile back. "As usual, I have no idea what you are thanking me for, but your tea was delicious as always."

Severus nodded again, and vanished all the tea before leaving with a sweep of his robes.

Ooo

Harry leaned back in his chair; his stomach jumped into his mouth when the chair tipped too far and he had to swing his arm around to keep it from tumbling over. With a loud smacking sound, the chair tipped forward and landed upright. Harry closed the book he had been reading and put it on the table.

"I feel like my brain had been wrung dry," he muttered.

Hermione looked up from her papers, "Did you read everything I marked?"

Harry gave a slow nod. His head felt like it was full of bees and the entire room was spinning. This was one of the worst dizzy spells so far. He reached up and clutched his head, as if it would keep everything in the room from twirling. Then it was done, Harry's mind was cool and clear. He looked up from under his fringe at Hermione who was leaning over the table with concern in her eyes.

Hermione shivered when Harry's hard flat gaze looked back at her. She had seen hints of this side effect before, but this was the first time she had been around when he was under the full influence of it. She kept quiet and waited. Harry remembered Hermione's theory about the side effects, she said that when a person's gift tried to push through the curse it back lashed and the magical discharge became internalized. The part of the body it affects depends on the gift, if Harry's gift was related to his mind then it would be his mind that was getting the brunt of the backlash. Apparently, in his case, it blocks a lot of his emotions.
"I read it; I assume you wanted me to understand the concept of genetic variation. The idea is related to mutation and caused by variation in the order of bases in the nucleotides in genes. I don’t know a lot about genetics, but what I understand is that these mutations occur in magical genes as well and that almost all muggles carry a small amount of magical genetics. This means that muggleborns have different magical traits due to their magical genes coming from a concentration passed down from muggles until there was enough for a magical child to be born." Harry continued to stare at Hermione through his entire explanation, his voice low and flat.

Hermione squirmed under his gaze but answered as calmly as she could. "Yes, this means that magical power is based on what genes you have. There is a set number you have to reach in order to be born magical and if you're just shy of that number you are a squib. When a person reaches sixteen, they gain abilities based on their genetics, the past pure blood families understood they needed this variation in order to have new magical gifts in their family, even if they didn't know why it worked like that."

Harry leaned back, his eyes were still cold but were slightly less blank. "So, you're saying that if the pureblood families didn't bring in muggleborns or half-bloods, they would always get similar gifts and the same level of magical power. By bringing in 'new blood', as they put it, they had a chance of getting a different gift in their line, or getting genetics that had a better magical boost making their current gift stronger."

Hermione nodded, "Yes, there are probably magical abilities that were lost in squib lines that could be… well, for lack of a better term, bred back into wizards."

Harry leaned forward and put his head in his hands, he took a few deep breaths and looked back up at Hermione. His eyes were back to their normal bright green expressiveness. "That's messed up," He gave a lazy smirk.

Hermione let out a sigh of relief.

"Am I that scary?" Harry looked down at his hands.

"Are you aware that you're different when it happens?" Hermione put her hand over Harry's.

He nodded slowly. "At first I didn't, but over time I noticed; it seemed to unsettle Dudley as well."

Hermione squeezed his hand for a moment, and then let go. She stood up. "Come on, we should go
do something fun, this has all been far too serious."

Harry looked up at his friend with feigned doubt, "Are you sure you're Hermione?"

She huffed while taking the quills out from behind her ears; she struggled with the one she was using to keep her hair up, as it got tangled in her frizzy locks. "I can have fun you know, I'm not all work, work, work."

Harry stood up and went around to help Hermione with the tangled quill, "I know, but normally me 'n Ron have to drag you into the fun, kicking and screaming." He got the quill untangled, and held it out for her. She snatched it back and glared at him.

"I will have you know, there is a wizard's chess board in my bag, and I brought it so that we could play later." She picked up her bag and stalked out of the kitchen.

Harry followed behind her, exaggerating his own accent. "Ooooh, wizard's chess, is it? We must be careful, else we might get into a spot of trouble with that."

Hermione was setting up the board when he entered the blue drawing room. She looked a little irritated, but more amused overall. Harry sat on the couch in his usual spot and rested his slightly aching head on the padded back. He was just getting comfortable when the sound of an owl pecking at the window disturbed his rest.

"I got it," Hermione said as she moved to let Hedwig in. When she passed the small side table, Harry caught her looking at the moldy tea cup that was still there. She lingered for a moment with a sad expression, said nothing and continued to the window.

The white owl, perched on her shoulder, was happy to see Hermione at the house with her master. She cooed when Hermione stroked her feathers and gave her a scratch under the beak while bringing her to Harry. She fluttered to her master's shoulder when she was close enough and held out her leg.

Harry removed the letter and patted Hedwig on the head. It was really a good thing he had such a smart owl; without her, none of this would work. Harry held an open letter from Dumbledore that Dudley had forwarded to him. On the back of the letter was a large "OK" scribbled in handwriting similar to his own. Harry knew that the OK meant that Dudley didn't think the Headmaster caught on. In this case having it written on the back of the open letter made it seem like a response to the
Harry read the letter with Hermione looking over his shoulder.

Dear Harry,

I am happy to inform you that I have arranged our activities for the end of the summer in a manner that allows you to spend a night, and the following day, with your friends. The Weasleys will be taking you shopping for your school things as well. I only require a small favor from you. I am hoping that you will allow me to retrieve you from your relative's home the night before the will reading so that I may take you on an errand of the utmost importance. I would not ask this of you otherwise. If you are agreeable, I will be at your home to retrieve you at 6pm on August 26th.

Yours,

Albus Dumbledore

Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry

Harry sighed, he was tempted to refuse the request but it was too big a chance to pass up.

"You have to go with him on this errand Harry, then you can see Ron before school starts."

Hermione seemed to be reading his thoughts. He leaned back on the couch. "Yeah, I know. The only problem is, how can I get back to Privet Drive without him knowing I left?"

Hermione glared at him the way she did when he wasn't done with his school work. Harry suddenly felt a strong desire to confess he wasn't done with his summer homework but forced the urge down. Hermione stood up and towered over his sitting form.

“There is no reason to pretend you are his puppet. Even if we are keeping secrets, you don’t need to act like you have nothing in your head. He needs to understand that you are not going to just follow behind him blindly." Hermione crossed her arms and took a firm stance. "You will arrive on the Knight Bus at the appointed time. You are now Lord Black, or have you forgotten? He will
learn about your new status at the will reading anyway. We can send your trunk ahead to Dudley through the Floo in your relative's house… if it's not still boarded up. Dumbledore doesn't need to know you were gone all summer, just that you can go where you please, when you please. Plus, we can gage his reaction to your independence and see how we feel about him.”

Harry felt very small under her gaze. She was a very impressive person, and sometimes he forgot how strong she was. Harry knew he needed to be strong as well, but... "I get it, but if he doesn't react well, I'm not sure what to do. He has everyone in his corner, and I only have you and Ron."

Hermione's stare went from commanding to downright scary. "Is that really what you think?" Her voice was clear like a bell and cold as metal. Harry felt like he might have made a mistake.

"Ahhh… no?" He asked.

"You have more people who love you and are willing to support you then you realize. At this moment, the twins would do anything you asked. I think they are working on things you haven't even asked for. I know Remus has been distant and in mourning, but he would also help. Also Ron, and Neville..." Hermione let her body relax slightly and pointed at the floo candle. "There are people who are offering help and asking for it from you, people you don't even know."

Harry nodded, "I get it, sorry."

Hermione let herself fall back onto the couch. "You'd better," She huffed.

Harry shifted uncomfortably, "So… now what?"

"I don't have to leave tonight, my parents are at a conference.” Hermione relaxed fully now that the drama had passed.

Harry cocked his head to the side a bit as he thought, then asked, "Want to train with me tonight?"

Hermione smirked wickedly, "Why yes, yes, I do."

Everyday Hermione could come to the house, after that night, she insisted on training for at least
an hour while she was visiting. She obviously had qualms about some of the spells they were learning, as they weren't very nice, but she never told him not to learn them.

The rest of her spare time she hid away in the library, or worked on the blood candles that Harry would need. He had no idea what she was doing other than candle making, but he assumed she was just interested in all the new magic.

She managed to make passable candles for the ritual, and then she stopped practicing the art all together. She claimed 'it made her magic feel wrong.'

Ooo

The end of August approached with incredible speed. Harry wasn't sure where all of the time had gone. The last month had been the best summer he had ever had. Harry wished Ron could have been with him, but he was happy to have Hermione.

He was standing next to his friend in the foyer of Grimmauld Place. It was shortly before Harry had to meet Dumbledore and he was antsy. Hermione was putting a few last minute things in his rucksack.

"Everything will be fine Harry, did you sent your trunk ahead to Dudley?" Hermione handed him the bag. Over the last month they had become closer than ever. Hermione was truly his sister and he didn't know what he would have done this summer without her. Her advice and guidance was a godsend at times.

He nodded.

"Good, I have to go. I am already late getting home, and Mr. Weasley will be at my place in twenty minutes to pick me up. I will see you at the Burrow tonight." Hermione turned to leave.

Harry watched her walk out of the hall in the direction of the kitchen. When she was out of sight, he opened the front door and moved just off the front step so he was outside the wards. He felt odd being outside, away from his relatives and Hogwarts. Harry took a look around the street, it was dingy and dark. The experience wasn't as exciting as he had always imagined it would be, instead he felt exposed and vulnerable. Harry raised his wand arm.

*BANG*
The night bus appeared loudly, sending Harry falling on his bum. Even when he expected the surprise, it still caught him off guard. The purple double tall bus rolled to a stop with the door directly in front of Harry. The door creaked open and Harry expected Stan to saunter down the steps in his usual manner that didn't fit his stature, but he never came. Harry looked into the bus to see Ernie, the driver, waving him onto the vessel. Grabbing his bag off the ground where he had dropped it, Harry complied with Ernie's summons and stepped through the door. He nodded to the driver and received a small nod in return. It might have been his imagination, but Harry thought that Ernie looked sad. Before he could ponder his line of thought the bus took off with another BANG! Harry was thrown back and tumbled down the walkway. He managed to grab a pole and pull himself upright.

"Take me to 4 Privet Drive, Surrey!" He yelled to Ernie.

Ooo

Harry stumbled off the bus, feeling rather like he had just been shaken in a maraca. Luckily, all the chaos of the bus had loosened his nerves, so when he saw Dumbledore standing on the stoop of number four, he didn't panic. The door was open and Petunia was standing in the way of the Headmaster with her arms crossed. Dudley was peeping out from behind his mother. They all turned and looked, except Dudley, who couldn't see or hear the bus. It took his cousin a moment to realize Harry was there. When he did notice, he gave a cheeky grin and pushed his way out the door and onto the lawn.

"See I wasn't lying! I saw him sneak out this morning!" Dudley waved his arms indignantly.

Harry approached his cousin with an angry face, "I can't believe you snitched on me!" he hollered.

When he was close enough, he whispered to Dudley, "I owe you."

Dumbledore approached them and Dudley scurried off to his mother. Harry felt himself shrinking as the Headmaster loomed over him. "Harry, you know you shouldn't be going off alone. I would like to know where you went."

Harry pulled himself together and remembered Hermione's words. They echoed in his head.

"Sorry, sir, that's private," he said firmly.
Dumbledore's eyes took on a bright twinkle. "Private?" he questioned. "Well I do hope she's pretty."

Harry physically stumbled in shock at the Headmaster response. His entire face lit up red. "I... it's not..." he stuttered.

"It's quite all right, Harry, you are a growing boy. Just don't do it again, without an escort."

Dumbledore gave a grandfatherly smile. Harry slumped in resignation. The old man won this round. He always seemed to find a way to throw Harry for a loop. It was moments like these that Harry felt like all the things he knew were true about the Headmaster didn't exist. All the things that Dumbledore was hiding and all the manipulations didn't matter. He was just a kind, grandfatherly figure, and Harry felt affection for him.

"Are you ready, my boy? We have a stop to make before the Burrow." Dumbledore held out his arm.

Harry looked at him, a bit confused. He reached out and took the Headmaster's arm. Everything went black, and Harry was being sucked through a thin rubber tube. His chest felt so tight, he thought it was going to explode. Then everything was normal again. Harry toppled over onto the slightly damp grass and gasped. "What..." he panted, while catching his breath.

Harry took the hand that was presented to him and felt himself being pulled to his feet with surprising ease. Harry looked at the thin, old arm and wondered where the strength came from. He glanced at Dumbledore's right arm, and was taken aback by the sight. The part of his hand Harry could see was blackened and shriveled. It looked useless and hung limply at the Headmaster's side.

"Sir, your hand!" Harry couldn't contain his shock and blurted the words out.

Dumbledore followed Harry's gaze. "Ah, yes. That is a tale for another time. Come, we have an errand to attend to."

Harry nodded dumbly and followed at his professor's side as they walked down a quiet suburban street.
"We are going to visit an old friend of mine. I am still lacking one professor this year, as always. I was hoping you could help me convince him to rejoin our staff." Dumbledore spoke as if they were on a lovely night stroll and not exposed to possible danger.

"Sir, how am I going to help with this? What can I do?" Harry was genuinely confused.

Dumbledore chuckled with warm good humor. His limp arm swaying merrily at his side. "Well, Professor Horace Slughorn had an unusual hobby from his teaching days. He liked to become close to his students whom showed exceptional talent. He enjoyed boasting about them and reaping certain benefits after they graduated and became successful."

Harry stopped walking, and it took a few steps for Dumbledore to realize he was leaving the boy behind. He turned to look at his young student with a questioning gaze.

"So what you're saying sir, is that he collected students?" Harry asked, his tone clearly relaying his dismay.

"You could put it that way," Dumbledore responded.

Harry wanted to roll his eyes. The Headmaster had put it that way, but with more flowery wording.

"So, you want me to let him... collect me. Is that right?" Harry couldn’t keep the attitude from his voice.

"That is the general idea," Dumbledore agreed.

Harry could hear Hermione in his head yelling at him not to go along with this. It was degrading and demeaning. Unfortunately, for Hermione, she wasn't here. This was an opportunity to stay on Dumbledore's good side and gain trust. Harry smirked and walked forward. "Well, lead the way, where's he at?"

The Headmaster seemed surprised by Harry's sudden change in attitude, but led the way as he was told.
The house they were heading towards became clearer as they approached. Harry became worried when he noticed the front door was broken down. Dumbledore sped up his pace and Harry trotted behind him. They entered the house slowly and with wands drawn. Everything was destroyed and the room had a funny and unpleasant smell. Dumbledore immediately went over to a disturbing splatter of blood strewn across the wall. He reached out and touched it, rubbed it between his fingers and sniffed it.

"Dragons blood," He concluded.

Harry felt a knot he didn't even know was there, loosen in his chest at the announcement.

"Horace, I know you're hiding here somewhere. Come out before you scare Mr. Potter here to his death." Dumbledore called out to the room, the subtle placement of Harry's name was not lost upon said boy.

Harry looked around the room, while Dumbledore continued to try and tempt his future professor out of hiding. The entire living room was a mess. Not one piece of furniture was standing, except for an over stuffed barcalounger. Harry approached the chair slowly. The smell that permeated the entire room, became stronger, almost overwhelming. Bile wanted to make its way up Harry's throat. The recliner looked battered and beaten, and there was a large gash running over the seat and up the back. The insides of the chair were pouring out. Harry noticed the stuffing wasn't white. He got closer to see if maybe it was some sort of brownish foam.

Harry knew what it was before his mind could find the words to describe it. He stood a foot in front of the chair and stared fixedly at the entrails and human viscera pouring onto the floor. The light blue and white striped chair was soaked through with blood. Where the cloth separated, it looked suspiciously like human fat and skin covered by fraying upholstery...

Harry had found Horace Slughorn.

Ooo
“He may be crying. I know if he is or not, but I am choosing not to tell you, because this is private information and you have no real need to know it.

The blindfolded man removes his blindfold, and looks down at the man who once was not short, and now is not anything at all.”

-Night Vale

"He may be crying. I know if he is or not, but I am choosing not to tell you, because this is private information and you have no real need to know it.

The blindfolded man removes his blindfold, and looks down at the man who once was not short, and now is not anything at all."

-Night Vale

AN- Someone who was once something and is now nothing. The something can be fragile and dependent. I am a writer who waits patiently at the stark, white, bottom of the page for you to meet me. If you do not come here where I wait, am I a writer? Or simply a person who sits and types. Types nothing, to no one; who sends their words into the void with hope, unaware of the hopelessness.

This is the reason I so enjoy our meetings.

3/14/2017

Reread -beta’d -minijaxter 4/17/2017
The room was loud and boisterous, the normal state of affair in the Weasley household. It was a room full of redheads and one girl with bushy brown hair, and everyone except her was trying to talk at once. The main topic of the night was Harry Potter. Not even an hour earlier, Hermione had arrived and learned that no one, except for Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, knew Harry was also arriving that night. She now wondered, if telling the rest of the clan had been a mistake. Everyone was talking over one another about why Harry was being brought here so close to the start of term? Why didn't he come earlier? Why was he on an errand with Dumbledore?
All of the family was yelling their theories, but none of them were listening. Hermione sat quietly on the couch and let the noise wash over her. All she wanted was for Harry to walk through the door safe and sound. Then they could take Ron upstairs and fill him in on recent events. She looked around the room until she spotted the twins. She wondered if they would be able to have a private conversation with those two in the house. Should they just invite them to the conversation and get it over with? Hermione sighed, she reached into her bag and pulled out a book to read while she waited.

Ooo

The muggy summer night air washed over Harry and swept away the dizziness. The calm clarity that settled into his mind was the only thing keeping him together. He was standing a bit away from the warm inviting house that shed its light over the grassy field. On his right, stood the Headmaster with his hand on Harry's shoulder. Neither one of them spoke. Not since the destroyed house in the suburbs. Harry was pale and slightly green. Dumbledore looked his age, for the first time in a long while. His skin was also pale and his age lines seemed deeper.

Together they strode forward down the sloping hill. Dumbledore's hand never left Harry's shoulder. It was the only thing keeping Harry upright, without the support he might not have made it across the lawn. All the tension between the two of them didn't to matter in the face of what had just occurred. This was most certainly a time to stand together and Dumbledore seemed to need the contact just as much as Harry.

The walk felt endless. Harry couldn't get the image of human remains bursting out of an armchair to leave his mind. The silent night wasn't much of a distraction, and so he was looking forward to the chaos that was always rolling through the brightly lit house.

When they reached the scrubbed wood door, the Headmaster raised a hand and knocked. It wasn't a loud knock but it caused all the talking within to abruptly stop. The silence was palpable. Then, footsteps approached the door.

Mrs. Weasley's welcoming face appeared, she smiled at Harry. When she got a good look at his pale drawn face along with the Headmasters serious expression, her smiled faltered. Harry walked over the threshold when the matron move aside for him and Dumbledore. The Headmaster moved farther into the room but Harry stood just far enough inside for the door to close. Everyone's eyes were on the two new arrivals but no one approached them. Even Mrs. Weasley, who would normally hug Harry, kept her hands to herself due to his obvious state of distress.

Hermione got up off the couch. Her movements were slow and careful as she made her way to Harry. She stood directly in front of him and looked in his eyes. Harry knew she could see his coldness. He knew that she saw him letting his emotion be wiped away. She slowly shook her
"Come on Harry, let's go upstairs," she coaxed gently.

Harry gave a vague sort of nod and turned where she directed. Hermione looked behind her and waved Ron to follow. The twins looked torn between staying to hear what the adults had to say and following their brother. They looked at one another and nodded. George followed Ron and Fred stayed with the adults.

Ooo

Harry dropped his knapsack on the floor by the bed, and then he dropped himself to the floor. He leaned back on the side of the bed to prop himself up as everyone else filed into Ron's room. Ginny scrambled after George and slipped in right before the door closed. Harry let the familiar room ease his nerves a bit while everyone arranged themselves. He noticed that no one took the bed behind him, they were all organized in front of him, except Hermione, who was on his left.

"Hey mate, it's good to see you." Ron said quietly, drawing Harry's attention. The tension in the air was so thick, that even Ron couldn't miss it. The normally oblivious boy looked nervous.

Harry gave a weak smile back. "I missed you guys." He sat up a bit so he could look around at them all.

Hermione put her hand on Harry's shoulder.

"We have a lot to tell you." She let out a heavy breath.

Everyone looked at Harry with questions. Ron shot a dirty look at Hermione's hand on Harry, his unease wiped away by his jealousy. Only Ginny had the nerve to speak up. "where did Dumbledore take you tonight that has you so… pale?"

This question seemed to open a flood gate. All three red heads in the room started throwing out questions.

"Why couldn't we owl you this summer?"
"Why didn't Dumbledore bring you sooner?"

"What does Hermione mean 'we have a lot to tell you'?"

All the words overlapped into an indecipherable mass of noise. Hermione put her hands up to try and quiet the room but she was ignored. "Guys, Harry seems upset maybe you should…” her words were drowned out by more questions. Her face was becoming red with anger and she looked like she was going to blow.

The absolute chaos began to draw Harry out of his emotionless retreat, and he blew up before Hermione could.

"HEY!" Everyone stopped. He was sitting up strait and his voice echoed in the silence that followed.

Harry began to explain.

"I would like to answer all of your questions, but I am trying to accept the fact, that I saw a human transfigured into a chair, who was turned practically inside out" Harry gave the room a stern look. Hermione looked white as a sheet and the rest of the room was a bit paler than a moment before.

"Just let me start at the beginning and work my way up to the events of tonight, OK?" Harry asked in a resigned tone. He knew he wouldn't escape without explaining everything. His audience held their tongues, so he pushed forward.

"I haven't been at the Dursley's since my birthday. It's a long story, but my cousin helped me get out unnoticed." Harry explained the plan with his Aunt involved. He glossed over where he found Light's Life and the bit about drugging his Uncle.

Before he got to the part about Grimmauld Place, he paused to sort out what he should tell them. He thought he would be bombarded with questions again, but everyone was waiting for him to finish. "So I lived at Grimmauld place. I found out a lot of stuff that Hermione would be better at explaining than me."
Then he told them about contacting Hermione and the candle he sent her. As expected Ron was upset.

"Why didn't you send me a candle?" his blue eyes bore into Harry with hurt and jealousy.

Harry smiled back good naturedly, trying to lighten the mood. "Well, you live with Order members, many who are family. Do you think you could have kept the candle secret here, let alone sneak out every day?" Ron was still glaring at him, but he looked a little less angry. Harry propped his head in his hand in an attempt to act casual and continued, "Also it's less odd if I send Hermione a friendship candle… I don't think it would be as believable between blokes."

Ron's ears turned red at the implications but he was still glaring when George stepped in, "Yeah, Ronnikins! Me 'n' Fred would have sniffed out your secret candle within hours. Remember the time we found out about the magazine only minutes after Cousin Barney snuck it into your room. You were flipping open the centerfold and gaping at the HUGE…"

"AHHH SHUT UP!" Ron scrambled across the floor and smothered the words coming out of Fred's mouth with his hands. His face was red and his ears were on fire. "I get it! It's not practical!"

George smirked behind his brother's palms, Ron was unprepared for the sensation of being licked. He pulled his hands back with another yell.

"Ewww, Merlin! That's gross!" he wiped his hands on his pants over and over.

Harry laughed along with everyone else in the room. He was glad to be here. He needed this kind of company. "Thanks guys. I feel loads better." His color was coming back and his eyes were becoming warmer.

"Are we OK?" Harry directed the question at Ron through the ruckus around them.

"Yeah mate." Ron wasn't glaring, his eyes were calm and alight with humor. Harry relaxed a bit more. He had been really worried about how Ron would handle being left out, but it seems like his friend was maturing. He was also glad George was here to break the tension.

When everyone calmed down Harry continued his story. There wasn't much more to tell, so he explained some of the Black family history. Hermione jumped in and explained a lot more than Harry could. Everyone seemed to accept that the Black Family wasn't evil very easily. George explained that most pureblood families understood the shift in views after Voldemort rose. Before
that, all the families, even the Weasley's got along pretty well, according to history. Harry left
everything about Dark magic and inheritance out, for now.

Ginny spoke up again. Her cheeks were a bit flushed, Harry assumed from laughter. "So why did
Dumbledore wait so long to bring you here?"

Harry wasn't sure how to respond. He looked to Hermione. Should they explain the trust issue with
the Headmaster? Hermione answered by gesturing around the room. Harry understood her
meaning. These are people that care and want to help. They love him. He smiled as he remembered
the words that she had yelled at him in the drawing room.

"Dumbledore wants Grimmauld Place, he's taking me to Sirius's Will reading in the morning. He
kept me at Privet Drive because he didn't want me to find out I own the Black house." Shocked
silence met Harry's explanation. The three red heads seemed like they didn't know if they should
be upset he was doubting Dumbledore or agree.

George was the first one to break the tension. "Because the house was left to you, it would bind to
you when you went there. Taking you to the reading late in the summer makes it seem like he was trying to ensure you didn't go to the house."

Harry nodded. "It did bind to me when I went."

Hermione made a sound of agreement. "Also Sirius didn't just leave Harry the house. He made
Harry his heir. So Harry is Lord Black and that is a threat to Dumbledore's control."

Neither Harry nor Hermione expected the reaction they got to that statement. The sheer volume of
the response was sure to attract the attention of the adults. Harry sighed and tried to get his bearings. Before he could do anything to calm the chaos, Fred whipped open the bedroom door.

"Harry, we need to talk." Fred had the most serious expression Harry had ever seen on either twin.
He closed the door behind himself and set up some privacy wards. Everyone in the room realized
at the same time that they should have done that earlier.

Fred moved into the middle of the room. His stance was strong and he looked ready for anything.
"Dumbledore just left, he was in a rush, so no one warded the area with more than a silencing spell,
before talking."
Harry sat up completely, so his back wasn't touching the bed. He took an equally serious expression.

"What do you need to talk to me about?"

Fred scanned the room slowly with his eyes. "I have always thought of myself, as being on Harry's side and no one else's. I assume everyone in the room has the same goal as myself. We are all here for Harry." Every person in the room adopted the same determined look.

George stood up. "I am here for Harry," he announced. Every person in the room voiced their agreement. Hermione placed a hand on Harry's shoulder. He met her eyes and almost rolled his own. Everything about her face was yelling 'I told you so'. He held back on his sarcastic desires and produced a small smile. She quickly removed her hand when she noticed Ron glaring.

Harry turned back to the 'court' being held. "So, what brought this declaration about?" he asked, while trying to hold his blush down.

Fred gathered the attention of the room and motioned for George to sit back down. "I stayed down stairs to listen to the adult's conversation, but they booted me. It was inner circle information only." His face became tight, after finally joining the order the twins were still left out. "Luckily I had extendable ears version two. They can go through silencing wards. I overheard Dumbledore talking about how he's trying to take Grimmauld Place. Mum didn't seem pleased. I wasn't sure if you knew Harry, but Sirius left the house to you."

"Oh, yeah, I know," Harry said nonplussed.

Fred's entire demeanor deflated. "Really?" he almost whined. "I thought I was bringing breaking news up here."

Harry chuckled at his friends attitude. "Yeah, really, sorry."

Fred flopped onto the floor. His lazy smile was back in place. "So we all agree that Dumbledore shouldn't be trying to take what's Harry's?"

George threw his arm around his twin's shoulder. "Think we should fill him in?" He shot a cheeky grin at Harry while lightly shaking his brother back and forth.
Hermione leaned forward with her teaching face on. "Well, we left off talking about how Harry is Lord Black." Her tone suggested that she wanted to see Fred's reaction to the statement and compare it to the previous reaction.

"WHAT?!" Fred almost leapt from the ground if it weren't for George holding him down.

"I know right?" George sounded astonished. The volume in the room was rising again as everyone was expressing their shock once more. Harry let his head drop into his hands. He felt like he had somehow missed something very important. He glanced at Hermione, but she looked just as baffled.

Harry stood up. The immediate silence that followed unsettled him a bit. He looked at the faces staring back and one face in particular stood out. Ron was very pale, but his eyes were shining with determination. Harry smirked at him in a way that hopefully said, 'shocking isn't it?' Ron returned the smirk.

Knowing that Ron was OK with everything happening, Harry took a fortifying breath and asked, "Can someone explain to me what is so important about being Lord Black?"

No one answered. From the looks on their faces they couldn't believe he didn't know, all but Hermione that is. She simply stood up and took a spot next to him. "We were both raised by muggles, even after reading about the ancient families I am apparently missing something because I also don't understand what's so shocking." She pouted a bit; she really didn't like not knowing something so important.

Ron surprised everyone by answering her bluntly. "Besides the political advantage, which I'm sure you know about. Harry will be let in on all the Black family secrets."

Hermione looked surprised and then seemed to ponder the new information for a moment.

Hermione collected her thoughts and voiced them. "Well I can see how that can be useful, I'm sure there is information in the library we could use."

Ron made a face at her unconcerned tone, "you don't understand Hermione, these aren't little secrets."
Fred made a dramatic sweeping motion with his hands. "My little bro is right. Families as old and powerful as the Black have literally rewritten history to cover things up, and the information Harry has access to… is major."

Harry and Hermione looked at each other trying to silently communicate and decide if they should bring up the Verum book or not. Before they could come to an agreement there was a knock at the door directly followed by it swinging open. Mrs. Weasley strolled in with a large tray in her hands laden with snacks.

"Sorry to interrupt you kids, but I thought you might want some treats," She announced. Her face was warm with joy over having so many of her children home at once.

"Thanks mum." Ron jumped to his feet and relieved her of the tray.

Once her hands were free, Mrs. Weasley moved to bend over and envelop Harry in a tight hug. "I just wanted you to know how glad I am you're here dear."

Harry awkwardly hugged her back, "Thanks Mrs. Weasley."

Dumbledore must have told her about Slughorn…

She pulled away but held Harry at arm's length to look him over. After a good long minute, she nodded in approval.

As Mrs. Weasley turned to leave she said, "Don't stay up too late, we have to go shopping in the morning." Then she was gone.

Everyone descended on the food while Harry and Hermione sat back down on the floor. Harry glanced at Hermione, she slowly shook her head negative. They were going to keep the Verum book secret for now.

"Mum looked worried, did it have to do with where Dumbledore took you tonight?" Ron asked around the large bite of cake he was chewing. Hermione cringed in disgust.

Harry looked at everyone with food in their mouths and decided he would keep out the details. "Yeah, the Headmaster took me to help him convince an old Professor to come back to the school."
When we got there…” He looked at the candy in his hand as he remembered the gore. Slowly he put it back on the tray. "Let's just say the Death Eaters got there first…”

Everyone let the silence reign as the news sank in. Their new Professor, most likely for DADA was killed before ever getting to the school…

A much needed subject change came from Ginny. "You should resume the DA, Harry, but maybe rename it," she tipped her head to the side in a manner many girls thought looked cute.

Ron's eyes lit up, "yeah! We could rename it, but rather than just the DA it should be a way to find recruits."

Harry narrowed his eyes, "recruits?"

"Well, I don't think we are the only people who are willing to stand with you," Ron said in a sagely tone.

Harry became very uncomfortable. Just the thought of starting his own… own what? Order of the Phoenix? He wanted to jump to his feet, yell, and rant about how this couldn't happen, but was that the right thing? He told himself this summer that he was going to act rather than react.

Ron was still going on about the DA and Harry tuned him out, he looked to Hermione. She was already studying him as if gauging his reaction. Harry cocked his head to the side in question and Hermione gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Harry turned his attention back to Ron, who was working himself into a frenzy over his ideas.

"Okay," Harry said loud enough to overshadow his friend's ramblings.

Ron stopped abruptly, "Okay?" he questioned.

"Okay, I'm in," Harry amended "I don't know if we will do everything you mentioned, but I am sure there are a lot of students who still want to learn to defend themselves. Let's start small and slow and see where it goes."
Ron smile was brilliant, "This is going to be great!" he cheered.

Harry puffed out a sigh, "let's keep it under wraps, okay? We can just start out like the DA"

Ron nodded frantically; he looked like he might explode with excitement and energy. Harry had underestimated how much being a DA leader had meant to his friend. It was something that separated him from his many siblings.

"Hey, Harry… Can we be in this... ummm, club?” George asked tentatively.

Harry was taken aback by the tone. "I don't see why not, I'm just not sure how we are going to have you join meetings while in…" He trailed off with a faraway look in his eyes.

"Harry?" George prodded.

Hermione waved her hand in the air while shushing him, "Let Harry think," She murmured. Harry had an inkling that Hermione already knew the answer to his ponderings, but was letting him figure it out on his own. He did love her for that, but the somewhat sly smile that slipped onto her face made him nervous.

Harry's mind was going a mile a minute. The small idea of reopening the DA was transforming as his thoughts raced. His friends didn't know the extent of the damage from Dumbledore's lies. They didn't know about core magic, inheritances, or the power that was being withheld from Harry. Once he told them, they would join him more solidly. It would be a new group whose sole purpose will be to fix all the damage. They would teach the members all the DADA they missed, maybe even take the curse off of them, and Harry had the perfect place for them to meet. They could use all knowledge in the Black library to make an untraceable way to communicate. They would have to keep the Order unaware, keep them thinking it was just a children's club. Could they pull it off? Harry looked down at the tray of sweets… yeah, they could. He sought out Hermione's attention again.

"Do you think?” he asked. He didn't doubt that she had thought of all this already.

She smiled wickedly, "I think it's a brilliant idea, but we have to plan it carefully."
Harry realized that she must have been rolling this idea around this all summer, not just tonight. She might already have plans… or more. He should have known that letting Hermione loose in a house of powerful secret magic might have caused her to become… what was the wizard version of a mad scientist?

Everyone else in the room just watched the silent interaction in confusion, until Ron couldn't take it and burst.

"WHAT are you two TALKING about?" He groused, obviously jealous.

Hermione waved him off, "We will explain later, there are a lot of details to settle."

Ron's face became more irritated. "What details?" he ground out between his teeth.

Hermione just gave him an uncharacteristic shrug, "Well, we need a new name, ideas?" This topic seemed to distract Ron.

"POTTER'S BATTLE BATTALION!" Fred bellowed.

"POTTER'S PASSABLE PARTNERS!" George followed up.

Ginny rolled her eyes and started to make her own suggestion, "How about-

"HARRY'S HOMICIDAL HARASSERS! Fred cut in.

Ginny let her face fall onto her palm and gave an exaggerated sigh.

"HARRY'S-" George started.

"-SNAKE FACED MANIAC-" Fred supplied.

"-HATERS?" George finished while giving his twin a confused look.
"I DON'T want my name in it," Harry yelled over the chaos.

Both twins sat back with a pout and crossed their arms. Harry turned his attention to Ginny. "You had a real suggestion, Gin?"

Ginny blushed prettily, "Ummm yeah, but you said you don't want your name in it so I don't think it will work."

Harry accepted her answer and nodded, he didn't understand what was so embarrassing that she would blush.

"Harry?" Hermione's soft voice pulled him to turn and look at her.

"I think we should consider making the name a play on the Orders name." She lowered her voice a bit before continuing, "The Black Family's original seal has phoenixes so it also fits if we use the house for meetings."

Harry gave the idea some thought, "yeah, and rather than using a word like Order, that sounds like rules, we could use something… softer?" he made a face at the last word, it wasn't right.

"You mean like a way of life rather than rules or laws?" Ron interjected.

Harry and Hermione both jumped a bit, they didn't notice him scoot across the floor to join them.

"Yeah, I like that," Harry agreed.

"SO we are keeping 'phoenix' in the name are we?" Fred crept into the conversation on his hands and knees across the floor, George was close behind him.

Ginny stood up and joined the circle, plopping back to the floor next to her brothers.
"Yeah but we don't want it to sound strict," Ron supplied.

Hermione was muttering the word Order over and over, occasionally she would throw in a synonym but then shake her head. "Order, According to a particular sequence… a system?" she questioned herself.

"System? Like a routine?" Ginny asked.

Hermione looked up at her, "Routine? That's interesting."

"Method!" Ron stated loudly, drawing all eyes to himself.

"Method of the Phoenix?" Ginny asked incredulously.

Fred and George looked at one another. The slow smile that was stretching across their faces would normally be a warning to run and hide, but the twinkle in their eyes contradicted the notion.

"PHOENIX!" George announced.

"METHOD." Fred concluded.

Harry felt a similar smile slip onto his face. "Phoenix Method," he tested the feel of it. "I like it," he concluded.

Ooo

When Harry woke the next morning, he wasn’t sure how long he had slept. He kept still, with his eyes closed and listened for the sounds of movement. Ron's light snores from the bed opposite his let him know it was still early. He was going to go with the Weasleys to Diagon Alley, and they were going to make sure he met the Headmaster at Gringotts for the Will reading. Harry was nervous. There was no way of getting around the fact that he was Lord Black, and the goblins would most likely notice that he had already claimed the house.
Harry rolled over and watched Ron slumbering in the pink dawn light that was flitting through the window. He felt bad that his friend was still more out of the loop than Hermione. They had talked before going to bed, and though he wasn't happy about it, Ron agreed to wait until they could go someplace safer to talk. Harry felt a surge of affection for Ron, when he thought about it. He was definitely going to tell him everything as soon as he could.

The pink light bathing the room was slowly transitioning to a pleasant orange, that matched much of the décor. Harry looked around at the orange walls, reflecting orange light, and felt like he was in a heating oven. Sounds of movement from the first floor indicated it was about time to get up. Harry begrudgingly rolled from the bed, landing on his hands and knees, in a spectacular display of teenage laziness. He groaned and almost flopped on the floor to keep sleeping.

*BANG*

The door burst open with force enough to shake the floor. Harry jumped to his feet with saucer sized eyes. His hand was clutching his bare chest in an attempt to calm his heart. Fred and George wandered casually into the room with wicked grins on their faces.

"Sorry 'bout the scare, Harry, forgot you were in here." Fred apologized, or maybe it was George…

Harry didn't respond, he didn't think he could. His heart was still beating a mile a minute. He watched as the twins wandered over to Ron, who was amazingly still sleeping soundly.

"Mum told us to get Ronnikins here up and about," one of the twins filled in.

They whipped the blanket off their brother, who still didn't stir. They each grabbed a foot and started walking out of the room. Ron was dragged unceremoniously behind them. He slid from the bed and landed on the floor with a thump. Finally Ron's blue eyes cracked open to slits and he glanced around blurrily while he slid across the floor.

"Wha's goin on?" he mumbled in a sleepy slur.

The twins didn't bother to answer, as Ron disappeared around the corner of the doorway.

Harry stood alone in the room baffled by the display. Normally the twins just dumped water right on him in bed if they couldn't get him up. Apparently, Ron's notorious ability to sleep through anything had gained new heights, and the twins' methods needed to rise to the occasion. Harry shrugged to himself and began moving around the room, gathering his things to get ready for the day. He was walking from the bedroom to see if the bathroom was free, when a familiar scream
stretched across the air, long and loud.

"AHHHHHHHHHHHHH COLD" Ron's voice sounded like it was coming from outside. The yell was followed by boisterous laughing from the twins.

The laughter came to an abrupt halt when Mrs. Weasley yelled, "I TOLD YOU TO WAKE HIM UP, NOT THROW HIM IN THE POND! WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH YOU TWO?!"

Harry smiled while he pushed open the bathroom door. It was nice to be back at the Burrow.

Ooo

Diagon Alley was full to the brim. Harry stood at the top of the stairs by Gringotts, Mr. Weasley was right beside him while he waited for the Headmaster. Over the many heads of the crowd, Harry could see the Twins' joke shop, he desperately wished he could be going in there rather than to the Will reading. He would get to see the new products and have a butterbeer with the twins in their flat above the shop… but he had other things to attend to.

Right on time, Dumbledore appeared on the steps just a few below Harry. He seemed to sift through the crowd like water between rocks. He walked up the stairs until he was eye level with Harry, two steps below him.

"Hello, Harry, are you ready?" he asked softly, obviously trying to be sympathetic to Harry's feelings.

Harry gave a shallow nod.

"Well then, come along. It is almost time." The Headmaster made his way into the bank.

Mr. Weasley clapped his hand on Harry's shoulder in a fatherly manner. "See you tonight, Harry," he said in an even tone but his eyes shined with sympathy.

"Yeah," Harry replied, and turned to follow Dumbledore.
The bank was as large and grand as Harry remembered. The tall marble walls supported an intricate glass ceiling. Goblins were working furiously behind each counter and some were running back and forth frantically trying to keep up with the work load.

Harry followed quietly behind the Headmaster, as they weaved through the people, making their way to the very back counter. As they walked, Dumbledore spoke quietly.

"Now, Harry, this is going to be hard for you, so I hope you let most of the responsibility fall to me. I want to make this as easy for you as possible. There is no telling what Sirius has left you. After Azkaban, he might not have had the presence of mind to change his will. If he did, it might not have been his clearest decision. With that in mind, please allow me to take extra burdens onto myself." His voice was soft and kind. If Harry didn't already know about all the lies he might have fallen for it.

Harry nodded for appearances. He couldn't believe Dumbledore! He knew Harry felt awful about not being a normal wizarding child and so he played up taking on responsibility for him. Bringing up Sirius's mental state was low, that on top of acting like he was taking on a burden for Harry… it might have worked. Before this summer Harry might have handed the title of the house over, and felt grateful. An overwhelming, burning anger begin to seep under his skin. He felt like he might spontaneously combust. Just when Harry thought he couldn't keep it in and was about to explode, covering the bank in bloody Harry bits, it was gone. A gust of dizzying wind blew through his mind and took it away. All it left was crystal clear knowledge that Harry needed to stop the manipulations. He needed to put his own plots in motion and act.

Deep down, Harry knew that these 'episodes' were something that needed to end. When he removed the curse they would go with it, but right now he was grateful to have them. The cold emotionlessness that he was afforded after the dizzy spell gave him an edge. He could use this to out maneuver the Headmaster.

They both arrived at the teller's counter. It was made of marble, like everything else in the bank but it was lower to the ground and a bit off to the side. The gold plaque attached to the smooth stone read 'Magical Document and Contracts'. Dumbledore stepped forward and took charge. Harry growled under his breath but said nothing.

"Hello, we are here for the will reading of Sirius Orion Black," Dumbledore politely informed.

The goblin behind the desk was writing something on an official looking parchment. He raised his index finger to indicate he would be with them in a moment. Dumbledore seemed unfazed by the rude treatment, his wealth afforded him the privilege of not being verbally insulted for interrupting the worker. It is well known that goblins are not very polite to wizards, unless they have significant holdings with the bank. Harry honestly couldn't blame them, since wizards still classify them as
creatures and not sentient beings.

The goblin looked at Dumbledore when he was finished with his paperwork. His eyes flickered up and down the old wizard’s form, his expression made it clear he was unimpressed. The goblin leaned back with a sigh and looked behind Dumbledore to Harry. He sat up straight when he recognized who the boy was and his eyes widened minutely.

"Hello, Mr. Potter. I am Nagnok. Let me lead you to the private reading room." The Goblin, now known to him as Nagnok, made a sweeping motion with his pale arm and came around the counter to lead them.

Dumbledore gave Nagnok a curious look, but followed without comment. Harry smiled behind the Headmaster. When the deed to the house had vanished after being signed, Harry had thought it might have gone to be filed. Apparently, he was right.

Nagnok led the pair into a medium sized stone chamber. The walls were covered in carvings of runes. In the middle of the room was a simple table and three chairs. Nagnok took the chair that was alone on one side of the table and gestured for Harry and Dumbledore to take the other two. They sat in silence while Nagnok began pulling paperwork out of thin air. To Harry, it looked like he was sticking his hand behind an invisibility cloak and pulling the parchment out. Once the Goblin had all the paperwork settled on the table he turned to his clients.

"I will now commence the will reading of Sirius Orion Black in Rune Ward Room number three of Gringotts bank. Are all recipients of the Will present?"

"I am here for myself and as proxy for one Remus Lupin." Dumbledore announced.

Harry felt a jolt of hurt rush through his chest. "Sir, if Remus is in the Will, why didn't he come himself?"

Dumbledore gave Harry his gentle grandfather smile. "I had a very important task for Remus that needed attending. Unfortunately, the timing was poor."

The hurt turned to simmering anger. An important task indeed… Dumbledore just didn't want any outside influence during the reading. Harry tried not to show any of his thoughts on his face. He gave a half smile. "That's good, I was worried it was more serious reason." Harry wasn't sure if he seemed sincere.
Dumbledore looked over his glasses with twinkling eyes. "Do not fret, my boy, Remus regretted not being able to see you today."

Harry nodded. Luckily the Headmaster misinterpreted the bad lying, as worry over Remus avoiding Harry. He probably thought that Harry worried about it because of how Sirius died, and honestly, he did worry, but now was not the time.

Dumbledore faced forward as the readings began.

"This is the reading of Sirius Orion Black's will at the request of Headmaster Dumbledore of Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry." Nagnok began in an official tone of voice. Dumbledore was looking at the Goblin with a cold stare.

"Wait," Harry felt the word slipping from his mouth before he could stop it.

Nagnok turned his attention. "Yes? Is there a problem?"

Dumbledore's stare became colder but the Goblin didn't seem to notice or just didn't care. If Harry wasn't mistaken, Nagnok looked rather smug.

"Ummm…” Harry searched for the words. "What you just said. This reading was requested? I thought it was a normal thing."

Nagnok steepled his fingers and smiled, a Goblin smile was a bit scary. "Yes well, Official gatherings for Will readings are not often conducted anymore. It is a rather old custom. Normally we send out a copy of the Will, sealed officially, to the beneficiaries."

Harry turned to the Headmaster with an innocent and questioning look.

Dumbledore smiled back in a kind grandfatherly way. "My boy, I felt it would be rather upsetting and shocking to get this news in the mail. I set this meeting up so you wouldn't be alone."
Harry doubted that Dumbledore's words were anywhere near the truth. If it was true, then Dumbledore would have asked Remus to be here and not out on assignment. He kept his thoughts to himself and gave a weak smile.

"Thank you for thinking of me, Headmaster." He said politely, with his eyes cast down. Now was not the time to fight this battle. He made sure not to make eye contact.

Nagnok waited with a neutral expression for their interaction to finish. Once silence reigned, he made a show of shuffling around some papers and clearing his throat. "Well, now that we have that settled… shall we begin?"

Harry nodded and Dumbledore put his twinkling eyes back in place. He seemed satisfied with Harry's answer. Nagnok lifted a highly embellished roll of parchment up to his eye level to begin reading.

"It seems that there are only two beneficiaries. Headmaster Dumbledore is standing in for one, Remus Lupin. Mr. Lupin has received 100,000 Galleons from the Black Vault and I quote, "All the Stuff in the box that's kept you-know-where. Don't forget the you-know-what." Nagnok looked over the scroll at the Headmaster. "You think you can relay that?" he asked condescendingly.

Dumbledore smiled and nodded. Harry just raised a brow at the wording. He would have to ask Remus what that's about.

Nagnok continued. "Well, it seems that before Mr. Black's death, Headmaster Dumbledore was the legal owner of the Black Manor." The goblin looked over the scroll for confirmation.

"Yes," Dumbledore agreed. "I would think that the ownership would hold unless Sirius named an heir." He added. Harry was surprised to hear that Sirius gave the house legally to Dumbledore, and had trouble keeping the shock off his face. Luckily the Headmaster was looking at the Goblin.

Nagnok looked back down at the scroll. "That would be true, but Mr. Black did name an heir."

"Oh? I was not aware," Dumbledore said innocently.

Harry almost scoffed.

Nagnok smiled. "Yes, it would seem that Mr. Potter here was named the heir to the Black Family. As such the ownership of the house would revert to him." His smile became wicked as he spoke.
Harry played up being surprised and sad. He tried not to overdo it. In the end it wasn't that hard, hearing proof of his Godfather's love truly made him sad. Dumbledore turned to him with heavy eyes. "Harry, this is a large responsibility. I would take it on for you until you come of age. Also, it will allow the Order to resume using the house. As long as you own it, I am afraid that the protections will not give me control. We could have all this settled here and now so you can go back to your friends."

Harry gripped the leathery arms of the chair, his nails gouged the wooden underside. He couldn't stop all of anger welling up in him. This man thought he could subtly slide an entire inheritance out from under a teenager, and it wasn't the only inheritance he had been hiding. Harry didn't think he could stop the anger from changing his face and pouring out of his mouth in a stream of acidic words. It was similar to how he had felt the night Sirius died, and that didn't go too well for Dumbledore's office.

Before Harry could loosen his anger, Nagnok spoke up. "Unfortunately that request is not possible Headmaster."

Dumbledore turned from a barely contained Harry and gave the Goblin an incredulous look that didn't sit right on the old wizards face. "Why ever not? It should be a simple matter, are you saying you will force this child to take on a Lordship if he doesn't want to?"

Harry almost shot right out of his chair but managed to hold himself down and restrain his anger. He wanted to know what Nagnok had to say. Just how much are the Goblins aware of through these magic disappearing documents?

Nagnok's smile went from wicked to downright evil. "The issue Headmaster, isn't about forcing a minor to take a Lordship, it is the fact that there are no legal grounds to strip him of the Lordship."

Dumbledore stared at the Goblin, as if he couldn't comprehend the words he heard. "Strip?" he questioned quietly, almost to himself.

"Yes, strip..." Nagnok said plainly.

"But that would mean he already holds the title. That can't be possible because he has been with his relatives all summer. He would have had to sign a magical document." Dumbledore's voice was firm.
Harry looked to Nagnok. He wasn't sure what the Goblin was playing at. He obviously enjoyed the Headmasters situation. Harry hoped Nagnok wouldn't give away that Harry has been to the Black Manor. Up until this point, Harry thought he would have to tell Dumbledore but now he might have a way out. He looked at the Goblin with a pointed and pleading stare. Nagnok glanced at Harry and then back to Dumbledore. Harry reorganized his expression before the old man looked his way.

"I sent Mr. Potter the required documents to take his rightful title," Nagnok lied flat out.

Harry felt his heart almost stop in surprise. He hoped the Goblin might help but he didn't think it would happen. For him to lie in the face of Dumbledore was more than Harry expected.

Nagnok continued his lie before he could be interrupted. "You called for an official reading of the Will, you did not ask for normal procedure to be halted."

Dumbledore turned to Harry and attempted to soften his features. "You didn't mention anything about receiving a document Harry. Why not?"

Harry schooled his features to look slightly confused. "Well, Sir, I didn't think much of it. The scroll appeared in my room, and I thought it was normal for situations like this."

For a moment, the Headmaster looked as if he wanted to throttle something, but it was gone so fast it might not have happened. "Why did you sign it? It might have been a trap or a trick."

Before Harry could think up a good lie, Nagnok cut in.

"Do you believe that the Gringotts Seal could be so easily fabricated? I find the insinuation insulting Headmaster," Nagnok stood up while speaking. Standing on the chair he was barely any taller, but it was an action with meaning. Did Dumbledore want to defy the powerful institution of Gringotts?

Harry felt his heart race, the thrill of deception stripped his emotions bare. The fact that he was going to get away with it made his skin hot and tingly with something like satisfaction.

Dumbledore stood abruptly. He did not accept the Goblins challenge but his displeasure was clear in his eyes. At that moment, with power flowing off the man in waves, Harry doubted how intelligent it was to try and maneuver around the most powerful wizard alive. Harry may be getting
away with a lot, but much of it was still due to his own dumb luck. This meeting itself was an example; it was luck that Nagnok had some sort of vendetta against Dumbledore. Since the beginning of this entire plot, luck had played a large part. It was luck, that the potion worked on his uncle; it was luck, that Grimmauld Place was empty. The Life's Light potion was a huge bit of luck. Harry didn't know how the recipe got in his trunk, or that it would even work… he needed to learn to rely less on luck and more on his own plans. He had to learn how to plot far enough ahead so that luck wasn't a factor.

Harry looked up at the angry Headmaster. He needed to learn to out plot the master plotter…

He was going to create The Phoenix Method, and he wasn't going to do it alone.

"I believe it is time for us to take our leave, Harry." Dumbledore spoke while still keeping eye contact with Nagnok.

Harry stood to leave, but stopped when the Goblin called to him.

"I would like a moment to speak to Mr. Potter about his new station."

Dumbledore moved to sit back down.

"Alone." Nagnok made it clear he wanted the Headmaster to leave.

"I think it would be more appropriate for Harry to have an adult-" Dumbledore tried to argue but was cut off.

"No, it is not appropriate for someone outside the family to be present, you know that well enough, Headmaster." Nagnok's voice was cool and becoming colder by the second. "We will be only a few moments, please wait outside the Rune Room."

Harry sat with his knees pressed together and his hands curled in his lap. He tried to look as if he was just being dragged around by procedure, so he gave the Headmaster a small, reassuring smile. Dumbledore's face relaxed when he took in the image Harry was presenting. The old man's blue eyes reflected something that made guilt spike in Harry's chest. He crushed the feeling as quickly as he could.
"I will be just outside if you need me, my boy."

Harry gave a shallow nod. He couldn't help his lingering affection for the old man… maybe it would never be completely gone.

When the door closed with a sharp click, his entire body relaxed and he turned to Nagnok. The Goblin was sitting once more with a pleased smile.

"So, Mr. Potter. I am sure you have realized by now that we at Gringotts are not pleased with Albus Dumbledore."

Harry sat up straight, "Yes, lucky for me. I wasn't sure what I was going to do if he found out I had been to the Black House."

"I thought as much," Nagnok agreed.

"Can I ask why the bank is not pleased with the Headmaster?" Harry sat forward in curiosity.

Nagnok's face twisted into something unpleasant. "Albus Dumbledore has been putting his hands in your financial affairs since you were a baby. At first, we thought it was just normal procedure, until he set up a fund for your schooling and made sure the rest of the Potter money was kept separate."

Harry was surprised, he always thought his parents had set that fund up. He kept quiet as Nagnok continued.

"Normally, the money from your family would all be in one vault, and you would have limited access due to your age but it would still be within your reach. Dumbledore's interference cut you off completely." The Goblin spat the last words. "This last act of meddling was the final straw. Requesting an official will reading was outside the Headmaster's power, until he became proxy for Mr. Lupin. There was nothing we could do since you are a minor."

Harry felt any guilt over deceiving Dumbledore burn up in his anger. Remus was sent away so he would need a proxy to come claim what Sirius left him… Remus probably didn't even know.
Nagnok ignored Harry's anger and forged on with his tale. "When you went to the Black Manor and signed the magical deed, it freed Gringotts' hands. The moment the document came to us, we filed all the paperwork to make you Lord Black, as the will stipulated. Gringotts goblins do not respect those who meddle with other people money."

Harry pressed his anger down. "Thank you for your services, I appreciate you protecting my interests."

Nagnok gave a small bow in his chair. "Oh, it was my pleasure Lord Black. We goblins respect money and you have a substantial holding here between your two families. There is only one more matter to attend to." He reached with his pale little hand into the pile of documents and pulled out an embellished scroll with the Potter Family Crest on it. He smoothed it flat on the table and held out a quill to Harry. "Because you have accepted the title of Lord Black, you are considered a partially emancipated minor. You are now able to claim the title of Lord Potter, as well and combined your school vault with your family one." He gestured to the beautiful document, "All you have to do is sign here and the Headmaster can touch nothing with the name Potter or Black."

Harry's head was spinning, and he wasn't sure if it was due to the symptoms of the curse or all the information he was getting. He reached out slowly for the quill. He wanted to keep Dumbledore out of his affairs, but was he ready for this? Thinking about all the luck that carried him through until this point settled the matter in Harry's mind. He had to start acting; he had to take control.

With a slightly shaking hand, Harry signed his full name including "Black" at the end so it looked just like his signature on the Deed. The scroll rolled itself up and poofed away.

Nagnok reached under the table and pulled out a long, smooth, black jeweler's box and placed it on the table facing Harry. Nagnok opened it so Harry could look at the contents. Inside were two beautiful and intricately crafted keys. One was jet black and the other was a glimmering gold. "The master keys to your family vaults; from these keys you can create subkeys for lower members of the family," the goblin explained.

Next to the keys were two rings. Both were bands with gems all around. Just like the keys, one was black and one was gold. The black one had silver stones and the gold one had black stones.

"Rings for the Head of the family," Nagnok informed.

Harry reached out and took the keys first, he carefully placed them in his pocket, then he took the rings. He recognized the House of Black colors but the Potter ring surprised him. He thought it would be gold and red, the onyx stones were not expected. Harry really didn't know much about his own heritage. That was something he was going to fix. He put the rings with the keys, he didn't think it was a good idea to flaunt them in front of the Headmaster. Nagnok seemed to understand,
he nodded and then waved Harry to the door.

"Thanks again," He was truly grateful for the Goblins help.

Nagnok just waved him off again, as if he didn't hear the gratitude.

Harry turned and left.

Dumbledore was directly outside the door. As soon as Harry exited his eyes darted to the boy's hand. Harry was glad he decided to keep the rings in his pocket. He gave the Headmaster another of his patented innocent boy-who-lived smiles.

Dumbledore looked almost uncomfortable for a moment and seemed to be composing what he should say.

Harry jumped on the moment of hesitation. "I am sorry, Sir. I didn't realize how much trouble I would cause by signing the papers when they came." Harry cast his eyes down because he remembered not to meet the Headmaster's eyes.

Dumbledore reached out and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder.

Harry looked up and fixed his eyes on the man's nose, "But it's not like I plan to do anything with the title until after I graduate."

Dumbledore's face relaxed and he smiled. "That's probably for the best. Let's get you to your friends for shopping."

Harry fell in step besides the old man. "Sir, are you still going to use Grimmauld Place for the meetings?"

"I am afraid not. Without ownership, I can't put up the proper protections. I will have to find another place to hold the meetings." Dumbledore sounded regretful of losing headquarters.
"I'm sorry sir." Harry wasn't really sorry. He knew good and well that the reason Dumbledore wouldn't use the house was because it was loyal to Harry, and, as Hermione had said, an ancient family's house will do what it has to in order to protect its own. Dumbledore couldn't trust the house anymore.

"Do not worry my boy, everything will work out."

Those words were oddly comforting, even though Harry knew that Dumbledore was probably very angry with him. He didn't think that Harry had intentionally messed everything up.

Together, they reentered the busy streets of Diagon Alley.

Ooo

Chapter End Notes

"The moon's weird, though, right? It's there, and there, and then, suddenly, it's not! And it seems to be pretty far up! Is it watching us? If not, what is it watching instead?! Is there something more interesting than us? Hey! Watch us, moon! We may not always be the best show in the universe, but we try!"

-Night Vale

AN- Oh! Hello. I, ummm… I didn't see you there. I wasn't as prepared as I normally am for this meeting. I guess that sometimes life does things without warning and this white expanse of creative potential is no different. Sometimes… well sometimes I feel eclipsed by the stark blankness. Sometimes I feel like I have typed nothing but disjointed sounds, represented by scribbles that no one understands, then it is swallowed up by the bright white light…

Then you are here… responding. Validating my scribbled, disjointed sounds as something comprehensible.
I guess what I'm trying to say is… thank you…

Skyrere…

LiTori…

Maybe2Morrow…

Runadaemon…

3/24/2017

Rejiggered

Beta’s-minijaxter - 4/17/2017
AN- Important things! After this chapter there may be a bit of a wait for the next one. I am moving to a new apartment. I am not moving far, just across town but it is because my current apartment is falling apart and my landlady has done nothing to fix it. So far two parts of the ceiling have fallen due to a leak, the hallway is now leaking, a pipe burst and I had to crawl through what I call "The Terror Basement".

What is a terror basement you ask? Well… I have a picture of the actual basement I had to go through to turn off the water. It's in my profile if you want to see it.

Thank you to my Beta minijaxter

THANKS! To all of my lovely readers! A special thanks to the reviewers who take the time to read my personal ramblings at the end of the chapter after the Night Vale quote.

The Links to the High Res Versions of the 4 cover pictures is in my Profile.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas
Chapter 9

Dog With a Bone

She had been awake for a while, curled up beneath the blankets. The sheet that used to be between her and the duvet was kicked to the bottom of the bed. It was scrunched up, and had become a snake at her toes.

Narcissa pulled her feet a little bit higher. Her hand moved to her ankle and absentmindedly played with a green and white woven rope that was always tied there. It looped around three times; Lucius had given it to her and told her to never remove it. But now he was gone and the rope was her only protection.

She had heard whispers that the Dark Lord was planning a breakout. She prayed her husband was going to come home soon. She was alone and feeling lost.

Draco was gone.

The Dark Lord took her son away for some sort of training before school started. She could roam her home as she pleased, but now had no desire to. Her reason for roaming was to wander in the direction of her child, but now their distance was too great to walk. He was out of her reach.

She was told to stay, like a dog, until The Dark Lord returned, he had a plan for her. His fingers had skimmed over the skin of her cheek, the cool pads of the tips pressed her chin up so he could see her face. Her eyes were downcast, her secrets safe.

Narcissa’s entire body convulsed at the memory of that small touch. She was sure he had no interest in her carnally, those tendencies left him with the last of his humanity. He seemed to find her amusing; she was like a pretty doll. He wanted to wind her up and see what she would do. Narcissa remembered the pleasure in his eyes when she was twisting on the floor with her hair secure in Greyback's hand. Her pain brought him joy, he told her it was going to make her strong. Her pain would be her strength and he expected her to direct it towards his goals.

Her pain would make her strong.

But her direction was her own.
She was willing to do anything.

Ooo

Harry was dropped off where his friends were waiting outside Florean Fortescue's ice cream. Fred and George had come over from their shop and joined Ron, Ginny, and Hermione.

The moment Dumbledore was gone, almost all of Harry's friends descended upon him asking questions about the Will reading. Hermione was the only one who stood quietly beside him until the questions became too loud.

"Will you guys be quiet!" She hissed, "We will discuss everything later, in private."

She put emphasis on the last word while tilting her head in the direction of Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Everyone shut up quickly and waited for the adults to wander a bit farther away.

Hermione turned to Harry and he knew she was going to ask the one question that could not wait.

"Does he know about the house?"

Harry gave her a sly smile, "Nope."

She smiled back just as slyly. Everyone else looked confused, but Hermione ignored them.

"I need you to write down headquarters location and let them pass it around. If we are going to do this they will need to be able to get there and this might be the last time we see Fred and George."

Harry looked around the street, eyes scanning the alleys and dark corners where suspicious people might lurk, but only saw overcrowded streets filled with people shouting, haggling and talking.

"Aren't we a bit exposed?" He asked.
"I have learned anything from the fiasco of setting up the DA, it's that more chaos and crowds is better. Remember The Hogshead and how well that worked out?"

"Yeah," Harry gave in. He took the scrap of paper and self-inking quill she handed to him.

After writing down the address, he passed it to Ginny.

She looked back at him questioningly, "Haven't we already done this?"

Hermione smiled. "New keeper," was all she said.

Ginny's eyes filled with understanding and she passed it to Ron. After Fred and George looked at it, they cast a small *Incendio* and let the ashes drift into the street and get tracked away on the many shoes that trotted over it.

Hermione pulled out six sickles and handed one to everybody. "These are just like the Galleons from last year, only I had to make them fast so they only heat up. When they do get warm you have 20 minutes to get to the Room of Requirement or directly to headquarters. Got it?"

Everyone nodded. Harry just smiled, happy once more that he brought her in from the beginning.

Harry saw Mrs. Weasley approaching in his peripheral and added his two cents quickly, "Don't make eye contact with Dumbledore or Snape they know Legilimency." He whispered. Everyone nodded.

"Ginny!" Mrs. Weasley called. "We have to get to your fitting appointment!"

Ginny glanced around, "New robes." She shrugged and ran after her mother.

Fred and George saluted and then left for their shop.

Mr. Weasley came up beside Ron. "Well you guys go off, I will be nearby and there are guards scattered around so don't worry."
Harry almost said something rude about not needing guards but held his tongue. Mr. Weasley was always kind and didn't deserve that. Once the three of them were "alone" Ron spoke up.

"So… am I going to get more information about what's going on or am I going to be left in the dark?" He sounded miffed but not nearly as angry as Harry thought he would be. Maybe Ron was growing up, that would be good.

Harry smirked and threw his arm over his friend's shoulder. "You will get filled in as soon as we are sure no one will overhear."

Ron's face was resigned as he nodded. "Yeah I can wait, but don't make me wait too long."

Harry's smirk turned to a true smile, "Sure thing."

The trio was walking past Eeylops Owl Emporium. The front of the shop was covered from bottom to top in flashing signs. Harry couldn't help stopping to check it out. The signs were advertising a new type of owl that was only recently bred for mail delivery. Without even realizing it, Harry started wandering towards the shop. Hermione trotted up beside him and put her hand on his arm.

"Harry?" She questioned.

Harry ripped his eyes away from the flashing lights to glance at her. "Have you seen this?" he waved his hand at the sign.

Hermione looked at the advertisement. "No, but I think it's interesting."

"Let's go take a look at them." He sped up into the shop.

Inside the Emporium was musty and smelled like animal bedding. The light from the windows made the dandruff from the owls glow gold as it floated in the air. It was all rather charming. The flashing signs continued in the store and all pointed to the back wall that held a display of the new owl breed.

The Burrowing Owl was being advertised as something different for witches and wizards who don't fancy having to keep a perch. Because they are fast runners and flyers they would be useful for magical folks who live in a more muggle area. They can run along the ground in areas where
seeing an owl fly during the day might be suspicious.

Harry leaned forward to look into the apathetic eyes of an eight inch high brown owl with unusually long legs. The lithe little bird looked back at Harry and gave a small hoot. The little card below the bird said that they didn't require a perch, instead they needed a box with nesting material, perfect for someone living in boarding school. Ron and Hermione were right behind him when Harry turned around, they gave him curious looks but didn't get in the way when he went to the front counter.

"Excuse me." Harry politely called for the attention of the shopkeeper.

A man with very thick glasses turned around. His lenses magnified his eyes making him look rather like an owl himself. He blinked a couple of times before registering that he had a customer in front of him.

"Yes? How may I help you?" he asked in a nasally voice.

Harry pointed behind him to the burrowing owl display, "I would like to buy one of those new owls."

The shop keep opened his mouth to respond but paused. His face crinkled up and he raised his finger to excuse himself as he sneezed. He blew his nose on a dirty rag that was pulled from his back pocket while muttering about 'ruddy birds'. He walked to the display with Harry following behind. "Which bird did you want?"

Harry pointed to the smallest one. The little eight inch bird that he had been looking at before.

"Why are you getting another Owl?" Hermione asked while the shop keep opened the cage to retrieve the bird.

Harry reached out and took the owl onto his arm. Its ambivalent stare didn't shift once during its transfer.

"It's not for me." He answered while following the shopkeeper to the front counter.
"That will be ten Galleons," the keeper snapped.

Harry pulled the money out of his pocket, "If I am giving this owl to someone else, how do I get it to them?"

The worker pulled out a quill and parchment and placed it on the counter. "For a sickle more, you can write a short letter explaining and the name of the new owner and the owl will understand." He rolled his eyes as if an idiot should know this information.

Harry added a sickle to the pile of coins and snatched the quill from the rude proprietor.

Dear Dudley,

I know you always wanted a pet and you seem to like Hedwig. I saw this new type of post owl and thought you would like it. It can run along the ground in case you don't want someone to see it fly until it's out of your school campus. It also doesn't need a perch, just a box and some bedding for a nest. Let it out at night to hunt. Let me know what you name it and keep in touch.

Eyes are on us,

Harry

Harry knew that the last part was a bit obvious but he was certain that the Order was already suspicious. He didn't think they had any idea how big Harry and his friends plans were, but they knew something was up. Dudley would understand the warning to keep personal matters out of his mail.

He handed the letter to the new owl and smiled. Once they were all outside, he stroked the bird's feathers and then lifted his arm.

"Go to your new owner boy," He instructed. The owl obeyed and took off to the sky.

"So that was for your cousin?" Hermione asked.
"Yeah," He breathed.

Ron let out a sigh of frustration, "you are on better terms with him than I thought."

Harry threw his arm around Ron's shoulder, "it will all come together soon."

Ooo

Harry packed the last of his new things into his trunk and squashed the top down so it could latch. Ron was doing the same on the other side of the room but having less luck. His trunk had a half an inch of space between the latches and wouldn't close. He was crouched on top of the lid and bouncing while swearing.

Harry smiled at his friends antics.

The door to the room was open and the sounds of the rest of the Weasley family rushing to get ready were rolling around in the hallway. A feminine voice spitting out very un-lady like words caught Harry's attention. He looked out into the hallway and saw Ginny scrabbling on the floor to pick up her things she dropped. He went out into the hall to help.

"Thanks Harry, bag broke," She huffed while gathering her things.

Harry reached down and picked up a candle. It was purple and sparkly. From the smell of flowers he assumed it was for recreation. He handed it to her and noticed that all the things she dropped were candles.

"Sure got a lot of candles." Harry felt stupid stating the obvious.

Ginny blushed and took the candle he offered, "Yeah…" she cleared her throat. "I don't know why but I have always liked them. They are calming, I guess." She stuffed the purple candle into the remains of the bag she cradled in her arms. "Might have gone a bit over board at the Alley yesterday."

Harry smiled warmly at her. She looked flushed and nervous and he wanted her to relax, but when
he smiled she became even redder. He liked Ginny but he might never understand her. She shuffled by him and went to the room next to Ron's. Harry shrugged and went back to his own bed to make sure he had everything packed.

Kings Cross station was as crowded as ever. Once Harry was on the other side of the barrier of platform 9 ¾, it was just a different brand of chaos. The steam bellowed out of the scarlet train and floated at the feet of the students rushing to get on board.

"Hurry up!" Mrs. Weasley yelled over the din.

The group of redheads plus Harry and Hermione trotted through the throng of people on their way to one of the train doors. Mr. Weasley helped the girls with their trunks, while Ron and Harry struggled to pull their own aboard. When everyone and their luggage were secured the train began to move. Harry couldn't believe how close they cut it, only a moment later and they might have missed their ride.

"Let's find a compartment," Ron huffed while pulling his trunk down the hall.

There was only one compartment with any space, luckily it contained only Neville and Luna.

They stored their trunks above in the racks and sat down with their friends. Harry felt like everything was sliding into place. He was going back to where he belonged, but this time he was ready to change.

"Hey Harry! How was your summer?" Neville looked bright and happy. Normally he was worn and rather sad after summer because his grandmother would rail on him the entire time. It seems the Ministry incident kept his grandmother proud and off his back the entire vacation.

"Mine was actually really good. How was yours? You look like you had fun." Harry felt his body relaxing into the fine leather of the seat as the conversation flowed easily.

Neville's face became even brighter, if that was possible. He reached into his robe pocket, he was already in school robes, and pulled out a wand. He held it out like it was his most prized possession but also incredibly fragile.
"My Gran bought me a new wand! Said I earned it by being a true hero!" his face almost split in half at the size of his smile.

Harry sat forward and smiled back. "That's great Nev!"

Neville stroked the wand lovingly,

"It is! It works so much better than my other one. I will miss my old wand, but it was my father's and never liked me." His face fell for only a moment when talking about his father but he brightened back up and started talking about his new wand again.

"Its 13 inches, made of cherry wood, and has a unicorn hair core. It's perfect."

"Sounds just right for you," Hermione said warmly.

"Yes, it does sound perfect, sad that is probably Ollivander's last wand," Luna spoke for the first time. Her airy voice was as unsettling as the words she spoke. Silence fell over the compartment.

Luna was sitting by the window in the bench seat across from Harry. She had her wand behind her ear as usual but she had no quibbler in her hand. She was actually rather toned down. Her clothes were only her school robes and she had no extra adornments.

"What do you mean?" Harry broke the eerie silence.

Luna looked Harry right in the eyes with her own wide and unblinking stare. A shiver ran down his spine. Her eyes weren't quite right. They were the same color they have always been but they were missing the shine of curiosity. Her eyes used to reflect her odd thoughts, but now they were rather flat.

"Have you not heard?" She asked in a way that made clear her words were a statement and not actually a question.

Everyone in the compartment shook their heads.
In a disturbing monotone voice Luna explained. "He went missing, just this summer he vanished and never returned. It is assumed that Death Eaters are behind it but no one knows what they want Ollivander for."

Ron shot forward in alarm, "What if they are trying to make a super wand?"

Hermione pushed him back into his seat so she could see Luna, "I don't think that's possible Ron. Are they still looking for him?"

Luna gave a slow nod, like she wasn't sure if anyone actually spoke to her. "My father said that there are constant search parties, but it won't make a difference." She concluded in a firm tone.

Harry felt a knot form in his chest, "Why would you say that? They have to try and find him." Even as he asked he didn't really want the answer.

Luna leaned forward, and her intense gaze filled his vision, it was cold and distant. "I said it won't make a difference because it won't. I saw him, Ollivander. He was shrouded and I couldn't hear him. Not like that time when I could hear them all, too many of them." She leaned even closer to Harry, he thought he could see something behind her eyes. Something that was screaming and clawing to get out, she whispered her next words.

"I know you understand Harry, because you heard them as well. That night you heard them all."

Frigid water filled Harry's chest and it became hard to breath. Sirius falling through the veil and all the voices that he could hear. The only other person who could hear them was Luna. But Harry didn't understand the words, he felt them more than heard them, while they were standing just beyond the veil.

Hermione disturbed the cryptic conversation.

"When is your birthday Luna, I don't think I have ever known." The mundane question was very out of place in the intense atmosphere. Luna was un-phased and answered without hesitation.

"November 14th."
Hermione scooted forward on her seat, "oh really? So you are young for your year? You're turning 15 this November?"

Luna shook her head, "No, I am older for my year, I am turning 16." Without waiting for a response, she turned to look out the window and stared at the passing scenery.

Hermione nodded even though Luna wasn't looking. It was more like she was confirming a theory. She caught Harry's eye and held his gaze for a moment, then she turned to her bag on the seat and started rooting through it. She turned back around with two small wrapped boxes. She handed one to Neville, and one to Luna after she got the girls attention.

"Open them when you're alone," She warned.

They nodded in unison. After the DA they tended to follow Hermione’s instructions without question.

Harry was with Hermione when she put sickles in the boxes with a letter. The letter was the same for every box. It just explained that the sickle was like the DA galleon. When it warmed they had twenty minutes to get to the Room of Requirement. It also warned them not to make eye contact with Snape or Dumbledore and explained why. The note ended by telling them that this was very secret and they should tell no one and burn the letter.

Hermione reached out and turned Harry's wrist so she could look at his watch.

"Ron we have to get to our Prefect meeting."

Ron sighed heavily, "Yeah fine."

They left the compartment, Hermione practically dragging Ron behind her.

Ooo

The Prefects meeting seemed to be running long. It was so long that Harry considered leaving the compartment to look for his friends. He sat for another minute in silence with Luna and Neville
before making his decision. Harry stood up and began moving for the sliding door, right as his hand reached out the door opened with a swish.

Hermione almost ran head first into Harry but avoided the collision of their heads by an inch. She jumped back in surprise.

"OH! Harry you scared me. Why are you standing in front of the door?"

Ron looked over Hermione's head, "Yeah, mate what gives?"

"I was just a little worried, that was a long meeting. I was just going to check if everything was ok."

Harry said while moving back to his seat to let his friends in. Ron flopped onto the bench while Hermione closed the door and sat with a bit more restraint.

Harry looked over his friends and took mental stock of their condition. He thought they looked a bit weary. Hermione was mentally cataloging whatever information they were given, but Ron, he looked more introspective than Harry had ever seen him.

"It was long, but it was only because there was a lot of cleanup that needs done after Umbridge." Hermione made a face when she said the woman's name, like she had eaten something rotten.

Ron stayed quiet, every once in awhile he would glance at the sliding door.

Hermione continued explaining the meeting. "The Head boy and girl wanted to make sure it was clear that the horrible squad from last year was over and no one could act under its name. And they will be lifting all the extra decrees she made, so you won't be banned from flying anymore! Isn't that great?"

Neville perked up at that news, "That's brilliant! We will have a real shot at the cup this year!" he beamed at Harry.

"Yeah it's great! I was sort of worried about that." Harry couldn't stop smiling if he tried, he turned to Ron. "Glad to have your best player and figurehead back?" Harry joked. Even though he was the captain of the team, they joked that Ron did all the strategy, so he was the real captain.
Ron was looking at the door with his brows furrowed and didn't respond. Harry reached over Hermione and lightly punched Ron on the arm.

"Hey Captain, my Captain." He smirked good-naturedly when Ron finally turned and looked.

"They are letting me fly again this year," Harry repeated.

Ron's eyes slowly widened as the words sank in. "That's great! We will have the cup for sure." His enthusiasm didn't last long and eyes trailed to the door.

"Everything OK?" Concerned, Harry pressed for information.

Ron looked at the floor, then his eyes flickered to the door again. "Yeah everything is fine. I was just thinking that I didn't want Malfoy barging in like he always does."

Harry could understand that, it was always the worst part of the train ride. Ron should be happy that Malfoy had yet to make an appearance, except it looked like Ron was concerned, not overly worried but maybe a bit unsettled. Come to think of it, Harry didn't even see the blond git get on the train.

"Was Malfoy at the meeting?" Harry asked.

Hermione chimed in before Ron got a word out. "Yes he was, but he didn't say a word. He just waited until it was over. I thought it was odd."

Harry looked to Ron for confirmation and received a small nod.

"Yeah mate, it's like Hermione said. He was really pale and…" Ron looked at the floor, he was out of words that could describe what he saw.

"It was his eyes." Hermione put a hand on Ron's shoulder as she filled in for him. "His eyes were… well they looked like people's eyes that are under the Imperius, like from defense last year."
Ron turned pale at those words. "You don't think?" he was unable to finish his sentence again.

"We will have to keep an eye on him." Harry confirmed. He gave Hermione a pointed look. He hoped she remembered the part of the Verum book about Parselmouth gifts. But she was Hermione, of course she remembered, she probably had it all figured out already.

"We only have ten minutes, put your robes on Harry." Luna spoke up for the first time since before the prefect meeting.

Harry reached for his trunk to comply. After changing he sat quietly. His head was spinning and his body felt oddly tired.

Ooo

The scarlet steam engine slowly came to a stop. It jolted forward and then settled back with a jerk. Any of the students standing eager to get off, stumbled in unison. Harry caught himself on the luggage rack above his head. Ron reached up and steadied Hermione from where he sat.

The group of five filed out into the crowded train hall. Many of the younger students were weaving through the older taller ones and laughing, except the first years who all looked scared. Harry led the group through the throngs of other students. He caught sight of Malfoy, flanked by his usual body guards, he saw what Ron and Hermione meant when they described him. He was pale and thinner, his eyes did seem… dull maybe? Harry didn't think it was like the Imperius, it was more like, he was hopeless. When Malfoy saw Harry looking he sneered, but not in a way that would invite a fight. Harry doubted he had the energy for an argument.

Ron was also looking at Malfoy. Harry expected him to glare after the sneer, but he didn't. Ron just looked away.

The group made their way to the carriages. Harry was still feeling oddly tired and lightheaded but ignored it. He stared at the Thestrals, Luna approached one and began stroking its beak like nose. He pulled his eyes away, as he walked by the creatures, heading to the buggy door. The skeletal horse closest reached out and ran its bony nose down his arm. Surprised, he looked up at it, and it looked back. Luna walked up beside him and placed her hand on the side of the Thestrals face. The horse leaned into the touch. Harry backed away a couple of steps before turning to flee into the carriage, the others were already inside. Harry squeezed in the seat with Ron and Hermione as Luna chose to sit across from him beside Neville.
"What took you so long?" Ron asked.

Harry wasn't really sure what to say, but Luna seemed to have no problem answering.

"Oh, Harry was making a friend," She said airily.

Is that what he was doing? Logically Harry knew Thestrals were not evil or bad, but having one pay attention to him felt like a bad omen. Of course the last time he thought he was being followed by a bad omen, it turned out to be his godfather… though, the way that ended, it might have been an omen from the beginning. Or maybe Sirius's Animagus form was an omen about his life.

The friends sat in silence for the rest of the carriage ride. The calling voice of Hagrid as he gathered the first years faded away. The front gate of Hogwarts loomed above and then behind them, its shadow crossing their path for only a moment. Harry studied his surroundings through the window, his mind purposely blank. When the carriage arrived at the entrance, it took him a moment to react. Hermione's hand on his arm brought him to full attention.

"Come on Harry." She smiled warmly. Harry followed her out into the cool evening. He took a deep breath of crisp air. It smelled like the closing of summer. Harry let dark thoughts of Thestrals and Sirius slip away. He was home.

The juxtaposition of entering the loud Great Hall after the peaceful evening air was startling, and didn't help Harry's swimming head. Students were talking and catching up, some were standing and yelling, while others laughed. All the houses stayed separated like pads of watercolor paint in a plastic pallet.

Harry led the way to Gryffindor table, his friends followed and took seats around him, except Luna who had wandered off to Ravenclaw. Harry looked up to the raised platform where the professors’ table was situated. Every chair was filled, at the very end of the table by the Slytherin was a new face. The new Professor was tall, he had blond hair and was smiling while talking to Snape. Snape didn't seem as amused by the conversation as the blond man was but he looked like he was being polite.

The new professor resembled Lockhart a little bit, he was good looking in a similar way, but unlike Lockhart this man didn't flash an overly bright smile or swagger. He seemed more like a Hufflepuff for lack of a better description. His smile was kind and his eyes were warm, even Snape looked like he was having trouble staying off the other man's friendly disposition. Between
nodding and replying to the new Professor, Snape was scanning the hall for trouble. Harry thought he was looking over the Gryffindor table longer than usual, but maybe not.

Harry nudged Hermione, "Hey, have you checked out the new Professor?" he staged whispered.

Neville leaned in, as well, from across the table.

"Yeah he seems… nice?" Neville whispered back. His entire demeanor indicated he was skeptical, or maybe just afraid to be optimistic.

Hermione didn't whisper but added her thoughts, "He doesn't look like someone who would be good at defense, but I guess you can't judge by appearance."

"Even if he's a terrible teacher, it won't be so bad, if he's at least nice," Neville commented.

The conversation about the new professor ended when Dean and Seamus started asking Harry if he was going to play Quidditch this year. Before Harry could answer, Hermione started explaining the Prefect meeting on the train. He laughed over how enthusiastic she was about Umbridge's decrees being torn down.

Harry settled into a moment without anyone's attention on him. The enchanted ceiling was clear and full of stars, the floating candles were bright and cheery. The many voices of the students blended together in a warm rumble, but his friends voices cut through the din. Hermione was describing Malfoy's odd behavior to Dean and Seamus, while Neville tried to interject his new wand into the conversation.

Harry turned to Ron who had been uncharacteristically quiet. He caught his tongue before he said a word. Ron was staring across the Hall, with a faraway look on his face. Harry followed his line of sight to Draco Malfoy, who was sitting very still and looking down at the table.

"Ron?" Harry called, he shook his friend a little.

Ron half pulled his eyes away from the Slytherin table. "Yeah?" he responded in a distracted tone.
"Are you ok?" Harry leaned in a bit closer and whispered for only Ron to hear. "You've been staring at Malfoy." He pointed out.

Ron pulled his eyes completely away from the Slytherin table and looked at Harry. "I know," He admitted. Harry felt his eyebrows trying to escape into his hair. Ron's face became flaming red and he raised his hands in defense.

"It's nothing like what you're thinking!" he screeched. Over half of the Gryffindor table stopped to see what the commotion was about. Ron became so red, that the blush went all down his neck and he was sputtering. He was saved from explaining when the Headmaster rose to speak, and the entire hall fell silent.

Dumbledore spread his arms out wide and waited for the last mumble to subside. He smiled gently and looked down on his students with twinkling eyes.

"Welcome back for another year, and welcome for the first time to our new students!" He looked over the long line of nervous eleven year olds.

Dumbledore put his arms back at his sides. "We will start by sorting our new students." He gestured for Professor McGonagall to come forward with the list and hat. She placed the stool in the middle of the dais, with her usual stern face and set the hat on top. She took a step back, unrolled the list of names and cleared her throat.

Harry only paid half a mind to the sorting. He clapped with the others at his table when his house got a new member. The other half of his mind was on Malfoy. Ron's odd interest was starting to seep into Harry's mind. He could tell from outside appearance that something was wrong with Malfoy but Ron seemed to see something more. Honestly Harry thought that Ron's interest was strange considering how much he hated Malfoy.

While thinking about the new situation, Harry's gaze wandered over to the Slytherin table. His eyes slid over Malfoy's slumped shoulders and bowed head. His entire posture changed and tensed the moment Harry's eyes settled directly on him. His blonde hair swayed as he raised his head, locking his dull silver eyes with Harry's. He didn't sneer or pull a face, but his eyes narrowed slightly. Harry thought he looked sad and confused, until his eyes widened and his arms shifted under the table. For only a moment, so fast it could be passed off as imagination, Malfoy's eyes flashed bright red. The only reason Harry knew it wasn't in his head, was Ron's gasp and the slight sting that flickered through his scar.
Harry looked away and turned to Ron.

"Did you see that?" he asked in a whisper.

Ron was still staring at Malfoy. His eyes were wide and his skin was pale and clammy. Slowly he nodded in response to Harry's question. Ron had been face to face with Death Eaters and looked less frightened than he did right then. Harry felt his gut churn and put his head down on his folded arms.

Ron whispered, "We have to keep an eye on him. Something is very wrong."

Harry silently agreed but was too tired to reply. His mind was wandering back to the mystery letter that came from the Floo Candle. *'Not everything is as it seems...'*

Hermione leaned over when she saw him resting. "Are you OK?" she asked with concern.

Harry turned his head to face her without lifting it from his arms. "I think it's getting worse. It started on the train and hasn't gotten better," He whispered.

Hermione knew he was talking about the curse symptoms without him having to say it. "We might have to move our plans up."

Harry gave her a sideways nod. "Yeah, tomorrow night we should take Ron to the Room. There's something odd going on and we need to be ready."

"OK," She agreed.

All commotion in the Hall stopped. Harry flipped his head around on his arms to get a view of the staff table. The Sorting Hat was being taken away and Dumbledore was standing again. He spread his arms once more, like a grandfather accepting a hug from his grandchildren.

"Now that we are all sorted, I have a few announcements before we are fed and then drift into pleasant dreams."
He gestured to the new Professor and the man stood.

"I'm sure you are all wondering who this young man is," Dumbledore continued, "This is Professor Arsenius Jigger the Third. Yes, you heard right, he is the son of the owner of Slug and Jigger Apothecary in Diagon Alley and many times the grandson of a professor who taught here long ago. His family is from a long line of Master Potioneer's, and as such he will be taking over the position of Potions Master here at our fine school"

Professor Jigger gave a small bow with a warm smile after the introduction, and then sat back down, seemingly oblivious to the uproar following the announcement. Dumbledore raised his hands and made a motion for the students to calm and quiet. Once there was a semblance of order he began talking again.

"I am sure you are all wondering who will fill our ever open position of Defense Against the Dark Arts. This year the class will be taught by none other than our own Professor Snape."

Snape did not stand, he only nodded to acknowledge the Headmaster's words.

The outburst after this news was much louder than the previous one. Dumbledore acted as if there was no outburst at all, with a wave of his hand the food appeared and he sat back down. Harry turned to Ron expecting him to be outraged and eating, but he was calm. He was not looking at Malfoy, this time he was giving the new Professor a curious look.

Harry went along with his friend's new interest and commented, "He seems nice."

"Yeah, I guess." Ron replied and turned to Harry. "I can't believe we have to put up with Snape in DADA!" He suddenly vented, acting much more himself. "The greasy git is probably dancing for joy, not that you can tell with his sour face." Ron huffed while piling food onto his plate, as if his anger was directly linked to his hunger and the mountain of food continued to grow.

Harry laughed, and patted him on the shoulder. "Yeah, we can't seem to shake him off completely."

Ron threw his arms up, some potatoes on his fork ended up flung behind him. "I thought I was clear of him since I didn't get an Outstanding on my O.W.L."

Harry sighed along with his friend, "yeah, me too. I got Exceeding Expectations so I thought I wouldn't have to deal with him or Potions. Though it meant I wouldn't get into the Auror Program
"Well Mr. Potter, it's a good thing Professor Jigger is more flexible than Professor Snape."

Harry turned around to find Professor McGonagall standing right behind him. She flicked a bit of potato off her shoulder and smiled down at him and Ron fondly.

"This applies to you as well Mr. Weasley. You will both be in Advanced Potions this year, no matter how many food items you throw at me." She handed them their time tables and moved on. Ron shrank in his seat, Harry thought he might melt into the wood from embarrassment.

Hermione read over her time table with a critical eye while Harry and Ron shoved theirs in their pockets.

"Great now I have bloody potions and Snape… only separately." Ron grumbled to himself and his gaze flickered to Professor Jigger.

Harry looked at Hermione who was strangely quiet. He thought she would be all over Ron and Harry about how they should be happy to get into advanced potions. She was still looking at the new professor, he thought her cheeks might be a bit pink.

"You OK, Hermione?" his voice made her jump. She quickly looked at him to cover up her staring.

"Yeah I'm fine. I was just thinking." She looked down at the table.

"Thinking, huh?" he smirked at her obvious embarrassment.

Her face became even more red, but with irritation. "If you must know, I was thinking about 'Hogwarts: A History'."

Harry heard Ron let out a suffering sigh, Harry just smiled and humored Hermione.

She gave him a knowing look. She could tell he had no interest but seemed to appreciate him trying. "I remember there was a small passage about Professor Arsenius Jigger the first. He taught DADA. I was thinking about how back when he taught, many DADA teachers were Dark Arts
practitioners as well."

Harry did find that interesting. He wondered if this new Professor knew about Dark Magic because it is in his family.

Shortly after that Dumbledore dismissed the students to their dorms. Harry walked tiredly with Neville to the Tower while Ron and Hermione helped the first years.

Ooo

The sun fluttered through the small crack in Harry's bed curtains. He slowly pried his heavy eyes open and lifted his watch to see the time. He woke up a minute before his alarm spell. His heavy arm flopped out of his bed to the table and grabbed his wand. He disabled the spell and sat up. Everything spun for a moment making his stomach jolt. Harry hoped that a night's sleep would help, but he felt worse. He was tired and his joints hurt. It was almost as if he had the flu.

He stumbled out of bed and felt around for his robe from yesterday. When he found it, he pulled the crumpled schedule out to check for the time of his first class. When he unfolded the paper another slip of parchment fluttered out. Upon further inspection, it turned out to be a note from the headmaster asking Harry to come to his office Wednesday night. According to the note, he was going to have regular meetings with the headmaster for "training". Harry sighed, just what he needed, a meeting with the old man. He shoved the note back in the pocket and looked at his class list.

He had DADA after a free period. Harry had hoped to talk to Hermione before classes but she had Ancient Runes when he had free. Harry dropped the robe and went to take a long hot shower. Maybe that would help him feel better. He just knew it was going to be one of those days where nothing worked out for him.

Both Harry and Ron made it to the Great Hall for the last half hour of breakfast. Most of the Professors were already gone but there was still plenty of food. He ignored his sore joints and spinning head and sat next to Ron to enjoy some Hogwarts breakfast.

Ron was putting as much bacon into his mouth as he could while also still trying to talk to Harry about their upcoming class. Harry couldn't help but find it oddly endearing. Over the month he was with Hermione, he missed Ron more than he realized. He was always able to lighten a sour mood. Without Professor Jigger or Malfoy around, he seemed more relaxed and like himself.

Harry nodded when he thought he was supposed to, as Ron continued to rant, the amount of food in
his mouth made it hard to understand what he was saying. Harry didn't care, as long as things continued to feel so normal. Ron's strange interest in Malfoy and his unnaturally calm acceptance of recent events was throwing Harry off balance. He was looking forward to bringing Ron completely into the loop tonight.

"Ready?" Ron's voice unimpeded by breakfast cut through Harry's thoughts. He was standing with his bag over his shoulder. For a moment he looked very grown up, sometimes it was hard to believe they only had one year left after this.

"Yeah." Harry stood up and grabbed his own messenger bag. Both boys walked slower than normal. They really didn't want to be in class with Snape and were trying to put off the inevitable.

The door to the DADA class loomed closer with every step. It was hard not to notice the other students milling around the darker than usual classroom. They all seemed to be waiting until the last moment to go inside. Hermione was nowhere to be seen. Harry assumed she was already in the room and seated with her books out. She didn't care who was teaching the class as long as they learned. Harry noticed Ron had stopped walking right before the entrance. Harry reached back and grabbed his robe sleeve to drag him in the room, maybe he wasn't as grown up as he seemed.

Hermione was sitting front and center with her material out, ready to take notes. Harry sighed and went to take the seat on her left while pushing Ron towards the seat on her right.

"Why?" Ron whined, "Why are we in the front?"

"Because Ronald, as much as we don't like Snape, he knows his stuff. I can't imagine he will teach this class poorly." Hermione snapped back, effectively shutting Ron up.

Harry dropped his head into his hands; the room was still spinning. He kept waiting for it to stop and clarity to settle in, but it didn't, not this time. He tried to ignore his aching joints and tired body in the few minutes they had left before class so he closed his eyes. He could hear Hermione shuffling around her books while Ron mumbled under his breath. The room became steadily louder and students from the hall started to trickle in and find seats. They accepted that this class was not something they could escape. The noise level evened out as everything settled and they waited for the Professor.

Harry wasn't happy that Snape was teaching this class but he did agree with Hermione. Besides Remus, Snape might be the best they have had in a long time. Harry didn't like that man but he felt less anger after his time in Grimmauld place. Just knowing that Snape tried to find Sirius, even after Harry went into his pensieve last year, was a big deal. The only thing that he still couldn't get over was how viciously Snape attacked his mind during their lessons. Harry couldn't think about it
anymore, he let his mind wander as he listened to the sound of his classmates talking.

Ron stopped mumbling and Harry knew Malfoy must have entered the room. He could imagine Ron's piercing gaze. He cracked his eye open to see if his assumption was correct and found it was. Ron was staring at the Slytherin, only this time Malfoy was looking back. His eyes were still flat and grey, but they were also calculating. Knowing that he was being watched as well didn't seem to deter Ron. He was like a dog with a bone and his jaw was locked. As soon as Malfoy noticed Harry looking he turned away to the front of the classroom.

From the shadows emerged a deep voice.

"You are all pitifully unaware..." the voice mocked.

Harry almost flew out of his seat in surprise. Snape slinked out of the dark corner of the room as if he was being formed from the shadows. He had been in the room all along… creepy. Everyone fell dead silent, then the shuffling of students getting out quill and paper filled the air.

Snape stalked to the front of the room, his robes flowed out behind him menacingly. His dark eyes scanned the students, they seemed to fall on Harry for a moment longer than necessary. The black eyes then flickered to Ron and stayed.

"Mr. Weasley... I would appreciate it if you kept your eyes to the front. Class time is no place to pine." Snape's growled.

Ron turned red to the tips of his ears as he complied. He mumbled a few unsavory insults under his breath.

"What was that, Mr. Weasley?" Snape asked in an even lower voice.

Ron sat up straight. "Nothing, Sir."

Snape swept to stand behind the teacher's desk. "I have been here, watching, for the last five years. I am very aware, of the dismal teaching methods employed by your previous professors ... All of you are behind. Now, it has fallen to me to correct this oversight." Snape was hissing by the end, he leaned forward and put both hands on the desk.
Harry expected him to launch into a speech much like he did in first year potions and then slap the black board with his wand and tell them to read. What he said next was, unexpected.

Snape leaned a little more over the desk and spoke directly to his students, like the adults they were becoming. "The world is changing. It is reverting," his words were quiet but firm. He leaned back to stand straight and clasped his hands behind his back. "Even if you had been taught properly, the curriculum set before you by the ministry, you would not be prepared to leave this academy." His dark eyes bored into everyone they fell on.

Harry felt his heart speed up. Even though Snape said nothing that directly implicated him as not being completely loyal to Voldemort, he was skirting dangerous territory.

Snape walked around the desk and stood right before the class. "I will be teaching you off the books. Do not worry, Ms. Granger, you will also get the ministry standard education." He sneered at her when she gasped.

"Books away. Wands out." He snapped. "Today, we will be learning a spell that some consider borderline Dark. It is a spell that might, one day, prove useful to certain parties."

Harry felt his heartbeat slow down, that last statement should settle the minds of any Jr. Death Eaters in the room.

Snape continued talking as he paced the room. "The definition of Dark has changed... over the years. True darkness, is indestructible, and ever changing. It lives in the crevasse of every heart. In order to defend against it, you need to understand its nature. It is ever moving and ever growing. Knowing counter curses is not all you will need, because Darkness takes many forms, thus you must take many forms as well."

Harry knew right then, that Snape was talking about evil not the Dark arts. Snape must be aware of the ministry corrupting the definition of Dark and he wanted his students to understand the difference. Unfortunately, he couldn't come out and say it.

Snape reached into his pocket and pulled out a handful of steel balls the size of marbles and put them on the desk. "Today you will be learning how to use and defend against the Oppugno Jinx." His word were clipped.

From the expression on the faces of the students it was obvious how silly this sounded. Some even
let out a weak chuckle.

Snape raised an eyebrow. "Oh... you find this funny?" he drawled, and turned to one of the unlucky students that laughed. "Why is this so amusing to you, Mr. Finnegan?"

The predatory tone made Harry uncomfortable and he wasn't even being asked the question.

Seamus pressed himself back in his chair as Snape leaned forward. "Well..." his voice was slightly shaky, "that's the spell my twelve year old cousin uses to send her stuffed animals after me when I upset her. Not very dangerous is it?"

Snape leaned back and pretended to ponder Seamus's words. "Not... very dangerous you say?" he walked around to the right side of the desk so he stood in front of the steel balls with his left side facing the class. He conjured a solid oak plank on the other side of the room. His voice was dangerous as he spoke.

"So, just because a spell can make toys attack you, it must not be dangerous? Did you know it is considered borderline Dark?" No one dared answer and he continued, "In my opinion, it can be one of the more devastating spells in battle. Darkness... is but a mind state."

He raised his wand.

"OPPUGNO!" He yelled as he slashed at the balls, and they shot from the table so fast eyes couldn't follow them. The sound of them hitting the wooden board was deafening. Splinters showered the floor and all that was left of the board when it was over were broken pieces. It reminded Harry of a shotgun fired at a target he saw on the TV, with Dudley this summer. He glanced at his friends, he knew Hermione had also recognized the similarity, her face was white as paper. Harry would never tell Snape, but he thought this lesson was brilliant so far. Those with any insight would understand that the word Dark was standing in for evil, it was evil that was but a mind state. They would understand that evil twisted good things into bad, safe things into dangerous things. Harry had to admire the man a little. It honestly made him wonder why he was so cruel and bad at teaching during their old Occlumency lessons.

"Mr. Potter," Snape's deep voice drawled his name like an insult.

All admiration fled Harry's mind when he heard his name spoken in that tone.

"Yes, Sir." He answered as politely as he could.
A nasty smile spread over the man's face. "Would you come to the front of the room, and demonstrate the proper way to counter this Jinx?"

Harry didn't trust a verbal response so he just nodded. He got unsteadily to his feet and moved opposite of Snape, he could hear the Slytherins snickering. It didn't go past Harry's notice that Snape didn't tell him the counter jinx. He was probably hoping Harry didn't know it and was too proud to ask. Luckily this was a spell that he covered with the DA, they didn't use it so violently but they did learn it. He just had to make sure he put enough force behind the counter.

Snape pulled more marble sized balls from his pocket. The new one were made of wood rather than steel, but if the same force was applied it would still be painful to get hit with them. Harry tried to ready himself for the attack but his head wouldn't stop spinning. Taking a defensive stance made his knees burn painfully, he gritted his teeth. Every ounce of his will power was behind his actions.

Snape looked him over with a critical eye. Whatever he was looking for he seemed to find because without almost any warning he began. Snape threw the balls into the air, as they fell back towards the floor he slashed his wand at them, silently incanting the jinx. The balls changed from their path to the floor and shot at Harry. He only had a split second to react. The moment the balls were in the air, Harry had started moving his wand in the upward slicing motion needed for the counter.

"REGREDOIR!" Harry bellowed.

It was a close call, the tip of his wand almost touched one of the wood balls as he performed the counter, but he was successful. The balls changed course and shot straight up, mimicking with his wand movement. The sound of them hitting the ceiling was deafening. Harry had put everything he had into the counter and it showed, the balls were half embedded in the stone ceiling. The room was quiet with shock.

This was nothing like the DA. Harry's heart pounded and sweat beaded on his forehead. His arm ached with the force of Snape's magic. It felt like he had taken a metal rod and swung it full force into a concrete wall. He was sure that the Professor only used a fraction of his magic to make the spell that strong, how far did Harry have to go to catch up?

As his adrenaline receded, the spinning in his head became worse. His arm was shaking so bad he almost dropped his wand. He looked straight at Snape. The man didn't look angry, shouldn't he be angry? The look on his face was something closer to concern… that's weird.
"Mr. Potter?" Snape said his name without malice, he sounded far away.

Why was everyone so quiet? Harry turned to his friends, they had matching expressions of fear. Hermione was moving out of her seat and coming to him. Suddenly the floor was also coming to him. Harry vaguely registered the pain of his knees hitting the stone, slab floor. The last thing he saw was Hermione reaching for him so his head didn't hit the ground.

Ooo

Chapter End Notes

"If at first you don't succeed, look around and find out who is trying to sabotage you with telepathic interference. It is someone you know."

-Night Vale

AN- Hello people separate from myself. Separate from my life. I am glad to see you here in my vast whiteness. In this endless plane of artificial existence, that is also separate from me and my life, but so full of parts of myself. Parts of me that I remove through my hands and fingers. That I put here intentionally, so that I may immerse in those parts of myself and ignore the others. I am glad you find those parts appealing as well, and have joined me, immersed in me… by partaking in this story you have absorbed a part of me that could be there for a minute, or forever.

That thought is comforting to me.

3/29/2017

Reflected

4/17/2017 - Beta’d by minijaxter
Despairingly Green and Selfish

Chapter Notes

AN- Important things! I decided to update early rather than late… because I… I don't really have a good reason. BUT because of this change in update time, there will be no new cover art for you people. This is a very sad thing because the new cover art was going to be either Snape's or the new professors cover. I will add the art as soon as I can but it might not line up with the story anymore.

This chapter is kind of an in-between plus a character intro.

Thank you to my Beta minijaxter

I have also Posted a side story One-Shot to this Universe called "Hermione Does Some Light Reading” Check it out!

The Links to the High Res Version of the 4 cover pictures is in my Profile.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 10
The first thing that came to Harry as he woke was the sharp smell of sanitizer and fresh bedding. He cracked his eyes open and saw a blur of white. He instantly knew he was in the hospital wing. This might be a record, getting here on the first day of classes. He reached over for his glasses and felt them being pressed into his hand and the white blur cleared as he placed them on his face.

Hermione and Ron sat next to his bed in two visitor chairs. Hermione was leaning forward a bit, she was the one that must have handed him his glasses.

"How long was I out for?" Harry asked.

"Only about twenty minutes. Snape brought you here and dismissed the rest of the class." Ron answered, he sounded both happy class was cut short and disgusted that Snape had touched Harry.

"What happened?" Harry had a guess, but he wanted confirmation.

"Right after you used the counter curse, you got really pale and passed out…” Hermione almost whispered the last part.

Harry groaned. He could understand why she wasn't keen on telling him, it was embarrassing, just like third year. Before he could ask any more questions, Madam Pomfrey bustled in from her office, followed closely by Snape. The Professor had a strange glint in his eyes that Harry couldn't interpret, but it made him uncomfortable. It felt like he was being analyzed, and that Snape was coming to conclusions using information Harry didn’t have.

Madam Pomfrey came to his bedside and started waving her wand around while muttering spells. The motion of her casting broke the strange moment between professor and student, causing Snape to quickly exit the ward.

Pomfrey seemed to be unloading her entire arsenal of diagnostic spells, when she was finished she looked Harry in the eye.

"How are you feeling?" she asked while scrutinizing him as if she expected him to lie.
Harry shifted around a bit. His joints still hurt but the spinning in his head was almost completely gone. Before he had passed out, he might have described his head as a pressure cooker and casting that spell had let out some of the steam. Harry wondered if maybe his magic was building up behind the curse or something and it needed to be forced out.

"I feel better than I did before class," he answered truthfully.

Madam Pomfrey nodded. "I would think so, your magical signature was all over the place. It seems to have stabilized. I believe you may be coming down with a bit of a magical bug and that the strain in class might have been a bit too much."

Harry was a confused. There was nothing to indicate he was sick at all besides passing out. His magical signature being out of whack would have been accompanied by some other symptoms, such as purple spots. He was about to express this thought when Hermione spoke up.

"Yes, it's a good thing Professor Snape noticed the symptoms and stopped the practical review before it got too bad. Having to perform all the spells we have learned in DADA was stressful."

Her voice didn't waver, she sounded like she was relaying facts.

Harry had no idea what was going on but he nodded in agreement. He assumed Hermione had a handle on the situation since he was unconscious.

"Sometimes I don't know what goes through that man's head, I swear," Madam Pomfrey huffed. She gave Harry one more look over and seemed satisfied. "You may go, but I want you to rest for your entire break and free period. You have potions tonight correct?"

"Yeah," Harry confirmed.

"Good, I want no more spell casting for you until tomorrow. Now off with you." She shooed all three of them out of her infirmary.

Ron and Hermione waited for Harry as he scrambled off the bed and gathered his things. Together all three shuffled into the corridor.
"What was that about?" Harry looked to Hermione for answers.

"Yeah, Harry's not sick. Are you?" Ron looked to Harry who shook his head no.

Hermione gestured for them to hurry along, as she whispered under her breath,

"For some reason Snape lied right to Madam Pomfrey's face. Whatever his reason, it worked out well for us. We can't let Pomfrey catch on to anything." She put her hand to the side of her mouth and spoke even lower. "No one can know it's the curse causing this or they might try and stop us from removing it."

Harry had to agree. He didn't know why Snape lied but it was convenient. If Pomfrey knew he passed out after one spell, no matter how powerful, she would be suspicious. For now he decided that Snape was not trying to sabotage him. The man might have his own ends, but his means currently aligned with Harry’s own. So he was grateful for the stroke of luck… He really needed to work on his codependency issue with luck.

"So if he's not sick, what is it?" Ron asked.

"Tonight." Was all Harry said but he know Ron understood. They were going to a secure location to talk tonight. Harry looked at his watch, "I'm going to sleep until Potions." He told his friends. He felt better overall but he was still very tired.

"Probably a good idea, I have Arithmancy in ten minutes, I have to go or I will be late." Hermione scurried off down the hall.

"You think you will get up for lunch?" Ron asked.

Harry shrugged, "Probably not."

"I will bring you something. I'm going to find Neville for a game of chess." Ron left as well.

Harry headed back to the Tower. The walk was short but every Slytherin he passed snickered after pretending to faint. The entire situation was familiar, but in Harry's opinion they needed new material.
He caught a glimpse of Luna around a corner. She was curled up on a large window sill with her cloak wrapped around her. Harry remembered how she was acting odd on the train and decided to approach her. She heard his footsteps and lifted her head from her knees, but did not look away from the window.

"Hullo Harry." She spoke to his reflection in the glass.

"Hey Luna," He answered to the side of her face. Harry wanted to say something more, something comforting, but he was never very good at that type of stuff. She looked very worn out and when she spoke again he could hear the weariness in her voice.

"Harry, do you think people are capable of a truly unselfish acts?" She asked the reflected Harry.

He wasn't sure how to answer that question, and he wasn't sure if he should answer it. He had always thought the heroes committed unselfish acts when they saved people, but it seemed like a stupidly simple answer.

Luna interrupted his thoughts. "Someone once told me, that all acts of kindness are inherently selfish. Giving to the poor makes you feel good, or saving someone even if you get hurt is to save yourself from the guilt of not acting." Luna gazed directly into Harry's reflections eyes. "Even having friends has benefits for a social animal such as humans. Being kind or helpful to your friends, ensure they continue being your friend."

Harry started to feel a creeping shiver up his spine. He had never really thought about life like that. He didn't have friends as a child, so he loved having them now. He would do anything for them, and it was true, that part of the reason, was so that he could keep them. It was a strange thought.

"Luna, why are you alone in the hall thinking about things like this?" Harry asked with concern.

Luna turned and looked at the real Harry.

"I just thought I would have more time. I'm trying to figure out if I'm glad to have had the time that's passed. But I find it comforting to know that everyone makes selfish choices, because it's possible that all choices are selfish in some way." She slid off the stone ledge and straightened up.

"I have class." She stated without waiting for Harry to respond, then she wandered away.
Harry turned and left as well. He wanted to shrug Luna's behavior off as her normal strangeness, but there was something heavy about her words. The topic itself was disturbing. This reminded Harry of another time he spoke to her in the hall. When she had first mentioned hearing "them" just behind the veil, she had said "they" were lurking just out of sight.

A violent shiver ran through Harry's body and he picked up his pace. He didn't feel safe in the empty halls all of a sudden. Once he was in the dorms, he flopped onto his bed and promptly fell asleep fully dressed.

Ooo

Harry was shaken awake by Ron. He stared blearily at his friend for a moment before he registered what Ron was saying.

"Come on mate, we got to go or we will be late."

Harry sat up and rolled off the bed. Ron was putting his bag in his hand and a sandwich in the other while leading him out the door. In the common room, Hermione was waiting.

"Finally! Come on." She grabbed Harry's arm and dragged him out the portrait hole.

Halfway down to the dungeons, Harry was finally awake enough to shove the food he was holding into his mouth and walk on his own without being led. When they made it to the corridor in front of the Potions classroom they were surprised to find the door open. The door was always closed until class was about to start. When they entered the class, they saw other students also a bit confused. Harry took a seat at the table in the middle, and his friends sat on either side of him.

The Slytherins were still pretending to faint. Some of them were really committing, they were doing trust falls into the arms of their classmates while fanning themselves dramatically. Harry had to commend them on the follow through, it was so impressive, he couldn't even get mad. He noticed that Malfoy was not joining the fun, this time the ringleader seemed to be Theodore Nott.

Harry ignored the jeering and looked straight ahead. At the front of the class, were two bubbling cauldrons. One cauldron was a bright shining silver, and it was filled with a liquid that looked like molten gold. Harry noticed that, every once in awhile, a drop of the gold potion would jump off the surface in an arc and plop back in. The second cauldron was black and was semi translucent. Where the light penetrated the thinnest parts of the dark material, it became a greyish red color.
The potion it contained was bright transparent green, that glowed eerily, and from the surface wafted a thin white steam that caused the glowing light from the potion to bloom upward.

Professor Jigger waltzed into the room with a bright smile on his face. He gave a little wave to the class as he walked to the front of the room.

"Hello, Class." Jigger's voice was warm honey. Every student relaxed a little when it was apparent that this professor wasn't going to be like Snape.

Professor Jigger moved to stand behind the two caldrons. "Today we won't be brewing, because we are still getting to know each other. Instead we will be talking about these two potions. They are both N.E.W.T level or higher, one of them can be found in your book, though the last step is left out to prevent sixth years from trying to brew it. The other is something my family invented long ago. Now get out your books, so we can talk about the first potion."

Harry turned to his bag and started looking for his book but couldn't find it. He racked his brain for a moment to try and remember if he rotated his books before falling asleep but couldn't remember. He must not have because he had his DADA book. Harry tried to ask Hermione if he could share hers but she was busy trying to get Ron's attention off Malfoy, so he could find his own book. Without any other options he raised his hand.

Professor Jigger saw him almost immediately. "Yes, Mr. Potter, correct?" he smiled.

"Umm yeah. I forgot my book in my dorm, can I borrow one from the cabinet?" Harry was glad this Professor didn't seem to care if he was famous, or if he did he didn't let it show.

"Certainly, let me get it for you." Jigger went to the cabinet with a bouncy step and began shuffling through the shelves. When he came back, he had a tattered looking copy of the text that he held out. Harry grasped it and pulled a bit but the Professor didn't let go, he bent his head and whispered while they were both holding the text.

"I know this one looks like it has seen better days but I think you will find it most helpful." His voice was light and pleasant as he spoke and when he was finished he let go of the book. It was a bit odd but Harry shrugged it off.

He didn't care if the book was old but he did find it interesting that someone had made notes all over the pages. The notes looked like improvements on the potions already there plus a few
personal comments. Harry felt a tingle in the back of his mind, something about the handwriting struck a chord…

"OK, class. Let's get started." Professor Jigger was at the front of the room next to the silver cauldron.

"Can anyone tell me what this potion is?" He asked.

Hermione's hand was the only one that shot into the air.

Jigger pointed at her. "Yes, young Miss?"

"Hermione Granger," She supplied.

"OK, Ms. Granger," He said patiently.

Hermione smiled and answered. "The Potion in the silver cauldron is called *Felix Felicis* also known as Liquid Luck."

Jigger smiled, his entire demeanor became even warmer. "That is correct. It is a very interesting potion that requires a pure silver cauldron, this one here is from my family's collection."

Hermione preened and blushed. Ron was looking at Jigger with a slightly disgusted expression.

The Professor went into a short lecture about how the potion worked and then asked them to turn to the page with the incomplete recipe. Harry opened his book to the correct page while thinking about all the things he would do if he had the potion. Like all the other pages in this copy of the text, the *Felix Felicis* page was covered in notes. Harry found the part where the recipe was listed and noticed that the previous owner had filled in the missing steps. His book had completed instructions along with improvements.

Professor Jigger was listing all the terrible side effects of taking the potion to often, along with anecdotes about people who had. Harry was only half listening, while reading over the notes on his page. When he got to the part about the six month brew time, he couldn't believe his eyes. The passage was describing how the potion needed to be set outside to absorb sunlight every day and taken in at night. But the section was crossed out and written next to it was a new process.
The potion only needs a week of brewing the cure properly. The extended brew time is merely so the mixture can absorb the correct amount of sunlight. I have developed an alternative method written below, I call it Life's Light.

Right there before his eyes was the very same instructions he found in his trunk this summer. He assumed that it was one of his roommate's notes or Hermione's, but if it was hand written into this old textbook, how would anyone know what it was? Maybe this person published their findings later? If they had, it would be in the new copy of the textbook. Harry leaned to his right and glanced at Hermione's copy of the book, his eyes scanned over the passage. Her book had the same six month long instructions as his own. Harry needed to get back to his dorm as soon as class was over to compare handwriting.

"The Next potion I have prepared, is from the other end of the spectrum." Professor Jigger raised his voice slightly to regain the class's attention. He was standing behind the ominous looking black cauldron with the glowing green potion. Harry put his thoughts to the side and tried to focus on the class.

"I do not expect any of you to know what this potion is. It is something that was developed by my family many generations ago. It is a very effective form of protection, it can guard any object." Jigger leaned over the cauldron, both his hands grasping the edge of the container, and he stared into the green light. The glow highlighted his face in an eerie way. He tipped his head up and gazed at the class, the effect was similar to holding a flashlight under your face and the curling white steam made him look like a floating head.

Harry could hear Ron whispering under his breath, sounded like he was saying "that's not right." Harry had to agree. Professor Jigger seemed enthralled by his own creation. After a few seconds, he began to speak while still leaning over the fuming potion. His voice was low and soothing. Ron seemed put off by the display but Hermione was transfixed, her eyes were wide and slightly glassy.

"I am sure you have heard many lectures about many potions over the years. Professor Snape has probably held up many creations as genius. He has most likely spoken to you about the subtle art of potion brewing, and how it is the ultimate manipulation of magic through soft coercion. All of this is true, and the potion in front of me is the embodiment of his words." He reached down and broke the surface of the potion with his bare hand, he pushed it to the very bottom of the cauldron and then removed it. His hand was unharmed and also perfectly dry. A slow and unnerving smile spread over his face as he continued his lecture.

"This potion is the ultimate protection from those unwilling to sacrifice. Its creation is dangerous, so dangerous, in fact, that it needs this specially made Obsidian Cauldron. During the brewing, this potion becomes one of the most powerful acids known to wizardkind, before it stabilizes, it will eat
through anything except certain types of glass. This cauldron is also from my family's collection. My ancestors mined the obsidian and carved the cauldron by hand with no magic. When they finally created the completed version of this potion they named it, The Drink of Despair."

Professor Jigger straightened up, flashed his normal warm smile at the class and he clapped his hands together. "OK! Who wants to volunteer to demonstrate the protective abilities of this potion?" his voice was light and cheery.

No one dared to even breathe hard. The complete personality shift they just witnessed had them all thrown for a loop. The lack of volunteers didn't faze Jigger, he turned to Hermione and cranked up the volume of his cheer.

"How about our bright Ms. Granger? Would you come to the front of the class please?" he invited.

Hermione was still wide eyed and admiring but she was also pale and unsettled. She obviously wanted to be nowhere near the green potion but her respect for education had her walking to the front of the room. Jigger put a hand on her shoulder and positioned her right in front of the cauldron.

"This will be easy I promise," he assured. From his pocket, he pulled a single knut and placed it on the table next to the potion. "All I need you to do is pick up that coin," he explained.

Hermione nodded. She reached out and picked up the knut with quivering hands.

Professor Jigger smiled and his eyes crinkled charmingly. Harry saw a small blush spread over his friend's cheeks.

"Good, good," he praised. "Now put the knut back and summon it please."

Hermione did as she was told easily, as her nerves were settling.

Jigger nodded when she finished and then requested the knut from her, Hermione handed it over. Then he turned and dropped the coin into the Drink of Despair. Everyone waited quietly for the light *clink* of the knut hitting the bottom of the glass cauldron.
Jigger gestured for Hermione to approach the potion, "Now I want you to repeat the steps you just did."

Hermione looked nervous once more. She raised her wand and tried to summon the knut, it didn't even cause a ripple on the surface of the potion. She put her wand back into her robe pocket, rolled up her sleeve and stepped up to the cauldron. She reached out and stopped right before her middle finger was going to touch the green liquid. Her face was pale and her hand was shaking almost violently.

Harry held his breath, Ron was clutching the edges of his chair to keep himself seated.

"It won't hurt you, I promise," Jigger reassured calmly.

Hermione gave a shaky nod, took a deep breath and plunged her hand into the potion. Her eyes were squeezed shut, but they slowly opened when nothing bad happened. Harry watched her try and pull the coin to the surface but she couldn't.

"It feels like it's glued to the bottom of the cauldron." Hermione explained to the confused class. She pulled her arm out and looked at it in wonder. It was dry just like Jiggers had been. A small smile appeared on her face and she sighed in relief.

Professor Jigger stepped closer to her and put his hand on her shoulder again. Hermione lifted her chin, proud that she had braved the strange test.

"Now Ms. Granger, is there another way you can think of trying to retrieve the knut?" Jigger asked.

"The next step might be to try and drain the cauldron," she answered confidently.

Jigger nodded, "give it a try." He handed her a water glass and pulled over a brass cauldron.

Hermione took the glass and started scooping out potion and dumping it into the second cauldron. After a few scoops she stopped.

"What seems to be the problem?" Jigger questioned with false curiosity.
Hermione frowned at the professor's attitude. "As you must know, every time I scoop the potion out and pour it into the other cauldron, it reappears in the first cauldron."

Jigger rubbed his chin ignoring Hermione's comment on his knowledge. "Does it now? How about vanishing it?"

Hermione looked like she was trying not to roll her eyes as she attempted to banish the potion. It failed.

"Well, I think that's enough from Ms. Granger. Thank you for helping, ten points to Gryffindor. Please take a seat." Jigger was bouncing on his heels as he invited the rest of the class to come try anything they could think of.

Hermione sat down. For almost the rest of the class period they watched as students got up the courage to try and retrieve the Knut. They tried all manner of charms and jinxes, one student even tried levitating the cauldron upside-down but the potion just defied gravity and stuck in its container. Jigger seemed to become more amused the harder they tried. With only a few minutes left in class, he called a stop to the trials.

"So what do you all think?" He asked the class at large.

"I think it's brilliant, I don't see a way to get around it." Harry was surprised that it was Blaise Zabini who spoke up. He was normally taciturn and unassuming as far as Slytherins went.

Professor Jigger glowed at the praise of his ancestor's invention. "It is brilliant, isn't it?" he preened. "But you are wrong in your last statement. There is a way around it. Otherwise the person who put the object there could never get it back." He reached for the glass that Hermione has used earlier and scooped out some potion. He placed the full glass on the table. It loomed there looking like a foul poison. In the clear glass the shade of green looked remarkable like the killing curse. Harry felt his toe curl at the thought.

Jigger walked around the table and stood behind the glass. He gestured at it casually. "As you can see. As long as the potion is not dumped, moved to far from the main body or removed in a large quantity, it is happy to stay in this glass. So can anyone tell me a way of being rid of it?"

The stillness of the class stretched for about thirty seconds before anyone moved. Harry was almost shocked out of his chair when Ron raised his hand. His face was white making his freckles
stand out, but his eyes were narrowed and held an edge that Harry often saw while playing chess
with him.

Professor Jigger didn't notice the look his student was sending him or chose not to interpret it. He
called on Ron to answer as if he was straining to be picked. "Yes, Mr. Weasley, I assume from the
hair." He chuckled at his own dull wit.

Ron put his hand down, "you could drink it." he said flatly. Suddenly Harry understood the look
Ron was giving Jigger. His friend didn't like or trust the new professor, this was a strategic test for
Ron.

Professor Jiggers face became so bright it was almost blinding. He started to bounce on his heels
once more. "Yes! That is exactly correct. Five points to Gryffindor. The only way to get rid of the
potion is to drink it. Now, there is of course consequences for doing that."

Ron's face became like stone as the professor went on listing the terrible side effects of the potion.
Horrendous thirst, all other liquids would vanish before you could drink them, overwhelming fear,
delirium, awful burning pain, and finally the desire to die when unable to.

"It's rather genius," Hermione said just loud enough for Harry and Ron to hear.

Ron turned to her and hissed back, "It's disgusting, that's what it is."

Hermione flinched at the tone but agreed, "It is that as well."

As soon as class was over, almost all the students bolted from the room. Most were talking about
how interesting the class was. Every comment that floated to the trio made Ron shove his books
into his bag more violently. Harry wasn't sure what made him so mad. It might have been the awful
potion, or the fact that Jigger's family invented it, or it could have been how much Hermione
blushed during the demonstration.

Almost all the students were gone by the time the trio was done packing, even Professor Jigger had
slipped out through his office door. They were halfway through the classroom when someone
stepped between Ron and the others, cutting him off. Draco Malfoy herded Ron farther into the
classroom and away from Hermione and Harry.
"Weasley, don't think I didn't notice you looking at me." Malfoy's tone held its normal sneer but was a bit weaker in Harry's opinion.

"Malfoy, back off," Harry yelled as he approached to defuse the situation. The Slytherin didn't even flinch at his words. Harry felt anger rising, he hated being ignored.

Malfoy continued to back Ron into a wall. "You're directly related to the Prewitt's aren't you?" he hissed in a high voice.

Harry reached out to grab Malfoy's shoulder and spin him around but froze. The entire room felt cold and the air became heavy. Over his rival's shoulder, he could see Ron's face contort in fear, as he nodded in answer to the question. Without another word, Malfoy spun on his heel and swept out of the room.

Ron looked like the only thing that kept him standing was sheer will power. Harry rushed over and grabbed him by the shoulders.

"Was it the same as last time?" he asked. He was referencing the opening feast, when Malfoy's eyes flashed red. Ron nodded, he was speechless.

Harry couldn't understand what was happening. Voldemort or some other evil force was finding its way into the school. There was no time to waste, they couldn't wait until after dinner, they had to talk now. Hermione took Ron's other side and together the three of them scurried out of the classroom and made their way to the Room of Requirement.

Ooo

The seventh floor was mercifully empty of students. Ron had recovered enough from his encounter with Malfoy to walk on his own, although he still looked pale and shaken. Harry stopped at the blank wall where the door would appear. He motioned for his two friends to stand aside so he could pace. As he walked he thought about what he wanted.

'I want a safe place to get me to my house.'

After the third pass, a simple scrubbed wood door appeared. Harry entered the room closely followed by Ron and Hermione. The door shut and disappeared. The room was very small, it had
bare stone floors and walls with a small dark wood table in the middle. The only source of light was a simple fireplace on the wall opposite from the entrance.

Ron looked around a bit confused.

"Why did you make it so small?" he asked.

Harry ignored the question and thought about how much he needed parchment and quill. Both his desired objects appeared on the small table. He bent over and scribbled out "Number 12 Grimmauld Place" and handed it to Ron.

Harry hoped that the Room was capable of connecting the fireplace to outside Floo's. This was one of those deciding moments in his life. Harry knew that if this fireplace brought him to his house he would have to go through with the Phoenix Method. Voldemort was making a move this year, it was obvious. Malfoy acting strange, Slughorn dead, Dumbledore wanting special meetings. Something big was coming and Harry needed his own force and power separate from Dumbledore. Something he built himself and could rely on. He needed to become a leader.

"Let me go first," was all he said to his two friends before grabbing the simple container of Floo powder and disappearing in a flash of green.

Harry stumbled out into a familiar kitchen, and his face lit with a small, sly smile. This was it, the beginning. He quickly informed the house of the new guest, and not a moment too late because Ron came spilling from the fireplace right as he finished.

Ron moved out of the way for Hermione and looked around the room.

"Is this Grimmauld Place? It looks different," he observed.

Harry put on a kettle for tea while he answered. "Yeah, once the magical deed was signed the house opened up."

Ron sat down at the table slowly, while still looking around. Hermione came out of the Floo without an ounce of grace. She spelled the soot off her clothes.
"We can do magic here?" Ron’s eyes were wide as the tea cups Harry was setting on the table.

Harry and Hermione smiled at each other.

"Yes," Hermione answered with a little smirk.

When everyone had a cup of tea, Harry sat down and let his tired, sore body sink into the chair.

"So, this is going to be a long story," he started.

Harry and Hermione took turns explaining the inheritance gifts first. Ron was a lot less surprised than they expected.

"Well every wizarding child who's related to a pure blood family knows about that myth. My mum used to go on about how the Prewitt family had a way to remove the curse but it was lost when every member of the family but her was killed." Ron explained calmly.

Harry and Hermione just stared at him.

"What? I didn't think any of it was true, but I guess it is… what I'm more upset about is the rich families having these wards that let you use magic underage. Not bloody fair," He huffed.

"I know right?!" Hermione crossed her arms and huffed along with him. Harry gave her a look that said to keep calm, there was a lot more to explain, and he moved on to the next topic.

"So now that you know inheritance gifts are real, I should probably tell you we found the removal ritual."

This got a reaction out of Ron. His eyes almost popped out of his head with surprise.

"ARE YOU SERIOUS?!" He yelled and jumped to his feet.
"Yes, we have been working the ritual for Harry. His symptoms of the curse are getting bad because his gift is so strong. We also know what Voldemort's gift is." Hermione clenched her hands under the table. Just thinking about the horrible power Voldemort held made her sick.

Ron plopped back into his chair. "Wow… The Black family really did have big secrets…" he said, referring to the conversation from the first night at the Burrow.

They explained everything else they learned that summer, including the prophecy. Ron closed his eyes as he listened. Voldemort's gift made him pale and the prophecy cause his face to screw up with pain. He slowly opened his eyes and looked directly into Harry's. He took a slow deep breath.

"So let me get this straight. Dumbledore seems to want to keep Harry within his control, going so far that he tried to take this house from him and he didn't tell him about You-Know-Who's super power or the possibility of unlocking his own super power?" Ron looked like he was straining to keep his temper under control. His voice rising at the end of each statement like his rage wanted to escape through his mouth.

Harry and Hermione nodded in unison.

Ron had more to say. "And Harry is the only one who can kill You-Know-Who? There also seems to be some faction of Death Eaters that are slaves of some sort, according to the mystery letter you got through the candle?"

Harry and Hermione nodded again. Ron's eyes gleamed with intelligent calculation and pure anger. It was an angry version of the look he had when he was thinking ten moves ahead of Harry in chess. He locked eyes with Hermione when he was done thinking.

"I guess you guys have already figured out that Dumbledore had some plan. Something he thinks only he can orchestrate, that no one knows all of, except him?" he asked.

Hermione nodded.

"Yeah," Harry cut in. "If you think about it, everything from being left at the Dursley's up to now seems like it had a purpose. To make me feel weak, dependent, wanting a mentor. Training me to save people and take on the responsibility of the prophecy…" he trailed off, it hurt to say it out loud. He had been played.
Ron’s anger calmed in the wake of his friends situation, he leaned forward and reached across the table. He clasped his hand into Harry's shoulder making him look up and into blue eyes.

"I'm with you, not Dumbledore, not the Order. You, I will back you up." His voice was steady and his gaze didn't waver. Harry believed him.

"Brother?" Harry asked.

"Brother," Ron Confirmed.

"Sister!?" Hermione laughed a bit as she said it.

"Sister," Harry echoed.

Ron turned bright red but didn't say anything. Hermione looked at him, when she saw his red face she blushed as well and didn't comment.

"So the Phoenix Method is happening then, for real. We are going to come here and work out strategy while trying to find a way for Harry to win?" Ron asked.

Hermione looked almost startled at the realization, "Yeah, this is real. We should look for some adults to help."

"We don't need adults," Ron argued, his temper rising again.

"Maybe Remus," Harry offered.

Ron calmed a bit, "Yeah, Remus isn't bad, if he's more loyal to you than Dumbledore."

Everyone leaned back in their seats and fell quiet. It was a reality now, you couldn't be with Dumbledore and Harry completely at the same time anymore. Harry shoved his hand in his pocket. The crinkling of paper caught his attention and he pulled out the note from the Headmaster.
"Oh yeah, in my time table I had this note from Dumbledore. He wants to start training of some sort and will be asking me to meet him more often." Harry held out the note and it was snatched by Hermione before Ron had a chance to start reaching for it. She scanned it over and stood suddenly, she pulled her wand and waved it in a complicated pattern at the wall perpendicular to the kitchen table. The stone wall became smooth and black. Using her wand the same way that teachers did, she started writing on the blackboard.

Harry watched as notes appeared in his friend's neat handwriting. She was laying out a plan of action.

*Harry attends meetings and reports back*

*We use information to analyze Dumbledore's angle*

*Execute the Ritual for Harry ASAP*

*Figure out what's up with Malfoy (possible related to mystery letter?)*

*Have first Phoenix Method Meeting*

*Research other family line Gifts*

*Invest in more materials for more Curse removals*

*Reach out to trustworthy adults and peers.*

Hermione turned to Ron and Harry with her determined face in place.

"These points are the important tasks within our current reach, in no particular order," she stated.

Harry and Ron didn't argue. Harry could even feel the ball of stress in his chest loosen a bit as he looked at a feasible list of objectives.

Hermione seemed to be thinking along the same line, because next she said. "We can't expect to take on Voldemort, at our numbers, with the little power and knowledge we have. We will have to start at the bottom and work our way up."

Ron raised his fist in the air. "Hear, hear! Now that we have that cleared up let's find something to eat."
Harry couldn't hold back his laughter. It was great to have his two best friends on the same page. It was also nice to see Ron being himself. Hermione found it less funny and placed her hands on her hips.

"Ronald, can't you think without your stomach for more than a minute? We have more important things going on." She crossed her arms and glared at the pouting boy.

Harry stood and stretched. "It's almost dinner Hermione, and we should get back to the school before anyone notices."

"Fine," she gave in. "But I'm coming back tonight to research some things, and we need to find a time to do the curse removal, and we should have a full meeting soon."

Harry chuckled, "OK, I will come with you tonight." He didn't mention that he wanted to get back to his dorm before dinner to check the handwriting in his book to the Life's Light paper. If it matched he wanted to talk to them about it.

Ron looked between his two friends, "I'm coming too," he blurted out.

Harry and Hermione both shrugged, "Sure."

Ooo

The three friends made it back to the tower with twenty minutes until dinner. Hermione rushed up the stairs mumbling about books while Ron threw himself onto the couch in front of the fireplace. Harry went up to his dorm a bit slower so Ron wouldn't get suspicious. When he found the room empty he thanked whatever force of luck was on his side (that he really shouldn't rely on).

He dropped to his knees and opened his trunk. After tearing through his things he found the folded paper. From his messenger bag that was still over his shoulder he removed the old potions book and opened to the *Felix Felicis* page. He took the folded note, flicked it open and spread it flat on the opposite page of the book. He scanned both recipes looking back and forth over and over, the handwriting was the same. One was obviously written by a much younger person but they were still very similar.

Harry looked at his watch, Hermione would be yelling for him any minute. As quick as he could he
flipped to the front of the book and looked at the inside cover to see if there was a name.

"The Half-Blood Prince, huh?" Harry read to himself.

So this Prince was still around or someone else had used this book and was pretending to be the Prince…

"Harry!" Hermione's voice carried up the stairs.

"Coming!" he yelled back while scrambling to his feet, he threw both the book and paper in his trunk and snapped it shut.

Ooo

Harry couldn't get the potion book off his mind. He couldn't stop trying to figure out who the Prince was. His first thought was Jigger. He had given Harry the book and said that weird line about it being useful. He discarded that idea because Jigger's hand writing from the black board didn't match, of course he could be using a spell to copy the hand writing. But what made Harry disregard Jigger as the culprit was the fact that Prince's handwriting was familiar… but from where?

Harry barely got any food to his mouth while he was thinking. Hermione kept pestering him to eat more while repeatedly asking him if he was OK. Eventually Harry was forced to drop his thoughts before Hermione bothered him to death. Ron was also being uncharacteristically quiet. Harry noticed he was staring at the empty space at Slytherin. Malfoy was missing from dinner. After what happened at the end of potions class, he couldn't blame Ron for keeping an eye out.

At the Ravenclaw table, Luna's halo of blond hair was visible at the very end. She sat alone, no special jewelry made of bottle caps. Her eyes looked tired and her hair unkempt. Harry felt a pang of worry for the girl.

Harry turned to Ron and tried to talk to him about Luna but before he could get Ron's full attention the hall doors opened with a sharp snap. Everyone turned to see who the late comer was, and Draco Malfoy walked in with less of a saunter then he had last year. He kept his head down and went quietly to the empty place at his table.
Harry watched as Ron's eyes followed Malfoy across the room, his face wasn't as intense as it had been while watching the Slytherin before. Harry felt the sudden desire to run back to Grimmauld Place and start researching anything that might give some answers to all the strange things going on this year. Before Harry could ask his friend if he was ok, Ron turned to him.

"The feeling’s gone, that weird unsettling feeling," he sounded startled.

Harry looked at Malfoy, he was still acting strange. Quiet and tired.

Ron sighed, "It's weird. Why would it just stop?"

Harry didn't answer, he was still studying Malfoy. There was something different about him, it wasn't a feeling for Harry, it was something he could see. Around Malfoy's pale neck was an intricately weaved silvery blue cord that fit like a choker. When Harry looked closer, he could see one peeking out from under his robe sleeve as he ate.

Harry nudged Ron with his elbow. "Do you see the cord around his neck and wrists?"

Ron squinted across the room, "Yeah... never seen that before. Not very fitting for someone of his class," He spat the last word, but he had a point. The ropes weren't flashy and didn't look expensive.

Malfoy looked up and caught Harry looking at him again. He snarled and threw his fork down. Many of the Slytherins looked over at the loud noise but Malfoy ignored them and stalked out of the hall.

"We should be more careful... he doesn't seem stable," Ron muttered.

Harry nodded in agreement.

Ooo

Severus Snape sat across from Sybil Trelawney in an otherwise empty Professors lounge. They were silent while waiting for the special brew that Severus brought to steep. Trelawney watched as
Snape rolled a tear drop shaped piece of crystal between his fingers. Back and forth he rolled it causing the light to glitter off it prettily.

"That's a pretty bauble," Sybil commented.

Snape stopped rolling the tear and looked down at it. "It is, isn't it? I came across it due to your influence."

Sybil gave a small smile. "I'm not sure what you mean, but the inner eye works in mysterious ways," she said airily.

Snape reached over the table and began pouring their tea. "That it does," he agreed.

As they sipped their tea, Snape began organizing his thoughts. He needed to bring up the right topics to prompt the information he needed. He wanted to know more about the Potter brat. There was something Dumbledore was keeping to himself, something important he told no one. Snape was about to start talking when a deep monotone voice came from his colleague. It wasn't often that Sybil would start talking without being prompted. Snape paid close attention.

"The Dark Lord branded all his sheep and killed the dangerous ones he wouldn't twist.

But one dangerous sheep hid away and was not missed.

She joined flock of white sheep among the Black.

She passed her danger down, she didn't look back."

Snape memorized the words as soon as he heard them. It was longer than most of the prophetic tidbits he got during their tea, but it was just as cryptic. Sybil soon came out of her trance and announced she had places to be. Snape barely answered or noticed her leave, he needed to figure out this riddle. The information he got from that crazy woman, using his tea, was something he kept to himself. Not even Dumbledore knew about the small prophecy's he was gleaning. The last one he heard from her prompted him to put a ward on the Great Hall to warn him if there was heavy spell casting.

The word "wouldn't" was meaningful and the white and black reference as well. Snape was sure the first line was about the Dark Lord marking his death eaters and the sheep were pure blood wizards. He tried to turn every pure blood family except for a few. There were a few that he only hunted and killed but no one was sure why. Snape needed to figure out what family's the Dark Lord tried to wipe out completely, but failed.
On a secondary note, he needed to find out more about what Potter was up to. These recent prophesies have to be related to him somehow since they are definitely related to the war. Maybe he would have to find reasons to give the brat detention. It wouldn't be that hard.

Snape stood and swept out of the lounge with purpose.

Ooo

Harry, Ron and Hermione sat around the large table in Grimmauld place again. Harry was tired and sore, as usual, so he wasn't happy to hear Hermione's news. She was explaining about the curse removal ritual.

"It's different for each person, the runes are created based on birthdays, blood types and information in that vein. The Runes I created for you, indicate that we should do the Ritual on Halloween night. It makes a lot of sense if you think about it." She sounded sympathetic.

"Are you sure we can't do it sooner?" Harry tried not to whine but he didn't want to be this tired and dizzy for almost two months.

"I'm sorry Harry, but it's for the best. It will give us our best chance." She sounded truly sorry to be causing her friend more pain.

"Yeah, all right." He gave in.

He put his head in his arms and rested while Ron and Hermione talked about when the first PM meeting would be. On the floor, next to his chair was his messenger bag. Inside was the Prince's book and the Life's Light paper. Harry brought them with every intention of telling his friends about it, but something stopped him. As he read more and more of the book, he felt like the Prince wouldn't want more people knowing about him. Harry decided it would be one of the things he kept to himself for now, he would even bring his regular book to class so Hermione wouldn't notice. Just for now.

When Harry tuned back into the conversation, Hermione was talking about having a meeting Friday night. It was after Harry's first meeting with the Headmaster and they could fill everyone in and discuss the meeting together. Hermione reminded Harry to bring the Marauder's Map, so they wouldn't get caught.
After that was settled, they all moved to the library to research other pureblood families and their possible gifts. Unfortunately, it was a fruitless venture.

Hermione shut her last book with a huff. "I can't believe there is no solid information here. Only rumors and speculation. The only Gifts recorded from other families were used in business like the candles."

Harry looked up from where he was resting his head. "The pureblood families take secrecy seriously. I mean look at this house. It's almost impossible to find even without the added protection. It's in wizard space, must have taken forever to make."

Ron nodded in agreement. "The Weasley's aren't that old but the Prewitt's had a huge hidden manor like this. It was destroyed in the first war by You-Know-Who. He tortured by mum's Uncle to find it."

Hermione crossed her arms and leaned back in her chair to pout, she hated not finding information she wanted. "What about the Malfoy's? Don't they have a huge manor with an actual estate?"

Ron got a sour look on his face at the mention of the name Malfoy, but answered her question. "Yeah they do have a manor according to rumors. Only no one has ever found it. Some higher ups claim to have been there but can't find their way back. No one knows how they do it without hiding their house like this one."

Harry closed his eyes, and dozed while his friends continued to talk. The subjects ranged from pureblood secrets to blood contracts. As Harry drifted deeper into sleep, he listened to Hermione outline the requirements for making a useful binding contract using blood.

Ooo

Chapter End Notes

"But here is the truth of nostalgia: we don't feel it for who we were, but who we weren't. We feel it for all the possibilities that were open to us, but we didn't take."
-Night Vale

AN- When I go to places from my past, even places outside of tangible reality, such as this white place. I often think of the things I haven't done. I have been here for so long, and I have done so many things, but I never feel like it's enough. I am sure I have company in this mind state.

But one of the most interesting things about revisiting old places, is meeting new people who have arrived since I last visited.

Hello new people.

4/10/2017

Recovered

4/17/2017 -beta’d by minijaxter
AN- This chapter ended up being late! I was planning to update sooner because me and my roommates got all our needed stuff into the new apartment. BUT then our old Landlady decided to be a huge bitch and called one of my roommates and freaked out because we weren't completely out, even though we still had two days left. She also yelled at him because no one cleaned up the parts of the ceiling that fell. She is crazy if she thinks we are going to clean any of the damage caused by the house not being properly renovated by her… So I spent my night moving things I planned to move Friday, and filling the new apartment with stuff we have not made room for yet. I live in chaos…

We will be calling legal aid soon because we have the feeling she will try to keep our deposit even though we had to emergency move because the house was uninhabitable due to the damage. Damage we did not cause, damage we informed her about as soon as the leak started and she did nothing until the ceiling fell…

On the bright side, the cats seem to like the new place.

Sorry about the rant… ON WITH THE SHOW!

I am sorry it is taking so long to get to the ritual! I promise there are only a few more things that need to be done and then a time skip. Like maybe two more chapters.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

I have also Posted a side story One-Shot to this Universe called "Hermione Does Some Light Reading” Check it out!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.
Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 11

A Severed Snape

Ooo

Harry groggily ate his eggs on Wednesday morning. He had DADA right before lunch, and Potions after lunch, but before dinner. He pulled out his schedule to make sure he had the time’s right.

Monday was double Potions and DADA, Tuesday was Transfiguration and double Charms. Wednesday was Double DADA and Potions, Thursday was just Double Herbology, all other hands on Herbology practical was done on your own time. Leaving Friday with Double Transfiguration and Charms. He put his papers back and focused on his eggs again.

His head was spinning, his bones hurt, and he was tired. The 31st of October couldn't come fast enough in his opinion. The Great Hall was busy, and loud, so when a sudden quiet fell, Harry knew the mail was arriving. He was surprised when a long legged, brown, owl landed a few seats away from him, ran across the table and stopped right in front of his plate. It took a moment for Harry to recognize the Owl as the one he sent to Dudley. It held a letter in its beak, and it stared flatly while it waited for him to take the envelope.

Harry reached out and plucked the letter from the bird. He offered it some bacon, and the owl accepted. Then it ran back down the table, disturbing a few goblets before taking off.

"That's an odd owl." Seamus said, as he cleaned up his half glass of pumpkin juice that the bird knocked over.
"Yeah," Harry agreed, but didn't elaborate.

The envelope made Harry smile. It was a Muggle envelope, and on the front Dudley had written his approximation of the address.

_Harry Potter_

_Hogwarts School of Witch Craft and Wizardry_

_Gryffindor House_

There was even a postage stamp in the corner. Harry smile grew when he saw it. He ripped open the envelope and pulled out a folded sheet of lined notebook paper. Hermione picked up the envelope and laughed a bit. Not in a mean way, Harry thought it sounded like she understood what Dudley was thinking.

He unfolded the letter and began reading.

_Dear Harry,_

_I hope things have been going well for you. I was so surprised when Archimedes showed up at my window. That's what I named my owl, just like from that Disney movie. Thanks so much! Sorry it took me a few days to respond, I was busy getting things together for school, and getting a box for Archie. He just loves his box, it's so cute. Dad wasn't even mad when he arrived, so the you-know-what must still be working. I wasn't sure if my owl was trained like yours so I wrote where I wanted the letter to go and used a stamp, just in case. Write back soon and let me know you got this letter._

_Dudley_

_P.S. I made some new friends already at school. They like this game called D&D and said they would teach me. I will let you know how it goes._

Harry handed the letter to Ron and Hermione on his right and let them read it. He was glad his Uncle accepted the owl, it reassured him that he made the right choice and set something good into motion.
The stone gargoyle slowly slid back into place behind Harry. He stood for a moment in the empty hallway and thought about what he had just learned. The meeting with Dumbledore wasn’t anything like Harry expected. He didn't learn advanced spells or magical secrets. He learned about Voldemort's Family. It was honestly disturbing, they were inbred, and Merope used a love potion on a muggle. It was just wrong… and Voldemort’s real name was Tom? That also seemed wrong. It was so mundane. On the other hand, Harry wasn’t the most exciting name, and he was meant to save the entire magical world.

"The hero of the wizarding world, the boy who lived!... Harry.”

Harry chuckled, because his name really fell flat when compared to his titles. He looked at his watch, he only had ten minutes to make it to class. He couldn't be late or Snape would have his head. Harry ran the entire way to the DADA classroom. He was just in time and breathed a sigh of relief, Snape was setting up a wooden dummy and didn't notice Harry slip in. He got his notes out and readied himself. If this was going to be anywhere near as enlightening as the first class, he wanted to take notes on everything.

Hermione gave him a pointed look. She probably wanted to know what happened in the meeting. Before she could whisper a word, Snape turned around and began his lecture.

The dummy was set up in the same space the wood board was in the last class, and on his desk was a small chunk of rock. Snape's dark eyes scanned the class. He paused on Harry, but didn't sneer, he had an odd glint in his eyes, like he expected Harry to do a trick. Harry felt his stomach tingle in worry, what was that look for? It was similar to what happened in the hospital wing. He turned to Ron and Hermione to see if they noticed, but neither one was paying much attention.

Hermione was writing a description of the demonstration setup, while Ron was looking at the empty seat that Malfoy normally used.

Harry sighed and refocused on class. He was worried about Ron's growing obsession. Today in the hall they spotted Malfoy, he was only a flicker between students in the crowded hall. He looked paler than ever, and he had added another set of ropes to himself, they were red and faded. When Ron caught sight of Draco, he flinched away. He told Harry that looking at Malfoy for too long had made his eyes sting. Hermione had scoffed and told him that his eyes were dry from staring too long, but Harry thought it was something deeper than that.

"Today we will be learning about old spells, that have fallen out of favor, and how they can be used to the detriment of others..." Snape's smooth voice pulled Harry to the present.
Snape held up a rock the size of a golf ball. "This rock, will shortly become the most dangerous object in this room. The spell that will change it, is one that was used by wizards long before household heating charms were invented."

He put the rock back on the table. "The spell is pronounced Flagrante. It heats whatever object you use it on to an incredible temperature. It was used on coal, for heat and cooking hundreds of years ago, but is barely known today."

Harry perked up at the name of the spell, he remembered seeing it in a book in the Black Library. It was considered borderline dark by the Ministry, even though it used to be an everyday spell. He wrote the name down, and he could hear his classmates scratching the name down as well.

Snape pointed his wand at the stone and silently levitated it so that it floated just below his eyes. He twisted his wand like it was a screwdriver, and incanted, "Flagrante."

Some of the students let out small gasps as the stone super-heated until it was red hot liquid stone. It was bright yellow in the center and burning orange/red on the outside. The ball was floating and slightly swirling. The surface turned black, and cracked, as the air cooled it, but the swirling was pulling the solidifying stone into the center constantly keeping it liquid.

"This sphere of molten stone, is approximately 1100 Degrees Celsius..." He swirled his wand and the sphere twisted and morphed into different shapes. "Lava forms an insulating crust when it touches air. Because of the spell I am using, the rock is always hot on the inside. I only have to keep it moving, so that the crust get pulled into the center, in order keep the entire substance liquid." Snape explained while maintaining a healthy distance from the ball of hot rock.

"Because the spell keeps the crust from forming completely on the outside, this little ball can set your dry clothes aflame... by merely being too close to you. The spell doesn't allow the rock to cool even when it is touching ice, this causes it to burn through anything that has a melting point below its own." Snape flicked his wand and the ball became a disc. "To stop an enemy in their tracks, you only need to throw this on them. It would burn... until there was nothing left."

Snape made a motion, and the hot disc flew at the wood dummy. He waved his wand in beautiful patterns to control the disc, every spot of wood it touched was burned. The disc left deep, black, smoldering, gouges. When the dummy was covered in fatal burning wounds, he called the lava back and it formed a ball to float next to him.
"You see how dangerous this is. It is similar to Fiendfyre, but luckily different in two ways."

Snape paced back and forth as he lectured, the lava following two feet behind him. "The first difference, is that it doesn't have a mind of its own. As long as you have your wand on it, you control it, and it does your will. Only when you let it go, will it burn anything, and everything. The second difference is the most important, there is a simple counter curse."

Snape stopped walking, "Repeat after me, Frigore."

The class responded.

"Again," Snape demanded, and the class complied.

Snape nodded. "Good. Now, I want each of you to come up and put out this lava." He opened his mouth to call the first name, and Harry was sure it was going to be him, but before he got a syllable out, his mouth snapped shut, and his face tightened. The red hot ball wavered in the air, and Snape hissed the counter spell from between his teeth. The ball became cold stone, it steamed and fell to the desk with a resounding clunk.

Everything happened so fast. Before anyone could react to the halting of the lesson, Harry's head ripped and exploded with pain. He covered his scar with his hands, and a scream ripped from his throat. Hermione was the first to move, she jumped from her seat to Harry's side.

Harry couldn't even see. Everything was white pain. All he knew for sure was that Voldemort was mad… really mad.

"HE'S ANGRY," Harry yelled.

Snape loudly commanded the class to dismiss as he approached Harry. The sound of chairs scraping the stone floor as students ran from the room, hurt Harry's head like a hammer to his temple. When the room was quiet, Harry lifted his head as far as he could and cracked his eyes open.

Snape was standing over him.

"You two, take Potter to the infirmary." The pain was clear in Snape's hissed command. He turned to leave, but Harry reached out and grabbed his robe as he passed.
Harry had a foreboding feeling, he was worried that if Snape went to this Death Eater meeting, he would die. All he could think about was the realization he had this summer. Snape had tried to save Sirius, even though he hated him, he had checked headquarters when he didn’t have to. No matter what Snape had done to Harry, he couldn’t let the man walk to his death. He was finally certain that Snape was on the side of the light, and was important to the war.

"You can't go… sir" Harry panted as he spoke. "He's too angry. More angry than ever." His hand slipped from Snape's robe as he began to pass out from the pain.

Snape ignored the warning, and left.

oOoOo

Harry woke late that night, he was in the hospital wing. His head was pounding, and felt like it was full of cotton. Ron and Hermione were gone, but there was a folded parchment next to his glasses on the bedside table. It was in Hermione's hand writing. According to the note they were shooed out by Pomfrey to go to Potions, but when they came back he was still asleep. Hermione also jotted a P.S. letting him know that there was no news about Snape's return. Harry sighed and folded the note. He reached for the pain potion left by the matron. Harry gratefully took the potion, the pain went away, but the cotton feeling was just something he had to deal with until the curse removal.

Harry had to know if Snape was still missing. He found his bag next to the bed and pulled it onto his lap. After fishing around, he pulled out the Marauder's Map and activated it. He scanned it left to right, he looked in the DADA office and classroom, but it was empty. He looked everywhere he could think of, even the potions lab, but Snape was nowhere to be found. Harry was about to give up and accept that Snape was still off the grounds when he caught movement by the forbidden forest.

There he was, a small black dot labeled Severus Snape was very slowly moving out of the forest. What concerned Harry more than the speed of the dot, was that it was shifting between black and red. That was something he had never seen the map do. Fear spiked through Harry's chest, when things flashed red it was a bad sign. right?. Something must be wrong. He rolled out of bed and snatched his wand off the table. He was only wearing the striped pajamas issued by the hospital wing, but he didn't stop to find a cloak.

Harry ran barefoot, he fled from the wing and rushed down the hall. He kept an eye on the map to make sure he didn't lose Snape's location. No one was patrolling this late at night, or early in the morning was more accurate. Harry ran as fast as his sore body would go. His lungs burned and he almost fell down two separate flights of stairs. After what felt like hours of running he got to the main entrance, flung one of the double doors open, and didn't bother closing it. He looked at the map again to make sure Snape was still outside. The dot was flashing red a lot longer than it was
black and it had stopped moving altogether.

Harry sprinted the last length of the grounds. His bare feet slipped on the wet, cold grass, and his lungs burned. He had to find Snape, even if he hated the man, Harry couldn't let him die. Not like this. Finally after a minute of flat out running, he saw Snape.

He looked like nothing more than a pile of black robes.

Harry stopped, and stood with numb feet. The reality of the situation was dawning on him, he scrambled to the professor's side. He felt panic surge up stronger. Snape hadn't removed his mask before crawling out of the forest. He reached out and slowly pulled the mask off, he idly noted that this was the first time he touched a Death Eater mask. Snape's face was white as a sheet, and his eyes were half closed with a glassy sheen. He was shaking, and could only move his eyes to look up at Harry. He had no expression, but his slow breaths spoke of resignation. Harry refused to let him die here, on the cold ground. He looked over Snape's body and felt around with his hands. The dark stains on the grass where Snape had dragged himself, made it clear that the Professor was bleeding, heavily, but the dark robe hid the wound.

After a few seconds of feeling around Snape's chest and abdomen, he felt a warm sticky wetness on the left side of the man's stomach. This was one of those deciding moments in Harry's new way of life. He had trained in Dark spells that included healing spells. He had acted, and trained so that he could handle these situations. He wouldn't have to risk someone's life to run for Pomfrey, and by the look of Snape he would die within minutes.

"I can do this, I can do this." Harry was telling himself, sounding more confident than he really was.

He used his wand to cut Snape's robe open and reveal a deep ugly gash that looked like claws, or teeth marks. Something from the forest had attacked the man, while he was weak from facing Voldemort. The Professor was shaking the same way Harry did after the Crucius curse, even with so much blood loss, and so close to death, he was shaking almost violently. Harry glanced up at the moon, it wasn't full… thank Merlin.

Harry pressed his wand to the wound, and began singing a spell that sounded like a Gaelic song, he repeated it over and over. This was the spell that could kill the caster if done too many times in a row, or on too large a wound. He and Hermione had only done it on small cuts. This was the first real test. He ignored the odd feeling that came along with using spells of this magnitude, like the magic was being pulled from someplace deeper. He knew it was the feeling of the magic coming from his core, that's the reason the spells were dangerous. When a person's gift pulled the magic from the core, it was a natural process, and would stop before killing someone unless they forced
it. These Dark spells were forcing the magic out of the core from the start and the curse made it harder.

Harry felt his chest relax as the spell began to work. The blood spread around on the grass began to glow, as the spell cleaned it. Harry sang while looking at the wound, from the corner of his eyes he could see Snape watching him. The blood began to slide back to the hole it came from, and the professor's eyes started to clear, and filled with something akin to hope.

Harry's head was spinning, faster and faster, as his joints began to burn. Apparently the curse didn't like this much core magic being used, but Harry kept singing. Once all the blood was back where it belonged, the wound slowly knit back together and left behind a pink scar. Harry felt himself swaying, and he began to slide sideways, until a shaky, but strong hand caught him.

Snape was sitting up. His face was still very pale, but his eyes were sharp. He climbed to his feet and pulled Harry up with him.

"Come, we have to get inside." His voice rasped as if he had been screaming for a prolonged period of time.

Harry nodded vaguely, and Snape slid his mask into his robe. Both of them slowly limped their way to the main entrance. Harry began to turn to go to the Hospital wing but the hand on his shoulder stopped him.

"You're coming with me." Snape didn't wait for a reply and began to shakily drag Harry with him to the dungeon.

The walk to Snape's quarters felt like an eternity, and all Harry wanted to do was lay down in the hall and sleep. They stopped in front of a painting of a raven and a snake, that Harry had never seen, and Snape mumbled something that caused the portrait to open up. The room they entered was cozy. It had a fireplace that lit up when they entered. A dark brown leather couch faced the fire, with two matching chairs on either side angled to face the hearth. Between the couch and the fireplace, was a forest green throw rug covering dark hardwood floors, and a dark wood coffee table on top. The rest of the main room was too dark to see with Harry's tired eyes, the fireplace was the only source of light.

Snape moved both of them to the sitting area, and Harry was pushed into the leather chair closest to the door. Then Snape stalked, as best he could in his condition, into the darkest part of the room. Harry squinted but couldn't see him, he could hear cabinets opening and closing along with bottles clinking. Snape melted out of the shadows, and back into the light carrying two vials. He handed
one filled with a milky white liquid to Harry, and kept a red one as he sat in the other arm chair.

Harry didn't drink the potion, he just held it. He wasn't sure what it was for, and his spinning head couldn't grasp that it might be important. His fuzzy mind was filled with intrusive thoughts of an over stuffed arm chair, spewing human remains. He was tired, and couldn’t control where his mind wandered, so it strayed into the dark.

Snape drank his potion and his shaking calmed to a controllable level.

"Drink your potion. I don't want to have to explain to that irritating matron, why your magical levels are so low." Snape's voice was flat, and tired. It cracked a couple times because of his raw throat.

Harry obeyed without thinking. The bitter liquid worked fast and Harry was able to think more clearly now that he wasn't so magically depleted. He suddenly became aware of how uncomfortable the situation was. He was alone with a man who hated him, in said man's living room. Harry wasn't particularly fond of Snape either, so that just compounded on top of all the discomfort.

"I should go back to the hospital wing before anyone notices I'm gone." Harry spoke quietly and looked at Snape's forehead then down at his knees. He hoped he didn't make eye contact with the professor while he was out of it.

Snape didn't respond immediately. He sat, reclined in his chair, with his finger steepled under his chin. Harry could feel the man's dark eyes boring into the top of his head.

Snape dismissed Harry's previous comment. "It seem that someone, or something... has finally instilled a sense of caution into that thick head of yours."

Irritated, Harry clenched his fists in his lap, and didn't rise to the bait. He wasn't sure what the Professor meant by that statement.

"Unfortunately, not making eye contact with known Legilimens, is not going to be an option in every situation," Snape concluded.
Harry's anger drained away in surprise. He expected more insults, maybe even a rage from the potions master. He just saved the man's life, which was a life debt. Just like what happened with Snape and his father. Harry looked up at Snape's chin to get a reading of his mood from his expression. He was met with a thoughtful look.

Snape leaned forward, and put his hands on the arm rest. His face melted into a calculating, and maybe even scheming, expression. Harry felt his stomach drop. He should have the upper hand, but he felt like prey being circled by a snake.

"I assume... that by now, you have concluded that I owe you a life debt." Snape kept his voice level.

Harry nodded, small and slow.

"There are many ways I can fulfil this debt, and there are many questions I have for you. Including, where you learned such a dangerous healing spell. Although... I can't fault you for knowing it, when its application tonight is the reason I am able to inquire at all."

Snape's voice dropped an octave, and he was unable to keep all the dismay from his voice. Harry thought he must be trying very hard not to show how much this life debt upset him. He also seemed to be straining to not insult Harry. Now that he thought about it, the two times he had class with Snape this year, he was not as laser focused on making Harry's life miserable, like he normally was. Well... slightly less focused.

This dark man, was one of the few remaining people who truly intimidated Harry. It was something he needed to overcome. Harry sat up straighter and tried not to look sheepish.

"What... ways to fulfil the debt are you talking about?" Keeping his voice steady was harder than anticipated.

Snape raised a brow. He seemed intrigued by the sudden change in manner. "I am getting the feeling, there are many things you are hiding. From the way you have avoided eye contact with myself, and the Headmaster. Oh yes, I noticed... even back at your relative's house. I also noticed your Aunt avoiding everyone's eyes." He took a deep breath, as if steeling himself, unable to believe what he was about to say. "What I am offering..." He paused, and rubbed the bridge of his nose, "What I am offering, is to teach you Occlumency."
Harry, was blown away. After what had happened with the pensive, he thought Snape would cut off his own arm before going back to those lessons. This was so unexpected that Harry decided to throw caution to the wind.

"What makes you think I would want to learn from you? It didn't exactly work out last time, and I ended up mentally weaker. I would almost say you were trying not to teach me." Harry let himself become a bit angry as he finished.

Snape was gripping the arms of his chair in an effort not to yell. His words were obviously strained. "I think you will accept this offer. I have come to understand the reasons that compounded, creating the disaster from last year. After you failed so miserably, I had to reassess how I went about teaching you, to figure out why. This time, I believe I have a solution."

Snape took a calming breath and continued. "I am also your last choice. You could go to the Headmaster, but... he is one of the reasons you need to learn this skill, is he not? You know, you need this, it will be vital to your survival."

Harry couldn't argue with his reasoning. He needed a way to protect his secrets, to protect Phoenix Method. Apparently he wasn’t doing a good job, if Snape was already suspicious. "OK, you have me there, but how am I supposed to trust you?"

Snape nodded, he seemed almost pleased that Harry thought to ask, and didn't just blindly agree. "I excel at keeping information away, from those who might seek it. I am also willing to submit myself... to an Oath." He sneered.

"Oath?" Harry questioned.

"Yes. A wizard’s Oath will make it so I am unable to repeat anything I learn from the lessons. Either from your mind, actions or verbally. It will also restrict you from speaking my secrets." Snape looked very tired as he explained, as if he were exasperated at the thought of an Oath.

Harry was feeling more, and more intrigued. "And what happens if you break the Oath?"

"You lose your magic, and become a squib." Snape stated plainly.

Harry felt himself gasp against his will. Why was Snape offering this? Debt or no debt, this was
serious and dangerous.

"Once you have mastered the skill to your fullest potential, the debt will be cleared. I assure you this arrangement is to my benefit, in many ways, as well as to yours." He explained.

Harry wanted to know how else it was to Snape's benefit besides fulfilling the debt, but knew he was unlikely to find out. This was another moment of reckoning. He was going to enter a deal with a spy Death Eater. Harry felt that this really was his only option to learn Occlumency, and since there was a life debt involved, he could count on actually learning this time.

"I only have one question. Does Dumbledore know anything about this offer? I mean anything at all, even if it was only mentioned in passing, that you might try and teach me again?" Harry wanted to fill all the loopholes.

Snape actually smiled. Well kind of, it was a crooked half smile. "I am almost surprised, that you would want to keep this from the Headmaster, so desperately. I can assure you that he knows nothing. He seemed adamant that I not try again."

Harry nodded, "Make it part of the Oath, and we have a deal."

He was feeling much less nervous, and Snape was making an effort to be civil. He did throw in some insults, but he wouldn't be Snape if he didn't. It was almost too surreal to accept. Snape surveyed Harry carefully, his expression clearly said he was still surprised Harry was using so much forethought.

"Acceptable terms." Snape agreed, after a moment of thought.

Harry nodded, "OK, so how do we do this?"

Snape moved forward on his seat stiffly, and Harry followed suit.

"Since you have obviously, used Dark magic before…” He looked Harry over, as if he still didn’t believe it, even though he witnessed it himself. “I have a special Oath Spell, that is not approved of by the Ministry that should suit our purposes. It is called the Tacet Arx Oath."
This didn't particularly bother Harry after everything he got up to this summer, so he remained quiet for an explanation.

Snape took the silence as his cue. "This spell will bind us from speaking in front anyone but each other, about anything that is said between us while the Oath is being used. After we swear the Oath, one of us only needs to say a keyword, Tacet, and when the other responds with the second word, Arx, the Oath is activated. Then, anything we say after that is considered under the Oaths protection, until the words are repeated." He spoke slowly so Harry could absorb all the words, or possibly because he enjoyed implying that Harry was stupid.

Harry felt like he had encountered something like this before. Something Hermione had said when she interrupted Ravenclaw's they while arguing. Then it came to him.

"It's like a Point of Order? Everything said in the Point of Order is outside of the normal flow of conversation. As if it's off the record in a way?" Harry hoped he didn't sound dumb.

Snape nodded, and looked a little surprised. "it is... like that. With the added benefit of protection. While the spell is actively…” He paused, looking for a word. "Recording, for a lack of a better term, it also automatically raises privacy wards, so strong, that we could stand in a room with someone and they won't be able to understand what we are saying. The protection is so powerful, it protects the information even inside your mind. If someone tries to rip it out of your thoughts, your magic will try to fight them, to keep the secrets hidden. The Oath will fight until your magic runs out, effectively killing you, but ultimately protecting the secrets. This fate can be avoided, by learning Occlumency." Snape looked almost excited, while explaining the theory behind the spell. The man obviously loved Dark magic.

Harry was impressed. This was one hell of a spell, "OK, I'm satisfied."

Snape held out his hand with his palm facing Harry. "Put your hand against my own," he instructed.

Harry complied. He felt uncomfortable with the physical contact, but he knew it was necessary.

"Repeat after me, if you find my wording appropriate. I, Severus Tobias Snape, swear Tacet Arx to Harry James Potter. I swear under this Oath, that Albus Dumbledore knows nothing, and will learn nothing, about this arrangement. I swear to uphold this Oath on the pain of my magic." Snape raised his wand, and pointed it to the back of his hand. A gold light bloomed on his skin.
Harry took a deep breath.

"I, Harry James Potter, swear Tacet Arx to Severus Tobias Snape. I swear under this Oath, that Albus Dumbledore knows nothing, and will learn nothing, about this arrangement. I swear to uphold this Oath on the pain of my magic." Harry raised his wand, and positioned it the same as Snape. The golden light appeared, and it felt like someone had stabbed him in the hand with a dull knife. Harry hissed, and gritted his teeth. How did Snape keep a straight face through the pain?

The light sank into Harry’s hand, and Snape's did the same. For a moment the pain became hot, and Harry almost yelped, but then the light reemerged, and it was red. It stretched out, and compressed into a string, it wrapped around their hands, and then sank back into their skin.

Both pulled their hands away as soon as it was over.

"Did that... use our blood?" Harry asked, only slight panic in his voice.

Snape gave a tired nod.

"You didn't warn me it would do that," Harry accused. He had read about how dangerous blood could be.

"Tacet," Snape barked.

Harry glared at him, but responded, "Arx."

Magic burst from them as a gust of wind, it mixed together, filled the room, and then settled.

"At least, it seems to have worked." Snape sounded even more tired. Having a protection of privacy, made him more willing to let his guard down. "I didn't tell you, because it was not free flowing blood. I could not have taken any to use against you, so there was little danger."

Harry let out a relieved breath, "Why did it use blood?"
Snape fell easily into lecture mode. "It is how the spell keeps track of us, and what we are doing. It is also where it draws the power to seal our magic. Other vows use some of a third parties magic to bind. The bit of magic from the third person is also how it executes its consequences for breaking the vow. With the Tacet Arx Oath, it is a bit of our own magic in each other that will execute the consequences."

"Makes sense," Harry agreed. Although, the thought of having Snape's magic in him was unsettling, but it was too late.

Snape sat forward, and weaved his fingers together. The entire feeling of the conversation suddenly shifted. Harry felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand up.

"Now, that I have you bound..." Snape's words were deep, and smooth. Harry felt, for a moment, that he might have made a mistake.

"Ummmm... yeah?" Harry almost squawked.

"There is the matter of why, the Dark Lord called me tonight. I feel that this is information you need to know. The Headmaster would not allow me to tell you under normal circumstances, but now... he need not know I told you at all," Snape explained, with a sly smile.

Harry relaxed, when he realized the predatory air was not direct at him, but at Dumbledore. That was somewhat of a surprise, but he accepted things as they came tonight. This was all very strange, but it seemed to be working out in his favor. It also became apparent, that Snape was using this Oath to protect himself from the Headmaster as well.

Something occurred to Harry, "Wait, if you tell me now, won't you be stopped by the Oath when you try to tell Dumbledore?"

Snape shook his head. "No, this is my information to tell. You won't be able to repeat it, and I cannot tell anyone that I told you, specifically, but I can tell anyone else about the information itself. It will work the same for your secrets, they are yours to tell. Unless, you consciously decided to protect them under the Oath, but having mental control of that caliber, may not be possible until you are more versed in Occlumency."

"OK, so why was Voldemort so angry?" Harry asked.
“You were correct in class, he was enraged. I have rarely seen him this upset. So angry, that he took it out on his followers. That is how I ended up where you found me. I was not prepared for a creature in the forest, and it got the best of me." Snape unconsciously put his hand where his wound had been. "The Dark Lord was angry, because some information came to him that he did not expect." Snape relaxed into his chair again. "In the first war, there were pure blood families that Voldemort did not try to turn to his cause. He just... exterminated them."

Harry shuddered.

Snape looked far away in memory. "To an outsider it would seem as if he were just killing as usual. But the inner circle knew better, we knew he was hunting some, and trying to collect others. We do not know what he based his choices on. There was one family, he was very determined to exterminate. The Prewitt family."

Harry's eyes widened. He knew that name.

Snape noticed his surprise. "I see, so you already know what this is about?"

Harry felt the blood drain from his face, and he broke out into a cold sweat. "The Weasley's."

"Yes," Snape confirmed, his voice firm, and his eyes hard. The Dark Lord had handed him the answer to the riddle he had been working on. The words Sybill spoke made sense when the name Prewitt was brought up. The only Prewitt to survive the first war, was Molly Weasley nee Prewett. Then she married Arthur, who is a direct Black descendant through his mother, who was blown off the tapestry for being a blood traitor. The white sheep among the Black.

Harry wasn't sure what this all meant. "I don't understand. It's not a secret that they are related to the Prewitt's."

"No, it's not." Snape agreed, and then added. "But remember, the Dark Lord was nothing but a wraith for fourteen years. Before his first fall he may have thought they were all dead. From the way he was speaking, it seemed that something important concerning their bloodline occurred, something he was trying to prevent. I don't know how he found out."

Harry's eyes narrowed, and anger flared in his chest. "I know how. Malfoy. He cornered Ron, and asked him if he was related to the Prewitt's."
"I would keep close to Weasley, and away from Draco Malfoy. I thought your friend might be involved, which is part of why I told you about this. I do not enjoy letting you in on this information, but it is better you know the danger in this school. When you are ignorant of the dangerous situations, you somehow stumble into them anyway." Snape's face reflected just how much he hated telling Harry about anything to do with his spying.

Harry suddenly realized a flaw in this plan. "I can't warn him. The Oath will stop me."

Snape sighed. "I think it is best he doesn't know. Can you trust him not to lose his temper? Not to do something reckless? I am already risking much by telling you. I can only worry about one child, full of Gryffindor stupidity, at a time."

Harry actually saw the sense in what the Professor was saying, outside of the insult. Ron might try and get more information from Malfoy, and get hurt or worse. Harry was having a very hard time accepting this new Snape, that is mostly civil and willing to help. He had a feeling that there was something deeper, forcing Snape's hand. He might not hate Harry as much anymore, and he was probably grateful for the healing spell, but he definitely wouldn't be offering this much information, and help, from the goodness of his heart. Harry needed to keep his eyes open for the true motive behind Snape's actions.

"Fine," Harry agreed.

"Good. Now as for our lessons. Come to my office at 8PM this Saturday," Snape ordered.

Harry let his shoulder slump in acceptance.

"Tacet" said Snape.

"Arx," Harry replied.

The magic in the room came back to them, in a reverse gust of wind that ruffled their hair. Harry stood up, he felt very tired now that this was over. He walked to the door, and stopped. He looked back at Snape. "Goodnight, Professor."

Snape nodded shallowly, "Goodnight, Potter." He managed to sound almost pleasant.
Harry left. The Portrait swung closed behind him, and he stood for a moment in the dark hall, with the map clutched in his hand. This was all too unreal for him…

"He didn't even say thank you…” Harry muttered indignantly.

oOoOo

Severus practically deflated the moment the portal was soundly closed. He pressed his fingers into the space between his eyes, and let out a long suffering sigh. His side still hurt, even after the powerful healing spell, and his entire body was sore from all the curses he took. He scolded himself for getting caught off guard by a creature in the forest. He had withstood to many pain curses, and was not aware of his surroundings. He didn't even know what attacked him, he fired off a stunner and ran until he was on the school grounds.

Now, because of his carelessness, he was walking a knife's edge. Snape rose to his feet carefully, and went to the dark side of the room. He opened an oak cabinet and pulled out a bottle of amber liquid. He looked at the hole in his robes and the pink scar. It was too late for dittany, he would have to live with this scar. He hated to admit that he was grateful that the Potter brat had found him. He couldn't afford to die at this important juncture of the war, it didn't matter who saved him, it only matters that he was alive to finish his work. There was plenty of time later, to die.

Snape poured himself a glass of liquor, while he pondered the parts of the night that didn't fit properly. He wanted to know how Potter had found him, and also how he knew that old spell. Was that part of the Headmaster's training? If so, then Potter learned the spell quickly in only one meeting. That was impossible. Severus knocked back all three fingers of his drink, and hissed out a breath as it burned on the way down.

This incident, was both making his task harder, and giving him an opportunity to get more information about Sybil's latest prophecies. In many ways he had no choice but to take that damn Oath. With the Unbreakable Vow to help Draco, he can't risk having Potter running amuck with his mind unprotected.

If Draco or, Merlin forbid, the Dark Load, caught a glimpse of that, he would be finished. He also couldn't risk Potter having a life debt over him. He couldn't survive with his life bound to two people on the opposite sides of the war. He was honestly lucky the boy agreed to the deal. Until the debt was cleared Potter could compel him to do something that goes against the Unbreakable Vow, which would kill him…So now he must walk the edge between helping Draco, if the boy would actually cooperate, and teaching Potter, so he could erase the debt.
One wrong move, and one of the two Vows would activate, and he would either die or become a squib.

Severus poured himself another drink.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"When life seems dangerous and unmanageable. Just remember that it is, and that you can't survive forever."

-Night Vale

AN- When life is chaos. Loud, messy, homeless. I am so very glad I can always come here, where even the words spoken to me, are silent, stark, black on white. It is in these moments that the written word, the symbols for our random sounds that fall together into coherent understanding, are so appreciated.

So very, appreciated.

Recombobulated 5/11/2017

Beta’d 6/5/2017 -minijaxter
Narcissa collapsed onto her bed with a vial of red potion in her hand. She shook, violently, as she drank it, and then fell back on the bed to wait for the after effects of the Crucius Curse to melt away, under the potions influence. Once her hands were steady, she slowly moved to her vanity to write a letter.
The Dark Lord was enraged. Narcissa had watched Severus being tortured for over thirty minutes. She feared he didn't make it back to Hogwarts. After all the Death Eaters had been dismissed, her Lord's eyes were still filled with fire, and he turned his anger on the only other person living in the manor. After he vented the last of his anger on her, he dismissed Narcissa with a command to come back the next day.

One good thing came from his change in mood. He wanted his captured servants freed, so he was pushing the Azkaban breakout forward more quickly. The Dark Lord wanted Lucius back in the public eye, he began to set things in motion through the corrupt ministry.

The letter Narcissa wrote to Severus was short, it included the information about the breakout, and inquired about his welfare after the torture. If there was one thing she knew about her friend, it was that he never had only one avenue. Deep down Narcissa knew Severus had other loyalties. She didn't know who he reported to, but she wanted to make sure he was well informed, and that he knew it was her that provided the information. She knew it was unlikely to work out, considering her son's mission, and the Vow Severus made, but she would grasp at every chance she could.

She lit her candle and whispered her desired recipient. The letter was gone and the room was left dark without the candles green light.

oOoOo

Harry, Ron, Hermione and Ginny stood in the hallway on the seventh floor. Harry looked at his watch, it had been five minutes since they activated the sickles. After another minute of nervous waiting, Neville and Luna came around the corner together.

Upon seeing them Harry started to pace and think about what he needed. The scrubbed wood door to the small room with the fireplace appeared, just as Neville and Luna arrived.

"Are you ready?" Harry asked with a playful smile.

Neville let his nerves go. Seeing Harry so relaxed seemed to bolster him. Luna on the other hand was very much the same as she was on the train. It worried Harry to see her so somber, the conversation they had in the hallway, flickered through his mind, but he pushed it aside. He opened the door and beckoned his friends in. The room was as dark, and small, as last time. The little table was still in the middle, illuminated by the fire light.
Hermione pulled her Floo candle out of her bag and set it on the table.

"OK, follow me," She instructed. Then she took some powder from the mantel, and stepped into the fireplace. With a flash of green flames and a shout, she was gone.

"You heard the woman," Harry joked, and followed after her yelling, "Number 12 Grimmauld Place!"

When Harry tumbled out into the kitchen he was pleased to see Fred and George already reclining at the table, like they owned the place.

"What took you so long mate?" one of the twins joked. The other one had his feet on the table and was leaning back in his chair. "Yeah we've been here forever." The reclining twin smirked.

Harry was thrilled they made it. Everything was falling into place nicely. He heard the other four Floo in behind him and turned. Without even asking, each person took a seat at the dark wood table. The twin that was reclining at the head of the table put his feet down, and moved to allow Harry his spot. Hermione took the spot to the right, and Ron to the left.

Harry slowly surveyed the room. The atmosphere was heavy, but not oppressive. Everyone's serious expressions made his insides squirm. This wasn't right. This wasn't The Phoenix Method. Harry took a deep breath and glanced to the kettle on the stove. He raised his wand causing everyone to stiffen in expectation. With a small flick, he lit the burner under the pot.

"Tea?" he asked lightly.

Tension whooshed out of the room like air out of a plastic bag. Everyone began chatting amongst themselves, as the tea kettle boiled and then floated to the table along with some cups and additives.

Hermione pulled out a second Floo candle from her bag, the one with Harry's name on it, and placed it in the middle of the table. "The one in the Room of Requirement will allow us to send messages without having to floo in. I put yours here Harry, just in case there is another mystery letter, we don't want it outside the safe house"
Harry nodded as he dropped one sugar into his tea and poured a bit of cream. He took a moment to collect his thoughts as he watched the liquids blend with the turning of his spoon. He tapped the spoon on the rim of his cup, and placed it on the table. When he looked up, he had the absolute attention of every soul in the room.

First he explained to those who were not at the Weasley's house this summer about everything revealed that night. He explained Dumbledore's manipulations, and how he had the first meeting with the old man.

"We will come back to that part later." He told them. Then he dove into the behavior Draco Malfoy had been exhibiting recently, and about the Letter that came from the Floo candle.

Everyone in the room was on the same page, though a bit confused about how the candle worked. All of them agreed that there was more going on than the adults were willing to admit, and that the Order was not to be completely trusted. They also agreed that Phoenix Method was necessary, at the very least to keep Dumbledore in check, and to look for solutions he might have missed in his close minded arrogance.

Harry made another cup of tea while everyone took a moment to freshen their own drinks. He wasn't sure how to explain the next part. It had seemed so easy when he told Ron, but this was more than just Ron alone at the table.

"There is magic that was buried." Harry found the words coming out of his mouth before he was ready, but he couldn't stop now. "Someone decided that a part of every magical person needed to be suppressed. That part is our Core magic, the Ministry labeled it Dark magic, because it has a possible price, and because it cannot be completely regulated. They forced all magical people to use only what they termed Surface magic, or Light magic. If we try, we can all get to some of our core magic, and use Dark spells but it's not easy due to the restriction."

Hermione stepped in to clarify. "I have managed to learn some spells that forcefully use my core magic. They are strong and, they can cause you harm if you use too many. They feel heavier than surface magic, which was called Light Magic, not due to its good nature, but because it feels lighter and easier to cast. The curse that is repressing everyone makes it even harder, and more dangerous to use Core spells, and almost completely blocks our Gifts."

Harry took a sip of his tea, no one else had touched theirs since they had begun speaking. He continued, by explaining what he had learned from the Black library and the Verum book. The room's reaction was the same as Ron's, they were all purebloods and had heard the stories. But because they were on the light side they were left out of the loop and didn't know the curse removal ritual was real. They all looked shocked, all of them but one. Neville had a serious expression, filled with concern. Whatever he had to say, he was apparently holding until the end.
"From what I have learned, Gift magic from our Core is a part of who we are. It is as dangerous as it is wonderful, and without it we are not complete wizards and witches. Because of its nature there is no counter curse, or Finite spell for the Core Gifts, there are only other inherent abilities, born in certain people that naturally cancel out or synergize with some other Gifts. Unfortunately, the families with this information are secretive and very few Core Gifts are known to exist for certain."

Harry looked down at his hands and took a deep breath.

"Everyone in the room is being subjected to a suppression curse. I explained what the ministry did, but what you don't know is that some people are highly affected by this restriction, and if your Gift is too strong then it will have an adverse reaction to the curse that can drive a person insane and handicap them for life." Harry made eye contact with every person in the room before he continued.

"This reaction is happening in me, and I am going to attempt the Removal Ritual to stop it. I suspect that some of you are having reactions and didn't know what it was. Part of what I want this group to do is reverse as many curses as possible-" Harry's words were cut short by the sharp sound of hands being slammed onto the table top.

Neville stood up with his hands still flat on the wood. "Removing the Curse is dangerous. I already knew that the ritual existed because the Longbottom family was one of the allied families." He looked almost ashamed to admit his family had worked alongside Malfoys and Blacks. "We tried using the Ritual for a couple of generations, but the risk of death was too high. Unlike the other families, the Longbottom's weren't willing to possibly kill their heirs for power." Neville practically spit the last word. "We accepted that some of us might suffer but it was less than the ritual took from us."

To say that everyone was shocked, was an understatement. Right here, was true proof that this was real, proof beyond words in a book and mysterious sickness. Neville admitted that there are families completely aware of all the secrets, who simply keep the status quo to protect themselves.

Telling that secret might put Neville in a bad position, but he didn't seem very concerned.

Harry understood why his friend was angry, and set out to soothe him. "I know there is a risk, but if you look at the Black Family charter, you can see that the children stopped dying. I think the Ritual we are using is an improved version." As he spoke, Hermione pulled out the Verum, and showed Neville what they meant. He seemed to calm marginally.

Harry pressed him with more reasons to use the Ritual, "Even if this is the risky removal, I have to do it. I can't let this curse bring me down. I also think that everyone should have the choice to take the risk, don't you?"
Neville slid back into his chair, "Yeah, They do. As long as it's not required."

"I would never require it. It is only one of the many things that this group is going to be correcting." As Harry spoke, he could almost feel the calming power in this words. In the vibrations he sent into the air. His head felt clearer and he was certain he was making the right decision.

Neville's shoulders visibly relaxed, and he nodded.

Before Harry could speak, another sound suddenly interrupted. The squeal of a chair as Luna stood up. Her eyes wide but more expressive than Harry had seen since last year. She looked at Neville for a long moment. An understanding seemed to pass between them, and then Neville looked away from her down to the table.

Luna turned to Harry. He was surprised to see her eyes glassy. Her breaths were heavy, as if she was holding back something powerful.

"I want to take the risk," She stated firmly. It was the first time he had ever felt like she was truly talking directly to him.

Harry had never seen someone so earnest and scared. The impact of her eyes and her words felt solid. He opened his mouth to respond, to tell her she didn't need to decide now, but nothing came out but air.

Luna understood that he wanted to reassure her, she smiled, and a tear welled over her lashes. "I want to take the risk," She repeated.

Hermione was the first to find her voice, "Why?" she whispered.

"This Curse from the Ministry, it might be the curse of my family," Luna began, she wiped her face and hitched a breath. "On my mother's side, there is a curse. Every Female born with blue eyes, who is related to the Prince family goes mad and dies. Prince was my mother's maiden name. I think it's happening to me, I have been seeing things, and hearing things that I can't explain, and not like before. It takes different amounts of time for different people. My father said that my mother started to mention voices right after I was born, when she was nineteen."
It was Hermione again who spoke up. "The Prince family is pure blood?"

Luna nodded, "Yes, they are traditionally neutral, but they lean towards purism. They will accept anyone with magic, but still don't allow muggles to marry into the family." She glanced at Neville as she nervously rambled. "They were not close to many others, that's why they probably didn't get invited the allied families. They kept to themselves, according to my mother there was some big secret they were hiding, I always assumed it was the curse talking, that she was rambling nonsense." She paused for a moment, as if stuck in a memory. "My mother, and my great aunt both died from our curse, but it might be symptoms of the ministry curse like you said." She said with hope welling up on her face.

"It might be, I read some stories in the diaries from the Black family, about people who refused to remove the curse going mad if their gift was strong. Only, none of them died from the symptoms directly." Hermione explained with sympathy.

Luna didn't look putout, she was resigned, and sad. "None of my family died from the sickness directly. They all… in some way or another… they..." She started to tremble with the effort it took to hold in her grief. "My mother became crazed. I have no memories of her completely sane. She would experiment with magic, to try and fix herself. She would become more and more desperate, and I would sit on the stairs and watch through the railing bars." Tears welled up once more and spilled down Luna's pale cheeks. She didn't bother to try and hold back. "One day I was hiding, and watching. My mother was casting spells on a potions and it reacted badly… she was thrown across the room... and didn't get up. All of the women in my family did it to themselves somehow." She put her face in her hands, and cried.

Hermione was out of her chair as soon as Luna stopped talking. She rushed over and wrapped her in a firm hug. "It might be that your family has a strong gift. One that's genetically linked to girls and blue eyes. Even the varying strength of the gift explains why the time frame was different for each person." In a true Hermione fashion, she comforted Luna with information.

Luna pulled back, her eyes were red, but she smiled. "I hope so."

"We will start on yours right after we do Harry's in October," Hermione promised.

Luna responded by leaning forward and letting her forehead rest on Hermione's shoulder.

"I sometimes become so angry with my mother. She knew about the curse, and the risks, but she choose to have me, even though I might end up like her…" Luna whispered.
Hermione placed her hand on the back of Luna's head and stroked her hair soothingly.

"I don't want to die," Luna concluded firmly.

"And you won't," Hermione was confident.

It took ten minutes for everything to calm enough for the meeting to continue. When everyone was back in their seats, Harry explained all the information from his meeting with Dumbledore.

Everyone was confused and disgusted by how the Dark Lord came to be.

"Shouldn't Dumbledore be training you to fight or something?" One of the twins asked.

"Fred's right," George agreed. "Isn't his family in that book of yours? He should be helping you remove the curse."

Harry flipped to the page that listed the allied families. "Yeah it is." He held it up for them to see.

Ron pounded a fist on the table, his temper coming back full force. "Then what is he doing?! Sure, knowing about Vo- Vold- That bloody git's past is all well and good, but he could be setting this ritual up for you!"

Hermione made a sound of agreement, and Ginny threw in her two cents. "Maybe he is planning to?" she suggested.

Hermione shot that thought down. "This is not an easy ritual, if he was going to do it he would have explained, and taken Harry's blood in the first meeting."

Harry took the middle ground. He didn't want to jump the gun on this topic. "One more meeting. If he doesn't say anything by that time, then he's not going to, ever."
Everyone murmured their agreement, it sounded fair to them.

"Hey Neville," Harry called out. "If your family knows that the curse exists, and about core magic, do you know what your families Inheritance gift is, or anything about the magic?"

Neville looked thoughtful. "Well… a lot had been lost. Much of the magic was orally passed down. There were stories about guiding children through their inheritance, but not much was kept since it wasn't used."

"I read something about Children needing a magical guide, but like Neville said, it was not explained. All it said was that each child was different, and the guide would have to feel it out." Hermione added.

Neville nodded, "Yeah, that's about as much as I know. I do know that my family had a gift for metal work magic. We were a type of Maker Magician that uses metals to make magic enhancing jewelry and weapons. There are paintings from hundreds of years ago in the manor, of Longbottom's using short swords with their wands, and wearing rings that called fire… but I'm not sure of everything it can do." He flushed at his family's lack of knowledge. It was sad how much information had been lost over the generations.

"What's a Maker Magician?" Harry asked.

Neville brightened, this was something he could answer. "The inheritance gifts are separated into classes. I don't know much about the others, but Makers Magicians are a class that… well, make things. They specialize in different materials, and the different materials have different abilities. Like metal fortifies and enhances."

Hermione jumped in excitedly, "Oh! That must be what the Verum book was talking about. There was the section about Inherent abilities. About how Parselmouth was a sign of a type of gift called Birth Magic. People with Birth Magic are just called Mages. There weren't many other types listed."

"Yeah, it's one of the only other widely known categories. Birth Magic is strong and it's an ability you're born with, not a talent like making candles. There's is normally a sign, like a natural ability." Neville added what he knew.

"Well Harry you are probably some type of Mage. You being a Parselmouth signifies a Birth
Magic." Hermione turned to Harry as she spoke. Neville nodded knowingly.

Harry sighed. "Great," He said sarcastically.

"That means that Voldy had Birth Magic too, right?" Asked one of the twins.

Hermione became serious, and explained to everyone about what they knew concerning Voldemort's ability. She told them about how it's in the same category as whatever Harry's will be, and that they think is allows him to manipulate people somehow.

"So, he's a super charming dude?" the same twin asked, might be Fred.

Hermione put a finger to her lip in thought. "It probably started out like that, but he has twisted it somehow, the same way he has twisted his body I think. But we really don't know for sure."

The conversation naturally sputtered out because of the serious topic. Harry collected his thoughts in the silence. He was glad they had Neville to add to their knowledge base about Core magic. He wondered if Voldemort tried to kill of the Prewitt line because they were some sort of Mage that threatened him. He glanced at Ron. His friend did have amazing strategizing abilities at only eleven… he beat McGonagall's chess board. Harry put that thought away for later.

Hermione took advantage of the lull, and stood up to gain the rooms attention. Harry knew what was about to happen. He argued against it but Hermione insisted, and Ron silently backed her up.

Harry wanted to believe he could trust anyone that he let into this house, but deep down he understood the need for caution, and for insurance.

Hermione pulled out a sheet of parchment. "Now that there doesn't seem to be any outstanding conflicts, I want to invite all the people at this table to formally join Phoenix Method."

Murmuring filled the room, laced with confusion. Harry felt a string of guilt thread through his chest.

"I thought we had already formally joined?" Ginny voiced everyone's thought.
Hermione placed the paper on the table facing her friends. At the top of the paper was the name of the organization, beautifully illustrated. Around the border of the paper were small runes, and under the title were three signatures.

"Remember the paper we had people sign for the DA?" Hermione asked.

Everyone nodded, and relaxed slightly, until Ginny pointed out something that caught her eye.

"Is that written in blood?" She turned a bit white.

"Yes, everything is Harry's blood. Except my name and Ron's, they are in our own blood." Hermione didn't see the problem. Harry rubbed his arm, there was no cut because Hermione knew the Dark healing spell, but he didn't enjoy giving so much blood.

Neville turned a shade of green that rivaled Ginny's white face. "But… but that's Dark magic." He shuddered.

Hermione just looked at Neville with a blank stare as if to say 'well duh'. "That's what we have been talking about. Dark magic not being evil, Ministry misconceptions…" she trailed off.

"That's about Core magic, but this is blood magic…" Neville didn't seem to have any other argument, like the word blood explained everything.

Hermione sighed dramatically. "Maybe being muggle-born makes it easier for me to accept, we take blood out of people all the time, but if I have learned anything from all the books in this house I read, it's that magic is just magic. There is no good or bad about it. It is wild, and natural, and deserves our respect because it can go out of control if not used correctly, but it is not any more evil than a tornado that destroys a town. It is the wielders intentions that make is evil." She put her hands on her hips, and waited for the rebuttals.

Ginny voiced her concerns, "But blood magic can be dangerous if it isn't done correctly…"

Hermione jumped on that. "So can Core spells, even using your gift too much has been reported to have killed some people in the Black family list. The magic the Ministry says is Light and legal is just the very surface of what magic can do. It is so shallow that there is practically no danger, but there is also huge limitations on what it can do. The Old ways of these ancient families was all
about regulations, and respect for magic, because they knew that magic had the control, not the wizards. They were merely asking nicely for magic to do what they wanted. I mean, have you ever noticed how many old artifacts there are that no one can replicate, the process supposedly lost to time. Hogwarts being the most well-known one. The magic wasn't lost, it was banned."

Harry remember the potion he made for his uncle. The feeling of his magic flowing into the potion, and gently coaxing the magic in the ingredients to do what it asked. It really did feel like he was politely requesting a certain outcome. Harry understood now why the old ways needed to be brought back. Even if they were only using surface magic, they were still being arrogant, magical people today acted as if they owned magic… it might be something they regret one day. They also lost many Old Magick’s, Harry's mind looked back to first year, and a golden mirror that showed him his parents. More than one core gift was probably used to make that Mirror...

Hermione looked weary as she explained the next part. "Everyone knows what a muggle car is, and how it works, and what a motorway is?" Everyone nodded, even Neville had been in a car and seen a muggle motorway.

Hermione nodded. "Good, then think of magic like this. Every time you do magic it's like driving a muggle car. There is always a risk, but millions of muggles do it every day. As long as you respect the rules of the road and pay attention, statistically you will be ok, unless some other driver is being reckless." Everyone nodded in understanding, it made a lot of sense.

Hermione had one more point to make. "What the Ministry is doing to magic is dangerous. The curse they created is from very old, and dark magic most likely. I have been doing some reading and from what I can tell, using powerful magic to restrain powerful magic is dangerous, and on top of that, there are thousands of magical people using surface magic without regards to magic itself, for hundreds of years..." Hermione sat down, she looked even more tired. Harry thought that maybe she has been doing a lot more work then she let on.

"Imagine," Hermione prompted. "Driving a car that can only go as fast as a Clean Sweep, and one day you hit the motorway where the cars are all going as fast as Firebolts. What would happen?"

Ginny's freckles were glaring against her pale skin as she answered in a shaky voice. "You would cause a backup at best, and be pulverized at worst…"

Hermione nodded solemnly, "exactly."

Neville looked far away in his thoughts for a moment. Maybe remembering words from his grandmother on the topic of magic. Ginny seemed to be absorbing, and accepting what she was
being told. The twins didn't seem to have a problem from the start, and have spent the entire conversation talking about where they wanted to be cut when they signed the contract, and if they should keep the scar.

Neville finally refocused on Hermione, "I have only one more question." He collected his courage and asked, "What about magic that takes more than just some blood, magic that needs something a person can't give without dying…"

Everyone fell silent, even the twins.

Hermione smiled, it was a smile that Harry knew meant she had the right answer. "As long as the part given is not forcefully taken, I don't see the problem. Imagine there is a potion that needs a human heart, but it can save a newborn baby who has a sickness. Now what if a Quidditch player dies in an unfortunate accident? Should the baby die just because using the Quidditch player's heart is arbitrarily bad? Don't you think the Quidditch player would want to save the baby?"

Color returned to Neville's face, "It would honor the Quidditch player's death. My Gran would say that the Player would live on in the baby as well."

Hermione smiled brightly, "That's how muggles feel as well."

The twins took notice of the conversation for the first time at that statement. One of the twins paused while explaining how he wanted his scar to be an X on his chest, he was still half standing and holding up his shirt when he asked. "How would muggles know how that feels?"

"You don't know about transplants?" Hermione was shocked.

Everyone but Harry shook their heads.

Hermione almost let her head drop onto the table… all she wanted was for them to sign the damn paper, but she explained. "In the muggle world, there are limitations on how much damage they can repair for organs. So they have a system where people can register to donate their bodies if they die young in some unforeseeable way. Then if someone else has a bad heart, they will take the donated one, and put it in the sick person."

Everyone looked disgusted, but also amazed.
"Wicked, that's amazing! I had no idea muggles could do that." Ron's eyes were wide.

Hermione almost laughed at his reaction. "Well yes, but I doubt wizards would need to transplant if they used Dark potions. They can fix almost any damage with the right ingredients. I think a donation system should be set up for the Wizarding World. So if someone dies in a potions accident or something, their body can be used to save countless lives. I think I will try and set that system up if this group succeeds in its goals. Of course using the magic without a license, or using a body that was not donated will be outlawed."

"We are going to change everything…" Neville didn't seem aware that he had spoken out loud but his words held a lot of meaning. Everyone silently thought about it for a few moments, and the weight of what they were doing settled in.

"OK!" Hermione clapped her hands causing everyone to startle. "I am going to explain the contract and then you can agree and sign, or not agree and be Obliviated."

"I agree," Luna said airily, she sounded more like herself then she had in a long time.

Hermione couldn't hold back the giggle this time. Her friends were so strange, in a good way. "Let me explain first."

"If you must." Luna acted as if she gave permission for the explanation.

Hermione stood back up, and cleared her throat. "This contract is much like the one for the DA except stronger, and virtually inescapable. If you break this contract you won't just get pockmarks labeling you a snitch, you will be incapacitated."

The gravity of the agreement was heavy. Hermione took a moment to let the information sink in for everyone before explaining more. "The blood from Harry, powers this contract, and your blood tethers you to it. The contract only says that you will not speak of this group to anyone but others who have signed this contract, or anything spoken about at meetings. It will also protect your thoughts to an extent, but a determined Legilimens could probably get through. If you break the contract, the core magic in Harry’s blood, will flow down the magic your blood uses to tie you to the contract, and knock you out until you can be collected by another member."

"And this will be signed by every member that joins?" Ginny asked.
Hermione nodded. "Yes, until we find a better method. We are researching a way of testing loyalty rather than using force like this. What we truly want, is a way of evaluating people's feelings. Our current theory is tying everyone to an object that constantly monitors the members resolve rather than threatening them. Our future hope is to be able to approach wavering members and offer aid, or a way out peacefully."

"We will be helping develop this method?" Neville looked like he wanted that option now.

"Yes, we can use all the help we can get." Hermione said while pulling out a small blade, a metal dish, and a quill. "OK, who first?"

Almost everyone leaned back like a kid being shown a shot. In contrast, the twins started pushing each other out of the way to be the first to sign.

"Hermione, I want my scar on my face! My left cheek." One twin requested, while shoving the other back by his face.

Harry laughed, while Ron pressed the heel of his hand to his forehead and sighed. "There won't be a scar. We use the Leighis Song to heal it." He explained.

"Really?" Neville perked up at the name of the spell. "Gran told me about that. Best healing spell for physical wounds. She said it was lost long ago, but that even the deepest wounds would only leave pink new skin, and unlike other spells it can put blood back and everything."

"Yeah, it does if you sing it a certain way. It's wicked. It probably was lost, but we found it in this house." Harry's eyes lit up while talking about the spell. He couldn't explain it, but ever since he started using core magic he felt more connected to it. Like Magic was meant for him. After almost draining himself helping Snape, he could almost feel the magic in him moving. It had started when he woke up, but has been getting stronger, along with his sore bones.

The twin that made it to the front first held out his hand. Hermione made a small cut on his palm and held it over the dish. After a few drops fell, she healed the cut.

"Now use the blood, and this quill, and sign your whole name, and don't even try to cheat because the paper will know." She instructed the twin.
He nodded, dipped the quill and signed, Frederick Septimus Weasley. The shining wet blood bloomed with soft white light for a moment, then a thin white thread of magic connected from Fred's chest to the paper, and from there to Harry's chest. It stayed visible briefly then vanished, leaving the blood signature dry.

Each member came forward. Hermione would cut their palm, they would bleed onto the dish, she would heal them, and then they used the blood to sign their name. Hermione would banish the blood from the dish and quill to start over. When everyone was finished, and seated, Harry moved forward to the front of the room.

"Welcome to Phoenix Method." He smiled.

oOoOo

Snape, and Sybill sat alone in the Professor's lounge. Each was sipping a cup of Severus's special brew that Sybill liked so much. Snape was staring at the table in silence, their tea time was almost over, and he had gotten no information. Tonight was the first meeting with Potter, and he wanted to see if he could squeeze anything more out of the crazy woman beforehand.

Unfortunately for Severus, the universe had no news for him. Snape held back a snarl that wanted to slip from his throat. He stood up, the action was Sybil's queue to stand as well.

"Thank you for the tea Severus, lovely as usual." Sybill pushed her cup slightly away as she spoke.

Severus nodded.

The sound of the lounge door opening, caused both Professors to turn. They watched a brightly smiling Professor Jigger waltzing in.

Snape held back a long sigh. He hated the new professor. It wasn't because the man was a poor teacher, he was actually a very good potions master. Snape hated him because he had trouble hating him. Everything the man did was in line with personalities Snape disliked… but he didn’t dislike him.
He was cheerful, and enjoyed teaching. The man could find a good thing in the aftermath of a tornado. The worst part was that his personality seemed to rub off on Severus, He tried to hate Jigger when the man was present, and found he couldn't. When Jigger was out of his sight, he had no problem hating him, he would think back on their interactions, and berate himself for being so soft. But as soon as the man walked into the room Severus held his ire down, and was polite.

"Why hello Professor Snape!" Jigger bounced on his heels while he greeted Snape with a big smile.

Snape could feel his irritation rise up. He invited it to come forth to cut his foe down with words, but as soon as it reached the surface, it sputtered out. Jigger's big dumb smile won again, and Severus found he couldn't be angry.

"I shall be going, I have a class shortly." Sybill announced in a tone that suggested she was talking to herself more than the occupants of the room. She floated away out the door, and the men watched her leave silently.

When the door click closed, Jigger moved to the coffee and tea station. "How are you enjoying DADA, Professor Snape?" He asked conversationally, while fixing himself a drink.

Snape raised his Occlumency shields high, and pressed them tight to his mind. He could feel his annoyance rising again. Snape held his temper on his own this time, he did not trust this man. It started when they first met, he had a growing suspicion that Jiggers apparent likability was not natural.

"I enjoy it as much as one can enjoy a room full of ignorant children," Snape responded.

Jigger turned around with his cup of coffee in hand, and a smile still firmly on his face. When he saw Severus's stern expression he faltered a bit. "Don't look so stiff Professor, it's not good for your health," he joked.

Severus held his Occlumency shields close when Jigger spoke directly to him. He felt a calm sensation brush his shield, and some of it trickled through, but Snape managed to remain surly. Just has he had thought, there was something literally infectious about Jigger's happiness.

When Snape's demeanor didn't shift at all, Jigger's smile became fixed, and he tilted his head as if remembering something. "Well I must be off, I have a bright young student that requested some office time for questions. Young Miss Granger." He said, with his normal excitement.
Snape made no response and kept his eyes on the man until the door clicked shut. He pulled a potion from his pocket and drank it. His recovery from the Dark Lord's wrath was taking more time than he would have liked.

oOoOo

Harry was kneeling in front of his trunk shifting through his things, and collecting what he thought he might need for his meeting with Snape. He put his invisibility cloak and marauder's map in his bag. The Half-Blood Prince's potion book sat at the bottom of his trunk, and Harry considered bringing it, but decided not to. He wasn't sure why he suddenly thought to bring it, it wouldn't be useful at all.

He snapped his trunk closed and left for the common room. Ron was alone in front of the fire, sulking. He had been like this for the past half an hour. Harry knew his friend was upset because he was being left alone on Saturday night, but he was more upset that Hermione was in a meeting with Professor Jigger. Harry dropped his bag on the floor next to the red couch, and flopped down besides Ron.

"Why did you have to get detention tonight?" Ron whined.

Harry laughed. No matter how much Ron grew up he was still whiney and sulky when he wanted to be. "Sorry, but you know Snape." Harry left it at that, he didn't want to get caught being asked questions he couldn't answer because of the Oath.

Ron gave a resigned nod. "I just don't understand why Hermione had to go have a meeting with Jigger on Saturday night. How important can questions about potions be?" Ron was in full whine mode. Harry thought that he was more upset that Hermione was with the professor, than he was about being alone. Ron didn't like Jigger since that first class, and it was obvious Hermione admired the man.

Harry patted Ron on the shoulder. "If you are still up when I get back, I will play a game of chess with you. Beating me always cheers you up." He stood, grabbed his bag, and made his way to the portrait hole.

"It only cheers me up because of how easy it is!" Ron yelled after him.
Harry turned, and made a rude gesture while laughing as the painting of the Fat Lady swung closed. When he was alone in the hallway, his smile faded and he let his arm fall to his side. It was time to go face Snape for his lessons, hopefully it would go better this time. Harry was glad that he had taken the Oath, he didn't know how he would explain this to Ron and Hermione after last year.

Harry slowly made his way down the hall. His footsteps echoed through the empty stone corridor. He would be lying if he said he wasn't nervous. He was very nervous... he had the feeling that these lessons, and the Oath were going to become something big, something that would change him forever.

When Harry descended the first staircase, that went below ground, he could feel as the air cooled. The dungeon always set him on edge, and tonight was no exception. The hair on the back of his neck stood on end. Harry moved so his left side was close to the cold stone walls. He walked carefully so his footsteps made minimal sound and he could hear if anyone came up behind him.

Harry turned the corner into the hallway that held the Slytherin Dorms. At the end of the hall was Snape's office. Even though he taught DADA now, he kept his old office because of his Head of House status. Harry took a deep breath, and moved slowly down the hall. He kept his steps quiet like before, and over the sound of his soft footsteps he heard a strange noise. Harry froze like a rabbit. He looked behind him and saw no one following. After a few moments, he shrugged and started walking again, only to stop when the sound reoccurred.

It was a small shaky whimper. Harry moved to the left where the sound came from, and waited. When it happened again he listened carefully. There were a lot of small nooks in the dungeons and they echoed, but Harry managed to figure out where the sound was coming from. He moved along the wall, creeping with his shoulder to the stone, until he came to the entrance of a small cubby that was a dead end, or Harry had always thought it was a dead end. At the end of the small hall the wall was open to an even smaller pathway, and halfway out of the path was Draco Malfoy.

Harry considered running before Malfoy saw him, but when he looked closer it was obvious something was wrong. Malfoy was on his hands and knees halfway out of the passage, he was shaking, and panting, like he had been running with all his might until he couldn't anymore. Harry noted that the Slytherin was wearing a third set of braided ropes. He moved farther into the nook with soft steps, for one crazy moment he thought he should be carrying a big stick just in case.

Malfoy's shoulders stiffened when Harry got too close to cover the sound of his footsteps.

Carefully, the blond head tipped up, and his grey eyes locked onto Harry. He didn't sneer or try to stand up, he just let his head drop back down like it was too heavy to hold up. A low bitter laugh shook Malfoy's shoulders.

"Come to take me down when I'm weak, Potter?" He spat.
Harry didn't know what to say. He wasn't sure why he even stopped for Malfoy, he hated the blond git.

"Well, come on, do your worst..." Malfoy's weak voice choked at the end of his thought. His hand reached up from the floor, and clutched his chest. Through clenched teeth, he let out a small sound of pain.

Harry began to move forward, he hated Malfoy, but there was something very wrong. Before he could move two steps the floor began to shake, the stones began to waver like they were liquid, and dust fell from the mortar. Harry put his arms out to steady himself, his heart rate rose as strong magic filled the passage.

Malfoy made a strangled sound, and both his hands grabbed the front of his robes over his own chest. He heaved a huge breath, and let it out slowly. The shaking began to subside and the floor became solid again. Just as suddenly as it all began, it ended, and Malfoy stood up. He looked to be in perfect health. He brushed the mortar dust off his clothes, and looked directly at the shaken Gryffindor with a steady gaze, then for a moment Malfoy's grey eyes wavered. He looked like he might tell Harry what just happened. Harry knew something wasn't right, but for the first time he thought that maybe, Malfoy needed help, rather than being the cause of the problem.

"Are you..." Harry began to ask.

Malfoy walked forward, and roughly bumped his shoulder into Harry as he passed. "Watch where you're going Potter," he sneered, as he turned to corner.

The sound of grinding stone, indicated the passage in the dead end was closing now that no one was in the way. Harry wasn't looking, he rushed around the corner, and stopped in the empty hall. Malfoy had vanished.

Harry decided he needed to come down here with more time, and explore with the map. There were a lot of shortcuts in the maze below the school.

"What just happened...?" Harry asked the empty hall, his question echoed back unanswered.

oOoOo
"Are we living a life that is safe from harm? Of course not. We never are. But that's not the right question. The question is: are we living a life that is worth the harm?"

-Night Vale

AN- Escape. Go to the place that makes you feel unjudged. Escaping is what I do in this white place. I do not appreciate the dinge, that is brought here by intolerance. This is a place where no one should fear harm, and where life is always worth living. No one will be judged in my domain. This is what I tell myself, the illusion of control. It is in reality, what I wish, and I look to you for fulfillment. Come to this place, and bring joy. Joy. More joy.

I would like for you to consider different types of joy. The joy of new life, brought into the world by you, or one you love. The joy of a soft, warm, blanket fresh out of the dryer. The quiet joy of coming home to a silent house, and filling the darkness with the light of a computer screen. The joy of time to yourself, and of time with friends. The joy of having free movement, and free thoughts. The joy of combining our thoughts, into a slowly forming collective consciousness, in a manner that hurts no one, despite the freedom to do so…

This message was brought to you by…

-Palmolive: Tough on grease, soft on NOTHING.

Recollected 5/30/2017

Beta’d 6/5/2017 minijaxter :)
Don't Rush, Do Drink. You are Normal

Chapter Notes

AN- I have a confession to make… I am not a self-motivated person. I love all my reviewers and revel in your words. So please let me know what you think. I know you are out there, I see how many people follow this story it makes me happy!

In other news, I am fully moved into my new apartment that has an entire ceiling that is in one piece. It is warm and dry! Those are two things I think a good living space requires.

THERE IS A TIME SKIP MID CHAPTER, WE ARE GETTING CLOSE PEOPLE!

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

For those who asked, the Quotes at the end of the chapters are from the podcast called Welcome to Night Vale. It is a wonderful show that is like public broadcast radio and H.P. Lovecraft had a baby.

Beta note - i have been listening to night vale for a while and i may have fell in love with deets, just a little bit, when i saw the quotes at the end of each chapter. :) - minijaxter

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)
Harry arrived at Snape's office door five minutes late. He didn't want to delay the professor any longer, but he also didn't want an earful about his current tardiness, so he tentatively knocked.

"Enter." Snape's deep voice responded almost immediately. Harry thought he sounded a bit irritated but it was hard to tell with Snape.

Harry opened the door only enough to slide his thin body through, and closed it without a sound. He stood in front of the door with his hands behind his back and waited.

Snape was sitting behind the desk. It was a larger desk than the one in his classroom, and it was the only furniture in the room besides the chair meant for students. The walls were covered in a mixture of Dark Detectors and Potion ingredients in jars. Harry didn't think the man could ever completely stop being a potions master. Snape was slashing a student paper with red ink, and did not look up at Harry who started rocking on his feet. After a few moments Harry opened his mouth and took a breath to ask a question.

"Do not speak, Potter." Snape commanded without looking up or pausing his quill.

Harry snapped his mouth closed, and glared. He thought Snape wanted to be out of his life debt, but he didn't seem concerned. Harry knew that by being late he had made it easier for the Professor to take control of the situation.

"Do not glare at me. You, were the one who was late," Snape said, while covering half the front page of the essay he was grading with a large D. His expression projected his thoughts, he obviously believed the writer of the paper to be an unredeemable idiot.

Harry wanted to know how Snape pulled off that trick. How did he know what Harry was doing
Snape piled all the essays neatly, and moved them to the side. He took his time and was methodical. Harry recognized this as another tactic to dominate their interaction. Snape stood up and walked to the door. When he left the office he kept the door ajar for Harry to follow. Harry sighed, apparently the tactics were working, because he trekked after the Potions master like a trained puppy. The man could have asked Harry to come with him, but no, he had to be dramatic. Control issues. How did Harry not see these subtle Slytherin tactics before?

In the Hall, they walked in silence for a minute before Snape stopped in front of the same painting as the night they made the Oath. The snake hissed hello to Harry, and he smiled in return. Snape whispered his password, and the portrait opened to the same dark living area as last time. But, upon entering this time, Snape waved his wand and the torches lit, along with the fireplace. Now Harry could see that the darkness had been concealing a kitchen with a small table. There were also two doors, Harry assumed it was a bathroom and a bedroom.

Snape indicated that Harry should sit, he chose the overstuffed chair closest to the door. The Potions Master remained standing.

"Tacet," Snape said smoothly.

"Arx," Harry replied.

Their magic filled the room in a gust of outward wind like. Snape's shoulders visibly relaxed.

"Why were you late?" He asked in a cool tone that meant Harry better watch his cheek.

Harry wondered if he should say anything. He was supposed to be keeping away from Malfoy, and Snape wasn't exactly understanding. His new perceptive mind was also telling him this was leverage. He looked at Snape and noted the lack of hatred in the man's eyes. Maybe Snape never hated him as much as he let on, maybe part of it was an act? Or possibly it was just age and time that softened the man a bit. Harry decided to give Snape the benefit of the doubt and to see if good faith would keep them both civil.

"When I was in the hallway that has the entrance to the Slytherin Dorms, I heard a strange sound. When I followed it, I found Malfoy coming out of a secret passage." Harry tried to sound like he was confident he'd done nothing wrong, but something about Snape always made him feel guilty. Damn the man for cultivating that knee jerk reaction.
"Is that so? I find it interesting, that you described that hallway as the one with my houses dorms. Now, why would that be? When the entrances are kept secret." Snape slowly drawled the sentence. Harry thought he sounded more amused than angry, but this was Snape so who knows.

"I might have been in the Slytherin dorms before…" Harry didn't meet Snape's eyes as he admitted his misbehavior.

"Ah, well. That would explain it." Snape didn't seem to know what to say. He looked a bit thrown by Harry's honesty.

Harry took the momentary pause caused by his truthfulness and continued his story before Snape could think too long about it. "Malfoy didn't look very well. He was on the floor and panting. Then I felt all this magic and everything was shaking… Malfoy looked like he was in pain, and suddenly it stopped and he was fine."

Snape narrowed his eyes critically, "And that is all that occurred?"

"Yeah, Malfoy insulted me and left." Harry considered telling Snape about the strange moment when he thought Malfoy was going to ask for help, but decided to keep it to himself. He might be wrong.

Snape moved to the kitchen, "Since you must obviously know something is wrong, there is no point denying it. I have been trying to get that boy to talk to me, but he has been very adamant about staying quiet." Snape smacked his hand down on the counter. "Do not seek him out, but if for any reason he goes to you for help… do not assume the worst. Come directly to me."

Harry nodded. "OK." Now he was certain Malfoy was in some sort of trouble, and it probably involved Voldemort. Everything generally did. That psychopath was like a barnacle on Harry's life.

Snape opened a long thin cabinet, and pulled out a large bottle of brown liquid. Then he moved to a smaller cabinet above the sink, and retrieved two glass tumblers that he took with him to the sitting area. He placed the glasses, and the bottle on a low table that was situated in front of the fireplace. Snape sat in the matching chair on the other side of the couch.

Harry looked closer at the bottle and was shocked when he read the label. It was Firewhiskey… what was going on?
Snape poured three fingers into each glass, and slid one over to his student. Harry would have suspected a trap. Get him drunk and report it to Dumbledore to get him in trouble, but the Oath made that impossible. Harry picked the glass up but did not drink any of it yet, he just held it loosely in his hand.

Snape knocked back half of his glass in one go. He put the glass on the table and leaned forward. His elbows rested on his knees as he let his forearms hang down. Harry felt kind of uncomfortable seeing his professor in such a relaxed position, like watching someone trying to do stand up comedy and falling flat. It was very out of character.

Snape took a long breath, and looked up at Harry. "I want to start tonight, by being rather honest with you." He stated bluntly. This explained the drinking, Snape being honest with a Potter required it.

Harry felt his stomach tingle. He wasn't sure what was going on but he felt like this was going to change everything. He nodded to let Snape know he was ready.

"I don't like you." Snape put up his hand to halt Harry's response, and continued. "I don't hate you either. I did hate you based on opinions I formed on my own, that happened to revolve around your father and his friends. After the incident with the pensieve... I hated you more. Until this year started, and I realized you never told anyone what you saw. For the first time, I saw past my rage, and realized that it truly blinded me. If you were just like your father was at your age, you would have told everybody." He looked Harry directly in the eyes, and Harry couldn't look away. When there was no invasion of his mind he relaxed, this was a show of trust he realized. No wonder Snape wanted to control the interaction so badly, he was about to be open, and vulnerable.

"So, you're saying that I did the exact opposite of what you expected, and you had to reevaluate? There has to be more to it than that." Harry was skeptical. After all, years of hatred, it didn't just end.

Snape finished his glass and sighed. "I said I don't hate you, but I definitely do not like you. I understand now, that you have some sort of honor, and that knowledge alone allows me to be civil."

Harry found that this, more relaxed Snape, was rather pleasant. His blunt honesty was refreshing. Harry was very aware that without the Oath Snape would be his normal uptight and prickly self. He was sure that the Professor had another reason to make the Oath, something that he was hiding, but whatever the reason was, it led Snape to try and gain Harry's trust. Picking up his glass he pulled the entire drink in a single gulp, and forced himself to swallow. This was his first time drinking
hard liquor and he had no idea it would burn so much. Harry coughed, and sputtered but managed to keep the drink down.

Snape grunted something like a laugh and refilled Harry's glass. "The first time I tried to teach you the mental arts, there were many obstacles hindering me from teaching you properly. I will admit that my anger... was the first problem. As I said, it made me blind, and I now understand how dangerous that is. I understand what I did was a violation of your mind, it was wrong, and I could have cost us the entire war... and it did cost us a high price." Snape truly looked regretful. His eyes told Harry that he understood how huge his mistake was. He had the feeling that Sirius's death may not have hurt Snape on a personal level, but it certainly drove home how much he risked over his own anger.

Harry wasn't as upset about the violent mental attacks as he probably should have been. It was truly not the worst thing that had happened to him, and he knew through personal experience that people made mistakes when blinded by an emotion. He was part of the reason Sirius was dead as well. Harry's lack of Occlumency was the more upsetting outcome of the mistake. It could have cost them a lot more than one man's life, if Voldemort had killed Harry, or gotten his hands on the prophecy, they would all be dead. Harry was upset about many things pertaining to Snape, but he clamped down on them, he needed the man's help.

Harry did not break eye contact, and nodded. It was all he needed to do, for Snape to know he accepted the closest thing to an apology he would get.

"The other problem last year, was options. I was, and still am, the only option. Dumbledore's fear of Voldemort possessing you is a limiting issue. Unfortunately, the mind arts are something like a born talent for me, and I have never had to have formal training. Because of this, I didn't have a clue how to teach someone from the beginning." Again Snape just looked at Harry until he nodded before he continued.

Snape finished another glass, and Harry followed suit. Both of their glasses were refilled.

"This time I have a new approach that I would never have tried before, because of my hatred for you. But now I am willing to give you a chance, and along with the Oath, I feel secure in this decision." He explained.

Harry's entire body felt warm, and pleasantly numb. All the pain from his magic fighting the curse was gone. His head felt fuzzy, but in a different and better way. "What kinda approach?" Harry asked before finishing his third glass.

Snape picked up his glass, and took a small sip rather than knocking it back as he had done the others. He leaned forward, and filled Harry's glass again. "The approach is one that is commonly
used between trusted student and teacher. I will have to create an area in your mind, where I can help you build your barriers, and teach you how to use them from the inside out. The reason I was unwilling to try this previously, was because it is very difficult to create that area of your mind, if I hate you, and you hate me."

Harry drank half of his fourth glass while he mulled over Snape's words. "But you said 'o dun hate me any'or." He slurred a bit, he was aware that he was probably a bit drunk, but not that drunk. Probably.

"Yes, that is something I said, isn't it?" Snape let his sarcasm smother the words. He raised a brow at his intoxicated student.

Harry nodded, as if they had just come to a profound conclusion. "An' I dun hate 'ou!" He proclaimed.

"That, is what I was hoping you would say." Snape took another sip of his drink, a small amount to savor.

Harry wasn't finished explaining his non hatred of Snape. "I mean 'ow could I hate 'ou when after I went to Grimm'old place I knew 'ou had tried. 'ou tri'd to save Surius."

Snape nodded solemnly, "I did, I was unfortunately, too late."

Harry nodded sadly in drunken understanding, and downed the last of his fourth tumbler, it was becoming much easier to drink. He only vaguely realized that he had let Snape know he was at Headquarters over the summer. Snape reached over, and filled his glass again before he explained more about the new teaching method.

"Creating the space in your mind can take a long time, it requires a certain level of trust, and the student has to be very relaxed and... accepting. Once we have created the space in your mind for me, we will begin building. This part will take time, and there are no shortcuts. We will have to get to know each other, so we can form the barriers best suited to you." Snape waited for his drunk student to catch up mentally. When Harry nodded he continued.

"The very first breakthrough is the part that takes the longest for the smallest result. I have to make a small wedge to squeeze through, this will imprint me into your mind, so your barriers won't reject me while we make them. This will also do the same to my mind, in regards to you…" Snape let the
last comment hang for a moment. If Harry were less drunk he might have been more shocked. "For some, this can take many weeks of trust exercises and meditation. Fortunately, there are alternate ways to create relaxation, acceptance, and trust. All I needed to know was that your hatred was gone for this to be safe enough to try." Snape sipped his glass while he waited for Harry to catch up again.

Harry was nodding the entire time Snape spoke. He picked up his glass while still nodding, and drew half the drink in. suddenly he stopped, and pulled the glass away so he could looked down at the amber liquid. He looked back up at Snape, back at the drink and, then back into black eyes.

"ou triked me…" he slurred.

Snape leaned back, and crossed his arms, "indeed I did." He raised a brow, "I thought it prudent. If I explained to you while sober, that this process will make me immune to your mental protections, I highly doubt you would agree. You are also very relaxed, which is important to the process."

Harry found that he had trouble being mad at the moment. His drunk logic thought it sounded OK. Snape would also be unable to block Harry's mind after this process as well. He just shrugged and finished what was in his glass.

Snape pulled the bottle away when Harry reached for it again. "I think you have had enough, for what I am planning."

Harry pouted and slumped back in his chair.

"I need you to understand, that this is not nearly as safe as the traditional method, but it has been known to be enough to work. I will use Legilimens to chip a very small pocket in your mind, that I will use to start from next lesson. If you are not completely open to the process, it could cause difficulties..." Snape was very serious as he explained. "You may also experience strange sensations, I have read reports of visions, normally pertaining to the instructor."

Harry pulled his eyes away from the bottle, and looked the Professor in the eyes. "I understand." He managed to say without slurring, which indicated he was taking this seriously.

Snape seemed satisfied, "do you give me permission, to invade your mind with the intent of creating an opening through which I can teach you the mind arts?"
The drinks were hitting Harry like a truck, but he understood he needed to focus and answer Snape. He shrugged his shoulders in agreement, "Ya' sure, why not."

Snape pinched the bridge of his nose and sighed. "I may have given you too much..." he muttered.

"I dun thin' so. I feel pr'tty good." Harry swayed in his seat as he spoke. His smile was big, and goofy. He felt like it had been lifetimes since he didn't hurt from the curse. Right now he was pain free, and all worrying thoughts were far away.

He saw Snape get up, and drag the coffee table so that it was in front his chair. Snape sat down on the table directly across from Harry.

"Look, at me," Snape commanded.

Harry was drunk enough to instinctively respond to the demand. His green eyes met black. Nothing happened at first, then slowly, like a snake, Harry felt the pressure slither into his mind. It wasn't like before, this wasn't a forceful invasion. Snape was sneaking up to the door of his mind, and knocking lightly for entrance. Harry felt his mind relax and open up. As soon as Snape crossed the threshold things began to change. He could feel the man chipping out a small space for himself, but he could also feel Snape leaving small parts of himself with every chip. It was like banging two identical rocks together, both would get scratched and chipped. This is probably why the student tended to hallucinate about the Instructor, because a small part of them was being deposited.

Harry was aware that he was seeing both the man in front of him, and an aspect of the man at the same time. The image of Snape began to change, as Harry's mind superimposed its new understanding of him. Everything slowed down, as the dark iris of Snape's eyes expanded to cover the white, until there was only black. The skin around his eyes became darker creating looming pits. Harry wondered if this was similar to tripping on muggle drugs. He watched as Snape's skin became ashen, and speckled with light grey dots.

Harry felt something in his mind crack. The man in front of him sprouted feathers, his nose became a beak, and his arms wings. Suddenly, Harry was looking at the largest, and most elegant dark owl. It fanned its huge wingspan before him, and crouched down on its razor sharp talons while its wings arched beautifully above its lowered head. It opened its ivory beak, and let loose a ferocious screech. Harry felt the sound vibrate through his chest, and pierce his ear drums. The great bird was screaming its strength, bellowing that it was a predator, and would not submit. It would fly above you with silent wings, and go for the kill, instant death. Harry felt true fear strike his heart. This creature in front of him was stealth, and powerful fury.
Harry blinked, and everything was back to normal, and the bird was gone. He was aware of movement, and sound directly in front of his face, but couldn't respond. Did any of that really happen? Either way, he never wanted to be on Snape's bad side again. His much more sober mind finally focused on the fingers snapping under his nose. How long had they been sitting here?

"Potter, pay attention!" Snape was practically growling.

Harry blinked again, and shook his head a bit. "That was… intense."

Snape nodded. "Yes, because of the rushed manner we used to create the connection, I had to utilize the strongest part of myself in order to succeed. That part of a person's mind is the essence of who they are. It is generally interpreted by the person seeing it, as an image. Normally an animal."

Harry thought he understood. Snape had used the strongest part of his mind to break into Harry's and create the pocket he needed. Harry's mind interpreted the information as an image. Harry wondered if Snape had the same experience. He wanted to ask but was afraid of what his innermost self would be.

"You turned into an owl. The biggest, and most fierce owl I have ever seen." Harry found the words slipping out. He needed to say it, but he didn't think it was possible to convey exactly what he experienced.

Snape only nodded knowingly. "As a master of the mental arts, I have looked into myself deeply enough to have seen it as well. It is a Greater Sooty Owl. Now, I am positive we succeeded in our goal." He handed Harry a pearl white potion in a vial. "Take this with you, and drink it in the morning. It will resolve your hangover."

Harry accepted the potion and stood up. He still felt drunk, but the experience he just had knocked much of it out of him. Now he was just dizzy, and tired. He walked to the door with the image of the great bird still covering most of his mind. He didn't have the energy to ask any more questions, he only wanted to sleep.

"I will see you next Saturday," Snape said while still sitting on the table, and watching Harry leave.

"Goodnight, sir." Harry opened the door, and left before his Professor could respond.
As soon as Potter closed the door Snape let his shoulders sag. He reached up with a shaking hand, and ran it through his hair. His entire body was trembling in the aftermath of what he had just seen. He knew he would see some type of vision, similar to the one Potter had. An image of the boy's inner self. What Snape had not expected, was the form the image had taken. Something was very wrong. Potter's form was not unheard of, it was something that happened very rarely, but his was different.

Deep inside Potter, was a creature of immortality. Most would automatically assume it was a phoenix, since he was the beacon of light, but Potter was apparently much too dark for that. Deep inside the boy, Snape had seen a Thestral, but it was one like he had never seen before.

Thestrals normally have a somewhat reptilian face, but Potter's looked much more snake like. All down the horse's back were long spine like scales that replaced its mane, and stood on end when it was angry. Its eyes were glowing, bright green, and slitted. Its entire body had fine black scales that were only noticeable in the light. There was a chance that the boy was born with the potential to have an inner Pegasus, like his mother, but the moment his one year old self watched her die for him, it changed. Then beyond that, something had warped Potter's inner self into a creature that didn't even exist.

Ignoring the extra snake-like features, the Thestral seemed to suit the boy well. They have a very gentle side, they are very loyal, and protective, but also vicious. They can also not be seen unless the person had seen death. Snape could see how it would be hard to relate to Potter without having lost something. Snape found it irritating how much he had in common with the brat. He wanted to hate the boy, or at least continue to dislike him, but after the impression he received upon creating the mind pocket, he knew Potter wasn't like his father.

Snape sighed, and poured himself another drink. He had a feeling that over time he was going to learn many things about the boy he would have rather not known. Things that would make it impossible to continue thinking of him negatively. He might as well indulge in some negative thinking while he could.

It had been almost four weeks since her son started school. She was only glad he was away from the monster that was her burden now.

Narcissa stood on the edge of a dark cliff over the cold ocean. Her back faced the plummeting
drop, and she looked high above her at the triangular prison that held her husband. The small island of Azkaban was made of only jagged black stone, all the life had been sucked away by the Dementors. It was cold, and damp, Narcissa pulled her shawl closer. She held a wicker basket on one arm, and her wand in her other hand. She had gotten special permission from the ministry to visit her husband. She knew this was all a part of the Dark Lord's plan, but she was happy to be able to see her Lucius, even if he was the only one not escaping tonight.

Narcissa cast her Patronus, a fluffy fox sprang from her wand in a burst of silver light. She began to walk, beckoning her fox to follow. The steep crooked stairs did not dissuade her from her goal, and she climbed. It seemed the steps might go on forever. Even though she knew what she was about to do was overall a terrible thing, she couldn't help being relieved that this was the big plan Voldemort had for her, and not something far worse. He already took her as some sort of pet. He tried to train her, and enjoyed making her hurt people. Narcissa shook the thoughts from her head. She needed to be focused.

She arrived before the huge, black, wooden doors. They were four times as tall as she was, and had huge iron straps bolted to the wood, holding the boards together. Each board looked like they were cut from massive trees. She walked right up to the doors, and held up a small metal plate with a rune inscribed on it. The metal gave off a red light followed by a loud click. The grinding of the rusted hinges was awful, but lasted only long enough for the doors to open a four foot gap. Narcissa entered, and the doors slowly shut behind her, so slowly they seemed to be giving her time to change her mind and run.

She was left in the dark, with only her fluffy fox to light the way. The small animal wound around her feet before trotting down the corridor. The silvery light bounced off the wet stone walls. They were slick with slime and mildew. The smell of the prison was terrible, it was mold, and human waste. The Dementors stayed away from her and her fox. The prisoners that she passed got a moment of warm relief and their moans filled the air as she walked past taking the light with her.

Even with her Patronus, Narcissa felt cold all the way to her bones. The stone floor slanted slightly, creating spiral that went upwards, and also downwards. There were no windows, but she knew that the inner wall was all that separated her from the pit of Dementors in the middle of the tower. The tower was as deep as it was tall, and Narcissa only had her fox to tell her if her husband was above or below the ground. When she started walking upward she was almost overwhelmed with relief. The bottom of the tower was the most horrible. It was where her sister Bellatrix, and cousin Sirius had been kept before their escapes.

Her fox Patronus stopped in front of a cell about halfway up the tower. It sat and waited for its mistress to catch up. Before she was in front of the cell, pale white hands came through the bars reaching out for her Patronus.

"My Narcissa." A weak, and pleading voice whispered from the dark cavernous room.
Narcissa sped up her steps, placed the basket on the floor and dropped to her knees in front of the cell grabbing the thin hands groping at the empty space. She looked at her husband and was relieved to find sanity in his eyes. He was thin and dirty, his hair unwashed and matted, but he was still her husband.

"Lucius." Narcissa breathed the name with relief. Her eyes became glassy with tears, she blinked away the burn, now was the time to be strong.

Lucius's hands clenched hers with the little strength he had. His head was bowed so that his dirty hair hid his face. Narcissa could hear small sounds and knew her husband was covering his tears. The straining, and heavy breathing stabbed into her soul. Her strong husband who stood between her and the Dark Lord was reduced to weeping on the stone floor of Azkaban.

Narcissa leaned as close to the bars as she could to speak. She knew no one would overhear them, no living guards came into the prison unless they had to and the Dementors sucked so much magic up that all monitoring spells failed.

"Listen to me. I am here under the orders of the Dark Lord. He is preparing to break his death eaters out, but... you have to stay a little longer. He has plans to ensure you walk free, rather than as a fugitive." She spoke with confidence. She wanted to reassure her broken husband.

Lucius's head whipped up, and he didn't bother wiping his tears away. Narcissa expected him to be upset he had to stay, but instead he said, "I threw everything away to keep you out of his clutches, and look where we are now. You are here under his direction." His voice wasn't accusing. He knew the reality of the situation, and was only sad it had come to this.

Narcissa held his hands tighter, and nodded. "It is true that I am doing his bidding, but I have not been marked, and there are still plans in motion. There is still hope."

Lucius didn't ask about the plan. He had faith in his wife. He felt hope for the first time since he was thrown in this hell hole. He would be patient, he would walk free, and he would keep his family safe. Narcissa drew away from her husband, her absence caused him so much pain he couldn't keep it from his face.

"I must go, and fulfill my role. I will leave my Patronus with you until I am finished." She was shaking, and couldn't stop. Lucius reached out and pleaded with her not to expose herself to the Dementors. She squeezed her eyes shut, turned away, and picked up her burden. "I must go." She whispered, unable to look her love in the eye. She sped off down the hall.
The moment she left the sphere of her fox’s protection she was smothered by cold dread. She could feel the monsters pressing up against the wall on her left as she ran to the top of the tower. Her fingers were becoming numb, and her breath burned in her chest. The Dementors were in a frenzy over the fresh emotions she held. When she broke the surface, and met with the top of the tower she dropped to her knees under the grey sky. There were three bridges, one extending from each wall to a circular platform in the middle of the opening. She struggled to the platform, and from her basket she pulled one of two candles she created. Cleansing candles, that would whip the prison clean of the Dementors thick influence long enough for the Dark Lord to impose his will, and take them for himself.

She planted the candle, and lit it. She cast a protective ward to keep the wind from blowing it out. It took everything she had to get back on her feet. The Dementors were becoming bold. They were swirling out of the top of the tower, some only ten feet from her. She could feel the pull on her soul as they reached out with their rotting mouths for the essence of who she was. For a moment she almost let them take her, let them end this awful suffering she called life. The image of her son, and husband flickered in her mind's eye, and she felt renewed. The dark creatures recoiled a few inches, and she gathered the will to run back down the tower.

She ignored the cries of Lucius as she ran by his cell on her way down to the pit. It was painful to run into the warm embrace of her Patronus, only to rip it away with her own foot falls. The lower she went the colder she became, the more she despaired. At the very bottom she saw six cells, two on each of the three walls. There was another circular platform in the middle with stone landings stretching to each cell. The spaces in the floor opened up to a bottomless pit filled with the majority of the Dementors. They swooped in and out of the floor freely and up into the center of the tower, where the walls separated them from the other prisoners. People say that this pit was where Dementors were born, it is why Azkaban is here, and why the worst criminals are at the bottom of the tower where the walls did not separate them from the demons.

Narcissa felt as if she had been engulfed by a Dementor's, every part of her was shivering as if she was left in a snowstorm without any clothes. Below the sorrow, and cold, was something more sinister. There was an air of something darker than the soul eating monsters below her feet, and swirling above her head. She knew she was feeling the only emotions left to those in the pit. Without their happy memories these people were left with only that which brought them to this fate. They were monsters in their own right.

Narcissa pulled out the second candle, and placed it directly in the middle just as she did with the one at the top. The candles would be able to spread their magic, and meet in the center of the hollow tower. She lit the candle, and cast the same weak ward for the wind. All she wanted was to collapse here on the floor and never move, but she couldn't. Her family needed her. She heaved herself up, her lovely robes covered in grime. She managed to make it back to her Patronus, and collapsed.

She lay on her back with her husband in her sight, while allowing the silvery light into her body and mind, she only needed a moment… just a moment. Lucius reached out, and she grasped his
hand. They were together in the warmth for now.

"I must go soon," she said between heavy breaths. Lucius didn't respond, she understood it was hard.

"In 24 hours the cleansing will be complete, and the Dark Lord will come. Remember there is hope in unlikely places." She explained, and then fell silent. She held his hand.

She only needed a moment.

Later, the darkness of her mind was broken, she didn't know how long she had been on the stone floor, and she didn't remember falling asleep. The light touch of a levitation spell brought her to awareness, as it pulled her away from her husband. She was too tired to call out, and could only hold close the knowledge that Lucius would walk free soon.

oOoOo

Severus sat in the Headmaster's office. He refused all refreshments as usual. The old man was behind his desk with a grave expression. The lines on his face were deep, and his eyes were tired. The news that was just delivered was grave. Severus knew he had to move forward with Potter’s lessons now or never. In the last few meetings they had only been getting used to each other. Severus would invade the pocket in Potter's mind, and they would communicate about mundane topics while the boy adjusted to being in his mindscape. Last lesson, they had moved on to playing chess while practicing, so Potter could learn to be in his mind and aware at the same time. This Saturday he would move on to figuring out what the boy needed to start his barriers. The brat was learning fast, he even started calling Severus by his first name, though he didn't recall telling the boy he could. It did serve to bring them… closer.

Severus had just come from teaching DADA, they were finally onto the Ministry curriculum much to Grangers relief… and Potter had seemed weary, despite the ease with which he consumed the material. He would have to inquire about the boy's state, he couldn't drag the information out like he normally would, he needed the boys trust for Occlumency. He had an idea of what might be causing the problem, but hoped the solutions would arrive soon. Severus refocused on his meeting with Albus.

"When will this news became public?" Severus asked.

Dumbledore removed his half-moon spectacles, and placed them on his desk. His fingers came up to rub the bridge of his nose. "In the morning edition. That is only because I convinced the Minister
that a special evening edition would cause panic in the night.”

Severus nodded. Breakfast at Hogwarts was going to be chaos. The prophet would arrive announcing that the biggest break out in history occurred the morning before. It was currently 3PM and the students would be settling into their last class before dinner, completely unaware of the world evolving outside of their protective bubble of the school. Also unaware of that bubble being corrupted from within. Dumbledore shared a small bit of information that would be on page three, overlooked by the majority of people in the morning. Lucius Malfoy was the only Death Eater that didn’t escape. According to Albus’ source, Lucius stayed on purpose to prove his desire to repent, and prove he never willing served the Dark Lord. It was a bunch of rubbish, but it seemed to be working to sway the ministry. There was already a parole hearing scheduled, and some ‘new evidence’ that was probably fabricated. This was all a part of Voldemort’s plan for sure. Lucius was much more useful with his resources than without.

"How does young Draco fare with his task?" Dumbledore changed subjects, pulling Snape from his brooding. His glasses remained on the desk, a testament to his weariness.

"He will not accept my help. From whisperings between students, I have learned that there seems to be something wrong with him, he is acting strange, but he will not speak with me." Snape relayed the facts, leaving out that his whisperings came from Potter. He was also careful to leave out any detail that could activate the Oath.

"He will eventually succeed. It is the lives of his family he seeks to preserve, and he will not fail. We must ensure he comes out still innocent." Dumbledore placed his hands together on the desk. His eyes closed in a long blink. "I only wish I could keep them all innocent, and safe. If only some had that option." He whispered almost to himself. He truly looked as if he held deep regret.

Severus felt something in his chest stir, the old man was planning something terrible to try and save them all. He still would not reveal this plan in full to anyone. Albus thought his plan was the only way, and Severus thought that was the most arrogant thing he had ever heard. More arrogant than anything the Dark Lord had done.

Dumbledore looked down at his desk. The next words that came from his mouth filled Severus with cold dread, unlike anything he had felt since the night Lily died.

As if the old man needed to confess for his own mental wellness, but still unable to face anyone while speaking, he kept his eyes fixed on the wood of his desk.

"I am only grateful…” He put his good hand to his mouth, and spoke from between his fingers. "I
am grateful, I will be gone before the end comes to pass." He finally looked up, his blue eyes held
immense pain, as they locked with Severus's black eyes. He felt the brush of the Headmasters
mind against his own, and knew he spoke true words. Through the light touch of their thoughts he
could feel Dumbledore's deep caring for his staff, his students, and mostly for Potter. Severus
understood that he didn't mean for these thoughts to come forth, or the previous words to be
spoken. The weakening of Dumbledore's health, along with the guilt, was taking a great toll on the
man. He was desperate for his plan to work out, and had gone to great lengths to manipulate Potter
to ensure it.

"I am sorry to weigh you down with these thoughts Severus. I know you will keep them to
yourself, and not ask me more." Dumbledore placed his glasses back on. He was right, Severus
would not ask more, because he knew it was useless to ask.

Severus offered no words of comfort, and did not verbally acknowledge what Dumbledore had
confessed. He simply allowed his mind to convey his acceptance, and his silence. The Headmaster
may not be evil, and he may have good intentions, but Severus would never fully trust him or his
plans. He could not believe that Dumbledore's way was the only way, or the most likely to
succeed. Especially since he didn't fully understand the plan, and the man would keep it until a
moment before his death.

In Severus's mind, his only true tasks were to fulfill his vow, to keep his charges safe, to keep
Lily's son safe, and assist him in Voldemort's demise. He was not looking forward to his Vow
being fulfilled, he truly did not want the Headmaster to die. He had grown closer than he would
like to admit to the man, even with all their secrets they kept from each other. Even if they didn't
always agree.

"Are you sure you wouldn't like some tea, Severus?" Dumbledore asked more like his usual self.

Severus felt his chest tighten. "Maybe just this once, Albus."

He reached out and accepted the tea.

oOoOo

Potions class had just begun. Harry could hardly sit still in his seat. It was the last class before
dinner, and after their meal was a Phoenix method meeting. The night before, on Tuesday, was his
second meeting with the Headmaster, and Harry couldn't wait to tell everyone the things he learned
about Voldemort. But the deeper reason he was so antsy was how close the ritual date was, today
was October 22nd. He had a meeting with Snape on Saturday the 25th, then it was just a week until
the Friday the 31st.

This was the third PM meeting, and they had not made much progress. Ron had been spending the last couple of days with the marauders map trying to figure out what Malfoy was up to, and Hermione was researching ways to replace the blood contract. Tonight they would put their information together with the others and discuss everything, like a real Order meeting. Speaking of the Order… he needed to contact Remus without arousing suspicion to ask him about the "you know what" in Sirius's will. That was something else to bring up at the meeting.

Harry was still tired, and sore all the time, but he seemed to be adjusting to the problem. Deep down he had a feeling it was a bad sign. No one outside Phoenix Method knew about the ritual, not even Snape. Their lessons were going well, they still snipped and argued, but Harry felt like he was making progress without having his personal thoughts invaded. He was starting to feel like he could truly trust the Potions Master. Maybe…

"HATE!" Professor Jigger yelled, and slammed his hand on the front desk.

Harry was startled from his thoughts by the sudden outburst. Hermione was wide eyed, and taking in every movement of the Professor as he taught. Ron was pretending to take notes while doodling, and pointedly ignoring Hermione's behavior.

"Hate, just like anything that is generalized as bad, has the potential to be used for good." Jigger walked around a small gold cauldron, full of perfectly clear potion, that was a bit more viscous than water. "This little beauty is the only hate potion ever invented." He gestured to the slowly bubbling clear potion.

He turned to face the class completely. "For every love potion there is a specific antidote that clears it from the system. This hate potion can do the same for any love potion, by simply canceling out the effects, rather than clearing it from the system."

Hermione hung on every word the man spoke, and took more detailed notes than she did for any other class. For Hermione that was quite a feat. Harry was slightly worried about her adoration of Professor Jigger, but he shrugged it off, they had bigger things to worry about. Plus she was not anywhere as bad as she was second year with Lockhart.

"It is not an elegant solution, and may not return the user to their previous feelings immediately, but in a pinch it will do. It also worked in the reverse, almost any love potion besides the weakest ones will cancel out this hate potion, but might leave the drinker feeling a bit more affectionate than normal." Jigger chuckled at his own joke.
No one else made a sound, not even Hermione gave a pity laugh. No matter how much she may admire him, the man was just not funny.

Professor Jigger cleared his throat as if to cover the awkwardness. "OK class, we will be brewing this potion in groups since it is the first potion of this caliber you are attempting. Whoever is at your table shall be your partners. Now off you go to collect the ingredients."

Harry, Ron and Hermione smiled at each other. Hermione went off to get the supplies while Harry set up the caldron. Ron took the opportunity to complain, he truly disliked Jigger.

"Do you see the way he seems to love those dark potions? It's not right, mate." He narrowed his eyes.

Harry shrugged, "He seems to love all potions…" he honestly only noticed in the first class, but that had been a family potion, so Harry assumed he was proud.

Ron huffed, "Are you going to be on Hermione's side? She slobbers all over her notes during class." He was over exaggerating. Harry knew she admired the man and she often went to office hours to meet with him, but that was just Hermione being Hermione.

"She's just excited that we have a good professor, she even likes Snape better now because he's a good DADA teacher." Harry rationalized. He knew Ron had a point, but he didn't want his friend to go off the edge like he sometimes did. He could not handle his friends fighting all year.

"Yeah sure… Snape is surprisingly good…" Ron said, with a face like he ate something rotten. He didn't seem completely convinced, but he dropped the subject as Hermione came back to the table with a small blush on her cheeks.

They were halfway through the potion. Ron was helping with some of the prep, but Harry was doing most of it while Hermione added ingredients and stirred.

Harry was getting the juice from the Gurdyroot with the side of his knife like the Prince’s book had said last night when he read. Hermione must have noticed because he began to comment.
"Harry, you are supposed to chop the root for the juice." She was leaning over and watching as he got twice as much out of the root as the other students did. "How did you..."

Harry shrugged, "Just a lucky guess," he said as he handed her the vial of juice.

Everyone was getting to the end of brewing and there was only ten minutes left in class. All the potions were a slightly transparent white. Hermione was glad that their potion was more transparent than the others, but it wasn't clear like it was supposed to be. Jigger was coming around and looking into everyone's little gold cauldron. Harry could see Hermione was becoming flustered as he approached, and the potion refused to clear as she stirred.

When Jigger was one desk away Harry grabbed the glass rod from Hermione's hand causing her to squeak in surprise. She opened her mouth to complain, but shut it as soon as she saw what he was doing. Harry began adding a half turn clockwise to every turn counterclockwise, like he had when he brewed over summer. He felt his magic open up, and fall into the potion with every extra half turn, causing the potion to clear completely before Jigger arrived.

The professor looked into their cauldron and smiled. "Very good!" He exclaimed. He looked right at Hermione and clapped his hands together. "You are very talented at potions just as I suspected Ms. Granger. Five points for Gryffindor."

Hermione smiled wide at the praise. Ron rolled his eyes, indignant about being ignored.

Jigger wandered off to Malfoy's table and began his praise about the only other perfect potion that was made. It was Nott, Parkinson along with Malfoy, but just like at their table Jigger only praised Malfoy, and ignored the other two.

"Like I'm chopped liver..." Ron grumbled under his breath.

Hermione glared at him, "you barely participated, Ronald."

Ron jumped at the chance to argue, "Harry did! He was the one that helped, and he got squat as well."

"Guys! Just be glad we passed. Still better than potions with Snape." Harry was glad his friends were being more like themselves, but part of him enjoyed the peace of them not arguing.
Professor Jigger announced the end of class, and as usual he fled to his office through the classroom door before any of the students had finished packing.

Harry was helping Hermione bottle their potion for storage, while Ron cleaned up the table. Most of the students were out of the room already when raised voices, and scuffling at the table next to theirs caught the attention of the trio. Harry turned to see Pansy grasping Malfoy's arm. They were both obviously upset and she was trying to calm him down. Over the last couple of weeks Harry had seen her trying to talk to Malfoy, but he always shunned her.

Malfoy's voice broke through her hissed whispers. "I said leave me ALONE!" He yanked his arm back as he yelled, Pansy clung tight to keep her balance. He pushed forward with his entire body dislodging her, and sending her crashing into the table behind theirs. The impact of her body caused the table to skid a foot back, and she landed hard on the floor.

Malfoy looked down at her with cold eyes, then he spun on his heel and left the room. Pansy pushed her upper body off the floor and watched him leave. She was visibly upset, but there were no tears, Pansy wasn't the type of girl to cry easily. The few remaining students were silent, and most of them turned back to their station to finish cleaning up and ignored the situation.

Pansy didn't attempt to pick herself up. She looked at the floor, and then at her scraped elbow. Harry went over to her. He could feel his friend's eyes on him. Hermione pretended not to be watching and continued cleaning. Ron followed, and stood a couple of feet behind him to the right. Harry wasn't sure if he was trying to be supportive, or make sure the Slytherin girl didn't hex him. Maybe a bit of both.

Pansy looked up when Harry's shadow covered her. He bent over a bit and extended his hand in an offer to help her up. At first she looked surprised, her eyes widened a bit while she looked at his hand. She recovered quickly and narrowed her eyes. Ignoring his offered hand, she stood up all on her own.

"You should go see Pomfrey for your elbow." Harry pointed at her injury.

Pansy continued to glare, and backed up a couple of steps. She reminded Harry of a wild animal that was dubious about an approaching human holding out food. She walked backwards keeping her eyes on them, when she reached the door she turned and fled.

Hermione finished cleaning and turned to Harry. "Pansy was probably uncomfortable in a room with only Gryffindor's." She commented.
Harry looked around. When had all the other students left? It was only him and his two friends, no wonder the girl looked so uncomfortable, she was vulnerable in a room with just the "Golden Trio".

"Still rude, Harry was trying to help," Ron scoffed and crossed his arms.

Hermione looked like she wanted to tell Ron off, but took a calming breath. "Come on, we have a meeting to prepare for." She picked up her bag and started walking.

Harry followed his friends slowly. He was thinking about the mystery letter, and how it said that not all the Dark Lord's followers wanted to be with him. Maybe their children were just trapped. He was sure some of them were rotten, but it was rather ridiculous to assume they all were bad.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"All of us are normal, and to be otherwise would make us outcasts from our own community.

Remember: if you see something, say nothing, and drink to forget."

-Night Vale

AN- Things are settling… sometimes, when something happens in life that seems big, it can encompass everything you think, and do. It can be infused into every word you speak, and every action you take. This is how mistakes are made. Later, you move on, and that huge thing isn't so big anymore. You remember it less and less… but the choices you made only stand out brighter, glaring against the black backdrop of the low point in your life…

I come to this white place, and emboss it with my black words, so that I can gain perspective… perspective is reality. It is the only important thing.
So when I am here, and I see you, it makes me happy that you are not rushing. That you have taken your time, and have chosen to take it with me.

Because I have rushed, and it never ends well.

Beta- this is why we have proofreaders :) -minijaxter

Congealed

6/24/17

beta’d-7/1/2017 minijaxter
AN- Hey all. Sorry this chapter is late, and sorry in advance of any errors. Like the other chapters they are slowly being edited. (Update, this is edited now! Thanks to my Beta minijaxter!)

I have been sick so that is my excuse for tardiness. I wanted to push until I was at the ritual but the cold got the better of me. Only one bigger event before the ritual so we will be there next chapter, promise.

Please point out errors and I will fix them as soon as I get the review. I assume the majority of you want the story faster and don't mind my loose editing style. By "editing style" I mean having my reviewers do it until my beta catches up. If it really bothers you I will hold off posting. Let me know.

Thanks to anyone who has helped improve the quality of this Story!

As always thanks to all my reviewers and readers!

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)
"Do you think someone is in there?" Ron whispered.

The trio of friends stood in a row outside of the Room of Requirement. They had arrived early to set up, before they called the rest of the Phoenix Method.

The normally blank wall where the Come and Go Room resided, already had a door. It wasn't the oak door from the days of the DA, or the scrubbed wood door of the small fireplace room. It was a plain black door.

Harry moved forward and grasped the handle, slowly he turned it, and the door clicked open. He looked over his shoulder. "Whoever is in here didn't specify for the room to keep people out," he whispered.

Before Ron or Hermione could tell him to stop, Harry slipped into the room. Ron grabbed the door before it could shut and scrambled after him, closely followed by Hermione. Both of them almost ran directly into Harry's back. They had expected him to run head first into the room, but instead he was standing just inside the door with his head craned back. The room was huge. Harry had never seen anything like it. There was so much stuff... towers of discarded things piled almost to the ceiling.

"Blimey..." said Ron, as he stepped up to Harry's right.

Harry nodded slowly.

"This looks like generations of items." Hermione's eyes were wide and glassy with possibility.
Harry began moving farther into the room looking left and right; it was hard to take it all in. There were narrow pathways with twist and turns through mountains of objects. He thought this would be a very good place to hide something you didn't want anyone to find. Harry played with that idea as he wandered through the junk labyrinth.

Hinges creaked and a door closed, the sound echoed through the large room from somewhere near the back. Harry froze, with Ron and Hermione close behind.

"Did you hear that?" Harry hissed. There was definitely someone else in the room.

All three stood still, and listened. They could hear hurried footsteps, and the sound of someone who stumbled over loose items in their haste. The mystery person was heading to the entrance, Harry took off at a sprint to try and head them off. He cursed under his breath, why had he wandered so far into the room? He finally made it out of the maze, with his friends hot on his trail, but he was a moment too late. The black door slammed shut, and Harry only saw a flicker of black robes before it closed. He ran over and yanked on the handle but it didn't budge.

"It's locked!" He yelled.

Hermione was bouncing on her heels, her pupils dilated as she analyzed the situation. "We have to ask the room for an open door. Whoever that was had a strong desire to keep us away, and the room complied, but if all three of think about the door opening it should work. We just need to calm down," She concluded.

Harry closed his eyes and took a deep breath, he could hear the others following his example. He began thinking about how much he wanted a door that was unlocked. After about thirty seconds there was an audible click.

Harry opened his eyes and smiled, Ron and Hermione smiled back. He began to reach for the handle.

*BANG!*

A sound like a gunshot rang through the door, and shook the floor. Harry's heart jumped out of his chest, and Hermione screamed in fright. Ron had jumped so high he landed on his bum. Harry ripped the door open as soon as he had recovered, and ran into the hall. The first thing he noticed
was the glass covered floor. He looked up, and as expected the high windows of the upper floor hallways were blow in. Not a single pane of glass was left unbroken.

Hermione and Ron stopped next to him. Hermione gasped, and put her hands to her mouth, Harry's attention was brought back to eye level, and he looked where she was pointing. In the middle of the hallway was a pile of black robes… no, it was a person.

Recognition pierced Harry's mind… Snape

"Shit!" He cursed, and ran to the fallen man. The crunch of glass under his trainers echoed in the corridor. He dropped to his knees, and rolled the face down body onto its back.

Harry opened his mouth to call out the man's first name and felt the Oath catch the word in his throat. He choked for a moment, but recovered before his friends arrived besides him.

"Professor." Harry called, and shook Snape's shoulder. There was no response. He turned to his friends, Hermione looked worried and was shifting from foot to foot, Ron just looked shocked. It took Harry a moment to come to his senses, he didn't expect to be so disturbed by seeing Snape injured. Even if it was unconscious, they were forming a bond in order to build Harry's mental barriers, and it was stronger than he anticipated.

Harry stood up, and pulled his wand. For the second time this year, he was glad he trained with Hermione over the summer. He cast the Patronus charm with the intention of delivering a message, and gave his stag instructions for Madam Pomfrey. The bright silvery animal nodded, and then turned to bound away through a wall.

Harry sat back on the ground next to his Mental Arts Master, and waited.

"When did you learn to do that?" Ron asked.

"Over the summer." Hermione responded, she sounded shaken. "We should start up the defense lessons part of the Method soon." She concluded.

Harry nodded, his eyes were locked on the unmoving form of Snape. "Yeah… tonight."
That night Harry would begin teaching his group everything he and Hermione had learned so far.

oOoOo

A bright, white blur was all Severus could see through his cracked eyes. He closed them again to protect his pounding head. He was most likely in the hospital wing if his sore body, and the smell of antiseptic potion was anything to go by.

Severus strained his mind to remember how he had ended up in this blasted ward. He kept his eyes closed as he thought. He hoped it was enough to keep Poppy from noticing he was awake. That woman drove him insane with her mother hen routine.

He remembered leaving the Headmaster's office. They had just had a meeting in which Albus admitted some rather disturbing thoughts. Severus had been pondering the Headmaster's words, and not paying much attention to where he was going. A door slammed opened halfway down the hall, it was a door he didn't remember ever being there before. Out from the open passage ran Draco, he was sprinting directly at Severus, while looking behind him as if checking to see if he was followed. He looked panicked and scared, this was the perfect moment to get some answers.

Draco turned forward to see where he was going, just as he came into Snape's range. His eye widened as his head of house’s hand shot out, and grasped the sleeve of his robe. Draco was halted so suddenly his feet almost came out from under him. Severus let a smirk slide onto his face. Ever since Draco had started avoiding him, he had wanted to put a stick in the spoilt brat's wheel, this was his chance.

"Mr. Malfoy…" Snape drawled the name out slowly, "Where are you going at such a pace?" He raised a black brow slowly as he spoke.

Draco's immediate reaction was not what Severus expected. Normally when he was caught breaking rules, Draco would whine or look up at him with fake apologetic eyes. This time his reaction was violent, and panicked. After he recovered from the whiplash of his sudden stop, Draco began to struggle. He was yanking his sleeve, and screaming for Snape to let him go. His eyes were wide, and wild, as he looked around frantically for an escape while flailing his body away from Severus.

Severus thought he might be having some sort of post traumatic episode, caused by the horrors he experienced over the summer. He reached out for the boy with his other hand to try and pull him closer, to calm him down. When Draco saw a second hand coming he suddenly came back to himself, and remembered he was a wizard. He reached for his wand in his robe pocket and began
to draw it out, when suddenly his body stiffened, causing him to stop mid motion.

Snape reached his own wand, but when he heard a high keening sound, like ringing in one's ears, he knew he was too late. Draco's face twisted in pain, and his hand came up to his chest to clutch his robes. Snape could see what was going to happen as if in slow motion. The glass pane in every window bowed outward, and he pushed Draco away as hard as he could. The magical discharge that burst from the boy was massive, and pressed outward like a wave from all around Draco. Then it stopped, frozen for a moment in time, before just as suddenly, it imploded back towards the boy.

The inward wave shattered all the glass, and brought it flying into the corridor, as if it were air filling a vacuum. Severus felt the first wave hit him like a cinder block in the chest, and it threw him ten feet down the hall. For a second between waves he hung in the air, then he was violently pulled back the way he came, his body ragdolled, and he closed his eyes for impact.

After that, he had no idea what happened.

Severus slowly opened his eyes. Madam Pomfrey was leaning over him with her wand lit. He used all his self-control to not press his head farther into the pillow.

"Ah, I see you finally decided to stop pretending to be asleep." Poppy ignored the surly man's scowl, and smiled.

Snape sighed, the Matron was unimpressed with his attitude, as usual. He propped himself up into a sitting position. "Is anything permanently broken?" He asked, half serious. It was one hell of a blast that hit him.

Poppy finished waving her wand around, and nodded to herself over the results. She didn't seem to be in a hurry to inform her patient of his own state of health. Severus crossed his arms over his chest, and glared at the woman with no result.

The Matron made some sounds to herself while reading the sheet of paper that had appeared after her diagnostic spells. When she finished she looked at the glaring professor. "Don't you give me that look, young man," she scolded.

Snape hated the way the Matron treated him like a student. He glared harder, he knew she would tell him eventually, and if it was serious she would have already told him.
Poppy clucked her tongue in annoyance. "You are fine. You had some cuts from the glass, heavy bruising, and a concussion from the impact, but you got off lucky. What exactly happened?" she became concerned.

"Student prank gone wrong. I don't know who it was, but I will have the Headmaster look into it. That level of magic is not a joking matter." Snape put on his seriously angry face to drive his lie home.

Poppy looked him in the eye long and hard before she nodded. "You were doubly lucky to have been found so quickly. Getting you here promptly averted some of the more serious complications that could have come from your head injury." Poppy was cleaning up the various potion bottles from the bedside table as she spoke.

"Would the complications have led to my death?" Severus asked the question carefully, and with a completely monotone voice. The last thing he needed was another life debt thrown into the mix. He could maneuver around one Vow, and one Debt, but a third would surely lead to his demise.

The Matron laughed lightly, "No need to worry Severus, this will not constitute a life debt. You would have survived either way, only you would have had to endure my company for much longer."

Severus let his shoulders visibly relax. He still had a fighting chance. "Whom, may I ask, found me?" whoever it was might get a higher grade on their next essay then they would have otherwise. He could just imagine if it was Longbottom, the child might faint.

Poppy became uncharacteristically quiet. She shifted around some clean hospital gowns, and didn't look Snape in the face. "Just a well-meaning student," she practically mumbled.

"And what, pray tell, was this well-meaning students name?" Severus let his voice take on a hard edge. Please don't let it have actually been Longbottom…

Poppy said the name too quickly for Severus to understand, he glared at her. She cleared her throat and straightened her back. "It was Mr. Potter. I was shocked stiff when his stag Patronus came barreling through the wall to tell me you were collapsed in a corridor."

"Potter," Severus sneered. Inside he was somewhat amused. What would have happened if it was another life debt? Is there such a thing as a double life debt?
Poppy crossed her arms, glaring at him. "Don't be like that Severus, the young man was just doing the right thing. Would you rather he left you there?"

Severus slouched down a bit. "Maybe…" He knew he was acting like a petulant child, but Poppy was one of the few people that brought it out of him. She treated all of her patient's, current or past students, as children, no matter how scary they grew up to be. Severus wouldn’t be shocked if the woman scolded the Dark Lord himself one day.

Before the Matron could scold him for his behavior, the door to the wing opened. The topic of their conversation slipped through the space just wide enough for his thin body. Severus glared, as was expected.

Harry met the Matron in the middle of the room, and Snape could hear snippets of conversation about a headache potion. It was a rather weak excuse to come to the ward, but it worked, and Poppy went to her office to fetch the requested potion.

Harry didn't approach his bed side. The boy looked directly into his eyes from where he stood. Harry wasn't trained well enough to send thoughts yet, but he was able to convey some concern and questioning. Severus gave a small nod to indicate he was OK, and impressed into the boy's mind that their lesson was still going to happen Saturday. Harry nodded back, and then looked away just as Poppy returned. Potter thanked the Matron, and fled the room like he had been set on fire, just like he would have if Severus still hated him as strongly as he once had.

oOoOo

Relief flooded Harry once he was standing outside the Hospital wing door. He was glad Snape didn't seem to have anything majorly wrong with him. He wanted to know what happened, but knew he would have to wait until Saturday. That was a long time to keep his burning curiosity at bay.

It was strange for Harry to worry about Snape. They had not gotten into any deep topics, or done any real bonding in their lessons yet. They talked about mundane things, he had a feeling that Snape wanted them to be very comfortable in each other's minds before moving on.

Harry shoved the Potion he just got into his robe pocket, and turned to head back to his dorm. Halfway down the hall a thought occurred to him.
"He didn't thank me for saving him. Again..." he mumbled to himself.

oOoOo

Harry sat at breakfast the next morning with a mind full of questions. Ron didn't seem disturbed at all by the events the night before. He had already decided that it was Malfoy in the Room of Requirement, even though they had no proof. Harry wanted to jump to the conclusion along with Ron, but he couldn't bring himself to make hasty decisions anymore. If it was Malfoy in the room, Harry wasn't sure he was doing something bad... but he was definitely the only one who thought that was a possibility.

The Hall became quiet, and Harry looked up from buttering his biscuit. The Headmaster was on his feet motioning for silence. The old man's face was stony, it immediately instilled a wariness in Harry.

Dumbledore spread his arms wide like he normally did. This time there was an air of comfort.

"Before the Daily Prophet arrives, I would like to say a few words." He put his arms down. "There will be news on the front page that may scare you, but please stay calm, and have faith that everything that can be done, is being done, to keep you and your families safe."

The hall filled with murmurs of nervous voices. Dumbledore took his seat, and waited with his students for the wing beat of owls. When the mail arrived, the light babble of students died to complete silence. The rustling of wings, and people collecting their mail was the only sound, until the first paper was unrolled.

Hermione's gasp was loud enough to startle everyone around her. She didn't say anything, she just put the paper flat on the table. Everyone who didn't have a subscription gathered around to read the headline.

**DEATH EATERS ESCAPE FROM AZKABAN! DEMENTORS ABANDON MINISTRY!**

Was written in huge black print. The picture with the article was striking. It was the looming prison with a large hole in the side. Harry skimmed the article, there was very little information about how the breakout occurred. The list of escapees included everyone that was arrested in the battle of the ministry... except Lucius Malfoy, this didn't sit well with Harry at all. The next Method meeting would be a review of the Patronus charm. The noise in the hall was slowly rising around him as the other students got the news.
Harry looked up from the paper to find every member of Method standing around him looking at the headline. Even Luna came over from the Ravenclaw table. He saw a bit of fear in their eyes, but most of them were just determined. He had to say something, he really wished they had figured out a portable communication magic.

Before he could think of anything to say Luna started waving her hands around her head. "Wrackspurts are everywhere. We should go to your doggy's house."

Harry smiled. Luna was right, they needed to talk in private. Only she would get the message across, and sound perfectly normal… for her.

Harry stood up and gave Hermione a significant look, she nodded and put her hand in her pocket to call the twins with her sickle. The three Gryffindor's, and one Ravenclaw followed Harry out of the hall. In the chaos of the news release no one would notice they had left. A white envelope was thrust in front of Harry's face as he walked. He took it from Hermione.

"The letter came while you were reading over the paper," she explained.

Harry looked at the letter, it was from Dudley. He shoved it in his back pocket, and hurried his friends along to the seventh floor. It only took a few minutes to get everyone through the Floo, the twins arrived shortly after.

Harry stood at the front of the kitchen. Everyone was silently sitting at the table. "This won't be a very long meeting, since it's impromptu." Harry turned to the twins, "Have you two heard the news?"

Both of them nodded.

Harry continued. "There are only two things I want to cover before we go back to our lives. First, I want to review the Patronus charm. I know we just started training in dark arts, but this is really important. The Dementors are under Voldemort's control. I also want to hold a one time lesson for the old DA, and anyone that wants to learn the charm. The lesson will be sometime after the ritual next week."

Hermione smiled up at Harry with pride, and she gave her silent agreement. Harry smiled back. This was also a great chance to once again drive home the point about dark magic not being evil.
The Patronus charm is Core/Dark magic that's why the shape is related to something important to the caster.

"The second topic is a possible new member. I have been thinking about this for awhile. I want to make a Floo candle and send it to Remus Lupin. I am hoping you all agree." Harry hid his nervousness.

"Remus? I think he could be a good member." Ginny put her finger to her chin in thought as she spoke.

"Good ol' Wolfman! As long as he signs the contract I think it's a great idea." One of the twins shouted. Everyone else murmured agreement. Neville seemed relieved, possibly because an adult was joining them.

Harry let out a sigh, he was really scared they would reject the idea. "Hermione could you make the candle?"

Hermione scrunched her face up. She hated candle magic. She said it felt weird, but she nodded in agreement.

"Can I help?" Ginny stood up. She looked excited at the prospect of doing some new magic.

"You can do it all, and I will just tell you how." Hermione smiled. Together the girls went to the basement room with the supplies.

Harry fell heavily into a chair. The remaining members moved to gather around him. Neville put a hand on his shoulder.

"You OK, mate?" he asked quietly

Harry gave a shallow nod. "Yeah, I'm just tired and sore. This was not expected, the break out will cause panic."

The twins crossed their arms at the same time, their uncharacteristically serious expressions made them look imposing. "We will help keep the peace in the alley, try to relax." One of them said.
Harry took a deep breath, and let his muscles uncurl. "OK, I will try and relax. I just can't wait until the ritual. I can't keep doing this forever."

Everyone nodded for a moment in silent agreement, until Luna spoke up. "No one can do anything for ever," she said to the room.

Harry let out a small bitter laugh. "I guess that's true. Did anyone else notice that Lucius Malfoy wasn’t listed in the breakout?"

Everyone nodded or shook their head at the same time. Except the twin who looked at each other, and then at Harry. “You didn’t look through the whole paper yet, did you?” one of them asked.

“No,” Harry answered, while he accepted a copy of the Prophet from the other twin. It was folded open to a page near the back, there was a small special interest article in the middle of the print. Harry skimmed the article, groaned, and then threw it on the table. The special interest piece boiled down to a few facts. Lucius Malfoy refused to escape in the break out, this proves he was never willingly following Voldemort, his case is being reviewed for early release on parole, due to good behavior. What a bunch of bollocks. “Well, we will just have to see how that plays out, at least we know for sure the Ministry in infiltrated,” Harry sighed.

Harry suddenly felt very old, as everyone stayed silent. He shifted in his chair and felt the letter in his pocket crinkle. He reached back and pulled it out. Fred and George looked at each other with sly smirks, likely plotting to lighten the mood.

"So Harry… you have had letters the last couple of meetings, and I heard from Luna here, that you get them regularly," possibly Fred stated.

Harry shot a small glare at the blond girl, she didn't seem to notice, and smiled back pleasantly. He sighed, it wasn't worth the aggravation. "Yeah, so?" Harry prompted.

The other twin, George? Spoke up. "We were wondering who the lucky lady is." He smirked in a way that could only be described as dirty.

Harry laughed, a real refreshing laugh. "It's not a girl."
The twin that Harry thought was George went wide eyed, the other twin held out his hand. A galleon was exchanged between them. Harry laughed again, those two bet on everything.

"So you swing the other way?" The winning twin, Fred? Asked.

Harry laughed even harder, "You got it all wrong!" he barked out between breaths. "It's not a love letter, it's my cousin," he explained after he managed to calm down.

This time both twins looked surprised, and Luna held out her hand. Two galleons were passed to her, she pocketed them with a vague smile. Harry lost it again, Luna was joining the twins betting pool now? That was just too much!

"How did you know, Luna? Did Ron or Hermione tell you?" Harry wiped his eyes as he asked.

Luna shook her head, "No." she said without further explanation.

"Well then, how?" One of the twins pressed.

Luna looked at him with her wide, blue eyes, and tipped her head a bit. Not like she was trying to being cute, but in true confusion. "Harry has a very loyal doggy," she answered, then she wandered off in the direction of the other girls.

Fred and George shrugged at each other. But Harry felt a very heavy sadness descend over him. What Luna said struck him deeply, he wanted to know more about this doggy, but wasn’t ready for the possible answer. He blocked the feeling out, and ripped open the letter. His heart dropped while he skimmed it over. The last few letters were all about Dudley's new friends, and the obscure (to Harry) rules of the game D&D. This time the letter was much more serious. Apparently Aunt Petunia called Dudley at school because Vernon was becoming more and more violent. In the letter Dudley asked Harry for more cheering potion.

Harry sighed. He might as well make a batch, and bottle it while he had a whole potions lab at his disposal in this house. He pushed himself to his feet, and trudged his way to the basement lab. He made a mental note to write a letter for Moony before the night was out.

oOoOo
Saturday night arrived very slowly in Harry's opinion. He had seen Snape in DADA, so he knew the man was fine, but he really wanted to know what happened. It was much easier to get away tonight by simply saying he wanted some time to himself. Hermione was going to be around to entertain Ron, since she went to bother Jigger the night before. Harry made a note to himself to get detention this week, or he wouldn't have a reason to leave for the next meeting with Snape.

He rushed down to the dungeons with no interruptions. When he was only one hall away from Snape's personal quarters he pulled out his cloak, and threw it over himself. They had started meeting directly in his rooms for convenience, and had a system worked out. Harry would come invisible and knock at the meeting time, Snape would open the portrait and look into the hall long enough for Harry to sneak in.

Harry arrived in front of the painting, the snake in the picture hissed "hello". It always seemed to know he was there even if he was under the cloak. Harry didn't respond, he didn't want to make more noise than he had to. He knocked lightly on the portrait frame, and stood back a step. The portal opened. Harry slipped past Snape into the main room. He pulled off his cloak with a flourish, he managed to contain the desire to hold out his arms and say "Ta-da!". Instead he said "Tacet!"

Snape didn't smile, but his eyes show a slight amusement at his student antics. "Arx." He responded.

The magic burst forth with a gust of wind and settled.

Snape went to his usual seat followed by Harry. "Today we are moving forward. You have progressed well, and I feel like it is time to begin the process of learning what memories will build your barriers." Severus leaned forward in his seat. His expression was pensive.

Harry nodded, "OK, what do I have to do?"

Severus did seem to enjoy the fact that Harry no longer assumed he knew best, but always asked to be instructed carefully. During their time building trust, Harry made it obvious these changes were intentional and, Snape let him know he thought it was all rather Slytherin.

Harry prepared himself while Severus explained what the next part of their training entailed.
The next part was going to be hard, the beginning of the barriers required the teacher to allow the student to explore the construction of their protections. Someone's protections were generally very intimate. Potter… or maybe he should call him Harry regularly, considering what was to come... The boy was about to learn more than he probably anticipated about his professor.

"I am going to enter the pocket in your mind, as I usually do, but I am going to bring my barrier with me, for you to… examine." Snape almost sneered on the last word. He was going to be exposed, and vulnerable. The prospect did not agree with him.

Harry nodded, and made direct eye contact with Snape, completely trusting him not to invade his mind inappropriately. Severus let himself be drawn into Harry's mind, and gripped his shields so they would come along with him. Student and teacher stood together in Harry's mindscape, like most people's minds the starting point was a white plain.

Harry turned to his professor and asked the question he expected since their meeting started. "Sir, can I ask what happened in the hallway when you were hurt?"

Severus closed his eyes, and concentrated on letting his barriers invade Harry's mindscape before he answered. When he let go of his shield it expanded from his astral projected body as a beautiful sea blue bubble, deep and mysterious. It looked like spun glass, and glittered. From the outside of the bubble plants grew to surround it. All of the plants were the same shade of green, and bloomed with white and orange flowers, but they were hard to see clearly, and they wove between the threads of glass. The outermost layer was a thin sphere of black lace, it was so far from the glass and flower sea bubble, that Harry and Severus stood on the inside of it, in the space between it and the rest of the barrier. It showed scenes of large owls, flying, sitting, diving for prey, and they were all magically animated, but moved slowly.

Harry stood open mouthed, his question forgotten for the moment as he looked around so quickly he almost fell over. Severus was glad that Harry thought his mental ward impressive, if the brat had commented on how feminine they were, or bad mouthed them at all, he wasn't sure he could have continued lessons. Like most mental arts master, his shields were very personal.

To keep Harry from saying anything at all, Severus answered the earlier question. "I encountered Draco, in to hallway where you found me ."

Harry turned to look at him, "Draco?"
Severus nodded. "It is one of the reason I do not want your Weasley friend to chase after him. He is currently very dangerous."

"That must have been him in the Room of Requirement," Harry pondered out loud.

Snape tried not to react at all when he heard that Draco was in that room, but he felt the area around his eyes tighten. He knew Harry noticed when the boy's eyes narrowed in response. Damn that brat to hell, he was getting far too good at reading Severus's face.

"What was he doing in the room? Does it have to do with the Prewitt's?" Harry pressed for information.

"I cannot tell you," Snape answered calmly.

He saw the fire blaze to life in the boy's eyes. He hated being left out of the loop. That was something Severus learned in their mental talks. They never got to deep, but Harry did discuss his feelings about Dumbledore's secrets fifth year.

"You can't, or you WON'T?" Harry raised his voice at the end. He was visibly trying to keep his temper under control. Something Severus thought was part of the new him, he was trying to create.

"I cannot say either way." Severus could feel the vow tightening around his hand, and heart. It was holding his words, and smoothing out his tone of voice.

"You sound like you did before these lessons started." Sadness tinted the boy's voice. All the anger drained from his being. Harry just looked tired, and much older than he was.

Severus tried to think of a way to tell the brat he was under a vow, without breaking the vow, but it seemed impossible. Frustrated he lashed out for the first time since he took the Oath.

"You Imbecile, I can't keep you out of my pensieve, my potions stores, or any other personal business I deem worthy of keeping to myself. But the one time, I want you to be a nosy, egotistical, self-righteous…” Severus had to stop when a sharp warning pain went through his chest from the Vow.
Harry didn't seem to notice, he was too upset by the insults. "Is that what you think of me?! I will always be stupid? I was right to think five years of hatred can't just vanish."

"I still hold strong in my many views of you, which is truth. If it was not for the debt, I would not be as civil as I am. But I can now admit that you are not as empty headed as I once thought." Severus tried to emphasize that Harry was not stupid, so we would think, and figure this out.

The anger slid away from Harry's eyes, and was replaced by confusion. He had obviously not expected blunt honesty from Snape, or the backhanded compliment. His green eyes twitched a bit as his thoughts raced.

"Severus, who do you think stole the boomslang skin from your stores in my second year?" Harry had a sly, and calculating glint in his eyes. It almost unsettled Severus… almost. But he gritted his teeth. The boy called him by his given name, which Harry knew irked him, and he brought up a particularly sensitive topic. The brat wanted to see if Severus would answer to the best of his ability, to prove he was willing to be honest, and he was getting a shot in under the ribs at the same time.

"I think it was you," Snape hissed.

"Wrong. It was Hermione." Harry smirked. "But I think you really believed it was me."

Snape nodded, but stayed quiet. He was surprised it was Granger.

Harry took a step forward, he looked Severus in the eyes, and asked, "What is wrong with Draco Malfoy, what is he up to?"

Severus opened his mouth, and made a real attempt to answer, but it was painful so he said, "I cannot answer."

Harry's eyes widened, "you're under a Vow! Is it an Unbreakable Vow? Wait, you can't answer that…” He rambled in excitement.

Snape just glared at him in a way that conveyed how dumb the question was.

"Well nothing I can do… Ron told me about those Vows." Harry was back to his normal self, but
his reaction earlier when he thought he was being kept in the dark, was worrying. The Boy had baggage, and their trust was very thin indeed. What Severus said before was the truth, there wasn't much between them accept forced civility, and trust based on need. If they were going to make Occlumency work for Harry they were going to have to really get to know each other.

Severus would let the boy in, to save both their lives, and the wizarding world… Merlin help him.

"Well, now that we are past that, shall we move onto what we came here for tonight." Severus pressed forward, It was a statement not a question.

Harry looked a little ashamed, but nodded. "Yes, Sir."

"What we have to do, is deconstruct the reason behind the barriers I use. This will allow you to understand what you might need to do. But everyone is different. The only two things that will be for certain, is that your representation of yourself will be included, along with an element you find yourself drawn towards." Severus was in full lecture mode. His last defense before he had to open himself up to a sixteen year old brat, so the lesson continued.

"Consider the nature of the mind, it is not a book to be read. There is no interpreter standing to the side, translating everything for you to understand. The mind is much like time. It is made up of moments strung together. Memories are a fourth dimension here, and are not linear. This means your oldest or newest memory is not the strongest, there is no past, only moments of the past, that can be pulled forward, and relieved just as vividly as when they happened. But never forget, every time you think of a memory it changes, just a little bit. Therefore you must choose memories that are more closely related to concepts, that make up who you are. As you grow, you may have to incorporate new concepts, and reject others. You will encounter people, and events, that impact your entire being. Some encounters will shatter aspects of who you think you are, they will break you down to a foundation. This barrier, will be that foundation. A solid, but flexible thing, that will support your mind. What you will be doing, is building an image of yourself in layers that misdirect, and block, in the center you will organize what you wish to only be yours. When you have mastered this art, you will be unable to completely lose your sense of self, as many do in life." Snape concluded his lecture in a deep drawl. Harry was wide eyed, almost entranced.

"Woah… OK." Harry breathed in awe.

"Now look at my barrier, and tell me what stands out first." This was the part he dreaded.

Harry looked up and around at the sphere, the brilliant blue glass bubble, reflected off his emerald green eyes. Severus felt his heart constrict when he thought of those colors.
"The blue color of the glass and the plants are what stand out." Harry announced his decision.

Severus braced himself for the coming conversation. He was revealing something he had told to very few, and most of the people who knew were dead, or not as trustworthy as he once thought.

"The blue glass, is in every way, a representation of my mother." Using the mindscape he brought an image of his mother forward for Harry to see.

oOoOo

Five feet and five inches tall, stood Severus's mother. She had long Black hair that went to her mid back, and the most pure, deep blue eyes Harry had ever seen. She was very pretty, and also very sad. Harry knew this was Snape's memory of her, this is how he saw her. He must have loved her very much.

"Her name was Eileen. For my entire childhood, she was my salvation." Snape stood two feet in front of his sadly smiling mother. The memory lifted her hand to her son's face, and tipped her head to the side. Her eyes crinkled and filled with tears as she spoke. Her mouth moved but she made no sound, she spoke words only Severus remembered. The image reset like a video and replayed the same motions, looped forever.

"She was born into the most secretive pureblood family. They were not as prejudice as many of the others, but they still strictly forbid marriage to muggles. My mother broke all the rules to run off and marry a muggle man she fell in love with. That is how I was born, and how she was disowned." Severus stepped back from the memory allowing it to fade away. He didn't watch as it dissipated into the white mindscape. Harry wondered if he looked away because it hurt to see her go.

"She must have been a strong person to turn from her family like that." Harry truly meant those words. He could see where Severus got the willpower to be a spy. "Your father must have been a good man for her to choose him."

Snape whipped around with fury on his face. He looked like he wanted to yell and rant, but caught himself in the last moment. He composed his face into something colder, and calmer. "He was a good man at the beginning, according to my mother. I unfortunately never met that version of the man."

Harry felt the pit of his stomach fall out. He knew that the next words Severus spoke were never meant to be heard by him. If not for the Oath and the lives on the line, he would not have had this
chance to hear them.

Severus looked at the Potter boy. He hoped that he was right when he concluded that Harry might not be as much like his father in personality, as he was in looks. He hoped Harry was like his mother, and would not ridicule him for his past.

"Sometimes in life, you make mistakes. You look at a situation from every angle, spend time with the decision, ponder it carefully, and still choose wrong. There are at times, factors outside of your control, or even your ability to conceive of them. Avenues into futures that only moments before were nonexistent, can appear before you, and when they do, your reaction is not always predictable."

Harry felt himself nodding. In his core he understood the words. It was the same for him as a child. He never could have known magic was real, and that it would be his way out of his relative's home. He also didn't think it was possible to end up being famous and hunted, but then that path opened up. He could also tell that Snape was describing more than his mother's life, he was talking about his own life.

"My mother... did not tell my father she was a witch before she married him. She thought she knew him, knew that he loved her enough to accept her as she truly was. That was her mistake. My father hated magic, he feared it and was jealous. He was not a kind man. He often took his rage out on my mother."

Severus took a moment to compose himself into an even stonier persona. Harry could see how hard this was for him. He also felt a strange kinship to him, Harry was also from a house with people who hated magic.

Snape took a breath and continued. "When I showed signs of magic my father started to turn on me. I was OK with this change, because it gave my mother a break. Soon after I showed magic my father also began to drink, and sent my family into poverty."

Harry just stood still and silent as Snape became lost in memories, possibly giving away more than he might have otherwise. His eyes were far away.

"As things became worse, my mother would try to protect me, and would bear abuse meant for myself. Through all of the terror and unhappiness, she stood by me, and pushed me to be positive. She would tell me stories about Hogwarts. When I was around nine years old she began to show signs of instability, her behavior became erratic, and she would say things that made no sense. She would talk to people who weren't there. Sometimes she would stand in front of the bathroom.
mirror, and talk about her eyes, about family secrets and curses. I do not remember much about it."

Harry felt the back of his mind tingle with recollection. There was something about what Snape just said that made him feel like he should know something. But this was Snape's mother, why would he know something about her crazy ramblings? Harry refocused on Snape's story, he would ponder it later.

Severus took a breath, as if to prepare himself for the hardest part. "When I went to Hogwarts, my mother had to endure my father alone, her mental state deteriorated quickly. In my fifth year I was called to the Headmaster's office and given the news that my mother had passed away. I never learned of the exact cause, but I was told it was self-inflicted. She must have just given up."

Harry didn't speak, and Severus didn't expect him to. This was not something you acknowledged directly, and Snape was not the type of person to accept sympathy. He explained in depth, so that Harry would fully understand the meaning behind his wards, and that is all. They stood together in silence for a length of time that seemed appropriate before going back to the topic at hand. Severus broke the quiet first.

"The blue of the glass is the same shade as my mother's eyes. The glass itself is beautiful and inspiring, but fragile. If anyone makes it past the outer defenses to the glass of my barrier they will be confronted with memories of her, they will be led to believe that she is the center of my mind, and then they will be redirected outward. The glass itself creates a maze of sorts."

Harry nodded in understanding. If you were trying to get to information and met the memories of someone's dead mother, you might think that's the end. The maze would just lead them around his mind into traps.

"The plants you noticed are there because they are my element. They are offensive and will lash out at persistent intruders that get to close." Snape explained curtly.

Harry looked up at the vines and stalks he could see through the complicated and wavy glass pattern. "What about the flowers?"

Snape's eyes narrowed. "They are related to my childhood friend, whom was very protective of those they valued," he growled.

Harry let the subject drop. He was still shocked at the amount of personal information he had
heard. He could respect that the man had more personal memories he wanted to keep to himself, if he didn’t strictly need to explain them for the lesson.

Snape let his demeanor soften and said, "I need you to try and think about something from your childhood that shaped who you are now. Since we are in your mindscape it will bring the memory forward."

Harry felt his heart drop. He knew this was coming, but he didn't want to do it. He also knew that refusing would be a huge slap in the face to Severus, who just bared a part bare to Harry. He tried to think of something good from his life before Hogwarts, like Severus had his mother… but nothing came to mind. Honestly, Snape's mum wasn't all good memories, she died. She went crazy, and then she died. Maybe he was focusing on the wrong type of memory… not just good things, but things that truly impacted him. When Harry concentrated on that thought, he remembered darkness. An inky blackness that encompassed everything, it was thick, and full muffled thuds.

Snape took in a sharp breath of surprise, as the entire whitespace went pitch dark, as if someone blew out a candle. Thudding from above began softly and became louder, muffled voices flitted in and out. Light came back through small cracks. People above them passed back and forth, casting them into momentary blindness, and raining plaster dust down on their heads.

Harry knew Snape was still there with him, but he couldn't stop this memory. It was the first time he had been put under the stairs. It was before he had a nest like bed in the small space, and before they had replaced the light bulb with one that worked. His bed had been a crib mattress too small for him, even before they threw him in here. He couldn't remember what he did to make Vernon angry.

Harry looked at Severus, his expression was grave in the flickering light. The people outside the door were gathering for dinner. It wasn't just the Dursley's, there were men in suits. Harry began to remember more details. He explained out loud for his professor.

"The Dursley's were hosting Vernon's first business dinner. Up until this night, I lived in a small crib that I had outgrown. I was able to climb out of the crib, and wander the house. Vernon didn't want his guest to see me, so he put me in the cupboard under the stairs and locked the door. It was the first time I was ever put here. He told me if I made a sound he wouldn't feed me, so I quietly watched the dinner from the cracks." Harry spoke calmly. This was a part of who he was and he accepted it, even if it wasn't pretty.

"The first time?" Snape questioned. His voice wavered a bit in disbelief.
A metallic click was followed by bright light. Snape raised an arm over his eyes to block the glaring light of the bare bulb above his head. Harry looked around calmly. They were in a giant version of his small cabinet bedroom. It looked like it did when he was a few years older.

"I lived in this cupboard under the stairs until I was eleven. I was only moved to the smallest bedroom when I was accepted into Hogwarts, because Vernon was afraid." Harry swept his arm around to make his point. Snape followed the motion of the arm with his eyes. The thin mattress bed and childish crayon writing claiming the space as "Harry's Room" confirmed the words.

"If anything from my childhood shaped a part of me, it was this space. Being trapped in it, being shielded by it. It was the only thing that separated me from Vernon, but it also separated me from the world."

Harry looked solemnly at the giant door. Loud footsteps were coming closer, accompanied by the cries of a small boy. The door was wrenched open, flooding the space with light. A young Harry was thrown into the cupboard by his hair. There was a bruise on his face and tears in his eyes. The six year old boy curled up and cried.

"It was a relief to be put in here, to be away from that monster. Only, sometimes, they would leave me here too long…” Harry sat down next to his giant six year old self. "The only thing that impacted me more than this space and my uncle, was going to Hogwarts.

Snape nodded. He looked like he was trying to stay stoic, but was failing. There was a tinge of disgust in his eyes. "We can work with this. I don't want to work that... beast," He spat the word, “of an uncle into your barrier, but the cupboard will be useful."

Harry nodded, the mindscape began to fade back to white again, and the soft cries of the child quieted. In the stark and empty space Harry felt exposed. He couldn't look at Snape. He felt the mental connection ending, and his mind returned to reality slowly. His eyelids blinked opened and found Snape wasn't in his normal spot, the sound of glass clinking announced he was in the kitchen area.

Harry stood up and wandered to the part of the room with shelves and bookcases, that were covered in various trinkets along with the books. He had never really explored his professor’s rooms before. He was always too nervous, but after experiencing some of each other's deepest memories it seemed more trivial.

Harry walked up and down the shelving, he didn't touch anything, but explored with his eyes. There were dark detectors, and small boxes covered in tiny locks that must have been shrunk,
because there was no way there were keys small enough. Harry wanted to touch some of the plants that looked like weird hybrids that shouldn't be possible, but he restrained himself. Snape was still shuffling about in the kitchen. He could hear the sound of ice falling into a glass followed by some sort of liquid being poured.

Harry slowed down his pacing, a small glittering light drew his eye. He recognized the item, and felt like the room had flipped upside down. Harry had not dared to touch anything that belonged to the professor, but this didn't belong to him. He reached out and placed his finger on the cool crystal. When nothing happened he pinched it between his fingers and lifted it closer to his face. The small, faceted stopper glittered more brightly when it was held to the firelight.

Suddenly his vision was filled with amber, and his ears with the sound of sloshing. Snape was on his left holding out a tumbler filled with what Harry assumed was Firewhiskey. He lowered the stopper, and side eyed Snape.

"Are you trying to trick me again? Because I may not be a genius, but I am not that dumb…" Harry sniped.

Severus took the attitude in stride. He shook the glass a bit, "Not this time I'm afraid. I thought you might need the drink as much as I, after that trying remembrance."

Harry continued to glare, but reached up and took the glass. He didn't drink any of the liquor yet. He held up the crystal stopper for Snape to see. "Care to explain?" he said coldly.

Snape sighed. His didn't express any guilt. Harry wasn't sure if that meant he was guilt free or if he just didn't care.

Snape took a seat in his usual chair and sipped his drink before answering. "You should be thanking me for having that." He waved his hand at the stopper.

Harry had no response. He wasn't sure what the stopper being in this room meant. He went to his chair and sat down. Their Oath protected them both, so there was really no reason to jump to conclusions.

Snape smirked, "I am glad to see you are overcoming your impulses, I expected more yelling and ranting." He threw back the rest of his drink.
Harry took a sip of his own drink. "What would be the point of yelling? It won't change anything. What I want to know, is why you didn't tell Dumbledore about this, Severus." Harry emphasized the name, and held out the crystal.

Snape refilled his glass with the bottle on the coffee table, and pointedly ignored the use of his given name. "I cannot explain everything, but it was in my best interest that no one knew that your magical outburst was faked. The Headmaster assigned me the job of fixing the backyard, and I used my position to hide evidence. You could say that stopper is the beginning of this."

He gestured between himself and Harry, then around the room to indicate what "This" was.

Harry assumed he meant their truce. He felt his chest warm, and it wasn't just the booze. The idea of Snape keeping his secret was… nice? Comforting maybe.

"Why was it in your best interest to help me?" Harry pressed while stomping down the warm feeling. He can't be endeared towards the professor if the man was playing tricks.

"When I saw the stopper, I knew you had concocted the magical burst, it must have taken a lot of time and planning. You were obviously hiding something from Dumbledore. Maybe I felt, sympathetic, at that moment, because I also hide things from him." Snape waved his hand at Harry, he obviously meant these lessons, and more were outside the Headmaster knowledge. "That is all I can say for now."

Harry knew that there was a lot more to the story. Snape hid the stopper, but how did he know the magic outburst was faked because of one stopper? Harry wanted to know, but he didn't feel like he needed to know… this was the first time Harry didn't have a desperate need to pry for information. He just trusted that Snape wasn’t trying to trick him, and that whatever was going on, would be revealed to him in time. It might have had something to do with learning about the Vow earlier. Severus was obviously in a precarious position in the war.

Does this mean he truly trusted Snape? He wasn't sure. Snape didn't hide things for the same reasons as the Headmaster. Dumbledore tried to control the world around him, including the people, by controlling information flow. Snape just wanted to protect his own skin, and the skin of those under his protection by extension. The self-preservation aspect made it easier to believe.

Harry put the crystal in his pocket and downed the rest of his drink. He knew he wasn't going to get any more information so he let the topic drop. After another silent drink, they parted ways.

oOoOo
"When a person dies and no one will miss them, the mourning is assigned to a random human. This is why you sometimes just feel sad."

-Night Vale

AN- I don't have much to say. I am tired. I’m at a point where life happens around me. It ignores me. So I ignore it back and come here. I think I will take a nap in the warm, white light. Would you like you nap with me? I found some blankets.

Stupid Life…

Repurposed 7/26/2017

Beta’d - 7/28/2017 minijaxter and a nap sounds good :)

Chapter End Notes
A look at magic

Chapter Notes

AN- So… the cold I had became a sinus infection. I am on antibiotics but feel like crap. Sorry this chapter was much later than intended.

I will probably take a break from posting to write more. I have caught up with everything I had written and now I only have the outline. This will also give my beta time to catch up.

Happy Good Friday to those who celebrate.

Please point out errors and I will fix them as soon as I get the review. I assume the majority of you want the story faster and don't mind my loose editing style. By "editing style" I mean having my reviewers do it until my beta catches up. If it really bothers you I will hold off posting. Let me know.

Thanks to anyone who has helped improve the quality of this Story!

As always thanks to all my reviewers and readers!

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

WARNING- serious Domestic Violence ahead.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective
Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 15

A look at Magic

oOoOo

Harry was wide awake and slightly tipsy. The canopy of his bed wavered in front of his eyes. Deep and red. He fingered the stopper in his hand, rolled it between his fingers as he thought of what he learned about Snape and himself. Somehow everything was different. He felt the shift when he decided he was OK not knowing everything about why Snape protected his secrets. It could also just be his own drunk, wandering mind.

Harry rolled onto his side and pulled the Prince's potion book out of his bedside table. He got into the habit of reading it at night. He was afraid of Hermione seeing it and asking too many questions. He flipped to the page he marked last time he read.

At the top of the page, before any of the potions information was an unrelated note.

_Sectumsempra – for enemies_

Harry filed that spell away to try out later.

oOoOo

Friday morning dawned bright. Harry was awake before the sun began to rise. This was the day, he was finally going to remove the curse. Hermione went over everything he needed to know the night before, there wasn't much he had to do except sit still.
It was just going to be the two of them, like at the beginning, over the summer. Hermione explained that it was safer to only have the person performing the ritual and the person having the curse removed in the room. Other ambient magic from stray people could throw it off. Ron agreed after a lot of grumbling.

Harry had been sitting in bed waiting for the sun to come up for the last hour. Now it had finally risen, and the sound of his dorm mates rustling as they rolled out of bed, still half asleep, was Harry's cue to get up. He threw his legs over the side of his mattress and hopped to his feet with energy he had been lacking the last few weeks. His excitement about the ritual overshadowed his sore joints and fatigue.

Harry opened his bedside table and pulled out a small box with both his Family Rings in it, and shoved it in his pocket. After the curse was removed he would take his rightful place at the head of his families. Nothing was going to stop him once he was free. He also pulled out the candle for Remus along with a note that simply asked him to light it tomorrow night at 8PM. there was going to be a Method meeting that night. Harry wanted to hold a meeting the night after the ritual, so people can see him and ask questions.

oOoOo

The day passed incredibly slowly. Every time Harry thought ten minutes had passed it had only been two. Maybe the minutes were multiplying, or maybe he was the victim of a time spell. Harry knew he was being silly, but he couldn't wait any longer, after mailing the candle he only had class to distract him. Ron wasn't helping very much. He was still grumpy about being left out of the ritual. No matter how many time Hermione explained, he still pouted.

Being extra agitated made Ron chomp at the bit every time he saw Malfoy.

"We should just follow him everywhere," Ron hissed to Harry at lunch. His eyes were glued to his target. "We can prove it was him in the Room of Requirement." He concluded with a smirk.

It was like the beginning of the year all over again. They had just managed to get Ron to leave Malfoy somewhat alone, and now he was obsessed again. Harry wished he could tell Ron that it really was Malfoy in the Room, but that information was under Oath. He didn't say anything in response to Ron's suggestion. He simply went back to his lunch while Hermione explained why the idea was terrible. Ron became more irritated when Malfoy left lunch early.

Harry noticed that the blond was becoming paler by the moment as he fled the Great Hall. It also didn't slip his attention that Snape got up and left through the teachers exit in the back, behind the staff table. Harry began to eat faster, he wanted to know what was happening but he couldn’t just run out of the hall after Malfoy without raising suspicion.
Severus found Draco two corridors away from the Great Hall in the direction of the dungeons. He approached the boy with haste. The child was so caught up in his own mind he had slowed down and didn't hear the approaching steps. Snape put his hand on Draco's shoulder and spun him around, but he didn't hold on this time. He didn't want the boy to panic and blast him again.

Draco squeaked in surprise when he was suddenly twirled around, but when he saw who it was his face contorted in anger.

"What!?” He barked at his Professor.

The lack of respect didn't even phase Severus. Draco had been on edge, and mean like an injured dog, for months.

"You are running out of options Draco, you should accept my help.” Severus’ tone was calm.

Draco glared back with an intensity that was almost tangible. "I don't need your help…” he hissed.

Snape scowled, and dropped all social niceties. "You listen to me, Draco. You are going to fail, and when you do, I will be brought down with you. So you are going to accept my help, whether you like it or not," he growled.

Draco's glare didn't waver. He bared his teeth like a mad dog, and his grey eyes began to slip into red. Snape could feel the icy magic creeping out of the boy. His words were high and cold, "You, do not tell me, what to do."

The red vanished, and left behind a panicked child. Draco's eyes brimmed with fear and tears, he pulled his shoulder from Snape's loose hold, and ran.

Severus was shocked still, he didn’t expect those eyes, or that voice. When he snapped out of his haze, he sprinted full speed after the boy. This was bad, things were a lot worse than he assumed. He had to find Draco before someone got hurt, or killed.
Harry left the Great Hall and looked up and down the corridor. No sign of Malfoy or Snape. He sighed and waited for Ron and Hermione to catch up. He had been in such a rush to follow the Slytherin's he had left them behind.

"Hey, mate! What's the rush?" Ron hollered as he jogged through the double doors.

Hermione was close behind. She stopped on Harry's right, and put her hand on his arm. "Is everything alright?"

Harry nodded slowly, "Yeah, I guess… I just had a bad feeling," he muttered.

Hermione put on a smile. "It probably just nerves about tonight. Let's get to Charms before we are late," she suggested.

Ron threw his arm over Harry's shoulder, and turned him around so they could head to class. "Yeah, everything will be fine." He tried to sound pleasant, but Harry could tell he was still miffed about being left out. At least he was trying.

The slap of running footsteps echoed behind them, all three Gryffindors turned around. The hallway had filled with students going to class, but the crowd was parting to make space for a running student, who was barreling through the corridor. Harry only had a moment to register that it was Malfoy, before he flew past knocking into Ron on the way by.

Ron fell, sprawled on the floor, but he jumped up almost as soon as he hit the ground. "THAT'S IT!" he yelled, in final frustration as he tore after Malfoy. They both ran up the grand staircase by the house hourglasses.

Harry sprinted after Ron with Hermione's words on his trail. "Harry, stop!"

Ron’s longer legs gave him an advantage, but Harry wasn't slow by any means. The gap from Ron’s head start was closing, but Harry still lost sight of him around corners. They came to a long stretch of hall where Moaning Myrtle’s bathroom was located. Harry skidded around the corner just in time to see red hair slip into the girls bathroom. There was a loud scream, and Harry pushed his legs to the limit to reach the restroom. When he pushed the door open he was relieved to find
Ron was standing by the wall near the door where Harry had entered. Malfoy was across the room at the sinks. The scream had been the Slytherin's. Malfoy was hysterical while clawing at the ropes around his neck. Ron seemed to be in shock. Harry was just as surprised as his friend, he had expected a confrontation and fighting, not this.

Malfoy's breaths heaved, desperate cries escaped his mouth, all while he pulled at the chokers around his neck. He fell to his knees on the hard wet floor, and pulled out his wand. Harry and Ron pulled their own, expecting a fight, but Malfoy turned his wand on himself. He gasped a charm to cut the ropes, but his hands were shaking so hard he gave himself small nicks. The ropes fell off his neck, along with small streams of blood that ran down his pale skin. He pointed the wand at each wrist, and cut of the ropes there as well.

Free of his burden, Draco looked up directly into Ron's eyes. He trembled, and his eyes were glassy with tears and fever. "What do you see?" Draco asked. The words were a breath, and a wheeze, more than a voice. The mirrors by the sink rattled, and one cracked.

Ron's mouth hung open. He was obviously confused, and shocked, but also a bit scared. He began to shake his head in reply. Harry moved closer to Ron and prepared for the worst.

Malfoy didn't take the silent answer very well. He let out a half choked scream, and magic flowed off his body in waves. The tiles below his body started to fracture, and all the mirrors blew out with a deafening, high sound, sending glass shards flying around the room.

"WHAT DO YOU SEE?!" He screamed. The force of his yell caused his voice to crack. Tears streamed down his face as he lost all control of himself.

Ron threw his arms over his face to protect himself from the glass. Harry pulled his wand and began to cast the first spell that came to mind. He flourished his wand and hollered, "SECTUM SEM-

Before he could finish, a pale hand shot out and grabbed his arm mid swish. At some point after the mirrors exploded, Snape had rushed into the bathroom. He squeezed Harry's arm so hard it started to hurt, and looked into his green eyes. Harry felt the message more than heard it in his mind, Snape was angry about the spell. Harry had no idea why.

Severus lifted his own wand and sent a stunner directly at Draco, who was screaming and clawing at his chest. The boy dropped to the floor with a wet thud. The wind and magic stopped just as
abruptly, but magic still pulsed around the unconscious body. Severus turned to Harry, he was still holding his arm. Their eyes locked and the message was clear, they would talk later. The professor dropped the arm and went to Draco. He knelt on the tile floor, his dark robes became damp and heavy. He put one hand on the blond boy's chest and pressed the tip of his wand to Draco's very pale forehead. Snape began to chant, his voice was low, and Harry couldn't understand anything he said or figure out what language he was speaking.

The bathroom began to rumble. Ron put out his arms to keep his balance, Harry grabbed his friend’s forearm to keep them both steady. The heavy feeling of magic that had been swirling around Draco seemed to be fading. Harry glanced at Ron who was transfixed by the proceedings in front of them. His eyes were following something that Harry couldn't see. His mind was overloaded with thoughts. Ron had some gift that was trying to break through, it's the reason he was so obsessed with Draco. Something was very wrong with Draco. Ron's gift has something to do with his Prewitt heritage, and is the reason Voldemort is angry… everything was fitting together.

Ron's eyes flickered to the grey floor. "It's sinking into the ground," he whispered.

"What is?" Harry whispered back.

"The magic…” Ron breathed.

Severus pulled his wand away from Draco, and twisted around to look at Ron. His intense stare shifted to Harry, and Harry understood. Snape had heard Ron and concluded all the same things Harry just thought of. The professor turned back to Draco and scooped the thin boy into his arms. He seemed reluctant to use magic on the weak student. Without another glance, Snape swept out of the bathroom.

Ron let go of Harry's arm, and slid to the ground. He was panting slightly. Harry went to his knees besides his friend.

"You, OK?" He asked, while clasping Ron's shoulder.

Ron nodded shallowly.

Harry sat all the way down. Together they stayed on the cool floor, for a while.
Evening descended. Snape never came to find Harry and didn't contact him in any way. Harry assumed he was still caught up with Draco, and whatever happened in the bathroom. So Harry made no attempt to look for him. Honestly, he wanted nothing else to happen before the ritual. With only an hour before curfew, Harry was counting the minutes.

Hermione was up in her dorm on her bed, with the curtains drawn for privacy while she went over her notes and organized her supplies. Harry mentally prepared. He sat in on the couch in the common room with a fire going. He focused on the fire and practiced the exercises he learned from Severus. He was having trouble clearing his mind, every time he tried he would see the anger on Snape's face in the bathroom. He could feel the man's hand clasp his wrist with such urgency that it shocked Harry to the core. Severus knew what the spell was, and it must be bad if he was so angry. Harry had trusted the Prince, and it almost bit him hard. Harry pondered about how Snape knew the spell, did he know the Prince?

As the clues fell into place, Harry’s limbs become cold. Snape is a potions master, the Prince used a potions book, and was talented in the subject. Snape is amazing in DADA, and the Prince had a spell for enemies. The book was old, but not out of use…

Harry stood up. His movements were abrupt and drew the attention of other students in the room. Harry ignored them, as he walked calmly to the boy's dorm. There was one way to find out if his suspicions were correct. Deep down he knew he had made the connections before, he just didn't look close enough. Now he couldn't look away, he knew too much.

Petunia Dursley hummed while she washed the dishes. Dinner was pleasant, as it's always been since she started to give Vernon the potion. There was a bit of a rough patch when she ran out but, the new batch her nephew sent her was working well enough. It might not be as strong as the first batch, but that was probably for the better. The first time around Vernon was practically vacant, this time he was much more lucid, only calmer and happier. Most of the time…

Petunia’s steady scrubbing slowly stopped. The dish she was holding slid down into the sink, she had to stop the denial. Sometimes Vernon would look at her, and his eyes would fill with venom. Nothing had happened yet, but it scared her. Petunia knew that no magic was forever, Lily had said so when they were young. Even spells with the word permanent in them would wear with time. Magic was like energy, it would be expended or dissipate without a constant source. Vernon was a muggle and Petunia worried about what that meant. Harry had said that the potion might change him permanently with time, but it hadn't happened. She had to use more, she didn't tell anyone that she had doubled the dose this time, to make sure the potion worked.
Petunia pulled off her yellow rubber gloves and let them fall into the sink with the half done dishes. There were only two things she had learned from Lily about magic. She could remember it clear as day. Petunia looked out the window over the sink while she remembered, in the dying sunlight the garden Harry planted swayed in the breeze.

Before the final fight with her sister they had talked. It was a week before Petunia was to marry Vernon, and Lily was trying to explain magic to her sister, to convince her not to marry the magic hating man.

Oh, how Petunia wished she had listened. The only good thing that came from the marriage was Dudley. Lily had said that no magic was permanent, magic either ran out or completed its goal. The second lesson was that powerful magic had a price, always had a price…

Petunia knew she was going to pay for what she was doing. Harry had said that if it didn't change him, then it never would. In his letter with the second batch he warned her that if it didn't work she should stop giving it to him. He had apparently talked to one of his school friends while making the potion, the smart one with the name she could never remember. She had said that if a muggle's biology isn't changed from exposure, then it wasn't going to work and the side effects could be unexpected.

When the potion didn't work as well the second time, Petunia knew she out of luck. Rather than tell anyone, she doubled the dose, then tripled it. She was out of potion already, but she just wanted a little more time.

Just a little longer…

oOoOo

Harry was shaking with excitement, as he crept down the empty hall with Hermione right behind him. He had the Map out and active, the invisibility cloak was over his arm just in case. None of the patrolling professors were near the Great Hall, and Snape was still in the hospital wing with a dot labeled Draco Malfoy. When the pair reached their destination they had to work together to open the doors. They were a lot heavier at night.

When Harry commented on the weight of the doors, Hermione explained a passage from Hogwarts A History that was all about how the magic in the castle rested at night. Apparently the big oak doors had a spell that activated in the day to make them lighter for students, but the spell "rested"
"OK!" Hermione exclaimed. They had just closed the door to the Hall. The house tables were against the walls like they were every night when the Great Hall was closed. Harry went to one of the tables, didn't know which one without them being lined up, and sat cross legged. He tried again to clear his mind like in the common room. He could hear Hermione moving around while she set up. She had warned him that it might take some time to draw the array. While he meditated he thought about Snape, and the Prince.

Harry felt like he had only closed his eyes for a moment when suddenly he was being shaken to awareness. He opened his eyes and found Hermione very close to his face. She looked worried.

"Are you OK?" she asked.

Harry wasn't sure why she was so concerned, "yeah I'm fine, why?"

Hermione backed up, "well… you were sitting perfectly still for a long time. When did you learn to meditate?"

Harry blinked stupidly. He had be sitting for a long time? He wiggled his feet and found them to be numb. He uncrossed his legs and felt his knees protest. He strategically avoided answering Hermione's question about meditation by looking around her at the hall. A large portion of the floor in the middle of the room was covered in the intricate array Harry had seen only on paper. At precise intervals the blood candles were set.

"This looks great." He hoped the complement would turn the conversation away from himself.

Hermione smiled, "Thanks, I really feel good when I create arrays. Are you sure you're OK?"

Harry put on a smile, "Yeah, I was just thinking about something I learned earlier. I will tell you later, it's hard to explain." Harry felt bad about the lie, but he couldn't expose Severus, he still needed to confront the man himself.

Hermione nodded and want back to her work. Harry felt relief wash over him. He didn’t want to lie more than he had to. He stood up and walked to the painted floor. He wandered around the perimeter of the design slowly and looked it over, he was careful not to step on it. Hermione was
reading over her notes and the original text of the ritual one last time before they began.

Petunia listen to her husband's heavy footsteps on the second floor, while she finished the dishes she had abandoned earlier. His movements sounded agitated, and caused her anxiety to rise. She felt her chest tighten as his steps became louder. She heard him enter the kitchen, but he didn't say anything. It was now dark outside, in the reflection on the window she could see him. He didn't look very angry. Maybe pumping up the dose had worked, and he was changed. Maybe he was the man she had thought he was when she met him.

Petunia kept her back turned to him, but stop washing and removed her gloves, while watching him in the window. He walked across the room and stopped directly behind her. He lifted his hand and placed it gently on her shoulder. In his face she could see a struggle. His good natured personality from the potion, fighting with the angry man he had always been. She reached up and across her body to cover his hand with her own. She wanted the good parts of him the potion brought out to win, for him to realize anger wasn't the answer.

Vernon's grip on her shoulder tightened, and he locked eyes with her reflection.

"You have been doing something to me with magic for a while now, haven't you?" His voice was steady but flat, and it revealed nothing about his thoughts.

Harry was settled in the middle of the array. His was sitting cross legged, and had his hands folded in his lap. Hermione stood directly in front of him outside of the circle. She held her wand raised, with a determined look. Harry welcomed the determination she showed, he was very nervous. He had been excited since he found out about the ritual, but now that he was here, all he could think about were the names in the book, the names of the Black children that had died. He told himself that the deaths almost stopped completely, and that this was an improved ritual… it had to be.

Hermione's voice broke Harry out of his inner thoughts. She began to chant low and draw in the air with her wand. The wand tip left behind green streaks of flame that created a rune Harry had never seen. So far Harry didn't feel anything, not even a tingle of magic. Hermione finished the first chant and her wand stilled. The green burning rune floated in the air, it looked menacing, the exact color of the killing cure, and of Harry's eyes. The rune began to drift downwards and crumpled in on itself like a piece of parchment someone was balling up. It became a glowing green fire ball just before it reached the first blood candle that was directly in front of Hermione. The ball hovered for
a moment and then dipped down the last inch to touch the candles wick. The wick lit and the ball vanished leaving only a green flame on the candle.

Hermione's confidence visibly rose and she smiled in a satisfied way. She moved to the next candle out of four, the one on Harry's right, and began the process again. She had to do this in order to light each of the candles. Harry focused on staying calm and breathing. This would work, it was Hermione and she was the most meticulous researcher he had ever met. This had to work.

oOoOo

Everything inside Petunia came to a stop. Her thoughts, and her breath became still like a stagnant pond. His question was unexpected, she thought he had no idea. No answer came to her mind, nothing that wouldn't upset him, all she could think of was the truth.

Petunia's head nodded without her permission. She was on autopilot and couldn't have lied if she wanted to. Vernon's reaction was delayed, she expected him to say or do something as soon as she confirmed his theory, but he didn't move. His face showed the internal conflict he had been experiencing when he first came into the kitchen, and his hand slowly tightened on her shoulder. When his grip began to hurt her, as his fingers dug into her flesh, his face settled into cold fury… and he finally reacted.

Vernon pulled back with his hand holding Petunia, he swung his body to the side and used the momentum to throw the much smaller woman. Petunia wasn't prepared for attack and felt like a ragdoll. Her body was easily flung, and she braced herself for the impact. Two chairs were knocked over and she hit the kitchen table but didn't fall. She gripped the table with her hands to control the pain in her lower back where she collided with the edge. Vernon was panting, and he reminded her of an angry, fat, bull. She leaned away from him and pressed herself against the table harder.

"How dare you use that foul stuff on me!? HOW DARE YOU! You manipulative whore, did you think you could control me?! You sided with the FREAKS AND TRIED TO MAKE ME ONE OF THEM?!" He bellowed, his face turned purple as he started to yell and rant. "You dumb BITCH!" he concluded in a roar.

Petunia felt a fire light inside her. He was mad, but she had the right to be angry as well. She took a step away from the table and ignored the pain in her back. "DON'T you call me a bitch! You were out of control, you were hurting me and Dudley! Your hatred was infecting me and our son! My jealousy of magic morphed into vile hate because of you. Then when Dudley finally overcame it, just a little bit, and helped me do the same, you lost it! You HIT OUR CHILD AND ME!"
This was probably the most cathartic thing she had ever done. She had been too scared when he was first becoming abusive, and when he was on the potion he was nice, but now she could let it out.

Vernon became redder and his breathing heavier. "You were letting OUR SON SPEND TIME WITH THE FREAK! THAT IS NOT ACCEPTABLE! HE WILL BE NORMAL!"

Petunia stepped forward, and tried to make herself look bigger and stronger. "WHY?! Why is it not acceptable? Members of my own family are and were magical." She lost some momentum as she finished her thought. She was related to magic, she should have been celebrating it with her nephew, the way Lily would have…

Vernon smirked when Petunia became quiet, "Yes, and I overlooked your taint, and married you anyway. I took pity on you having to be related to those freaks."

Petunia felt like a nail was hammered into her chest. Vernon had always thought of her as less and himself as superior because of her connection to magic. The husband she worked so hard to be a good wife to, and tried to never disrespect or upset.

She based so much of her own worth on his opinion that she used magic to change him, rather than divorcing him. She thought that as long as he saw her as something worth keeping then it didn't matter if she was a squib, and she could stay justified in her past actions and attitude… but that wasn't true. She had been placating herself, and blinding herself to the truth. Vernon was a controlling monster, and she let her own problems lead her to him. He manipulated, and hurt her.

Petunia gritted her teeth in anger. Never before had she had the courage to tell him off, or to have her own opinion. That was changing right now, she glared at Vernon with all her spite.

"Fuck you." She spat the words at him with venom. Vernon reeled back for a moment, he obviously didn't expect his obedient wife to defy him.

What Petunia didn't expect, was the backhand that knocked her to the floor, she was still in shock when her body slapped against the linoleum floor.

oOoOo
Hermione lit the final candle. There were beads of sweat rolling down her face from the effort. This magic took a toll on her, she had never drawn on so much core magic before. When the final rune balled up and disappeared, she stepped back and let her wand arm fall to her side. The rest of the ritual would run on its own and she just had to keep an eye on it.

Harry felt the magic of the spell for the first time when the last candle came to life. The magic pulled on a part of him deep inside. His own blood composed part of the wax, and when it burned with magical fire it felt like a part of himself was burning. It started like a small warmth in his center, then it grew larger and hotter. It became painful and Harry clenched his teeth and fists to stop himself from crying out. The candles began to melt insanely fast. The red wax didn’t pool below the candles but instead flowed along the chalk lines.

It only took a couple of minutes for all of the array to be converted to wax rather than chalk. When the candles had burned all the way down and the flames were about to go out, they roared to life into pillars of green fire. Harry wanted to scramble away, but forced himself to stay in the circle. The pillars calmed, but the green fire did not go out. It settled into a softly glowing flame and began to travel along the wax patterns.

Harry was reminded of a time when he watched Dudley play with lighter fluid. He would draw a picture on the asphalt and light one part on fire to watch it spread. What was happening was very similar, but much slower. The flames crept along the wax like a lazy snake. It slowly winded its way closer to the center, growing longer. Harry felt real fear, he hurt somewhere inside, someplace not physical. He was scared of what would happen when the entire array was on fire.

His fears were realized when the four ends of flame connected, the array completed. The burning that was somewhere in what Harry would call his spirit, became a bonfire, and he screamed. He didn’t have a choice, he screamed because if he didn’t let the pain out it would consume him. He was dimly aware of Hermione screaming with him, yelling his name. When he was able to open his eyes, he was blinded by bright emerald light.

Harry could feel himself passing out, and he invited the darkness.

oOoOo

Severus sat quietly in the Headmaster’s office. He contained his rage, and put on a calm exterior. Dumbledore sat in his normal place behind his desk, his face was serious but his eyes were dull. Snape had come here to request help for Draco, the boy was still in the hospital wing and had not woken up from the stunner.

He needed help to put the boy back the way he should be, but Voldemort’s hold on him was too deep, and if Severus tried to change anything about the boys core the Dark Lord would feel it. He
needed someone powerful and experienced, so he came to Dumbledore. When he requested help, Albus had flat out refused.

Snape let the tiniest bit of venom leak into his voice. Anger would not help his cause but it didn't hurt for Albus to know he was angry. "You have trapped me in an elaborate plan to save Draco's innocence, you are going to die to protect me and him, but you won't help me save the boy from his own magic?" He may have let a little more anger leak in than he intended.

Albus put on the required remorseful face, but his eyes were bright. Snape wasn't sure how to interpret the expression. "Severus, I do not participate in any of the old ways, and have not for a long time."

Severus almost rolled his eyes. It was very unlike Albus to tell such an obvious lie. "Do not lie to me Albus. You must be engaging in the old ways, if you really mean for the Potter Brat…" He stopped mid rant, something was wrong.

Dumbledore leaned over his desk to get a closer look at Snape. "Are you OK, my boy?"

Severus slowly shook his head. "No…" he breathed.

Without an explanation he fled from the office. He ran down the spiraling gold stairs and slipped out from behind the gargoyle before it finished moving. He ran as fast as he could towards the Great Hall. Someone had set off his magic wards in a big way. The wards were set up to gauge the level of magic being performed, and would only go off if it was a large amount. Whatever was happening in the hall was more than just a "Large amount"; it blew his wards completely away.

When he was only two turns away from his destination, he saw a student running at him. After a few steps he realized it was Granger. Her face was tear streaked and she was obviously panicking.

"Professor Snape!" she yelled his name as they met. "Professor! You have to help!" she cried.

Severus didn't respond, he simply kept his pace and as expected Hermione changed course when she got to him. Together they sped into the Great Hall. The air was charged with magic, it felt ionized as if a lightning had struck the room.

In the middle of the large empty space, was an expertly created array that was burned into the floor
by magic flame and wax. In the middle was a limp body.

It was Harry.

Severus felt stomach drop. He rushed over to his student, ignoring the way the smoldering stone and wax hissed as he stepped on it. He bent over he reached for Harry's pulse point on his neck. He hesitated for a moment out of the intense fear that the Boy-Who-Lived was dead. The words from all those months ago came back to him.

_He will come prepared, he will come in pair. Where we all eat, is where his fate he will meet._

He moved his fingers the last inch. When he felt a pulse, the rush of relief was so overwhelming that he actually let out a sound. The pulse was weak and erratic, he needed to get Harry to the Hospital Wing, but it was not safe to use magic on him. Severus slipped his arm under the boy's knees and behind his back then lifted him easily from the floor.

Harry's clenched hand fell lax, and from it tumbled a small crystal bobble.

_oOoOo_

Petunia held still. She was prone on the floor. Vernon stood above her, breathing heavily. She felt blood trickle down her chin, her cheek throbbed. The only thing keeping her down was surprise. When heavy footsteps began to move closer to her, she snapped out of her shock and scrambled to her feet. The rage on Vernon's face indicated that he wasn't finished.

Petunia turned to run, but a large meaty hand grabbed the back of her neck and pulled her back. She was turned around and faced the beady eyes of her husband. He was staring her down like a dog proving it’s dominance. That's what this was, a piss fight. She glared right back and didn't look away.

"What did you just say to me?" Vernon growled. Spittle that wasn't caught on his mustache hit her face. She cringed, disgusted.

It might have been smarter to bow her head to his whim, and then run away after, but she didn't feel very smart, she felt angry. Petunia gathered herself, and repeated what she had said.
"I said, Fuck. You." She was calm as she spoke.

The hand on her neck tightened, she knew what was coming. The blow was much harder than the first one. She hit the wall behind her and slid to the floor. Vernon was coming towards her and yelling.

"I WILL TEACH YOU TO TALK TO ME THAT WAY!"

Petunia scrambled away on her hands and knees to avoid the kick that was aimed where her face had been. She was almost to the door, but she felt his hand close around her ankle, and knew she wasn't going to make it.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"And now, a look at traffic.

There's an accident at the corner of Hollows Road and Great Hills Drive. It's a pretty bad accident. It is likely neither party saw an accident of this magnitude coming. Each driver stands, staring, dumbfounded at their two twisted cars, which look like one. One…what? Not a car. A spiteful burning beast borne of mundane haste and arrogant industrial progress.

The two drivers cannot comprehend what to do. They are still, mostly. Fidgeting, sometimes. Thinking, not at all.

A neighbor who came out of her house upon hearing the hard smash of hard metal can't seem to process what is happening, either. She's slowly leaning away as if wanting to leave, wanting to forget she ever witnessed this, but she cannot move. She cannot take that first step. Her eyes, growing wide, wild, as her mouth opens, slack at first, and then slowly recoils into an unheard scream.
The two drivers feel the neighbor there, but they do not turn. They do not ask for help, or aid. Too scared to move, they stand and gaze into the crumpled slits along the sides of the pressed cars, that damnable block of hot machinery and its black smoke swirls.

And on the concrete, there is glass. And above the glass are arms, and hair, and drying blood. And the drivers stare at their own wretched bodies inside the mangled contraptions, and they do not think about anything other than what they once were. They watch their bodies, hoping for a twitch, a breath, any kind of movement. Hoping for another chance in life.

So, it's backed up pretty bad near the Best Buy. Choose some alternate routes today.

This has been traffic."

-Night Vale

Recuperate 8/7/2017

Beta’s 8/20/2017 -minijaxter
Chapter Notes

AN- New chapter! I am slowly going over the older chapters and fixing obvious mistakes. I am up to chapter 7.

I would love a new Beta if anyone is interested. Nothing huge, just grammar or spelling mistakes and I am always open to hear writing suggestions, but that's not required of any of my betas.

My updates will be much slower so I can make sure the plot stays tight. If I go back and make any changes to fix plot holes or plan for future events I will let you guys know, but for right now that doesn't seem to be an issue. Also this will give you guys longer chapters, they had been getting a bit short recently. Old note, currently have the best beta.

Summary- This is a story about people, feelings and corruption. This is most definitely a story about magic. Because there is a lot more to the world of magic than just silly wand waving. When Harry decides to start making choices independent from Dumbledore's influence he discovers a much more than he expected. Perspective changes everything. It can also make things weird.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Warning- Sexual assault implied.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)
Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 16

Foolish Things

It had been three days.

Severus stood in the back of the Infirmary. If anyone came in right now, it would look like he was unloading his latest potion stock for the Hospital Wing stores. But in reality, he was watching the young boy that was prone on the bed across the room. Potter had not moved a finger since the night he was found in the Great Hall. He was pale against the white sheets…

The brat's friends clung to his side for a day and a half, before they were forcibly removed by the Headmaster. Severus reached down to remove another potion bottle from the crate he was unloading. The menial task he performed helped him clear his mind, and think. He was angry that Harry rushed forward into something like that ritual, he was mad at himself for not seeing it… if he had not been so hesitant to trust the boy, and open up, then he might have gleaned some information from the brat's mind about his plans sooner. But he had kept everything light and on the surface, for too long.

Severus sighed, it was no use regretting it now. He placed a bottle in the cabinet, and his eyes wandered a few beds down from Harry's. There lay his second failure, Draco. He was still in a magical coma, if they let him wake up he could blow the entire ward away with his magical discharge. Snape paused in his unpacking, he had not talked to Dumbledore since their interrupted “conversation”. He was furious at the old man, and couldn't look him in the face. He refused to help Draco, and it was somehow related to why Harry tried that ritual, Severus could feel it in his gut.

It wasn't even the end of the first semester, and both his charges were in comas…

Without even realizing it, Severus had walked over to Harry's bed side. On the small table with the boy's glasses was a magically sealed black box, no one was able to open, and the crystal stopper. Granger had been clutching the bobble to her chest when they brought Harry into the ward. She said it had fallen out of Harry's hand when Severus picked him up. It was in that moment when he realized that everything was somehow connected… He wasn't sure if it was connected because of his own actions, or if it would have always been this way.
The ritual would have been dangerous no matter what they had done. It was being performed by someone who was inexperienced. The objects were made by someone who was not proficient in the crafts used to create them. The ritual itself was unstable... but, it would have been multitudes safer if Harry had not been holding the crystal. The small box he had in his pocket was made to dampen magic on the inside, and conceal it, so it had no ambient magic. But the crystal was a different story. It was quartz, a stone that naturally absorbed and held energy.

The ritual, like most core magic, was very sensitive to ambient magic. The crystal was charged with Lights Life, and because of the stones nature, it would always have a bit of the Light inside of it. That extra magic was part of the reason the ritual went south. Now the crystal was different. It was smooth, as if the magic had melted away its corners. When Harry’s friends went near it, they said they could feel it pulling on something deep inside of them. Snape didn't feel the pulling, and wondered why.

Even stranger, was the fact that no one could move the crystal more than a few feet from Harry, it just stopped, and no magic or force could propel it away.

Severus wondered if all this happened because he pulled prophetic words from Sybil's mouth with his brew. Or would it have happened this way no matter what? Was he the cause? He put the Lights Life recipe in Harry's trunk because of a small prophecy she had spoken before the end of last year. But he also put the wards on the Hall that let him save Harry because of the same woman's words. Those actions led to so much, probably more than he could imagine. If he was right in his assumptions, then Harry has been up to more than he let on.

Harry somehow knew about the Half-blood Prince, and that was not connected to the original chain of causation. Maybe this was fate...

When Poppy did her scans of Harry, she said he seemed like he would recover, but it would take time. She said that something had burned his core. As if there had been a growth on it, and it had been cauterized off. Severus assumed that the curse was removed, all signs pointed to success. The reason the ritual was dangerous was because it used magical fire and blood to burn the curse off of the core, but if it is done wrong or affected by outside magic it could burn the core very badly. Luckily for Harry it did not burn it all up, and his would fully recover, in time.

Snape knew there was an easier way to remove the curse. He didn't know what it was, but it had been used to remove his own curse when he was seventeen, after he joined the Death Eaters. But after the removal process, his memories had been wiped away. He looked over at Draco. The Dark Lord was becoming overconfident if he thought his plan for Draco would work. He needed to find a way to convince Dumbledore to help, or his Godson would die. Pain filled Severus's chest when he gazed at both his boys... his boys? He wiped that sentiment from his mind.
Voices from the hall pulled Severus out of his thoughts. He hurried back to his unpacking just in time to avoid being seen at Harry's bedside. The Granger girl came into the ward followed by the Weasley. Snape watched the redhead. That was another thing he had to look into. The boy's gift is something that Voldemort wants erased, Severus couldn't let that happen. If the Dark Lord wants it gone, then it must be powerful or somehow undermines the Dark Lord's power.

He could hear them talking, but they were whispering too quietly for Severus to understand their words. From their body language it seemed like the Weasley boy was upset with Granger, possibly blamed her for something. They were both rapidly moving their arms as their whispers became louder. Granger broke first, and stomped her foot down as tears budded in her eyes.

"HOW WAS I SUPPOSED TO KNOW RONALD?!" She yelled.

Ron didn't back down. "YOU WERE THE ONE DOING THE RESEARCH!" he threw right back in her face.

Severus dropped the pretense of unpacking potions, and watched the fight unfold. What he gathered from listening in, was that Harry and his friends went about this ritual without any adult input. Granger was the main coordinator and researcher. What Severus wanted to know most, was where she got her information.

Before any more useful information could be gleaned from the argument, Madam Pomfrey came storming out of her office in a fit of healer rage. She hissed her displeasure at Potter's friends and scolded them in a whisper for disturbing her charges, before she kicked them out of the ward.

Severus turned his attention back to his potions. While he put the bottles on the shelves he thought of more ways to put himself in the ward without being suspicious. He had to be here when Harry woke up, before Dumbledore got his hands on the boy. Everything was going to be hard enough for Harry when he got the news, the last thing he needed was the Headmaster trying to twist his thoughts.

oOoOo

The glare of moonlight on the white walls was familiar. Harry groaned when he realized where he was, through the slits in his eyes. He squeezed them shut again and groaned. The sound of shuffling feet and screeching of chairs responded to his groan.
"Is he awake?" Ron whispered.

Harry could tell he was leaning over the bed from the closeness of his voice.

"Don't crowd him Ron," Hermione hissed, followed by a rustle of clothes and a grunt.

Harry imagined Hermione grabbing the back of Ron's robe and pulling him away from the bed. He couldn't stop the small smile that lifted his lips.

"He's smiling! I know you're awake Harry." This time Hermione was the one leaning over him as she spoke.

Harry couldn't fool them into thinking he was asleep any longer. He opened his eyes. Hermione's relieved face was above him, Ron was hovering on the other side. The ward was empty except for his friends, they must have snuck down here to sit with him.

"Hey guys," Harry tried to soothe their worries by acting casual. That was apparently a mistake if he judged Hermione's glare correctly.

"How can you be so calm!? You were in a coma for four days!" Hermione was obviously restraining herself, and wanted to yell. She managed to keep her volume down, but still give the impression of yelling. In complete contrast to her anger, she flung her arms around him. "I am so glad you woke up!" she gasped, and pulled back. Her arms were immediately replaced by Ron's. He gave a tight but brief hug, and then pulled back as well, the tips of his ears were pink.

Harry wasn't surprised by their outburst. As he woke up he could feel the weight of his limbs and assumed he had been out for a while. "I know you were worried, but I have to know if it worked."

Hermione visibly restrained herself, but she couldn't keep the worry out of her eyes when she answered. "We don't know… how do you feel?"

Ron leaned in a bit closer when she asked.

Harry shifted his joints a bit under the covers. He was pleased to note that they didn't hurt at all
anymore. He closed his eyes and turned his focus inward, he could felt the energy and magic zipping through his body. His mind was very clear, but not emotionless. It was like his magic was keeping his thoughts precise, but it no longer blocked his feelings while it did its job. Harry was very relieved that he didn't become some monster and was instead a balanced mixture of his calculating self and his human self. He then turned to his magic, it was much stronger now and he could feel his core pulsing. Under all the refreshing energy there was a slight pull… something connected to him…

He reached for the dot of magic with his mind.

Hermione's surprised gasp caused his eyes to snap open. She was look at something to his right. Harry slowly looked at the bedside table and felt his own eyes widen. The crystal stopper he had been holding during the ceremony was glowing, and slowly moving across the table towards him.

Harry reached out and touched the bauble with the tip of his middle finger. It was warm, and felt like it was a part of him. He pinched it between his thumb and middle finger, lifting it to his eye level. Its new smoothness made it look like nothing but a ball of light.

Harry tore his eyes away from the ball and looked at his friends. "I think the ritual worked… but what happened to cause this?" he asked, while gesturing with the object in question.

"I didn't know you were holding it when we did the ritual. I think it's magical signature is what caused everything to get out of hand. If I had known, I would have told you not to take it with you." Hermione looked at the floor, guiltily.

Harry leaned forward and took her hand with his free one. "It's not your fault I didn't tell you. I took it with me as a good luck charm… because it's part of the beginning from this summer."

Hermione lifted her eyes to meet his. She squeezed his hand. "Thanks."

"How is that jewel part of how everything started?" Ron blurted out.

Harry chuckled at his friend's bluntness, but felt the laugh die on his lips when he caught the way Hermione glared at Ron. There was obvious tension. Harry cleared his throat and answered. "Remember when I told you about the potion I made that released magic? Well this was the stopper for the vial I used. So I felt like it helped me gain freedom and… it's kinda stupid, but I thought it might help me be free of the curse as well." Harry felt his cheeks heat as he admitted his
superstitious thoughts. He looked down at the white linen covering his legs.

Hermione put her other hand over the one she was holding. "It's not stupid, Harry."

Harry looked up at her and smiled. He was glad he has a sister like her, she always knew how to make him feel better. They separated their hands and Hermione crossed hers over her chest, Harry recognized it as a sign of her worry returning. She looked at the glowing ball Harry held from the side of her eye.

"That crystal pulls at something in me when I go near it…” She whispered.

Ron nodded, "Yeah mate, it's a really weird feeling."

Harry looked at his stopper, "I feel like it's connected to my magic, I don't think it will hurt me or anyone else."

"That's the conclusion all the professors came to when they examined it. They also couldn't get it more than five feet away from you, so it's here for good." Hermione shrugged in a very uncharacteristic way.

"But I'm sure you're going to research it," Harry supplied.

Hermione showed him a wan smile. "Yeah, I plan on it, but that's not my main concern right now."

The arms crossed over her chest tightened and Harry felt the pit of his stomach drop.

"Something's not right." Hermione muttered.

Harry looked at the crystal in his hand.

Hermione followed his gaze, "Not just that. We assumed the ritual was updated or changed to be safer, because the deaths decreased in the book, but I think we were wrong."
Ron opened his mouth to respond, but closed it without a sound. Harry noticed they wouldn't speak directly to each other very much. Harry didn't bother to ask for clarification because he knew Hermione wasn't done. "The letter we got from the candle in Grimmauld Place, indicated that the Death Eaters all have the curse removed, but none of the current generations Death Eaters or their children died at sixteen." She continued.

Harry felt his blood run cold. Of course… Voldemort has a much safer way to unlock the curse. That explains why so many pure blood families would turn to him at the beginning. Where did he get this safer method?

As if she was reading his mind Hermione answered the question. "I should have assumed the Ministry wouldn't put this curse on everyone without having a way to remove it safely. The ritual we used was formed by the Pure Blood families in desperate times, through trial and error." Hermione was talking so fast Harry almost couldn't keep up.

Ron jumped on the line of thought. "Yeah! And if Voldemort's power is connected to manipulation, then he would be in the perfect strategic position to weasel it out of someone who knew the removal method… but who?" All three went silent as they pondered the question.

Harry let his gaze wander the moon lit room while he thought. His eyes landed on a figure in a bed a few away from his own. The silvery blonde hair gave away the identity immediately. "What is Malfoy doing here?" He asked.

Ron looked over at the bed Harry was staring at. "He's been unconscious since we confronted him in the bathroom."

Harry was shocked. Whatever was going on with Malfoy was worse than he had thought. "Do they know what's wrong with him?" He asked.

Ron shook his head and became serious. "No, but Snape is really upset with Dumbledore. We heard them arguing outside the Ward a couple of days ago." He supplied.

After a moment of silent contemplation Ron lightened up, and clasped Harry on the shoulder. "So mate, any idea how to use your gift? Anything feel different?"

Harry and Hermione were quick to jump to a lighter topic, and together the three of them began to
theorize about how Harry could tap into his gift.

Severus sat awake. His quill was poised over parchment, he had just finished composing a letter. The last couple of days, were spent arguing with Albus about Draco. Severus wanted to take action, to try and help the boy, but Albus seemed to think the problem would sort itself out if he covered his ears and eyes, and pretended it wasn't happening.

The Headmaster refrained from informing Draco's parents of his condition. At the very least Narcissa deserved to know her son's condition. Severus tossed and turned in bed until he couldn't take it. He had to get up and write a letter. He would send it by candle directly to Narcissa, and be done with it. He wasn't sure if the Headmaster's hesitance had anything to do with Lucius's tentative social standing. It was true that he had been paroled from Azkaban, but only a short time afterward he was awarded a trial. Snape saw it as the ploy that it was. All the death eaters escape but one stays to plead innocence, it makes Lucius' look like he was wrongly convicted. At this point the Ministry was almost completely controlled by the Dark Lord through planted Death Eaters, it was relatively easy to get Lucius freed under close probationary watch.

Severus waited while the finished letter dried, with his Floo candle ready and lit. He didn't know what it would accomplish, but he knew in his gut that a boy's mother should be aware of situations like this. If Dumbledore didn't help, and is unable to find someone else to help, then Draco would most likely die. Along with him, Severus himself might die, if the vow interpreted his lack of action as a betrayal.

Severus folded the letter and sealed it with black wax. He whispered his recipient's name, and let the green flames take his note away. He cast tempus, he still had a few hours before sunrise. He put on his outer robes and left his rooms to go check on his charges.

Narcissa curled into her husband. She could not fall asleep, but she found a sliver of comfort in Lucius's soft breathing. Everything had gotten a little better when he came back to the manor. The Dark Lord was pleased with the success of the break out, and he seemed to have lost interest in her, to favored Bellatrix.

She was fine with this change and felt like maybe she could coast to the end of this war if things stayed the way they were. Then about three days ago something angered the Dark Lord. Narcissa didn't know what it was, but it must be related to Draco, because the Dark Lord had refocused his
attentions on her. He found a way to hurt her with little effort, and no physical damage to her body. Narcissa stopped her train of thought right there. She couldn't think about it... she couldn't remember. She pressed her eyes shut against the terrible burning tears, and held her breath until it passed.

'Don't think, don't think, don't think' was her mantra.

She heard a rush of flames, and through her closed eyes she saw a flash of green. Someone sent her a letter. Unclenching her eyes she waited a moment for her vision to adjust to dark room. Slowly, and carefully, she detached herself from her husband and crept across the plush carpet. The letter landed on the vanity near the edge. Narcissa sat on her little stool and broke the wax seal, her friend's spidery handwriting greeted her with disturbing news.

She couldn't stop the loud gasp that escaped her. She pressed her hand to her mouth to muffle her grief but it wasn't enough. Lucius stirred in their bed and sat up.

"Cissa?" he mumbled while half asleep. His long hair was down and mussed.

She met his eyes through the darkness, he must have seen her despair because he was suddenly at her side holding her. She handed him the letter, he read it quickly and swore under his breath. Narcissa could count on one hand the amount of times she had heard her husband swear. Now he seemed to be reciting a list of every curse word he knew.

"Cissa, we have not lost him yet." Lucius held her close as he spoke. "Severus has given us a solution unknowingly. We can appeal to the Dark Lord to have Severus be Draco's guide. We have to tell the Dark Lord about the Vow, it's Draco's only chance."

Narcissa felt every fiber in her body tense. It was truly their last chance to save their son. The Dark Lord would punish Severus if he tried to help Draco without permission, but if they told him about the Unbreakable Vow, and how it threatened Severus' life... he might relent to save his spy. Narcissa would take any punishment to save Draco, even death.

She nodded against Lucius's chest, his arms tightened. He understood the risk they were taking.

oOoOo
Severus heard voices from the Hospital Wing as he approached. The first night Harry and Draco were in the ward together, Weasley and Granger had snuck in after dark. He assumed that was the case this time, and was about to turn and leave. But a third voice stopped him in his tracks,

it was Harry's voice. Without thinking about the consequences Severus marched into the ward, as if possessed. He banged the doors open harder than intended in his haste, as he was overwhelmed by anger, and a deeper emotion he ignored.

Harry was sitting up in bed with wide eyes. He was obviously startled by the door suddenly being slammed open, but he relaxed when he saw it was Severus.

"Professor Snape, we only wanted to visit Harry." Hermione was on her feet with her hands up in defense. She apparently thought he was here because they were out of bounds after hours.

Severus didn't acknowledge her. His eyes were locked with Harry's. The boy's green eyes narrowed. Anger flared even greater now that Harry seemed to be OK. How dare the boy try that ritual without any help from an adult!

"What in Merlin's name were you thinking!? Scratch that, you weren't thinking at all!" Severus let the anger burst out of his mouth.

Harry's eyes widened at the hostility. When the boy didn't respond, Snape continued to rant.

"Could you not wait for the Headmaster?! Was he going at a pace you found unacceptable, so you had your little friends do it for you? And here I was thinking you might have a sliver of intelligence, and you go off and do something like this! Do you know how DANGEROUS that ritual is? To have it done by someone who's inexperienced, and to have the candles and potion made by those without the proper gifts?!" A feeling Severus had only experienced in small amounts for Draco, rose up like a raging storm in his chest. He thought of Harry in the middle of the smoldering circle, pale, his chest almost still. Severus’ kept his eyes locked with Harry's shocked, and angry green ones. There was a light tap on his barriers that he recognized as Harry. On instinct, Severus let his shields down the smallest bit for the boy. It was enough for Harry to catch the surface of his thoughts, the caring, worry and the image he saw in the Great Hall after the ritual. All the anger fled Harry's expression, and left behind only shock and warmth.

"I'm OK," He whispered.

Severus's breathing calmed, and he unclenched his fists.

Harry saw his Professor loosen his posture, and responded to his rant directly. "I don't know what you mean about waiting for the Headmaster. I didn't learn anything about this from him."
Severus deflated, the wind left his sails. "All those meetings you have with him, I assumed…"

Harry slowly shook his head. "He has been teaching me about Voldemort's past. I learned about the ritual from the Black Library."

Anger surfaced again, and it was an old anger at Albus, but now it burned hotter. The old man wasn't lying when he said he didn't participate in the old ways anymore. Severus assumed the meetings were to prepare Harry for the curse removal, to create the trust needed to be a guide. Just what was the old man thinking? What did he expect Harry to do against the Dark Lord without his powers released?

Hermione and Ron stood to the side and watched the interaction with interest. Severus glanced at them, and knew that he had let too much show in his relief and anger. It was too late now, the Oath would protect them from accidentally letting out anything about their lessons, or what went on during them. But it was obvious that there was more between Harry and himself then there was last year.

Severus sighed and conjured a chair. He sat down and prepared to explain. He had no intention of revealing his and Harry's new understanding, that was personal. But he would impart everything he was sure the trio was missing about the old ways. There was much they wouldn't find in books. It is actually a blessing this happened, or he would have had another Draco situation on his hands.

"Do you three know why, Mr. Malfoy is in a coma?" He asked in a low dangerous tone.

All three shook their heads.

"Do you know anything about Gift Guides, or what happens if you don't have an anchor?" he went on.

All three shook their heads again, only this time Granger opened her mouth. "I read books that mentioned them, but they never elaborated," She admitted.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose. This was going to be a long night.

oOoOo
Harry was shocked and warmed by the concern that he felt from Severus's mind. All he wanted to do was yell out loud, that he knew that Snape was the Half-Blood Prince, but all the things the Professor revealed about the Headmaster's lessons took precedence. He would bring it up later, when they were alone.

Honestly, Harry felt ashamed that it took him so long to make the connection. Now that the curse was gone and he could think clearly, it was embarrassing. If he had shown the book to Hermione she would have connected it in an instant from the Light's Life paper. His own muffled brain, and the fact the Snape didn't write on the board in DADA were his only excuses.

When Severus started to explain the "Old Ways" Harry was shocked at the amount of information they were missing. He felt much like he had before this summer. Like a child who messed up. He shoved down his self-hatred, mistakes happen, and now he would learn the truth and make it up to himself and his friends. Maybe he could convince Snape to join the Method.

"The reason Draco is in this state is because he doesn't have a guide, or an anchor." Severus explained smoothly. Harry snapped from his thoughts, he could see the concern in the man's eyes that his friends probably didn't notice. Snape was worried about Malfoy. He paused in his speech and pulled out his wand to cast some privacy wards around the four of them. He took a deep calming breath and explained.

"Before the curse existed, Magical people all trained their gifts, and their magic through an apprenticeship system." There was a long pause as Snape collected his thoughts again. Hermione leaned so far forward she looked like she would tip over with a strong wind. "Sometimes is was siblings, parents or friends of the family. Adults and children were paired by the synergies of their gifts, and some people are naturally suited to be a guide in general. The apprentice worked for the master, and the master helped them stabilize and train their powers. The second task of the guide is to help the child find an anchor." Severus paused when Hermione raised her hand like they were in class. He scowled but nodded for her to speak.

"Professor… why do the apprentices need an anchor? What is it anchoring?" her voice was hesitant but she was too curious not to ask. Harry was glad she did because he was also confused.

Snape sighed in a way similar to when he would let his guard down with Harry. He rubbed his forehead as he answered. "I think I need to start further back… with theory."

"Why are you telling us all this in the first place? You never liked us." Ron blurted from Harry's left, and it took all Harry's self-control not to smack him.
Severus's sharp, black eyes focused on the red head. Ron ducked his head in response to the glare.

"There are many reason, Mr. Weasley. Most of which are none of your concern. BUT the main inspiration for your education in the Old Ways, is the prevention of Mr. Potter's demise. The Headmaster has apparently left him ignorant which has led to this… situation." Severus drew out the last word like it was the name of a disgusting bug. "I am one of those people naturally suited to be a guide, so I will take up this task for Potter's sake." He tinted his voice with irritation that made it seem like the last thing he wanted to do.

Harry clamped down on his desire to laugh. Most of Snape's reasons for helping were based in the new understanding between them both, and Harry agreed that it was no one else's business. Ron's eye were the size of saucers by the end of the speech and he could only nod in response.

Severus continued his lesson on magic as if he was never interrupted, he gave the impression that Ron and Hermione were below his concern. Harry wanted to roll his eyes but refrained.

The Professor stood and paced as he spoke. "Core Magic, Dark Magic or Heavy Magic, is the essence of who a magical person is. I am sure you have read many books in the Black Library that explained the difference as intentions. This is only partially true. The other difference is where the magic comes from. There are no comprehensive book on this topic, it is just something you know if your family existed before the curse."

Hermione almost bounced in her seat. "You mean like how some spells pull magic directly from the Core as opposed to Surface magic?" she asked excitedly.

Severus was visibly holding back a sigh. "That is part of it," he conceded. "But there is more, it is deeper than that." He sat back down in a tired way. "Surface magic is Core magic that has left the core and lives in your body. It is different from Core magic because it has been exposed to environmental magic, ambient magic that is everywhere. Magical people always have Core magic leaking into their bodies and becoming Surface magic, the curse does not stop this process or we would not be able to cast any spells. The reason Core spells work for you at all and feel so difficult, is because you are pulling the magic from the small opening the curse leaves for Surface magic to rise from."

Hermione's face became alight with understanding. "I have been wondering how we could perform Core spells when we have the curse in us," she said half to Snape and half to herself.

Severus nodded absently, "Yes. That would be the reason. Once a magical child turns sixteen the channel between the Core and the body should open and make the magic easier. This
transformation also completely unleashes the Core talent or gift." The professor's face became grim and he laced his fingers under his chin, while resting his elbows on his knees. Harry saw his eyes flicker to Malfoy before he continued explaining.

"The natural process of the body and Core connecting, is dangerous, if not guided. If the magical child refrains from performing Core magic then their surface magic will naturally stabilize, but if they do use their gift or Core spells... it can be fatal, and dangerous to those around them. Every time Core Magic is drawn to the surface in large amounts and used, it leaves behind a residue in the body, that joins the Surface magic. Over time, if the Surface magic is not discharged or grounded it will build up, and be expelled violently."

Hermione gasped, "So Malfoy has had the curse removed?" she asked.

Severus nodded, his eyes were sad. "Yes. The Dark Lord removed it. He is arrogant, and thinks he can use his power to control Draco's gift without a guide... or he wants Draco to die, slowly. I am unable to help without disobeying the Dark Lord, and possibly speeding up Draco's fate."

Everyone looked at Malfoy in silence. Even Ron's eyes held sympathy for the Slytherin's situation.

Snape's voice cut the silence. He cleared his throat and continued in a lecturing tone. "The guide’s purpose is to help the child control their magic, and find their anchor. The anchor can be an item or even an animal familiar. It is used to ground the Surface magic so that it can discharge safely, without having to cast a multitude of Surface spells every day."

"So what you did to Malfoy in the bathroom?" Ron hesitantly questioned.

"That was an old spell, used to help struggling children. It can't be done often, because it is stressful on the child's body, but it is a better alternative than blowing up half the school." Severus's lips twitched in response to the shocked expressions of Ron and Hermione. He stood and began to pace again. "Magic is balance, the Heavy and the Light, Inner and Outer magic. This is an idea that has fled our society, and will be our downfall. The Dark Lord’s dismissal of the concept, is the reason Draco is in that bed. There are strict rules, that if broken can lead to disaster, those broken rules almost took Mr. Potter’s life."

Guilt covered Hermione's face and Ron shot her a small glare. Harry realized what the core of their tension must be... it was him.

"Sir, was it really the magic in the crystal that caused the ritual to get out of hand?" Hermione asked softly.
Harry was grateful that Snape didn't snap at her. He actually seemed sympathetic and explained in a softer tone. "It was a mixture of factors, the crystal was part of it, but all of the factors have the same base, Ambient magic. Core magic is different because it is pure. It has not encountered the environment and so is made up of only your magic. Surface magic is diluted by the magic of the world around us. When using one's talent, such as making the candles for the ritual, the person making them, cannot use any Surface magic during the process, or it can taint the outcome. There are even processes used that cleanse a room of ambient magic for this purpose."

Hermione's guilt double in her expression. Harry reached out and placed his hand on her arm. He didn't want her to be upset, because it wasn't her fault, they didn't know.

"So it's like disinfecting a room before surgery?" Harry voiced what he knew was on Hermione mind, even if she was too upset to say it. He felt her press her face into his shoulder, as if she was making sure he was still there and alive after her mistake.

Severus nodded. "Yes it is very similar."

Ron looked confused by the comparison.

They waited for Hermione to calm herself. Harry rubbed her back while she controlled her breathing. He was impressed she didn't cry, it was more like a small panic attack. He understood her feelings because he was having similar ones. They both thought they had a handle on the situation. They thought that they knew everything they needed, and could manage the Method on their own, but they were wrong.

Harry now understood, he needed help, he needed Snape to join the Method. He wasn't going to give up yet. It's like Hermione said about adults all those months ago at Grimmauld place, they just have to determine the good eggs from the bad.

Severus continued his lecture, he seemed to want to impart as much information as possible. Harry assumed he wanted to avoid another catastrophe.

"Core magic, and the gifts magical people use, are dictated by personality, no one casts a Core spell exactly the same. The reason Surface magic interferes, is because the environmental magic pulls your core magic further from who you are. Some people grow out of their anchor, and are able to keep their magic under control by regulating the amount of time spent using their gift, and the surface magic will naturally dissipate into the atmosphere. People, called mages, who have
Inherent abilities, cannot always control when they use their power, and are required to have an anchor. In recent times, all unlocked magical people use one because it allows them to hide their status as 'Dark', if someone notices and excess of surface magic they might become suspicious." Snape waited for the inevitable questions.

Hermione didn't disappoint him, and immediately began speaking the moment Severus stopped.

"Sir, how did all of this history get swept away? Did they just build Hogwarts and hope people forgot?"

"I should have assumed you would want more history on the subject." Severus said, with very little sarcasm. "Hogwarts was built because of muggleborns."

That caught everyone's attention. Ron puffed up a bit, "NO! It was built by the founders for all magical people, why would Slytherin build a school for muggleborns when he hated them?"

Severus smirked, in a way that made it obvious he was going to enjoy destroying Ron's views. "Slytherin did not hate muggleborns, he hated that they were diluting tradition. He acknowledged that they often had stronger gifts, and wanted their power to be integrated into our world. The apprentice system grew because muggleborns were appearing more often, soon it became impossible to find them all, before they turned sixteen. As you could probably imagine, it was a time of chaos, as unknowing magical children killed their families by mistake, or blew up parts of their village."

Hermione's eyes were wide with understanding. "This is probably why which hunts existed. Because he wanted the power in the magical world, Slytherin caused an up rise in muggleborn population?" She asked.

Snape nodded. "Yes, mostly through propaganda. If my memory is correct, it was three thousand years ago that a muggleborn started the Black family. It is how they got such a powerful, and useful gift, not that they would admit that now," he admitted.

Harry couldn't stop the laugh that burst from him. It was just too funny, the Blacks were muggleborn at their roots. Hermione cut through the laughter with more insight. "I assume the population got out of control, that's why Hogwarts was built?"

"Correct," Severus responded as if they were in class. "They created the book that is still used today to find all magical people at birth. At the beginning, they used to steal the muggleborn babies and give them to families without children. This history being covered up, is how a lot of
the fables about Dark witches stealing baby, and other rubbish, came to be believed. The school was used to educate all magical children in the traditional ways, and to guide them through their gifts."

Hermione cut in, "even if nothing bad had happened to the babies like in the myths, it's still terrible to take them from their parents," she protested.

"Yes, it was admittedly Slytherin's idea to go about things that way. It is ultimately what caused a rift between him, and his childhood friend Gryffindor. But remember, Hogwarts is thousands of years old, and it was only a short few hundred years ago that the Ministry began obscuring history after creating the curse. The Old Families didn't forget so easily, they just pretended, then they turned to the Dark Lord when he rose fifty years ago, and offered a way to remove the curse without risk. Even I do not know how he does it," Severus concluded.

Ron didn't seem to catch the finality of his voice, and blurted out indignantly, "But not all the old families became Death Eaters."

Snape scowled, "No they didn't, and look how they declined. Although it is not all due to them following the light."

Harry sighed, Severus being polite was nice while it lasted. He watched and Ron became as red as his hair.

"WHAT is that supposed to mean!" His anger overrode his fear of the professor.

"It means, that the Dark Lord put your family where it is by systematically exterminating your mother's side," Severus said, with no remorse.

Ron snapped his mouth closed, and dropped into his chair. "What?"

Harry glared at Snape until the man looked at him. He thought directly at his Professor, They had to tell Ron. Severus clamped down on the idea. "Not now, but later." He said out loud to the confusion of the two in the room.

Severus's entire body stiffened and his face became blank, he stood up and said. "It is late, and the Matron will surely be here to check on Mr. Potter soon." He scanned his eyes over all three of
them. "We will meet again to continue this conversation, we seem to have information that might be useful to each other." He looked at Ron as he finished.

He connected with Harry's eyes, and sent a clear message of time and place he expected him to be with his friends. Harry nodded, but was worried about the man's suddenly change before he swept from the room.

The look in Hermione's eyes told him, he was in for a long night of questions he couldn't answer because of the Oath. He sighed and resisted pulling the blankets over his head.

"What did he mean, why would You-Know-Who exterminate part of my family in particular?" Ron asked.

Harry felt terrible, as he could only shrug. He could feel the tangles of his life trapping him. He had a feeling it was only going to get more complicated. He looked over at Malfoy. That was the first complication they needed to fix.

oOoOo

Dirty claw like nails, gripped Narcissa's hair so hard she thought it was going to be ripped out. A large man's full weight was across her back, straddling her. She stopped fighting minutes ago, she just lay still, and watched the proceedings.

The moment they told the Dark Lord about the Vow Severus was under with Draco, the torture began for her husband. It was worse than anything Draco had to endure, and Narcissa had to be restrained once again. Only this time Severus wasn't here to pull Greyback away. He pulled on her hair until the roots were numb, while he sat across her back. To the outside observer it looked like he was only restraining her, if violently. But she could feel him pressing into her back through their clothes, his other hand was under her robe on her thigh. Every time she struggled he would grunt, and press harder, his ragged claw like nails would dig into her skin. Blood was running down her leg onto the floor.

Now she was still, she restrained her reaction to the sight of Lucius twisting on the floor, so that the monster above her didn't become more excited at her pain. The sting of her injured thigh was merely an annoyance, compared to her heart that bled for her husband.

Finally, it was over. Lucius was panting on the ground. Though the punishment was harsher than
Draco’s, he handled it with experience. He was able to get up to his knees to grovel, and praise the beast that had just been torturing him.

"Greyback, let Narcissa up." Voldemort's high cold voice commanded.

Hot breath was released next to her ear, along with a dog like whine. The monster ground against her lower back one last time, so hard, it pushed the air out of her. She coughed as she was hauled to her feet by her hair, and pushed into the circle with her husband.

Voldemort looked down at her with calculating eyes.

"I have thought over the situation you have put me in, with your rash actions." He paced in the front of the circle with his hands behind his back. "I will allow Severus to become Draco's guide, in order to save my spy in Hogwarts."

Narcissa didn't let the relief she felt show outwardly.

The Dark Lord's eyes shifted to Lucius, "BUT" he barked with his high voice, it shot through Narcissa like a cold blade. The pause after felt like an eternity. "But, I am very disappointed. After all the work that went into gaining Lucius' freedom... this, is how I am repaid? I am going to have to ask for something in return, some insurance."

The Dark Lords next works filled Narcissa with dread. His red eyes slid over her slowly. "Narcissa..." he hissed her name, "You will take the mark by winter."

She felt the bottom drop from her stomach, and from the corner of her eye she could see her husband tense.

"Yes, my Lord," She responded, with no feeling.

Voldemort let a sick, lipless smile spread over his face. "Good, I think we shall have the ceremony when Draco is home, so he can join the festivities." The final word slipped from his mouth like oil.

"I feel like now, would be a good time for another lesson, don't you think, Narcissa?" Voldemort
imitated what he must of thought was a cooing tone. "We want to make sure you are ready for life as one of my Death Eaters."

Narcissa felt her body react violently to the idea, but managed to nodded, "Yes, my Lord."

Voldemort paused, "Oh, how silly of me, I should invite Severus to the show, and inform him of his new job." He pressed his finger on the Mark of the closet servant.

It was only minutes before Severus walked through the double doors of the dining room. He had his mask on like all the other servants, but the slowing of his pace gave away his slight nervousness at being the last one called.

"Ah, Severus, how nice of you to join us. I have found out some interesting news from our Narcissa." The drawl in Voldemort's voice didn't fit his high tone.

Narcissa felt exposed. She was ruffled, and the blood from the claw marks on her thigh was soaking through her white robes.

"And, what news was brought to you my Lord?" Severus's eyes burned into Narcissa through his mask as he asked.

Voldemort chuckled unpleasantly. "The existence of your Vow to Narcissa."

Without warning the Dark Lord cast the Cruciatius Curse on Severus. He crumpled to the ground screaming. The look of absolute pleasure on Voldemort's face made Narcissa’s insides crawl. There was a time when this beast was handsome, and charming. Now he was exposed in this new body, he couldn't hide who he really was.

"HOW DARE you make a Vow like that behind my back!" Voldemort snarled, his entire demeanor changed. His rage pulsed around as magic.

After agonizing minutes, the Dark Lord let the curse go. Severus dragged himself to his knees just as Lucius had. "I…am…so…sorry, my Lord." He managed to say between his shivers.
Voldemort looked down at his servant with no sympathy. "I understand that you have a soft spot for our Narcissa, Severus. BUT, if you make a decision like this again without my permission, I will kill you myself."

Severus pressed himself closer to the floor. "Yes, My Lord."

Narcissa suppressed her relief, her entire body was shaking with the effort. She half believed the Dark Lord was going to kill her friend on the spot. She bet everything on him being too valuable as a spy. But if he was killed, and Draco was saved as a result, she would have had to to live with it.

Voldemort began walking around Severus in a slow circle, like a vulture. "You will become Draco's guide. And help him complete his task. I cannot afford to lose my spy at this juncture."

"I will do as you say my Lord." Severus grovelled, and pressed himself closer to the floor.

Voldemort nodded briskly, "Get back in line, it is time for Narcissa to give us a show."

Severus complied, and went to his place in the circle. Narcissa moved to the middle and waited with dread. Her Lord waved his hand dismissively, Greyback compiled by going through the double doors at the front of the room. When he came back he was dragging a small, crying, muggle girl behind him, his face reflected how much he enjoyed his task. He threw the girl viciously by her hair into the circle with Narcissa, and went back to his place.

The child stayed limp on the floor, only a sob or two moved her body. Narcissa stood above her with her wand in her hand. She was gripping her wand so tight her knuckles were white, but if she loosened her grip, her hand would shake so badly she might drop it.

"Narcissa, do you remember what we went over last lesson?" Voldemort asked in his interpretation of a sweat tone.

"Yes… My Lord." Narcissa breaths were became deep and long, to calm herself.

The Dark Lord walked up behind her. "Let's review."
Voldemort wanted her to cast the Crucius Curse but discovered she couldn't, because she doesn't truly want to cause pain. He decided it would be entertaining to give her lessons in causing pain, and used this small girl as her target.

Narcissa raised her wand, her arm quivered and stopped above her head. She tried to move it down and cast the spell that was expected of her but she couldn't.

"Do it," Voldemort purred into her ear.

Narcissa clamped down on the desire to flinch away. She took a deep breath, and brought her wand down in a cutting motion. The girl on the floor yelped in pain as the whipping hex struck her. Narcissa felt vomit coming up into her mouth, but forced it down. Around her the masked men and women were laughing, and cheering her on.

This was one of the worst things she could be punished with. Worse than torture to her own body, and the Dark Lord knew it. He reveled in it, and savored it.

oOoOo

Harry woke up slowly the next morning. It had been a long night, with a lot of information. He still felt a deep pit in his stomach when he thought about how stupid he had been. He had thought he could do it all on his own, with only the help of his friends. Snape brought him back to harsh reality with all the information he dropped on them.

Phoenix Method needed the professor, and probably Remus. The Method needed experience to guide it, that fact was very clear now. Harry sighed, and rolled over with his eyes still closed.

"Harry?" a soft male voice called from his bedside.

Harry's heart swelled for a moment. The voice was one he had not heard in a long time. He cracked his eyes open, and found a concerned and slightly frazzled Remus leaning over him.

He reached for his glasses and the world came into focus. "Remus? What are you doing here?"
The man smiled in his usual gentle way, or maybe a bit more gentle than usual. He reached into the messenger bag on the floor, and pulled out the candle Harry sent him. "I am here because I followed your instructions, and nothing happened. I contacted Albus to check in on you, and he told me you were in the hospital wing. So I came as soon as I could," he explained.

Harry felt warm. It was nice to know an adult cared and rushed to his side when he was sick. A small voice in his head reminded him Snape had been there the entire time. For the first time he might have adults he could trust.

Something occurred to Harry, "You didn't tell Dumbledore about the candle did you?"

Remus shook his head. "No, I thought you might have reasons for keeping it a secret. Don't worry, it's not unusual for me to ask after you. I don't think Albus thought anything of it."

Warmth spread through Harry's chest again when Remus admitted he checked in on him. He looked at the man closely, he seemed healthier and was wearing better clothes than the last time Harry had seen him. But there was something very sad around his eyes. Harry needed to clue the man into the Method, and stay close to him, he needed some family and Harry was the last of it.

Remus nervously picked at his robe sleeve. "Albus is very busy, while I was visiting you he asked if I could pass on some news."

Harry only half heard Remus, he was too excited about telling him everything. "I have news, too," he blurted out. "I need you to stay a little while so I can get everyone together and tell you." Harry almost bounced in his seat, he might fix part of his plans problem, and get time with Remus all in one shot.

Remus looked at the floor, "Harry, the news I have from Albus is very important."

"Whatever he has to say he should tell me himself. I need to find my things so I can call everyone, or get Hermione, she's good at organizing." Harry began to look on the floor around the edge of his bed for his bag.

Remus put his hand on Harry's shoulder to stop his excited movement. "Harry I need you to listen," he said firmly.
Harry gently pulled his shoulder away, and began to get up to look for his Sickle. "I told you, he can come tell me himself." He was becoming slightly irritated with Remus's insistence. He let it drop, and smiled while he looked around. He found his things on a chair by the next bed over, and began to look through his pants pockets.

Remus stood up, deadly serious. "Harry, I think you should sit down."

Harry gave a sound of triumph when he felt the cold metal of his coin slide into his hand. He pulled it from the pants, and smiled at Remus. "Don't worry so much, I was told I would recover, and I feel fine right now." Harry looked around the ward, "Where is Madam Pomfrey? She's normally hovering around me when I'm here," he chuckled.

"She is in her office so we could be alone," Remus explained.

Harry was a bit confused, why would they need to be alone? He walked back to the bed, still excited about all the things he needed to tell Remus. "So much has happened Remus, I don't know where to start…"

"Harry," Remus's serious tone stopped Harry mid-sentence. "I need you to listen to me, sit down please," He pleaded.

Harry stood defiantly next to the bed. "I don't want to hear anything that Dumbledore thinks I need to know, unless he tells me himself."

Remus's face softened, "It's not like that Harry, it's…"

"NO." Harry raised his voice, he knew he was acting like a child, but he really couldn't handle anything from the old man right now. He was still too angry about the information that he was denied, that almost killed him earlier in the week. "I don't want to hear it," he insisted.

Remus became firm again, "It's important that you sit, and let me talk."

Harry responded to the stern tone with more defiance, "No, you listen. I am here because of Dumbledore, so I don't care what he has to say…"
"Harry, your Aunt is dead."

Warm arms circled his body, and his face was pressed into a shoulder before he had time to fully process the words. They washed over, and around him, his mind was slow to absorb them.

"Albus, thought you might not want to hear the news from him, so I volunteered." Remus spoke softly. He ran a hand over the back of Harry's head.

A million thoughts went through Harry's mind. How did it happen? Where was Dudley? He felt sad, but shouldn't he be sadder? He was just starting to get to know her, she was healing… Dudley, he needed to talk to Dudley.

Harry began to pull away from the embrace, but was held in place. He didn't fight, "How?" he was shocked by the cracking in his own voice.

Remus tightened his grip, "Apparently, your Aunt and Uncle had a fight and he… went too far."

Pain and guilt surged up Harry's throat. He clenched his teeth, but a gentle hand through his hair was his undoing. His cry was strangled by his own desire to keep his vomit down. He choked, and coughed, as his insides twisted. His Aunt had finally been finding peace, Harry was finally understanding why she was so bitter. She was just starting to heal. Harry had just been trying to help.

The little girl with the pinched face, who stood in the background… faded away.

"I did this…” Harry choked out.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes
"We all do foolish things when we are teenagers. We all have foolish false events that happen to us, foolish gaps in our memories. Not everything that has happened, has ever really happened.

Listeners, especially our younger listeners, consider this:

When we talk about teenagers, we adults often talk with an air of scorn, of expectation for disappointment. And this can make people who are presently teenagers feel very defensive.

But what everyone should understand is that none of us are talking to the teenagers that exist now, but talking back to the teenager we ourselves once were – all stupid mistakes and lack of fear, and bodies that hadn't yet begun to slump into a lasting nothing.

Any teenager who exists now is incidental to the potent mix of nostalgia and shame with which we speak to our younger selves.

May we all remember what it was like to be so young? May we remember it factually, and not remember anything that is false, or incorrect.

May we all be human – beautiful, stupid, temporal, endless…

And as the sun sets, I place my hand upon my heart, feel that it is still beating, and remind myself: Past performance is not a predictor of future results.

Stay tuned now for whatever happens next in your life."

-Night Vale

AN- My life is getting crowded. I use my white space, and remember when things were a bit emptier. Come and remember with me.

Considered 8/17/2017

Beta’d - minijaxter - 9/24/2017 - thank you for your patience :)
Severus stormed into his quarters. His entire body was racked with pain from the torture he endured. Part of him was furious with Narcissa, but a larger part understood. She made a strategic move by telling the Dark Lord about the Vow, but it was risky. Unfortunately it was her only move if she wanted a chance at saving Draco, and she ultimately saved his own life as well.
Severus looked at the clock on the wall. He had to meet three Gryffindor's in a few hours. But he needed to rest, and take some potions. He had a feeling that Harry was going to drop a bomb on him, with his little friends. Every lesson with Harry had cemented in Severus's mind that he was hiding something. Possibly from himself as well.

Memories of the night he first entered the boy's mind floated to the surface. The skeletal horse with spines down its back. So terrifying, and so very sad. The essence of who Harry was.

With slow and controlled movements, Severus managed to make it to his potion stores and pulled out what he needed to prevent permanent nerve damage. He downed the potion and let his tired body fall into bed. He set an alarm spell to wake him when it was time, and drifted to sleep. As his mind blurred, he began planning how he was going to handle Draco's training.

oOoOo

The white hospital wing felt dingy. The sheets scratchy, and the mattress hard. The sterile air was dry.

Remus had left over an hour ago. He didn't look like he wanted to go, but Harry insisted.

Now he was alone.

Harry wasn’t in pain, sad, or longing. He was guilty. He’s the reason someone died, for the second time.

It was putting a strain on his mind, and on his body. He could feel it in every limb, in his skin, his bones, and even his hair. Everything that made him Harry. It was growing and melding with the guilt over Sirius.

With time, it would become bearable. Harry possessed a certainty he couldn’t grasp before the ritual. But right now, that logic didn’t help. He needed to find a way to put the guilt someplace else. Somewhere in his mind where it could dissipate without hindering him.
He sat on his bed with the photo album his Aunt had given him. It was open to the picture of Lily and Severus smiling, with Petunia blurred and angry in the background. He wished he could have seen things from her perspective, but he had been a child. If he could have cleared the fog of jealousy from his Aunt sooner, then maybe she would have left Vernon, she might have seen how toxic he was. A flicker of anger flashed through his chest. He was the child, she was the adult. He shouldn't feel bad about the past… The anger tapered off, there was no use being angry at the dead.

Harry heard the hospital wing door open, but didn't look up. He continued to stare at the picture as footsteps approached his bedside. The mattress sagged as someone sat down. He had a good guess about who it was that invaded his personal space, only one person was so presumptuous.

"Harry." The old man's deep voice echoed in the almost empty room.

Harry didn't respond. As angry as he was at the Headmaster, he couldn't blame him for this tragedy. There was a lot he could pin on Dumbledore, but this was only Harry's fault.

"I know you most likely want to be alone, but I thought you might want to know that I went to your Aunt’s house the night of the incident. If you have any questions, I will answer them." Dumbledore's voice was soft and kind. It reminded Harry of when he was younger and thought of the Headmaster more fondly.

The silence continued, Harry could feel Dumbledore shift like he might be uncomfortable with the lack of response.

"I knew that something had happened before the Aurors were informed, due to the wards. I arrived first, and I found the box with the empty potion vials. I also found your letter." The words hung in the air.

Harry continued to keep his head down and mouth shut. He wasn't sure what Dumbledore wanted him to do. Maybe confess that he made a potion and gave it to a muggle? Was the letter not enough proof? Harry became angry again, But his eyes caught the blackened hand that rested on the Headmaster’s lap. He still didn't know how it happened, only that it was a very serious curse.

No use getting angry at the dead…

The sudden thought rocked Harry. Was Dumbledore dying? It wasn't something he had considered,
"I have kept this information to myself, no one knows how you were involved", Dumbledore supplied.

Now Harry understood. He was supposed to be grateful, and thank to the Headmaster for "fixing" the problem, and then wander back under the man's wing. Harry wanted to be reject the idea, but maybe it wasn't a bad thing. He tried to get along without the Headmaster, and all he did was get someone killed. Again.

The image of Sirius falling through the Veil played in Harry's mind. No, Dumbledore wasn't perfect. He thought of Severus and all the information he was denied, and all the information that could have helped Harry. There was also Remus… Harry locked down his resolve. He was not going to let Dumbledore pull him in.

"I also saw your cousin,” Dumbledore added.

The words were like a knife in the heart. Damn that old man… Harry couldn't stop himself from looking up. He looked at the Headmaster’s face, but avoided his eyes. The old man seemed to notice, and frowned. But now that he had a reaction he pushed forward.

"He was very upset, as you could imagine," Dumbledore said with sympathy. His blue eyes soft and understanding. So inviting for those in pain.

Harry's chest tightened. Of course Dudley was upset, he probably never wanted to see Harry again. The old man was playing with his emotions.

The Headmaster smiled sadly at Harry's obvious distress. "I took the liberty of showing Dudley the box and the note. I was surprised to discover he knew about the potion, but he didn't know that you had sent a warning, or that his mother was ignoring it and increasing the dose." Dumbledore paused for a moment, and Harry could feel him assessing his reaction to the news before he continued. "Dudley expressed to me his desire to see you. He does not blame you now that he understands the circumstances."

There it was. The ace up the old man's sleeve. He made sure Dudley understood all the information so he wouldn't blame Harry. Now Dumbledore held that over him as bait. The worst part is that Dudley should hate him, Harry felt responsible. Or maybe the worst part was Dumbledore using
this tragedy to his advantage. Harry felt guilt, anxiety and sorrow well up, and mingle in his chest. But without the curse he could control it. He could analyze the situation, and his time spent with Snape only sharpened that ability.

"I would like that, to see Dudley," Harry answered in a small, sad voice.

Dumbledore softly smiled and nodded. "I will see what I can do."

"Is there going to be a funeral?" Harry asked. Hopefully he could get more information.

The Headmaster’s face dropped, "There was a small service and memorial two days after the incident. The tragic circumstances, and the fact that Dudley alone was managing the event, made a smaller and earlier service easier on him. You were unfortunately still not awake at the time." The old man looked truly saddened. The sympathy in his blue eyes was mixed with true caring. Harry always felt confused and hurt when the Headmaster looked at him like that. It was obvious that the man really did care for him on some level, which made his manipulations more hurtful.

Harry nodded. He put his eyes down while he thought about the situation. He wasn't going to give into Dumbledore, but he needed help, and he needed to see Dudley. He also needed to figure out what he could get away with. This was self-defense manipulation.

While Harry had been thinking, Dumbledore stood up from the bed. "I must go, but I will be in contact when I have arranged for Dudley to meet with you." His tone of voice indicated an end to the conversation. Before leaving he dispensed some parting advice. "Give it time, people are meant to forget. If we did not, then we would all be angry or hurt every moment of our lives," Dumbledore murmured.

Harry didn't look up until he heard the doors to the wing close. Humans were meant to forget? That might be true, on the surface. Friends forgive, and small slights are forgotten. But pain this big, will linger. It's not like physical pain, that is hard to remember after it's gone.

He reached to his bedside table and picked up the black sealed box, that had been there since he woke up. If he was going to push his boundaries with Dumbledore, he knew just the thing to start with. He opened the box and took out his two family rings. He put the Potter one on his right ring finger, and the Black one on the middle finger of the same hand. Dumbledore's reaction to seeing the ring will give away a lot about what he's thinking.

Harry looked at his rings for a moment, then back to his photo album. He turned the page to one with a happier picture of his Aunt. She had her arms around Lily, and was smiling. Both sisters
looked happy and carefree. Harry smiled back at them.

He wasn't sure he could have changed the outcome of his Aunt and Uncle. He had only been trying to help, now he had to live with this death on his soul. It was even worse because his Aunt’s perspective on magic was just starting to change for the better. He knew that it wasn't entirely his fault. and that Vernon might have gone over the edge on his own. He also knew he didn't force his Aunt into anything she didn't accept of her own free will. But the fact that he offered, made him the guilty party. His first attempt to be active and not reactive had backfired.

Maybe he was wrong. Maybe it wasn’t about being preemptive, but instead about just being. Existing. Not letting the time you have mean nothing, and not letting your actions be wasted.

That was the mistake Sirius had made. He had existed, but made no difference. His choices took him out of the game. His first he got his friends killed and he was put in Azkaban for 12 years, then he got himself killed. His return had meant nothing. James and Lily were still dead, Voldemort was still alive, Harry still went back to the Dursley's. The status quo was unchanged.

Harry would make a difference.

He would do what felt right, make waves, it was all he could do. It was all anyone could do.

He pushed his guilt to the side.

It had all been for Sirius, and now he would do it for his Aunt.

oOoOo

The next day Harry was released from the Hospital Wing. and Severus waited at the appointed place for their meeting. It was a small alcove in the dungeon. From there he planned to take Harry and his friends to his quarters to speak in private. While he waited he continued to plan out his training for Draco.

The one major problem he was facing, was location. He did not want to risk harming the students in the school while the boy was so unstable. Waking him from the coma was going to be the most dangerous part of the endeavor. He was considering asking for leave, so he could take Draco to Spinner's End, but if he could avoid the Headmaster learning of the situation that would be ideal.

The sound of footsteps on the stone floor brought Severus out of his thoughts. The echo in the
hallway informed him that it was only one person. Severus was expecting three, so he slid back into the shadows to avoid being spotted. He listened as the footsteps slowed down just in front of the alcove, then slowly, the person came into view.

Harry was standing alone at the entrance to the dead end. He looked into the darkness and Severus could tell that it was too dark for the boy to see him. What was he doing here alone? He had made it clear he wanted to talk to all three together.

Harry squinted into the darkness. "Severus?" he called in a loud whisper.

Severus stepped out of the darkness. "I thought I told you to bring your friends," He said with a stern tone.

"I am bringing you to them. There is a lot I need to tell you, and it will be easier if I just show you," Harry responded, not at all shaken by Snape's harsh tone.

Severus regretted ever letting the brat close enough to lose the fear he tried to instill in all his students. Snape crossed his arms, but followed when Harry began to lead. They walked all the way to the seventh floor before Harry stopped in front of a blank wall. Severus knew what room was here but he didn't realize anyone still used it.

Severus watched as Harry prepared to walk by the blank wall three times to make the door appear. The boy turned to make the first pass and almost fell over his own feet when a door popped into existence before he was halfway across.

From Harry's reaction he could tell this was a new occurrence. The boy brushed his surprise off and opened the door. Inside was a small room with a table and a fireplace. Severus didn’t expect to see a Floo candle on the table, he glanced at the name. Narcissa was probably aware of this candles existence, that sly minx. Did Harry know that a death eater's wife controlled the network? Harry's voice drew his attention.

"I am going to take you to a safe house I have set up. But before we go, I need you to understand that you will have your memory erased if you choose not to join us." The boy had one of the most serious expressions Severus had ever seen on his face. He could tell that this was important. This was somehow related to the chain of events that started with own actions.

He nodded to the boy. He had almost no idea what he was walking into. The thought of going in
blind made the spy in him very uncomfortable. He also knew that Harry was hiding many things; he had known this since they started their lessons, and the tempting answers were so close that he ignored his unease.

Harry accepted the nod and pulled two scraps of paper out of his pocket along with a muggle pen. He scribbled something on one paper, and used the Floo candle to send it somewhere, then he held onto the second paper.

"We just have to wait a moment. I sent a note ahead letting everyone know you agreed to the terms, so they are preparing everyone," Harry explained, without actually giving much information.

After a minute of awkward silence Harry held out the second scrap of paper. Severus had expected an address to be on the scrap, since this "safe house" was most likely under the Fidelius charm. What he didn't expect was to see a familiar address. What in the world was the boy up to?

His confusion must have shown on his face, because Harry threw him a smirk before flinging his Floo powder into the fireplace and being whisked away. Severus was beginning to feel like he was being herded, and didn't really have a choice but to go forward. He turned back to the door and confirmed it was locked tight. The room wouldn't let him out easily, he was sure that whatever was requested of the room was worded by Ms. Granger, and would be difficult to bypass with his own request. With forward being his only option, other than staying stationary, Severus flooed to Grimmauld place.

oOoOo

Harry walked out of the fireplace with a little more grace than he normally did. The entire Method was waiting for him, along with a very nervous looking Remus. Harry was trying to hide his own nervousness. The group had talked about bringing in some adults, but had never agreed on anyone. Now here he was throwing two adults at them at once, one of which none of them liked except Harry.

"Harry, what is going on?" Remus asked, fidgeting with his hands.

Harry opened his mouth to respond, but the flare of the fireplace cut him off.

A collective intake of breath was heard as Snape gracefully stepped out of the Flames. He stiffened when he caught sight of his audience. There was a very tense moment, with the Method on one side of the room gathered around the table, and Snape on the other, with Harry in the middle.
Ron slowly began to reach for his wand.

"Ron, no," Hermione hissed, and put her hand on his arm to stop its movement.

Harry trusted her to keep control of their group, so he turned to his Professor.

Snape was stiff. If you didn't know what to look for, he seemed intimidating. To Harry he looked like he wanted to leave, but was determined not to be intimidated by a room of children. His rigid shoulders and tight mouth gave him away.

The man made eye contact with Harry. He could feel a tremendous amount of thought, more than they could share. One of the problems with mental communication was that it didn't allow for detailed thoughts, only concepts and impressions. What Harry did glean from their connection, was a strong sense of vulnerability. Severus felt exposed, and he was angry. He was weighing his options and coming to a conclusion…

"Tacet," Snape's deep voice cut through the taut atmosphere.

Harry felt his heart jump in surprise. He didn't expect Severus to activate their Oath in front of everyone. A long few seconds passed before Harry was able to vocalize his response.

"Arx," he responded softly.

The magic flew outward in a gust of wind. Harry heard Hermione gasp in surprise and understanding, while the others only sounded confused. He turned to look at his friends, and saw that most of them were on their feet and ready for anything. The twins on the other hand were lounging as if they were watching a play, and needed some popcorn. Luna was also still seated, she seemed concerned, but her eyes were looking past Snape.

"I am aware that I cannot escape from this house. I assume it is under your complete control. So tell me, is this a trap? Did I put my trust in you, only to regret it?" Severus was calm as he spoke, but it was a forced calm.

Harry was hurt that his Professor would jump to that conclusion after all the time they spent
together in Occlumency lessons. But the man did admit he put some trust in Harry, so there was still a chance.

Harry kept his tone even. "This is not a trap. You are here for the same reason Remus is. An invitation to join us. He is just as much in the dark as you are."

oOoOo

Hermione was the first to retake her seat. She simply observed the events unfolding with a keen eye. Ron still had his wand out and looked unsure. Hermione grabbed his arm and pulled him down to his seat without taking her eyes off the action.

Harry and Snape were talking, they looked like they were possibly arguing calmly. She couldn't understand anything they said, it sounded like random gibberish to her. She found the entire phenomenon fascinating. When the magic filled the room, she felt it wash over her but not include her, she knew she was on the outside of some spell.

Ron slowly leaned back in his chair. The sight of Harry and Snape talking in a seemingly familiar manner was throwing the poor boy for a loop.

"Hegat gop de nenene srup!" Harry huffed while waving his arms. He looked like he was trying to convince Snape of something. Hermione wondered if she could figure out if there was a code or if it was randomly scrambled.

"Herp bot neptu canjion," Snape replied smoothly.

Harry looked thoughtful.

Hermione had been sure there was something going on with Snape and Harry when they were in the infirmary, but now it was undeniable. She had assumed Harry would tell her in time, maybe he had been worried they would be mad he was befriending their hated Professor. Now she knew it was bigger than that, he was part of some sort of magical contract or something, and he had brought Snape here to be a part of the Method. That in itself was a big deal. She was going to trust Harry. They had both made mistakes, but if they didn't have faith in each other, then everything would be lost.
Out of the corner of her eye she saw Neville and Remus sit down. The twins had kicked their feet up on the table, and had somehow obtained popcorn.

Luna caught Hermione's eye and said, "He's not very happy about this you know." Her eyes were clouded and blank. She was getting worse every day. Sometimes there were moments of clarity where she was the old Luna, but mostly she was lost. The only thing the girl did was her school work. It seemed to help her stay focused on reality.

When it came to figuring out how to remove the rest of their curses, Snape was probably their best bet. That was most likely a large part of the reason Harry wanted him in the Method. Luna didn't have a lot of time.

"Who's not happy?" Ginny asked while closing the book she had been reading before Snape's arrival. She was the only one that still responded to what everyone else assumed was nonsense. Luna didn't answer. Ginny frowned and pushed her Candle magic book aside.

oOoOo

Harry heard people sitting back down and relaxed. As expected, Hermione kept a level head. He took a moment to glance around the dark kitchen. When he was assured no one was going to start throwing curses he turned back to Snape.

"An invitation to what? A small group of children?" Severus sneered the way he had in first year potions class.

Harry didn't let the man's attitude deter him. It was just a defense mechanism.

"It's an invitation to a group that's outside of the grasp of Voldemort, and Dumbledore. A group that has a secure meeting place, and a stockpile of pure blood family books." Harry smirked as he finished. He saw the look of interest flash in Snape's eyes at the mention of books.

"Even Black didn't have access to this house's secrets, but you do?" The sarcasm was heavy.

Harry nodded calmly, "I do." He took a step forward. "I know you are the Half-Blood Prince, and I read the Potions book you wrote in. I also figured out you left me the Life's Light potion instructions. So, this..."  Harry motioned around. “is the result of your actions. Because of you I
got out on my own this summer," he concluded.

Severus had an expression on his face Harry had never seen, obviously shocked. "Have you told anyone about my… pen name?" He was suddenly off balance, not something you often see.

Harry grabbed this advantage. "No, I kept it to myself. Now that I have told you under the Oath, I can't tell anyone else."

Severus's entire body visibly relaxed. "That explains how you knew one of my personal spells. But it does not explain how you got the book."

Harry shifted uncomfortably. "I probably should have told someone sooner. I got it from Professor Jigger. I had forgotten my book, so he gave me a used one. But it seemed like he knew it was not a normal book."

Snape narrowed his eyes. "I do not like that man. This just confirms he's up to something." They had spoken about the new professor in lessons. It was a safe, neutral topic.

Harry nodded, "Yeah, I just don't know if he's doing something bad or just self-serving. I don't want to jump to conclusions."

Snape smirked, very close to a smile. "You, don't want to jump to conclusions?" he mocked with no malice.

Harry was glad his professor was relaxing a bit. "Yeah, I am trying to be better about that. Look where it got me with you in first year."

Severus finally let go of his tension. He stood for a few moments and looked thoughtful. He was probably analyzing the situation. After minute of thinking he said, "I want to know more about why you made this group, but I will join if certain conditions are met."

oOoOo

This was his chance; this could also be Draco's chance, if he got his way. Severus looked into
Harry's eyes, he could see magic stirring, and they practically glowed green as the boy spoke. This would also be beneficial to Harry as well, if everything lined up properly. He had needed a place to bring Draco, and Harry had unknowingly provided one for him.

Severus was impressed, not that he would admit it. Just having the secrets of the Black family at their disposal made this group formidable. It was obvious they didn't know what to do with all the power and information, he would rectify that. He could turn this ragtag collection of children into a force to be reckoned with. Not a force of battle and fighting, but of secrets and information. Of course he would make sure they were being properly trained just in case. He would also add to their numbers, he had a few Slytherins that needed a way out, when the time came.

This group was a chance he was willing to take.

And who knows, maybe something good will come from this situation. A situation Severus created with a single action, that took only a moment's time. A slip of paper in the right place, and suddenly there was a new side to a war. A new hope in a world trapped between old men. Hope created by young men and women, where age was a necessity, but not the driving force.

"What I want…" Severus started, then he paused. This was not the way to begin an alliance. "What we need, is to offer protection and guidance. I will join, only if I am able to bring Draco with me, and use this house to train him and you. Also, I have some other students that are not happy about their place in this war. I would like to create an alternate option for them. Even If it might be too late for Draco, others still have a chance." He was being earnest, truly putting out his intentions, hoping they would be taken seriously.

Harry was visibly surprised by the request, and the offer. He seemed to think about something, more secrets maybe. Or perhaps, he had never stopped to think that the people trapped on the dark side of the war might be the other kids his age.

Harry would want to help them, Severus was sure. The boy knew what it was like to be trapped.

"Yes, that will be fine. Better than fine, actually." Harry eventually responded.

Snape held back a smirk, and nodded. "Tacet"

Harry let his smiled show. "Arx"

The magic receded.
The moment the magic was gone, Ron was on his feet, questioning the situation. "You can’t possibly be serious about this?" he asked. The implications of Snape being there with Remus were obvious.

Harry felt a jolt of guilt because he left his friends in the dark. For Ron, this was just one of many things he didn't know until it was too late.

Severus ignored Ron's outburst and turned to the occupants of the room. "I was not aware, I would be attending a gathering of this sort. After discussing some conditions, I have agreed to listen to what Harry has to say."

The reaction to hearing Snape refer to Harry by his first name washed over the room in a ripple of murmurs. Severus almost enjoyed the shock value he held. He would keep the lessons he gave Harry plus any personal information under the Oath, but he would slowly make it clear he held weight with their leader. He needed to secure his position.

Severus moved to take the last open seat at the table, as he turned, he saw the Lovegood girl. She was curled up on her chair, farther to the back of the group with her arms around her knees. She was muttering to herself, but everyone in the room was ignoring the sound. She stopped talking and turned to look directly into Severus's eyes, as if she felt him staring. Everyone in the room focused on the sudden interaction.

Harry looked between the two, and had a moment of realization. He remembered back to the Occlumency lesson where he saw Severus's barrier for the first time. When he saw the memory of Snape's mother and heard the story. His mind had tried to make the connection but the curse had muddled his mind to much. Now, it was so clear. Snape's mom was a Prince, and so was Luna.

Harry shot up as the thought flew through his mind.

Luna was the first to speak. "Doggy doesn't want you here," she said, with more malice than anyone had ever heard from her.

Severus narrowed his eyes, and without missing a beat responded. "Tell that mutt that it's not his choice anymore."
Hermione stood up this time. "Wait, you know what she's talking about?"

Snape shot a glare at her but she didn't back down. "And you... do not?" There was a mocking edge around his words, taunting Hermione with the fact that she hadn't figured it out first.

Everyone in the room shook their heads. Severus realized they probably don't know many things, and were only reacting to the events around them.

"This girl." Severus waved his hand at Luna. "She has the same gift every blue eyed female in the Prince family has. If the curse is not removed from her she will die."

Everyone tensed. They already knew that was a possibility, but no one had said it out loud since Luna herself admitted it.

Ron asked what everyone was wondering. "How do you know about the Prince line, or their curse?"

Severus smirked. Harry thought might be enjoying the shock value a little too much. "Because she has the same eyes as my mother," He explained.

Ron had the good sense to not respond, and Snape continued. "This girl is probably one of my cousins. The Prince line has a very powerful type of gift. The gift of Mind Magic. They are mages that get all sorts of mental powers." Severus looked to Harry and nodded to confirm his suspicions. "Yes, I have a Mind gift. It is why I had trouble teaching you Occlumency, and why I was made a spy for the Headmaster. I am a natural Occlumens."

The room became contemplative. Everyone who had been doubting Snape as a member was probably rethinking their opinion. He obviously had a lot of information they needed.

"Why would mind magic be needed to spy on Voldemort?" Hermione questioned.

Severus looked surprised that they didn't know. "Do you not have any idea what the Dark Lord's power is?" he questioned back.

"We theorize that he has a magic that lets him manipulate people, by bending their magic slightly with his presence or words," Hermione recited her own research.
"That is the general idea. He can bend the magic of people's minds, it makes people more willing to see his perspective, but it twists them," Severus confirmed. "He created the Dark Mark for more than just calling and tracking his followers. It is an amplifier of his power. Those who bear the mark cannot escape his influence with distance and time. It is also ten times more effective." He sneered at his own explanation.

Hermione's eyes doubled in size, "That's what the mystery letter was talking about! That's why the writer said there are Death Eaters that are trapped." She slammed her hands on the table.

Harry nodded his agreement. They would explain about the letter when they got down to the real meeting. Severus seemed to understand and turned back to Luna. His eyes softened as they settled on her. "Shortly after my mother passed, I joined the Death Eaters. Dumbledore started trying to recruit me as a spy, but before the curse was removed... I was truly enthralled by the Dark Lord. After my curse was gone, I came to my senses as my mind naturally protected itself from the Dark Lord." Severus's visibly tensed, he hated revealing any of his past.

"So, you really are the only one who can spy," Hermione whispered, with an undertone of pity. It wasn't a question, only a verbal confirmation. "Do you think Dumbledore knew what your gift is?" she asked.

Severus nodded, "In retrospect, he could have stepped in, and stopped me from joining the Death Eaters. I think he suspected what my gift would be, and wanted me to be trapped into spying." Harry could sense there were other reasons he decided to defect from the Dark Lord, but Severus Snape would always have secrets.

Hermione became outraged. "But he only suspected! You could have been enthralled forever! You could have ended up like Malfoy! Or dead!" She yelled.

Harry could see Hermione becoming protective. As soon as Harry revealed he trusted Snape, Hermione gave him a second chance. Now, Severus was revealing choice pieces of his past that would make it easier for him to settle into the group, and also caused Hermione's sense of justice to be hackled.

Harry wasn't sure if it was the time he spent with Snape, the curse removal, or possibly both, but he could see the subtle manipulation. Severus probably pinned Hermione as second in command the moment he entered the room. Now he was going to win her to his view point with subtle and well placed truth. It wasn't evil, or even really bad at all... It was like Slytherin nesting? Harry wasn't sure if he should be happy Snape was taking this seriously, or worried, partly because he recognized the tactic and almost found it... endearing?
Harry looked Hermione over quickly. She was definitely drawn in by Snape's past, but he could see the wariness in her eyes. She had some idea of what was happening, and might be thinking along the same line as himself. He would need to talk to her privately.

"Do you know what Luna's gift is? Why it hurts her so much?" Ginny interrupted. She looked hopeful.

Severus's eyes darkened. Harry assumed he was pulling up deep memories of his mother. "She has the gift to see, and speak to the dead. Not just those tied to our realm as ghosts, but also those who are peaking through the veil with nothing to anchor them. Before the curse is removed, the gift is out of control. She is currently hearing all of the dead that might be here, and they are all pulling at her mind without consent," he drawled, cold and controlled.

Harry felt his chest tighten. Now, he knew who the "doggy" was; Luna could see Sirius. Harry looked at her, but any lucidity she might have had was gone, and she stared off into nowhere. There was no use trying to talk to her when she was like this, his only option was to find another way to remove her curse.

Ginny looked shocked, and upset, but also resigned. She turned to Luna, and pulled out the girls school work. Luna began her homework and looked totally normal. Ginny smiled sadly. Luna was almost herself when she was doing work.

Severus went to his seat and settled in. everyone in the room seemed nervous, but also a bit more accepting of the man.

oOoOo

Severus watched carefully, as Harry moved to the front of the room to begin the meeting. As soon as the boy stepped into the shoes of a leader, his entire demeanor changed. His eyes became sharp, and his shoulder pulled back. He turned to face his people, and they all looked to him with unwavering trust. There was almost an aura around Harry.

"I have called you all here for many reasons." His voices vibrated with magic as he spoke.

Severus had felt it before, but now it was stronger. Harry didn't seem to know he was doing it. Everyone, even the twins were paying full attention as Harry continued. They took their feet off the table with one look from their leader.
"I know I didn’t talk to you all before making this choice, but something’s have changed, and we need to start moving faster. We are not as self-sufficient as we think we are. We need people with more experience than us." Harry motioned to Severus and Remus. Remus looked worried about something, concerned for Harry.

"I have invited two men I believe I can trust. I just need you, to trust me," he finished, and waited for the verdict.

Neville was the first to speak, He stood up and held himself with more pride than Severus had ever seen. "Isn't this exactly how Dumbledore treated you? He would scheme and not explain anything. Ask you to trust people because you he trusted them?" He took his seat again and waited for a response.

Harry smiled. "Yes, that is how he treated me." He raised his hand to stall the uprise of voices.

Severus's eye was caught by a glimmer of light on Harry's hand. He was wearing rings?

Harry continued speak and drew Severus's attention away from the new jewelry. He found that the Boy was hard to not pay attention to, since the curse was removed.

Harry’s voice drew in the room like a calming song. "We have been meeting every week since we decided to train. I hope that you all can trust me enough to understand, that this is a unique situation. I won't ask you to trust them only because you trust me, they will be asked to sign the paper." All the members calmed down at the mention of signing the paper. Severus glanced at Remus, who looked confused, and was becoming unsettled.

Harry's attention was focused on the two older men now. "As you can see, we have an open forum. Where all the members' opinions can be voiced."

Severus was relieved. Whatever Harry's gift was, and Snape was forming a theory about that, it did not twist people like the Dark Lords. As proven by Neville, they all have their own thoughts and ideas.

"Harry, what exactly is going on?" Remus spoke for the first time.

It was a fair question, so Harry explained from the beginning. He started with leaving the
Dursley's, Hermione jumped in and helped fill in the blanks. By the time he got to the parts that happened at the school, the entire group was helping him explain. The twins were standing and doing physical interpretations of events. They claimed it was to help the new members visualize. Harry seemed to think it was a riot.

"And that brings us to now," Harry finished. Severus knew he had left out some of the details that were not his to tell, and something he did, or didn't explain, was worrying the wolf.

The twins capped the end of the story with their usual dramatics. "Yes, to just a few moments ago! When Snape shocked us all with his appearance from the fireplace!" Fred… or maybe George, Put a hand to his head like he felt faint, and fell into his brother's arms to reenact their shock.

Much of what Harry explained, Snape already knew. They had spoken about Dumbledore a lot during their lessons, and he found out more after the almost fatal ritual.

Harry was looking at Remus with anxiety in his eyes, waiting for his friend's response.

"It is hard to believe Albus would do all that. But... I also don't see a reason for you to lie, Harry." Remus's hazel eyes were full of conflict.

Harry took a relaxed stance. "I'm not saying the old man is evil, or out to get anyone. He is just blind to the potential help surrounding him. He doesn't think anyone can do what he does. He wants the Order to be his pawns, not his supporters. We are not here to take him down, but to find other ways of completing the same goal. Plus making changes in the magical world that need to be made." Spoken like a true revolutionary.

The words flowed with calming influence. Even Severus, with his barriers, could feel himself relaxing. He was beginning to get a very good idea of what Harry's power was.

Remus's conflict slipped off his face. Whatever it was that worried him, didn't seem as important now. He slowly nodded. "So what do I have to sign? You said something about a paper?"

Hermione pulled out the paper with the blood signatures. Remus eyed the now rust colored names, warily. He became visibly nervous when she also pulled out a small blade and a bowl. "Until we have a better way, this is how we keep track of the members," she explained. Before he was asked to sign, she laid out the parameters of the contract, and what happened if he broke it.
For a moment it looked like Remus might back out; he looked to Harry. Severus watched closely as they interacted. Remus began to shake his head, but Harry placed a hand on his shoulder and said some quiet words Severus couldn't hear. Remus's shoulders relaxed, and his eyes cleared of any confusion. The air around the two almost shimmered with magic.

Severus glanced around the room to see if anyone else noticed. Everyone was watching the proceedings without any indication they saw anything… except Weasley, the youngest boy. Ron was looking at Harry with narrowed eyes, not with anger, but with interest. His eyes weren't fixed in one place, but instead roamed over Remus like he was solving a puzzle.

Cheering, snapped Severus from his thoughts. He looked back at Harry, and saw that Remus had signed the paper, and a cut on his hand was being healed. He was surprised they were using Core magic to heal it. Apparently these children have been training hard.

Suddenly all attention was on Severus. Harry was looking at him expectantly.

"The conditions I requested?" He reminded.

oOoOo

Harry nodded, and turned back to his group. "Severus, has asked for some conditions to be met before he helps."

The room became tense, worried about what Snape might have asked for. Harry looked like he was concerned about their reaction, but plowed forward, as was his way. "There is only one condition that affects us as a group. He has asked for sanctuary... for Draco Malfoy…” The sound of shifting bodies overlapped the words, but no one spoke. Harry didn’t pause. “while he recovers from complications caused by having his cursed removed, and protection for any children of Death Eaters who might not want to follow their parents. He has also offered to help others who have their curse removed, including myself. So I think this is a good trade..." Harry continued to ramble, as if stopping would give everyone the chance to refuse. "I think we need his help, if what happened to Malfoy could happen to any of us…” He trailed off, showing his nerves for the first time.

Everyone looked thoughtful. They all knew of the young Slytherin's condition, and were informed by Hermione that the cause was the untrained rampage of Malfoy’s gift. Hermione was the only one not contemplating the news, she was looking through her bag on the floor. When she
straightened up, she was holding an expensive piece of paper.

Harry recognized it as the paper the mysterious letter was written on, but this one looked less worn. She held it out to him with a small smile. "This came before anyone else showed up. With all the chaos, I didn't have a chance to show you." She looked abashed that she had forgotten.

Harry took the letter and unfolded it. It was short. Three words and a name.

*Save my son.*

*Narcissa*

Understanding dawned on Harry. The first letter was from Malfoy's mother as well. Once again something was deeper than Harry had assumed. Something drastic must have happened for Narcissa to give herself away like this, and ask for help so directly. The stricken look caught Severus's attention, and he came over to see the letter. Harry held it out, without hesitation. A small sign of his trust in the man, if anyone cared to notice.

Severus didn't seem surprised. "When I saw the candle on the way into this place, I knew Narcissa would be aware you were on the network. She would take any advantage to save Draco. I should have expected this after…" He cut himself off.

"After what?" Hermione asked.

Severus's eyes grew dark. "She had been through much. Most recently she has become the favored entertainment for the Dark Lord," he snarled.

Hermione cover a gasp with her hand. The group of barely adults could only imagine the worst, but their imaginations were probably lacking compared to the reality. Hermione removed her hand from her mouth, and raised it. "I accept Severus Snape's Membership with his conditions," she stated, loud and clear.

There was silence...
The next hand to slowly rise into the air, was not expected. Ron's pale freckled limb shook slightly above his head. "I accept," he agreed quietly. Then, barely above a whisper, he expounded. "I know there is more going on with Malfoy then we have seen, or been told. We have to understand his condition, so we can successfully remove the curse from the rest of us. Plus… his mother. I'm not a monster." The end of his statement needed no more explanation. Slowly everyone else in the room raised their hand.

"This doesn't mean we have to like him… or trust him," Neville modified, but still kept his hand up.

Harry nodded. Feeling in his pocket for the two sickles he would give the new members.

Severus stepped forward, and Hermione pulled out her knife.

oOoOo

The signing of the contract was completed, and everyone in the Method was sitting around the table in silence. In the middle, along with the Floo candle, was the small crystal stopper. Everything that was known about the item had been explained. Many were surprised to learn that Severus had taken the time to help Harry. That his actions were the reason the Method existed. Severus let his smugness float on the surface.

Harry sat at the head of the table. On his right was Hermione, followed by the twins, then Neville, Luna, Ginny, Remus, Severus, and it ended on his left with Ron. Everyone had questions, but the pressure in the room kept them pressed inside their minds. The situation was still a little awkward.

Finally Harry spoke. "So, Luna can see the dead?" he asked quietly, and felt dumb for blurting it out.

Severus nodded. "That is the gift that all blue eyed Prince Daughters have received."

Harry fidgeted with his fingers. The atmosphere of confidence he held before was gone, and replaced with a young boy that has lost too many loved ones. "So the doggy she keeps talking about?"

Severus held in a suffering sigh, "That is most likely, Black." He only half spat the name.
Harry's hands tightened around themselves. He didn't say anything more.

Severus took the topic, and changed the line of thought. "There are many mind gifts in the Prince line. You have to be related in some way to the family, in order to have any mind gift." He waved his wand, and put a pot of tea on. He was going to get comfortable since he was apparently stuck here for a while. "I put my potion recipe in Harry's trunk, because the events were.. Prophesied." He let his flair for the dramatic shine through, as if he were scaring firsties.

Remus voiced, unaffected by his tactics, asked the obvious question. "By who?"

Severus smirked. "Why, our own Divination Professor."

Harry visibly stiffened.

"And, before you all start buzzing in my ear about her being a crackpot," Severus quickly snapped to cut off any retorts. "She is related to my family, a cousin. She has a legitimate gift, that is being repressed by the curse." The tea pot whistled. Cups began floating to everyone as Snape continued talking.

"I have a special brew, that allows the… 'Pressure', is an apt word for it, to be released. It is required weekly, so that she can retain enough sanity to teach. She is not aware of any of this. Ms. Lovegood can benefit from the brew as well. I will begin bringing it."

Ginny smiled. "You would do that?" she asked brightly. Still weary, but warming up.

Severus only nodded. He could never tell them how deeply it affected him, to see another go through what his mother had. He created the tea in case there was ever another blue eyed Prince girl, or if he ever fathered one. This was when he was young, and dreamed of Lily. It was only by chance that he ended up helping Sybill, but it worked out for both of them.

Hermione put cream in her tea, and set it to stir itself. "So she is really crazy, the curse is repressing a powerful gift, and it's driving her insane?" She deduced.

"That is correct. I happen to hear snippets of her predictions, while administering the tea. One of
them prompted me to put the note in Harry's trunk, another gave me the idea to ward the Great Hall, thus saving the boy's life." Severus explained in his lecture voice.

Hermione's eyes widened, and then darkened with guilt. "So, when I found you in the hallway?"

"I was already on my way to the Hall. I didn't know what was going to happen there, but I knew it was important." Snape was again gentler with the guilt ridden girl than expected. "I do not know if I have changed things for better, or worse. Or honestly, if I have changed them at all. If I did not act in response to Sybil's words, would Harry have found another way to get out of his home this summer?" He posed the question, not expecting an answer.

Hermione's entire body jumped when Severus voiced his thoughts. Her hands clenched the table. Snape noticed her reaction, "What are your thoughts Ms. Granger? On the matter of fate?"

Hermione shook her head, "I don't like to think about it," she admitted.

It was not the expected response from someone like her. He let it drop this time.

"If Professor Trelawney is really a seer, then we should bring her in and remove her curse," Neville suggested.

"Perhaps in the future, but as of now, she is well and truly insane, and cannot separate reality from the things in her mind. Only my sessions with her keep her stable." Severus glanced at Luna, "We have others to attend to, and then we can help her." He made his point clear.

Ron glared at Snape, "We may have let you into the Method, but you are not the leader, stop acting like it," he spat.

Harry held up his hand. "It's OK, this is part of the reason I asked him to join. There is so much we don't know, but I agree with him on this. We should wait."

Hermione put her hand on Harry's arm in the comforting way she always did, and nodded.

After some silence, the twins struck up the original topic. "So this little trinket, does anyone else
feel like it's pulling at you?" Fred asked… or maybe George, "It's a right creepy feeling," the other twin added.

Everyone at the table nodded, and murmured their agreement. Hermione watched Severus closely, he was staring at the gem. He looked puzzled.

"Professor Snape, do you feel the pulling?" She asked.

"I do not," he confessed.

Hermione's eyes lit up, you could see the gears turning in her mind. "Do we know anyone else besides Professor Snape and Harry, who has had the curse removed?" She raised her voice for attention.

"Well, Malfoy, but he's still in a coma." harry replied.

Hermione bit her lip. "I have a theory. I think that the gem is pulling at the magic of the curse. It is all the same magic, from the same origin, and the stopper has absorbed some magic according to the professors that examined it. What if it's the curse magic, what if the gem is now some sort of curse magnet?" She was bouncing her her seat.

Harry reached out and picked the stopper up. He looked to Severus and Remus. "Do you think that's possible?" he asked.

Remus looked closely at the gem. "Maybe, Crystal is known for having interesting interactions with magic. This looks like it was carved from clear quartz," he mused.

Harry looked to Severus for his opinion. It was becoming clear that this small group would be like his council.

Severus made eye contact. Harry could see he had something to say, but didn't want to voice it here with everyone. He felt his professor relaying a message. They needed to resume lessons. Harry assumed that meant he needed time to think, and then they would speak privately.
In his peripheral vision, Harry could see Hermione watching them. She was looking closely, like she did in the hospital wing, and while they were arguing earlier. Harry saw on her face that she had figured it out. She knew that Snape and him could communicate somewhat without words. He hoped she would keep it to herself. Harry glanced once more at Severus, and felt he noticed as well.

It was getting late, and the meeting ended with many loose threads.

Harry prepared himself for a lot of questions from Hermione that he literally couldn't answer.

As he was walking to the fireplace, Remus cut him off. His expression was full of caring. Harry held back a sigh. He could tell that his friend had been worried all night. He probably wanted to talk about Aunt Petunia's death.

"Harry, are you alright?" Remus asked in a hushed, concerned tone.

"I'm fine Remus, really," Harry replied. He stopped himself, again, from sighing. Remus had been hinting all night about Harry's feelings over the accident. He really didn't want to think about it, he just wanted to meet with Dudley, and move on. He didn't have time to deal with it right now.

"If you're sure..." Remus trailed off. He squeezed Harry's shoulder, and then left through the fireplace. His unspoken support clearly offered.

oOoOo

Stay in bed and hide.

That is what she was going to do.

Narcissa curled in closer. She could not block out the screams of the little girl. She could not forget the feeling of having no control. The weight that held her to the ground, the ragged claws that drew her blood, and the hot, rotten breath on her neck.

She did not feel human any longer.
Her hand trailed down her side to her thigh. White cotton bandages covered the claw marks that Greyback left. They would scar, he was not transformed when he cut her, but he is always one with his wolf. The cuts would be there for the rest of her life. A reminder of her weakness.

Lucius told her it was the opposite. She was strong, she survived. That because of her, they were both alive, as well as their son. But sometimes, she had trouble seeing things that way.

Her husband told her not to lose herself. That this is what the Dark Lord did. He made you forget who you are. Lucius put another braided rope on her other ankle. It helped a bit. She didn't know what she would do without him. When the time came for her to take the Mark, she didn't know if she would be strong enough to survive, and fight the Dark Lord's influence. There wasn't much of her left, and after she was marked, there would be nothing.

She decided not to tell Draco about the marking ceremony, yet. Severus wasn't aware either, but he would find out soon. When that time came, she wouldn't be able to hide it from her son any longer.

Narcissa closed her eyes. She would sleep. And when she woke up, she would be more herself again. She would be strong and move forward.

As long as she had her family she would survive.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"Leonard gave me my start. He took a chance on me. He gave me the life I have, and now he doesn't have life. It is an equation with a mis-written number. Nothing can be solved. It is an error…"

-Night Vale

A/N- Well that was… hmmm. And now… ummm. *Flips thought papers* Everything's a mess... Oh here. *Clears throat*

"And now, a word from our sponsors."
Too much clutter in your home? Do you have excess furniture? Old clothes? A couple of folding bikes you never ride anymore? Jazz CDs that you no longer want because you finally realized how intellectually dangerous they can be?

Perhaps you could put that stuff online for sale!

There's no reason to let old junk go to waste. How does that saying go? "One person's trash is another person's leather bodysuit?" It's true! I bet that couch of yours would look really good in, say, Denise Esposito's house. In fact, it's there now. We went ahead and sold your couch to Denise. She's already come and picked it up while you were at work.

Also, we sold your TV to Sally Jensen, and your fridge to Mario Landis, and both of your cats to Pedro Renia. We sold all of your belongings, and you didn't have to do a thing!

Craigslist. We sold your stuff while you were gone.

-Night Vale

Settled 8/23/2017

Beta’d minijaxter 9/24/2016 - apparently football is good for editing. :}
AN- Here is the new chapter. Sorry it's not what you wanted just yet! Next chapter Draco wakes up and all the awesome Drama!

THANKS! To all my reviewers on all the sites this story is posted! You guys on AO3 are especially awesome.

I just had the best idea while writing this chapter!

READ the side story! Hermione does some light reading

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

*SPOILER*

I have been planning for a while to have some people’s powers synergies to create new and interesting magic, also very powerful magic. While writing this I came up with one that solves a plot problem I was working on so I am excited! Of course these magic's were never discovered before because families were so secretive about their gifts, but not the Method!

*SPOILER OVER*

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)
Harry Potter didn't know what to feel. He was certainly feeling something, but he wasn't sure if it was the correct thing to feel, or if there was a correct feeling. He held himself to a high standard ever since he started Phoenix Method. Aren't leaders supposed to always be in control? Harry was definitely not in control… This wasn't like the wooly fuzz that covered his thoughts before. Now, he was just confused. All the decisions he had made, and will have to make, were muddled together.

Another presence slowly slid into his mind, it slipped between the tangled thoughts, and offered stability. The mind that touched Harry’s leant him the strength he needed, to raise his forming barriers.

Heavy, oily, darkness, felt smooth on the skin as it settled over them. Harry felt cold sadness fill his chest, as his Aunts' angry voice surrounded him; it was muffled by the door to his cupboard. He sat on his thin mattress and listened to his family. Normally he would be alone under the stairs, but this wasn’t real..

A pale hand gripped his shoulder. Harry wasn't sure if it muted the sadness, or made it worse, because it was being acknowledged. The words "Are you OK?" were often the key to a person’s undoing.

"Harry, you must organize your mind. Does this memory still serve its purpose for your barriers?" Severus's deep voice came from behind Harry. Even though there isn't enough room in his real cupboard, here in the dreamscape, Snape could be with him.

"Yes, it was always Vernon that put me here. It was him that it protected me from, not her." The darkness parted for a moment. A strip of light flickered as quickly as the door opened and shut. The clatter of a china made both occupants look down. A cheese sandwich on a chipped, white plate
was on the floor.

"That BOY isn't getting any food today! DO YOU HEAR ME!? NOTHING!" Vernon's voice boomed through the wood door. His meaty fist pounded on the wall, he laughed and taunted the child inside about starvation. Plaster rained from the ceiling and Harry moved to cover his food on reflex.

"Vernon, we will be late." Petunia's irritated voice cut off the pounding and yelling.

"We will be on time! I have to make sure that freak knows his place. No food today! He did that funny stuff and appeared on the school roof," Vernon sounded outraged.

"He won't eat dear. Come along Dudley." Petunia called out and led her husband away.

Harry and Severus sat in the quiet darkness of the memory. The hand on his shoulder tightened.

"She was feeding you behind his back?" Severus stated, but Harry slowly nodded, and they sat quietly for a moment.

"Do you want to finish our session here?" Severus's voice broke the quiet. "Now we know that the cupboard still works as the base of your barrier." He was being nice, too nice.

"Who told you?" Harry asked. Snape never went easy on him, or let an Occlumency session end without progress. He listened to the creaking of the house and studied the musty brown wood. He wasn't sure how he felt about this place being such an influence on him. He had never thought about it consciously, but here he was, protecting his thoughts with it.

Severus sighed, realizing he was caught. "I was there when the Headmaster told Lupin about your Aunt," he admitted.

Harry nodded, "I'm not mad, I just don't want to talk about it. Nobody knows except you, Remus and Dumbledore, and I want to keep it that way."

Severus's silence was his agreement.
Harry was uncomfortable and words bubbled up without his consent. "I want to talk about trees." An obviously bad ploy to change the subject.

"Trees?" Severus questioned.

Harry laughed a little. "Yes, you said I need an element, and that it normally relates to strong memories. Trees were a place of escape for me. Dudley and the dogs couldn't climb them, and the Whomping Willow protected Remus and Sirius. I also gardened a lot, I think my element might be plant related... like yours." Harry stopped when he realized he was rambling.

"Then tell me about trees." Severus's responded. Still too soft, but maybe that was OK.

oOoOo

The blue drawing room was guarded by a set of sliding double doors made of a dark oak. This was lucky for Hermione, Ron and Neville, because it made spying much easier. They looked over each other's shoulders through the crack in-between the doors.

"What do you think they are doing?" Neville whispered.

Ron shrugged above him. "I don't know. They went in there and activated their weird thing that makes it so we can't understand them, and now they are just looking at each other." He sounded irritated.

Once training began for the members of the Method, Grimmauld Place became much busier. Harry gave permission for all members to come and go as they please for personal practice. Using the Room of Requirement ensured no one knew they were off school grounds. Hermione thought it was all rather brilliant and sneaky. Secretly she enjoyed the sneaky part.

The house always had at least one or two people in it. After the meeting the night before when the first adult members joined, Harry offered a permanent room to Remus. The man reluctantly accepted, but insisted he help the Method by bringing information from the Order, Harry agreed. Hermione thought that Remus living in the house was great. she came here and talk to him about the Method and Homework, and dragged Ron along, who roped Neville in to avoid boredom. They had been in the kitchen going over their DADA essays with Remus, when Snape and Harry came through the fireplace.
Everyone paused. Hermione felt like they were all a bit on edge with Snape around. It had only been one day since he joined, and they had no real proof he wasn't going to be mean like before. Neville looked like he was caught after curfew and glanced at Remus for help.

Snape looked at the papers spread across the table and must have recognized the essay he had assigned. He gave a curt nod that was almost approving, he looked at Remus and nodded again

"Lupin," he said civilly.

Remus nodded back "Snape" he responded with equal civility.

Snape swept out of the room with Harry tagging along.

After only ten minutes Hermione couldn't contain her curiosity. "Professor Lupin, do you know what Professor Snape and Harry are doing here?" She questioned, with the most innocent face she could muster.

Remus sighed and put his quill down. "Call me Remus, Hermione. I'm not a professor anymore."

Hermione flushed. She knew it was stupid to be afraid of calling an adult by their first name, especially when they were part of the same secret organization, but she had never done it before.

"Sorry, Remus. Do you know what they are doing?" She amended, becoming redder.

Remus put his hand through his greying hair. "Harry told me they would be meeting alone, but he did not tell me why." His tone was worried.

A half an hour later the students finished their essay corrections, but Harry and Snape had not come back to the kitchen. That’s how they ended up outside the Blue Drawing room, spying. When they first arrived at the room they had only intended to check and see if Harry was ok, but after they found him they couldn't control their curiosity. Harry was sitting on the couch and Snape was sitting on a chair across from him. Between them was a chess board with a half-finished game set up, but both the occupants were looking at each other directly in the eyes.
It had been five minutes since Hermione and her cohorts found the odd scene, and nothing happened. They could tell the Oath was active by the feel of magic in the air, as if lightning had struck nearby, but other than that it was quiet and still.

"OH! They moved!" Ron hissed.

Hermione pulled herself back to the present. Ron was right they did move. First Snape reached out and made a move on the chessboard, and then Harry responded to the move, but they never broke eye contact.

"Creepy, that is," Ron muttered.

Soft footfalls from behind them went unnoticed by the spying teens.

"What are you three doing?" Remus's sudden question had all three of them jumping out of their skin. Hermione fell on her bottom and knocked over Neville who knocked over Ron.

The teens looked up from the floor with sheepish smiles. Remus glanced into the drawing room, and then slid the doors completely closed. He turned on his younger co-members.

"If you had made too much noise and interrupted them, it could have been very dangerous." Remus scolded.

Hermione narrowed her eyes. "So, you do know what they're doing?" She accused.

"I didn't before, but now I have my suspicions. You're lucky they are in a deep mind state, or they would have caught you." Remus ran his hand through his hair, he looked tired. "Come on you lot, let's have tea, and I will tell you what I know. But don't tell anyone else, please," he half pleaded.

The three on the floor scrambled after Remus as he turned and walked back to the kitchen. When they arrived the kettle was already on the stove, and Remus was fishing out cups. They sat around the table and waited, they were the picture of patience and manners.

When tea was served, and everyone was settled, Remus began to explain "I don't know much, and I
only have my suspicions from what we just saw. I’m also only telling you because I know you three." He looked right at Ron and Hermione. "Especially you two. I know you will poke around until you find out the truth. So, don’t repeat my words"

All the children nodded in understanding, not even attempting to defend themselves.

Remus accepted their agreement. "I believe that Severus is teaching Harry Occlumency again. There are many ways to do it, and one way is cooperative work in the student's mind to build shields from the inside out. It takes time, and is very difficult, but it is the best way to do it if you are capable. I just never thought they could pull it off, because there is a high level of trust required." Remus concluded his assumptions, and sipped his tea, waiting for a reaction.

Hermione had a moment of dawning understanding. "Harry trusts Snape more than we ever knew. They must have been working on this for a while."

Remus nodded. "When Severus arrived last night at the meeting, I suspected something like this. Now it is confirmed, and I think it's a good thing. Severus is very talented and knowledgeable, and Harry needs to protect his mind." He smiled a bit.

Hermione nodded in agreement, but Ron looked like he was unhappy, even as he reluctantly agreed. Neville was the only one to voice doubt. "But there has to be a reason that Professor Snape decided to help Harry. I don't think asking politely would have worked."

"I think a lot happens to Harry, through his own actions or events around him, that we don't know about." Remus looked down at his tea with a sad smile. "Only this time, something good came from it."

Hermione saw something in Remus’ eyes that scared her. He knew something about Harry that others didn't, but she only nodded in response as they finished their tea.

"So why were they playing chess?" Ron blurted out.

Remus chuckled, the melancholy air around him warmed, and began to explain. All the children listened attentively as he described the concept of a tether to reality while training to always have your barriers up.

oOoOo
Harry swung his legs back and forth through the air. Severus kept his legs still, but allowed them to hang over the edge and dangle. They were at the entrance of Harry's cupboard, but it was no longer under the stairs. The door was high in a tree that was covered in white flowers that looked like clouds. It was only the door was suspended in the branches, but when it opened the cupboard still was inside.

The door was open. Both teacher and student were sitting on the edge of the entrance.

"A Dogwood tree… very fitting." Snape drawled.

Harry laughed at the man's mock disdain. "Yes, it reminds me of Sirius."

Severus grunted. "Yes well, other than poor taste, I find myself impressed with your barrier set up. It is unique," he reluctantly complimented.

"You did say that it didn’t need to be a literal barrier, like yours." Harry smiled. He was happy with his progress.

"Yes that's true, and this form is convincing. If anyone does break in, they will only think they have found an unhappy child protecting themselves from their past." Severus looked down. "Now for the last step. You will need to incorporate the essence of who you are. Much like the owls in lace that I use. But that will have to wait for another time." Snape's mind briefly flashed to the snake like Thestrals he had seen the first lesson with the boy. He wondered if they would look the same when Harry manifested them here.

Harry nodded. "Good, I’m getting a headache." He rubbed between his eyes.

"That will stop eventually, until then, some Firewhiskey always fixes it for me. Not even pain potions can completely heal the pain that Occlumency causes." Severus stood as he spoke.

"Like Dementors and chocolate? Whisky fixes Occlumency head pain?" Harry was dubious.

Snape smirked, "Yes actually, why do you think I chose it when I tricked you the first time, and have been offering it since? Did you think I just enjoyed watching drunk children?"
Harry blushed bright red. "NO... maybe."

Snape gave a sharp laugh, the only real laugh Harry had ever heard, then he jumped from the tree and disappeared.

Harry was so surprised he didn’t immediately follow.

oOoOo

Harry landed on the couch and grabbed his head. "Oh man, that hurts more than before."

Severus stood and adjusted his robes. "Yes, the second phase does normally cause more pain. Is the tree holding up?"

Harry nodded faintly. He was trying to focus on the fine stitching of his seat to control the pain. But his eyes wandered left and right, and then stopped on the table besides the couch. The teacup that Sirius left was still there, the fuzzy tea was dried up, and the mold was withering at the bottom of the china. No one had picked it up since the Method started… they all must know why it was left there. Even the house knew.

Harry looked away. He would figure this all out and fix Luna. Then she could talk to Sirius for him.

Everything just had to work out…

"Good, we will be having company in the kitchen." Snape announced.

Harry looked up through squinted eyes. "What?" He had forgotten Severus was there, he knew he sounded dumb, but couldn’t care at the moment.

"Some of your little friends were watching us. I am sure they waited up for you." Severus sneered in genuine annoyance.
"How did you…” Harry wasn't able to see anything of the outside world except the chess board, so how did Snape know?

Severus reached down, and gently helped Harry to his feet. "I have been doing this a lot longer than you, and it is part of my gift." He explained as he helped the pained boy to the door.

Snape said the word to end their privacy bubble as he guided his student. "Tacet."

Harry mutter "Arx" before exiting the room. He stumbled a bit on the thin runner that spanned the hallway to the kitchen. Severus kept him steady until they turned the corner and opened the doors.

Their entrance was met with a sudden silence. Hermione was the first to react, she noticed Harry using Snape as support, and stood to help him into his seat.

"What's wrong with Harry?" Ron looked from his friend to Snape, "What did you do!?" he accused.

Remus reached out at put a hand on Ron's shoulder before he jumped out of his chair. "This is a common side effect from major milestones in his training," he assured.

Severus ignored all of the commotion and went straight to the whiskey he knew was hidden in one of the cupboards. He put the bottle and a glass on the table in front of Harry.

"I plan to bring Draco here by the end of the weekend," Severus announced, but never took his eyes off his student.

Harry began pouring himself a drink. Hermione watched curiously, then glanced at Remus questioningly. Seeing Remus unbothered by the whiskey, she let it go and turned her focus on Snape.

"How will you get him here?" She asked.
Severus poured himself a drink as he spoke. "I have already owled Lucius, and he agreed to let me move Draco. He will send Dumbledore a letter claiming he wants to take his son home for further treatment. The Headmaster can't stop a legal parent."

"Does Lucius know where you are taking him?" Harry asked over his half-finished drink.

Snape scowled. "Of course not. He will simply think I have taken him into hiding for training as the Dark Lord ordered. As much as I would like to trust my old friend, I cannot… just yet."

Harry nodded, "OK, sounds good to me." He glanced at Snape, and felt his teacher's intentions to try and win Lucius to their side. If Severus thought it was possible, then it probably was, he knew Lucius better than all of them. They had a couple days to plan, and Harry was sure they could come up with something to test the waters with the older Malfoy.

Harry's easy acceptance of Snape's plan didn't ease the groups worries at all. Ron looked more agitated than before, the only thing keeping him in check was Remus's hand on his shoulder. Harry continued to drink his whiskey and ignored the reaction of those around him. They needed to go through with this plan. Helping Draco would in the end help all of them.

"How are we going to keep Malfoy contained? Isn't he still going to be under the control of Voldemort?" Hermione was the first to settle into the idea that Snape was trustworthy. She looked at Harry with faith in her eyes and smiled.

Severus put both hands on the table. "I believe, I know what Harry's gift is, and it is the key to helping Draco. With Harry's help we can conquer the Dark Lord's influence."

Everyone leaned forward when Snape didn't elaborate. "And what is Harry's gift?" Ron demanded.

Severus smiled. It wasn't a happy smile, but an almost evil one. "Harry has the gift that the Dark Lord likes to believe himself to have. There are many types of mages, but the rarest, and most powerful are called Magus. They can control magic itself." he concluded with a drawl.

Control magic? He couldn't do that could he? Harry felt a cold shock run through his blood, as the weight of a great responsibility fell on his shoulders. The implications of this information were huge. If Voldemort found out… Harry didn’t want to think about any of it. He reached out and poured his second helping of whiskey, but before he could bring it to his lips a hand reached out and snatched the tumbler.
Harry turned to take his drink back from Hermione, only to see her throwback half of it. Her face twisted in disgust as she placed the glass down. She heaved a breath, "So you're saying that Harry can do anything?" Her eyes were wide as she processed the possibilities. "Wouldn't that make him like... a god?" She whispered.

Harry slowly slid the tumbler of drink back to himself. Hermione's point was all too real.

Severus smirked, "Not anything, he is still bound by the laws of magic. But with training, and time, he could be close. Like I said, his gift and the Dark Lord’s are different. There are, of course, different levels of ability, and that depends on the user's overall talent and their dedication. It is very dangerous to use this gift without careful training," he warned. But underneath his serious face, Harry could feel his excitement. This was something amazing for him, because he was forever a scholar.

Harry finished the other half of the drink, "The young Black child that died shortly after getting his gift, he was a Magus, wasn't he?" He sighed, the last thing he wanted was god like power… he pushed down his angst, he had to accept his lot in life as it was revealed.

Hermione reached into her bag and pulled out the Verum book that she always had near her. She flipped through the pages until she got to the entry they had seen so long ago. Everyone leaned over and read the description of the boy's powers, and his death.

Remus turned away, retrieved a tumbler for everyone, and placed them on the table.

"Remus?" Harry questioned the man's actions.

Remus looked at him with turmoil and pain in his eyes. He poured himself and everyone else a drink. "I know this will be dangerous, but, I also know you won't back down Harry."

Harry understood, his friend was worried and scared. He reached out and touched Remus' shoulder in a comforting manner, with only the desire to soothe him. The moment his hand made contact, Remus’ muscles visibly relaxed, and his face softened.

"And, there it is." Severus whispered, he was looking at the scene, as if it was the most fascinating experiment he had ever seen.
Hermione nursed her drink with a thoughtful look. "There is what?" She glanced at Snape.

"There, is the difference between the Dark Lord and Harry." Severus answered. His face held something akin to hope. "Magic, as you all know, is who we are." Severus turned on his professor mode, Harry thought it was a funny contrast to the whiskey in his hand. He looked down at his own glass, maybe he should stop drinking if he was finding humor in inappropriate moments.

Severus gestured to Harry. "Magic, is as much linked to our emotions, as our emotions are linked to our magic. Even ambient magic, can change our feelings and mood. The Dark Lord has Magus powers, that allow him to twist surface magic. Before he was Voldemort, he used his gift in addition to his charm, to manipulate people. But, he was never able to move beyond the surface, so he created the Dark Mark to amplify his ability on those who bear it." They all knew Severus's mind magic saved him from the mental effects of Voldemort's power, but did it have other consequences? Snape glanced down at his own arm for a moment before continuing.

"Harry is the other side of the Magus abilities. His magic naturally tries to soothe. He is able to calm others, by calming their magic, if someone's magic is twisted and angry, he can smooth it without even trying. When he is trained, he will be able to feel where the magic is being manipulated by curses and other spells, and he will be able to remove it."

Severus sat down, his movements were heavy as if he just finished unloading a burden. "Without training he will be able to Clear Draco's mind enough for us to seal the mark, temporarily." He concluded, bringing the topic back around.

"So he can fix anything?" Hermione looked dubious.

Severus sighed. "No not everything. There are some curses that are mingled with every bit of our magic, and removing them would kill the person. It will also expend a lot of energy for Harry to do more than calm someone's magic. The bigger the problem with the person, the more magic it takes from Harry. And as I said, he is restricted by the natural laws of magic," he reiterated.

"That's how the Black kid died?" Ron spoke up for the first time.

Snape nodded, "Yes, he probably drained himself trying to fix a curse to powerful."

"So he could possibly remove the ministry curse?" Hermione's eyes brightened.
"In theory," Snape responded.

Ron's eyes were dark and his face sad. "I don't know if this is a good idea." He studied the beaten up table top.

Harry turned to his friend, "Ron, you know I have to try."

Ron nodded and clutched his drink. "I know..." He whispered, and lifted his eyes from the table to look at his best friend. "You know, I always thought you looked different since the curse was removed."

Harry raised his brows, "Look different?"

"Yeah, brighter, I guess," he mumbled.

Silence rained while everyone sipped their drinks. The idea that Harry could remove people's curses was hard to accept. The risk to his life made all of them uneasy.

"If Harry is going to risk his life to remove the curse, I want to be the first one for him to try it on."

Ron announced. "I don't want anyone else to get hurt."

No one verbally responded, but their silence was acceptance. They would perfect the removal before they tried it on Luna.

"So, when do I try?" Harry asked. Willing to jump right in. The only good thing to come out of this was his ability to make a difference.

Severus leaned forward. "Not until you get some guidance, and an anchor. I will train you with Draco before you attempt anything. Also, that gem you carry around now, the one that won't let you leave it behind, you might need that."

Harry reached into his pocket and pulled out the stopper. "This?"
Hermione perked up. "It pulls on curse magic, or we think it does. Would it take stress off the process if the magic was being drawn naturally to an object?"

Snape nodded, "I theorize that it is possible. We will train with the gem, and a separate anchor."

Harry looked around at the small group. "This turned into a meeting, maybe we should call the others and fill them in?" he pointed out.

Hermione reached into her pocket, and he knew she had called the others.

Severus looked at Harry and prodded him mentally, gaining his attention and conveying the importance of what was about to be said. "I know, you and Draco don't get along. But if you use your gift to soothe what the Dark Lord is doing to Draco's magic, then Draco can isolate it." Severus's tone was serious and thankful.

"What is Draco's Gift?" Harry had been wondering this for a while.

Severus collected his thoughts before answering, when he started to speak he had everyone's attention. "His Gift is the same as his father's, he is a Utility Mage. Meaning he uses a category of object to do things other magics can't. He uses Knot magic."

"Knot magic, like Neville's family and metalworking? What is the origin of that magic?" Hermione sounded interested.

"It is similar." Snape agreed. "Through the braiding and knotting of ropes made of different materials, Draco can create wards and protections, there are other things they can do but it is not my place to give away their secrets. The origin is Celtic, as you know the Celtic culture spanned much of what would become France and Germany long ago," he explained.

Hermione leaned back in her chair, "So they can make wards that Surface magic can't break?" She deduced.

"That's a simplified answer, but overall it is correct." Severus watched as the young woman before him put things together in her mind.
"So their manor is huge but still hidden, because they have Knot magic?" she asked.

Severus looked at her approvingly. "Yes, they have built hedge mazes, and stone walls, that knot in patterns all around the manor and protect it from everything, including apparition and portkeys."

Before the conversation could continue, the fireplace flared and the twins stepped out.

"Good timing." Hermione declared, a little louder than necessary.

The twins looked around at the occupants, and then saw the bottle of whisky. Without missing a beat they summoned glasses and pour themselves a helping before sitting down.

"We do try to have the best timing." One twin quipped and sipped his drink.

"I assume you didn't call a meeting to get us drunk, so what's up?" the other asked.

Hermione jumped right to the topic at hand. Her eyes bright with excitement, or maybe a bit tipsy. "We have some new information, we will fill everyone in once the others arrive. But I want to talk to you two about your portkey project. I know you’re trying to make emergency portkeys that can bypass Hogwarts wards, but we need them to do more." She went on to explain about Knot magic before explaining her request. "I was hoping that you could work with Malfoy long enough to have him help bypass knot wards with your portkeys. The Malfoy manor is a place that is likely a base for Death Eaters, we need to be able to bypass their wards in an emergency." She finished in what seemed to be one long breath.

The twins looked at each other and nodded. "Ok, if he is willing, so are we." They answered in unison. Strangely OK with teaming up with a Malfoy.

Hermione let out a breath. The fireplace flared, and the others arrived.

oOoOo

It was Monday. After the impromptu meeting over the weekend, and a small hangover, Harry thought he had things under control again… until his meeting with Dumbledore that morning.
before classes. The Headmaster used a word Harry had never heard before, Horcrux.

Harry felt dirty just thinking the word. The existence of... those things, and how they are made, explained a lot about Dumbledore's actions, but Harry didn't think it excused all of them. No matter how dark the situation, or how dangerous, one person can't make all the decisions for the group, Harry still saw Dumbledore's methods as a softer version of Voldemort's.

The Headmaster also hinted a lot about Harry needing to find the other objects Voldemort used. There was a distinct feeling of a timer running out. Harry couldn't help but think about Dumbledore's blackened arm, was the old man dying? Is picking up the Horcrux hunt really the right path to take? If there was one of those foul things within reach, Harry would go and get it, but spending time looking for them while Voldemort does whatever he pleases didn't seem like a great idea.

Dumbledore implied he was close to finding another Horcrux, so Harry would leave that up to him, and report to the Method about the new development. His people could spend some time researching what the other Horcruxes could be; Hermione will probably love it. Then together as a group they could work out their next move.

Dumbledore also arranged time for Harry to see Dudley. He was nervous because his cousin hadn't sent a letter since before his mother died, and Harry was worried that if he contacted Dudley it would upset his cousin. On top of everything else, they were moving Malfoy tonight. Dumbledore got the letter from Malfoy's dad requesting to bring his son home, but Snape was taking him to Grimmauld place right under the Headmasters nose.

Harry truly hoped that there were no more surprises coming, he wasn’t sure his heart could take it. But he was probably hoping in vain since his new training with Snape was starting this week…

"AND THAT! Is how it's done!" Professor Jigger yelled as he threw a handful of powder into his cauldron with a flourish.

Mental whiplash assaulted Harry as his thoughts were violently pulled to reality. A plume of smoke rose from the cauldron. When it cleared there was nothing but clear viscous liquid left behind. Professor Jigger waved his hands to clear the last of the smoke. "That is a perfect example of removing a spacer ingredient to create an instantaneous reaction between two components of a potion that were being separated by a third." There was a light applause as the Professor bowed like he had just done a magic trick for a room of Muggles. "I want three feet on this reaction for next week, you are dismissed." Jigger began to clean up his demonstration.

Harry turned to his friends to chat while they packed up. Ron was putting his stuff away with his usual carelessness, but Hermione was not in her seat. Glancing around Harry saw she was up front
talking to Professor Jigger.

A loud shuffling to Harry's right caught his attention. Pansy was rushing to put all her supplies away, her head was bowed and she was avoiding all eye contact. Blaise reached out from next to her and tried to get her to slow down. She shrugged him off and shoved the last of her things in her potions kit. Blaise grabbed her by both shoulders and turned her to face him. Harry couldn't hear what Blaise hissed, but Pansy’s reaction was explosive. She shoved the other boy away and started to yell.

"You heard what Professor Snape said!" Pansy's voice cracked, and her entire body shook with the effort to contain her tears. The entire class had turned to watch the scene unfold.

Blaise was still keeping his voice low when he responded, but Pansy didn't seem to care about being overheard. "His father is taking him home, you know what that means!" She put her hand on the table and bent forward as if she was in physical pain. "We… are never…" She heaved a breath. Harry couldn't see her face, but could hear her tears fall in her voice. "Never going to… see him again." Her voice was high, and tapered by her grief at the end. Then she turned and fled, pushing students aside to get out of the room.

Severus had informed Harry that he would be telling his house that Malfoy was being taken home, so that they wouldn't snoop around. Apparently some of the Slytherins were aware of the danger Malfoy was in due to his family. Pansy obviously thought going home was a death sentence.

Harry turned to Ron with a pleading look, "I know you don't like them…"

Ron sighed heavily, "You want to scope them out for the Method?"

Harry smiled softly at his friend, Ron's face was filled with exasperation mixed with acceptance. "Fine…" Ron's shoulders sagged, but he threw a small smile over his shoulder as he finished packing his things.

Hermione's voice cut through the commotion in the room. "You guys go ahead, I still have questions for Professor Jigger. I'll catch up." She said dismissively.

Harry nodded, but Ron scowled, as they left for their next class.

oOoOo
It was the end of the day, with only an hour until curfew.

"Do you think we are ready for the first match?" Ron asked Harry as they walked to the Hospital wing.

"Huh?" Harry questioned dumbly. He hadn't thought about Quidditch since school started. He had held tryouts, but let Ron pick all the new players. He also let Ron run the weekly practice. Harry spent that time pretending to look for the snitch, while he was actually making plans for the Method. He was just so busy he didn't have a thought to spare for the game. This suddenly struck Harry, he loved Quidditch, but was ignoring it... so maybe he should focus more on something fun.

"Harry!" Ron snapped when he realized his friend had zoned out again.

"Sorry Ron, just thinking about how I need to give the team more attention." Harry replied honestly.

"Damn right you do! All season you’ve barely paid attention. Now we have the first game coming on November 10th." Ron was only one octave away from whining.

"I will try and do better Ron, it's just been hard this year. I do want to play more and have extra practice, I miss the game." Harry threw his arm around Ron's shoulder and shook him a bit.

"Plus this game is versus Slytherin, and since Malfoy is out it will be an easy win." He smirked.

Ron's eyes lit up, "Oh yeah! Let's win this match and then train for the real competition!" he smiled brightly, and Harry smiled back, happy he could reassure Ron.

The infirmary's doors came into view. Harry could see Severus waiting, but he wasn't waiting for them. Just as his Professor made eye contact a familiar voice echoed down the hallway.

"Severus, Thank you for meeting me here." Lucius Malfoy drawled.

Snape looked away from Harry and nodded to his old friend. "As Draco's Head of House I felt I should escort him off the premises," he lied.
Harry put his head down and acted intimidated, as he tried to slip by the two men. He was supposed to walk by the Hospital wing to make sure the meeting happened as planned, then he was going to go the Grimmauld place and wait for Snape and Draco to arrive. The twins finished the preliminary portkeys and this was the first real test with anyone but the twins. The portkey was designed to go through Hogwarts wards, and let anyone keyed into Grimmauld place or their guest through without harm. Since all portkey wards were a little different this one was made for Hogwarts wards, only.

"Potter," Snape's old acidic voice sizzled with hate.

"Sir." Harry nodded back.

Severus glared and Harry tried to look scared. At the same time he glanced at the older Malfoy. He wanted to gauge his reaction. The blond man didn't look very angry that Harry was there, but he also didn't look well over all. He was very pale with dark under eyes, on top of that he looked worried, a deep crease between his eyebrows.

Both Harry and Ron scurried away under their teachers glare. Once they were around the corner they ran.

"Do you think he's going to do it?" Ron panted as they jogged to the 7th floor.

"When he looked at me he sent a feeling of assurance, so if he is going to do it, he will be very careful," Harry responded.

The night after the impromptu meeting to tell the others about Draco's arrival. They made a plan based on the letters from Narcissa, and from Snape's information about the family. They were going to try and slowly bring the Malfoy's over to the Method. Ron and some of his siblings were unsure, but trusted Harry fully with this choice.

Severus assured them that Draco didn't want to serve the Dark Lord, and that Harry's gift would clear his mind of Voldemort long enough for Draco to seal the mark temporarily. He was also positive that Narcissa would follow whoever protected her family. It was Lucius that proved to be the unpredictable element. Severus was going to judge the man, and then decide if he should hint at a third side of the war.

Harry felt dizzy once he reached the Room of Requirement. Everything was happening so fast.
Sometimes he felt like he was just hanging on for the ride. The Floo to Grimmauld place didn't help the spinning feeling. He was aware that part of the problem was his surface magic building up, and if he complained to anyone they would just tell him it was going to get better with his training.

He sat heavily in a chair, Ron was across from him. The twins were also there to see if their gadget worked.

The three brothers were talking around him, and Harry tuned the noise out, closing his eyes. He wished Hermione was there, she always knew how to keep him calm. Unfortunately she had an extra study period with Professor Jigger. She seemed to have taken a special interest in potions this year.

Over twenty minutes passed before the whoosh of the portkeys arrival filled the room.

oOoOo

It took only minutes for Lucius to finish the paperwork for retrieving his son. Severus stood back and watched in an official capacity. Even though he was the boy's godfather, he tried to not treat him differently while in the school.

Once everything was in order, Madam Pomfrey gestured for Lucius to take his son. Severus watched him cast a careful levitation charm, and followed as the man propelled his son down the hall in front of them. They walked at a slow and unsuspicious pace until they were on the grounds.

"Come with me," Severus beckoned, and he turned off the path that traveled to the front gate.

Lucius complied with a wary glint in his eye. They arrived in a grove of trees out of sight but still well within the wards of the school.

"What is this all about Severus?" Lucius looked uneasy. He was obviously worried about being doubled crossed, but it wasn't normally this easy to fluster him. Severus took this as a good sign, the stress of being under the Dark Lord was getting to the man.

"I will be taking Draco here, rather than leaving the wards," Severus stated.
Lucius looked more worried. He shifted away from Snape a fraction. "I thought you were taking him to Spinner’s End."

Severus shook his head, "I have a better place than that set up." He folded his hands behind his back and took a strong stance.

In response, Lucius regained some of his haughtiness, not willing to back down. "This is not a part of the plan we discussed. We are still in the wards, how do you think you can get away?" He sneered.

Severus smirked, it was a sly look that Lucius would recognize as his 'I’m about to win' face. "Being in the wards is a part of my plan. I will be taking Draco someplace very safe, where I hope he will make new allies, as I have. Powerful allies." He put emphasis on the word powerful.

Lucius paled. The implication of betraying the Dark Lord didn't seem to anger or disgust him, but it did scare him. The more he pushed this, the easier it was to see that Lucius might want to be free of Voldemort.

"Trust me, Lucius. You know I would never hurt Draco. I can keep him safer than anyone else, even Dumbledore." Severus extended his wand, "Just make a simple oath that you won't tell anyone about this, and I will show you some of my ally's power," he extended the tempting offer, and saw the shift happening in Lucius's eyes. They had been friends for years and they both loved the boy floating between them. Severus was happy to save his godson, but he didn't want to leave the parents behind, they deserved a chance. Lucius might never let go of his blood purist ways, for he truly believed in them, but he was no monster. Together they entered the service of the Dark Lord, and together they realized it was a mistake.

Even if they never said it to each other for fear of being discovered doubting, they both knew the other was not truly loyal to the cause anymore. Severus had been suspicious for a long time that Lucius found a way to dampen the Dark Lord’s gift knot magic. If he broke free from the Dark Lord’s control for even a short while, he could have dampened his Mark. Severus would have to ask how, if he ever got the chance.

Slowly Lucius raised his wand and crossed it with Severus'. They would make a simple, one time Vow, Severus really couldn't afford anything more, his web of Vows and Oaths was becoming a bit more tangled than he wanted.
"I, Severus Snape, vow on my magic to keep the events of this moment secret. Cōnficiō" He waited for Lucius to finish his vow.

"I, Lucius Malfoy, vow on my magic to keep the events of this moment secret. Cōnficiō"

A small burst of magic occurred between them and settled.

"Now, I will take Draco." Severus reached out and grasped the floating boys arm. He easily slid him closer through the air.

"We have to get out of the wards." Lucius looked around to make sure no one was watching.

"We do not need to," Severus said calmly.

Lucius met his eyes and raised a blond brow, as Snape pulled a small, round white stone out of his pocket and held it out. He scoffed, "Portkeys don't work here anymore. You of all people should know the custom wards that were erected to stop portkeys." Lucius was becoming angry and nervous.

Severus continued to be calm, he needed his old friend to keep it together. "This is a demonstration of my ally's power. Once I am gone, head west and you will reach the end of the wards while out of sight," he instructed.

Both of Lucius's brows were raised high. The idea that someone could outdo Dumbledore's wards was impressive. Severus hoped those brat twins got it right, this portkey was designed for only Hogwarts wards. All wards are different so they can't make a universal portkey yet, but once more peoples have their gifts unlocked they might have the power they need, and Draco was a big part of that… they needed him.

Severus placed the stone on Draco's chest and covered it with his hand. He looked at Lucius, who was waiting, tense. He had to say the password to the Portkey… those damn brats… he would get them back for this.

Severus's face contorted with the effort it took to get the words out of his mouth. DAMN BRATS.

"Gryffindor Rules," he grated out. A hook behind his navel grabbed Severus and pulled him away, but he caught a glimpse of Lucius's surprised and bewildered face.
Chapter End Notes

"The Whispering Forest is a place where we can all plunge our feet and hands into the cool, soft soil, allowing our fingers and toes to grow and spiral into the earth, quickly and deeply intertwining with themselves, each other, snaking in and through a complex organic network to become one.

In The Whispering Forest, everyone is one. Everything."

-Night Vale

"We are the livestock of plants and trees, which feed us and give us air knowing that we will soon die and feed them."

-Night Vale

A/N- Man… trees are weird, am I right? Like, they are alive and stuff, but they apparently can't feel. We think they exist for us, but I'm pretty sure we exist for them. I mean, they were here first. Trees have been here so long it's almost as if they licked the earth to claim it as their own… if trees could lick that is. They’ve had billions of years to figure their shit out, and trap us in an endless cycle.

Anyhow, glad to be back in this bright white place. Glad to see you back here as well.

I like it here, because I can think of everything as it is. Humans spend a lot of time thinking about what was, and what will be. They only think about the moment they are in, in relation to things that happened or will happen. For example, they will think about how mad they are because someone ate their food, or in a more long term situation, they will think about how they have the job they do because of past events. No one almost ever just thinks of current existence in an isolated manner. About how they have a job and should just enjoy having it. Future thinkers will always worry. For example, they will think about their debt in future terms. They owe money on their house so they will think about what will happen when their rates change, or if they lose their job. They never stop, and just enjoy the feeling of being current on their
payments. Of being OK right then, and ignoring the possibility of trouble, for just a second they could have no worries. Even if they are not up to date on payments, they could just stop and think about being alive. Acknowledge your existence as it is.

Come to this white place and just be now.

Use less paper.

Beta note- This is called practicing Mindfulness. Being aware of the here and now and enjoying the moment. -minijaxter

Beta’d - october 22,2017
AN- Every time I think I am going to fit a lot into a chapter I end up with so many more things I want to write about!

Next chapter will have more DRACO and the meeting with DUDLEY! PROMISE! ALSO I will be unlocking more people's curses so you can all see the awesomeness of my plan begin to rise up and devour your minds!

This story is so much longer than I planned originally, it turns out that my writing style takes a lot of words, and I am very bad at guessing how long something will be based on my plot idea…

BN- I have found that it takes a lot of words to make a good story :)

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Please everyone review more and keep me going! I LOVE ALL OF YOU!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas
Small puffs of smoke punctuated the whirling clicks. The sounds of the silver instruments intertwined until it was just a hum of noise. When Dumbledore first began to collect his little machines the noise bothered him. It was hard for him to think clearly, and he had the tendency to focus on the sound and think of nothing. Over time he learned to adapt to the buzz, and now he didn't think he could sit in this office without the merged clicks and whirls of his collection.

The instruments didn't do their job properly if there weren't enough of them. Harry made quite a dent in the number last year during his tantrum, but there were still enough to get the job done, and that job was secrecy. The combined sounds of each silver object creates a magical filter that kept all sound in the room from escaping. There is no spell or curse that can overcome the noise barrier they created. The smoke some of them produce is only for aesthetic, but Dumbledore liked those ones the best, they had character. There were only four sets of ten made and Dumbledore had managed to collect three sets, he considered it one of the greatest achievements of his life.

Everyone thought he was crazy for trying so hard to get so many, but those people were unaware of the collections function, and thus could not understand the importance. Secrets must be kept. Gellert always understood, he gifted Albus his first one. With deep sadness, he looked at the silver machine closest to his desk, it let out a puff of smoke in a ring, then he looked away to bury his sorrow.

Dumbledore's secrets were building. Some of them were clawing at the back of his skull to get out, but they could never be free. The Malfoy boy's situation truly stirred up the dust in an old man's mind. He couldn't help the boy and had hoped his last days could be spent with his family. He knew his actions would sadly cost Severus his life. The man had never once mentioned his own safety, and was only concerned with his godson. He was truly a good man, and luckily things took a turn for the better for Draco. Now his only option was to keep his hands out of it and try not to make things worse. He had a terrible tendency for making things worse.

The relief he had felt when Severus told him that Narcissa confessed to Voldemort about the Vow, and that Tom didn't want to risk losing Severus, was so overwhelming that he cried. He shed tears for Severus while the man stood before him. He knew that his spy might never trust him again, but that was a small price to pay if the man lived. Severus never mentioned that Albus was willing to let him die, and Albus kept silent as well. Draco was being taken for training at the manor, that meant that the plan was still in motion, and Severus was going to live.
Voldemort was keeping himself hidden and the Death Eaters were almost completely absent. There was a raid here, and a muggle family killed there, but nothing as bad as the first war. This was never a good sign, it was the calm before the storm. Dumbledore knew that Tom had some deeper plan, he only lies low when he has some bigger plan in the works. He had seen it before in the first war, all activity would die off, and then a bomb would drop. Dumbledore was truly disturbed by the prospect of Voldemort having the upper hand right under their noses, it felt like a silent hand slowly closing around his throat. The secrets, the quiet, they all made the hand close tighter.

To add onto the silent strangulation, Harry was drifting out of his grasp. Dumbledore could feel it. The boy didn't confide in him anymore, and seemed to be absent from the halls most days. The only time you were sure to see the boy was in class or at Quidditch.

Harry was also wearing those rings. He said he wouldn't wear his family rings until he was older, but last time Albus saw the boy they were glittering on his fingers. The sight of the rings could mean that Harry learned of their significance, or he could have done it on a whim. To be safe Dumbledore pretended not to notice them.

A deeper instinct inside him whispered it was a bad idea to make a fuss, like a mouse turning its back on a coiled snake. He could not show weakness in front of Harry, he needed to draw the boy back under his influence, and keep him from knowing his true destiny, or the plan would fall apart. He still had one thing that he could use to win the boy back. He had to win him back to save everyone, no one else could bare this burden.

A knocking at the door drew Dumbledore back to the present.

"Enter," he called in his kind grandfatherly tone.

Minerva McGonagall walked in. Her hair was pulled back in a severe bun with a large wide brimmed hat perched on top. Her robes were as orderly as ever, and she wore a tight and agitated expression.

"Ah, Minerva my dear. Is everything prepared for Harry's visit with his cousin this weekend?" Dumbledore let the twinkle slip into his eyes as he spoke.


The Headmaster didn't seemed phased by his deputy's attitude at all. "And Mr. Malfoy, did he
make it off the grounds with his father?"

The lines around Minerva's mouth became harsh and she narrowed her eyes. "Yes, Severus escorted them himself." Her voice was tight as she spoke.

Dumbledore smiled as if nothing in the world was wrong, "Good, good, that is all Minerva." He dismissed her with a wave of his good hand.

The Deputy Headmistress did not move. "You are aware, that Mr. Malfoy is going to die of his condition if it is not addressed." She met his gaze with her own fiery one.

Dumbledore let the smile slip off his face. "Yes, it is an unfortunate situation. That is why I let him go home with his father, he should be with his family," he lied.

"An unfortunate situation?" Minerva couldn't keep the quiver of anger from her tone. "This is something you could have helped with Albus. Severus told me how he came and pleaded for you to step in and save his godson!" She shouted.

Dumbledore weaved his fingers together and looked over his half-moon spectacles, "Come now Minerva, we both know Severus isn't the type to plead."

"THAT is not the POINT!" Minerva barked. She took a step forward in the direction of the desk. Dumbledore leaned back into his chair. His Deputy was obviously very upset so he didn't stop her rant.

"That is a child, that is going to die, Albus! I may not like him, but he does not deserve this!" Minerva gestured into the distance as she spoke. "You have the ability and knowledge to help that boy but you didn't. DON'T you lie to me and say there was nothing you could do, I know there was something, or Severus would not have asked. I don't know why you won't help, but nothing should be more important than the life of a student. I do not agree with your decision." She fumed, and finished with her arms crossed over her chest and her jaw firmly set.

Albus understood why his deputy was so angry. This is to be expected, he did not think it was wise to let the Order know he was allowing Draco to be taken to the Dark Lord for training. So it was understandable to draw the conclusion that Mr. Malfoy was going to perish slowly. If she knew the reason he refused to help she would probably be even angrier, but she might understand, unfortunately he couldn't tell her, he couldn't tell anybody.
If she knew that one of the possible consequences of his decision was Severus's death due to the Vow, she would never forgive him, and would possibly turn from him. Even though everything worked out in the end, she would know he was willing to let Severus die for the cause.

Dumbledore looked down at his hands, "I am sorry it has come to this for Draco, I truly am." He said quietly. He did not look up, he could hear Minerva's breathing, and it was heavy with anger. He listened to her turn and storm out of his office before he lifted his eyes.

He wished that he could make everyone understand he was doing the things he did for the greater good.

oOoOo

Lucius returned to his manor, both relieved and worried. He truly trusted Severus to keep Draco safe, because no matter what side Snape may be joining in the war, he would always be there for Draco. Lucius knew that Severus was probably not truly committed to the Dark Lord but he had to keep that information to himself for his son's sake. The ability to bypass wards raised by Dumbledore himself was impressive, and Lucius would consider this third option as long as it didn't oppose his own personal beliefs and values.

The manor was quiet when Lucius entered. It was rare for the Dark Lord to be off the grounds, but when he was, it almost felt like home again. The white marble floors seemed brighter without the pain and darkness hanging over them. Lucius's expensive dragon hide boots made a satisfying click that echoed through the halls on his way to his wife. Narcissa was waiting for news of their son.

He entered Narcissa's favored conservatory, she was seated at a small tea table with a cup waiting for him at the place across from her. She smiled at him with hope in her eyes while lifting her own tea cup. Sun streamed down through the glass ceiling, and lit off her eyes like warm steel.

"Did everything go as planned?" She inquired, her voice quivered with pent up worry. The hand not holding her tea was clutched in her robe where the scar on her thigh was located.

Lucius didn't answer until he was seated and began putting together his cup of tea as he spoke.

"The main objective was reached," he replied simply.
Narcissa relaxed minutely. "But something changed?" She asked. Lucius sighed softly. He was always terrible at lying to his wife. "I learned that Severus wasn't completely honest about where he was taking Draco," he admitted.

Narcissa relaxed fully. The hand that had been clutching at the scar on her thigh fell away. "I trust Severus, did he say where he was taking our son?"

Lucius wished he could feel as confident as his wife seemed. He wanted to tell her about everything that happened, but his vow bound him, so he said as much as he could. "He did not disclose a location to me. He said it was a safe place away from the Dark Lord and Dumbledore, but not Spinner’s End." He took a sip of tea to hide his evasion.

Narcissa smiled, eyes alight with knowledge. "Oh, he must have taken Draco wherever the new group hides."

Lucius choked on his drink, and coughed in an undignified manner. "You knew this third party existed?" he asked once he cleared his airway.

Narcissa placed her tea down gracefully. "I did not know for sure if they existed, I only theorized that they did. I assumed Severus joined them as an alternative to serving under one of two masters."

Lucius just stared at her disbelievingly. He didn't give his wife enough credit.

"Oh come now Lucius, we both know Severus isn't a true blood purist. He may have believed it at one point, but I could see him pulling away from the dark. Now that there is an option besides that crazy old man the light follows, he took it," she said as if it were obvious.

"That doesn't explain how you learned that the third party might exist," Lucius pried, recollecting himself.

Narcissa gave a sly smile. "They created Floo candles. Somehow they learned some of the old ways. Imagine my surprise when Harry Potter's name appeared on The Inventory."

Lucius felt rage build inside himself. Severus took his son to Potter! What was the man thinking? "Why would Snape side with Potter?" Lucius spit the boy's name out like a bad taste.
Narcissa put her cup down and looked at her husband with concerned grey eyes, "Does it matter? Our son is safer with them, than at Spinner’s End. He is hidden from both sides of the war," she reasoned.

Lucius stood so suddenly his chair toppled over. The iron patio furniture bounced off the stone floor. The sound it made was like a gunshot that startled Narcissa.

"Of course it matters!" he yelled. His anger sputtered when he met the wide and glassy eyes of his wife. She acted like everything was fine, but the trials she went through recently left a permanent mark on her mind.

Narcissa pulled herself together, but her eyes were still watery as she looked up at her husband. "The only thing that matters, is that our SON is alive, and it is going to stay that way." Her voice was quiet, but the determination behind her words did not need volume to be heard.

Lucius let much of his immediate anger be swept away but he did not back down. "Narcissa, our values and beliefs matter. I agree that the Dark Lord had crossed a line… but I still support Pure Blood values. I do not want our son exposed to a group of people that oppose what we have taught him. I could not bear it if our son turned from the path we set him on," he argued.

Narcissa didn't answer him for a long moment, she only looked up at him with wide and disbelieving eyes. When she did speak, it was with the same quiet but determined voice.

"Draco cannot follow any path, if he is dead." She rose to her feet to be level with Lucius as she spoke, "Are you implying that Draco would be dead to you if he turns from your values?" She hissed.

Lucius simply stared. He wasn't sure if that was true, but he also couldn't say that it wasn't true. As the seconds passed without him denying her question, he watched Narcissa's face crumple into disbelief and pain. Lucius felt he had to say something to stop the landslide he felt coming down upon him. "Our beliefs are what make us who we are, you have to understand Narcissa. If we can't uphold our values, then what does that make of us? Who are we then? I want to keep our society safe from Muggle influence, and I want to keep our family on top of society. I would do anything in order to uphold my beliefs. The son I raised must also hold those values," Lucius yearned for his wife to understand.

Narcissa looked down at her fine china, she clenched her fist over her scar and held back her tears. "I would have agreed with you at one time. I would have stood back and done nothing, while you did whatever you had to in order to complete your goal. But now, after what I have gone through, I
realize that there are no absolutes other than death." She looked up at her husband, her eyes were desperate and full of fear.

Narcissa let go, and allowed herself to cry. "There are no values, or morals, that cannot be broken. There is always a situation that can tear them down, and when that happens to you... When you are faced with a crumbling wall of your beliefs, either watch them fall, or you die for them." Her voice broke, and a sob slipped from her lips. Lucius went around the table to embrace her, but Narcissa pushed him with a violent cry.

"NO!" she yelled, and hugged herself, letting out a high, long sound of restrained cries. And then the damn broke, and she was screaming. "You don't understand Lucius! I have been faced with that situation! Over and over and over..." Her breath hitched, and she looked her husband in the eyes, her own hollow. "I watched as they tortured our son, and I struggled on the floor by my hair! I knew I would break any taboo, and lose all my soul, so Draco could live..." Narcissa took a ragged breath and clutched her thigh. "As that muggle child writhed on the floor under MY wand, and cried for her mother... I knew, I was doing it for my son. Since you’ve been gone I let myself be torn down, and tarnished my soul... because the only thing I will die for is my family. I will do anything to save Draco!" She heaved a breath, and sobbed.

Lucius slowly approached Narcissa with his arms out, "Love, I do not want our son to die."

Narcissa did not pull away as he got closer. He knew she was still upset, and he couldn’t say exactly what she wanted to hear. But he wrapped his arms around his wife's small shaking body, and said what he could. "I do not want to be under a psychopath's control, I do not want our son to die. We agree on these things and will make them happen." He felt Narcissa's head nodding against his chest.

"I love you." She whispered.

oOoOo

Severus closed his eyes, and let the pull behind his navel take him to his destination. He held his godson tight, so he wouldn't get lost in the space between this and that. The weight of the last few weeks began to lift as they traveled, and Severus, for the first time since this all started, felt hope that he would live. He had not examined it closely, and he never admitted it out loud, but he had been certain he was going to die with Draco. So he had focused all his concern on his godson, because his life held more value, he was still innocent, but Severus still hadn’t wanted to die.

It was almost funny that Harry Potter once again had a hand in saving his life, even if he didn't
Hardwood floors came up under Severus's feet. The force of their landing, and the weight of the unconscious boy, brought him to his knees. He tried to gently place Draco down as he landed, lurching forward to protect his godson’s head.

A rush of movement announced Harry’s arrival by his side.

"Let’s move him to the blue drawing room." He heard Granger say.

Then everything started to fade away into darkness.

oOoOo

Harry paced the room for the hundredth time, and for the hundredth time someone in the room told him to stop. Severus had collapsed upon arrival, and Draco was still in a coma. The twins said the magical backlash of moving through the wards had knocked the professor out and that he would wake up soon. While they waited for Snape to wake, the rest of the Method had arrived and were all packed into the drawing room.

Luna was the only one talking constantly while she drank a cup of Snape's special tea. Ever since she had begun drinking it and was able to think clearly, she’d been in a very good mood. Her continual rambling was actually the only thing keeping Harry from walking over and shaking Severus until he woke up. Her voice was back to it’s old airy tone, and Harry found that comforting.

"You know, I’m named after the moon, but I don’t know much about it. I heard that muggles have been to the moon, but I can't imagine how they got there. I have also heard they think it's made of cheese. Also, why did they go there? To find out if it really was cheese? Sometimes I think muggles have a far greater sense of curiosity than magical people…” Luna continued to rant about the moon for a while. Hermione was twisting her hand with the need to explain about space travel, and proverbs, but managed to contain herself. She seemed to notice that Luna's rambling was keeping Harry slightly calmer and didn't want to interrupt.

"And did you know that there is a place where people don't believe in mountains? I assume it is because they live in an area where there are none, and they can't leave due to the secret government-…” Luna stopped talking abruptly and looked over at Snape.
"He moved!" Ginny yelled.

Harry stopped pacing and bolted to Severus's side. The man sat up and looked around. His eyes landed on his Godson laying on the opposite couch and he sighed with relief.

"You were knocked out by the-…"

"Magical backlash from the wards?" Snape finished Harry's explanation as a question.

Harry nodded to confirm his suspicions.

Severus rubbed his head, "I thought that might happen, but we should move on to waking Draco."

"So soon?" Hermione wondered.

Severus again looked around at all the faces in the room. "The longer he's like that the more damage it causes. It should also be just me and Harry so he doesn't panic too badly." He pulled some ropes made from different materials out of his robe and placed them on the table between the couches. Harry assumed they were for sealing Malfoy's Mark.

Everyone began to file out of the room, some looked very disgruntled about being kicked out, mostly Ron. Harry caught the twins pulling extendable ears from their pockets as they left. He honestly didn't think it mattered if they over heard anything, as long as Malfoy doesn't know they are there. Harry wondered if Snape saw the extendable ears. He was glaring at the twins like he could set them on fire with his mind… but that could have been because of the portkey password.

When everyone was gone Harry turned to Severus who was already leaning over his godson.

"So how do we wake him up?" He asked.

Severus looked up at him, "It is a simple counter curse, and I suggest you move around behind the couch where he won't see you immediately. As soon as he wakes and you can grab him, do so."
The instructions given with firm resolve.

Harry nodded to show he understood and moved behind the couch. He was very nervous for some reason. He knew logically that this was a good thing, Malfoy won't be controlled by evil, and Severus will have more reason to stay with the Method. But something was stirring in Harry, ever since his aunt’s... accident, he felt less confident in all his choices, past and present. It's like he didn't know himself as well as he thought, as if he lost who he was.

Severus sat on the coffee table right in front of Malfoy and pulled out his wand. He made a very small circular movement with the tip, and whispered "a mortuis resurgere."

Malfoy inhaled deeply, and then his eyes fluttered open. Harry was having a hard time not imagining some sort of sleeping beauty scenario. But that notion shattered when Malfoy’s eyes landed on Severus.

He sat up suddenly and pressed himself away from his Godfather. "I TOLD you, I don't want your help!" he blurted.

The magic in the air began to increase exponentially, Harry’s fringe began to lift, and sparks like static popped. The air smelled charged, and burning. Severus reached out and grabbed Malfoy by both arms, "Well that's just too bad Draco, you are getting this help!" he snapped back, and then looked over Draco’s shoulder to made eye contact with Harry, signaling him to make his move.

Draco tried to lash out in rebellion. "NO! I WILL DO THIS ALONE! FOR THE GLORY OF THE DARK-..." He began to yell as magic poured from him. Harry lunged forward, his arms circled Draco’s shoulders, and everything stopped abruptly.

Harry held him tightly from over the back of the couch. Draco’s sudden pause was understandable if he was feeling anything like what Harry was experiencing, it was startling. Unlike the other times he had used his gift unknowingly to calm upset people, this time he could feel it working. He could sense his magic leaving his body, like sweat from his pores. It was entering Malfoy's body, and gently lapping against the other boys magic, soothing and smooth, undoing all the tangles.

While Harry was focused, Severus was using the spell he had used in the bathroom to pull away the extra magic. A shock went through Harry when he reached deeper and encountered Voldemort's magic stirring under Draco's. It burned, and Harry hissed as his magic pushed the angry red aura back to the Dark Mark. That was something Severus had warned him about, he couldn't dissipate magic with his gift, and it had to go somewhere. Harry could feel Malfoy's temperature rising, and his shoulders pressed into Harry's chest, but he never pulled away. As if he
instinctively knew Harry was helping.

In short order, most of the magic was soothed and Voldemort's was trapped in the mark. Harry's magic touched the mark and the burning pain spiked, Harry yelped and pressed his face into the crook of Malfoy's neck causing the other boy to gasp in surprise.

"It's done!" Harry moaned out through the pain.

Severus snatched up the rope and handed it to his godson. "Seal, it Draco," he ordered.

Malfoy took the rope and paused. Too much was happening too fast, and it was obvious that he was confused and overwhelmed. But after the moment of hesitation he began to intricately weave the ropes into two separate braids. He tied one on his arm below the mark and one above.

"You can stop now, Harry," Severus spoke softly.

Harry let go, and stumbled back. His entire body hurt, and his mind was heavy with surface magic, but he was OK.

"Harry?" Malfoy questioned as he turned to see who had been holding him. His flushed red and he whipped back around to Severus, "What’s going on!?" he yelled. His voice had an edge to it that unsettled Harry. Like he could lose control of his emotions at any moment. After being entangled with Voldemort's magic for so long Harry would be surprised if Malfoy's mind wasn't in shambles.

"Harry used his gift to push Voldemort's influence out of you, and you are in a safe place where I will guide your gift," Severus answered. He maintained eye contact, holding Draco's full attention.

Harry watched every line of Malfoy's body relax. He was taking this a lot better than expected. Why was he so calm? his question was answered as godson and godfather continued to talk.

"Where am I?" Malfoy asked slowly.

"You are in the Black Ancestral home, it houses a third organization in the war run by Harry Potter." Apparently Severus didn't see any need to move slowly, or impart the information
Harry watched Malfoy tighten up, "I can't stay here." His voice was strained with tension and fear.

Severus raised a brow, "And why not?" he asked, the same way he did in class.

"My father… I have to honor my family and uphold our values…" Malfoy stumbled over his words. To Harry it seemed like he just wanted to be happy he was safe, but at the same time he was guilty.

Severus put his hand on his godsons shoulder."I can assure you, that your parents are just glad you are alive." The affection widened Malfoy's eyes, and he looked away to hide the film of tears forming.

Draco pulled back a little, "you don't understand, my father… he…” his breathing sped up as he looked for the words. Harry was sure his presence had been forgotten, and Draco slowly broke down.

"Your mother is glad you are alive. I understand, Lucius might have some issues with this arrangement, but he will just have to get over it." Severus let his old snark leak into his voice.

Malfoy looked down at his lap, "I just don't want to disappoint him… he always said that we are what we believe… but it was horrible. Not only being controlled, but even before I got the Mark… they did terrible things." His voice hitched as he finished.

Harry was having trouble melding this Malfoy with the one he had gone to school with all those years. But being possessed by an evil wizard does change people, Harry remembered how much it affected Ginny.

Malfoy was slowly losing his composure. "You know what happened over the summer at the manor… then after the Mark… He was in my thoughts and in my magic, I felt dirty everywhere, and everything hurt all of the time. He would take over... and I would watch myself do horrible things… things I would have to do if I served him and… I can't. Severus… My father-"

Severus leaned forward and gave a very rare hug. Malfoy put his face in his godfather’s shoulder. His body shook and Harry knew he was crying, he felt like he was intruding on a very private
Severus pulled away, but held Draco by his arms again and forced him to make eye contact. "Draco, I understand that your father will be unhappy with you being here, and I know you truly believed in all his teachings, but we sometimes face situations in life that challenge and tear down our beliefs. When that happens, and our boundaries are pushed to the breaking point, we only have two choices. Let them break or die for them." the speech sounded well rehearsed, like one of his lectures. Harry wondered how many people Severus had said those exact words too.

"I don't want to die for them," Draco answered quickly.

"I know," Severus responded with pride in his voice. "But I also know, that when our beliefs are torn down, it tears down who we thought we were. What do you believe Draco? Do you still hold Purist Values?"

Draco took a breath and answered. "I... I don't know what I believe. When I thought I might die I truly didn't want to die for Purist Ideals... I always thought I would if I had to, but I didn't and now I don't know where I stand."

Severus nodded. "That is understandable. When we are lost as a person, we have to take new experiences into ourselves and rebuild with them as a part of us. It will most likely happen again, to a lesser degree hopefully, and you will have to rebuild with more experiences, but this is how we grow. There is no absolute except Death. Draco, remember that. Sometimes, the stronger person is the one that endures, rather than the one that dies for a cause." Severus shifted so he was closer and could speak softer. "I know you are young, but after everything that you have been through, I feel like you can understand what I am going to say." He paused, long enough for Draco to end the conversation. But he nodded slowly. Harry felt like the words that were about to be said were for his benefit as much they were for Draco.

Severus leaned back ever so slightly, "Every moment you are alive, up until and including your death, is all you have to make a difference. Despite what many will tell you, dying for a cause doesn’t change anything. The moment when you are alive, and the next moment when you are dead, will not move mountains or drain oceans. Very few of us have a chance in life to truly change anything, and our ambitions are specks in the universe. Those who hold great responsibility and fail, would see their failure be absorbed into the ever moving river of time, to be washed away, and the earth would still be spinning. If you are going to die for something, do not worry about its impact, or its meaning. Just make sure, you will not regret it."

Severus ran a hand through his hair and sighed. He glanced briefly up at Harry before continuing. "I can see from your face that this idea scares you. What I am trying to impress upon you is the idea of, now. What we experience now will shape us and the future, so you must live with your
choices, and you will eventually die with your regrets. Pick values and actions that make living and
dying less painful. The easy choice is not always the most painless. Choose wisely, because you
will live the rest of your life with the results…" He trailed off as his voice became tight.

Harry reached up and touched his own cheek, he felt warm tears running down his face.

Draco looked back down at his lap. His shoulders began to shake with the force of his cries.
Severus moved to the couch and pulled his godson into his side. All Harry could hear was bits of
words coming from Draco. Things he had heard Ginny say as she broke down after second year.
Draco Malfoy was never going to be the same.

oOoOo

Harry sat on one of the couches in the blue drawing room. Across from him on the opposite side of
the coffee table, Draco slept on the other couch. He fell into a real slumber for the first time in
months after he calmed down, Severus arranged him on the couch and conjured him a blanket,
before heading to the kitchen for the meeting tonight.

There were no screams or curses flying, so Harry assumed the eavesdropping members had cleared
out before Snape left. He hoped they had been listening during Severus's talk with Draco, maybe it
would help them understand why Harry trusted him. It was moments like the one that just passed
that helped Harry understand why Snape did the things he did. He was sure that there was much
about Severus' speech that he didn't comprehend, but it helped Harry understand why Severus put
his hate and anger aside to help him. It also made it easier for Harry to do the same. Because there
was nothing they could do about their past other than apologize, but there was something they
could do now for the future.

Harry was supposed to be in the kitchen along with Snape, but he couldn't bring himself to move
yet. He had watched a classmate being ripped from the inside, and it had disturbed him. Was there
something in the world that would bring Harry's values and morals to their knees? Would he be
willing to die for what he believed in? Harry wasn't sure, and he didn't know if he trusted himself
or his decisions, but he was too far deep back out now.

He wondered if this is how all leaders felt. Do they only act confident, when in reality they are
aware they might be in over their heads? He would rely on his people's opinions to guide his own
choices for now, and maybe no one else would die.

Harry stood from his seat slowly. The Method was waiting. He was surprised that no one came to
look for him. He walked slowly out of the room and closed the door behind him. Draco would be
asleep for a while according to Severus. Harry hoped their training would start soon, he was
beginning to feel pressure from his magical build up after using his gift to help Draco. Hopefully they could start tomorrow night if Draco wakes up and collects himself.

The dark wood floors of the hallway were cleaned, but didn't shine as nice as they did when he first arrived and claimed the house. The runner rugs were getting a bit dingy Harry noticed as he shuffled down the hall. People cleaned up after themselves, but there was no continual maintenance of the house, maybe he needed to look into getting some help. Kreacher was long gone, Harry actually had no idea what happened to him, but maybe Dobby would like to move in. Harry was not lacking money, and could offer to pay the elf, he decided to bring it up as a smaller topic in a meeting.

Harry was still pondering the pros and cons of having Dobby in the safe house when he approached the kitchen door. He reached out to grab the doorknob, but before he could touch it, a huge crash boomed through the silence, followed by screams that sounded like the twins. Harry shook his head as he opened the door. He warned the twins not to provoke Severus, but they hadn't listened and now they would pay the price.

The door swung open and the scene that confronted Harry was more chaotic than he had expected. The entire scrub wood table was flipped sideways, and the floor was covered in broken china and tea. Most of the rooms occupants were standing to the side of the room but the twins were in the middle, apparently they were the cause of the flipped table and mess. Severus was closer to the twins than the rest of the room and had a very smug look on his face.

The twins were standing very still, pointing at one another, in shock. Their skin was slowly turning green like a strange infection spreading over them, their hair and eyes were turning silver. When they noticed Harry they smiled sheepishly.

"Sorry about the table Harry," one twin apologized.

"And the china..." the other added.

Suddenly they both looked pained, like they were trying to hold back a burp. They covered their mouths with their hands to prevent whatever it was that was trying to escape, but failed.

"Slytherin RULES!" They both yelled through their fingers.

Harry just tipped his head a bit to the side in confusion, and looked at Severus for clarification. The older man was smirking, even smug if possible, he looked back at his student and tipped his own head slightly. Harry felt Severus in his mind momentarily, he gave the impression of innocence and
seemed to be saying "What?"

"Don't pretend you don't know anything, I know you caused this." Harry replied verbally.

Severus crossed his arm over his chest, "I have no idea what you are talking about; I am but an innocent bystander," he insisted.

Harry heard Remus' not so subtle snort from the other side of the room. The twins jumped to their own defense as soon as Harry looked their way.

"Don't believe HIM Harry! He's a silky-haired, mature, responsible man! Slytherin rules." One twin yelled. He paused when he finished and looked very confused.

The other twin was wide eyed when he faced his brother. "What are you talking about Fred?!!" He asked, appalled,"Slytherin rules." He added at the end like an involuntary tick.

Fred looked back at George with equally wide eyes, "I don't know, I was trying to call him a silky-haired, mature, responsible man..." He trailed off for a moment as he registered what he’d said. "Slytherin rules" slipped from his mouth as an afterthought.

Harry couldn't take it anymore. He began to laugh. Not small little chuckles, but big deep chested laughs that caused him to bend forward. Just before he walked into the kitchen he had been so serious and worried. He had been full of fear over Draco, and failure. But this moment of childish revenge really brought everything back into perspective. He wasn't alone, and the members of the Method were free thinking people that would do as they pleased from time to time. Harry couldn't control everything, Severus was right.

Between gasping breaths Harry stuttered out, "Are you trying to call Severus, a slimy, greasy, evil git?" Tears were starting to leak from the corners of his eyes, and he barely got the words out before he laughed again.

"Yeah that's the one!" George pointed at Harry for emphasis, "Slytherin Rules."

Everyone in the room was laughing along with Harry, except the twins. It had become obvious that they were unable to insult Snape, and that every time they spoke they had to say 'Slytherin Rules'. On top of that they were green and silver.
Hermione and Ron came over to Harry. Ron was swept up in the high energy of the room, and the fact that his prankster brothers were victims of a great prank, so he began to explain what had happened with big sweeping arm motions. Hermione stepped in to help when it became obvious that Ron was only capable of exclamations.

"It was AMAZING Harry!" Ron threw his arms open as he yelled.

"We were all sitting at the table, beginning tea while waiting for the meeting to start." Hermione explained.

"Yeah! We were doing that and then BAM!" Ron slapped his hands together for emphasis.

Hermione chuckled at Ron's excitement. "What he means is that the twins started yelling that someone was trying to poison them, Because they were able to detect something wrong with their tea."

Ron made a body motion while swinging his arms like he was flipping a table over. "And then BANG, CRASH, AHHHHH!" he yelled while demonstrating the situation.

"When the twins tried to throw away the tea cups they flew back at them to force them to drink. During their struggle with the cursed china the table was flipped. As you know they lost the fight and ended up like that." Hermione jabbed her thumb at the twins who were frowning.

Harry smiled at Fred and George, "I warned you guys not to mess with Severus. I hate to say it but..."

"You told us so? Slytherin Rules." They said in unison.

"Yeah, that." Harry agreed. He looked around the half destroyed kitchen, "I think I am going to hire Dobby for the house, anyone object?"

There was a murmur of agreement through the room, "As long as you pay him an agreeable wage." Hermione added through the din.
Everyone began to move around and clean up. The twins still looked decidedly put out as they worked, and Severus made no visible effort at all, he only stood to the side smirking. Harry looked at his teacher from the corner of his eye. He wanted to thank the man for breaking the awful tension that had been slowly settling over the Method. Harry was afraid the conflicting feelings about Draco being brought here was going to cause an explosion, but this well timed prank seemed to defuse the situation.

Harry turned fully towards Severus as a realization dawned on him. Even though everyone expected the payback the twins received, this was too well timed. Was it possible that Severus planned the prank right before the meeting to intentionally break the tension? It did have a lot of benefits for Snape, if everyone was in a better mood it was safer for Draco.

Harry watched as Remus approached Severus. He couldn't hear what was being said, but he was always on edge when those two were near each other. Remus still held a lot of guilt about almost killing Snape, and Severus was still very fearful of werewolves.

Remus had a glint in his eyes that was the same as when Sirius would tell stories about their school days. Harry assumed they were talking about the prank Snape pulled, it seemed like a safe enough topic so he turned to get back to work… when suddenly Remus reached out and clasped Severus on the arm.

Harry thought he might have a stroke, it was a friendly action, but Severus probably didn't like being touched by the wolf that almost killed him. Harry was sure the Snape was going to throw the hand off and begin yelling, but it never happened. Severus simply responded, and Remus became slightly red in the face and dropped his hand before wandering away. Maybe Severus was truly trying to keep the peace, at least for Draco's sake.

"The world must be ending," Harry muttered to himself.

"Oh no, that's not happening for at least another hundred years." Luna's voice floated from behind.

Harry visibly jumped and spun around. "Luna! Where did you come from?" He clutched his chest while his heart calmed down.

Luna was holding a tea cup with some of Severus's brew in it. Seeing her with a different but equally intricate cup every time she was in the safe house was a normal occurrence. Harry had to admit that she look right holding the delicate cups. She tipped her head to the side causing her
bottle cap earrings to jingle.

"I came from behind you." She answered innocently.

Harry was glad to see that she was acting more like her old self. He smiled. "Right, of course you came from behind me," he agreed.

Luna smiled back and sipped her tea. "Your doggy is starting to understand why you invited Professor Snape."

Harry felt his chest ache at the mention of "his doggy". He turned completely around and stepped closer to Luna. "What do you mean when you talk about my dog?" he asked in a whisper.

"I mean the dog that follows you everywhere. Every time I see you he's there, even if it's just in the background." She said airily. The stricken look on Harry's face caused her eyes to soften, "I can't talk to him, and I don't think he can tell I can see him, but I get a general idea from his body language. Maybe when I don't have the curse I can do more for Sirius." Her voice was a soft breeze, and the words barely audible.

Harry felt like the air was squeezed out of him when Luna said his godfather's name. "So, it is him?" he whispered.

Luna nodded slightly, "There is nothing you can do right now." She said, her tone was rich and solid. Harry understood her meaning and they stood in a silence for a moment.

"Do you think I should bring up the world ending during the meeting?" she broke the silence with her normal airy voice.

Harry smirked, "You said it would be a hundred years from now?"

She nodded.

Harry put on a serious expression, "Well, I think for today's meeting it is a bit out of our scope, but keep it on the list."
Luna looked back equally serious and saluted, "Yes, Sir!" she mocked and marched away.

oOoOo

Hermione sat at the fixed kitchen table in the basement of Grimmauld place. The meeting was finally going to start, everyone else was preparing their tea or other beverages. Hermione stirred her tea unconsciously while she lost herself in thought. Somewhere in the background of her mind she registered that Harry was standing, and the meeting was starting, but she didn't feel inclined to focus on it.

She was wondering about Malfoy, or maybe it was Draco now? That felt weird to think… After what happened to Ginny in second year, she wondered if Malfoy would be highly affected by Voldemort's possession. Ginny took a long time to get over it, and it changed her a lot. Hermione hoped the experience would help Malfoy understand that the Death Eaters were not a good choice, but under it all she was sad that anyone had to go through that torture. She probably didn't know the half of it.

It would make everything a lot easier if Malfoy worked along with them. Hermione knew that Harry would lock the boy away if he had to, he would do it for Severus, to keep that man happy and in the Method. She knew the thought should upset or scare her, but it didn’t. Hermione found that she simply trusted Harry, and after spending more time around Severus she understood why Harry trusted him.

Harry was talking about the topic of saving Slytherin students who may be in the same situation as Malfoy. Hermione vaguely recognized the murmuring of agreement mixed with arguments going on around her. She heard Harry say there was no definite plan until they got a better idea of how Draco was going to work out. Harry calls Malfoy, Draco? Hermione shook off that strange occurrence and refocused her eyes on the room. She scanned the faces around the table and landed on Ron.

He looked annoyed, and was saying something to Harry. He was probably arguing about Slytherins or something… That boy was always mad about something. Hermione wondered if she should be trying to start something romantic with Ron. When she was younger, she thought she loved him, she had these ideas about how they would end up together. But now… she didn’t think he challenged her on an intellectual level. He had a great strategic mind, but his lack of common sense might lead her to murder him one day.

Hermione let her gaze wander to Harry. He was good looking and smart, but she knew it was too late for that. He was like her brother. Plus she didn't feel that certain something when she looked at
him, she knew she would feel something when she met someone she really liked. Hermione paused her train of thought, she was sitting in a literal war meeting of a powerful group, in a real war, and she was thinking about boys… Hormones, she concluded, it must be hormones. That mixed with the constant danger she was in since she was 11 that desensitized her, has led her to think about boys during a Method meeting. She almost laughed out loud but muffled it with a sip of her tea.

Harry was talking about his upcoming training to learn to use his gift to remove the curse, and his mention of Hermione's name brought said girl back to the meeting. He was listing people he wanted to be with him for the first part of the training. Apparently he was supposed to find something with great personal meaning and wanted some close friends to help. Hermione nodded her agreement and promptly zoned back out.

In the back of the room behind Harry, Hermione noticed that the kitchen door was open. Must have been left open when the twins flipped the table and Harry ran in. In the dim hallway she saw a slight movement. Hermione strained her eyes to see what was out there, looking back at her from the darkness were two grey eyes framed by un-gelled blonde hair. Apparently Malfoy was awake and spying on their meeting. Hermione was sure the boy didn't notice her looking at him, she wondered if she should say something, but decided it didn't matter, since he wasn't getting out of this house without signing the blood contract.

Hermione glance around the table to see if anyone else noticed Malfoy. No one was looking at the door, Ron was too preoccupied arguing with Ginny to notice the spy with his oddly keen senses. Hermione could feel another set of eyes watching, glancing around she found Severus was staring with his dark gaze. She tilted her head to the open door, Severus nodded to let her know he noticed Malfoy. With a stern face Severus slowly shook his head to tell her not to say anything. Hermione shrugged lightly and went back to her tea and thoughts.

The meeting droned on for what seemed like forever. Hermione's inability to focus continued, she wondered if her surface magic from the curse was causing her fuzzy mindedness. Hopefully Harry will find a way to remove the curses with their help and it won't matter.

Finally, Harry was announcing the final topic of the night. He waited for silence, and as the mumbling died down, Hermione looked up at her friend’s face. She was chilled by the deep and angry expression. Everyone else in the room must have felt the mood shift, because they all quieted at once.

Harry looked at each person in the eyes before opening his mouth, and uttering a single word.

"Horcrux."
The word cut through all the fog in Hermione's mind and sent ice down her spine. Simply hearing the word felt wrong, each syllable was coated in grime. Harry began explaining everything he knew about the topic, and everything Dumbledore had told him about Voldemort's creation of the foul objects. While she listened, Hermione began to rack her mind for every instance of the word she saw in the Black library.

She needed to do more research, but there was one thing she knew for sure.

They needed to go back to the chamber of secrets.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"A word from our sponsors.

When you die, the surface of the moon will not change.

The difference between the landscape and lighting of that barren little world from a moment where you exist, to a moment where you do not, will be minimal, and unrelated to your passing. From a car window driving on a highway, looking up at a moon framed by incidental clouds, the surface will be the same muddle of mystery and distance it always is.

And even a methodical study of your absence as it pertains to moon geology and cartography will find nothing. Searching through a powerful telescope, and analyzing with computer algorithms built around your nonexistence – even that study will find that all craters and rocks appear to be where we left them a few years back, that it is the same distance, orbiting at the same rate, and that the researches feel just the way they did about the moon as they did before you died.

Nothing will change about the moon when you die. It will be the same – still the moon, still there.

Still the moon.
This message brought to you by an anonymous sponsor. Looking for whatever product or service we offer? We are, whoever we are, the best choice in whatever industry that is."

-Night Vale

A/N- Life is big, and also infinitely small. From my perspective, my life is huge and uncontrollable at times. From the perspective of the moon, my life has almost no meaning. I like coming to my white space because in this place my life is the biggest. I am a god to my characters… although, at times they do as they please and deny their god, it’s irritating.

I love it when you all come to my white space from your own to enjoy my puppet show. It must be scary to leave your seat of god to come into my domain, but also oddly freeing, to not be responsible for the events that happen here. Only an observer.

The freeing feeling of no responsibility is part of the reason I read.

Why do you?

Beta Note - I like to get lost in another world. It is why I read other stories. And you being a God in your domain does not mean that the characters don’t have free will or a mind of their own. :) Sometimes we don’t control the story we tell, sometimes we are just the method to get the story told :) - minijaxter

Beta’d - 10/22/2017 -minijaxter

Rejiggered 11/7/2017

Rutabega’d - 11/30/2017 - sorry for the delay this month has been CRAZY!! - minijaxter
The Slytherins were subdued. Before Draco had been "sent home" they held some hope that their friend would recover from his mystery illness. Now he was gone, and many of them thought he had been sent to his death. Every day that passed they waited for the terrible news.

Harry watched the green clad bunch from his seat in Double DADA. The class had not yet started, and only the Gryffindor's were chatting. It was Wednesday morning and that meant that Draco had spent his first entire day at the Safe House. Harry had not been back to the house since the meeting Monday night, and he didn't plan to go back until his training Friday. Some people might say he
was being a chicken, but something about facing Draco made Harry very uncomfortable.

Severus went back to the house last night and reported that Draco spent most of Tuesday sleeping. When he was awake he only spoke to his godfather.

Some of the Method were meeting tonight to get homework help from Remus, and to train. When Harry was not available, training was run by Severus or Remus for whoever showed up. Tonight would be Luna, Ginny and Hermione; they joked about it being girls only training. But Harry was worried about members being in the house with Draco...

"POTTER!" Severus barked from the front of the class. Apparently the lesson started while Harry was lost in thought.

Snape slunk across the front of the room, his dark robes moved like an oily shadow. He glared right into Harry's eyes. His outward demeanor showed only disdain, but from Snape's eyes, Harry felt a subtle amusement.

"If you have been paying attention, you will be able to tell me the incantation of the smokescreen spell." Severus crossed his arms over his chest and waited.

Harry had a moment of internal panic. He knew the answer, but he was so rattled by the situation that the words seemed to have fallen from his head. "Errr…." Was his intelligent reply.

An evil smirk crawled over Snape's face. "I see… Perhaps, Mr. Potter is truly only able to charge head first into a fight without thought, so he did not bother to learn this spell."

Harry wanted to stick his tongue out at the man but contained the desire. He knew Snape was teasing him, and Harry refused to let him get under his skin. Severus turned with a sweep of his robes and stalked back to the front of the room. The lack of chuckles or rude comments from the Slytherins amplified the feeling of worry and sadness that was radiating from their side of the room. Normally Harry would have heard some comments thrown his way after failing to answer a simple question. He sighed and leaned back in his chair. The class continued at a crawling pace.

Hermione put her hand softly on his arm and squeezed gently. "We will help them," she whispered.

As usual, she said exactly what Harry needed to hear, and he smiled softly.
After dinner Harry wandered out onto the grounds and sat by the lake. He was in a slightly hidden spot under a tree, maybe a little too close to the forest. The girls had already left for the safe house to train, and Harry had managed to escaped Ron and Neville's attempts to drag him into a chess tournament. After all the chaos of the last few weeks he wanted to be alone for a while, especially with his upcoming visit with Dudley, he needed to clear his head.

No one in the Method, except for Remus and Severus, knew about his Aunt’s death. Harry considered talking to Hermione about it, but every time he gave the situation more than a cursory thought he would feel sick, so he let it drop.

The Methods reactions to the Hocruxes went about as well as Harry expected. Many of the younger members were scared. Severus swore out loud, which shocked everybody, and Remus looked tired, very tired. After Harry had explained as much as he could, Hermione left quickly, saying she knew of some books in the library. Harry was sure she meant the small study behind the phoenix bookcase. Only the two of them knew about that spot, and Harry knew Hermione had read almost every book in there.

Harry was already making mental plans about how they were going to get back to the Chamber of Secrets without Dumbledore finding out. After Hermione showed him the very old and rare book that listed how to destroy a Horcrux, he knew that Basilisk Venom would be their best bet.

Harry huffed, he was irritated. He had decided he had other things to do than take up Dumbledore's quest to find the Hocruxes, but somehow he ended up doing it anyway. He tried not to think about it, and let his mind wander. In his irritation, his thoughts floated back to DADA, because he still couldn’t remember the incantation Severus picked on him about… it started with an F, maybe?

Harry leaned back on his hands, the frost covered grass stung his palms, but he ignored it. Winter was coming… His thoughts were cut short when a figure on the edge of the forest came into view. The person looked male, average height, in a black cloak with its hood up. For a moment Harry didn't think much of it, during all his years at Hogwarts there always seemed to be some creepy figure lurking near the forest. Only about half the time was it someone dangerous.

"AY! YOU 'DAR! STOP!" A deep and gritty voice boomed through the air, Harry was on his feet the moment he recognized it as Hagrid's. The large half giant came busting out of the tree line like a cannonball. He had his crossbow drawn and loaded as he ran after the dark figure.

Harry began to run to his friend. They were kind of far away so he watched the scene unfold as he approached. Hagrid caught up to the mystery person and grabbed them by the back of the cloak, he spun them around so hard they almost went a full revolution and stumbled backwards. The only
thing that seemed to keep the hooded figure from running off again was the large arrow head pointed at their face.

Harry arrived just as the cloaked figure was holding up their hands in surrender.

"TAKE OFF YER HOOD!" Hagrid bellowed, as he made a twitching motion with his bow.

Harry saw the half giant glance at him, but he never looked away from his captive for more than a second. Slowly the mystery person moved their raised hands to their hood and pulled it back. Harry felt the tension leave his body as Professor Jigger's face was revealed. He moved to stand by Hagrid, and was ready to laugh the whole thing off as a misunderstanding. Harry smiled a little as he turned to his Professor, but Jigger wasn't smiling back, his eyes were on Hagrid.

Harry glanced to his left and saw the crossbow being held steady, still pointing directly at Professor Jigger. Harry turned fully to his friend with confusion, "Hagrid?" he questioned.

Hagrid responded with only a grunt, he glanced at Harry's baffled face and very slowly lowered his weapon.

Professor Jigger let out a breath and threw a charming smile at Harry.

"What was yeh doin' in my forest?" Hagrid growled, his entire body was tense, and he looked like he would raise his bow again at any moment.

Jigger shifted his charming smile to Hagrid, and it faltered a bit when the half giant didn't so much as blink. "I was simply collecting some ingredients that grow locally, I am the potions master you know." He ended with a small lift to his tone making the statement sound friendly.

Harry felt as he always did around Professor Jigger, sort of warm and generally comfortable. He always thought the man was a decent person, if a bit creepy about his potions, but definitely brilliant. Hermione was taken with him as a professor and Harry generally trusted her judgment, but Hagrid was acting strange, and didn't seem to like Jigger at all. Harry felt conflicted, he was OK with Jigger. but his friend's stance and attitude was setting him on edge.

"Hagrid, it's just Professor Jigger. When Snape was the Potions Master he was in the forest all the time." Harry reasoned, he wanted to defuse the situation.
Hagrid grunted but relented to Harry's point. "Off with ya then!" He shooed the Professor like he would an angry animal.

Jigger gave a small bow, "I will see you in class Mr. Potter." Then he turned and left without looking back at Hagrid.

"Hagrid are you ok?" Harry asked. He was truly concerned, the half giant was generally so friendly.

Hagrid huffed and rolled his shoulders. "I'm fine," he grunted.

Harry nodded and began to follow his friend as he walked away, "mind if I join you?"

Hagrid looked down at Harry, and his face softened for the first time since Jigger was there. "Tha'd be nice, bin a while since we had a cuppa." he admitted.

They walked together in silence for a while. Harry felt a bit guilty about not spending time with Hagrid this year, so he was glad he got the chance to. He wanted to ask about what just happened, but thought he better wait until Hagrid was a bit calmer...

"Fumos!" Harry smacked himself on the forehead as he exclaimed.

Hagrid gave him a questioning look.

Harry chuckled, "it's the incantation for the smokescreen spell, earlier I…” He sighed and shook his head. "Never mind, it doesn't matter."

Hagrid laughed and slapped Harry on the back. Together they made their way to the man's hut.

Hermione stepped out of the fireplace in the basement kitchen with surprising coordination. She
brushed away the little bit of soot that got on her clothes. No matter how much she practiced, she was never able to completely avoid getting dirty when flooing. It was apparently a skill only people who grew up with magic could obtain. She scowled at the thought.

When she finished cleaning up, she realized she was the first of the girls to arrive. Remus was already at the kitchen table pouring over some papers, and surprisingly Snape was sitting across the from him, drinking tea. Hermione had never seen the two men together without being forced, she was a little confused about the situation.

Remus looked very focused, while Snape appeared more irritated than normal. Neither of the men acknowledged her arrival, and she was a little scared to draw their attention. Remus was muttering very fast under his breath while folding and unfolding the parchment he held in different ways. Hermione watched as Snape leaned forward a little bit to look at the paper, and then scowled more fiercely.

"I..." She started to say, but stopped abruptly when both men looked at her. Normally she wouldn't be so nervous around them, but she just didn't know how to handle them being together. She assumed they would both be more on edge, and she didn't want any backlash, mostly from Snape.

"Oh, Hermione I didn't see you floo in." Remus sounded as he normally did, slightly distracted but friendly. Snape just scowled into space.

Hermione plucked up her courage and approached the table, admittedly she stayed on Remus's side. "Is that the Marauders Map?" she inquired when she stopped at the edge of the table.

"Yes, I asked Harry if I could borrow it for a while." Remus replied without looking up.

Hermione leaned over to get a better look, she could feel Snape's glare on the top of her head and tried to ignore it. "What are you using it for?" She asked.

Remus didn't look away from the map as he spoke, still slightly distracted voice. "I was thinking, the technique used to make the map would be useful in our research. Your idea of finding a better way to communicate led me to thinking about the map, and how it collects and shows information," he explained.

Hermione's eyes became bright with ideas. "OH! So if we could connect some parchments, we could make a system, parchments could collect information from each other, and share it between them."
Remus looked up and smiled. "Yes, much like Riddle’s Diary, except it would be connected to other people’s parchments and not… whatever was in the diary." He was excited she caught on so quickly.

Hermione let out a small squeak of excitement, "This is so great!" But after her initial excitement died down, she became concerned. "But how are we going to get this to work? I have never heard of magic like this except the diary. Also the map shouldn't work at all, Hogwarts is unplottable… and everyone who made it is…” She trailed off when she realized what she was about to say.

Remus smiled, kind and soft. He didn't seem upset she brought up his dead friends. "It's OK, Hermione. Actually, I am the one who finally figured out how to make the map work."

Hermione's eyes brightened with interest, "How?"

Remus gave a sly smile that was not often seen anymore. "I made the paper a special way," he admitted, in a covert tone.

Hermione's eyes widened. "You made the paper for the map?" She whispered, very impressed.

Snape made a disgruntled sound that was ignored.

Remus nodded. "I used special ingredients, it was similar to making a potion but you get a solid object after."

Hermione practically sparkled with excitement. "I didn't know that type of magic existed, is it similar to candle magic? Where did you learn about it? This will make it possible to connect the papers in a network like the candles!" She gushed.

Remus laughed at his former students rambling, she was obviously excited. "Whoa! Hermione, let's slow down a bit. I am not even sure how to do this yet, I can't completely remember how I made the paper for this map. I had notes, but I don't know what happened to them," he lamented.

Snape snorted even louder this time, and both Hermione and Remus turned to him. He glared at them, Hermione wondered what put him in such a foul mood.
"It is obvious…" Severus drawled in a condescending tone. "Lupin is a Makers Magician. It is a category of gift that includes creating something new, it is grouped with candle magic. Like most people still sealed, he is sometimes able to use a small bit of his gift, he must have done so when he made the infernal map…" He trailed off in disgust.

Hermione felt the pieces click in her head. If they did manage to get the Curse off of everyone in the Method, they could make so many things that could outdo the magic that is commonly used. Her thoughts were interrupted as Snape began to talk again.

"The Wolf's magic, along with yours, will be able to create something useful for communication." He concluded.

"My magic?" Hermione questioned.

Severus leaned forward, "Yes, your magic. I assume you are the one behind the creation of the arrays used for Harry's ritual?" He sneered, probably still irritated about that entire ordeal.

Hermione nodded slowly, she was still guilty about that fiasco. Her heart clenched when she thought about it.

Snape leaned back and sighed. "You should not have been able to create working arrays, I assume while working on them you felt sick?" His tone was dry, and his temper was obviously short.

Hermione nodded again, she remembered feeling sick and almost passing out once.

Snape nodded back. "you are most likely a Utility Mage like Draco, but you use Written Magic. Not great for battle, but it can create very useful things. Combine it with Lupin's magic, which is probably paper or fiber oriented, and you will make things thought impossible. If the Wolf’s magic is fiber oriented, he could likely help Draco out."

Hermione felt a bright light, warm her from the inside out. She had a gift, and it was exactly what she would have wanted. She smiled brilliantly and Snape scowled back at her, but she didn't care.

"It's almost like our magics synergize somehow." Hermione commented to Remus. Before she got a
response, Snape cut in again.

"That is because they do." He said, as if it were so obvious an idiot should have known.

Hermione ignored his attitude in favor of information. "You mean, they are meant to work together?" She pried.

Severus nodded, "All the gifts known to exist, either synergize or cancel out with another; it is nature's magical checks and balances."

Hermione's eyes widened, "Like Harry and Voldemort! The Curse threw off the entire balance of magic! They were meant to balance each other..." Her words tapered off. It all made too much sense.

Severus smirked, "Now you really understand the incompetence of the ministry, if not for them, The Dark Lord wouldn't be able to exist as he does." He glanced at the map as he finished speaking. His face became tight, he stood up abruptly, stalking out of the room, leaving his tea.

Hermione watched his exit in confusion.

"Don't mind his foul mood," Remus said, with an amused edge to his voice. "He is just upset because the marauders cursed the map so it only ever shows him insults. He is determined to see the map, but I can't seem to remove the curse." He held back laughter as he spoke.

Hermione smiled back as she mentally filed away her new information for the next meeting.

The floo flared, popping out Luna and Ginny. Together the girls left to train.

oOoOo

Hermione sat in the kitchen of Grimmauld Place, alone. The other girls had left after training, but she felt restless. Training had started out well enough, but then dissolved into some sort of girl's night. She sighed to herself, and decided to look over the notes Remus had left on the table before he retired for the night.
She clutched her mug of tea and savored the warmth, as she read over the complicated papers. She had to admit, she didn't understand most of what she was looking at, Remus was way above her, but she was determined to catch up.

A small noise from the kitchen door caused Hermione to quickly look up. The door was slightly ajar, and she was sure she had closed it earlier. But it stood open, and creaked a little in the draft of the big old house. Without thinking, Hermione got up to close the door, but as she reached out to touch the dark wood she paused. Remus wouldn't have opened the door and left without saying anything, and everyone one else was gone, even Snape… no, not everyone.

Hermione let out a small sound, she was alone in the house with Malfoy. How could she have forgotten him? He must have come to the kitchen thinking no one was here and saw her; but he didn't barge in like he owned the place. He didn't disrupt her to make snide comments, instead, he left. It was almost as if Hermione's presence spooked him, like a horse and a snake. Which is funny, because that would make her the snake.

Hermione took a deep breath and made up her mind. She would go talk to Malfoy. Everyone but Snape had been avoiding the boy for the past couple of days - it wasn't right. She steeled her nerves as she grabbed a second mug and put it on a tray with hot tea and other accoutrements.

After taking a deep breath, she exited the kitchen with her tray and walked slowly down the hall. For a long moment, she just stood in front of the door to the blue drawing room. When Malfoy wasn't in his assigned bedroom this was the only other room he went to, She knocked on the door, being careful not to drop her tray. There was no response. She knocked again, and waited, there was no verbal response, but she heard shuffling from the room. Hermione wasn't sure what to do, should she open the door or walk away? Her original plan was to see Malfoy, and she disliked sudden changes. Making up her mind, she opened the door and walked in.

Malfoy looked up from the couch, his eyes were wide with surprise. When he saw who walked through the door, he set his face into a neutral expression. Hermione was relieved he didn't sneer or glare. She walked to the couch across from his and put the tray on the table between them. She freshened up her own cup without saying anything, because she honestly didn't know what to say. She had not planned this far head.

Malfoy was looking at the floor silently. His entire body radiated discomfort. Slowly he moved to make his own cup of tea. His movements were careful, as if he were being faced with an angry dog that might snap at him.

Hermione looked to her left so she wouldn’t seem like she was staring. Her eyes settled on the old unwashed tea cup on the end table. The fuzzy mold on the inside had died a while ago, and was shriveled up at the bottom of the cup. Her heart hurt for a moment as she thought about how no one cleaned the cup up, it had become a universally understood fact; the cup was not to be touched.
Dobby had started coming by the house to clean, and even he didn't dare to touch it, he had said something about the house not wanting the cup moved.

Hermione looked back at Malfoy, still grasping for something to say. He was looking at the cup with unfocused eyes, his face unreadable. "I didn't ask for any of you to help me."

The sudden sound of his voice almost made Hermione jump. She hadn't expected him to speak first. She took a deep breath before responding. "No you didn't, but Severus did, and so did your mother." She kept her voice soft.

Malfoy's head whipped around to look directly at Hermione. His eyes were filled with disbelief, but below that, there was a small bit of hope. Hermione wanted it to be hope. She reached into her robe pocket and pulled out the last letter Narcissa had sent through the candle. She held it out for Malfoy with loose fingers.

He took it with the same caution he had been displaying since Hermione entered the room. As soon as her fingers released the note he snatched it to himself, and then quickly opened it. The three words and a name quickly scribbled on the paper met his eyes. His entire body became stiff, his eyes were fixed on the note as his breathing quickened. "No…" the word came out of his mouth like a breath.

Hermione started to assure him the note was real, but paused as Malfoy shot to his feet.

"NO!" he roared.

Hermione jumped to the far side of her couch away from Malfoy. His hand tightened around the parchment causing it to crinkle. "This isn't real! She would never ask for help, or beg, she is too strong!" He was yelling, but not directly at Hermione.

She calmed slightly when he didn't lash out at her. Then, a small ember of anger began to grow in her chest. "It is NOT weak to ask for help!" Hermione snapped back, she surprised herself with her own reaction.

Malfoy was equally surprised, his shoulders fell, and he deflated a bit. Hermione grasped the moment and threw more words at the boy. "It is one of the hardest things to do, asking for help." She was no longer yelling, but her voice was clear and strong.
Malfoy sneered at her for the first time since he arrived, it hurt Hermione more than she expected.

"Asking for help from the enemy is strong?! She would be undermining who she is!" He was yelling again, his shoulders rising with his volume.

The small ember in Hermione's chest became a bright flame, and she yelled louder than him in response. "Are we really the enemy?! And if we are, then your mother is undermining herself for YOU! For her son! That IS strength!" She took a calming breath, and looked into steel grey eyes, "Is that what you think of yourself? That you are weak because you're here?" her tone was strong and clear like a bell, full of conviction.

Her words must have struck a note with Malfoy, because his face lost the sneer. But before he gave anything away his expression became neutral. He held up the note, "I still don't think this is real," He said plainly.

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest and leaned her weight to one side. "Fine, I will fire call Severus so he can bring your wand, and you can check for yourself." She knew she was being petulant, but she didn’t care.

Malfoy's entire stance changed and his eyes filled with anger. "DON'T CALL HIM THAT, HE’S NOT YOURS! HE’S MY GODFATHER!" He hollered.

Hermione took a step back and reached into her pocket for her wand, but didn't take it out. She wasn't going to back down out of fear. "He is also ours! He is part of the Method!" She yelled back. Her stance was firm as she faced him from across the coffee table.

The door to the Blue room burst open and Remus came in with his wand drawn, panic on his face. He was in his night clothes and looked as if he had just been woken up, which was probably what happened.

Malfoy and Hermione both stopped yelling and turned to the door. They were breathing heavily from their anger. Without a word, and completely ignoring the wand pointing at his face, Malfoy fled the room. Remus stumbled a bit because of force of the boy shoving past him to get through the door.

Remus slowly lowered his wand and looked at Hermione; she was smiling, a strange little smirk on
her lips. "What happened?" Remus moved to the couch and flopped back onto it.

Hermione sat on the other couch, the smirk still on her face. "I had a fight with Malfoy, and he threw a temper tantrum," She explained.

Remus tipped his head to the side, "You had a fight with Malfoy, and you're smiling about it? Did you win?"

Hermione crossed her arms in a smug manner, "No, but the fight had nothing to do with me being a muggleborn. In fact, it wasn't brought up or used as an insult."

Understanding dawned on Remus, "I see, so our resident Malfoy is making an effort of some sort."

Hermione nodded, "He was upset, I think it was understandable, but he didn't lash out at me with things he normally would." Hermione moved to the other couch, and Remus cleaned Malfoy's cup with a swish of his wand.

"Tea?" Hermione waved at the still steaming hot pot on the tray.

Remus sighed as he poured himself a cup.

oOoOo

Harry felt sick. He was alone in his dorm room, on his bed, with his curtains drawn closed. The rest of his classmates had already left for breakfast, but Harry knew he wouldn't eat. It was Friday morning, normally he would be getting ready for double transfiguration, but not today. After dinner the night before a small slip of paper was delivered to Harry, it was the Headmaster informing him that his classes were canceled, and instead he was meeting his cousin.

Harry groaned and wanted nothing more than to fall back onto his bed and sleep some more. He wanted to pretend none of this was happening. Not only was he going to face Dudley, but he was also going to face Draco that evening for training with Snape. He wondered if it was karma for avoiding the safe house all week. He hoped Draco had settled in over the few days he was there, and it wouldn't be too weird.
With great effort Harry rolled out of his bed. His bed hangings bulged out momentarily as his body slipped off the mattress, giving the illusion that the bed had just birthed a boy onto the floor. Harry rose from his hands and knees into the streaming light from his window. He didn't bother to pick up his glasses from the bedside table, and wandered off to take a shower.

A little while later, Harry pulled his robe over his school uniform and brushed away the wrinkles. He slipped on his trainers and checked the time, breakfast was almost over. Harry left his dorm, the corridor echoed with every step. All the students were still in the great hall, but Harry was meant to meet the Headmaster outside his office. A low rumble of footsteps and voices met his ears as he traveled to his destination. There were no classrooms in the hallways he was heading towards, so he only met one or two stray students on the way. As he walked, the low din of children heading to class faded away.

Harry turned the corner, and saw Dumbledore was already waiting for him at the gargoyle. Without speaking, the Headmaster placed a hand on Harry's shoulder and began to lead him to the entrance hall. Outside a carriage waited to take both of them to the gates of the school. Harry looked at the Thestral hooked to the front of their ride, the moment he laid eyes on it, the skeletal horse turned to look back at him. They held eyes for a moment before Dumbledore pulled him to the carriage door.

The ride was short, and very soon they were outside school grounds.

"Are you ready?" The Headmaster asked with a soft grandfatherly tone.

Harry nodded and grasped the old man's sleeve. He took a deep breath and prepared for the unpleasant sensations of side-along apparition. He kept his eyes closed until the crushing rubber tube released him and his feet touched solid ground again.

When Harry opened his eyes he saw a campus of brick buildings covered in ivy. The leaves on the trees and vines were shades of red and yellow, and the air had a bite of frost on it. "Where are we?"

Dumbledore looked down at his student. "We are at Smeltings Academy."

Harry was surprised, he didn't think he would ever see his cousin's school, but it made sense, school was still in session so Dudley couldn't leave.

Dumbledore pointed to a double set of iron gates built into a brick wall. "Dudley is waiting for you
in that courtyard. I have ensured no one will interrupt, I will wait here."

Harry nodded shallowly. It took a few seconds to get himself to walk forward. When he reached the gate he stopped to take a calming breath and then pushed forward. The courtyard had a single red brick walkway through the middle leading to the entrance of a building in the distance. The pathway was lined with trees that were slowly shedding leaves. Along the way between the trees was a wooden bench with no back, behind the bench was a small pond. Dudley sat with his back to the path facing the pond. Harry approached quietly.

Dudley looked over his shoulder when Harry was only a few paces away. He smiled, it was sad, as if bent the wrong way. Harry thought he looked very tired and might have lost some more weight. He lifted his hand in greeting. "Hey." It was a lame thing to say.

Dudley moved over so Harry could sit next to him. "Hey," he responded when his smaller cousin was seated. They looked into the pond together, both were collecting their thoughts.

"Dudley…"

"Look-"

They started speaking at the same time, then paused.

"I'm sorry." Harry blurted out after the short silence.

"It's not your fault." Dudley spoke over Harry's apology.

Harry tried to say something else, but Dudley help up his hand. "Just, let me talk," He insisted.

Harry nodded, if that's what his cousin wanted who was he to say no?

Dudley looked back at the calm water, his eyes became far away as he recounted what had happened. "At first I was angry at you. I got the news about mum and was taken to a police station. No one would let me go to the house or see my dad. I didn't even know exactly what happened, only that mum didn't make it." Dudley looked at Harry, his eyes were bright with a film of tears.
"But then, I finally got to go back to my house, some cops brought me there. The police had moved everything, and there was dust everywhere from them fingerprinting. I was told to take what I wanted because the house would be closed until the estate was settled. I looked for the box that the potion had been in, but it was gone, I thought the police had it." Dudley rung his hands and looked back at the pond. "The next day, your Headmaster came to my dorm. He told me he had the box and showed me the letter you sent mum about what your friend had told you… after that I was less mad, but more confused. I didn't understand why mum gave dad more when she was told not to, I didn't understand why dad was so angry." His voice became strained as he held back his tears. "I had no one to talk to…" Dudley's voice cracked and he stopped speaking.

Harry sat awkwardly, while his cousin collected himself. He thought about reaching out to put a hand on Dudley's shoulder, but before he could decide Dudley started talking again.

"I spent a week here at school, but I didn't have to go to classes. The day before classes started again, your Headmaster came back and told me he found me a therapist, but not a regular one, one that knows about magic." He smiled, small and watery.

Harry looked away from the pond. "A mind healer?" He questioned.

Dudley nodded, "yeah, one of those. And I have been seeing her every weekend since then. She has helped me figure a lot of things out. Mostly about my mum, and why she acted the way she did… and it helped me come to terms with the fact that my dad wasn't a good person. What he did to you was wrong, my mum wasn't strong enough to fight him… and what he did to me was wrong too. The way they raised me wasn’t healthy," he admitted,

This time, Harry didn't have to think about it, he placed a firm, supportive hand on his cousin's shoulder. Dudley leaned into the touch a small bit, his eyes were much clearer. Things would get better for Dudley in time, but that wasn't something that needed to be voiced.

Dudley sighed and continued talking. "My mum was looking for validation, I think, she thought my dad also hating magic, made the way she treated her sister OK. I think that once my dad started treating her poorly, she lost that validation. After that, she wanted to be… forgiven maybe. She thought if she fixed things with you… It's confusing." He trailed off, Harry squeezed the shoulder he was holding. "I just wish I still had a home," Dudley confessed in a whisper.

"What about Privet Drive?" Harry felt worry and confusion bubble up.

"It's gone," Dudley explained like I was obvious.
Harry felt his mind reeling, where was he going to hide for the summer, or make Dumbledore think he was living? Where was Dudley going to live at all? He would bet all his gold, that Dumbledore was going to use this to put Harry someplace closer and easier to control. "What do you mean it's gone?" He asked, hoping for a solution.

"Well, I'm not of age, and I really didn't want to go back there, so when the estate was settled they sold the house." He didn't seem very upset about losing his childhood home, but overall it was a small price compared to what he already lost.

"Where will you go?" It was really the more important question, Harry could take care of the other problems himself.

Dudley grimaced, "Aunt Marge's… she's not happy that my parents left me everything. I don't want to live with her, but it's only during the winter break and summer, also I don't really have anywhere else to go. The money from my parents pays for school."

Harry felt his heart jump. He knew that feeling, of not having any place to go, except a place where people didn't want you. Only, Dudley did have someone and someplace! "But Dud, you have me." Harry wanted to explain the safe house, and the Method, and tell his cousin he always had a place to go, but he wasn't sure if the old man was listening in or not.

Dudley smiled, brighter this time. "Thanks."

Harry scrambled for a way to explain, he felt in his pocket and found a bit of parchment. "Dudley do you have something to write with?"

Dudley looked confused, but felt around his Maroon and orange uniform, and pulled out a stubby pencil handing it to Harry.

*I have a safe house and a group of friends that will take care of you. I can't talk about it out loud because my Headmaster might be listening, and he can't know about it. I will write to you before winter break, I bet Marge will keep her mouth shut for some money and I can take you to my place.*

Harry finished writing and handed the scrap over. Dudley read it slowly two times over, before looking Harry in the eyes and smiling, he nodded. Then Dudley ripped the paper up into tiny
pieces and put it in his pocket to get rid of later.

Harry felt a huge weight slip from his back. He still felt bad about what happened to his aunt, but knowing Dudley was going to be OK, and wasn't mad at him, helped a lot. Dudley was far from alright now, but someday he would be.

Now he had to deal with telling his friends everything. If Dudley was moving in for winter break and summer, he had to explain what happened. Now he regretted not telling anyone about his aunt's death… who knew this would come back to bite him?

Harry let out a sigh mixed with a slightly hysterical laugh, and caught his head in his hands as it dropped forward.

Dudley raised a brow at his cousin's strange behavior…

oOoOo

Harry sat nervously at the old table in the safe house. He was very early for his training with Severus and Draco, but after meeting Dudley, he had so much energy he couldn't sit in his dorm. Dumbledore tried to corner him to talk about the meeting before they parted, it bothered Harry that the old man was being so insistent. What happened between him and his cousin was personal, but Dumbledore was never very good at respecting personal boundaries.

Snape was due to arrive soon, and Draco hadn't come to the kitchen yet. He was probably waiting until the last possible second in order to avoid extra time with Harry. Not that Harry blamed him, it must be very unnerving to be stuck in a house with people who were previously enemies. Snape often checked in and talked to Draco, He explained the situation with the Method. But Draco had still refused to sign the contract.

Harry looked down into his cup of tea. He had been drinking a lot of tea lately. He idly wondered if there was a negative repercussion for drinking too much tea. The Floo flared, Harry glanced over as Hermione exited the grate more gracefully than Harry ever could. She scowled at the small bit of soot that was on her shoulder, less soot than would have been on Harry. Hermione noticed him at the table, and immediately picked up on his pensive mood. She didn't say a word and simply sat across from him. She was the person he requested be with him while he found his anchor tonight. Who was going to be the person with Draco? Would he only have Snape? Harry assumed this to be true, since no one else here counted as a trusted person for Draco. Harry felt a bubble of sympathy for the other boy well up in his chest. If someone had told him last year that he would sympathize with Draco Malfoy, he would have laughed in their face.
Another flare of the floo deposited Severus into the kitchen. His exit from the fireplace was more graceful than Hermione's, and he had not a single bit of soot on his clothes. Harry caught Hermione looking on with envy, and suppressed a smile.

Everyone sat or stood in silence until the exact moment of their meeting time arrived, and at that moment the kitchen door creaked open, slowly. Draco slipped through the slot of the barely open passage, it was only big enough for his body to fit through sideways. He didn't look nervous, only withdrawn, but Harry noted that he wasn't sneering either. The worry that the old Draco would come through the door settled, and Harry let a small smile grace his face.

"We should move to a more comfortable room." Severus's kept his voice low, and gestured for them to follow.

Everyone exited the kitchen and walked down the hallway to the Blue room. Harry mentally noted that the carpets were much cleaner and the floor shined. He should give Dobby a raise.

All the students entered the room first, and were directed to sit together on one couch. Hermione moved quickly to make sure she was on one end of the couch, forcing Harry in the middle between her and Draco. Severus sat on the couch opposite them. He pulled a small box out of his robe and placed it on the table in the middle. Hermione also pulled out a box and placed hers next to Snape's.

Severus leaned forward and opened his box first. Inside were some small shiny objects. Harry heard an intake of breath from Draco. "How did you...?" He whispered.

"I had some communication with your mother, and before you ask, she is doing as well as expected." Severus pushed the box a little closer to Draco. "Do any of these pull on your surface magic?"

Harry took a closer look at the contents while Draco shifted the objects around. There were three pieces of jewelry. One was a silver bangle that looked like a snake eating its own tail, and there was a matching ring. The third piece was a pendant, a simple silver coin with a green gem in the middle. Other than the jewelry, there was a frayed piece of rope that looked like it had once been intricately woven, but the fuzzy, and fraying of the fiber, obscured the pattern.

Draco reached out and touched each item, when he reached the frayed rope he nodded and picked it up. "This," he said quietly.

Snape nodded, "Good, I was worried I didn't bring enough items. As I have told you both, you will
need a trusted person, and an item that holds great emotional value, in order to start creating an anchor. Magic and Emotion are so closely linked, that they are practically one and the same." Severus looked to Hermione. "I went to Malfoy manor, and with the help of Draco's mother I found objects that might have worked for him. I asked Hermione to do the same for Harry."

Draco looked at the box that contained what Harry’s most trusted person thought he was most emotionally tied to. His face was a mask, but his eyes shined with curiosity, he waited for the box to open while fingering his weaved rope.

Hermione looked at Harry, her eyes held a strange emotion. "I'm sorry Harry, I went into your things to do this. I wasn't supposed to ask you because your input could mess up the ritual."

Harry nodded in understanding, he was aware that if he knew about the choice it would change his emotions and thus his magic.

Hermione reached out, and placed her hand on the lid of the box. "I found a few things that might work, but the item might have to be shrunk permanently to keep on your person, and I didn't think you would be willing to do that to your photo album, and the other items are too useful to do that to, like the cloak and map…” She was rambling now, her voice betrayed how nervous she was. "Then I found this, it's the only thing I think will work."

Harry looked at the box intently as the lid was slowly raised. A small flash of reflected light hit his eyes, his pupils dilated, and he felt himself go numb. He sat perfectly still as he stared at the item in the box. He hadn't looked at it in so long. Old guilt, and a desire to fix what he had broken overwhelmed him. A film of tear sprung up immediately in reaction, making his eyes bright.

Harry's hand trembled, as he reached out to touch the shattered shards and twisted metal frame. The one object that could have saved Sirius, something that Sirius had given him. His Godfather had given him a way to keep both of them safe, and Harry had forgotten about it. The tip of his finger touched the largest shard of broken mirror, and became as cold as the glass. He could feel the shards pulling on his magic, he had always felt it when he touched the broken mirror, but now that his curse was gone, the pull was so much stronger.

He opened his hand and scooped the shards and metal out of the box by the cloth they were wrapped in.

"Is it pulling on your magic?" Severus asked, he sounded concerned, which meant that Harry wasn't doing a good job of covering how much this hurt. He nodded in response, and Severus began explaining the next part of the process, sparing Harry anymore pity. Apparently all they had
to do was meditate with the object. The first time they needed to meditate with the person that chose the object, then after that, they did it on their own until it became second nature to send the surface magic into the item and to the earth.

Harry wasn't listening very hard. His grip tightened on the glass, and he felt it biting into his skin. He was thinking of his Aunt and Dudley. His cousin had effectively absolved Harry of his guilt, but there was no one to do that for him when it came to Sirius's death, he couldn't even fix the mirror because it was a magical item. If only he could fix it, if Sirius had his when he fell through the vale, then maybe he could communicate from there. Harry would finally get to tell him how sorry he was for getting him killed, and how angry he was that Sirius made the choice of leaving the house. That once again the rash man chose to make his existence meaningless, and that he left Harry alone again.

Harry squeezed the broken mirror harder. His hand was cold, and his magic was flowing to the shards faster and faster. Maybe he could fix it. With another squeeze he felt the snap of his skin breaking under the sharp pressure of the glass. Blood welled up, and Harry felt something change. His magic surged through him, and into the mirror, like water through a broken dam. Was this supposed to happen? Was he meditating like he was told to, wasn't Hermione supposed to help?

His skin was warming up, it was becoming unbearably hot and when he tried to drop the mirror his hand wouldn't move, his arm wouldn't move. His magic picked up his intention and was taking over, out of his control.

Draco watched closely as Granger opened the box. What was the item that held Harry Potter's emotional attachment? Why was it only one item? When the lid to the box was removed Draco felt his anticipation sputter out. Inside was only some broken mirror and the bent frame that once held it. It looked like it used to be a small hand mirror, his mother owned many of them.

Draco glanced at Severus to see if he was equally put out by the anticlimactic reveal. He was surprised to see his godfathers eyes fixed on the mirror shards, and his expression became concerned when his eyes trailed to Potter. Draco felt his own eyes drawn to Potter, and a shock ran through his body. Potter's eyes were bright and his hand shook as it slowly moved to touch the shards.

What the hell was with this mirror? Even Granger looked sad and worried. Draco had been extremely nervous about seeing Potter again. His rival and enemy… or former enemy maybe, had seen him at his weakest. Potter had seen him possessed, broken and crying. The worst part was that Potter had helped him… had saved him. When he was grabbed from behind he felt Potter's magic enter his body through every pore, and drive the Dark lord’s burning red magic away. Draco hated to admit, that it was a wonderful and relieving feeling, and it had felt like freedom. It was something Draco had not felt for months, and because of that, Potter's embrace had been
comforting. He had not felt a comforting touch besides his Godfathers for a very long time, not since last year, when Pansy had hugged him, or when Blaise had cuffed him on the shoulder jokingly.

Draco refocused on Severus after it was established that Potter’s broken mirror would work as his anchor, and the man began to explain the meditation they would have to do. Draco was concentrating on Severus's Instructions, and the piece of rope in his hand, when he felt a pressure from his right. Shortly after he felt the pressure, Severus stopped talking. Draco looked up at his godfather, and the man was staring at Potter. Draco turned his head to look as well, but before he had a chance to see what was happening, the bubble of pressure he had been feeling, popped. The air was suddenly filled with power. The static of magic and ionized air brushed over him. His fine blond hair began to lift away from his head with the force of ambient power.

For just a moment, Draco caught sight of Potter, his face was contorted with panic and pain, he looked frozen in place against his will, and in his hand, pooled blood and glass. Draco took in as much of the image as he could, before a high ringing filled his ears, it was the only warning they got before a torrent of magic burst forth. He threw his arms over his face in anticipation of the blast, but there was no push from the wave of power. Rather, it felt like a shock of electricity from a nearby lightning strike, it went right through his chest making it hard to take a breath, and caused his entire body to tingle.

Draco lowered his arms, Severus was also lowering his, along with Granger. They were all looking around slightly confused. Then movement from the middle couch caught their attention. Draco stood up along with Granger, as Potter began to convulse, he dropped his mirror shards and blood splattered over the floor along with the sound of falling glass.

Draco didn't know what to do, he looked to Severus for help, and watched as understanding dawned on his godfather's face. Snape pulled out his wand and with a sweeping motion he cleared the table from between the couches, conjuring pillows. Then he ran to Potter and carefully moved him to the floor so he wouldn't hurt himself in his fit.

"Something went wrong! Harry let the Mirror pull on his core magic rather than his surface magic, and then the blood made it stronger, causing him to lose control. Now his surface magic is building up very quickly, we need a new item!" Severus's voice held a note of panic Draco had never heard. His godfather was actually scared for Potter, he cared.

Granger had tears brimming in her eyes, but was still calm and collected. "I don't know what else there is! How did this happen? Why didn't the magic hurt us?" while she spoke she was scanning the room for anything of use.

Severus was trying to find a way to calm Potter, he was trying to make eye contact to invade his
mind, but Potter was too far gone. Draco stood to the side like a statue. Wave after wave of immense power rolled off Potter and through Draco, he had never felt so much magic, except from the Dark Lord… but this was comforting... even though it seem to be hurting Harry.

Severus looked desperate as he explained, still attempting to force his way into Harry’s mind. "The Mirror might have had too much guilt or pain associated with it, he might have tried to fix it unconsciously. Either way, he pulled on his ability to fix magic. The nature of his gift won't allow him to hurt those he cares about without intent, but it will destroy his mind and core if he keeps this up." He gave up trying to make a mental connection, "We need another anchor…” he repeated.

Draco still couldn't comprehend the amount of power Harry was giving off, or the obvious caring his own godfather was showing. The loyalty Severus expressed to him wasn't a lie, or a ploy, it was real. Draco could see that now. The sudden understanding that this person, this -dying- kid his own age, might really be his way out of his bad situation, kicked Draco into gear. He began to look around the room with Granger, not that he would be much help since he didn't know much about Harry personally, but he had to try.

He saw the old crusty cup on the end table. The cup that no one ever cleaned up, not even the house elf. That meant it was important, and this was Harry’s house, so it might be important to him. It was a long shot, but Draco felt like he had to do something. Potter had saved him, and now he could return the favor. They could be on even footing.

"Granger, what about the cup?" Draco pointed at it.

She was surprised by his voice, and then turned to where he was pointing. She stared at the cup for a moment, as if she couldn't believe she didn't think of it. Then she bolted for it, she grabbed it up and turned around so fast she almost fell. She dropped to her knees next to Harry and put the cup in his flailing hand. To stop him from breaking it she threw herself over him while holding his hand and the cup in both of her hands.

It had felt like forever from the moment Harry began convulsing, to the cup being placed in his hand, but it had only been minutes. But waiting to see if the cup worked, felt even longer. Granger held Harry to the floor with her weight, squeezing his hand in hers, and she finally let herself cry.

Then Harry slowly began to calm down.

Draco felt the breath he was holding slowly leak from his lungs.
Severus moved closer to Harry and began to check him over with his wand. The relief Draco saw on his godfather’s face struck him to the core. What Hermione said earlier in the week echoed in his head, Severus really was theirs, the Method’s.

Hermione slowly moved off her friend, she looked to be slightly in shock. Luckily she was the type of person that went into shock after everything was over, which was a good type of person to have around in a crisis.

After a minute of running his wand up and down Harry's still form, Severus sat back on his heels and sighed. "He should be fine, that cup will serve as his anchor from now on."

Hermione was on the floor next to the couch Harry had been on. She was slowly picking up the bloody glass shards and placing them in her other hand. "I'm sorry, I didn't think… I didn't know." Her voice wavered.

Severus moved around Harry's resting form and pointed his wand at the mess.

"Let's just clean this up." He began the movements to clean the glass and blood away.

"NO!" Hermione threw her handful of glass back to the floor. Specks of blood hit her face and got caught in her hair.

Severus stopped his spell, shocked into silence.

"No…" Hermione said quieter. She focused on the bloody mess, and confessed. "Everytime I try to help Harry, something terrible happens… and I hurt him. I need to fix this."

Draco held still, this was something private. He wondered what else had happened that caused Hermione to say that, but didn't think it was the right time to ask.

Severus lifted his hand as if he was going to comfort Hermione, but stopped and let it drop back to his side. Draco assumed he wasn't as close with Granger as he was with Harry. "We are dealing with old, and powerful magic, on top of that you were doing it unsupervised for a long time. Things are bound to go wrong." He tried to reason.
Hermione shook her head and clenched her fist. Harry's blood trickled from the one that had been holding the glass. Hopefully it was just Harry's blood and she hadn’t cut herself. She shut her eyes tight as if to hold back her tears. "No… even after you came, everything I try to do, anything I specifically do myself, seems to hurt him. I don't want to hurt him…” She opened her eyes and looked at Severus. "And you help him, you do Occlumency with him and even if you don't realize it you are healing him… you used to hate him, and now you are his greatest benefit." Hermione took a hitched breath, "I'm supposed to be his best friend, and I can't seem to stop doing things wrong, or giving him the wrong advice. I'm hurting him.” The confession sounded like something she felt was long overdue. It contained a hint of jealousy towards Severus, that she was obviously ashamed of.

Severus let his shoulders relax, and this time he did carefully place a hand on Hermione's shoulder. "Hermione…” The name came naturally, but was slightly odd to hear from his mouth. "You are young, and you are not perfect. When you have gone through as much life as I have, you will make less mistakes. Even I make mistakes, I assure you, I am making them all the time, even now,” he explained quietly.

Draco found the wording of Snape's final statement odd, his godfather felt like something he was currently doing was a mistake, but what?

Severus paused for a moment to collect his thoughts before he continued. "You are desperate to help Harry, so much so, that you refuse advice from wiser sources. If I had told you not to use the mirror, would you have listened?" He asked earnestly.

Hermione slowly shook her head.

"Exactly, your guilt is hurting Harry, you need to let it go." Severus dispensed the advice, but Draco thought the man should also follow it. Not that he would dare interrupt.

Hermione nodded grudgingly, "I just don't want to hurt him anymore…”

In the most comforting voice he could muster Severus responded. "You are doing much more good Than you think, he needs you. I can see it, he would not have made it this far without you."

Hermione's face crumpled into tears and small sobs. She turned and pressed her face into Severus's chest. He looked distinctly uncomfortable, but he placed a hand on each of her shoulders, not quite a hug but it was the best he could do.
Draco watched the scene with a deep sense of relatability. They were all kids. They were fighting as hard as they could for their freedom. Freedom from the Dark Lord, from Dumbledore, and from the Ministry curse. They wanted their generation to truly be the decision makers when their time came, but as it was now, they would all be puppets of some higher authority composed of an older generation. But because they were kids, they needed Severus, and Remus, and any other adults willing to be on the new generation's side, because the new generation wasn't ready yet.

Draco wanted the same future as the Method, he wanted to be the one making the choices, not just doing what his father or the Dark Lord told him to. He wanted to grow into a real adult, he wanted to be involved in his own future, and to make choices based off of what he experienced, not what he was told to think! The ferociousness of his own thoughts surprised Draco, but now he knew what he was going to do. He glanced at Harry for a moment, so much power in one person…

"I want to join."

Both Severus and Hermione looked up at Draco from the floor.

"I want to join the Method," he concluded, firmly.

oOoOo

Lucius sat on a comfortable couch in the conservatory, his wife's favorite spot. Narcissa was lying across the couch with her head on his lap. She was sleeping, the dark circles under her eyes spoke volumes about how much she needed this nap. The Dark Lord has not been going easy on her ever since he decided she was going to be marked this winter… and that time was approaching quickly.

Lucius ran his fingers through his wife's cornflower hair. He didn't want her to be marked. He stopped himself from clenching his hand that was still in her hair. The situation was becoming desperate. The Dark Lord had always wanted to mark Narcissa, but didn't want to lose Lucius's loyalty over it. Now, with the Vow and Severus, he had leverage. After he marked her he could kill Draco and Severus, and for all Lucius knew that might be the plan.

He sighed. Severus needed to be informed about these potential plans, maybe he would have an idea. Lucius didn't want his son with Potters group, but it might truly be the best place, they might even be useful. For one thing, they managed to make a floo candle. This meant that Severus was in contact and outside of the Dark Lord's reach.
At this point there were only a couple of months left, and he was becoming more desperate.

Narcissa shifted in her sleep and sighed. Lucius knew what he had to do. He would inform Severus though Potter’s candle. This didn't mean he was going to compromise his beliefs… that would never happen. He was just taking advantage of a resource… that was all.

oOoOo

Severus sat at the kitchen table with Draco and Hermione. Harry had been put to bed in the room he used for the summer. It was Friday night, so his absence from the school it wouldn't be noticed.

Each person at the table had a hot cup of tea, and had cleaned themselves up.

"Are you sure you want to join?" Severus asked carefully.

Draco looked into his tea. He wanted to sneer at the old china, but refrained. He needed to start over, and not default to what his parents had taught him. "I want to be the person in control my life. When I get out of Hogwarts, and begin changing society, I want it to be my choices. Not my father’s, or the Dark Lord's, or Dumbledore's. As I see it now, we are all going to be puppets and nothing's going to be different." He took a deep breath, he hoped his thoughts came across well.

Hermione nodded. "Yes, that is a large part of what we want. We also want the curse removed, and to reform the ministry. but we might have different opinions of what we want the Magical world to be like in the future." Her concern was a valid one, backed up by their aggressive history.

Draco understood what she meant. Once he figured out what he wanted and who he was, he might still hate muggleborns and half-breeds or something, but that wasn't the overall point.

"You might be right, I might want different things, but what I’m sure we both want, is for that fight to be between us, and not between two old men who aren’t relevant telling us what to do. I want this to be our generation’s time, and for us to figure out what the world is going to be like." Draco said everything calmly, but inside he felt nervous. He used to think of his father when he needed to be strong, but he couldn’t anymore. His father never fought back, he let the Dark Lord lead the battle, and when things turned bad, he continued to follow. Draco wanted to head the charge, and change course as he pleased.

Hermione kept still for a moment as if she was thinking. Then she smiled. It was a warm smile that reached her eyes. She held out her hand. "I agree, I want to fight you in the future, not your father, and not his master."
Draco smirked and took her hand shaking it. "I want to fight you and not Dumbledore," he agreed.

Severus watched the interaction with a strange look on his face. Severus thought he would never see the day that Draco shook hands with a muggleborn. Draco was also surprised, he accepted into the Method without agreeing to some warm fuzzy light side methodology. But they seemed willing to take the gray in as well. They weren't like Dumbledore, trying to force light beliefs down everyone's throats. They just wanted all restraints removed, and for things to play out as they should. They wanted true freedom. Draco remembered Severus saying something about scouting the other Slytherins, and he hoped that they did. Because he could think of a few that would want to fight for their right to… Well, fight? There wasn’t really a better way to put it.

"Well…” Severus began, "We will set up a meeting for tomorrow night, and we will also finish the meditation training, if Harry is up to it."

Hermione responded by pulling out her coin and setting a date for the meeting. At least Draco assumed that’s what the coin was for.

Hermione began to fill Draco in on what joining would entail at the meeting tomorrow. As they were talking, the floo flared and Luna stepped out. Draco was slightly surprised to see a member here so late, Severus and Hermione seemed unfazed.

Luna walked to a cabinet with a clear glass front. It’s shelves were full of different tea cups, she selected a light blue one with a swirling handle and small gold butterflies on it. Draco could tell the butterflies were real gold leaf, and thought about how much that cup must cost.

Luna pulled out a small bag of tea and placed the last contents into the cup before pouring the already hot water from the kettle on the stove. She walked over to the table at placed her cup to steep, and sat down.

Severus reached into his robe and pulled out a full bag of the same odd tea and gave it to Luna. She thanked him but had a worried look on her face.

"Do not worry, I have plenty for Sybill," he assured her.

Luna smiled.
Draco had no idea what any of that meant. He knew their Divination Professor’s first name was Sybill, is that who they were talking about?

Everyone sat in a pleasant silence sipping their tea, until Luna spoke up. "I am glad you are joining the Method."

Draco put his cup down. "How…?" When did she find out?

"Doggy looks unhappy, I assume it's because you are joining. Also, you came out of your room." She spoke without even looking at him.

Draco looked at Hermione, who shook her head in a 'Don't ask' manner. Severus had a scowl on his face ever since the word 'Doggy' was mentioned.

There were some dynamics between them all that was lost on Draco....

"I have a joke." Luna stated bluntly. "An owl and a squirrel are in a tree." Everyone's attention was now on her. "The squirrel turns to the owl and says nothing because squirrels can't talk, the owl replies by eating the squirrel, because it is a bird of prey." Luna began to laugh at her own joke. Everyone else was silent.

Then Hermione chuckled, and Snape cracked a half smiled.

Draco was just confused, and he knew it must have shown on his face.

"Oh, come on Draco, it's funny because it's not a joke." Hermione verbally prodded him.

He found it odd that he didn't mind her calling him by his first name. Maybe this could all work out.

"I actually think it's a funny joke," Luna replied to Hermione, completely serious.

"Luna, you do understand that it's an anti-joke, right?" Hermione tried to correct. The two girls
began to bicker about what a joke was.

Draco sat back and sipped his tea. Lots of new dynamics he needed to understand, the slytherin in him whispered.

All bickering stopped when the floo candle in the middle of the table burned to life. From it popped out a thick creamy piece of parchment. It floated to the table, where no one touched it.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"I sometimes wish I could tell you more, but I cannot. I cannot tell you everything I think you should hear, because it is... boring. Or, it is unnecessary. Or it is very necessary but unapproved.

There are many reasons I cannot always tell you what I want to tell you, but the main reason is that you need to find it out for yourself. I could preach, and teach, and shout, and explain, but no lesson is as powerful as the lesson learned on one's own."

-Night Vale

AN- There are many things I have learned on my own. Many that have consequences which I regret. It makes my mother sad when she remember the situation I am in. She tells me that she should have done something, she tells me that it is her fault for not stopping me.

I tell her that she's wrong, that I would have done it anyway. I wouldn't have listened. I tell her that I would have resented her if she succeeded in stopping me.

None of my words ease her guilt, because she is my mother, all of her guilt hurts my heart, because I am her daughter.
She will always see things in retrospect and take the blame, I will always know that I would not have listened because it was a lesson I did not understand until it happened to me.

There is no avoiding this situation. It is something you must live with, it is something to overcome.

I come here to the white place in order to share my experience even though it is futile in many cases.

Maybe I am doing it for myself more than for you.

But if it does help one of you, I am glad.

Recomputed 12/7/2017

BN- It is every parent’s wish that their children will listen to them and learn from their mistakes. But it is every child’s wish to explore the world on their own and find it out for themselves. It is one thing for someone to tell you what happened and a completely different one to actually experience it for yourself. Being a mom has made me really feel grateful for my mother and all the crap I put her through. But by experiencing new things whether they are good or bad is what makes us grow and become better people.

-minijaxter

-beta’d- 11/30/2017-minijaxter

Re-beta’d- minor changes 1/29/2018
Vows revealed

Chapter Notes

AN- Sorry for the long wait. Life (meaning work) became chaos for a while and all I did for weeks was work and sleep… sometimes watch anime. During this chaos a friend from out of state showed up, so I'm tired. Like very tired… BUT I tried to write a little every day and I have no intention of abandoning this story.

At the end of October The Binding of Isaac: Afterbirth is released, I have preordered it at the low evil price of $6.66 on steam. So when this happens I might vanish for a while again, just a warning.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 21

Vows revealed

oOoOo
The heavy, cream colored paper, seemed to loom over the rooms occupants from its spot on the table. Its small stature not making it any less ominous, the dark wood of the table causing it to stand out.

The room was deathly quiet. Hermione remember the first time this happened, with just her and Harry in the drawing room. This time it could be a Method member sending a message from the Come and Go room… but it was unlikely since they could also just Floo into the kitchen.

Draco reached out for the paper, but before he made contact Severus grabbed his hand.

"Don't touch it." His tone indicated that he thought Draco should know better.

Hermione glanced at Draco's shaken expression. He obviously didn't consider it could be a trap, he seemed to be having trouble adjusting, now that he was a target for both sides of the war.

Severus reached for his wand and cast spell after spell on the paper. When he was finished he tentatively reached out to touch it. Everyone relaxed when nothing explosive happened. Snape unfolded the letter and read it to himself. His face became dark as his eyes scanned lower and lower down the page. When he was done reading it, he looked up, his face betrayed nothing, but his tense shoulder told Hermione he was worried.

Very carefully, he held the letter out to Draco, his body taut like he was waiting for something bad to happen. He relaxed when the boy took the paper without incident.

Draco read letter slower, his eyes became wider as he reached the end. "No…" he whispered.

"What is it?" Hermione couldn't stand being left out anymore.

Draco looked at her with haunted eyes. "It's from my father."

"What does it say?" Hermione was surprised, she didn't think Lucius would resort to contacting the Method in order to give information to Severus or Draco.

Draco was visibly shaking by the time he managed to answer. "The Dark Lord is going to mark my
mother this winter while I am home for break. My father thinks it’s payment for his freedom, and also punishment for…” He trailed off as if he almost said something he wasn't supposed to. He looked at Severus for help.

"I was surprised you were able to take the letter from me," Snape responded. Something passed between him and his godson.

Draco nodded, "Aunt Bellatrix told me what she did, before I was marked. She danced around and taunted me for being weak… I’m sorry Severus, I would have let you help if I wasn't…” The edge of hysteria creeped into Draco’s voice. The possession would probably always weigh heavily on his soul.

Severus held up his hand to stall his godson's words. "I know Draco, it wasn't your fault."

Hermione crossed her arms over her chest, she really didn't like being left out. They were talking about something without mentioning it directly, and it bothered her.

There was a short silence in which Draco seemed to collect himself. His eyes were glassy, but he refused to cry. "I don't want my mother marked." He stated in a resigned manner. He was acting like he was still under Voldemort's control, and everything was futile.

It rubbed Hermione the wrong way. She huffed, irritated. "Well of course we won't let that happen." She practically snapped, it was a tone she used on Ron and Harry when they were being prats.

Draco glared at her, "And how do you plan to stop it?" he spat back.

Hermione sighed; she wasn't in the mood for this. "Listen, I have a lot of explaining to do, and I can't tell you everything now, but we have some projects in the works that might help."

Severus nodded. "Ah yes, what the twins are working on," He muttered to himself.

There was a brief flash of irritation in his eyes, Hermione assumed he was still mad about the 'Gryffindor rules' thing. The twins were still slightly green and muttering the occasional 'Slytherin rules.'
Draco was opening his mouth to argue, but Hermione cut him off. "I want to know what else was in that letter that you're not telling me," she insisted.

Draco stared at Hermione stubbornly, so with a sigh, Severus stepped in. "Draco, Hermione is correct, there is something we may be able to do for your mother, but you have to work with the Method," he advised.

The slant of Draco’s shoulders was hard, and aggressive, but his eyes held fragile hope. He was rightfully upset about the situation with his mother, but he was also smart enough to know that being upset and throwing a fit wasn't going to fix it.

Severus laced his fingers and placed his interlocked hands on the table. "There is also something you can do Draco, to help the Method, and your mother."

Draco locked eyes with his godfather.

Severus looked grave, and Hermione felt the air in the room become heavy with tension. "You should tell the Method about everything in the letter."

The cryptic advice caused all the pieces to click into place, in Hermione’s mind. The way Severus was carefully wording his statements, and the surprise he expressed when Draco was able to take the letter. It was obvious that Snape was unable to speak about whatever the situation was, and It was probably due to some type of vow.

Draco looked concerned, leaning away from Severus. "I… I don't know if that's a good idea. What if they don't understand? What if they don't help my mother?" He questioned quietly.

Hermione wanted to jump in and say they would never let someone be marked against their will, but she knew that it was the wrong move.

Severus leaned farther over the table as if he could drive his point home by closing the distance Draco put between them. "They will have to know eventually... if we expect them to acceptus, and work with us. They are our best chance to survive this war. I know it seems ridiculous, they are a group of children, I thought the same thing as you. But you are smart Draco, you felt what Harry can do, you know I am right." Smooth and clear, Severus’ explanation floated through the room.
Draco's eyes were wide from the intensity of Severus's words, and he nodded slowly.

"Good, we will only be explaining our… situation, to Hermione and Harry. They will decide when it is best to tell the others." Snape punctuated his sentence with a tone that clearly expressed his determination.

"I would also like to know about this situation." The dreamy voice of Luna floated from the other end of the table.

Everyone else in the room looked at her. It was clear that all of them had forgotten she was there from the moment the letter popped out of the candle.

Severus let out a suffering sigh, "I suppose, Ms. Lovegood can also be included." He was clearly put out by the fact that he overlooked her. Hermione assumed his pride as a spy was damaged because a fifteen year old girl went under his radar.

oOoOo

The deep sound of hooves hitting dirt hummed in the background. Everything was illuminated by the twilight sun that only barely peaked over the hills. The dogwood tree was bright red with fall leaves, and the little sunlight there was, caused them to glow like low burning embers.

Harry sat at the door of his cupboard alone. His legs dangled off the edge of the wooden floor, he was looking down at a herd of Thestrals that were milling around the base of his tree. He wasn't sure when they arrived, he thought he should know, since this was his own mind. He should probably talk to Severus about it…

He didn't mind them being in his barriers, he actually kind of liked them. The only thing that bothered him was that they didn't look quite right. He was sure he remembered exactly what a Thestral looked like, but the ones below his tree were more snake like. They had spine like scales that ran down their backs and sometimes puffed up when they were irritated.

Small particles began to float in the air, the sun ignited them like fireflies. Slowly the scene began to dissolve. The tree broke down to nothing, along with the thestrals, and ground. All that was left was a door hanging in the blackness, a few stray glowing dots floated around. Harry sighed, it was time to wake up. He stood up in the doorway, turned, and went into his cupboard, closing the door.
behind him.

Harry’s vision swam into focus, and even without his glasses he could see he was in the safe house in the room he used over the summer. He remembered everything that happened. He remembered the explosion of magic… and pain.

Harry shot up in bed. What had happened to everyone in the room when his magic burst!? He jumped to his feet and ran to the door, he stumbled on shaky legs. He tried to open it so fast he fumbled and almost hit himself in the face while swinging it open. He ran down the hall and jumped the entire first set of stairs to the landing, then he sped down the second set and rounded the corner to the kitchen.

He skidded to a halt, and stood on the small landing before the last few steps into the kitchen, panting from his run. Everyone in the kitchen looked up at his entrance, and Severus raised a brow at his ruffled state.

"Are you alright?" Hermione asked.

Harry drew in a couple a deep breaths and blew them out in an attempt to calm his racing heart.

"Everyone's OK." He assured himself while looking around the room.

Hermione stood up and walked to him, "We’re fine, but what about you? Should you be up and moving?" She placed a hand on his arm and gently guided him to a chair.

Harry sat absently while he continued to survey the people in the room.

"If he was able to run the way he did, then he is physically fine. His new anchor worked perfectly. Although his vague description of our state of being, makes me wonder if he is mentally fine." Snape drawled from his side of the table.

Harry looked at him, what did he mean his new anchor? The sly insult slipped past his confused and worried mind.

"I can see from your face that you are confused, which only confirms my long time suspicion about your mental stability. I assume you don't remember anything after you began convulsing." Severus
said conversationally, as if he wasn't slipping jabs at Harry into his statements.

Harry felt the cold weight of guilt transform into a clear ringing note of utter relief that reverberated through him. They were all really OK. His shoulders sagged and fatigue returned following the receding flood of adrenalin. Without the intense worry clouding his mind he registered the veiled insults that were being casually tossed at him. He looked up at Snape with a glare that held no bite. "Hey!" he shot back.

Severus leaned forward slightly to look Harry over, and ignored his student's offended retort. "You should probably rest some more, you are still very pale," he commented in a tone that held none of the concern that shined in his eyes.

Harry shook his head like a stubborn child. "No, Tell me what happened, what did you mean when you said I have a new anchor?"

Severus's face contorted into an expression that told Harry he truly didn't want to rehash the entire tale, then it settled into a look that clearly said 'only because it's you, I will do this'. He crossed his arms over his chest and began to explain. "The moment the glass broke your skin and let blood flow, your magic took over. I assume you were thinking about fixing the mirror." He waited for Harry to nod before continuing. "Once the blood touched the magic of the mirror it was all out of your control, your core magic was being sucked out and leaving behind massive amounts of surface magic."

Harry perked up, "I do remember the magic building up and exploding, that's why I thought you all must have been hurt."

Severus nodded, his face was grave. "It is very fortunate that the nature of your magic does not allow for you to hurt people unless you are consciously attempting to do so. Because your magic is about healing other peoples magic, it did not harm us, but if it had been able to hurt us, none would have survived."

Hermione put her hand on Harry's shoulder, "The amount of raw power you exuded was incredible, Harry."

Draco didn't verbally join in, but he nodded his agreement when Harry glanced at him.

The idea that he could have killed his friends set every inch of Harry's body on edge with fear. He
felt like a dangerous monster, like he could lose control and wipe out everyone he loved. His stomach churned and he felt the little bit of color he had drain from his face.

Severus must have noticed Harry's reaction. He reached across the table and placed his hand on Harry's arm. "Harry, it was your Magic's nature that saved us from harm, but it was also because you care. Do not fret over this, everyone is fine." His voice was calming, similar to when he had talked Draco down from panic when he first arrived in the safe house.

Harry felt his twisting insides settle, his teacher's voice and words of wisdom never failed to soothe him. He nodded and decided to let it go as Severus advised, his magic would never hurt his friends he cemented this idea to himself. He glanced around the table and his eyes landed on Draco. The longer Harry looked at the other boy the more uncomfortable he became, but there was no sign of reluctance or malice so Harry tentatively smiled and looked back to Severus.

"Good, now that everything with that incident is settled, there are some important matter that must be discussed." Snape put in a more serious voice, and gestured at Draco. But his eyes became dark and Harry thought he saw some fear lurking in the back of his black eyes through their connection.

Severus must have felt Harry touching his mind, because he turned and fully locked eyes with his student. Fear, regret and sadness burst forth into Harry's mind, like a tidal wave, the emotions began to drown him. All at once, the feelings receded, and Severus didn't even blink, his face impassive, and his eyes hard.

Sadness welled up in Harry again, this time it was his own sadness. What has to happen to a person for them to be able to mask such intense feelings? Severus was truly a master spy, but Harry was honored that he held this spy’s trust. He owed him so much.

Harry reined in his emotions, he took a calming breath and looked back at Severus. Slowly he nodded his head to let the man know he was ready for whatever was going to be said. Everyone else in the room had waited patiently for the short and silent communications between the two men to end. Draco had an unsettled expression, he possibly didn't understand what just happened, or maybe he did and was upset. Harry assumed the news he had to tell was more important than solving the mystery of Harry and Severus.

Severus looked away from Harry and nodded to Draco. On that signal, Draco took a deep breath and began to speak slowly. "Over the summer my mother took drastic measures to ensure I was not killed this year. She made an Unbreakable Vow." He paused for a moment for everyone in the room to absorb the news.
Harry felt his mind begin to scrabble for a memory, as he put more pieces into place, things began to make more sense, but it was not a pleasant truth. Back when he was in Snape's quarters after he had a run in with Draco, when he had confronted Severus about what Draco was up to, but the man couldn't say anything... He felt his fingertips become numb and the shock of his conclusion washed over him.

"No..." Harry whispered, he looked to Severus, hoping the man would deny his involvement, but he remained stoic and silent.

Hermione realized what Harry's reaction meant and placed her hands over her mouth to hold in her dismayed gasp.

Draco simply nodded, "I see you figured it out. It was Severus that my mother made the Vow with, and I am going to tell you what the vow was about."

Hermione lowered her hands, "But won't that kill him?" she asked in a whisper.

Luna chimed in for the first time, her Ravenclaw traits poking their head out. "Draco is only the subject of the vow and not a participant, so he can tell anyone he wants. The only other person involved who is able to do that, is the one who cast the vow." She looked at Draco with her large pale eyes, "I assume the caster is the one who told you the content of the vow," she concluded.

It was not a question but Draco nodded for the others benefit. "The caster was my Aunt Bellatrix. The next time she saw me, she taunted me about needing help and told me all about it." A note of shame colored his voice.

Harry grew impatient, "So what was the content of the Vow?" he asked as calmly as he was able.

Draco recognized the edge of panic in Harry's voice and began to explain. "Because of my father's failure in the ministry at the end of last year, the Dark Lord began to punish my mother in his place. He punished her by... torturing me." His composure wavered for a moment before he clamped down and pushed forward. "When school was going to start, the Dark Lord found a way to extend the torture. He gave me the Mark and then ordered me to do something almost impossible, his magic that was possessing me through the mark compelled me to finish the task. So my mother pleaded for Severus to make a vow to ensure he would help me complete my mission."

Harry felt his insides loosen marginally, all he had to do was help Draco complete some task by the
end of the year? Not too bad, it wasn't even winter break yet. It all just depended on what the task was.

There was a long pause, Draco looked like he was trying to pluck up the nerve to say what his task was. Every second that passed caused Harry's heart to drop lower and lower.

Draco opened his mouth, his face was pale, and the word seemed stuck in his throat. "I… he…” Draco swallowed and tried again. "I was given the task of letting Death Eaters into Hogwarts… and…” Another pause, Harry was starting to lose his cool, but he was afraid of scaring Draco into silence, so he contained his desire to scream in the boy's face until he spit it out.

Draco squeezed his eyes shut, his breathing sped up slightly and then he blurted out the rest. "And I was order to kill Dumbledore!” He yelled quickly.

Everything stopped. No one move, whispered, or even seemed to breathe. Harry's mind understood what he just heard but he couldn't fully accept it. He looked at Severus, the man was sitting calmly, but his eyes were tightly closed, as if Draco's words had pained him. Draco still had his eyes squeezed shut as if he was waiting to be hit.

Hermione reached out and grabbed Harry's arm in a grip so tight it was probably going to bruise. Harry understood how she must be feeling. They all knew that Dumbledore was going about the war wrong, but it was never the plan to kill him, it wasn't even a thought. Somewhere in the back of his mind, Harry still felt a thread of affection for the old man, he was the only person to ever act as a grandfather to Harry, even if it was with ulterior motives.

Then there was Severus. His feelings about Dumbledore were probably similar to Harry's. What would it do to the man when he killed his old mentor? Not IF he killed him, but definitely WHEN. There was no choice to be made, if Severus didn't kill the headmaster, he was certain to die as a result of the vow. That was something that Harry could not let happen. Severus had been forced into a position where he had to make the vow…

Harry felt certainty settle over his mind, it felt like cool silk on hot skin, soothing and crisp. He expected to feel more disturbed by the realization that he was trading one life for another, but he didn't. He was sickened by the idea of killing a fellow human, but it was necessary… and Harry didn't want Severus to die… maybe it was partly selfish...

"He isn't going to live long anyway, is he?” The airy tone of Luna’s voice broke the silence with its oddly sharp edge of dismissal. She spoke the words as if she was talking about the end of a class nearing, not person's life ending, but she had a point. Harry had told everyone in the Method about
the Headmaster’s cursed arm after he found out it was caused by destroying a Horcrux. He looked up at Severus, dark eyes awaited him, and they were full of worry. The slightest brush of minds told Harry that Severus expected rejection and disgust.

"Well, we should make sure you get the perfect moment to kill the Headmaster before he dies from the curse." Harry held his teacher’s eyes as he spoke, letting him know he meant what he said.

Severus's entire face betrayed his shock for only a moment before he regained control.

"Yes, we should probably get as much strategic advantage out of the situation as we can." Hermione's voice wasn't as steady as Harry's, but she made her position on the subject clear. She also chose Severus.

Severus managed to collect himself from his shock enough to contribute. "I can't say much, but I can tell you that the Headmaster predicted that a… situation such as this might arise. That Narcissa might try this method to save her son. After I reported Draco's orders to him, he told me to do what I must. I am sure he fully expects what is to come."

Harry nodded, "That makes things easier. Should we tell the rest of the Method?"

"Yes, but not quite yet. First let's get Draco's membership locked down, then we can talk about how to help his mother and the vow." Hermione's eyes were far away as she calculated the new information into her plans. Her face became hesitant for a moment, then it settled into a determined expression.

Draco's very tense stance slowly relaxed. His eyes had been shut the entire time, now he slowly opened them. "So… I’m going to be safe?" he asked in a shaky voice. He probably expected the Method to let him face failure and the Dark Lord.

Harry shrugged, "Honestly, saving you is just a side effect of saving Severus." He waited for some sort of angry outburst, and was surprised when Draco scoffed and shook his head. It seemed that once he realized no one was going to attack him, he calmed down and accepted the situation. Harry shouldn't have been surprised, if his summer was as bad as he heard then this was probably a relief, the Method was the lesser of two evils in the blond’s life. Better to live with the enemy that doesn't torture and possess you.

Harry felt the tightness that always seemed to be around his heart loosen a little, now that he knew
what the vow was about. It seemed so long ago when he first found out there was a vow and yelled at Snape in his quarters... Harry felt his mind trying to pull some information together, something important about Severus and vows... he looked down at the table and narrowed his eyes as his brain worked. Then it hit him like a hippogriff going full speed. His head snapped up and he looked right at Snape. "Oh dear Merlin." Harry breathed.

Severus raised an eyebrow, he looked into his students eyes for an explanation but Harry shook his head. This was too complicated to express without words. "Tacet." Harry said firmly.

Severus hesitated for a moment, he seemed on edge due to Harry's serious attitude. He glanced around at everyone else in the room, they were all looking at him or Harry with confusion in their eyes. "Arx." He responded.

The swell of magic filled the room like a gentle breeze. It washed over Harry and Severus, then it created a film over everyone else in the room, keeping them separate. The wash of energy felt comforting and familiar to Harry, it had been so long since he and his teacher had used this oath, that he forgot how calming the solitude could be. Unfortunately the slight comfort of the magic surrounding him did not soothe the worry clouding his mind.

Harry looked at Severus with a serious expression. "How dangerous was the combination of vows, Severus?" he asked, knowingly.

Snape's face slowly morphed into one of surprise, he obviously never expected anyone to figure it out, or if they did put it together, he never thought they would ask about it. After a moment, he reconfigured his expression into one of calm understanding. "It is alright Harry, I have everything under control." His tone conveyed a sense of false calm used by a parent to soothe a child.

Harry felt his irritation rise at being placated like a child who doesn't need to know the harsh reality. "That's not what I asked..." he snapped back harsher than intended.

Severus dropped his calm face and looked rather guilty, he probably never intended to inform anyone of his twisted vows and oaths. Harry assumed the man thought he was sparing people the bother of worrying about him. Snape never seemed to comprehend that people will worry about him regardless, because they care, or maybe it was that he never accepted that people truly do care.

Harry felt his anger drain as he contemplated why his teacher behaved this way, it was a sad thing to realize. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to snap... I just..." Harry wasn't sure how to express his feeling for Severus without it becoming an awkward jumble of words. He hoped the silence he left hanging out conveyed how much he looked up to the man, and was grateful for his help. He
looked into Snape's eyes and left himself open, clear enough to read. He was only angry because he was scared of losing his friend.

Severus's eyes softened and he let out his breath in a huff. "I understand that you are worried for me Harry, but there is nothing I can do about my situation, as it is."

Harry leaned back and crossed his arms, waiting for the explanation to continue.

Snape knew he couldn't escape, so he complied. "After the vow with Narcissa, I knew I had to play my cards right. When you entered the equation things became more complicated, I had to help you and keep your secrets, without anything I did reacting badly with my Unbreakable Vow. Fortunately the vow didn't react badly to the aid I was providing you, it could have interpreted helping you, as hindering Draco, and I would have died. Since I was not killed, I assumed that joining the Method was a safe bet as well, but now it doesn't matter since Draco is here and accepting my aid." He crossed his arms as he finished, and adopted a posture similar to Harry's.

"Why did you take the Oath with me, if it was so dangerous?" Harry asked.

"Two reasons." Snape held up two fingers, "First, the Oath kept you from exposing any secrets you might learn during our lessons that would have gotten myself or you, killed." He lowered one finger, leaving his index finger raised, "and second, locking you into an Oath guaranteed my life debt to you would be repaid with our lessons, leaving the debt unpaid with no Oath, was the most dangerous option. You could have called upon me to do anything without even realizing it, and I could have died." He pinned Harry with a hard gaze.

Harry's eyes widened, he hadn't consider how much power he held over Severus. Not just a life debt, but his actual life was in Harry's hands. "So if I had learned that you planned on killing Dumbledore, I could have ended the debt by ordering you not to kill him, or something similar?"

Severus nodded, "Yes, and I would have been compelled to comply, ending my life. You of course, would have had no idea the order would kill me, I am not even sure when I would have died. It might have been the moment you ordered me, or when I failed to kill Albus with in the time limit of this school year." He shrugged in a very not Snape manner, acting more casual than usual.

"But everything is OK now, right? I’m accepting our lessons as payment for your debt, Draco is joining the Method, and the Method is aligned with your goals." Harry's voice was edged with worry, but became more relieved as Severus nodded along with his points.
"Yes, everything should be fine, as long as all goes according to plan." He assured.

Harry let the words sink in and wash away his worry. He could only trust that Severus was being fully honest and not veiling a larger problem.

"Are we finished now?" Severus asked with a large dose of snark injected into his words. He obviously didn't like being interrogated as if he were a naughty child, no matter how well meaning it was.

Harry smirked, only now becoming aware of the odd reversal of roles. "Yeah, we're finished."

They both said the key words to release the privacy Oath, after the swirling of air and magic Harry became very aware that everyone in the room was watching him intently. He wasn't sure what he should say, everyone was probably expecting an explanation for the sudden activation of the Oath (Draco probably wanted an explanation for the Oath overall). He glanced at Hermione, and was relieved to see she didn't seem to expect anything, she accepted that there were some things that were private, and that Harry would tell her if it was very important.

Harry smiled lightly at her and decided to not explain himself to anyone, even if Draco looked at him like he wanted to stab Harry in the face… repeatedly.

The sound of stumbling footsteps caught everyone’s attention. Harry turned and looked behind himself at the staircase just as Remus came into view on the last landing. His face was groggy, and he was rubbing his eyes with his right hand as he wandered down the last flight. Remus pulled his hand away from his eyes and blinked in surprise, he wasn't expecting the kitchen to be full of people.

"Sorry Remus, did we wake you?" Hermione asked with polite concern.

Remus tipped his head to the side in a very wolfish manner. "It's six in the morning, and I was just going to put tea on," He answered, bewildered by the situation.

Severus cast a tempus and sighed as the time reflected what his colleague had said.

"We should all go to bed, it's Saturday so no one will notice if we all sleep here for a few hours." Hermione suggested.
Everyone else mumbled their agreement, and a chorus of scraping chairs announced their departure.

Remus watched with a bemused expression, he gave Draco an odd look as he passed by. When Harry walked by he reached out and clasped his shoulder gently, "I take it something happened with the ritual?"

Harry glanced up at his honorary uncle with a weary smirk, "It's a long story, I will explain after I sleep."

Remus nodded and let Harry go.

Everyone shuffled up the stairs like a pack of zombies. Sleep was needed to deal with the events of the next day, there was a lot to do for Draco's acceptance into the Method, and even more to do concerning Dumbledore's limited time.

Harry sighed when he was finally in front of his bed again. He stretched his arms out to either side and let himself fall face first into the soft blankets.

Sleep followed soon after.

In the morning, everything will make more sense.

\text{oOoOo}\text{Chapter End Notes}

"Most people think pitbulls are dangerous dogs, but – biologically speaking – most pit bulls are just three Shih Tzu's wearing a trench coat."
A/N- I feel like the quote says everything on this one. Every time I turn around I discover that something I thought was a pitbull is actually three Shih Tzu's wearing a trench coat. I would really like some time in a place where pitbulls are pitbulls and Shih Tzu's don't wear coats in threes.

I swear, one more surprise Shih Tzu and I'm done… with something… not really sure what I'm done with. BUT be assured I am finished with It, in its entirety.

At least this vast expanse of white won't turn out to be something under a coat… I hope.

Beta’d-minijaxter 12/18/2017

Repramanded 12/18/2017

Rutebega’d ;) - minijaxter 2/18/2018
AN- Oh man… OK so stuff happens in this chapter I have been planning for a while! AND in the coming two chapters we get to unlock some core abilities! ARE YOU NOT SO EXCITED?!

Thanks To David305 for helping me with my corrections of this chapter.

The Links to the High Res Version of the cover pictures is in my Profile.

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 22

Into the Light, Into the Dark
Harry listened to the soothing sound of hooves on dirt. It was a deep melody that was never the same from one moment to the next. His eyes were closed even in his mindscape, the cool wind washed over him through the branches of his dogwood tree; it brought with it the light scent of the blooming flowers. Harry enjoyed the fact that having his mindscape caused him to come here when he dreamed, rather than experiencing a nightmare that was sure to happen, this was much more pleasant.

Harry felt his ear twitch as he perceived a slight change to the pounding hooves, the sound was becoming higher and closer. Even with his eyes closed he could tell his tree was slowly beginning to fade. Through his eyelids he could see the glow of sparkling dust and pollen dissolving. Harry pulled his legs into his cupboard as the door began to slowly close with a creaking mewl. As the sound of the hooves became dampened, the high clicking became louder, it almost sounded like it was right above his head.

Harry pulled his blankets closer and imagined he was still sleeping, maybe if he pretended hard enough, he could slip back into his tree… the clicking persisted and Harry felt his head beginning to ache from the sound, a significant amount of irritation began to bubble up in his chest and he was prepared to shout at whoever was making that sound in the dorm.

A high and crystal clear note passed through the air and invaded Harry's mind, his irritation popped like a soap bubble and his eyes flew open as he recognized the sensation of a phoenix song. Above him on the headboard of his bed was Fawkes, shuffling side to side, and looking down at him. On the bird's leg was a small rolled scrap of parchment.

"Shit…" Harry muttered, and he sat up.

He was still in the safe house, he noted. As the fog of sleep cleared from his mind he remembered why he was there. Ignoring the giant bird that loomed over him, Harry reached for his wand and glasses. He flicked his wand for the time. It glowed back at him, a bright 11:22 am; he had slept for almost 5 ½ hours.

He flicked the time away like smoke and unfolded his glasses so he could place them on his face. As the frames settled on his nose, and he turned to look at Fawkes. His head spun and his eyes burned; the bird was a fuzzy blob of orange and red.

Harry pulled his glasses from his face and everything came back into focus… slowly he slipped the ugly wire frames onto his face again and the room blurred again. He lifted them and the room
cleared, he repeated this process a few times before he was convinced that this was real. Harry sighed and folded his glasses, and slipped them into the pocket of his robe that hung on the bedpost. He probably should have been more shocked, but at this point, suddenly not needing his glasses wasn't a huge surprise. It was nothing compared to uncovering the oppression of an entire magical system by the government, or something like that. So he shrugged it off and made a mental note to talk to Severus, Hermione or Remus about it. If anyone asked he would tell them he was getting a headache because he needed his prescription updated or something similar.

Fawkes shuffled faster back and forth on the wooden headboard. He turned back to the bird and reached out to take the note. Relieved of his burden the Phoenix hopped down on the bed and began walking around curiously. Harry stroked the bird a few times before opening the small scroll.

He was not surprised to find the Headmaster's handwriting scrawled across the parchment. The green ink gleamed up at him as if still wet, the sight caused Harry to become irritated beyond the rational. The image of the same ink reading "Mr. H. Potter, The Cupboard Under the Stairs" flashed through his mind.

A soft warbling note floated up, and doused his anger like a fire hose. He slumped his shoulders in defeat; he shouldn't let himself become so angry when reminded of the past. He was mostly just irritated that Dumbledore found a way to invade the one place Harry thought he was safe from him. Luckily the wards did not allow Fawkes to carry un-welcomed people into the house.

"Thanks, Fawkes." Harry assumed the words were accepted when the phoenix responded with a small chirp and continued to trot around the bed. Harry turned back to the short note and read.

*Meet me in my office as soon as you get this note. I apologize for sending my message with Fawkes, but I had a very difficult time locating you this fine Saturday.*

There was no signature. Harry sighed as he stood. He grabbed the robes on his bedpost and threw them on over his rumpled clothes. He turned to leave, but noticed Fawkes was still there. The bird was sitting in the middle of his bed looking up at Harry.

"The old man apologized for the only part of his message that I enjoyed." Harry gestured to the phoenix as he spoke. Fawkes trilled and fluffed his feathers proudly. Harry chuckled at the bird's antics and waited a moment for him to disappear in a flash of fire, but Fawkes continued to sit on the bed and watch him.

"I got the message and will see the Headmaster, you can go now if you want." Harry explained,
and tried not to sound like he was ordering the bird around. Fawkes tipped his head to the side, Harry shrugged and turned to pick up Sirius's old dirty tea cup.

In a rush of feathers the bird fluttered across the room, and the surprisingly light, but always warm, weight of the phoenix settled on his shoulder. Harry was startled for a moment, he assumed the bird was leaving, maybe Dumbledore told Fawkes to stay with him until he arrived at the headmaster's office?

Harry left the room and trotted down the stairs into the kitchen, as he rounded the corner he heard sudden scuffing of a chair as if someone moved abruptly. Severus and Remus were across from each other at the table sharing a pot of tea. They seemed to be behaving more civilly than usual, if Harry wasn't imagining it, they might even be acting cordial. He got the impression they had abruptly cut off a conversation when he entered.

Harry grabbed a tea cup from Luna's collection, he was the only person she allowed to use them. He found it funny because he owned them all since they appeared with the house's transformation, but she still managed to claim them as her own.

He placed the silver and white cup on the kitchen table and began fixing himself a cuppa from the existing pot. When he finished he looked at the other occupants of the room, and both were staring at him.

"What?" Harry couldn't help but sound a little defensive with the way they were gawking at him.

Remus silently raised his hand and pointed over Harry's shoulder. Harry looked and got a face full of feathers, he sputtered. He honestly forgot the bird was there in the short time it took to make his tea, he was so light and comfortable, and it felt natural to have him there.

"Oh!" Harry exclaimed, and rubbed his hand through his hair. "Yeah, him…" Lacking the words to explain the bird's presence Harry casually flicked the Headmaster's note onto the table. "He won't leave until I arrive at Dumbledore's office." He amended to his action.

Snape snatched the paper off the table before Remus could react, he glowered at it and then looked up at Harry. "Be back before we induct Draco, you both also have lessons with me." He said sharply.

Harry nodded, he didn't risk speaking when Severus was in such a foul mood.
Remus placed the scrap of paper back on the table and sighed, "Just be careful pup, we don't know him like we thought we did."

Harry nodded again, this time because he felt himself flush at being referred to as pup. Remus started doing that in the last couple of days. Hermione said it was because he viewed Harry as pack now. He kind of liked it, but found it extremely embarrassing at the same time. Harry sat at the table and sipped his tea. He pulled out the dirty cup from his pocket and placed it on the table. "So how am I supposed to carry this around all the time?"

Severus sneered at the moldy cup, "As long as you know what it is and can associate it with the emotional connection, you may transform it into anything you like."

Harry became thoughtful for a moment, then he pulled out his wand and tapped the cup. Slowly the china became metallic and it shrank to the size of a sickle. He smiled at his work and picked the new charm up. Harry reached around his neck and unclasped the simple chain that hung there. It held the small quartz stopper that he couldn't separate himself from. Ever since Hermione theorized that it pulled on curse magic Harry kept it around his neck and tried to feel if it was pulling in any particular direction. So far he didn't have much luck, Hermione thought there were just too many cursed people around the school.

Harry strung the tea cup onto the chain through its small handle and put the necklace back on.

"There, all better," he proclaimed while sliding the necklace under his robes.

Remus smiled at him and Harry remembered he was supposed to explain what happened last night. "Oh, I was supposed to explain," he began, but Remus held up a hand to stall him.

"Severus was kind enough to fill me in," he supplied.

Harry nodded to Snape, "Thanks."

Remus looked intently at Harry's face, "Where are your glasses?"

Harry pulled them out of his pocket and held them up, "I don't know when it started, I think sometime last night, but I don't need them anymore."
Severus reached out and plucked them from his hands. "I had an inkling this might happen, I was not sure if you forgot them last night, or if you didn't realize that you didn't have them on. Some witches and wizards have common muggle problems, like poor eyesight, due to magical complications, but it is very dangerous to try and fix magic in a place like someone's eyes, so they settle for glasses. It is completely genetic, your father probably had the same problem. I deduce, that when you had a surge of your core, it might have fixed all the twisted magic in your body as you became over saturated. Especially since the focus of your magical burst was trying to fix something." He drawled out the explanation like a dry lesson plan. Then Severus tapped the frames and they transformed into more stylish square glasses, although they were still wire frames. He held the spectacles out to Harry. "They are now plain glass, and even though I cannot make them too different without the transformation failing, I thought square ones would suit you better, tell people Hermione changed them for you."

Harry put them on and glanced at himself in the glass of the china cabinet, he did look better in square frames. "Thanks!" he almost chirped. He looked to Remus for his opinion only to find him sending a cool glare at Severus.

There was a pause of the conversation in which all the members of the table sipped their tea. For Harry the silence was comfortable, but he got the feeling that the other two were on edge with each other, but it didn't feel particularly hostile... just a bit cold. Harry was having trouble reading the dynamic, so he began to talk about something off the top of his head. "I think I might invite my cousin to live here over Christmas and summer," he blurted out.

Severus looked like he wanted to argue but kept his comments to himself. Harry suspected that the man didn't like Dudley, even if Harry had mended fences, he had a ridiculous protective streak in him. Remus on the other hand looked at Harry with bright eyes. "Oh, pup, I forgot you were going to be meeting with your cousin yesterday in all this chaos, it went well I take it?" he sounded genuinely curious and happy, Harry felt warmth spread though himself.

He recognized the feeling from when he first learned Sirius was his godfather. It was a feeling of having a parental figure take interest in his life and care. He also felt like that because of Severus from time to time, but with him there was a different type of respect and friendship that comes with the mental arts.

Harry smiled, "It went better than I thought it would. But I learned that he only has his aunt to take him for summer and Christmas, and she’s vile. Marge is Vernon's sister and she’s upset that Dudley got everything of his parents’ in the Will... she’ll be horrible to him. So I want him to come here, I figure we could bribe Marge or something."

Snape made a sound that was between a snort and a grunt. Harry wasn't sure if it was because he
thought Dudley deserved to go to Marge's, or because Harry wanted to bribe someone. But Remus' smile, it was a gentle smile that was filled with pride. "I think it's good you're helping your cousin, I am glad you two can be there for each other."

Harry couldn't stop the blush that rose on his cheeks from the compliment, and the pride in Remus's voice. He cleared his throat that was suddenly tight. "I just need to write to him soon, so we can make plans." The response was muttered.

Remus clasped Harry on the shoulder, "I think it will all work out; no one in the Method would turn someone away who you trusted." The comforting hand remained in place. Harry could feel Snape's glaring eyes burning into the hand on his shoulder and wondered if Remus was ignoring it, or oblivious to the angry potions master.

Severus leaned forward and his black eyes narrowed, "Speaking of accepting outsiders, we shall have a long discussion after Draco's induction about my Slytherins."

Harry looked at Snape, "Of course, I want to help them." He tried to keep the pang of jealousy out of his voice as he spoke. He really did want to help them, but something about Snape's protectiveness of "his Slytherins" rubbed Harry the wrong way. He understood a bit better why Draco kept glaring at him… maybe it was a bit like sibling rivalry.

Unfortunately, when Harry looked at Severus while responding, he made eye contact. So even though his voice was steady, the flash of jealousy was easily detected by Snape through their connection. The older man did not comment, but Harry saw the smug satisfaction in the man's expression. Then Severus shot a superior glare at Remus.

Harry groaned to himself under his breath… Dear Merlin, were they competing for his affections? PLATONIC affections, he told himself, because it definitely was. Maybe it was better to say they were competing for a parental role in his life. Harry honestly didn't mind, as long as they didn't let it get out of hand, it was strangely flattering…

"Well, I've got to be going, don't want to keep the old man waiting too long." Harry threw back the remains of his cold tea and stood to walk to the Floo.

Before he was even halfway to the fireplace he was suddenly enveloped in lukewarm flames, and the smell of a grassy park. He felt someone softly shove him from behind, it only lasted a moment, but Harry was certain the hands were small and feminine. He stumbled one step, and when his foot met the ground, the flames began to dissipate. In the last licks of the fire he heard a light laugh, like copper, then it was gone… and he was in the entrance hall of Hogwarts.
For the first time ever Harry was transported by a phoenix. It was hands down the most comfortable form of instantaneous travel he had ever experienced, if not the creepiest. Harry reached up and stroked Fawke's chest, "Thanks," he muttered, and a single happy note was his reply.

Harry began the trek towards the Gargoyle that served as the entrance to the Headmaster's office. He was glad he had this chance to collect his thoughts and wasn't popped directly into Dumbledore's office. He glanced at the bird on his shoulder and wondered if Fawkes did that intentionally.

Harry mentally prepared himself for facing his greatest challenge in this world. Many would think that he would be talking to Voldemort, but honestly, that megalomaniac was rather straightforward when you thought about him carefully. Dumbledore on the other hand was much more of a winding path. Harry refused to lose, he was a headstrong person, made of stubbornness born of oppression, and the repeated clashing of his will against the people who tried to squash him.

He needed to steel his soul and lock down his thoughts before he faced his most difficult challenge. Luckily, it was not his most dangerous one. A solitary note drifted form the phoenix on his shoulder, it fortified him. By the time he reached the statue guarding Dumbledore's office he was ready.

The sound of tea being poured into fine china is very distinct to the refined ear, Severus was told this many times by Lucius Malfoy. No matter how many times he was told, he never understood the difference. As he poured his own special brew into the white cups provided by the school, he pondered over the sound, it wasn't any different to him than the sound of the fine china at Grimmauld place.

"Oh, I do love your tea Severus." The wispy voice of Sybill Trelawney floated from across the table.

Severus finished pouring both of their tea, and slowly placed the pot back on the table.
Sybill continued to prattle, "I have not been feeling quite myself; the inner eye has been eluding me as of late. Your tea always does make me feel more connected with the spirits, if you will."

Severus nodded blankly, watching his colleague raise her cup to her lips. Just before she sipped the tea she was overcome with another verbal bout. "You know, I always said tea is good for the soul."

Severus nodded absently, he took a sip of own tea to encourage the babbling woman across from him. She lifted her cup again and mimicked his actions up until the actual drinking the tea part. Then she pulled the cup away to amend the end of her last thought. "I believe tea and the soul are connected, which is why tea leaves can tell our futures."

Severus sighed and placed his own cup down. "Sybill, drink your tea before it becomes cold," he chided.

Sybill looked at the tea in her hands with a slight surprise, as if she had forgotten it was there. "Oh right, of course." She muttered before taking a sip.

Minutes passed, while Severus put up with the seer's company like he always did. She drank her tea frustratingly slowly, and Severus had given up on getting any information from her as she threw back the last of her drink.

"Tea was lovely as always Severus." Sybill announced in a more solid voice. The difference in her before and after the tea always amazed Severus. She cleaned up her place setting with focus and accuracy, more than she was able to apply simply walking down a hallway before the tea.

Severus went about cleaning his own place, as Sybill stood and prepared to leave. He didn't look up when she bid him goodbye, but he made a sound of acknowledgment. Her footsteps began to fade as she walked across the professor's lounge.

Severus finished cleaning up his cup along with the pot, he placed his tea back in it’s pouch with a preservation charm and turned in his seat to stand. His vision was filled with flowing, brightly colored robes, and his senses were overwhelmed by the smell of incense that wafted off of the fabric. Severus flinched back from the sudden invasion of personal space, it was very hard to sneak up him, and this was the first time in recent memory he had been startled by someone.

Severus looked up at Sybill, but she did not look down at him. She was simply staring off into the distance with a blank expression while being far too close. Snape pushed his chair back with his feet to put some distance between them.
"Sybill? Was there something you needed?" he asked, he kept his voice calm despite the intense feeling of foreboding.

Sybill remained quiet and still, her lack of action flooded the room with tension. Severus couldn't remember the last time he had felt so unnerved. Death eater meetings didn't affect him as much as this silent woman did in this very moment.

Then there were hands on either side of Severus's face, caging him. She moved so fast that he didn't even register it happening, her hands were cold and firm. She was holding him still with a strength that was not physical, but maybe metaphysical. Her cold fingers curled like claws and gripped him tightly as if she were asking "why am I here?" and he felt a sense of deep pain and a struggle to be free. Sybill leaned down and placed her face directly across from Severus's, his breath caught at the sight of her blank eyes, seeing nothing, and through him. Then she was looking into his eyes. On instinct he brushed her mind, and he was met with fire, burning, twisting agony, the person she was meant to be was writhing, and unrecognizable. She had been trapped and tortured for so long, she was not human. This is what happens to those of the spiritual arts who retain their curse, yet are not given the relief of death.

Severus felt sick, and filled with indignation and righteous anger, this is what his mother had suffered before she died, and this is what Ms. Lovegood's mother suffered. It would also be Luna's fate… But Harry would see to it that it did not come to that.

Sybill began to speak, her voice was the deep droning tone of prophecy. Her words flowed around Severus and their meaning pierced him through his eyes and into his mind.

"Beware of the man who feels nothing.

He is the dark seed planted by his master,

He will grow to extinguish the light.

Those of magic will know the truth,

Those with magic will be lost in his darkness.

The 1st of 13 lights will be extinguished,

This will be the beginning and the end.

Beware of the man who makes you feel."

Severus shivered deep in his bones, never had he felt so disturbed while listening to Sybill. Not
even her first prophecy made him feel this way. Suddenly she began to speak again in the same deep voice. He knew instinctively that her next words were not a prophecy, but they were perhaps the words of the real Sybill Trelawney, the first words she ever spoke of her own volition.

"Thank you, Severus, for trying."

For a moment her eyes were filled with something besides blankness or agony, then she blinked and they were far away and hazy. "What in blazes am I doing back in the lounge?" Sybill asked, she straightened up and looked around in confusion.

Severus collected himself the best he could, "You came to ask if I had extra tea for later," he supplied while holding out the charmed pouch of tea.

Sybill took it with false confidence, "Oh, right! Of course I did." She walked to the door, stopped and turned to look back at Severus. Her face was similar to an elderly person who knew their mind was slipping but was putting on a front, it was forlorn and filled with denial. "Thank you again Severus... for the tea, I mean."

Then she was gone.

Severus was a practical man, he knew that living with the curse when you possessed spiritual powers of the mind was not pleasant. He knew it was probably downright awful... but that. That was hell on earth he saw in Sybil's mind. He felt the ripping pain of fresh guilt claw at his chest, because in part, her agony was his fault. When Sybill went to the Hogs Head for the interview with Dumbledore, she was already at the end of her sanity; she was in her mid-twenties, and the effects of the curse were profound by then. She had maybe five years left before she was driven to take her own life, like all others in her situation.

She had wandered into the bar already drunk and raving, Dumbledore kindly tolerated her while she made a mockery of the interview. Then, she gave a real prophecy and the path of her life was changed. The Headmaster hired her to keep her close, and shortly after he hired Severus when he begged for forgiveness.

When Severus met Sybill and looked into her blue green eyes, he knew instantly she suffered the same fate as his own mother. She was probably from a branch family of his, her gift was not as potent, and allowed her to linger in insanity longer than most like her. Dumbledore had ordered him to try and keep her stable, and he had complied. He invented the tea she drank today that allowed them to stay sane, but Sybill was already so very damaged that she would never completely be as she should have been. He simply prolonged her agony, trapped in a decaying
mind, all on the orders of Dumbledore.

The Headmaster had to have some idea of what was going on inside Sybill, and still requested him to prolong her life in case she was useful. People like her, Luna, and his own mother tended to become items of power to some people, and their own well-being was overlooked. For the first time since her death, Severus was somewhat relieved his mother passed away and avoided an awful fate such as Sybil's.

oOoOo

Harry wandered down the hall in the direction of the Gryffindor common room, his meeting with Dumbledore had gone as well as expected. He played the part of the perfect savior and listened to the old man talk about Tom Riddle and the Slytherin Locket. He did notice the Headmaster eyeing his family rings like he always did, as if staring would unearth their reason for being on Harry's hand. Dumbledore threw in a few thinly veiled comments about how difficult it had been to locate Harry, which were ignored.

Harry also got the impression he was not meant to know what the Horcruxes were yet, that Dumbledore wanted to lead up to some great reveal but his plans were foiled by Slughorn's death and he was forced to explain why the man had been important.

This morning's meeting was only half about the locket. Harry knew there were possibly seven of the foul objects and now he knew that Dumbledore had more information and was going to dispense it slowly like a game. The other half of the meeting was about Dumbledore encountering Riddle for the first time. It was an odd story. Harry could see in the memory that Tom was already rotten from the start, but Dumbledore was blind to it. He seemed to hold more affection for the boy than he should have on first meeting, like he had a soft spot for lost children. He was also impressed by the boy's talent and overlooked many of the signs. It made Harry wonder what else he overlooked, other mistakes he might have made with Riddle that led to Voldemort.

The entire meeting Harry could only think of the Headmaster's actions over his long life and how much they affected the world… even just recently he tried to alter Harry's life by controlling Sirius's will and keeping Remus away... He never did find out what Sirius left for his fellow marauder.

Harry clambered through the portrait hole into the common room and glanced around. Hermione, Ron and Neville were around the fireplace. They looked over at him when he came in, he made a jerking gesture with his head and began walking to the boy's dorm. All three of the others stood and quickly followed him. When the last person entered Harry silenced the entire room and sat on his bed. Ron and Hermione took Ron's bed and Neville sat on Seamus's bed on the other side of Harry's. After a moment to collect his thoughts Harry explained from at the beginning of his
meeting with Dumbledore.

"And that's everything he told me this morning." Harry finished.

Ron and Neville were silent and Hermione was thoughtful. "I feel like I know the locket you mentioned," she mumbled to herself.

"I just wanted to fill you guys in before the meeting tonight, maybe you can work some stuff out I missed before we induct Draco." Harry rubbed the back of his head and yawned, maybe he would take a nap.

"WHAT!?!" Ron screeched, successfully scaring away any thought of sleep from Harry's mind… oops.

Neville winced and raised his hands in a calming gesture.

Harry sighed, it was probably better that Ron found out about Draco before the meeting. He told Ron everything he had missed, weighed down by the angry glare Ron fixed on him. When he finished Ron sat quietly and didn't respond. Harry took his silence to mean he needed time to process, so he left with Hermione and Neville close behind. At least Neville took it well.

oOoOo

Albus Dumbledore sat at his large oak desk. The door to his office swung shut behind his young guest. The meeting went better than some before. Harry seemed more pliable and willing than he was over the summer, and the beginning of the year. Dumbledore attributed this to Harry being back at school and under his wing once more, the poor boy must have felt lost over the summer, and now understood the need for a strong hand to guide him.

The family rings on the child's fingers were still a problem. Albus assumed he kept them on as a sentimental reminder of what he lost, but he was probably unaware of what would happen if he didn't remove them. On the day of his 17th birthday they would prick him for blood to enact old core magic that bonded him to the Houses of the rings. Even though he was Acting Head of both the Potter and Black families and had the magical right to everything including properties, his real inheritance would be kept until he came of age. Before that day came Albus had to think of some way to remove the rings.
He sighed and leaned back in his chair. With a casual gesture he called Fawkes to himself. The firebird fluttered to his desk. "Hello, old friend." Dumbledore said soothingly while stroking the phoenix's chest. "What information do you have for me? Where was the boy hiding today that kept him from my view?"

Fawkes looked into the Headmasters eyes. Normally they could communicate on a primitive level through images, it is something only the master of a phoenix familiar could accomplish. Today Fawkes showed nothing but blackness.

Dumbledore's brow furrowed in confusion at the lack of response from the bird. He pressed his mind harder into that of the phoenix’s and met a resistance he had never felt before. Frustrated anger began to rise.

"What are you willing to show me?" Albus asked, his tone held indignation.

Fawkes met his master's eyes and released a single image.

*A bright flame on the wick of a green candle.*

That was the only image the Headmaster was shown. The images he exchanged with Fawkes were normally steeped in metaphor, but this was beyond his ability to decipher with so little context. He felt a familiar rise of frustration as he realized this was all the information his familiar was going to offer.

Harry stepped from the fireplace with only a slight stumble, he imagined he almost looked respectable. After a quick glance around the empty kitchen he concluded that he was the first to arrive for the meeting. Remus was most likely still in his room and Draco was probably hiding in the Blue Drawing room.

Harry moved to the closest chair and plopped down. The kitchen was no longer as dark as it had been before he took ownership of the house, but it was still underground and had that cool feeling of a dungeon. Harry would never admit it to anyone, but he liked underground rooms. He enjoyed walking the dungeon halls of Hogwarts on his way to lessons with Snape more than wandering the towers of griffins. The cool and enclosed spaces that muffled outside sound and echoed inner sound, brought him a sense of safety.
Harry never brought these feelings up because people would probably want him to see a shrink… or whatever they’re called in the magical world. After being locked in a cupboard most of his childhood it would make sense that he would be afraid of closed spaces, he didn’t particularly want to investigate why it was the opposite. The only person that knew anything about his fondness for the dark enclosed underground, was Severus.

When he first arrived at Hogwarts he was amazed by the open space, He wanted to fly and feel free, he was happy to live in a tower. But the longer he lived in the open sky, the more danger he was put in, the more he realized he was ignorant of many things that could hurt him or his friends. If he had still been in the dark he would not have seen the signs of danger and might not have pursued it as he did, and if his ignorance led to a poor outcome, at least he wouldn’t have known he could have prevented it.

Slowly over the last five years he began to see the appeal of the dark, of places where less space meant less danger. Where less awareness meant he couldn't dread, because he didn't know of the possibilities. Harry was starting to think that being in the dark wasn't so bad, you couldn't be afraid of what you didn't know was coming. Being in the light and seeing all possibilities for danger and disaster… that was scary. But now Harry had a responsibility to be in the light and know as much as he could.

Harry was beginning to understand Dumbledore. He still did not agree with the old man's choices, but after leading the PM for a few months, and after learning so much about the war, he was beginning to understand. Knowing more was truly terrifying. It allowed you to know what was coming and also put the fate of more people on your shoulders who didn’t know, or who chose to follow you out of the dark. There was no way to go back to the clouded ignorance that could wrap around people like a protective shroud.

Harry knew less than Dumbledore- that was for sure, he could only imagine the possible endings the Headmaster could see… it must be maddening. Did having more knowledge of the world make someone more likely to be manipulative, or just crazy? Harry was aware that longing for ignorance was wrong. That being ignorant had its own way of making people bad, crazy or even evil. It was truly ignorance and ego that made up 90% of Voldemort's personality.

The scariest person is someone who does have a vast amount of information, but chooses to ignore or discount some in favor of something more comfortable. The only thing that is for certain, is that evil people don't always see themselves as evil. Harry could be the bad guy if viewed from a certain angle… it was really about a person's point of view. It came down to the person, and the situation, some would find comfort in not knowing, and others find it in having all the facts. Harry smirked as he thought of Hermione.
The sound of the kitchen door opening drew Harry from his thoughts.

Draco entered the room with an air of confidence he had previously been missing. Being accepted someplace and having a purpose can do wonders for the healing psyche. Harry was glad to note that he also lacked much of his smug ego, he wasn't completely without pompl or he wouldn't be Draco, but it was better.

Harry smiled when Draco noticed him at the table, he tried to make his expression friendly and not forced. Grey eyes widened slightly and Harry was sure that Draco's pale skin became slightly pink, he was probably still nervous about interacting with members of PM. Harry tried to give off a relaxed impression so the other boy could be a bit less tense.

The kitchen door opened again and revealed Remus this time.

Harry's face morphed into a true and open smile. "Hey, Moony!" he chirped.

"Hey, Pup" Remus sat in the chair across from Harry.

Draco was roused from whatever trance he was in by Remus's movement and took a seat himself. Harry was surprised to see Malfoy sit beside their former professor. Draco had always seemed wary of Remus after his status as a werewolf was revealed, but right now the blond didn't even bat an eyelash.

The room fell silent for a moment, and Harry felt like there was something he meant to ask Moony, something he had forgotten many times… "OH!"

Remus startled at Harry's sudden outburst.

"I meant to ask you something for a while now, but I kept getting distracted," he explained.

Remus pressed his hand over his heart as it calmed down, "I assume, from your outburst that you remembered what you meant to ask me?" the slight edge of sarcasm in Moony's voice reminded Harry of Severus.

"Ummm, yeah… heh." Harry laughed lightly in embarrassment. "I meant to ask you what Sirius left you in his Will."
Remus's face settled into an expression that Harry couldn't quite read. If he had to guess he would say it was confusion mixed with contemplation, but there was a third emotion he couldn't put his finger on. "Why would you ask me that? You were at the reading when they announced the money he left me."

Harry tipped his head slightly, "Not the money, the other thing, you know the secret?" Harry felt a strange tension begin to rise in the room, it was palpable in the air. It was a rare occurrence, Remus's was angry.

"I was not informed of anything but the money that was left to me." The older man hissed between clenched teeth, "Dumbledore seems to have forgotten that detail."

Harry saw Draco shift slightly, he was probably uncomfortable now that Moony was angry. A werewolf's magic could became oppressive, it was probably the wolf trying to intimidate those that were not pack. Harry felt it, but was overall unaffected, he assumed his closeness to Remus was the reason the magic wasn't trying to drive him away.

"What was the secret that Padfoot left me?" Remus was obviously trying not to sound as enraged as he seemed to feel, but he was failing.

Harry made no attempt to cover his own anger. 'The old coot didn't deliver the message from the Will like he said he would!' He leaned back and crossed his arms. "The message that he left said that you are supposed to get the 'you know what, you know where', Moony."

The anger in the room did not diminish, but Remus began mumbling to himself as he thought. "I was sure that one of them would have moved it, how does he know it's still there…. Maybe he checked when he was trying to kill Peter…"

A soft whoosh followed by even softer footsteps announced the arrival of a new person. Harry looked up when the quiet steps didn't approach the table. Severus was standing halfway between the fireplace and where everyone was seated, he was looking right at Remus.

Harry worried for a moment if the angry wolf's magic was going to upset Severus, who was known for his dislike of werewolves, but he didn't look bothered. In fact the angry magic seemed to wash over the man with little trouble, much like it did with Harry. Severus glanced at Harry with a clear question on the surface of his mind, 'what is wrong with the wolf?' Harry touched his teacher's mind with the implication that he would explain later. Severus nodded and took a seat next to Harry and across from Draco. Harry was sure he saw a slight hint of concern in the man's mind, apparently his mentors were closer than he thought, Harry was glad they were getting along.
He turned to speak with Severus, but the expression on his face stopped the words from leaving his mouth. His teachers face was grim and distracted. Severus looked at Harry when he felt him staring, their eyes met again and Harry knew something had happened. The only thing he got from their connection was a strong "Later" and the distinct feeling that Severus was compartmentalizing everything. Harry let it drop, he would be filled in later anyway.

Everyone sat in a slightly awkward silence while Remus got his anger under control, and by the time the next person arrived the air was almost completely clear of oppressive wolf anger. The next person turned out to be Hermione carrying a large file folder, and despite how little anger was left, she seemed to notice its presence. She paused for a moment on her way to the table as if to consider whether it was worth bringing up. She decided against commenting and took the seat facing away from the fireplace. She pulled the large muggle style file folder from under her arm and practically slammed it on the table.

"What is that?" Harry was almost afraid to ask.

Hermione smirked, "This…" She began in a proud tone, "is a compilation of information about all projects we are working on."

Harry leaned closer to the large file and made note of the many small color coordinated sticky notes that were protruding from the side of the thick folder. She also had a small pile of thin felt tipped markers on the table, each tab was colored and then labeled in neat handwriting with a different color.

Hermione looked her tabs over, stopped at a section of green sticky notes with silver writing and then stuck her finger in a section of the file to flip it open. She scanned over a few lines of notes in her own handwriting before speaking. "I was thinking that we could cover a few important topics after Draco's induction."

Severus leaned forward, it was the same way he would loom while sitting at his desk in class, and it seemed to have little effect on Hermione. "We will not take too much time on these projects, I have a lesson with Harry and Draco."

Hermione smiled sweetly. "Of course," she chirped.

Severus glowered at her lack of fear. Harry thought the fact that he still tried was amusing, but he wouldn't be Snape if he didn't. Plus he could always make Neville want to crawl in a hole if he felt
his ego needed a boost.

"What project are you open to now?" Everyone was slightly surprised to hear Draco ask politely after Hermione's work, he was half standing out of his seat to see her file folder.

Hermione was the only one to take his civil behavior in stride. "This is our plan to go into the Chamber of Secrets, there are a few details I want to hammer down before we go, and also I would like the details about container transport for Severus."

Draco's eyes almost bugged out of his head, "Are you all daft?!" His voice cracked slightly with the effort it took for him not to yell in his shock.

Hermione gave the blond a slightly befuddled look, "Why are you so surprised? Weren't you lurking about in the hallway during the meetings?"

Draco gained a slight dusting of pink of his cheeks, he probably thought no one ever saw him sneaking around. Harry found this new Draco very amusing.

"I... just because… it was hard to hear," Draco admitted.

"Fine, we can go over those details," Severus interjected, ignoring his godson.

Hermione gave another sweet smile as she stuck her finger into another section of the file and flipped it open. This one was marked in grey tabs with green writing. "I would also like to talk briefly about prospective Slytherins that would benefit from joining the Method." The smile she held turned sly.

Severus looked like he wanted to huff out a sigh. "Yes, and that as well," he gave in.

Harry tried to stifle his laughs as Hermione primly closed her folder, she had Severus play right into her hands. She got the harder topic approved by skewing it in Snape's favor and then followed up with another topic he wanted to talk about. One of the only things Severus and Hermione butted heads about is the amount of information that is covered in a single meeting. Severus seemed to think that too much was a bad thing and convoluted the meeting, while Hermione wanted to cover a variety of topics at once. Harry found, that if he just let them battle it out, things tended to land in a good place for a meeting. Although Hermione was becoming very Slytherin in her tactics.
"We also need to go over the meeting I had with Dumbledore this morning," Harry supplied.

Hermione rapidly flipped to a section of her folder and pulled out some papers. "I already documented what you told me earlier today, and made copies for everyone so they can read it and then bring questions later. Don't worry they can't take the paper out of the house." She handed Harry a paper to look over. He took it slightly bewildered.

The Floo flared and ejected Luna gracefully. She wandered across the room without acknowledging anyone and began preparing a cup of her special tea. Ginny and Neville were next to enter. Neville grabbed a seat at the table by Hermione and Remus while Ginny joined Luna and began making a pot of tea for everyone else. Luna came to the table with a steeping cup from her collection in one hand, and a tray of empty cups and condiments in the other. She took a seat next to Draco who glanced at her briefly but said nothing.

Luna placed her full cup carefully on the table and then began handing out empty white cups to everyone else, except Harry who got a new cup from Luna's collection. The cup was covered in roses that were bright gold and royal blue and matched Luna's cup in design but hers was dark yellow and light pink.

Ginny came to the table with the pot of tea and poured her own before handing it around.

Just as the pot made its way around the entire table two more members arrived. The twins came out of the fireplace one after another with their usual flair. They practically skipped across the kitchen to the table, one twin squeezed a chair between Remus and Draco while the other did the same on the side Luna was sitting.

The number of people on one side of the table caused the twins to squeeze very close to Draco. One twin that Harry thought might be Fred, put his arm around Draco to free up some room. "You don't mind, do ya mate? It's a bit snug." He smirked as he reached for an empty cup.

The twin that was probably George put his arm over Draco's shoulder as well, "Excuse me Draky-poo, space is a bit sparse," he apologized with a wicked grin.

Draco looked like a deer in headlights, he simply stayed perfectly still with a look of terror on his face. Harry was sure that he thought the twins were planning a horrible prank, but in reality they were accepting Draco in their own strange way.

While the Slytherin boy pretended he didn't exist, the twins began preparing their tea in perfect
unison. The possible Fred was using his left arm and the possible George was using his right as if they were the same person to complete their tea task.

"Who told you two?" Harry asked, it was obvious they knew what this meeting was for.

A pair of identical mischievous smirks flashed across the table. "Ooooh you know, a little angry red freckled birdie called us here a couple hours ago," the twin on Draco's right sing-song-ed.

"Ronniekin's was none too pleased about this turn of events, he came to us expecting sympathy," the twin on the left explained.

The pair tightened their one armed hugs on Draco so that they were as close to his sides as possible. "As you can see, we are just tickled," the right twin said.

"He got no sympathy from us!" The left agreed.

Harry felt a small ache forming between his eyes, this meant that Ron was probably spitting fire. When Harry left him in the dorm he was probably somewhat angry, but when he didn't get to complain to his brothers (who also probably picked on him) he most likely went over the edge.

A scuffling sound across the table pulled Harry from his irritating thoughts. Draco apparently had enough hugs and tried to duck out under the twins arms. This led to the twins trying to grab him and pull him back to the table, which then led to a scuffle when they only caught Draco's robes.

"WHY WON'T…" Draco flailed his arms to loosen the twins grip on his robes. "YOU TWIN WEASELS…" He continued to pant and yell as he grabbed his own robes and yanked them.

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" With one big pull he got free and jerkily adjusted his robes and hair with a huff. There were some wrinkles he could not smooth down from being crumpled and he glared at them.

"But we just want you to feel welcomed Draky-poo" one twin said with mock hurt in his voice as they both reached out for him.

Draco scurried back from their grasping hands.
"Guys, Leave him alone." Harry managed to say with an almost serious face, "He doesn't understand that you are actually welcoming him, he thinks you're making fun of him."

The twin on the left pressed his fingertips to his chest, "Why, I never!" he drawled in a high voice.

"After all the time we spent with Draky-poo, you would think he understood us better than that, right Fred?" The twin now identified as George asked his brother, also in a high feminine voice.

"I have spent no time with you, Draco snapped in a flat tone.

"After all those long walks the three of us took," Fred continued, ignoring Draco.

"I have never taken walks with you!" Draco's voice was gaining a slightly desperate edge. Harry thought maybe he was trying very hard to behave and the twins were making it difficult, so he took pity on the soon to be member.

"Fred, George, maybe you can ease him into the group a little slower?" Harry asked in a tone that made it clear it wasn't really a question.

The twins sighed dramatically but relented. Draco slowly made his way around the table, giving the twins a wide berth, and sat next to Neville.

"So we are welcoming Malfoy now?" Ginny asked with a bit of snark.

Harry rubbed his hand over his hair and sighed quietly while standing up. "I guess I should tell you the reason why we are here tonight, the time for the meeting to start passed and I'm not sure if Ron is joining us, sooo…"

Before Harry could finish his sentence a loud whoosh of the fireplace interrupted him, and Ron tumbled out in a whirlwind of long limbs and red anger. He straightened himself out and glared at Draco, then the twins before he stomped his way to the table and sat next to his sister. He didn't say a word, but him showing up meant he was still on Harry's side. He wondered what had Ron so angry, they had talked about taking in Slytherins before… maybe it was just because it was Draco or was it because Slytherins were officially joining PM.
Harry turned back to the group at large and continued explaining the purpose of the meeting.

"Ummm, yeah… So we are having this meeting because Draco has decided to join the Phoenix Method."

There was no outburst like Harry was expecting, he looked around at the faces that looked back at him. His confusion must have been plain on his face because Ginny giggled at him. "We trust you Harry, plus if he’s joining then he has to sign the contract, so if he turns on us he will be knocked out," she reasoned.

Harry let out a breath and smiled, the grin faltered a bit when he met Ron's angry eyes but he brushed it off.

"Knocked out?" Draco’s voice cut through any chatter.

Hermione flipped open her file folder to a tab with a small black bird drawn on it and pulled out the contract. Then from her bag she produced the small bowl and the quill. "Yes knocked out, in accordance with the blood contract you will be signing."

Draco’s face paled, "The…?" he said weakly.

"Blood. Con. Tract." Hermione said, slower and louder like Draco was dumb, then she thrust the paper at him.

Draco glared at her, but took the paper with slightly shaky hands. While he looked it over, Hermione went back to her file and pulled out a parchment with ink writing. She handed the paper to him. "Here, if you want an interpretation of the runes on the contract, I have written up the specifications of it here, so you know what you are signing."

Draco took the second paper with much more confidence and read it over. The longer he read the less pale he looked, Harry wondered what he thought the contract was before reading about it.

Draco took a few minutes to carefully look the terms over, he muttered to himself as he read. Things like ”of course they can talk about it in the house." And "Well that's obvious isn't it?" When he finished he placed the paper on the table and looked from Hermione to Harry. "I accept these terms." Draco stated firmly when he was finished.
"Great!" Hermione chirped as she pulled out a small knife.

Draco paled once more, "No Blood Quill?" he said snidely in an effort to cover his nerves.

Hermione hummed, "No, I assume there is one somewhere in this house, I just haven't located it yet."

Draco held out his hand, it quivered like he was trying to control his shaking. Hermione quickly and efficiently cut his finger and drained some blood into the bowl. She took out her wand and sang the Leighis Song over the cut to heal it.

"That spell…" Draco began, his eyes were wide as the casual use of powerful magic.

"We will talk about the core magic we have learned after you sign, there is a limit to how much we can tell you in the house before you're a member, don't want to knock myself out cold." Hermione joked.

Draco took the quill and dipped it in the bowl, his signature was loopy and elegant, his eyes widened slightly when the rest of the names appeared after he finished. A small line of magic connected Draco to Harry like it did for all the rest, only this time Harry was much more aware of it without his curse, it gently pulled on his core as if reassuring him this person was still loyal.

Hermione pulled the contract back as soon as it finished glowing and placed it in her folder. Severus stood and approached Draco, he reached into his robes and pulled out a long pale wand and handed it to his student.

Draco smiled a genuine smile when his fingers wrapped around the handle and he pulled it to his chest. Severus placed a hand on Draco's shoulder, "I am proud of your decisions tonight." He said softly.

Draco's face flushed at the praise, it meant a lot for Severus to verbally acknowledge someone publicly. Harry was happy things worked out and viciously squashed the pang of jealousy in his heart.

A warm hand on his shoulder informed Harry that Remus had moved from his seat to behind Harry's chair. "I am proud of your acceptance," he said, looking down at Harry. Then he looked around the room at all the members looking back at him, "All of you," he concluded.
There was a moment where everyone just sat and absorbed the new status quo, except Ron who was pouting to himself.

The sound of shuffling paper pulled everyone's attention to Hermione as she flipped her file folder to a red and silver tab. "First thing I would like to go over is the plan for Draco and the twins to work on the new portkeys," she announced.

"I thought only the chamber and my Slytherins were to be topics tonight?" Severus hissed dangerously.

"What plans for me?" Draco asked at the same time Severus was trying to intimidate Hermione.

"Oh the twins have been mostly filled in, so I thought you might like to read my notes about it." She handed him a stack of papers from her file, then she raised her hands in a defensive motion when Snape glared at her, "That's all," she said sheepishly.

Severus sat back in his chair, but Harry could see him keeping an eye on what parts of the file were being opened as Hermione began outlining the Chamber mission and selecting people who wanted or needed to go.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"Knowledge may be terrible, but we can only prefer it to ignorance. Light may be terrible, but we can only prefer it to the dark."

-Night Vale

A/N- The desire to hide, to not know. It is a very strong desire indeed… one of my greatest fears is being deceived, sometimes I only want to be in the dark, uninformed and with no responsibility. Making choices and taking responsibility is how I ended up where I am, if I had done nothing, would I be someplace better? At the very least,
those who gave me advice would not hold any guilt for my predicament, it would only be me at fault.

You see, doing nothing is still something, there is no way to avoid being the guilty party… except through ignorance. Not knowing without intentionally avoiding knowledge of a situation is the only solution. Simply not knowing that there was something you should or shouldn't be doing can sometimes exonerate you of blame. Unfortunately, the state of not knowing without pursuing ignorance is not something that can be synthesized… it simply is or isn't. It can certainly be simulated, but then you would be a liar, but that's up to you.

Harshly scolded! 3/2/2018

Harry rubbed the small metal tea cup between his fingers. His eyes were closed, but he could practically hear Snape's irritation. The man had some sort of aura that projected only his negative
feelings or something, Harry thought it was a spell he created to intimidate students. Next to him Draco was quiet, Harry wouldn't have known he was there if he hadn't seen him before closing his eyes.

A minute passed, in which Harry rolled his cup charm between his fingers and sighed lightly. He was having much more trouble meditating this time, but considering what happened last time he got it to work… it might be for the best.

"Potter, will you stop your incessant sighing, one would think you were a waiting maiden on a widows walk." Draco's sarcasm didn't cover the slight scorn of his tone. He couldn't get mad at the blond for snapping, if they switched places Harry would have snapped as well.

He sighed louder this time and opened his eyes. "Sorry, I just can't seem to grasp the meditation like I did last time." Harry looked down at his anchor.

Severus leveled a cool glare at his student, he seemed to be in a particularly foul mood. Harry knew when he befriended the man that it wasn't going to be flowers and sunshine, but this was bad even for Snape. He had a suspicion that it was related to whatever was bothering Severus in the kitchen right before the meeting. Harry had hoped they would skip the lesson and just talk about whatever it was that had Severus so off balance, but expecting Snape to skip a lesson he deemed important was like trying to stop the world from spinning. Harry hoped that once the lesson was over and Draco left, Severus might fill him in on what was going on.

"Maybe if you put your childish, petty fears about hurting your little friends away in the toy box you call a mind, then you will be able to grasp the incredibly simple concept of focus." Snape snapped in a manner he hadn't since before their oath.

Harry reeled back at the tone, he glanced at Draco from his peripheral vision and saw that even he seemed surprised at their teacher sharp insults. Harsh words aside Severus was probably right, his fear of losing control was holding Harry back.

"You just need to calm down and focus on something," Severus said, softer, it was his own way of apologizing for his temper.

"Like a thought?" Harry guessed.

"No, something simpler. Try putting your hand over your heart and breathing in for two beats and
then out for two." Severus instructed.

Harry complied with the request, he closed his eyes and placed his hand over his heart. He tried to sync his breathing to his heart beat, at first it seemed to be working, but every time he got close his excitement would speed his heart rate and he would mess up. Harry sighed in frustration and opened his eyes. Severus holding an object he had never seen before. It was wooden and tapered at the top, attached to the base was an upside-down pendulum like from a grandfather clock.

"Ah, a metronome," Draco nodded in understanding.

Severus placed the metronome on the table between the couches, "I think you can both benefit from this."

Draco lowered his brows, "I was doing just fine."

Severus didn't comment, he tapped the top of the pendulum with his finger and it began to tick back and forth in a steady rhythm. Harry felt the cool wind of understanding settle on his mind. He closed his eyes and began to breathe with the ticking. One Inhale then one exhale, repeat, repeat, repeat… repeat… re… peat…

Everything began to dim.

From behind his eyelids Harry could tell that the light was becoming brighter; the air in the room was starting to move like a light breeze. When he felt something soft glance off his cheek, Harry opened his eyes to a shower of petals. He was in his mindscape, sitting as he usually did in his tree, but also in the open entry to his cupboard. He looked down at his hand and was surprised to find his metal teacup between his fingers. This was the first time he had ever bought something with him into this place; the charm was glowing lightly.

"Very good boys."

Harry almost fell out of his tree in shock when Snape's voice echoed through the sky. He must be talking to both him and Draco in the outside world.

"Now if your anchor is glowing I want you to place it to your sternum."
Harry moved his charm to his chest where it clinked against something else. He looked down and found the vial stopper had also come with him into his mind. It was glowing darkly in comparison to his anchors light yellow hue. He also noticed a faint string of the glowing color leading off to the right, it became less visible the farther it was from him.

Harry moved the crystal out of the way so he could follow his teacher's instructions. The moment the tea cup touched his chest he felt its magic link to his own, he watched as his excess surface magic trickled down the connection and then drifted to the ground.

"Yes, just like that, boys. It seems you were both able to attach your anchors appropriately." Severus praised.

Harry moved his anchor away and looked back at the stopper, the glowing string was becoming brighter and tapered to the right as he watched. A light tapping drew Harry from his mind, his eyes snapped open and he was back in the blue drawing room. The door to the room opened and Remus came in with a tray of tea.

Harry looked down at the bauble, it didn't glow outside his mind… or he couldn't see it. He looked back at Remus on his right. His right? He looked from the stopper back to Remus again and noted the angle of the string in his mind had been pointing at Remus, it had also been getting brighter as the man approached. Everyone in this room had been freed of the curse except Remus, it was anecdotal, but it was the first evidence that the crystal pulled on curse magic.

"I thought tea might be nice," Remus said softly.

Harry glanced at Severus, the man was obviously annoyed at the interruption, but since they had just completed their goal he didn't complain.

"Tea would be great, Moony." Harry smiled warmly as Remus placed the tray on the table.

"I'm sure you have more training so I will get out of the way." Remus turned to leave. Harry was about to tell him they had finished when a sharp look from Snape stopped the words in his throat. Remus left with the soft click of the door.

Draco looked up after retying his braided rope back on his wrist and made himself a cup of tea. "I am curious," he began while adding sugar to his cup, "Why didn't the topic of the unbreakable vow
to remove Dumbledore come up at the meeting?" He directed the question at Severus.

Severus then redirected the question to Harry, "It is not my place to bring that up to Harry's people, I assume that's also why Hermione didn't bring it up, she was waiting for his cue," he said plainly.

Draco looked surprised that Severus was deferring to Harry, The blond glanced to him for an explanation.

"I was planning to bring it up but… Ron." Harry tailed off.

Severus nodded, "the Weasley did seem rather volatile, and I believe it was the correct move not to breach the subject."

Harry slowly nodded, "yeah, I think maybe we should just keep it between the people who know for now."

"That may be wise, but I do think we should inform the wolf." Severus paused for a long moment, then he looked between Draco and Harry. "There is also something that has come up, tomorrow I would like to meet with you two, the wolf and Hermione. I have some research to do before then, and I believe you two still have DADA homework." Severus looked at them with the gaze of a knowing professor, Harry glanced over at Draco with guilty eyes and found himself sharing a conspiring look.

Severus swept from the room leaving Harry alone with Draco. There was a moment of silence that was heavy with awkwardness, then Harry spoke up. "Do you think that Nott, Zabini and Parkinson are really going to be open to joining PM?" He asked.

Draco's posture became more relaxed, "I think so, and I have known all three of them my entire life. They have expressed concern about becoming a Death Eater, unlike the golems that followed me around."

Harry felt himself relax when Draco answered honestly and didn't snap at him. It was really very strange to think that Draco might have been acting like git because of how he was raised, then after he had second thoughts he continued to act as his family wanted out of fear. Of course he slipped back into his git persona from time to time… he was Draco Malfoy after all.
Harry made his own cup of tea, and took a sip. "No offence, but why would they express any concerns to you… you know, with your father being how he is."

Draco looked directly at Harry, purposely making eye contact. For a moment Harry thought he was going to get yelled for talking about Lucius Malfoy, But Draco simply stared into his eyes as if he was looking for something before he responded. His brows furrowed, and he apparently found what he was searching for. "Who said they confided in me first?" Then he stood, "I have to go find those insufferable twins, we have work to do."

With that he was gone, Leaving Harry alone with his tea.

oOoOo

Late Saturday night after everyone had left the safe house, a single dark figure crept down the stairs into the kitchen. He moved quietly across the stone floor like a breeze on the night. He grabbed a small bit of Floo powder, stepped into the fireplace, and whispered his destination.

Remus landed as silently as possible in the Room of requirement of Hogwarts. He left the room and headed up the stairs to the tower he once called home.

oOoOo

Sunday morning found Harry laying in his bed in Gryffindor Tower. He had been awake for a while, but he didn't feel like getting up. He was contemplating what he has seen in his mindscape. How the crystal stopper had glowed and pointed at Remus. He was sure he could use that with his own abilities to maybe checkout the curse magic in people… maybe change it to something less harmful.

Severus would tell him he needed to train his core magic more and Hermione would want to run a million tests. Harry just wanted to try it, he had a feeling, like instinct. His magic was always trying to soothe and heal others magic, right? So this feeling must be correct. Plus, he made a pact with himself to be more proactive and less reactive.

Harry sat up and pulled the curtains around his bed open with a sharp snap. Ron's head whipped around at the sound. He was sitting in his own bed, as if he had been waiting.

"Hey…" he said weakly.
"Hey..." Harry replied, "I didn't know anyone was still in here," he added.

Ron looked down at his hands, "Yeah, they all left, I was just thinking."

"Me too," Harry confided.

Ron looked up at him, his eyes were tired. "I feel like I can't do much for PM, you know? You, Hermione, Remus... Even Malfoy, you do so much..." he trailed off and looked back down at his hands before picking up his line of thought. "It's just, Malfoy joined, and other Slytherin's are going to be recruited, and I'm going to become even less useful... I know it's stupid, but I don't want to be out done by them."

As Ron confessed an idea struck Harry like lightning. "There is something you can do, something only a brave Gryffindor can do." Harry knew he was playing on Ron's desire to prove he was a true Gryffindor and to get out of the shadow of his brothers, but this was a chance he couldn't pass up. He would be training for weeks or months before he had a chance to remove a curse, he couldn't wait that long.

Ron's head snapped up, his eyes were wide and his pupils were dilated with interest. "What can I do?" He asked, the edge to his tone was slightly desperate.

Harry smiled, "Not long ago you volunteered to be the test subject for the first curse removal, remember? I don't think I am ready to remove the curse, but I want to try and do something, even if it's just seeing if I can feel the magic or change it."

Ron nodded enthusiastically.

Harry explained what he had seen in his mindscape and the theories Hermione and himself had come up with. "So you see right? The Crystal can guide me, I just have this deep feeling that I can do this, and if I go along with Severus it will be months before I can try anything. But we need this now, who knows what Voldemort is doing while laying low, we need more. The Phoenix Method needs more, but this could be dangerous..." Harry's rant trailed off, he knew he sounded desperate, but everything was moving so slowly, and it felt almost like fate that the crystal was made in the ritual.

"I think you're right." Ron's face was determined. "We have been doing everything too slowly, we said we didn't want the last generation to run our future but Snape and Remus are the ones setting
Ron's words reminded Harry of Severus's lecture about how young they were, and how they needed to take control but with adult guidance until they grew up, he brushed the thoughts aside. They were old enough for this, it was different from Sirius and the ritual… it had to be.

"So what do I do?" Ron asked.

Harry motioned his friend over. "Sit on my bed across from me."

Both boys pulled their feet onto the bed and crossed their legs facing each other.

"OK" Harry breathed, "I just need you to be still, and tell me if anything hurts or makes you uncomfortable."

Ron nodded and closed his eyes.

Harry studied his friends face, there was not a trace of fear. Ron trusted Harry, and that meant a lot, it made Harry feel guilty for doing something possibly dangerous with all that trust placed in him, but he had to. He had been stagnating for too long. His core ability was all about fixing magic, so this was safe as long as he didn't take it too far. Ron knew there were risks.

Harry closed his eyes and imagined the metronome sound, he evened his breathing and let the meditative state take over. When he opened his eyes again he was in his tree, in the doorway to his cupboard. The soft sound of leathery wings came from below and Harry smiled. He reached up and wrapped his hand around his necklace with the crystal, and he took a deep breath to calm his nerves, he was relieved it came with him again.

Harry looked down at the stopper and found the same dark glow surrounding it, there was also a thread of color leaking from the aura and stretching in the direction of Ron. He took a moment to hone in on the magic causing the glow, he reached out to it with his mind, and his magic, until he could faintly feel it the same way he felt his own core. This was something taught to him by Severus before the first attempt to connect to his anchor.

Harry had a suspicion he would be able to feel the magic in the crystal, the most popular theory about why he couldn't be separated from the object was that it had connected somehow to his core.
When the curse was removed it became the magic in the crystal, but didn't completely detach from his own magic, it was just repurposed into a link.

Although he couldn't sense the stoppers magic as strongly as his own core, he was confident it was enough. Harry backed up into his cupboard and closed the door, it was his signal that he was leaving his mind. When his eyes opened again he was back in his dorm, and Ron was still sitting with his eyes closed. Harry could feel the magic from his crystal, but could no longer see it. Slowly he took his necklace from around his neck and pressed the gem into Ron's chest.

The moment it contacted his friend, Harry could feel the magic in the crystal surge forward. It still maintain its link to the stopper, but the majority of it moved through Ron. Just like when he pushed Voldemort's magic out of Draco, Harry push his magic into Ron, but this time he did it through the Crystal.

Harry's magic was being led by the magic from the stopper, it was pulling him along through Ron's body until it stopped at something that felt uncomfortable. Harry assumed the magic that was making his hair stand on end was Ron's curse, he didn't know what to do at this point. He couldn't see what was going on, everything was done by the feel of magic, unfortunately that didn't help him in delicate situations. With Draco all he had to do was drive the red magic back to its origin, but here he was facing magic that was wrapped intricately around someone's core.

For a second Harry thought about pulling back, but he pushed that feeling down, he had to try. Carefully, Harry moved his magic until it touched the curse, at that moment the magic of the crystal also touch it.

"AHHHHHHH!" Ron let out a continuous, pained scream.

Harry felt the crystal pull on the curse without regard to the core, it was like ripping a large weed out of the dirt in his Aunt's garden without loosening the roots first. It was going to tear the magic of the core out with the curse like roots taking soil.

Harry tried to pull back as Ron screams reached a volume that seemed impossible, but the crystals magic held his own in place and fed off his power to continue pulling. On complete instinct Harry did the only thing he could think of, he pushed his own magic forward into Ron's core and around the curse, he completely enveloped the crystals magic. Ron's anguish became something else, it was beyond pain and Ron was unable to express it with his voice. His teeth clenched together and he began to twist and writhe. Harry threw himself onto his friend so that the Crystal didn't lose connection, something told Harry if that happened, Ron would die. Harry suddenly felt his magic begin to siphon the curse magic off of Ron's core, it was still pulling at his friend's magic, he could feel the damage he was causing, but it was less than the pulling rip of the crystal. Hot prickling welled up behind Harry's eyes and the desire to give in to the approaching hysteria tried to overwhelm him. His breaths were becoming hitched, tearless sobs, but he held on.
When it was over and all the curse magic was pulled from Ron's core, Harry carefully funneled the magic into the stopper. A thin thread of the Crystals magic was still attached to Ron's core but Harry felt the release that allowed him to remove his own magic. When all his magic was back where it was meant to be, he felt the first hot trail of tears down his face. He could feel the magic connecting the Crystal to his core and to Ron's, but he ignore the odd phenomenon so he could check on his friend.

He picked himself up off the larger redhead and grabbed his shoulders, "RON!" Harry shook him while he yelled. "RON! WAKE UP!" Harry's voice cracked and the previous hysteria took this chance to consume his mind.

Harry leaned over so he was above Ron and shook even harder in his panic, until he saw one eye crack open. "Ron?" Harry asked hopefully.

The second eye opened a slit so that Ron was squinting up at Harry, but he wasn't looking at Harry's face, his eyes were focused on his forehead. He didn't respond to any of Harry's pleas, instead he raised a shaking arm off the bed. He extended his index finger and pressed it into Harry's scar.

"There," he whispered. Then Ron's arm fell to his chest and his head tipped to the side as he passed out.

"RON!" Harry screamed.

There was a thundering on the stairs that sounded like many sets of feet. The door to the dorm burst open so hard it bounced off the wall and almost closed again.

Neville, Seamus and Dean ran to the bed.

"What's going on?! We just came back from class and heard you yell!" Seamus looked pale at the site Harry crying.

"I don't know, we were talking and then he… just…" Harry could barely manage the lie through his tears, he looked at Neville pleadingly to understand this was serious.

Neville seemed to get the message, He pulled his wand out and pointed it into the room. "Expecto Patronum!" A bright lion burst forth. "Madam Pomfrey, come to the Gryffindor Sixth year dorm, it's an emergency." Neville gave the message and waved his wand causing the lion to run through the dorm wall.
"When did you learn to do that?" Dean asked.

"Ummm… over the summer," Neville lied, poorly.

Harry knew that Hermione had been teaching all the members of PM how to cast the Patronus charm and send messages since the beginning of the year, Neville was the last to manage it, but the most impressive.

Only moments after the ethereal lion ran through the wall the sound of a Floo activation could be heard in the common room. Quick, light footsteps came up stairs before Madam Pomfrey hustled to the bed and began examining Ron. "What happened?" she asked in a business like tone as she waved her wand.

"I'm not sure, he just screamed and passed out." Harry tried to keep the guilt out of his voice, he hoped the waver in his tone would be mistaken for worry.

"This is not good." Pomfrey muttered under her breath as a bunch of symbols formed in the air from her scans.

Harry had no idea what the symbols meant but he felt a stab of dread at the statement. Pomfrey waved her wand again, Ron levitated off the bed and floated behind her, matching her brisk pace. Harry scrambled off the bed and followed close behind her.

oOoOo

It did not take long for the news of Ron's collapse to spread through the school, the whispers of rumors sometimes seem to move at the speed of light. The only student that didn't find herself in the loop was Hermione. She stood over a bubbling cauldron, soft green light illuminated her satisfied smile.

"Very good Ms. Granger." Jigger stalked out of the shadows in the back of the room.

Hermione didn't startle, she knew he was there observing her work. A light blush rose on her cheeks. She had never understood potions better than she did after Professor Jigger's lessons, she
was seriously considering perusing the art, and Jigger really seemed to see talent in her, he appreciated her efforts and intelligence.

She was aware that Ron didn't like Jigger, she had to admit there was something about him that was both exciting and unsettling. She didn't think he was particularly dangerous, but she thought these extra lessons would let her keep an eye on him, after all, their track record with new professors was not great.

Yes, this was a win, win situation. She got extra lessons and she could keep tabs on Jigger.

A hand rested on Hermione's shoulder, she looked up at her professor.

"Now let's start on your next advanced project," he smiled warmly, his eyes showed her he was happy with her progress.

Maybe he was looking for an apprentice, Hermione wondered.

oOoOo

Shortly after Harry arrived at the hospital wing, McGonagall rushed in followed by every Gryffindor that heard the news. She knew better than to interrupt the Medi-witch while she was working, so she stood back against the wall with Harry. The worry in her eyes was bright as she watched one of her lions being worked on.

Harry felt a stab of guilt for causing this situation, he could only hope everything would be OK.

Madam Pomfrey stopped waving her wand and placed the last potion vial on the bed side table. She turned to the group of worried red and gold clad people. Everyone held their breath, and when the Medi-witch nodded there was a collective exhale.

"He will be fine, in time," she said quietly, then her eyes traveled to Harry and he felt his stomach drop.

"How did this happen?" Professor McGonagall asked.

Pomfrey pulled her eyes from Harry and looked at the concerned head of house. "Mr. Potter
informed me that Mr. Weasley collapsed this morning in their dorm, after examining him it seems he is suffering from magical exhaustion. How this came about? I am not sure." She informed in a McGonagall in a business like tone.

McGonagall nodded, "I need to inform his family of the incident." She looked at Harry, "and I will need to speak to you Mr. Potter, about what caused this."

Harry didn't get a chance to reply before his Head of House was shooing him out of the room along with her other lions.

"I would like to speak with Potter first, Minerva." Pomfrey called out.

McGonagall looked reluctant for a moment.

"He may have information that will help Ronald's recovery." The Medi-witch supplied.

"Very well, I will speak to you later Mr. Potter." The professor leveled her student with a serious look before leaving with her other charges.

Harry was left alone with Madam Pomfrey and a sleeping Ron. The silence was thick and the nurse continued to stare Harry down.

"Ron is really going to be OK?" Harry asked tentatively.

"Yes." Pomfrey's tone was curt, "But there are some anomalies I would like explained."

Harry looked everywhere but at the Medi-witches eyes, "Anomalies?"

Pomfrey did not respond.

"I don't..." Harry began.
"There was magical damage deeper than expected. It will heal, but it was almost too much." Her tone was cold.

Harry felt his heart speed up, she meant core damage… "Why didn't you tell Professor McGonagall?" he desperately tried to change the line of conversation away from himself.

"Because I was asked not to," she answered briskly, she didn't seem pleased with the idea of not telling.

Harry felt cold dread begin to fill his chest like ice water, "Who asked…" He didn't get to finish his question, the doors to the infirmary swung open and Harry felt the icy water of dread form a solid block of fear.

Albus Dumbledore entered with a swirl of robes, his face was distorted with an expression Harry had never seen before on the old man. It sent a shiver down his spine, the Headmaster looked almost deranged. He ignored Harry and approached Madam Pomfrey, she looked uncomfortable with the Headmasters demeanor.

"What happened?" He demanded. His tone was sharp and edged with panic.

"I was told Mr. Weasley collapsed in his dorm, after examining him I reported to you because of the core damage, as you requested," Pomfrey answered.

Dumbledore walked to Ron's bed side and drew his wand. He began casting spell after spell that even Pomfrey had not cast, and he read the complicated symbols that appeared in the air. The more he cast and read the more distraught he became. "No… not again," he whispered to himself.

Dumbledore cast a few more spells that seemed to confirm whatever he feared. He turned on Madam Pomfrey who was standing nearby. "Who was with him when this happened?" His tone was harsh.

Pomfrey took a step back from the angry old man, "Just... it was." She was flustered and her expression told Harry she didn't want to throw him under the knight bus when the Headmaster looked so angry.

"It was just me," Harry answered for the Medi-witch, his statement pulled Dumbledore's attention
to the fact that he was in the room.

The Headmasters eyes narrowed, "My office, now." Was all he said before he turned to exit.

"But sir, Ron..."

"NOW!" Dumbledore roared.

Harry didn't try to get out of it again, and promptly followed. The entire walk to the gargoyle was spent in a thick silence, Harry could almost feel Dumbledore's magic vibrating in anger and fear. He wasn't exactly sure what was happening, he assumed Dumbledore was informed of Ron’s core damage, but why was that scaring the old man so much?

When they entered the office Dumbledore went right to his desk and slowly seated himself, he took a deep breath and a strange calm over took the room.

The sound of feathers caught Harry's attention, he turned to see Fawkes on his perch.

"How did Mr. Weasley come to have so much damage to his magical core?" Dumbledore's calm tone drew Harry's eyes away from the phoenix.

Harry was struck by the sudden mention of core magic, it was the first time Dumbledore had ever said anything about its existence. He kept his face as calm as possible when he replied.

"I don't know what you mean, sir."

The air in the room shifted with magic. Harry felt the change before Dumbledore reacted. "DO NOT. Lie to me." The old man clenched his teeth as he spoke, his anger was palpable.

Harry focused on keeping his calm, "I'm sorry if I'm making you angry sir, but I really don't know."

Fawkes shifted uneasily on his perch as the angry aura grew, it pressed against Harry and made it
feel hard to breath.

"I don't like us being at odds, Harry, but I must make sure mistakes are not repeated." Dumbledore spoke more calmly but his magic swirled around the room.

Harry felt it covering him, he had the desire to look up at the Headmaster. To simply look at him and tell the truth. He knew it was crazy, he managed to squash the desire to say anything he shouldn't, but his head move of its own accord. It felt like a soft touch tipping his head up, so inviting and kind... and he looked at Dumbledore.

Their eyes met. The immediate pressure on Harry’s mind was immeasurable. The Headmaster was trying to look into his thoughts, but he hadn’t expected barriers. Harry wasn't completely sure what was going on, his head felt fuzzy and the room was spinning a little. He knew his Occlumency was working on autopilot, but he was slowly becoming overwhelmed with the feeling that everything would be OK if he just let the Headmaster in.

The force pushing on his mind increased and he was vaguely aware of Fawkes squawking across the room. He continued to fight the warmth that was trying to spread over him, but his subconscious was beginning to give in, because he longed for the kindness being offered. it was different from the Imperius curse, he felt like his emotions were being manipulated and that was much harder to defy.

Then his barriers fell…

He felt it like a blanket was pulled from over his head. Everything he was supposed to be keeping from the Headmaster was going to be revealed, the terror of that idea wiped out all the false feelings of security, unfortunately it was too late to raise his barriers again. But not all was lost, before Dumbledore could make one movement into his mind, a swell of magic burst from Harry and filled the room corner to corner. The massive magic wrapped around Harry's mind and protected his thoughts, he recognized the feeling as the Oath he took with Severus.

It was protecting his secrets, fierce as a lioness over her cub, but it was also drawing its power from his own magic, Harry could feel himself becoming weak, rapidly. As his vision began to darken around the edges, and his ears filled with his own heartbeat, and Dumbledore pushed on.

A flash of fire in the corner of the room went unnoticed by the Headmaster.
Severus was in the room he used at Grimmauld place, he was pouring himself over a large book, and the rest of the room was covered in parchment and various book from his own and the Black collection. His fingers were stained with ink and he had a quill behind his ear that was leaving ink on his temple. It was a habit he had when he was particularly deep in research, one he didn't let others see.

The sound of roaring flames caused Severus to pull his wand, but he stopped short when the fire revealed Fawkes, who flew over and landed on Snape's shoulder.

"What are you…” he began while looking for a letter or some other form of written communication, But Lukewarm flames very suddenly rose up around him and cut off his inquiry. He felt a small, cool hand rest on the side of his face, a hand he recognized. His eyes burned with the memory, and he reached up to place his hand to cover hers, but before he could the hand move away. Severus stepped forward to follow, and then the flames were gone, and he was standing in front of the closed door to the headmaster office. He looked behind at the spiral stairs and then at the bird on his shoulder.

He didn't have time to wonder about how he got here, the magic he felt through the door was alarming. Severus burst into the room, what he found left him shocked, and then he was enraged.

Harry was slumping over in a chair in front of the Headmaster desk. Severus could feel the magic from his Oath with Harry, and the magic from Dumbledore. It only took him a moment to put together what had happened.

Dumbledore stood when his office was breached, "Severus, this isn't what it looks like, I need to save him."

Severus ignored the old man and moved to Harry's side. He fell back on muggle habits in his worry and reached forward to check the boys pulse. The steady beat reassured him that Harry was alive.

"Understand Severus, history cannot repeat and I need Harry until it is time for him…” Albus cut himself short, as if he almost revealed something he shouldn't. Honesty Severus had no idea what he meant by any of it and he didn't care, he was too angry.

"Mr. Potter needs medical attention." He didn't trust himself to say anything else. He was aware
that this was an isolated incident, there was no way to prove what Dumbledore had done because no wands were used, and the old man knew that. Severus couldn't risk any other methods or the Oath he had with Harry might be revealed…

Severus pulled his wand and began to levitate Harry from the room.

"Severus." The weak tone of Dumbledore's voice stopped Snape, he turned and looked into light blue eyes. "You know I wouldn't do anything to endanger anyone unnecessarily, always for the greater good." He was whispering by the end, he sounded like he was convincing himself more than Severus.

"I don't like the boy, but this was uncalled for," Snape replied before leaving the office.

He was also leaving the situation, this was going to become one of many things that he "overlooked" for the Headmaster. There was no way to prove it and Harry will probably not remember most of it, as is often the case with failed Legilimency of this proportion.

Dumbledore will probably feed Harry some lie about why he passed out, but Severus will make sure the boy hears the truth as he should. Luckily it seemed that Albus didn't get any information from Harry. Pride rose in Severus, his boy did well.

oOoOo

Albus fought down the guilt that was rising in his chest. He had to try and see into the boys’ mind, he had to know if it was happening again…

But he got nothing.

He knew Severus was loyal and would keep this quiet, but that wasn't his biggest concern.

Worry overwhelmed the guilt and Dumbledore began twisting his hands nervously. Ronald Weasley was without the curse and Albus had no idea why. It is completely possible that Harry was simply there at the wrong time, or this could be just like before, all those years ago. Then there was that mysterious magic. Just as he thought he was going to get his answers a huge amount of power welled up to stop him. Albus had no idea where it came from, and that scared him, was someone helping the boy protect his mind?
He expected some resistance from Harry, he was sure to have some barriers from his old lessons with Severus, and considering his immunity to the Imperius curse, Albus was not surprised the boy could somewhat resist his… persuasions. But this magic was something else, something dangerous.

Dumbledore looked around his office for his familiar, he wanted something calming. When he didn't see the bird he remember that Fawkes left on Severus's shoulder.

He was left alone to worry about the fate of the wizarding world.

oOoOo

Severus entered the infirmary with Harry floating behind him. He glanced around for a bed and Fawkes flew from his shoulder to land on the railing of one next to Ron Weasley, he had no idea why Weasley was here. He lowered Harry onto the bed next to his friend and turned to search for Pomfrey.

He didn't need to look long, she was already walking over to the bed, her eyes were locked on Harry and her face was grim as death. Without a word she began to cast her spell, the more she cast the more upset she seemed to become. For a moment Severus thought Harry might be more seriously hurt then he assumed, but after another spell Pomfrey diagnosed him as simply magically depleted.

"He was with Albus, wasn't he?" She asked suddenly.

"I cannot confirm that," Severus replied, knowing that Pomfrey would understand. Her face confirmed that she got the message, and she was angry. The Medi-witch looked down at the pale boy for a long moment before turning to retrieve the potions she needed.

"What is Mr. Weasley doing here?" Severus asked when Pomfrey returned with a vial.

"He is also magically depleted." Her answer was curt.

Severus walked over to the red heads bed, "Simple magic depletion?" he asked in a dubious tone. It all seemed a little too coincidental.
He raised his wand to run some test but paused when Pomfrey spoke, "I shouldn't have told him, I had a bad feeling." She looked Severus in the eyes, then she went back to caring for Harry.

Severus ran his spells, the results were not what he expected. There was a lot of core damage, almost too much to recover from, Ron got lucky, but all the core damage was suspicious. Snape assumed and Pomfrey informed Albus of the damage, the Headmaster must have come to check for himself. The only thing that could send Albus into such a frenzy is if the damage was related to the curse. Severus didn't know of any spell that would check for him but he would not be surprised if Albus did.

"It's not your fault, Poppy, you didn't know he would react this way." Severus took a seat in the chair between both beds.

"I just… I don't want to know what he did. He must have had a good reason…" She didn't seem convinced of her own words. She rested both of her hands on the edge of Harry’s bed, and leaned over, looking down at her charge, guilty.

"Go and rest, I will stay for the moment." Severus could stay under the pretense of relieving the madam, this worked well for him. It was something he did sometimes while stocking potions so she could have a break.

"Thank you, Severus." Pomfrey smiled softly through her obvious distress, and went to her quarters.

It only took an hour for the peace that settled over the hospital wing to be broken. The doors burst open with such force that Severus was surprised they didn't dent the wall. He had his hand on his wand before he realized it was a distraught Hermione that caused all the ruckus.

She rushed to her fallen friends but stopped short of both the beds, the sight of Harry being there caught her off guard. She looked from Ron to Harry and was obviously torn about who she should check on first. She worried her hands and shifted from side to side, it was really more than Severus could take. He spoke up before the tears in her eyes overflowed and he would have to face a crying girl, he was always bad at that. "They will both be fine, Hermione."

Her tension deflated like a party balloon, and she walked over to the chair on the left of Ron’s bed and sank into it. Severus wondered how someone her age held up so well under all the pressure she had in her life, on top of that her two closest friends seem determined to commit suicide through
stupidity. "How did Harry end up here?" Hermione's voice was strained, and Severus could see from the distance of one bed length that she worn.

"It is not something… that can be spoken of in such an open area." He kept his voice low, sometimes the Madam of the wing was able to hear talk from her quarters.

Hermione made a sound of understanding and looked down at her entwined hands. "I was getting extra lessons and didn't hear about Ron until after."

Severus heard the admission for what it was, she was not simply explaining, she was admitting guilt. The girl took far too much onto her own shoulders, this was not her fault, nor was it wrong that she didn't hear about it until after her lesson. Severus wanted to tell her as much but found he could not get the words out, it was not in his nature to be that comforting, so he simply repeated… "They will be alright."

Hermione let a small smile slip onto her face, he hoped that meant she understood his meaning.

"Oh, Ms. Granger, I thought you would show up at some point with both your cohorts bedridden here." Madam Pomfrey came from her office looking much more put together then when she went in.

"Good afternoon, Madam Pomfrey." Hermione smiled and nodded like nothing was wrong and the Medi-witch seemed to buy it.

"I have someplace I need to be, apparently something went terribly wrong in transfiguration and the student cannot be transported up here. Can I trouble you a little longer Severus?" Pomfrey didn't seem to be asking since she was still moving about and collecting what she needed to tend to a transfiguration accident.

"It is no trouble, Madam." Severus answered politely, he let a slight edge of irritation into his voice. No need for her to think he wanted to watch over some bedridden brats.

"Thank you, dear." Pomfrey's words trailed after her as she left the ward in a rush.

When the door swung shut Severus immediately pulled his wand and with a quick succession of flicks he erected multiply privacy wards. He slowly turned and stalked across the ward, he stopped
at the foot of Harry's bed. "I know you are awake," He revealed in a flat voice that didn't betray his anger or his worry.

Hermione perked up when she heard Harry sigh, then he slowly opened his eyes. "Hey, Severus," Harry greeted weakly.

Severus did not greet his student back, he crossed his arms over his chest and looked sternly down his nose.

"I uhhhh…" was Harry's intelligent reply to the obvious rebuke that was being directed at him silently. He pulled himself to a sitting position.

"Harry, what happened to Ron, and you? When I came here I thought only Ron was hurt." Hermione cut through the tension, her tone made it clear she didn't care what Severus was trying to accomplish with his silent anger, she just wanted answers.

Harry looked down at the white sheets over his legs, "I had a talk with Ron this morning, and he told me he wanted to be more useful to the Method… I told him about something that happened during my meditation with Severus… and…"

"You said nothing to me about something happening during lessons." Severus cut off Harry's tentative speech, he felt irritation begin to override his worry and it was very apparent in his tone.

"I just didn't think it was very important at the time, it was only confirming something we already knew," Harry tried to justify.

Severus scowled, he felt his face contort in a way that it hadn't since before the Oath with Harry. "You didn't think it was important, but then acted on the information without consulting anyone?"

Harry opened his mouth to defend himself but Hermione cut him off, she looked hurt.

"Do you not trust us?"

Severus could read her like an open book, she was worried that her past mistakes lost her the trust she valued the most.
"NO!" was Harry's immediate and outraged reply, his head snapped up to look at his friend. "That's not it at all!"

"Then what? I do have to side with Ms. Granger on this, it does seem like you don't trust us." Severus hated playing sides, but he felt Harry needed to know how his actions affect others.

Harry looked lost, "I just..." He looked back down at the sheets. "I have been trying to change, to be more proactive, only reacting is how Sirius died. I didn't want to tell anyone because they would stop me from trying and then it might be too late!"

Severus knew he should back down a little, soften his tone maybe, but the boy's complete lack of rational thought irritated him beyond control. "You foolish, incompetent, dunderhead! You are wrong, it is your rash and impulsive actions you need to curb!" Snape walked to the side of the bed to better yell into his student's face. "Did you wake up this morning and just decide to try a dangerous experiment out of the blue?!"

Harry sat up straight and dawned a defiant expression Severus knew too well. "How do you even know it was an experiment or dangerous!? For all you know it was an accident and you are yelling at me for no reason!"

Severus felt the last thread of control snap, his voice became smooth and cold. "I know what you did, because it is the only way the Headmaster would react as he has. The only thing that would make that old man slip up like he just did is if that boy..." He flung his arm out to point at Ron. "Didn't have his curse anymore."

"What do you...?"

"How did...?"

Both Harry and Hermione began to speak, but Severus spoke over them with sharp words.

"You could have KILLED him, YOU could have DIED!" His voice became strained, "Do you know how dangerous it is to touch someone's core with your own magic!? It only takes moments to erase a person's soul! You need TO THINK, TO CONSULT OTHERS!" His voice rose above a yell.
"I DIDN'T KNOW!" Harry screamed, his voice cracked, and his eyes had an obvious shine of tears. "I didn't know it was THAT dangerous!" He cried out in blind defence.

"THAT'S WHY YOU TALK TO SOMEONE! TALK TO ME! First with Ron, and then you placed yourself in danger by going with the Headmaster!" Anger was slipping into pleading, and Severus grasped onto his rage.

"I'M SORRY! It all happened so fast, and then Dumbledore was here and he took me to his office… then I woke up here!" confusion and maybe a little fear mixed into the anger in Harry's voice.

"He almost killed you tonight! I don't know if I am angrier with YOU or HIM! You are both capable of the greatest feats of stupidity, I have ever seen!" Severus said before thinking, his anger slipping further into a hot pool of worry.

Hermione gasped and put her hand over her mouth, she always knew they were fighting against Dumbledore as well Voldemort, but this confirmation of his abuse of power was still shocking.

Harry’s mind seemed to have glossed over his almost demise, and clung onto the insult. "I SAID I DIDN'T KNOW! I WAS JUST TRYING TO LOOK AND… and… then it all got out of hand." The fear reared his voice, and it cracked.

"You call almost KILLING someone OUT OF HAND?!" Severus's anger was a wildfire in his chest being fueled by worry and fear for his student he came to care about… unfortunately it just looked like fury.

Harry was up on his knees so that he wasn't being looked down on. "It just happened and I had to stop Ron's core from getting too damaged and then he fell! And…" The tears that had been threatening to fall this entire time finally broke over his lashes and down his cheeks. "And… he didn't move… I yelled for him to wake up." Harry was lost in his story, guilt coated every word, "Then he woke for a second, he pointed at my forehead… and said... 'there'." He whispered the final word in confusion and pain, so lost.

That one small, quiet word, broke Severus's angry streak, and he felt the heat rush from him.

"Where did he point exactly?" The sudden shift of Snape's voice away from anger snapped Harry from his memories.
"Here." Harry pointed at his scar, "He touched my scar."

The blood drained from Severus's face, he felt behind him for the chair he had occupied before and stumbled back into it. "When Ronald wakes we all need to talk."

"I would think so! What's all this about Dumbledore trying to kill Harry?" Hermione spoke up now that there was a break in the argument.

Severus and Harry looked at her like they had forgotten she was there.

"He didn't know what he did would harm Harry so much, but it still does not excuse his abuse of authority, or of his gift," Severus clarified.

Hermione looked disgusted. "He used his gift?!"

"What does any of this have to do with my scar?" Harry said bluntly almost cutting off Hermione's outrage.

"It doesn't… can we just wait for Weasley to wake, I do not desire to repeat this more than I must." Severus felt drained, if he looked and sounded as tired as he felt, then the children would grant his request, and they did.

"But, Ron's really going to be OK?" Harry asked quietly.

Severus nodded. "I checked myself," he reassured.

Fresh tears of relief traveled down the dry tracks of their predecessor's. Harry dropped from his knees back to sitting on the bed, his face tilted to look at his lap. A small sound escaped him, it could have been a sob, and then it was followed by another sound that was certainly a cry. The young man's emotions finally took over now that everything was settled, and they ripped through him like a storm.

Severus recognized everything Harry was going through, he had gone through it many times himself after his own mistakes, and maybe this would have been his reaction if his own situation
Severus stood before he could stop himself, a wave of empathy drove him to wrap his arms around Harry, and hug him to his chest. The parental comfort broke the dam that was barely keeping the sobs at bay. Harry hugged Severus back and cried.

"I'm sorry, I really- didn't mean for it- to go so far!" Harry was talking between hitched breaths, "I was just trying to be better!" He yelled out his frustration.

Loss of emotional control was a common side effect of magical depletion, but this was also a long time coming. Severus moved a hand to the back of Harry's head, "You were simply rationalizing, trying to find the reason for the loss of your godfather, but that wasn't your fault. You didn't have enough information, and there were too many variables... myself included."

"But this is my fault." Harry's cries slowed, but he kept himself in the embrace.

Severus sighed. "This was a mistake, you are lucky it turned out well. Now you can work on being less rash." He was not very good at verbal comfort, he simply stated the truth.

Harry was silent, Severus pulled him to arm's length and held his shoulders. "You have a new perspective on things, now you know what you have to do. You are very Gryffindor and also very Slytherin, you must balance them, because too much of either is not a good thing."

"You just said that too much Slytherin is bad..." Harry's disbelieving tone put a smirk on Severus's face.

"Yes, many of my own mistakes were caused by the opposite problem you have. I would calculate and manipulate, trying to keep all my options open... it cost me great pain in the end," he admitted.

Hermione came forward and hugged Harry from behind, Severus was grateful she waited for that moment, and didn't interrupt earlier. For being so bookish she really was good at reading a situation.

Hermione pulled back and crawled on the bed next to Harry so she could see his face. "I am upset you did something so thoughtless, but I do see you understand your mistake. So I
forgive you." She crossed her arms to make her statement final.

Harry hugged her, "I'm sorry, Hermione."

Hermione didn't hug him back, but she did mutter, "Better be…"

Fawkes chirped from Harry's head board, sending a calm wave through the room.

oOoOo

Sunday came to a spectacularly underwhelming end. Harry was confined to the infirmary and Severus couldn't stay without seeming suspicious, but he left behind some wards incase the Headmaster decided to visit. Hermione reluctantly left at curfew with Madam Pomfrey shooing her the entire way out.

It was just past midnight, the moonlight was creeping across the white floors like a flowing river. Harry was sound asleep after the emotional roller-coaster he went through that day. He was in his tree watching the thestrals play in his mind's moonlight. Some of them raised their odd scales in a way that Harry interpreted as playful and not angry, others kept them flat on their back.

A familiar clicking sound invaded the peaceful dream, Harry remembered that Fawkes was still perched on his headboard. The bird refused to leave while Harry was still there. It sounded like something was disturbing the phoenix, Harry ignored it, if it was important Fawkes would wake him up more directly. This was a nice night in his mindscape and he really needed the solitude it provided.

The next moment the solitude was broken by something Harry couldn't ignore, a yell ripped through the air and shattered his sleep. He sat up in bed with a shock, the juxtaposition of reality from his dream caused his head to spin. He woozily turned to see Ron curled up in a ball, pressing the heels of his hands into his eyes. He was shaking slightly and his breathing was heavy. Harry was grateful that he didn't continue to yell or Pomfrey would have heard.

Harry rubbed the sleep from his eyes, he was relieved beyond belief that Ron was awake, but the scream from earlier kept a healthy amount of worry afloat.

He slid out of bed and quietly maneuvered to Ron's side. "Hey." Harry whispered, he reached out and placed his hand softly on Ron's shoulder.
The warm arm under his palm tensed as Ron's entire body became stiff. One of his tightly shut eyes cracked open, the wrinkles around his eye lid told Harry it was a great effort for him.

"Harry?" Ron whispered.

His pupils were blown wide leaving only a small rim of blue around a pit of black, he snapped his eye shut and hissed in pain. "Everything is so bright!" Ron groaned.

Harry glanced around the ward, it was dim with only the moonlight. He didn't understand why Ron was being blinded, but the way his eyes looked might explain why he was in so much pain.

If this had something to do with Ron's gift then Harry couldn't get Pomfrey unless he absolutely had to, so he did the only thing he could think of. He used his own gift. Severus said he had the power to soothe other people's magic and Ron's was obviously tangled up after being released. Harry grabbed his friend's wrists gently, and tried to pull his hands away from his eyes.

Ron struggled against him, "No!" He whined.

"Ron, I can help. Trust me." Harry's words were punctuated with his effort to move Ron's hands.

At Harry's words Ron stopped and allowed his hands to be removed, his face crumpled in pain when his eyelids were the only thing keeping the light out. After everything that had happened, it warmed Harry that his friend still trusted him. He rested his hand over Ron's eyes, a small sigh of relief slipped out and his face relaxed.

Harry focused like he was taught by Severus when meditating, his hand warmed with magic and he could feel his own power guiding Ron's confused magic into order. Something told Harry that the magic was tangled up because it was new, there wasn't always this much power around Ron's eyes, and it was simply trying to do its job.

Something warm and damp met Harry's skin, he moved his hand and looked down to see a tears slip from Ron's open eyes. His pupils were normal but the blue of his iris was brighter and clearer than before.

"Are you ok?" Harry asked.
Ron nodded, he wiped his face quickly, "Yeah, mate. My eyes burn a little, s'why their watering…” He muttered from behind his sleeve.

"How is your vision? Is everything still bright?" Harry leaned forward to get a good look at his friend eyes.

Ron's eyes lingered on Harry's forehead a moment, then he leaned away and squinted.

"Yeah, but not as bad as before, now it's like everything is glowing, but you are the brightest in the room, so don't get so close." He pressed Harry back by his shoulder.

"Sorry." Harry smiled and ran his hand through his hair.

"We should get some sleep, I'm sure Snape can figure out what's happening with me tomorrow." Ron admitted begrudgingly.

"Well we know that your curse was removed, so I guess we just have to figure out what your gift is, though your eyes are a big hint," Harry explained with a sheepish smile.

Ron's bright blue eyes became huge with shock, "My curse is gone?"

Harry nodded.

"Huh…” Ron leaned back in his bed, he looked like he was trying to absorb the information.

"Well…” Harry moved back to his own bed, "Night then…”

"Night," Ron responded distantly.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes
"The Night Vale medical board has issued a new study indicating that you have a spider somewhere on your body at all times, but especially now. The study said the further research would be needed to determine exactly where on your body the spider is and what its intentions are. Only that it is definitely there and is statistically likely to be one of the really ugly ones."

Night Vale

A/N- Not much to say about this one, the white space is full of things for the next chapter. I also watch as people wander in and out looking for more but never leaving anything behind. Please leave your thoughts for me… but no spiders.

Recalibrated 1/26/2018

Beta’d - 3/11/2018 - minijaxter - also Dumbledore is a jerk. :}
The Waiting, The Worried and Gryffindors

Chapter Notes

AN- I am very sorry about the long wait, but I have a monster of a chapter for you. I meant to finish this sooner, but I gave myself a plot goal to reach and then kept realizing I had more things to add to the story before my goal… That mixed with the holidays and a sinus infection, kinda slowed me down, but I did it!

My life is going to become, interesting… in the next few months, so please be patient with me. I have no plans to abandon this story.

Remember when I told you guys about my roof collapsing and all the housing problems? Well, back then we found great apartment that I love and never want to leave until I move away from this town. Just last week I got word from my landlord and he said that he will not renew my lease due to circumstances out of his control, that he can't tell me about. I am now on a month to month set up and he can give me a 30 day notice at any time, I assume that he might not own the building soon, and is preparing for the worst… so I might be moving… again.

Anyway, I am really glad I can talk here in my AN and at the bottom of the chapter, I hope you guys don't mind and maybe feel like you can relate to me, or like you have someone to commiserate with.

Either way, remember you are not alone in your problems and feel free to bitch at the bottom of your reviews if you are having a bad time. I don't mind.

Love you all!

*Thanks to my Beta Minijaxter, you are the best!

Also play Undertale…

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.
Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 24

The Waiting, The Worried and Gryffindors

The sound of many voices overlapping washed through Harry's dream scape, he groaned as his tree began to dissolve and the waking world came into focus. The voices receded like a wave as he opened his eyes. Through the first crack of light, Harry could see a crowd of people, all of them were looking at him.

"He's waking up." A hushed whisper cut through the calming din of other voices.

It was completely silent when Harry sat up, it was one of the very few times silences reigned in a room full of Weasleys. Molly Weasley walked briskly to Harry's bed side and wrapped him in a tight hug. "We were so worried about Ron when Professor McGonagall fire called us, then we got here this morning and found you in the hospital wing as well." Her arms tightened before letting go. She held both Harry's shoulders in her hands and looked him in the face with an honest expression. "I am so relieved you are both OK."

Harry felt a heave of guilt, obviously Mrs. Weasley didn't know the true reason her son was in the hospital wing. He tried to shrug the feeling off as best he could and smiled back at his friend's mom. "Thanks, Mrs. Weasley."

She smiled softly back before heading over to her family.
Harry glanced at Ron who shrugged back and smiled. He was obviously over any trauma he might have experienced, Ron was always good at that. Probably had something to do with having too many older brothers.

Madam Pomfrey bustled over and began giving Harry a checkup, while she buzzed around him waving her wand he looked at the rest of the room. Mr. Weasley was in the back talking to Severus, Harry wasn't sure what the Professor was doing here, and it was odd since he was supposed to dislike both Harry and Ron. Separate from everyone else, the twins plus Ginny were huddled together whispering.

The door to the wing opened just enough for Hermione to slip in almost completely unnoticed, she moved to the whispering group and added her own voice to their secret conversation.

Harry's mind was wandering and he was about to let himself zone out when one voice began to rise over the others. "Well, why is he not here to explain what happened?" Mrs. Weasley's voice was becoming high with anxiety.

"Calm down dear, I am sure there is a good reason," Mr. Weasley attempted to soothe.

At some point while Harry's mind was wondering Mrs. Weasley had joined Severus and her husband's conversation. "I will NOT calm down. Our son almost died and the Headmaster is nowhere to be found. I want an explanation." Molly hissed between her teeth.

"If we can all keep our tempers in check I will explain everything," Severus drawled condescendingly.

Harry held back a snort, it was very hypocritical for Snape to tell anyone to hold their temper after yesterday's events.

As angry as Mrs. Weasley was, she was not about to defy Severus unless she had to. After a moment of silence that assured Snape there would be no more outbursts he began to speak. His raised lecture voice drew the attention of the whispering group and their muttering died down. "The events that occurred yesterday morning were caused by an accident." Severus paused to make sure everyone in the room was listening. "Young Mr. Weasley suffered magical depletion due to an error while he and Mr. Potter were practicing spells for class. Mr. Potter was caught in the backlash of a magical burst, which is why he was kept overnight as well," Severus's voice didn't even waver as he lied.
Harry saw Madam Pomfrey stiffen as she finished her last spell, her face pitched by her dislike for lies. She knew that Harry was injured later the same day and not that morning, but she didn't try to reveal the lie for what it was. Harry wondered if she was ordered to keep silent or did it because she understood the situation.

"If he was only magically depleted why is he still being held here?" Mrs. Weasley questioned.

Severus turned to her slowly,

"There was an unforeseen side effect…" He raised his wand and erected many privacy wards. Everyone shuffled around a bit nervous. "The side effect is, He no longer has his gift restrained," Snape explained bluntly.

Harry felt a shock run through him, he didn't expect Severus to tell anyone outside the Method. He glanced at Pomfrey, her lack of surprise confirmed that someone had told her already.

Mrs. Weasley gasped, and the members of the method tried to act confused.

"Oh dear," Mr. Weasley groaned.

Mrs. Weasley twisted her hands together. "Do we know which gift…?" She weakly whispered.

"The Prewett." Severus voice seemed to cut the woman like a knife, she stumbled back with a hand to her breast.

"No…" She breathed.

Harry looked at Ron to find him looking back, his face was concerned and confused. This time Harry was the one to shrug, he honestly had no idea what the big deal was.

"Wait… so you knew we all have a curse on us?" Ginny's incredulous tone broke the silence.

Harry would have firmly placed his palm to his face if he could have, but he didn't want to lose his cover as a innocent bystander just yet. The look on Severus’ face showed his own desired to show
his dismay. They couldn't avoid telling Ron's parents about his curse being removed, Harry knew that they needed to know more about his gift, and the elder Weasley's were the only ones with the information, but Harry hoped the Method members would figure it out and play dumb. He also wished Severus wouldn't go ahead with his Slytherin plans and expect everyone else to catch on.

"All the pureblood families knew Ms. Weasley." Severus made his tone as condescending as possible.

"And how did you know about the curse, young lady?" Mr. Weasley turned to his daughter.

Ginny froze like a deer in the night bus lights. "W... what? I didn't know, I just can't believe you kept this from us!" she put on an almost believable angry face.

Harry wanted to groan out loud, Ginny was not smooth when it came to lying, but her parents seemed to buy it and that's all that mattered.

"Ummm..." Ron made his presence in the room known. He looked nervous to have everyone looking at him. "Why is it so bad for me to have the Prewett gift...? Whatever that means." If Harry didn't know that Ron already knew about gifts, he would have been fooled by his friends act. Apparently some people in his family could lie properly. Harry glanced at Severus to find him looking at Ron, bewildered. Luckily no one was looking at Snape.

"Oh! My baby!" Mrs. Weasley cried out as she rushed to her son and wrapped him in a tight embrace.

"MUM!" Ron yelled while trying to remove himself from her arms, "Just tell me what's going on!"

He waved his arms around before slamming them to the bed once his mother was a safe distance.

"Molly, please." Mr. Weasley put a comforting arm around his wife to calm her, "We should tell them all, in case this happens to another of our children." Mrs. Weasley reluctantly nodded. Mr. Weasley gestured to Snape.

What followed was a lecture very similar to the one Severus had given when he joined the Method, about what the curse was and how gifts worked. All the members of the Method nodded and pretended to be hearing the information for the first time, some with better acting than others.
All of the Method members attention sharpened when the name Prewett was mentioned.

"Now we come to why this is a problem for Ronald." Severus was pacing as he lectured.

"There are many families with many unique gifts in the world. The Dark Lord desired to possess individuals with these powers for his own use… except a few. There were a select number of families he attempted to eradicate from the planet. The Prewett's were one of these families, although I never figured out why." Severus turned to Mrs. Weasley and raised a brow indicating she explain.

Harry waited with anticipation, he had been wondering about the answer to this riddle since Severus first told him the prophecy about Ron's family. The white sheep among the black…

He was also looking forward to the relief of Ron finally knowing the truth, Harry really wanted to tell his friend about the prophecy Snape heard but the oath stopped him.

Mrs. Weasley took a deep breath, her pale face was grim as she began her explanation.

"During the first war, You-Know-Who hunted my family down… I am not the only survivor." She glanced at Severus. "I believe I also have an uncle who escaped out of the country, but he was less of a concern for the Death Eaters since he didn't have the family gift." She swallowed thickly, she obviously didn't want to continue, as if every fiber of her being was trained to never speak about this topic. "The reason we were hunted is because our gift threatened to expose the true reason the Death Eaters stayed loyal." She stopped again, her face was even paler.

Harry remembered that the Dark Mark was actually a channel to keep the Death Eaters in Voldemort's thrall from a distance, or even possess them in Draco's case.

After Mrs. Weasley regained herself she continued. "You see, the Prewett's ability is to see Magic, and we were able to see how the Dark Mark worked. You-Know-who didn't want us telling anyone, or he might have less people willing to join him…” she let herself fall into a chair by her son's bed.

Severus picked up the topic by explaining the small prophecy he heard from Sybil. He made it seem like he was the only one who know about the prophecy and that it was a recent development.

The room was silent, Harry glanced at Ron and was surprised by how calm he looked. Most people would be scared to have an ability that will make them a target, or angry that they had this information kept from them, but Ron had any intense look of concentration. The same look Harry saw every time his friend was calculating strategy. There was a good possibility that Ron didn't hear anything after he found out he could see magic.
Remus sat in the Grimmauld place Kitchen with a glossy wooden box on the table in front of him. Draco was across the table looking somewhat bored, but overall more comfortable then he expected being alone with a werewolf. Draco had heard that his least preferred Weasley and Harry were in the hospital wing from Severus as he passed through the hideout, but he was unable to get more information since he was confined to the house. It did explain why no one was in the safe house when normally there was at lease Hermione in the library.

He thought he would spend the entire day alone and bored, but then Lupin showed up with a mystery box. Draco was reluctant to join his former professor, but honestly anything was better than being alone with nothing to do. Also, it seemed like Lupin wanted to show someone what he had, he looked excited when he entered the house and his eyes were bright in a way Draco had never seen.

Draco leaned over the table to get a better look at the box, it was dark wood with some faded labels that indicated it was once used to store expensive cigars. Remus was looking down at the container with a strange glint in his eyes, it reminded Draco of the twins. Slowly the older man reached out and lifted the lid, inside was an array of seemingly normal objects, plus a few Draco had never seen.

"It was exactly where we had left it, I was sure Sirius would have taken it when we left school, but it was still there," Remus said, while taking objects from the box one by one and laying them out on the table.

Nothing that was being put on display looked very interesting to Draco, there was a bunch of blank parchments that Lupin was organizing into piles seemingly by the color of the paper. Some of the paper was almost white, while other sheets varied in shades of yellows, reds, and browns.

Along with the parchment, many small vials with different colored ink were placed in a line. Next Remus reached into the box and pulled out small paper envelopes with neat writing on them, they looked to be filled with different substances. The last thing that came from the box was a long oval stone, it was very smooth and looked almost like a shallow bowl. Draco couldn't imagine what it was for, he leaned forward a bit to inspect it.

Remus must have seen him looking intently at the stone and decided to enlighten him.

"That's an ink stone."
Draco looked up at the older man. "Ink stone?" Was that what ink was made of, he wondered.

Lupin slipped into teaching mode. "Yes, in some Asian countries ink is stored as a dry bar. To use it, a solvent is put in this ink stone and then the stick is rubbed on the stone until some dissolves. Some Inks store well when dried, but some others need to stay wet to work. For us wizards, we are able to add magical ingredients to get different types of ink, such as color changing ink. If you know what you are doing, people can make ink that's not just aesthetic but has a deeper purpose."

Draco felt a slight pang of interest, it sounded similar to potions and he always liked knowing more about anything to do with that subject. He leaned back in his chair to ponder this new information. He felt silly that he never knew where ink came from, it was always just there when he needed it. Were there many other gaps in his understanding of his immediate surroundings? He overlooked something he used every day and didn't know about an entire section of magic because of the oversight. Draco decided he should be more interested in his surroundings. Granger probably knew all about ink and its production. He wonder if his ignorance about where his resources came from had anything to do with his wealth growing up.

"Why are you the only one here today?" Remus asked with a light tone.

The question knocked Draco from his train of thought. "With Weasley and Harry bedridden, everyone is at the castle." He noticed how relaxed Lupin was around him, and hoped this was a sign that he was being accepted into the Method. He was truly beginning to see the appeal of this group's motives.

"Ah, yes. I wish I could visit them as well, but like yourself, it would be out of place for me to be seen in the school." Remus fiddled with the ink stone, he looked a bit guilty.

Draco felt an opening, his Slytherin side never completely dormant. Comforting Lupin would look good to the others, he would never admit he might want to make the other man feel better… nope. "Severus said they would both be out tomorrow. I am more annoyed than worried, I was supposed to be prepping for a practical test of the portkeys I designed with the terror twins." Draco pouted a bit.

Remus chuckled, "Yes, I am glad they are OK. It must be very vexing to have a project halted at such a crucial point." He turned his attention back to the materials in front of him and continued to organize them.

Draco leaned back in his chair, he tried to give off an air of disinterest as he casually asked about the materials. "So… what is all this?" He looked at the table of items from the side of his eye.
"Oh, this?" Remus played along with the boy's attitude, "It's nothing really."

Draco snapped forward in his chair, "If it's nothing, then why were you so excited about it?" His voice was sharp with irritation. Lupin let out a full rich laugh. Draco had never heard his former professor laugh, he always seemed to just chuckle lightly. It felt odd that he was the one to make Lupin laugh.

"You are truly a curious individually, aren't you?" Remus's voice was still light with humor.

Draco crossed his arms and curled back in his seat, "NO!" he felt his cheeks warm up.

Lupin laughed again, the sound was thick and golden. It seemed to fill the room with comfort, the effect was like the opposite of when he was angry. Draco peered up at the older man and found warm hazel eyes looking back, his cheeks flared with the heat of his blush. No one ever looked at Draco with affection like that, not even his own father. The gaze was filled with something like protective endearment, it was similar to how the Wolf looked at Harry. Draco felt his chest tighten, was he being taken into Lupin's pack like Harry was? Both he and Remus spent much of their time in the safe house, even if they didn't spend it together, maybe the Wolf instincts had something to do with it.

Draco expected to be revolted by the idea that a werewolf wanted to take him in like some sort of pathetic orphan, but the feeling never came. He couldn't deny that he was an orphan… and having someone to fill the empty space his parents left was comforting, and a bit hard to accept…

Lupin's voice pulled Draco from his thoughts. "All this stuff is from the research used to make the Marauders Map."

Draco perked up, he had seen the map only once since he had come to the house, but he heard all about it from Granger. This was his chance to know something before Hermione, and it was about something important to her. Draco leaned forward as Remus began explaining all the items.

oOoOo

Harry fiddled with his rings. He turned them around his fingers over and over, ignoring the red irritation of the skin around the metal. A small hand settled on his own, effectively stopping his nervous movements. "You are going to rub your skin off if you keep that up," Hermione
They were sitting together in Transfiguration. The lecture was simply background noise for Harry. He wanted to be out, classes seemed almost trivial after everything that happened. He had planning to do, Severus had something to tell them in the next PM meeting and Ron had training for his new gift. Unfortunately he was still a student and needed to keep his grades up…

Severus wouldn't tell him anything until Friday night. He couldn't stop the rest of the Method from holding a meeting during the week, but he firmly said he would not attend. Apparently he was behind on his grading and would only come to the house to train Ron. Harry pulled his hands out from under Hermione's and reached up to fiddle with the stopper and tiny cup on his necklace. He heard Hermione sigh as she turned back to her notes.

After what seemed like forever, McGonagall finished her lecture and class was over. Harry shoved all his books in his bag as fast as possible and then waited for Hermione.

"Are you coming to the safe house tonight?" Harry asked.

Hermione didn't look up from her packing, "Ummm, no. I have something to do."

"Lessons with Jigger?" Harry tried to keep an accusatory tone out of his voice. He didn't exactly think that Jigger was bad for Hermione, but it also seemed odd to have as many extra lessons as she did. It was Tuesday, they had Potions tomorrow and Double Potions was on Monday, what could she possibly need to see him for today?

"Uh, yeah." Hermione continued to look down at her bag as she latched it shut. Harry trudged out after her to Double Charms.

oOoOo

**Tuesday**

Harry sat quietly in the Blue room.
Ron was undergoing the same training Harry and Draco had done. The twins were picked to find potential items to be Ron's anchor. Harry thought it was fitting, as close as he was to Ron he could not beat the twins, Ron practically idolized them… when he wasn't being used for testing.

Luna sat next to Harry with a delicate white cup in her hands, the surface of the tea cup had a pearly sheen. Harry could smell her special tea, it was simply the scent of Luna at this point. He was surprised that Ron was open to having people watch him train, and that Snape allowed it, something about Ron being calmer in company than in solitude.

Harry watched as his friend tried to meditate over his anchor. It was a small orange flag on a stick with Chudley Cannons written across it. Ron admitted it was the first thing he ever owned that wasn't a hand me down, he had saved it for years.

Warm pressure on Harry's shoulder announced the arrival of Fawkes. According to Remus, the phoenix arrived at the safe house after Harry was released from the hospital wing. When he arrived to watch Ron train the bird followed him around. Harry assumed he would eventually get bored and leave. He reached up at stroked Fawkes's red feathers as he mentally planned the next PM meeting.

"That… went better than expected," Severus' smooth voice announced.

Harry refocused, Ron was out of his meditation with a goofy smile on his face. He smiled up at Harry. "I did it," he said proudly.

Harry laughed, "Awesome."

"While you both are here, I have a question." Ron looked between Harry and Severus, but his eyes dropped to Harry’s chest every time he glanced at him.

Harry glanced at Snape and shrugged. "Sure, what's up?"

Ron looked at Harry's chest again and then down at his own chest. "I can see a line of magic connecting me to Harry… specifically where his necklace is. I was wondering if I should be worrying about that."

Severus' brows almost touched his hairline, he moved closer to the boys to investigate.
"Fascinating, can you describe to me what the magic line looks like?"

The sheer curiosity in Snape's voice made Harry laugh. He had almost completely forgotten about the magical link with everything that had happened. He couldn’t really see it when he wasn’t meditating, so it slipped his mind.

oOoOo

Wednesday

DADA was drawing to a close. It wasn't the most interesting lesson, mostly review. There was only a few weeks until Holiday break, so all the professors were preparing small mid year tests. Thinking about break agitated Harry’s anxiety, he had written a letter to Dudley and offered to bribe Marge for his freedom, but his cousin never wrote back. On top of that issue was the problem with Draco's Mother. The blond was expected home and he still needed a way to save his mother from the mark. Hopefully the field test of the portkeys will go well and everything would work out.

Harry glanced at Ron, he was rubbing the small flag shaped pendant under his table. He still needed to consciously ground his surface magic every few hours because he couldn't control his ability to see magic yet. Harry looked back to the front of the room and pretended to pay attention, he simply wanted this week to end so he could move on with PM's plans. He hoped his paying attention face was enough to fool Severus.

Class ended and Harry packed as quickly as possible, maybe if he moved faster the day would end faster. He turned to hurry Ron and Hermione along, but only Ron was still packing his books, Hermione wasn't even in the room anymore.

"We should probably catch up to Hermione or we won't get a table near her." Harry started helping Ron clean up.

"Why would we want to get to Potions any sooner than we have to? I don't get that girl." Ron grumbled as he latched his bag.

The walk to the dungeon was torturous, Harry wondered if someone was slowing time so Friday would never come.

When they finally arrived at the classroom only half the students had arrived, Harry was earlier
than he had ever been for Potions. He spotted Hermione at the front middle table and began moving to join her but Ron grabbed his arm and dragged him to the table behind her.

"No way am I stilling front and center," he muttered.

Hermione looked back at them and laughed lightly, "It's not going to kill you, Ron."

Ron crossed his arms and stubbornly stayed seated. Before anymore arguments could be made, the seat besides Hermione was filled by someone unexpected. Hermione look at the newcomer, silently waiting for them to do something.

Ron began to stand and say something, but Harry reached out and pulled him down into his chair by his arm.

"Granger." The newcomer nodded.

"Parkinson," Hermione responded neutrally.

Both girls turned to face the front of the room with no further comment. Harry leaned close and whispered to Ron, "This is a good thing, Snape said he was going to slowly spread the idea of other options besides Voldemort to the Slytherins before bringing any to PM."

Ron huffed lightly, "I know it's good, I just have trouble not reacting."

Harry nodded and focused on the caldron in the front of the room as class began.

"Jiggers is a creep for watching his students from the corner." Ron whispered from the side of his mouth. Jigger emerged from the shadows where Ron had indicated, with a smile on his face that was out of place for someone skulking in dark corners. Apparently Ron could see someone's magic even if they were shrouded by shadows.

Professor Jigger walked slowly to the caldron which brought him closer to his class. For every step the man took in their direction Ron scooted back his stool. Harry glanced over at Ron, his eyes were becoming wide.

Jigger stopped at the cauldron and placed his hands on the rim facing the students. "Hello, class."
His voice was smooth and calming.

Harry heard Ron's breath hitch, his hand reach out and grabbed Harry's robe sleeve in a vice grip causing Harry to turn and look at him.

Ron's face was pale, his freckles stood out starkly against his skin. "Don't you see what's happening?" He asked in a quiet shaky voice, as if he had a hard time getting the words out. He was gesturing to their professor.

Harry tipped his head to the side in earnest confusion, "It's just Professor Jigger, he is a good guy."

Ron stumbled back off of his stool and away from Harry. The loud screech of his seat on the floor brought Jiggers attention down on the previously unnoticed interaction.

"Is everything all right over here?" He asked, concerned.

Ron remained silent and pale, Harry smiled up at his professor. "Everything's fine, sir," he lied.

Ron took another slow step back before turning and rushing out of the room.

Jigger looked after him with a bewildered expression.

Harry laughed nervously. "He said he wasn't feeling well, he looked like he was going to sick up, didn't he?"

"Well, someone should probably check on him," Jigger suggested.

Harry stood quickly, "Right, I will go do that."

Jigger smiled comfortably. "That's a good lad, Potter. Have Ms. Granger catch you up after class."
Harry was halfway to the door before Jigger finished speaking. When the door shut he looked around and found Ron still out in the corridor. He was sitting on the stone floor with his back against the rough wall. He looked up when he heard the door, and his pale face relaxed when he saw Harry.

Before Ron could finish standing up Harry was already grabbing his arm and pulling his friend behind him causing Ron to stumble along.

"Harry, slow down!" Ron yelled when he almost completely lost his footing.

Harry stopped in the middle of the entrance hall. "We need to get to the Safe house and talk." He moved in the direction of the stairs without looking back, expecting Ron to follow.

oOoOo

Harry and Ron tumbled out of the floo one after another into the kitchen of the Safe house. Draco and Remus looked up from the tea they were sharing at the table. Harry shook off the odd sight of those two having tea and turned on Ron.

"So what was that all about?" He crossed his arms, something was irritating him in the back of his mind and it was putting him in a foul mood.

Ron stood straight, making the fact that he was a head taller than Harry more obvious. "Don't give me that attitude, you didn't see what I saw." He crossed his arms as well.

Draco Leaned back in his chair with his tea, Harry heard a faint 'this should be good'.

With a sigh Harry unfolded his arms, "Look, I'm sorry I snapped. I honestly don't know why I am so irritated by this," he apologized.

Ron also relaxed his stance, "Yeah, its OK mate."

Draco let out a quiet sound of disappointment came from the table.
"SO, what happened? What did you see?" Harry asked calmly.

Ron got himself a cup and sat at the table to make tea. "I honestly don't know what happened, but I know what it looked like." He scooped sugar into his cup and swirled it around while thinking. "I can't believe I am about to say this, but I wish Snape was here, he could tell me what everything I saw meant."

As if on cue the floo flared and Snape unfolded from the green flames. He set his withering gaze on Harry and Ron. "You two are meant to be in Potions," he drawled.

"Are you tracking us?" Harry snapped.

Severus raised a brow and turned to Ron as if declining to dignify the accusation with a response. "I have a ward on the floo that tells me whenever anyone uses it. If one of the members of PM is off school grounds. it is good to know that they are here and not missing."

"Makes sense." Ron shrugged.

Severus also moved to prepare himself tea. "What brings you two here when you are supposed to be in class?"

"Ron saw something when Jigger came into the room and ran out of class, I said Ron was sick and followed." Harry summed up.

Snape Hmmm'ed as he tapped his spoon dry on the side of his tea cup, "I thought this might happen."

"That Ron would see something?" Draco asked. He had a shine of excitement in his eyes. Things must be incredibly dull being in the house all the time.

"Yes, I didn't want to say anything, but apparently it was very noticeable that something is not right with our Potions Professor. It had been bothering me for a while," Severus explained.
"But I thought it was the DADA Professors that were cursed…" Harry clammed up when he realized what he had just said to Snape.

"I have no doubts that I will not continue at Hogwarts after the close of the school year, but don't you see what a great opportunity this created for the Dark Lord?" Severus waited for someone to answer, and Draco didn't disappoint.

"Oh! If you became the DADA professor like Voldemort wanted and then he had someone kill Slughorn…"

"Then there was a not cursed position to fill…" Ron cut in.

Harry laughed, "Are you saying that Jigger is a Death Eater? That's crazy, he's so nice."

"But is he?" Ron pushed.

"Well… yeah..." Harry tailed off, suddenly not so sure. He felt odd, everything he remembered of Jigger felt OK. The man had done some creepy things, like the first class with that green potion and skulking around the forest, but it all seemed innocent enough. "What did you see Ron?" Harry needed to know.

Everyone turned their attention to Ron. "Like I said I'm not completely sure, I'm new to the magic vision thing, but as Jigger walked closer I saw his magic expanding… it filled the room kinda like when you and Snape do the Oath thing. Only when the magic touched someone it didn't cover them, it kinda seemed to be absorbed by everyone. It felt like…” Ron's eyes were far away as he remembered.

"Could it have been some sort of protection spell or something, for if a caldron exploded, maybe?" Harry suggested.

"I don't think so," Ron countered. "What I was seeing made me worry, but what I felt when the magic touched me… I was calm and the emotions conflicted with my first impression. Like one was a feeling that came normally and the other was being… induced? When I said something to Harry, the idea that Jigger might be up to something didn't seem to register for him." He looked at Harry as if studying him.
Severus stood up and began to pace. "I have encountered such a feeling when around the man myself. I feel like there is a very light tapping on my mental wards, as if my barriers are alerting me to something. When I am away from Jigger I find him irritating, but when around him I am not as angry. If you see him regularly, as students do, the effect might not wear off easily."

Harry sat back, was this really true? Did he like Jigger because the man made him? Was he possibly overlooking worrying clues because the man seemed nice... The floo flared but Harry ignored it to voice his thoughts. "So, it's possible that Jigger is a Death Eater and he has the power to what... seem harmless?"

"That's ridiculous, Professor Jigger keeps his sleeves rolled up when he tutors me and there is no Dark mark." Everyone turned when Hermione spoke. Harry looked down at his watch, it wasn't double potions today.

"Sorry we left you in class Hermione," Harry rubbed his hair nervously.

Hermione smiled, "it's fine, Pansy thought it was her presence that caused Ron to leave, until I described the amount of bacon he ate at breakfast."

"Hey!" Ron pouted.

"Pansy?" Draco asked.

"Yes, she sat with me today," Hermione looked proud of this accomplishment.

The idea that his friends were a step closer to joining him made Draco smile.

"If we could please refocus on the topic at hand, I still have grading to complete," Severus's commanding voice ended any side conversations.

"Yes, as I was saying. Professor Jigger does not have the Dark Mark. I have noticed a calm in his presence and I have concluded it's a spell to keep students calm so they are less likely to make a mistake. Also, if he were a Death Eater and he wanted to strike at Harry he could have done so through me many times over." Hermione finished in a tone that challenged someone to find a flaw in her logic.
As always Ron was up to the challenge. "But if his power is something that makes him seem harmless and it gets a better hold the more time you spend with him like Snape said, then you would be compromised."

Hermione looked irritated, "That doesn't change the fact that there is no Dark Mark, and we all know Voldemort is too arrogant to not Mark someone under his service. It could be that he uses his calming spell unconsciously," she snapped.

"For the record I wasn't informed of another spy in Hogwarts beside Severus," Draco interjected.

"Nor was I," Severus added.

"See," Hermione said with a smug tone.

Harry always found it amusing how much she enjoyed beating Ron.

Severus interrupted Hermione's gloating to amend his statement. "But, the Dark Lord doesn't tell me everything and Draco was very low in the hierarchy."

Hermione bit her lip, "I know you all have valid points but there is a lot pointing to the Professor not being bad. I spend a lot of time with him and he has never done anything bad and he has had a lot of chances."

"We also spent a year with a fake Moody Death Eater and didn't notice," Harry pointed out.

"But you were also mysteriously entered into a death tournament that year as well," Hermione argued.

Severus stood up, "We have no way to prove exactly what Jigger’s magic is doing, or if it is with nefarious intentions. We also cannot prove he is or isn't a spy, but we should be wary and keep an eye on him. I am glad that Ronald has brought this to our attention." He began to walk to the floo, "Now, I have work to do."
"Can't we just have a Method meeting now? Classes are over." Harry pleaded, he really didn't want to wait until Friday to get everyone on the same page.

"No." Snape turned and flooed away.

Thursday … was slow and uneventful.

Friday

Ten minutes…

Harry glanced at his watch, still ten minutes.

He stared at the little hand as it moved around the face of the watch his cousin gave him. The second hand was nearing 12 o'clock, and with its passing there would only be nine minutes left of charms.

A hand suddenly blocked Harry's view of the timepiece. "Harry," Hermione hissed under her breath.

Harry looked up at his obviously irritated friend.

"Take some notes or something, Professor Flitwick is staring at you," she warned.

Harry sighed and picked up his quill, he didn't bother pretending to write he just twirled it in his fingers to distract himself from the time. The moment class was dismissed Harry shot up from his seat and began to pack as fast as he could. Everyone was going to arrive at the safe house within the hour and Harry wanted to put his things away and prepare. He had a feeling this was going to
be a long meeting.

A half an hour later Harry was in the safe house with Dobby bringing in food from Hogwarts and setting it up on the table. This would be the first time that a meeting would happen during dinner. Severus expressed concerns about all of them being absent at the same time from the great hall and insisted this be a one time thing.

The sound of feathers alerted Harry to Fawkes entering the room. The bird swooped to the fireplace mantle and settled down.

"Hello Fawkes," Harry greeted.

The bird sang a single note in reply, puffed his feather and began grooming. Harry wondered if the phoenix knew there was going to be a meeting and was preparing for guests. He also wondered when the bird would get bored and leave.

Just as Dobby finished setting up Hermione arrived. "Harry! You left so fast you forgot a book." She tossed the text at Harry who barely caught it in time. She pulled her large tabbed binder from her bag and moved to the front of the room where the board was located and began to copy bullet points for the meeting. Harry groaned as the list grew longer and longer, all he wanted to do was get things in motion and to know what Severus wanted to tell them… but it looked like there was a lot to talk about.

Everyone else began to arrive soon after Hermione finished her list. Draco and Remus came into the Kitchen from other parts of the house, they were talking and laughing. Harry wondered when they became so close, he wasn't sure if he was happy or jealous. The twins were the last to arrive and take their seats, they did so with their normal flourish.

Everyone loaded their plates with food, while Hermione began the meeting points that could be discussed while eating. "We all know that there are plans for some Slytherins to join our ranks, Severus has already begun planting suggestions in his conversations with the chosen students."

Hermione smiled and pulled her wand out. "On Wednesday, Pansy Parkinson willingly sat with me in Potions, we were civil and she often made eye contact with other prospective members. I think she was trying to gauge if Severus' hints were true and I was their safest bet."
She used her wand to put a checkmark next to the bullet point of the topic. "I say that's progress, we can soon approach them," she concluded.

Harry didn't miss the look of excitement that floated across Draco's face, even if he was getting on better with many of the people here, he probably missed his friends. The chatter about the Slytherin news calmed down and Hermione moved on to the next topic. "Next, I would like the Twins and Draco to explain their progress with the Portkey experiment."

The twins both looked up with their mouths full of food. One of them began to speak and a chunk of mashed potatoes fell out of their mouth and on to their plate.

Draco cringed at the sight, "I think I will explain." He put his utensils down neatly. "We have made great progress integrating my knot magic with the twin's new portkeys. Previously, Portkeys could not be used to leave wards that prevent them from activating, until the twins came up with a way of keying the portkey into the specific wards."

The twins stepped in to explain with their potato free mouths. "We still haven't found a way to create portkeys that bypass all wards without first syncing it into the wards-" one twin explained. The other twin cut in to elaborate, "But with Draco's knot magic we can create one that will bypass his family's knot magic wards after he keys it in."

"Yes," Draco picked up the line of conversation very much like the twins do to each other. "So the plan is for me to take one of the special portkeys with me and sync it into the wards, then before the ceremony to mark my mother, I will remove her secretly."

Harry thought this was a sound plan, he only had a couple concerns. "Are you sure the new portkeys work?"

The twins both smiled wickedly, "We are testing them tomorrow, Draco will be making small scale wards around Severus' house so we can test."

Harry blinked and looked at Snape, "Really?"

Severus nodded slowly, "Unfortunately, it is the only available location that is secluded enough, and I will be taking them there in the morning."
Harry nodded in understanding but was still concerned, he turned back to Draco. "but aren't your family's wards much stronger and weaved into the landscape with giant hedge mazes?"

"Well, yes." Draco looked nervous, "But we don't have many other options, my core magic should in theory allow me to bypass my families wards… and I want to do it this way so that I am the only one at risk." He looked down at his food.

Harry felt shocked to his core, Draco shouldn't have to do this alone. The Method should back him up. "I don't think you should do this alone." The words came out before Harry could stop them.

"Oh, really?" Severus spoke up unexpectedly. "How do you propose we help more than we already have? There is no way to get close to the manor if you are not invited, even if there was it would be incredible dangerous. We have given Draco an option, and that is more than he had before, if anyone dies because you felt he needed more help it would be on your hands ,and on Draco's conscience as well. This is the best option." Severus' tone was hard and absolute.

Harry felt the words drop onto his head like bricks. Severus was right, sometimes there was only so much you could do and then the rest is up to the people responsible, like Draco. He was doing that thing again, he was just following his impulses, the current plan was more sound than his sudden need to help more. "OK," Harry agreed.

Severus' expression softened, "Good, then everything will go as planned."

"So how does the new Portkey work?" Hermione asked, her timing was perfect and broke any tension.

The twin on the right who had the potato mishap answered, Harry thought it was Fred. "They work just like the first model. The original version created a small ward bubble around the user so that they are protected from the effects of the main wards. We key the Portkey into the wards so it can mimic them, this tricks the main wards into thinking our small ward bubble is a part of itself."

The twin who was possibly George cut in. "So in order to bypass Knot wards we needed knot magic to mimic it. Draco provided us with a lot of information, in the end the new portkey is made from a rope of knot magic."

Hermione looked thoughtful, "what happens if it's not keyed into the wards?"
Draco jumped in to answer her question. "The ward bubble pushes against the main wards and sets them off. The ward bubble expands very quickly and doesn't stop until the portkey successfully activates. Because it is magic intended to counteract the wards, the moment it touches them it will set off the alarm. There is also the possibility of harsh magical backlash, more than there is when the portkey is successful… we have never tried to use a portkey without keying it into the wards, so this is just theory."

Hermione didn't seem satisfied with the answer and pressed on. "But isn't there the possibility of shattering the main wards? The magic expanding that fast from the portkey could cause some sort of magical pressure bubble. Like when lighting strikes and displaces the air so fast it causes thunder."

By the expression on Draco's face he was probably confused by the physics reference but he answered best he could. "I guess it's possible, but the likelihood of my magic being stronger then family wards is low."

Hermione countered without a pause. "Anything is possible, with the right force behind it, a piece of straw can pierce a tree trunk, and it has been known to happen in hurricanes. Also, there are very few cases of modern surface magic conventions being used with core magic. I am sure knot magic has never been used like this before, even though there will be no surface magic involved, the actual technique being used was originally intended for surface magic." Hermione crossed her arms, she obviously expected to win what she perceived as a debate of sorts.

Draco simply shrugged in a un-Malfoy like way, "I didn't really think of it that way, it's possible I guess." He didn't look happy as he admitted defeat.

Ron leaned closer to Harry, "Is that straw and tree thing true?"

Harry shrugged, "I don't really know."

Dobby appeared and began cleaned away everyone's plates. They finished dinner and desert during the conversation about the portkeys. Hermione Checked off another bullet point on the board as tea was being served. "Next on the list, plans for going back to the chamber of secrets," she announced.

Remus and Severus both groaned. They didn't like this mission even though they understood its importance. Draco on the other hand brightened like a kid in a candy shop and almost threw himself over the table to look at the map Hermione was laying out on the table. There was a short pause of surprises due to Draco's enthusiasm, but Hermione just plowed forward regardless. "I
made a non-animated copy of the marauders map so we can work out a plan. We have no map of the chamber itself, so we will have to plan based on Harry's knowledge and I guess, improvise the rest." Hermione was flustered at just the thought of improvising.

"How many are we taking on this mission?" Ron asked, his face took on a calculating expression.

"I though just us three, or maybe even just you and Harry since you have both been there…" Hermione's tone indicated she had reservations about sending Harry and Ron alone.

"No adults?" Remus cut in.

Hermione shook her head, "I don't want to over complicate this, and it is a simple task."

Harry looked at Moony and smiled, "I got this."

Remus nodded slowly, he looked nervous about sending what he considered children into the chamber, but he seemed to accept they needed to do this alone. Harry was glad no one argued, he wanted to complete this without adults, prove to Severus he was learning.

"I would like to request a place on the team going into the chamber." Every head turned to Draco.

"What…" Ginny voiced everyone's though.

Draco held up his hands in a defensive pose, "Listen, you said a team of two or three."

He gestured to Hermione, "but you don't look like you are really keen on going into the chamber, I assume you would go to be the level headed one. So… why not send me?"

Before anyone could respond Luna chimed in, "I think it's a wonderful idea," she said airily.

Hermione glanced at her and then looked back at Draco, she stared at him for a long moment, her eyes scanning him and judging what she saw.
Draco sat very still and waited for her verdict, he never thought he would be hoping for Granger's approval, but here he was, life was funny that way.

"Fine," she concluded.

Everyone began to speak at once, Ron was already standing out of his chair. Hermione raised her wand and yelled, "STOP" A sound like a gunshot cut through the commotion. "Listen, Draco is right. Harry and Ron could use someone more thoughtful." Hermione sent an apologetic look to Harry.

He shrugged, she wasn't wrong.

"This is also accomplishing another task I had planned, this will be a test for you Draco. Work with the Method successfully and show us that Slytherins aren't all stereotypes." Hermione had a hard expression and looked Draco dead in the eyes.

He nodded slowly, "I will."

Hermione smiled brightly, it was like flipping a switch. "Good! It's settled, the team will be Harry, Ron and Draco. We will formally make plans tomorrow."

Ron looked like he wanted to argue but kept it to himself. Everyone else was a mix of doubtful and accepting, except Severus who looked very smug.

oOoOo

The meeting took a break. Everyone was milling around, stretching and getting more tea.

Ginny slid up next to Hermione quietly. "Are you sure about sending Draco?" She whispered.

Hermione gave her a side eyed look, "Yes, it's now or never. We need everyone to trust him and this is the safest mission, they will only get more dangerous and we can't just lock him up here forever. Plus, when his mother comes we need her to feel secure, like her and her son are accepted."

Ginny furrowed her brows in thought, "Do we really need them to feel secure?"
A look of disbelief shadowed Hermione's face. She glanced behind Ginny and found Neville and Ron watching the conversation. "Chickens..." She muttered under her breath. "Yes, do you want enemies where there doesn't need to be any? We can help people and bring them to our side, and in the process have less people to fight."

Ginny seemed to understand her message, "Yeah, you're right." She smiled and walked over to the boys waiting for her. Hermione sighed, sometimes it really felt like the only thing holding the group together was their faith in Harry. If he had objected, no one else would have even considered Draco a viable option.

oOoOo

The meeting resumed.

Harry felt anxious, the only things left on the list was an overview of the progress to remove curses, and developments concerning the stopper around his own neck. Then there was time slotted for Severus, as that time approached Harry felt a sense of dread bubbling up. Hermione began talking about what happened with him and Ron and how that shed some light on how the curse worked.

Harry could barely hear her over the sound of rushing wind that were his thoughts. Somehow he knew that Severus was going to drop a bomb on them, his body language the last week gave him away, and he was worried. Previously Severus only wanted to talk to him, Ron, Hermione and Remus alone about whatever this news was, but over the course of a week he changed his mind. It was not common for Snape to change his mind about anything, and that only made Harry worry more.

Hermione moved on to explaining the plan to test ways of using the stopper with Ron's ability to see magic as a new and safer way to remove Curses. They were planning some very heavily supervised test to see what they could learn. Normally Harry would be excited and involved in the conversation about removing the curse. He might even push for them to test sooner rather than later, but he felt oddly subdued. Ron's brush with death impressed upon him the importance of planning and careful testing. Plus, with winter break approaching, along with Draco's mission and portkey testing, a strict schedule was important... Did he really just think that? Hermione and Severus were really rubbing off on him.

"Now, the last of the meeting time is going to be directed by Severus." Hermione's words worked like a wake up alarm. Harry's attention was fully on his teacher.
Severus stood from his chair and began to pace in front of the table. Harry knew this was what he did when he needed to collect his thoughts before explaining something difficult.

He slowly stopped walking and turned to face the room. "As you all know, I supply a special tea to Ms. Lovegood to help with her, condition…" He paused, Harry saw the slight change in his face others might have missed. He was concerned. "What some of you may not know, is that I also supply the same tea to Sybil Trelawney for a similar, but much more advanced condition."

The room was dead silent. Most people already knew about this and the rest had put the pieces together.

"During our sessions there are times when she unknowingly gives a prophecy due to the release of core magic the tea causes. Normally the prophecies are about minor things and I simply file them away, But within the last year her prophecies have become more and more serious." Severus looked at each person's face, as if to make sure they understood the gravity of his words.

"Like the prophecy about my mum and the Prewett's?" Ron asked.

"Yes, but I believe the latest prophecy is even more serious." Snape looked directly at Harry and Hermione. "This prophecy may impact everything we are trying to accomplish in the Method."

The room filled with the din of muttering and hissed whispered of worry, Harry felt his dread bubble farther up his chest as he watched Severus wait for quite. When all eyes were on Snape he recited Sybils words.

"Beware of the man who feels nothing.
He is the dark seed planted by his master,
He will grow to extinguish the light.
Those of magic will know the truth,
Those with magic will be lost in his darkness.
The 1st of 13 lights will be extinguished,
This will be the beginning and the end.
Beware of the man who makes you feel."
Everyone took a moment to absorb the words, Hermione was unsurprisingly the first to speak. "So there is a spy in the school?" She asked.

"Or in Phoenix Method?" Ron added.

"It can't be in the Method, not with the blood magic," Neville said quietly.

Severus gave an appraising look to the shy boy. "Longbottom is correct, if the spy is as dark as the prophecy makes him seem, then he would not be able to fool the blood magic."

"So the spy is in the school," Hermione stated firmly.

"Then it must be Jigger," Ron spat.

Hermione rounded on him, "I TOLD you Ronald, he doesn't have the mark!"

"SO?!" Ron shot back lamely.

"Voldemort has a power that can make people feel things, that parts likely about him! Heck even Harry has that ability when he soothes magic!" Hermione shot back.

"So you think its Harry!?" Ron was outraged.

"It was just an example, Ronald." Hermione did look a bit ashamed.

"Guys, stop!" Harry slapped his hand on the table, "We can't say for sure who the spy is, for all we know the prophecy could be referring to Draco before he joined us."

"I mean, he has a point," Draco cut into the awkward silence. "I was possessed by the Dark Lord and he was trying to kill Dumbledore, and if anyone is a metaphorical light, it's him." Draco admitting he is a possibility seemed to drain much of the tension in the room. Harry mentally screamed his thanks at Draco for covering up his stupid outburst. Only a select few knew about the Vow to kill Dumbledore and he almost spilled the beans.
Harry was improving his impulse control but still had some issues, he glanced at Severus and got a glare in return. Their minds touched and Harry could practically hear him saying "you got lucky this time."

"There is one more thing I really don't understand about the wording." Hermione turn the topic away from the spy and Harry could have kissed her for it.

"The part where it talks about those with magic and those of magic, isn't that the same thing?"

Severus took control of the meeting again and walked to the drawing board. "That is an excellent question Hermione, We touched on the subject lightly when he spoke about emotions and magic being tightly bound, but we did not talk about the different ways magic manifests. The way we have magic is not the only way magic appears in sentient life."

Hermione's eyes shined with interest, and everyone else accepted they were going to get a lecture. Severus erased Hermione's list and drew a circle with another circle inside it.

"This is a subject not spoken of since the ministry banned it, most people think that all magic is the same and that something like a goblin has a magical core like a witch or wizard, but this is not true." He pointed to the outer circle, "This is us," he pointed to the inner circle, "This is our magical core. We can be filled with magic from our core like a charge, and we can be overcharged, but we are not made with magic as a part of our biology." He paused for everyone to process his explanation. “Creatures WITH magic have it running through them, it is a part of them but separate, somewhat like our blood. It can be drained, changed, tainted and it is only truly part of our souls, thus our emotions. It is not a part of us physically but simply in us, this is why it takes discipline and self-control, because it can overwhelm us and destroy us, so we must respect it. We need to create spells and rituals to use it, because we are its guests.” Severus paused again let his speech settle into the minds before him, Hermione looked like she was straining to keep all her questions inside. Severus continued before she burst.

"Creatures OF magic are truly one with it. At some point in their evolution they became magic. They are creatures that biologically could not exist and function, but they do because they are, to different extents, made of magic. If there was a world without magic and they crossed over, they would die, while we would simply become muggles. They do not need spells or wands, using magic is like breathing to them. We used to respect magical creatures the way we respected magic, before the curse... What we have done to them, will come back to bite us in a terrible way." The moment Severus finished Hermione's hand shot up like a firework.

She didn't even wait for Snape to acknowledge her before she asked her questions. "How does this tie in with the prophecy? What about Witches and wizards with inherent gifts like Ron, Harry and Luna? What about hybri-"
Severus silenced her with a sharp look, "One question at a time."

Hermione blushed slightly and nodded.

Severus' tone was heavy with snark. "I will answer the two you already hurled at me. Witches and Wizards with inherent gifts are thought to be the next step in Magical people's evolution. The theory is that all magical creatures were once non-magical creatures of some type that had magic, and then became more and more made of magic with every generation. So people like Ronald are already somewhat made of magic, just enough to have an ability that does not need an incantation or wand. Though it is not enough for any other significant difference between them and all other magical people."

He sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. "Your first questions is related to the fact that our magic is not completely one with us. We are, at our most simple form, a container for it. It has sway over us and is a part of our soul, but is separate. Because it is separate from us it is more easily manipulated by people outside of ourselves. This is the reason curses have more of an effect on us than say, a dragon, or a giant. Even Goblins that have less magic devoted to their form than larger magical creatures, can resist a curse more readily than a magical person. It is also why Wizards and Witches are much easier to possess, and why Leglimency works on them. It is possible to enter the mind of a magical creature, but it is very difficult and normally only happens between a master and their familiar on a rudimentary basis." Severus took a deep breath, prepared to field more questions.

Hermione immediately asked another, "So the prophecy is saying that the dark spy has an ability that affects Witches and Wizard much more than a magical creature."

Severus rubbed his eyes, "yes, that is what I was getting to."

Hermione opened her mouth but Severus stopped her from speaking. "There is a much deeper magical theory around all of this Hermione, and I do not believe this is the place to get into it."

"Can I ask a question?" Ginny spoke up. Severus signed but waved her to continue. "What about Magical creatures that can control magic as well as being made of it, also what about curses like werewolves and vampires?"

Remus perked up, Harry was sure he already knew everything Severus mentioned but was curious about the man's theories.
Snape rubbed his forehead. "That was two questions, but I will answer them, and then we will all get some rest. There are many different magical creature with different magical makeups and even some that are theorized to be in transition, from having magic to being made of magic such as goblins and elves. This is the reason we think they can control their magic but also do not need spells." Severus glanced at Remus before continuing. "As for magic curses, they work much like a muggle diseases. There are muggle diseases that literally change the body they infect. Curses like the werewolf bite actually change a magical person so that they are made of magic in part. It becomes part of their blood and saliva and like all magic without an outlet it builds until it discharges once a month turning the host into a wolf."

Despite his warning, Hermione looked ready to jump at him with another question. Severus’ remained a step ahead and continued explaining. “The curse came from a man who was trying to make an animagus potion and failed, he became the first werewolf and spread the curse. Over the generations, we have seen the curse mutate in a way, the wolves people turned into now are more like real wolves than mutations, and the wolf instincts have crossed over to the human side more strongly. One day Werewolf's might just be a new magical creature that can willingly become a wolf, or are permanently half wolf. The only reason it is a curse is because it cannot be removed, but also conflicts with the person natural magic."

Severus sat back down at the table and poured himself tea. He leveled the room with a serious and slightly bewildered look. "I did not expect to give such a lecture, I told everyone there was a dangerous spy in the school and that someone might die and all you want is to talk about magical theory."

Harry laughed and passed him the cream, "you are in a room full of mostly Gryffindor's and some Ravenclaws, mortal danger doesn't concern us much, and for some knowledge is everything."

"I want to talk more about this prophecy, mortal danger is in my top five concerns," Draco snagged the sugar from Severus when he finished. He wasn't trying to be funny and probably meant what he said but Harry couldn't help laughing.

Luna's dreamy voice asked the very intelligent question from across the table. "Severus, what are the greatest advantages and disadvantages to being made of magic or containing it?"

Severus groaned loud enough for only Draco and Harry to hear, "This isn't going to be over anytime soon is it?"

Harry smirked when he saw the glow of interest on most of the members faces. "Nope."
The first white flake of the season gently floated past the gilded window of the conservatory. The gold of the window frame blazed in the orange light of the setting sun and made the snowflakes that followed look like glowing embers in the sky. The beautiful scene was a reminder of her son's impending arrival, and even though she missed her dragon dearly, she wished he would never set foot in this house again.

Narcissa pressed her small hand against the cool glass, willing her body to pass through to freedom. She had not left the manor since the Azkaban break out, she could barely remember what it felt like to have the sun on her skin without a pane of glass in between.

The door to the conservatory opened with a squeal, Narcissa didn't bother turning around when foot falls approached her. A warm hand landed on her shoulder followed by the voice of her husband. "Narcissa, you should come and get some rest." His tone was soft, but the worry he felt for her was clear.

"I think I will stay out here tonight," Narcissa replied without turning around.

Things between her and Lucius had been tense, even though they stopped fighting about the fate of their son, they never came to an agreement. Narcissa still felt that her husband was not as concerned with Draco's welfare as a father should be, but even though she was angry with him she could not stop loving him.

The hand on her shoulder squeezed lightly before falling away.

"Very well," Lucius sounded resigned, this was not a new occurrence and he no longer fought with her about it.

As his footsteps became fainter, Narcissa felt her chest tighten with sadness. Part of her wished to have him hold her and comfort her, but deep in her heart she knew there was a chance he was truly loyal to the Dark Lord, and she could not bear that truth. He claimed to not want to be under the rule of a psychopath, but he also did not waver from his values, and the Dark Lord was one with those values.

She had fallen on him for support when he first arrived home, but since the first fight that had
concluded with a stalemate, they have had many more fights and Lucius was never able to claim loyalty to his family over his values.

Narcissa fell back onto the sloping arm of the chaise she was sitting on and pulled her blanket over her shoulders a little closer. She turned her head to face the glowing sunset and gentle snow, and waited for sleep to come.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

"Stay tuned next for that nagging feeling that you left the coffee pot on. Surely it's no big deal, but oh, geez! What if it is a big deal? Oh, no! I can't believe you left the coffee pot on!"

-Night vale

"There's a difference between your, you're, and yarn. Yarn isn't even pronounced the same way. It's a completely different word."

-Night Vale

AN- You must have been very determined to get to the bottom of this long road, but I am glad you're here. I am glad every time I see you here, it helps.

Now go check your Coffee Pot, or Stove… I need to check mine.

ReFlibidibiefaskfgls… 3/2/2018

*runs to the kitchen - whew they are off* - beta’d-3/11/2018 -minijaxter
Help, Risk and Pack

Chapter Notes

A/N- I have a lot of explaining to do… hehe. Continue to read for Excuses!

I know I was gone for a long time and I'm sorry. I never stopped writing, I just slowed down and decided to write ahead a bit. My work got (and is currently) very busy so things got a bit behind.

If you are one of my readers that keeps up with my Authors Notes then you are aware that about a year ago I moved due to a roof cave in and that my new place was great! Well now I am going to be moving again because my landlord is being foreclosed on… so there will continue to be delays intermittently throughout this story, but the next few chapters should go smoothly.

My roommates and I have not found a new place to live and as of this weekend are technically squatting. We still pay our landlord but the bank wants us out so they can finish the foreclosure. So that's fun…

I do already have another chapter lined up, the one after that is half done and this one is super long! Yes, I am bribing you for forgiveness with more pages!

Sorry for errors in advance, let me know when you find them, I only had a chance to read this over once.

So stay tuned for more crazy life adventures with Deets!

The Links to the High Res Version of the cover pictures is in my Profile, along with an ongoing update on how many pages I have written and how many I have posted.

WARNINGS- This story will have implied same sex relationships or attraction. This story contains descriptions and aftermath of torture. This story contains domestic abuse.

NO PAIRINGS RIGHT NOW, this is a Harry and Draco friendship story. It might change later and even the friendship part takes a long time to get to.

NO CHARACTER BASHING, maybe a little for Dumbledore but nothing too bad.

Summary- This is a story about people, feelings and corruption. This is most definitely a story about magic. Because there is a lot more to the world of magic than just silly wand waving. When Harry decides to start making choices independent from Dumbledore's influence he discovers a much more than he expected. Perspective changes everything. It can also make things weird.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes
Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 25

Help, Risk and Pack

Harry pretended to sleep, he hoped that if he pretended hard enough he might actually fall back to sleep. The morning sun was pouring into his room and slipping through his eyelids. He scrunched up his face, turned over, and threw the blankets over his head to block out the light. He was still at Grimmauld Place, it was Saturday so there wasn't much harm in him staying a bit longer.

A sharp tap interrupted Harry's pretend sleep, he ignored it…

Another tap, followed by a flurry of taps and scratches.

"Fawkes, stop!" Harry groaned.

The tapping continued.

"Fawkes!" Harry groaned louder.

A warm weight and the soft prick of talons announced the Phoenix as he landed on Harry's side. The scratching and tapping was becoming louder, Harry removed the blankets from his face and looked up at the red bird.

"That's not you…” He mumbled.

Fawkes tipped his head and warbled lightly in response.

Harry's eyes met the bird's black bead eyes, and for a moment the image of a letter flickered in his mind… odd.

If it's not Fawkes then it must be an owl Harry concluded, that's why he thought of a letter.

Harry rolled over to look at his window, the phoenix on him walked along with his roll. Sure enough there was an owl at his window, it was an odd looking, long owl…

"Dudley!" Harry threw himself from the bed, ignoring Fawkes' insulted squawk as he fluttered away.

He whipped the window open allowing the tall bird into the room. It had a muggle envelope in its beak as it ran in a circle around the floor. Harry tried to grab the spry little thing but it was too excited, it ran left, right and in figure eights, faster than any owl Harry had ever seen.

After a few minutes of trying he gave up and sat on his bed to wait for the owl to calm down. After another few circuits around the room the owl slowed down and came to a stop and Harry's feet.

"'Ello, Archimedes," Harry greeted as he bent down to take the letter.

The tall owl hooted happily and began to explore the room.
The envelope was blank and sealed tight, Harry turned it over in his hands a few times to make sure there was nothing written on it. When he was assured it was blank he ripped it open and unfolded a short letter.

I am SO sorry I didn't write for so long, I spent most of the time working on Aunt Marge so I could come stay with you for the winter break. Guess what? I won! Although she did demand the compensation you offered, sorry. My break starts December 14th which is a Saturday, I plan to pack on that day and arrive on Sunday if that's OK. Send me all the details, I just realized I don't even know where your house is.

Dudley

Harry couldn't stop the huge smile that took over his face even if he wanted to. He had thought Dudley was angry with him and had lied last time they met, but he wasn't, he was coming to stay! His cousin's break started a week before Hogwarts break, the last day of classes for Harry was Friday the 20th. He was sure is would be OK, Remus could keep an eye on Dudley.

He leapt from his bed towards his desk, his every movement was filled his excitement. He grabbed some blank parchment and scribbled out a reply. He told Dudley that Sunday was excellent and that his house was hidden, all he needed to do was get a ride to number 11 Grimmauld Place.

Harry reached for a smaller piece of parchment and wrote Number 12 Grimmauld Place on it, he folded it up and sealed it with wax. On the main letter he explained that Dudley should only open the sealed paper when he was between numbers 11 and 13. Then he folded the papers together and sealed them shut.

He knew it was a risk sending the address out like this but he didn't think anyone would be looking for Archimedes, just this once it would be OK. He took safety measure and warded the letter as well of course. When he was finished he tied to letter to the tall owl and sent him back to his master.

Things were looking up, the day started with good news and Harry didn't plan to let the mood drop. He began his morning rituals with a hop in his step.

Harry entered the kitchen, he approached the table and spotted a ready pot of tea.

The other occupants in the room looked up at his arrival, Remus and Severus were reading the paper while Draco ate a light breakfast.

"Morning all," Harry was chipper as he sat down to pour his tea.

Snape stared blankly over the top of his sagging paper.

"Why are you so happy? Have you forgotten the grim prophecy that hangs over us all?" He drawled in a grouchy tone.

Harry shrugged in response, "I think I have come to full capacity. I don't want to be worried anymore, we all have a lot of big problems weighing on us."

He glanced around the table as he listed the problems, "Vows, Oaths, Marks, and Curses…what's one more prophecy on top of the one we already have?"

When no one seemed amused Harry decided to move on.
"Plus I got good news."

"What sort of good news?" Remus asked gently.

Harry grinned like a fool, "My cousin coming to stay for winter hols."

Draco's groan didn't go unnoticed but Harry chose to ignore it.

"Well as long as you are glad about it." Remus chose the neutral path.

Severus didn't respond at all, he simply snapped his paper so that it covered his face from view.

Harry sighed, everyone seemed very stressed out. He wasn't sure if it was healthy that he was not worried, maybe something short circuited in his mind, but he was fine with it. He snapped up the last of the toast from the plate in the middle of the table.

Draco shot him a glare and Harry smirked back.

Before a fight could break out the floo came to life and spit out two very excited brothers.

"ARE YOU READY?!" One twin bellowed while still being ejected from the fireplace.

Harry saw Draco's shoulders sag slightly.

"Dragon, let's be off!" The other twin held out his arm as if to escort a lady.

Draco sighed and ignored the red heads.

The first twin approached as held out his arm as well, "Dragoon, away we shall go!" he announced dramatically.

Draco took a bite of his last piece of toast while staring straight ahead and ignoring the twins.

Without a response the twin resorted to calling out for Draco repeatedly, back and forth.

"Drigin?"

"Drake?"

"Drakey?"

"Drigoon?"

"Ickle-Drake-On?"

"Puff the magic Dra-"

Severus slammed the paper he was trying to read onto the table. "FOR the love of MERLIN will you two SHUT UP! You cannot even enter my property without me present, so you must wait."

There was dead silence, then a soft sound... it started quietly and began to grow in volume. Harry looked over at Draco and was shocked to see him trying to smother laughter.

Another sound from the other side of the table caught Harry's attention, he looked to find Remus also holding back a smile.

Draco and Remus caught each other's eyes, the muscles in their jaws twitched and the last of their
control snapped, and both began to laugh without restraint.

The twins looked between the two, thoroughly confused.

One leaned near the other, "I think those two have been stuck in this house together for too long."

Severus let out a suffering sigh and dropped his paper onto the table. With one swift movement he grabbed his tea and downed the last of it while standing up. He moved to the fireplace and turned sharply causing his robes to swirl gracefully, then at the last moment he halted their movement with a snap of his arms to his sides.

"Well, come on."

After the loud scuffle of the twins and Draco collecting themselves and their materials they scurried after their professor. After a little fuss all four of them were on their way to Spinners end to test the new Portkeys.

Harry smiled, maybe his good mood was rubbing off on everyone. He glanced at Remus who smiled back.

"What are your plans for today?"

Remus looked thoughtful, "Hermione had some idea she wanted to run by me."

"Oh? What kind of ideas?"

The bitter bite of the wind threatened snow as it ripple surface of the cold grey lake. Harry welcomed the idea of snow, when the white fluff falls the air always seemed a little warmer. He wonder if it really did become warmer and resolved to ask Hermione, she would know.

When the wind settled the lake would still and become reminiscent of cement car park after rain, the only thing breaking the illusion was the bright sun reflecting off the water. Harry threw a stone into the water and watched the concrete ripple, he wonder if the giant squid got annoyed with kid throwing rocks. The breast was probably dormant right now, so it probably didn't matter.

The grey scenery was fitting and oddly beautiful considering the current state of Harry's life. There was a possible spy and murderer loose in the school, many of Harry's closest friends were tied up in a dangerous vow's or plots and he was planning to kill a man that was once a mentor, plus he was keeping that secret from many people that trusted him. On top of it all, somewhere in the distance Voldemort was planning… something. It was almost comical how underwhelming the Dark Lord was compared to everything else, he almost didn't feel real.

Maybe he should have found it odd that all his dread and worry slipped away, but he couldn't bring himself to care. He was relieved to be unburdened of angst and simply attributed it to his training, or possibly just burning out. He logically knew the events unfolding around him were serious and possibly dangerous but it was as if his mind ran out of energy to care, it placed a frosted glass wall around his problems. He knew they were there but he also understood that he couldn't do anything about it at that moment, he would handle what he had to, when he had to. Until then he would calmly plan. Maybe the new prophecy was his breaking point and whatever snapped in his mind was meant to be snapped for his sanity.

Harry reclined on the large rock by the lake, he took a deep breath of crisp air and felt it clear his mind even more. His warm cloak draped around him, fluttering in the light wind. He wondered if Hermione and Remus were coming up with any good ideas, he knew he should have stayed when
Hermione arrived to go over her plans with Moony. The box of materials used to make the Marauders’ map was a tempting hook, but ultimately he decided to leave them alone.

Harry had seen a slight glitter of disappointment in Remus’ eye as he walked to the fireplace, but he didn’t want to risk his new emotional freedom by having a bunch of reminders of what he lost shoved in his face. He didn’t want to dwell on Sirius or his dad, not when he was feeling the first bit of peace since the summer.

Distant crunching of frosted grass let Harry know someone was approaching him. Embracing his new mindset, he didn’t bother looking to see who it was, and he continued to gaze out into the open lake. It was unlikely someone who meant him harm would open attack him… unlikely.

When the footfalls halted and Harry waited for whoever it was to speak. The silence dragged, without even touching the person Harry could feel their magic tangling in emotional turmoil. His control of his ability was becoming more and more refined but it was rare that someone was projecting so much he didn’t need contact to feel it.

Guilt began to creep into Harry’s mind for making the person squirm, he was about to turn to them when a folded piece of heavy parchment landed on his lap. He grabbed it without thought and flipped it open, he was so intent on the paper he only half registered that the person was running away.

His eyes skimmed the first line of elegant script and his heart froze. This was it, this was "what" and now was the "When" of something he had to do.

Harry threw himself from the rock and sprinted after his target. He was only mildly surprised by who he was chasing. His heart jumped with excitement over this chance to make things right, he would begin this on his own, but this time he would ultimately figure it out with help.

He reached out, his fingers splayed as he neared his target. With a final half run half leap he grabbed his prey’s arm and swung them around to face him.

Harry panted, his breath misted from his mouth and he was unable to speak. He looked into the wild, dark eyes across from him, they were filled with panic and fear.

Fresh tears slid down worn, red tracks. They had been crying for a while, the dark eyes were rimmed with swollen skin and red irritation…

Harry felt all his excitement slide away, this wasn’t right, this was a product of war.

He let his gift flow out in response to the tangle magic in front of him, and he soothed it without thinking. His own ball of anxiety melted when the eyes he was looking into relaxed. The fear was redirected to the letter in his hand but the panic was lessened and replaced with shame.

"It was a mistake…" Her voice cracked.

Harry remained quiet, anything he could say might cause her to clam up.

Understand of what she had just done fell onto her shoulders and they sagged, the knowledge that she couldn’t undo it cemented on her face.

"I was out of options… without…" Her voice became high as she fought for composure, her entire body was shaking with terror and adrenaline beneath Harry’s hand. For a moment he felt the heady sensation of power over someone else, but it was quickly washed away by empathy.
She pulled her arm from his grip and closed the distance between them. When her small hands curled in his robes Harry expected violence and anger, but instead she simply rested her forehead against his chest, unable to look him in the face. Her body quaked harder from restrained tears and possibly broken pride.

Her grip tightened and she whispered, in a raspy cry worn voice.

"Help."

Harry felt the word resonate through his body like a gong signaling him to go, to start something new.

"I will, Pansy."

She looked up at him with wide bloodshot eyes, it was obvious she didn't expect to get a positive answer. Harry was shocked that she literally risked her life on the hope that he would help her, and didn't go to Dumbledore instead. Severus's subtle hints to the Slytherins must have paid off.

Harry gently gripped her shoulders and moved her back to a respectable distance.

"Follow me," He instructed.

It was a cold Saturday, there was no one outside to see their interaction, and Harry expected the path to the seventh floor would also be empty, most students would be relaxing in their dorms. He was proven correct when they both arrived at the blank wall hiding the safe room without encountering single soul.

Harry began to pace in front of the wall, calling the room he wanted to surface. The Method only had meaning when it was making a difference, he only had meaning when he impacted those around him. He wouldn't go down like Sirius, he wouldn't make mistakes that wiped his purpose away, and he didn't want to exist without mattering, and he definitely didn't want to bring hope only to not fulfill it. He loved Sirius but he didn't want to share his fate.

Harry stopped walking when the wooden door appeared. He looked back at Pansy's nervous face and smiled reassuringly.

Saving this one person, this was making his existence matter.

He opened the door and felt her follow him into the small room. He watched her examine the dim surrounding, the small fireplace, old table, and when her eyes landed on the green candle, a light of recognition sparked on her face.

Harry didn't comment on her reaction. He grabbed a scrap of old notebook paper on the table and scribbled out a note. He watched surprise flicker in Pansy expression when he showed proper use of the floo candle.

They waited somewhat awkwardly for the response.

With a flair of green the same paper popped out of the candle with a scribbled response. Harry chuckled at the answer he received, there was only one person in the kitchen.

He shook his head at the ridiculousness of the situation as he wrote the safe house address.

"Sorry, but you have to go first."
Harry handed Pansy the address and gestured to the pot of floo powder.

She looked hesitant for a moment, and then her face hardened with resolve. Although she still had tear tracks and red eyes, there was something very inspiring and strong about her at that moment. She was walking away from everything she knew, of her own volition to take a more difficult path. Maybe it was just to save her own skin, or maybe it was because she wanted to do the right thing, it didn't really matter.

The courage it took for her to even approach Harry was commendable, no… it was impressive.

Harry smiled softly, he hoped he looked calming and accepting as Pansy walked into the fireplace. After one final deep inhale she threw her powder into the fireplace and yelled her destination.

The vibrant green flames swept the girl away to her new life, and at the same time the flames added her to the list of what was Harry's to protect.

He took a moment to collect himself and then followed after his new potential member.

Harry stumbled from the fireplace into a slightly awkward moment.

Luna was the sole occupant of the kitchen, she sat at the far head of the table. Her head was high and her face proud. She looked more connected to reality than Harry had ever seen her.

Her small hands delicately held a tea cup that looked like half a Fabergé egg with theee small legs on the bottom. The scent of her special tea permeated the room.

Pansy stood at the other end of the table looking smaller than Harry had ever seen the proud girl.

"What's going on?" He asked.

Luna turned her attention to him and her face morphed into her normal airy smile.

"Oh, nothing," Her wispy voice was laced with innocence.

Harry could feel the magic in the room and in the two people before him quivering with tension.

"…OK," Harry slowly removed Pansy's letter from his robe and handed it to Luna.

Pansy looked like she wanted to protest but kept her mouth shut.

Luna scanned the letter and nodded.

"This won't do at all," She whispered, then she held the letter out to an empty space in the room.

"What is…" Pansy began, but Harry cut her off with a pointed look.

Luna nodded again, "Yes, Doggy is beginning to understand. He just needed time."

Harry felt his heart swell, it always hurt that Sirius was against his decision to let Slytherins in the Method. Even if it was only a whisper of the man left clinging to a girl whose aura reached to the realm of death, it still meant something to Harry.

"I'm glad," It was all he could think to say, but Luna's smile assured him it was enough.

"I will go fetch Hermione and Remus, they are in Remus' office." She gracefully swept from the
Harry turned to the confused and slightly scared Pansy.

"What did she say to you?"

Pansy wringed her hands and kept her eyes on the table, "She told me that if I brought any misfortune to you or anyone else in this house, she would punish me. Normally she wouldn't scare me, but something is different..."

Harry was not very surprised by the statement, everyone in the Method was very protective of each other, and even Draco who pretended not to like anyone was obviously attached to the twins and Remus. With no solid knowledge of who the "Dark Seed" in the prophecy was, everyone was on guard.

Harry nervously rubbed his hair, "Yeah, we are a protective bunch..." he said lamely. He ignored the second half of her statement entirely.

The sound of people walking down the hallways interrupted any response, a moment later the kitchen door swung open to admit Luna, followed by Hermione and Remus.

"Pansy!" Hermione sounded surprised, Luna must not have told them why they were being requested.

Hermione bustled over to the other girl, "Are you OK? You look terrible!"

She fussed while herding Pansy into a chair.

Remus looked at Harry for an explanation, he was trying hard to keep accusation from his eyes.

Harry pointed to the letter on the table, Remus read it quickly.

"Oh my. This is happening sooner than Severus predicted."

Harry began making tea for Pansy who was dead silent, she looked like she was waiting for judgment to fall on her.

"I brought her here so we could figure out what to do, together." Harry handed Pansy her tea.

Remus smiled, his eyes proud in a way Harry loved to see, "It was the right thing to do Harry, Severus should be back soon."

Pansy seemed to relax more when she heard Severus would be one of the people deciding her fate.

Harry didn't know what to say, he took his seat and made his tea instead. Maybe all his angst falling away was what he needed to think clearly in tight situations. Maybe... he wasn't as brave as he thought before. His mind began to wind up turmoil like thread on spool, his previous Zen like calm was being wrapped in the strings of his rising anxiety.

The whisper of wings sent a wave of calm through the room as Fawkes landed on Harry's shoulder. A single note washed away his fears and restored his new mind set.

Pansy gasped at the bird's entrance, then her eyes narrowed in a calculating way. Harry was slightly uncomfortable with the predatory gleam she was apprising him with, but her measurement of him was cut short by the floo flaring to life.
Severus came first without even a lag in his stride, followed closely by the twins who seemed to be talking in depth about the experiment. Last was Draco, he was looking down at his robes and brushing nonexistent soot from them.

The sound of porcelain meeting wood proceeded the warm tea that flowed across the table. Harry lifted his elbows to avoid soggy sleeves and righted the luckily unbroken cup. Pansy was unaware of anything Harry was doing, she stared wide eyed at Draco as if he were a ghost.

Draco’s attention, along with everyone else's was pulled to the sound of the cup meeting the table.

"Pansy?" He sounded hopeful and worried.

Tears that Harry thought had run out rolled down worn tracks at the sound of her own name. Pansy threw herself from her seat and closed the distance in only a moment. She flung her arms around her friend's neck, her momentum stopped by the collision with his body.

Draco managed to stay on his feet through his surprise, and after only a second he wrapped his arms around Pansy. The relief on his face was so stark that it shocked Harry, and for a moment he was looking at himself and Hermione. He wondered how Draco hid the deep worry he must have had for Pansy, how he kept going while she was trapped.

Some small understanding of Draco snapped into place in Harry's mind, they were different. Where Harry would have charged in to save Hermione, Draco let Pansy make the right choice on her own, he didn't try to force her into safety she might not have wanted. He offered an option through Severus, then he let her save herself, and he waited patiently.

Suddenly Harry didn't feel very brave, not compared to that.

Pansy pulled back from the hug, her face was dry and determined.

"How did you escape your father? Last time I saw you, you were sick and he came to take you! I thought… you." She trailed off, unable to say that she thought he had died or was going to be killed, instead she changed the topic.

"Did Severus tell you to go to Potter for safety as well? You were braver than me to leave your family so early…" Pansy's eyes dropped, it wasn't obvious if she was ashamed of waiting so long or sad that she left her family, maybe both.

Draco's cheeks reddened and he looked off to the side, the twins chuckled in the background while they exaggerated trying to cover their amusement.

"Well… I wasn't even conscious when I was brought here, Severus did it to save me from my sickness."

Draco's entire face became pink as he admitted the truth and his eyes studied the brick wall to his right.

Pansy looked up at his chin with confusion, "What?" she muttered.

Draco managed to look down at her, he smiled softly while holding her eyes with his.

"You are the brave one…"

Pansy took a sharp breath.
"I was brought here for my own protection. I was being possessed by the Dark Lord." He added.

"Is that why you were sick?" The hands she still had on his arms tightened.

"No, I was sick because the Dark Lord never helped me find an anchor." Draco sounded unconcerned, as if he was purposely trying to make light of his near death.

Pansy's hands clenched, the fabric between her fingers became sharp with folds. Her jaw twitched as if to speak but all her words tried to come out at once, the sound was pure anger.

After a few seconds of Draco rubbing his hands up and down her arms she seemed to calm enough to speak.

"That bastard," She hissed from her tight mouth.

"Well put." One of the twins agreed.

"Hear! Hear!" The other added.

A snort of laughter was the twins reward, and it was surprisingly from Hermione. She covered her smile with a hand as her shoulders shook with mirth. Harry smiled, and slowly everyone in the room was chuckling or at least smirking.

"Why don't we have tea in the blue room and I will explain what we do from here." Hermione offered.

Pansy nodded, she looked as if she just noticed that she was surrounded by her previous enemies. She reluctantly pulled away from Draco, her source of comfort.

Hermione noticed her hesitation, "Why don't you join us Draco, I am sure the twins can report on the experiment."

Pansy visibly sagged in relief as Draco put his arm around her shoulders and began to lead her out of the kitchen.

Severus waved his wand to prepare tea to being with him.

"You are going to want this." Remus held out Pansy's letter to Snape.

He nodded as he plucked it from the wolf's fingers and left with a tray floating behind.

Harry took a seat at the large kitchen table, he suddenly felt very tired. He was still mostly free of stress but he felt a bit worn from all the emotions of the last couple of hours.

Remus and the twins joined him at the table while Luna moved around making more tea. She seemed a bit stiff and Harry wondered if she was still wary about Pansy. She placed a new tray of tea within reach of everyone, and in front of Harry she put a bottle of Fire Whiskey.

Harry looked up at her in surprise, but she simply smiled.

Remus gave the bottle a dark look but said nothing.

Harry made his tea and spiked it lightly, then he handed to bottle off to the twins and it made its way around the table, even Remus took a bit.
"So, how did the Portkey test go?" Harry took a sip of tea and let it warm him.

"Perfectly! Of course that's expected with Fred and me." George boasted.

"Yeah, WE keyed the new portkey in and Draco went through the wards with minimal magical drain. Even less than the prototype Severus used at Hogwarts." Fred puffed up proudly.

Harry smiled, "That's great, and Now Draco can go in and get his mother confidently."

Fawkes chirped his agreement from the place on Harry's shoulder where he had settled down. Everyone sipped their spiked tea, each seemed to want to bring something up but wasn't willing yet. Harry had an idea what the topic was.

"So… Pansy." He began lamely.

Remus looked down into his tea sadly, "I just wish more like her would come to us."

Fred and George looked at each other with confusion, and Fred spoke up.

"What caused her to come here?"

Harry replayed the moment Pansy approached him, he grasped at every detail before they could dissolve like salt in the rain. Her sacrifice was not small, and he would see that she had a place with his people.

"She got a letter from her father, she was told that over winter break she would be marked." His tone held the seriousness of the situation.

"The letter told us, all the Death Eater children would be marked before the year is over." Remus explained gravely.

"Can we trust her?" George asked earnestly.

Harry nodded, "She approached me directly, Trust her like any other member. Once she signs the contract it won't matter anyway."

The twins nodded, they would do as he asked, even if they didn't trust her. Maybe it was better that they didn't, in the case that he was wrong then someone will be watching their backs.

"What are they doing in there?" Pansy was obviously irritated, she was at the kitchen table and held a full cup of tea that was becoming cold. She was much calmer than this morning when she was brought to the house but a new development was making her nervous.

Draco was trying to keep her calm, but he was secretly irritated he was being left out. He understood Harry's hesitation to leave Pansy alone but Draco wished he didn't have to be the one to watch her.

The entire Method was gathered for a meeting about an hour ago. They accepted Pansy with varying degrees of enthusiasm, although Ron took it surprising well in Draco's opinion.

After a short meeting in which it was voted that Pansy would be given the option to sign the contract, everyone left for the blue drawing room to do experiments with Ron's magical sight and the ability of the crystal to pull on curse magic.

Draco was left to explain that if she choose not to sign the blood contract she would never be let out
of the house… ever. Her response was not what he expected.

"Well of course I'm going to sign it." She snipped.

"Listen Pansy, you have… wait… what?" Draco had been prepared to argue with her and was cut short.

She huffed and crossed her arms like she had done since she was a child.

"This place may seem like a house of riff raff, but in the short time I have been here I have seen it for what it really is."

This time Draco crossed his arms and waited for her to explain.

"This is the winning side of a three way war. This house if filled with power. The Dark Lord is strong and his followers are all without their curse, but he kills his loyal and many aren't… bright. On the other side is an old man who is unable to change his ways and pushed away his most powerful tool."

She gestured around to indicate where the "tool" had gone.

"Now there is this third side of the war, it is being led by the most powerful thing the light side had, and boy is he powerful."

Draco felt a shiver go down his spine when Pansy described Harry as powerful. He always knew Potter was strong, but he hadn't really seen how strong he had grown. He was to close.

Pansy continued talking, unaware of Draco's revelation.

"Have you felt the magic rolling off of him sometimes? When I first approached him he soothed my core magic with a single touch. I don't think he knows that I know what he did, but it was impressive. Almost Dark Lord level manipulation."

Draco sat up straight, "But…"

Pansy waved him off with her hand, "Oh, I know Potter won't go dark. No phoenix would stay with someone who was truly evil, but Harry is defiantly not light either. He is simply powerful, he somehow had his curse removed and I bet he's going to figure out how to do it for others."

Draco swayed in his seat. He had been in this house for months and only picked up a fraction of what she had figured out. He believed he had joined the new light side or something, he wanted his generation to make the decisions when the time came and he over looked the tilt of many of the group's members. Somehow Harry's manipulation of entire rooms of people didn't seem bad…

Maybe it was because Harry wouldn't twist a person's magic into dark like Voldemort would, the fact that he soothes other magic made it seem OK, but in reality is was very similar to manipulation. The difference was Harry cared for his people and wanted what was right, so it was really bad?

"Don't think too hard on it, Potter's not bad, he's like the leader of the gray or something. From what I see he doesn't expect people to be what they're not. Severus is still as Slytherin as always and Potter seems to accept that." Pansy was oddly calm on the topic of simply joining Harry Potter to lead a war for independence.

"Actually they seem to get along… really well…" She gave Draco an expectant look, waiting for an explanation.
Draco felt a little calmer, "Severus and Harry don't just accept each other; Severus was Harry's occlumency teacher, he has a place in Harry's mind."

"Ooooooh," Pansy leaned forward, her eye were bright with interest, as if this was a great piece of gossip in the girls bathroom. Under her outward expression Draco could tell she was equipping herself with all the information she could, she never did anything by halves and wanted to truly be in the Method.

"Yup, and the meeting they're having now it to plan how Harry can safely reproduce removing Ron's curse." Draco smirked at the end of his drawling tone.

"I knew it!" Pansy clapped her hands together, "All I have to do is work my way up the ranks and I can turn this group into a powerhouse."

Draco laughed, Pansy never changed. She saw everything as an opportunity to gain rank.

"What so funny?"

Draco calmed his chuckles, "There is no rank here, gain their trust and they will listen to your opinions."

Pansy looked honestly confused, "No ranks?"

"None," Draco made his tone serious to drive the point home.

"So how do I know if I have their trust?" Pansy still needed a goal, it was her way Draco concluded.

"Keep an eye on the Wolf, when he treats you like pack, you're in," Draco offered.

Everything around him was a wash of feelings, like a hurricane they whipped around with no regard to his presence. Magic was everywhere and his own was stretched to the limit from his body. He reached out for anything that he could recognizes and tried to hold it like a butterfly in his caged fingers, secure but not so tight that he crushed it.

The crystal in his hand was pulling his magic like it did with Ron, but this time Harry reined it in so he didn't touch anyone's magic until he was ready.

"You are very close, when you're ready you can touch her with the crystal." Ron's calm tone helped keep Harry's panic in check.

It had been weeks since Pansy was brought to the Safe House and inducted into the Method. It was December 14th, the Saturday before Dudley was due to arrive. Since the first meeting about using the crystal to help remove curses they had trained almost every night, even Hermione sacrificed her school work for this.

Now was the day they were going to test out their new technique, and their first subject was Luna.

It was strangely easy to get to the safe house more often without anyone noticing, Dumbledore had been as quiet as Voldemort. He seemed oddly distracted by something and that was fine with Harry considering their last meeting almost killed him. Since that fateful night, Dumbledore hadn't call Harry for anymore private meetings. Severus thought that it was just a pause so that Dumbledore could regroup and that after winter break the meetings would resume. Now Harry was employing the wait and see strategy.
"OK, I'm ready," Harry whispered.

He could feel every member of the Method take in breath as one when he spoke, they collectively held it in for silence as he moved the crystal to touch the skin between Luna's clavicles.

He felt his magic jolt from his body and the room's breath was released only too be carried away on the breeze that kicked up. It cycled around Harry and Luna and it was chilled by the reality of what they were doing and the magic that laced its every movement.

"Oh, wow" Ron's shuttering tone was pulled into the slow cyclone. What he was seeing with his gifts sight must have been amazing.

Harry was in control this time, the magic flowing around was his own surface magic being dispelled as he used his core magic to control the crystal, its magic hovered on the surface of Luna's skin, waiting to be let loose to do its job.

"Let it out slowly, Harry." Ron instructed.

Harry complied, He lessened his hold on his magic and felt the crystals power seep into Luna. He could feel it straining to surge forward as is had with Ron, it pulled on Harry's core with all its might but he was stronger.

Harry allowed the wild magic to make its ways slowly through Luna's body as it tried to reach the curse on her core. The process was slow and drained Harry of his own magic in his effort to keep his friend safe.

"Stop," Ron commanded.

Harry risked a glance at Ron, his eyes were wide and fixed on something Harry couldn't see happening in Luna.

"You are about to touch the curse, you know what to do?" Ron asked, he was being very serious and it made Harry more nervous.

"Everything will be fine," Luna assured everyone, she smiled faintly as if she was both excited but scared of being too hopeful.

Harry took a deep breath, this was it.

He let the crystals magic touch Luna's curse. Even though he couldn't see what was happening he could feel the pull of magic become suddenly powerful, almost beyond his control. The magic covered the curse and attempted to rip it away violently like it had with Ron.

Harry used every ounce of his ability to keep the magic from pulling the curse from Luna's core. After many tests and trials it was concluded that the magic of the crystal needed to fully surround the curse magic and then become one with it before it was pulled away. This way it would gently slide off the person's core, but the crystal magic was wild and simply wanted to take the curse magic. Harry discovered he could somewhat control or soothe the crystals magic with his own ability, he needed to keep it inside the cursed person until it completely fused with the curse.

Harry couldn't feel when it was time to pull the magic out, if he did it to soon he might kill the person, if he waited too long he would simply make the curse stronger and the crystal magic might stay in the host. Luckily Ron could see when the time was right, and could tell Harry where to push the magic and where to pull back.
Beads of sweat formed on Harry's forehead, the effort it took for him to perform this task was greater than he expected, but he refused to fail. They had only done small scale tests, allowed him to touch cursed people with the crystal and prove he could control it, they had no choice but to go into this half blind. Luna insisted that Harry try and that she be the test subject.

Harry's control wavered for only a moment and Luna cried out in pain as her curse was tugged on violently.

"We should stop," Hermione was pale with worry.

"NO," Both Harry and Ron snapped.

Harry pushed more of his own core magic into Luna to regain control. They continued to wroks, Harry struggling while Ron yell out direction.

Then it happened, something unexpected. Harry felt his magic also begin to become one with the curse. It was sinking into it like water into a sponge. Harry looked at Ron, he met blue eyes briefly and knew Ron saw it happening, but they kept quiet, this had to work.

When Harry had done this to Ron, it wasn't just core damage that hurt his friend, it was the curse magic. When it was freed from the core it ran wild through Ron and mixed with his surface magic, the reaction almost killed Ron because he had no anchor.

What was happening right now was going to save Luna a lot of pain, and probably hurt like no tomorrow for Harry.

"Almost there…" Ron warned.

Harry braced himself, this was going to suck.

"NOW!" Ron yelled.

Harry used every bit of his will to pull the magic back to himself. Some of it went back to the crystal, a mixture of all three magic's, his, curse and crystal but the rest flooded into his body.

Ron's eyes widened as he watched, "A link is formed between them, and the crystal."

Luna opened her eyes she had kept closed the entire time.

"That felt odd, but much less painful than I expected."

She touched her chest, "I feel lighter."

A collective sigh of relief followed her statement.

Hermione sprung from the couch to hug Luna, she turned to Harry with words of congratulation on her lips but came up short.

"Harry?" She crawled across the floor to her friend, he was doubled over and heaving his breaths.

Hermione grabbed his shoulder to shake him but swiftly regretted it when a shock of magic ran through her so strong it knocked her back and she collided with the couch. Ginny ran to her while everyone else's attention turned to Harry.

Severus and Remus pushed through the small crowd to get to their charge.
"DON'T touch him!" Hermione yelled as she pulled herself to sitting with help from Ginny. Suddenly she was in front of Ron grabbing his robes, "What happened?!

Tears were hanging on her lashes as she pleaded for an explanation.

Ron looked to the floor, away from her pained gaze.

"His magic became one with the other magic's during the process," He admitted.

Hermione shook him, "Why didn't you say something?"

She continued to shake him when he didn't answer but simply looked at his pained friend with sad eyes.

A pale hand gripped Hermione's forearm and ceased her violence, she slowly dropped Ron's robes and looked up at Severus.

He looked into her brown eyes and spoke honestly, "This is not your fault, and we all agreed to try."

A smaller pale hand landed on her shoulder, "It is more my fault than anyone's." Luna's airy voice was quite solid as she spoke.

Hermione looked at Harry, he was still curled over clutching his Anchor and the Stopper while emitting small sounds of pain and effort.

"Why isn't anyone doing anything?" She sounded defeated.

Severus moved his hand from her arm to her shoulder, "You know as well as I that there is nothing we can do, he must control this. I should have seen this possibility, his magic's natural desire to calm others magic is what allows him to control the curse magic in the crystal but there is always a chance when magic mingle that they will fuse."

Everyone looked back at Harry as he struggled almost silently.

"Why didn't he stop… "Hermione looked at Ron, "Why didn't you say something?"

"He was right not to say anything."

All eyes went back to Severus, "Harry felt it happening, and knew that if he stopped right then it would endanger Luna. He was much more comfortable endangering himself. Isn't that right Ronald?"

Ron nodded shallowly under the scrutinizing gaze of his fellows, "When he looked at me I knew what he wanted…" He confirmed.

Harry's breathing became ragged with his effort to control the still semi wild magic, the room was silent for a moment and only filled with his breaths.

"He will be OK?" One of the twins asked.

Remus stood and smiled in his way that calmed those around him, "If what Ron saw is correct, as long as Harry has his Anchor there is not much danger, it is just painful…"

He looked to Severus for help.
"Yes," Severus jumped in, slightly less reassuring than Remus. "When Harry pulled the magic back it went to his core, he is simply converting it to surface magic to be dispelled."

As if on cue Harry screamed, a sound almost inhuman, and he slammed his hands to the floor with his anchor between the ground and his palms. A burst of magic flooded into the ground so forcefully that the entire house shook as if it were an earth quake.

Then it was over. The air crackled with residual magic and Harry sat up and panted in air as if he held his breath the entire time.

Pansy smiled in the back of the room where she watched, she leaned closer the Draco and whispered, "He's becoming more powerful faster than I thought possible."

Draco ignored his friend's words and moved closer to Harry, and was the first to speak.

"Are you OK?"

Harry slowly turned and looked at Draco with half lidded eyes and a goofy smile.

"I think I need a nap."

With a thump Harry hit the floor face first.

Late Saturday night after everyone else had gone back to Hogwarts or retired to their rooms, Severus sat alone in the kitchen.

The bottle of fire whisky Luna had left out was half empty, a tumbler of melting ice and liquor sat before the quiet man. It was a rare moment, Severus had his sleeves rolled back and his mark exposed, and he stared at it with fury in his eyes that even Harry had never seen.

Severus went over the events from earlier that day in his mind many times. He had not lied when he said that magic sometimes fused, but it was uncommon. He suspected that it was not just Harry's abilities alone that caused the reaction with the curse magic, but also the magic from the Crystal. The small jewel held power that wished to grow, that wanted to consume other power but did not have the capacity to hold it. It was also linked to Harry, which gave Harry moderate control over everything the Crystal absorbed and almost all of it went back to the boy to deal with… But there was so much potential in that power.

Severus narrowed his eyes on the Dark Mark, How could he ask Harry risk so much for the plan slowly forming in his mind?

Snape snorted and reached for his drink with his unmarked arm, the boy would jump to help no matter the risk involved… that was the problem. Severus knew Harry would say yes.

He raised his glass to his lips and took a long drag of cold burning liquid.

The sound of someone entering the kitchen from the stairs behind him went unnoticed until Remus was seated across from him pouring his own glass of whisky. The Wolf was glancing at the revealed Mark every few moments, he had never seen one so close without being in danger.

Severus moved his arm to the space between them as he placed his glass down, the mark was face up. Remus looked nervous and surprised that Severus was openly showing his shame.

"I think he can do it..." He said vaguely.
Remus looked up from studying the Mark, into Severus's Dark serious eyes.

"Wha…?"

Severus refrained from snorting at the Wolfs unarticulated response, he possibly had too much to drink…

"Harry," Severus elaborated, "He could maybe… remove the Dark Mark."

Remus sat ram rod, "What?!"

"With the abilities he displayed and that Crystal, he might be able to remove it." Severus sounded both excited and terrified, the alcohol was making him express more than he intended.

Remus knocked back his drink and poured another.

"We know what the side effect will be, after removing two curses both people have magic linking their core to Harry's and we don't even know what the consequences of that will be. We are simply assuming it will be better than keeping the curse."

Severus gripped his tumbler with both hands and leaned forward until his head was almost touching the rim.

"I know…" He admitted.

Remus put his hand on Severus's shoulder from across the table.

"I know you don't want to risk Harry."

Snape's head bobbed in a nod... He was far too drunk.

Remus slid his hand up Severus' neck and into his hair for a moment.

"But there's really no stopping that boy."

Harry awoke Sunday morning while the sun was still on the horizon, he felt very refreshed despite the magical drain from yesterday. As he stretched in bed he remember, Dudley was coming today. A surge of excitement ran through him and urged him from his bed. After washing and dressing, he practically stumbled down the stairs into the kitchen, it was still hours until his cousin would come and experience part of the magical world for the first time, but Harry wanted everything to be ready.

Upon entering the kitchen he found Severus and Remus at the table nursing cups of coffee rather than tea, and very strong coffee from the smell of it. Harry greeted them and got unenthusiastic replies, it seemed like a good idea to let the two men alone for now, so Harry left through the door that would lead to the Blue room.

He was so full of energy that he jogged down the hall to his destination, when he arrived he found Ginny and Hermione having lessons with Pansy in order to catch her up with the rest of the orders training. Even after weeks of Pansy being in the house and a part of the Method, all three girls were still a bit tense around each other, and Pansy was tense with everyone but Draco.

Harry noticed that they were practicing some of the more dangerous offensive spells that were in the Black library that used magic directly from a person's core which made them much more dependent on will than words and wands.
It had been a while since he had brushed up on his training so Harry decided to join.

"Hey guys!" He greeted with a wide smile.

Hermione returned the smile, "Harry! Come explain this spell for Pansy, I am having trouble getting it across."

Ginny made a face of frustration as if to imply that it was Pansy's fault and not Hermione's.

Harry joined the circle they had formed and threw the red head a look that warned her to not start anything, she responded with a nod and visibly tried to smooth her face out.

"Well," Harry began, "It's similar to the Patronus, which is the closest magic to core spells that is common today."

Pansy put her hands on her hips, "I have never produced a Patronus before."

She looked slightly embarrassed to admit it.

"I think we should start there then, the Patronus charm is considered one of the hardest spells because it is one of the only ones that is still used that utilizes core magic. It uses the little bit that leaks from everyone's curse and then wand movements and incantations were used to fill in the rest, But if you are curse free you can be a bit more lax on the wand movements."

Harry looked to Hermione to pick up the lesson for him, he could see she was bursting to explain more and he didn't mind handing off.

Hermione caught his glance and smiled, "Yes, the Patronus is far easier for someone with full access to their core. I know you had your curse removed by your family on your sixteenth birthday but had little training so far besides your anchor, so this is a good place to start."

Pansy looked at her ring which was her anchor and nodded, "OK, how do I start?"

Harry felt his energy well up and couldn't contain his smile when she agreed to start with the Patronus charm. He could feel his magic flowing into the room to calm everyone's energy but didn't bother to stop it, he was too excited to care. If Severus were here might get a lecture about control and not affecting other with his magic without permission, but he didn't care right now.

He got a look from Pansy that told him she knew what he was doing but shrugged it off when she didn't say anything, he wanted everyone to get along, plus Ginny looked far more relaxed.

Harry clapped his hands together, "OK, let's get started! I want Pansy up to speed fast because Severus mentioned that we might start dueling over break."

Two hours later Pansy was producing an impressive amount of glowing mist that was taking an avian like shape. Harry had to remind himself that we was on thirteen when he learned the Patronus charm, and that he was still under the curse, otherwise he would be jealous of how quickly the Slytherin girl was progressing.

During their training the other young members of the Method trickled into the blue room and joined the practice. Glowing, silvery animals were romping through the room in all directions, including Draco's sleek red fox and Neville's proud lion.

Harry expected Pansy to be frustrated by the demonstration of everyone else's successful Patronus',
but instead she looked determined to catch up.

The door creaked open just enough for Remus to slip into the room. He approached Harry with his usual warm smile.

Harry glanced at Pansy to see if she was uncomfortable with the werewolf's presence, he had not had a chance to see them interact much in the weeks that followed her arrival.

He was surprised to see Pansy was completely fine, more than fine actually. She seemed to pay rapt attention to Remus as he approached and greeted him politely.

"Hello, Professor."

Remus turned his smile on her, "I have told you Pansy, no need to call me professor anymore. Remus is fine."

Pansy nodded and looked at her feet.

"Hey, Moony," Harry gave his own crooked smile. Pansy's eyes flickered up at the nickname.

"Hey, Pup," Remus returned, his smile grew when Harry made a face like he always did when being referred to as a pup.

"I just popped in to let you know an Inner Order meeting was called, so Severus and I have to go for a bit," He explained while glancing at the twins, they looked putout about not being invited because they weren't "Inner Circle".

Harry was slightly surprised, it had been weeks since Dumbledore called the Order. Ever since the fateful meeting in his office, when Harry could have died the old man had been holed up in his tower.

Remus responded to the obvious surprise, "We are slightly concerned about the purpose of this meeting, so I think it would be wise to keep the Method members here until we get back."

Harry nodded, it would be easier to have an impromptu meeting if everyone was still in the safe house. He was about to verbally agree with Remus when he felt an intense gaze on his direction. Harry glanced around and spotted Draco looking at them. The blond seemed to be mostly glancing between Remus and Pansy.

Harry ignored that odd occurrence for a moment.

"OK, I will let everyone know they should stay here until you get back. Dudley is arriving in a couple of hours, so things might get a bit crazy."

Remus sighed in an exaggerated manner, "When are things not crazy, we will just have to adjust." He left with a wave to the practicing members and shut the door behind himself.

Harry turned to the training members, all of which were already paying attention since Remus entered. He made eye contact with Draco who looked off to the side and then scanned the small crowd before speaking.

"For those of you who were not close enough to ease drop," Harry paused for the light laughter following his comment.

"Remus and Severus have been called to an order meeting," The hush that followed his
announcement was piercing, it sharply contracted with the din that proceeded it. Harry knew that everyone understood the implication of an Order meeting, Dumbledore was on the move, which meant that Voldemort may also be moving.

After a moment of letting the news sink in he spoke again, "I am requesting that everyone stay in the safe house until their return because we will be having a meeting immediately."

Everyone began muttering to each other, except the twins who were speaking loudly about what the Order could be doing and suggesting crazy things, such as world domination.

Harry turned back to Pansy and continued their training.

Two hours later Harry called an end to training to everyone's relief, but without training most people weren't sure what to do with the remaining time until Remus and Severs returned. Many of the members didn't spend time in the safe house unless there was a meeting or training.

Neville and Ginny looked at each other hoping the other had an idea. They looked slightly uncomfortable and were glancing and Pansy nervously and even at Draco sometimes. Harry had never considered that some members were still wary of Draco. He knew that Pansy was still untrusted by many but he thought that Draco was completely integrated because of the twins. Heck, even Ron was getting along better with him and admitted that he was trustworthy.

Ever since Ron discovered his new eyesight he has been cataloging what different core abilities look like and knot magic was one of the most complex and interesting, so he was forced to spend time with Draco.

People began pairing off and forming small groups to entertain themselves while they waited.

Neville and Ginny moved to a corner of the room and continued to glance at the Slytherin's and whisper. Harry sighed and wandered over to Luna who was alone on the other side of the room from everyone else. She was holding a silver cup with yellow butterfly's on it. Harry could tell from the smell that her tea was just regular tea now, and that made his heart feel lighter.

"Hey, Luna." Harry took a seat by her side on the small couch.

"Hello, Harry." Luna sipped her tea, it had become her trade mark, always having an overly decorative tea cup from the Black collection. Harry was glad she still used those cups.

"You look like you could use some quiet." She commented in an offhanded way.

Harry felt himself relax, Luna could always tell when he was unsettled and never bothered him about why. Even if he still felt more relaxed than he had in a long time, less like he had to do something or the world would end and more willing to accept that he couldn't control everything, he still need quiet from time to time. A couple of weeks ago he brought up his change in emotion with Severus, and it was concluded that he was reaching a breaking point so his magic self-soothed to regulate his emotions before he went over the edge. Severus warned him that it was similar to self-medicating and that he should use this time to take it easy, because if something big happened he might not be able to self-regulate anymore.

"Yeah, maybe," Harry admitted as he glanced over at Ginny and Neville.

"Ronald is your key to harmony," Luna sounded far away as she spoke.

Harry looked at her, she was staring off to the side and her eyes were focused on something Harry
couldn't see. He stopped wondering where she pulled the information she dispensed from and just accepted that she was normally right. He just had to figure out the exact meaning of her message.

"Luna," Harry called her attention away from… whatever she was looking at and waited until she was focused on him.

"How are you doing? I mean with your gift… I mean… is it still getting better?" He knew it had only been a day since she had her curse removed but he still worried he did something wrong.

Luna smiled wistfully, "Every moment that passes." She reached up to her neck and grabbed the bottle cap she wore as a necklace.

Harry felt his shoulders relax, before they tried to remove Luna's curse she asked him to be the one to pick items from her things to be her anchor. When he had seen the bottle cap necklace in the box of items she brought him, he was sure it would be her anchor.

"I'm glad, ummm… what's it like?" Harry felt as if he were prying into a very personal matter but he was so curious.

Luna didn't seem phased at all by the question, she put a finger to her chin in thought.

"It's like… being able to breath for the first time. It comes very naturally and I can control how much I see. Before it was like being near the Vale all the time, there were voices and images all screaming at once, now I can step back and only feel what I want. Every minute that passes allows be to move more freely within my ability."

Luna spoke clearly as she always did when she was referring directly to her gift, it was something that Harry notice a while ago. She spoke airily when she was more encompassed by her ability.

"You know…"

The ringing tone of her voice caught Harry's attention, she looked him right in the eyes, and she wasn't looking through him as she usually did.

"You save me, you and the Method saved my life. Not only that… but you all gave me a place to live, a reason. Because of you, I have friends."

For the first time Harry saw Luna embarrassed, she looked away again and he didn't try to make her look back. He simply accepted her words.

"I am Happy you're here, Luna."

They sat together in silence and watched the other member's mill around the room. They stayed in their small groups for the most part. Neville and Ginny were still in the corner, the twins were in a deep conversation with Draco by the fireplace, while Pansy was at his side taking shelter in his presence. Ron and Hermione were on the couch with papers spread out in front of them.

Ron looked up from the papers and glanced around the room. When he spotted who he was looking for he waved his arms and called out.

"Malfoy, come look at this," Ron was louder that necessary for the size of the room. His volume drew the attention of everyone else.

Neville and Ginny watched closely as Draco walked over to the pair on the couch and took a seat on the floor on the opposite side of the table. All three of them began talking at once and pointing
to various things the others couldn't see. Draco pulled out some rope and began to demonstrate some knot magic for Ron. Hermione smile and said something that was apparently funny because all three began to laugh.

Neville and Ginny put their heads together and whispered while watching the trio.

Harry bumped his shoulder lightly into Luna's, "Looks like you were right, again." Who would have thought a muggleborn, a Weasley and a Malfoy would be laughing together and not at each other's throats."

She made a sound of agreement, her eyes were far away which indicated she was using her gift in some way.

Harry knew he was practically talking to himself when Luna was like this but he didn't mind. After a few seconds Luna's eyes cleared of fog and she looked at him.

"Doggy thinks that this is a sign of the world ending, I think he's being over dramatic."

Harry laughed, it sounded like something Sirius would say. He wondered if Luna would be able to talk to his godfather whenever she wanted once she had full control of her gift. He wanted to ask but was too scared of the answer, part of him desperately wanted more than the random messages from Luna but another part wanted to put his godfather to rest.

"Hey Luna, Sirius knows I love and miss him right?"

She looked at him sadly.

"Yes."

Her answer was simple but filled with emotion, it made Harry feel like warm water was filling his chest. Luna was never able to control what or who she saw before, but now she was getting more control by the minute.

"Why doesn't he show himself to me if he's a ghost?" Harry had been wondering this for a while.

"He not a ghost," She answered bluntly.

The confusion on his face was clear so she elaborated, and Harry was reminded of why she was in Ravenclaw.

"Ghost are rare, they are imprints of a magical person's core. They have all the person's memories and emotions, they also have the ability to retain new information. Some think the core magic imprint binds the person's soul to earth, so there is little difference between who they were and what they are now besides being incorporeal. It was a truly violent and traumatizing event that imprinted them and they can never move on. True earth bound ghost are even more rare now because of the curse which is why there has only been one in Hogwarts since the curse was enacted."

"Myrtle," Harry muttered.

Luna nodded and paused to collect her thoughts, her eyes fogged over as she consulted with… something, Harry couldn't see.

"My ability lets me communicate with spirits. Spirits of those who died come to the realm of the living because they have something they left behind, but they are not trapped here. They come to
watch over the people still alive but also return to the beyond the vale from time to time, but they
don't truly go to the afterlife more like an in between place. Once the people they are missing have
joined them or the situation they left behind is resolve, they move on permanently. Sometimes they
are quiet and peaceful like Doggy, but others leave the afterlife because of regret and are just
torturing themselves. In the end all Spirits move on or go crazy."

Harry thought about what he just learned, "So he can't show himself because his spirit doesn't have
magic on this plain to have a ghost or talk?"

Luna smiled, "exactly, He also doesn't stay for very long, just checks in on you."

Harry felt his the warmth he had for Sirius grow a little, it was nice to know he was being checked
on by his godfather.

"So if he's only going to this in between place, does that mean he can't see my parents?" Harry felt a
pit in his stomach.

"Yes, Doggy can only see other spirits in the in-Between, he won't see your parents until he moves
on."

Luna saw the worry on Harry's face and added to her explanation, "But don't worry, he will move
on. He already plans to when he's sure you're going to be OK."

Harry nodded and decided to change the direction of the topic, he didn't want to talk about feeling
guilty that Sirius was still here.

"You said Spirits of those who died, are there other types?" He asked.

Luna raised her arm and poked Harry right in the sternum, "the ones in the living. All living things
have a spirit. I thought my gift was to talk to the dead who were vising us, but I can hear whispers
from anything that has a spirit, which clears a lot of things up for me."

Harry felt a shock of fear, "you can hear my spirit?"

Luna laughed, it was like the clear tone of a bell.

"I don't often hear the spirits of living people, they don't reach out to speak because the person can
speak for it, unlike many spirits that yell at me like I'm deaf. But I haven't had much time to
practice my gift, so I'm not sure. Maybe if…"

Luna trailed off and looked into the distance in the manner she always did when listening to the
spirits.

"Your cousin is here."

Harry jumped to his feet the moment her words registered and he dashed for the door. His sudden
movement caught the room's attention, they all followed him with Hermione, Ron and Draco in the
lead.

Harry climbed the rarely unused stairway in the corridor that led to the ground floor. This floor
held the main dining room and many sitting rooms, along with a conservatory that currently held
no living plants, and a study. No one came to this floor often, not since the order left and the front
door fell out of use, also Harry didn't like the big dining room, and when he wanted to be in a study
he used the one in the secret passage in the library. He was considering letting Neville use the
conservatory so they could grow potions ingredients.
Harry looked through the tall thin window next to the door, everyone else crowded around him and the window on the other side. They watched as a black sedan pulled up and parked the side of the street between numbers 11 and 13. The driver's side door opened and revealed a large grotesque woman who was wearing very fine clothes, Harry felt himself sneer in a perfect imitation of Severus. The ugly cow probably bought those new clothes with the promised bribe he sent her.

Dudley got out of the car looking thinner than he did over the summer, luckily he was still pretty muscular and not malnourished. Marge smiled in a disgustingly smug way as she pointed out the house numbers and laughed in her nephews face.

Harry was glad he couldn't hear them or he might have lost his temper and blown the dumb bitch up again. His hand gripped the molding under the window, and he felt his entire body begin to shake. He wished he could open the door and call out to his cousin, but the only way he would be seen or heard is if he left the wards, which he couldn't do. He hoped his letter explained what to do well enough.

Dudley began to unload his luggage from the boot, there were more bags than Harry expected. His cousin drudged through the task of unloading, he looked tired and his hair was not shinny like it normally was, but instead it was lank against his forehead.

As if to reflect the boy's mood the overcast sky began to release its rain in a light drizzle. Marge's face distorted so horribly as she screeched that Harry thought he could hear it through the wards, even though that was thoroughly impossible.

Their Aunt rushed to the boot of the car and grabbed the last bag, a duffel bag and threw it at Dudley, then she quickly got back in the car and peeled off. The force of the bag was too much for the tired boy, he hit the ground hard and laid there for a moment with his duffel on top, as the rain got heavier.

The look on Dudley's face struck a deep cord with Harry, because he had seen that same face in the mirror every day when living with his Aunt and Uncle. If he didn't forgive Dudley before, he certainly did now, because it was clear that he defiantly understood what Harry went through all those years.

The shaking in Harry's body intensified and he wanted to rip the door open and run through the wards, a soft and warm hand on his shoulder sapped much of the anger from him. It was something that only Hermione could do, through a single touch she expressed that she understood but it was not a good idea to do whatever stupid stunt was running through his mind.

He looked back into her brown eyes and nodded, then he looked at the rest of his friends. He expected some of them to be angry at Dudley because of their past, or some of them to jeer at the Muggle. But they were all hushed and they sadly, or at least politely, watched the scene unfold.

Harry turned back to the window in time to see Dudley begin to pull himself up from the ground. He looked down the street in either direction, then he looked at number 11 and 13. From his pocket he pulled the letter Harry had sent and slid the smaller sealed paper from inside.

With a fortifying breath that always preceded Dudley dealing with magic, he broke the seal. At first he flinched like he expect something to happen, after a moment of nothing he unfolded the paper and looked confused when all he saw was an address that didn't exist.

When he looked up from the paper he stumbled back with wide eyes, his foot met the edge of the curb and he fell back onto his bum while still watching a house appear from where there was nothing. Harry could remember the when he saw that sight himself and imagined it was the most
magic Dudley had ever witnessed once.

Dudley continued to sit on the wet pavement, breathing hard and clutching his chest. Harry felt a renewed temptation to open the door and leave the wards to retrieve his cousin, who seemed too shocked to pull himself together. Eventually Dudley did manage to recover from his surprise enough to get to his feet, and with a great amount of hesitation he began to walk towards the safe house.

Harry grabbed the door handle and took a deep breath, with a decisive movement he swung the door open. Dudley was a few steps away from the wards and couldn't see Harry standing in the door frame yet, but as soon as he crossed the line of protection Harry suddenly appeared on the open doorway.

"Harry!" Dudley yelled in both surprise and happiness, "Where did you come from?"

Harry couldn't help but enjoy Dudley's wonderment at the magical things that were just normal to himself now.

"There are protective wards that hide activity up to about the middle of the walk way, so until you crossed the protection the door looks closed and the house seems abandoned."

Dudley looked up at the rest of the house and let out a small gasp. After reading the address on the paper Dudley saw what Harry had seen when he first arrived at Grimmauld Place, after crossing the wards he was seeing the house in all its glory with Harry as its owner.

Harry opened the door wider and stepped to the side.

"Come in!" He prompted.

Dudley peeked in the doorway, everyone in the entry way was looking back at him curiously. Harry saw his cousin hesitate when he noticed all the people gathered.

Harry tried to relax and seem inviting to counteract all the people.

"Come on, they don't bite." He encouraged.

Dudley entered the house slowly while looking around at everyone with slight distrust in his eyes.

"It's not biting I'm worried about," he stage whispered.

His eyes landed on Fred and George.

"Well maybe a little worried about biting," he amended in obvious reference to the twins.

They both gave toothy smile back while Draco chuckled besides them.

The entry way became silent and everyone began to shift on their feet awkwardly.

"Ummmm… let me show you your room." Harry grabbed Dudley by his arm and dragged him to the stairs.

Dudley staggered behind him with only his duffel bag over his shoulder, "Wait my things!"

Without thinking Harry pulled his wand and waved it behind himself without pausing, the luggage responded instantly and floated quickly to catch up with its owner.
Dudley was obviously impressed, even if a bit nervous about the magic, "Whoa! You didn't even use words!"

Harry ignored the complement as they arrived at the room he had prepared. He was slightly embarrassed because he had worked so hard all year to be able to cast simple spells wordlessly, and this was the first time he used the skill casually.

Dudley looked around the room with his mouth slightly open. Harry had chosen one of the larger rooms with an exaggerated bay window that contained a cushioned seat. The room had rich tapestries and warm wood floors, the color pallet was mostly deeps golds with some dark browns.

"It's amazing!" Dudley breathed.

Harry didn't know what to say, he watched as his cousin continued to explore the room in silence. Even though they had formed a friendship over the summer and Dudley didn't blame him for his parent's fates, Harry still felt sort of awkward. They didn't really know each other that well outside of the many years of antagonizing each other. He felt like she should use the time they had this break to get to know the real Dudley.

Harry's thoughts paused as he remembered someone else he had a similar situation with. Since Draco joined the Method Harry hadn't really spent much time with him. They had a few short conversations and acted civilly, but Draco spent much of his time with the twins or Remus, and lately Pansy or Ron. Harry decided he needed to make sure he knew what was going on with all the members of Method, starting with Draco… and Dudley.

Harry felt a jolt of panic, he had completely forgotten about Dudley and the Method. Could Muggle sign blood contracts? Or did he have to try and keep his cousin away from all vulnerable information?

"Harry?"

Dudley's voice brought Harry back to the present.

"Uh, Yeah?"

Dudley shuffled his feet, "Are there any adults in this house or is it just kids our age?"

Harry chuckled, he wasn't sure what was funny, the fact that Dudley thought to ask about supervision or the fact that he thought of them all as kids.

"There are two, one lives here and the other comes and goes. They are both out right now though," Harry explained as he watched his cousin unpack. He felt like now was a good time to try and explain about the Method, but he didn't want to give away too much.

"Umm, Dud. Just so you know, this isn't just a house I stay in on break… it's like a base I guess. For a group… I don't know how to explain it."

Dudley put another shirt in his dresser and then leaned against the top.

"This is a secret organization dedicated to destroying Voldy- what's-his-face, but also to undermine that headmaster of yours, right?"

Harry was stunned and he was sure it was all over his face, "How?"

Dudley laughed as he began unpacking again.
"Mum gave me the short version of what happened to your parents after you told me about the
wards this summer, she said you were important somehow. Then when you needed to sneak away
from that old crazy guy, and later told me you had a secret house, I kinda put two and two together.
The security on this place it a bit over the top for everyday use I imagine."

He put another shirt away as Harry absorbed what he was hearing. Dudley once again showed he
was observant and smart, he was really underestimated. Harry was about to comment on how
impressed he was when a bright light shot through the wall causing Dudley to yelp and stumble
back. Harry didn't react as the light stopped and revealed itself to be an otter. The glowing creature
looked up at Harry and spoke with Hermione's voice.

"They're back from the meeting," It said and then faded away.

Harry perked up at the news, He could ask Severus and Moony about the blood contract and
Dudley. He looked over at said boy who was pulling himself off the floor.

"Come on, the adults are back." Harry waved Dudley to follow as he left the room.

"That otter thing was like the dear thing, from when you saved me from the Dementors!" Dudley
gaped as he rushed after Harry.

"Yeah it was the same thing, it can be used to communicate and looks like a different animal for
everyone."

Dudley match stride next to Harry.

"Cool," He said while trying to act casual about it.

He wasn't very good at hiding how truly amazed and interested he sounded. It warmed Harry that
his cousin was taking in the magical world as something amazing to behold (if a bit nervously),
rather than something to be jealous or scared of. He was walking a different path than his mother
and hopefully he will have a better life for it.

"Yeah, it is cool isn't it?" Harry said wistfully with a pleased smile.

Both boys entered the kitchen at the same time, everyone was gathered around the table with
Remus and Severus by the fire place.

"We should get this meeting started…" Severus began upon seeing Harry but be trailed off when
his eyes landed on Dudley.

Harry clapped his hand on his cousin's shoulder, "This is Dudley, we were expecting him
remember?"

Severus stared for a moment longer, "Right…" he drawled.

Remus approached the obviously overwhelmed boy and put out his hand.

"Hello, I'm Remus," he offered with his trademarked warm and gentile smile.

Dudley looked more at ease with someone welcoming him rather that gawking at him like
everyone else, Harry assumed it was because most of them had never met a muggle. As for
Severus, he just disliked new people…

Remus' show of manners snapped Hermione out of her peer pressure induced silence. She
approached Dudley as he finished shaking hands with Remus and offered her own hand in greeting.

"Hello, I'm Hermione."

Dudley took her hand, "Hi, Dudley."

He didn't seem to know what else to say.

The awkward greetings were cut off by Severus' snapping tone.

"We should start the meeting."

He stalked to the front of the table and Harry followed.

"What about Dudley?" He asked.

Severus glared over at topic of the question, he looked as if he was about to snap again until understanding flashed in his eyes. Harry assumed he was in a bad moon from the Order meeting, not that those mood impacted Harry anymore, which sometime made Snape more irritable.

"He is not able to be bound by the blood contract, if that is what you were thinking. He is a muggle and has no core to be bound by." Severus' tone was more even as he responded.

"Then how to we make sure he keeps all this to himself?" Harry tried not to say it to loud.

Severus' let out a suffering sigh, as if Harry's lack of knowledge was painful to him.

"He is a muggle, we will simply bind him with a spell."

The sheer confusion on Harry's face caused Snape to pinch the bridge of his nose in frustration. He turned to the room as a whole and got everyone's attention.

"It seems we have a new member today, but this member is unable to sign the contract due to his muggle status."

Severus' announcement caused everyone to look at Dudley who shied away.

Hermione spoke up with clear understanding of the situation, "He can't enter any bonds or oaths without a magical core!"

Severus' nodded his head in her direction, "Yes, but he can be bound by a spell, with his permission of course."

Everyone waited for Dudley's response. He looked to Harry who smiled encouragingly.

"I… yes. I want… am OK being bound by a spell. I…" He looked over at his cousin again.

"I want to be a part of this."

Harry wondered at the wording of that last statement. Maybe Dudley wanted someplace to belong now that his parents were gone, and maybe his school life was not going well, if you add that with his aunt abandoning him… maybe Dudley was feeling lost.

"Very well." Severus accepted.

Before he could move on to casting the spell another question rang out.
"I thought you couldn't bind someone into silence, only enter oaths, like an unbreakable vow." Pansy spoke up with a hint of her old snooty tone.

"Yeah, and why can't he give a vow? Even squibs can do that," One twin added on.

Severus sighed again, a longer sigh than before, and dove into a fast spoken explanation.

"Apparently I need to give a lesson. In short, a squib has a magical core and can willingly enter blood contracts and vows, they are able to sustain the vow with their own magic and bind their core to contracts. You cannot bind a squib or a witch or wizard into silence against their will because you would have to sustain the spell yourself while their magic fought it. The process would drain you over time. With a muggle there is no fighting, so it will use some of your magic but it will not drain you faster than your core replenishes."

Severus turned back to Dudley with sharp movements and a snap of his robes.

"Now, if I may begin…" He raised his wand.

"Wait… if squibs have a core and can do some types of core magic, why can't they cast even one wand spell?" Hermione's question, although valid, was poorly time.

Severus let his wand arm fall to his side, Harry could tell by the look on his face that he was counting backwards in his head. When he was slightly calmer he turned to Hermione and answered.

"Squibs did not exist before the curse, at least not according to any records. Now let me finish this spell before we move on." He spoke between his teeth.

Harry watched as Hermione had to cover her mouth with both hands to stop herself from asking more questions. Harry also wanted to know about how the curse is apparently the reason squibs exist, but he also valued his life too much to interrupt Snape again. Rather than put his life on the line, he simply watched as the man cast the binding spell on a profusely sweating and nervous Dudley.

It was a short spell that sparkled silver and settled on Dudley and seeped into his skin.

Severus glanced at Ron who had been watching with a keen eyes. Ron nodded his approval, indicating that the spell took hold as expected. Magic like this was not often used on muggles, it was comforting that they had someone that could verify if it worked.

"That was it?" Dudley asked as Severus lowered his wand.

"That was it," Harry confirmed as he got up from his chair.

He clasped his cousin's shoulder, "Not too bad, right?"

Dudley nodded and smiled in relief, "Right."

Severus turned to face the room with a snap of his robe that grabbed everyone's attention.

"Now, if I can begin this meeting…"

"What about the squibs?" Hermione's question burst from her with incredible speed like sick she just couldn't keep down.

Remus shot to his feet when Severus' face darken to a dangerous extent.
"I would be happy to explain," Remus cut off whatever terrible insult was about to tumble from Snape's lips.

"You see," Remus began while he gently pulled Severus back by his shoulder and stepped between him and the students.

"Most old families keep records, as you know. Any family that existed before the curse who had records we can access, doesn't seem to have any squibs recorded. After the curse suddenly the records show squibs being born."

A much calmer Severus stepped around Remus to finish answering the question.

"Other than records, anyone with relation to a pure blood family would have heard the stories about the unfortunate existence of squibs."

Pansy stood from her seat next to Draco and everyone's attention was drawn to her.

"When I was young, my parents told me that before the curse there were just stronger and weaker magical people, but no squibs." She sat down quickly with slightly flushed cheeks, this was the first time she had spoken up with the entire Method in the room.

Severus nodded, "Some think that Squibs are the weaker magical people, and because their core is weaker it does not leak enough through the curse to have sufficient surface magic. Others believe that some people had an adverse reaction to the curse magic and core strength has nothing to do with it, much like potions allergies."

Harry looked around at the shocked faces in the room. The Weasley's were not the type of pureblood family that would pass those stories down, so every head of red hair sat above a surprised face that mirrored his own feelings.

Then he saw Dudley, his head was tipped down to hide most of his face, and what Harry could see was obvious sadness. Glossy blue eyes peered up and caught Harry looking.

"So my mum was a witch? She could have gone to your school and been happy with her sister… if this curse thing didn't exist?"

Harry opened his mouth to answer but his throat tightened with grief for all the possible futures he could have known if the curse didn't exist. He was also afraid he would spew inappropriate theories about Petunia not marrying Vernon if she had been a witch.

He simply nodded.

Determination settled onto Dudley's face, and Harry understood that his cousin was in for the long haul. At the root of everyone's problems was the corruption deeply seeded in the wizarding world.

Severus took the extended moment of silence as his cue to begin the meeting before more questions were thrown at him.

"Well, if I may, I would like to speak about the topic we gathered here for. Dumbledore called an order meeting for the first time since the incident with Ronald and Harry."

Severus' smooth voice washed over the room as he explained in great detail the proceedings of the meeting. Harry had trouble focusing on the individual words his mentor was speaking as the dark walls of the underground kitchen flickered in the low candle light.
He caught the basic gist of what happened in the Order meeting, Dumbledore seemed to call everyone together to make it look as if he was doing something. When in reality he was simply shuffling his feet because there was no leads with Voldemort so quiet.

The only important information that came from the meeting was the fact that Dumbledore was still looking for Hocrux's. Many of the members were sent to seemingly random places to collect information that is meaningless to anyone who is not in the loop, but Severus and Remus saw it for what it was. Albus was desperate and spreading out the Order to search any lead, this was his equivalent to flailing aimlessly in the dark.

The pit of Harry's stomach rolled in reflex at the thought of a desperate Dumbledore. As manipulative as the man may be, he was the best at being a step ahead. Harry wondered how the fight against Voldemort would evolve after the old man's imminent demise. His stomach lurched, he didn't like to think about what was to come. He knew Dumbledore was not going to survive the curse on his arm, and he understood that Severus had to kill him to save himself and Draco… Hell, Dumbledore asked him to do it. He just couldn't imagine what he was going to feel when the moment came. Even knowing all the manipulations Dumbledore imposed in Harry's life, he still had feelings deep down from when he was a scared eleven year old boy, feelings of Dumbledore being a savior, a mentor and something like a grandfather.

Harry knew he should shed those feelings, but it wasn't easy. He could ignore them with his anger as he screwed Dumbledore over every which way, but ending his life was a different matter.

He pulled his mind away from the depressing topic, he learned recently that mulling over a problem with no solution did nothing but make him more worried, and worrying was not a viable solution. Instead he switch to contemplating if he should spend some of his copious amounts of money on battle gear for Severus' upcoming dueling lessons.

The meeting drew to a close and Harry was brought back to reality as people began to gather around him and his cousin to introduce themselves. He pushed his worries down and watched as Dudley smiled and chatted with witches and wizards. Harry allowed his new calm to take hold, and let the warmth of the scene before him wash over his mind.

A single candle continued to burn in the center of the kitchen table. The dark room as constricted down to a small bubble of flickering light, everything outside the illumination was stark blackness. Everyone with classes in the morning had retired to bed early. Draco sat alone at the table, waiting for the people that only pretended to leave for bed.

It didn't take long for the kitchen door to creak open, Draco could only hear it, as it was beyond his orb of light.

Severus melted into view from the darkness, completely silent. His dark robes made him appear as part of the blackness that surrounded them, like a void monster of some type. From within the flickering sphere it seemed a possibility as it gave the impression that they were floating in the empty ether of space.

Severus took a seat opposite Draco, he steepled his fingers as he placed his elbows on the table. Slowly the door creaked open again, and the light was filled with people who had unintentionally become the inner circle of the method.

Draco glanced at Hermione and then his eyes slid over Luna, Harry and Remus. He knew Harry hated this, the intermittent secret meetings they held ever since the Unbreakable Vow came to light. They never did tell the rest of the Method about the vow because they were unsure if they
were willing to do what had to be done.

The parallel between the Method, the Death Eaters and the Order that this inner circle created was not lost on Draco. From the bitter expression on Harry's face it was obvious he saw the similarity as well, he made his distaste for this situation clear but adapted surprisingly quickly to this new world of secrecy.

On the other hand Draco reveled in this world of privileged information, especially because he was on the inside. Harry may have held it against the headmaster when he withheld knowledge, but Draco understood the old man's reasoning, even if he made some literally, fatal mistakes by keeping to many secrets from his golden boy. There was a delicate strategy to the headmaster's actions that Draco could respect from a distance.

Harry's speedy integration into this new structure of the Method led Draco to believe that their leader was coming to understand the importance of restricted information flow. The member that probably caused Harry to accept their new inner circle was Ron, the red head's temper was legendary, and no one wanted to do damage control if he found out about their plans to kill Dumbledore. He would probably become the first person to test the strength of the blood contract when he attempted to defect.

Hermione let a large file thud to the table, the sound called Draco's thoughts back to the present. The file folder was similar to the binder that held the general Methods notes, but this one was black with a silver bird on the front that looked suspiciously like a phoenix. This folder was also much thinner than the one used in the larger meetings.

Hermione flipped to the most currently notes.

"First order of business," She began.

She didn't get much father, a bright flash of fire lit the room and then died out, leaving only Fawkes behind. He settled on the Harry's shoulder, causing the boy to look much less bitter.

Hermione cleared her throat and continued as if she had never been interrupted by a large fire bird.

"Have we pinned down a definite date for the Death Eater invasion?" She looked to Severus as she spoke.

"We are close, the vanishing cabinet is almost completed. Once I have it repaired I shall report to the Dark Lord that Draco fixed it and he will set the date." His deep voice was flat.

Hermione made a note in her papers with a grim expression.

"We will need to make sure we have trained members in all the open areas of Hogwarts to protect nearby students just in case our plan fails." She made another note to herself.

"The plan will not fail, I am fulfilling my vow by letting the Death Eaters into the school, but they will not get any farther then the come and go room." Severus growled.

Draco was very aware that Snape didn't want to be responsible for letting killers into a school of children, but he was grateful that the man was taking the vow seriously and keeping them both alive. He reached down to his bag on the floor and pulled out his notebook, he flipped to a page with many sketches of rope patterns.

"I have the rope wards planned, so when they come out of the cabinet they won't be able to go back in."
He pointed to one complicated drawing, then he flipped to the next page with an even more complex patter.

"And this one will keep them from getting out of the Room of Requirement."

Hermione made more notes and then looked at Harry.

"Any contact with Dumbledore?"

Harry shook his head no, "Severus seems to think that Dumbledore will contact me after holiday break and act as if nothing happened."

"He is rather predictable," Severus drawled.

Hermione made a quick scribble.

"And what about the magical connection you formed with the people that you removed the curse from? Anything new to report? Any changes?"

Harry put his hand over the round Gem that hung from his neck.

"No change, I can still feel the connection between myself and the crystal, and also the connection it has with Ron and Luna."

He glanced at Luna as he explained, slightly embarrassed.

"Like I can tell that Ron's asleep right now."

Hermione, was jotting down more notes and spoke without looking up, "We will be explaining the details of the bond to everyone soon since Ron can see it now, we just want to keep everyone calm when you explain."

Harry looked irritated at the prospect of keeping more secrets but agreed, "I hope it's very soon, I want to remove everyone's curse, but I won't invade people's privacy unknowingly."

Hermione did look up at this strong statement, she smiled warmly. Harry's show of moral integrity filling her eyes with inspiration.

"I know you wouldn't do that," She stated firmly as fact.

Draco admired the loyalty and faith between Harry and Hermione, but he also couldn't help but want to make vomiting motions when they got all… sappy.

"Well!" Draco said dramatically while stretching his arms above his head, interrupting the moment.

"I think it's about time we went to sleep."

Draco looked around the table for confirmation, almost everyone was agreeing and yawning as they stood up, but Remus was looking at Severus in an odd way that caught Draco's attention. He watched as the wolf leaned over and whispered something into Severus' ear and heard slightly louder "no" that the darker man hissed back.

Remus reached out and touched Severus' forearm while whispering again, Severus pulled back and hissed something about "risk" and then left.

Draco wanted to ask what they were quietly arguing about, but he had figured out from months
living in this house that sometimes it was best to stay out of it. He learned through experience that some members of the Method had connections and bonds with other members that weren't easy for everyone to accept or relate too. He filed many of the relationships away as he observed them, but he never presumed to understand them. He would never try to interpret Harry and Severus' bond, just as he knew that Harry respected the reasons why Draco and Remus got along so much better now.

Draco stood from the table as the tense situation between the older men continued to brew, and decided he should go to the blue room. He wasn't tired and had no reason to sleep since he had no obligations in the morning. He pulled the book he left on the coffee table to himself and began to read.

A half an hour after he opened his book Draco closed it. He had read the same page over and over but had not retained any information. Wanting a cup of tea the blond rolled off the couch in a lazy manner he would never display in front of anyone.

Severus had classes early and would be needing to sleep, so the kitchen should be empty by now.

Draco crept down the clean hall like a cat, quietly, just in case his teachers were still arguing. He leaned up to the door and listened but it was silent. With a paranoid slowness he pushed the kitchen door open, when he wasn't snapped at by Severus' deep voice he assumed the cost was clear.

The stone floor let his sock covered feet be silent as he walked past the table to the counter with the tea pot.

"You should be sleeping," A strained voice floated from behind.

Draco whipped around while letting out a small yell that was higher in register then he was comfortable with. Remus was sitting at the kitchen table with a smirk on his face and Draco huffed in irritation.

"Get a kick out of scaring people twenty year your junior?" Draco drawled the best he could with his heart still trying to escape his chest.

Remus' smirk grew, "Make me a cup, would you?"

The strained tone was still present in the man's voice, and on closer expression Draco notice the normally easy smirk was rather forced. He chose not to comment on his observations and simply turned back to preparing tea for them both.

"You were the only one that noticed myself and Severus arguing."

The wolf's blunt statement blew up Draco's plan to stay out of it. Without turning around or looking away from the tea he responded.

"Yeah, everyone else was too concerned with going to bed."

Remus' warm laugh filled the air, "Not only that, but you are always watching Draco."

Draco could feel the wolf's unnaturally amber eyes on his back as the word reached his ears.

"I know you are always watching, because I am also watching," Remus' tone was soft and not at all threatening.

Draco turned back around with the tray of tea, "Oh, are you?" He played dumb.
Ramus's leaned forward to take his cup as Draco sat down.

"Yes, and I noticed something in common between people who are always watching, like you, myself, Harry, and…" He hesitated before saying, "Severus."

While pouring his own tea, Draco waited in silence for Remus to reveal the commonality he claimed to find.

"Acceptance."

The word struck deep, Draco's hand shook and some of his tea missed the cup.

Acceptance, was not something that he had experienced often. He was raised to run a rich and powerful family, not to make friends. He ruled Slytherin, but was he ever accepted before the Method?

He remembered a dark underground room, lavished with rich green and silver draperies and lit by a single fireplace. He wasn't alone, there was another person across the sitting area, and her face was half shrouded in the shadows so he couldn't see her expression besides the small frown on her lips.

*Her voice echoed in the stone room despite the cloth wall covers, "do you ever wonder what our lives would be like if we had a choice about becoming Death Eaters?"

For the first time in many years, he answered a question without considering the consequences, and without agonizing about what the 'correct' answer was for the situation or if his answer would get back to the wrong person.

"I do…"

"Me too…" She responded.

Draco looked at the Wolf across the table, the memory still floating in the back of his mind. Remus had him told stories of his days at Hogwarts with his first friends. Draco could imagine how liberating it must have been to have people who knew his secret, just like that moment was liberating for himself. The first time he admitted he might not want to follow the Dark Lord.

It was the first time someone accepted him without him having to pretend to be someone else.

Remus' dry voice pulled on Draco's mind, "Even though we have all found a small measure of acceptance, people like us are always wary of rejection, always watching for it and planning how to avoid it."

"I am not trying to avoid rejection! I am planning!" Draco stood suddenly, the wolf always seemed to rile him up.

"Planning what? How to act, what to say, and what you can hold over others? You watch, to know more about a situation than others, but why?" Remus sat calmly and asked his questions like a classroom lecture. His attitude only served to irritate Draco further.

The flustered blond took a deep breath, he needed to calm down and take back ground in the conversation.

"I plan, so that I can stay on top."
"Why must you be on top?" Remus shot back.

Draco felt his cheeks flush as he struggled for an answer, "Because… because…"

Remus leaned back in his chair and took a relaxed pose that reflected the ease in which he was juggling the conversation. "Because at the top no one can reject you. At the top you don't need people to like you as long as you have leverage on them."

"No!" Draco slammed his hands onto the table, "It's because I am meant to be on top!"

"Is that what your father told you?" Remus' response was quick.

"SHUT UP! You don't know anything! My father… he…he…" Draco felt the anger wash away as no adequate words to defend his father came to mind.

He slowly sat back on his chair, "My father loves me," Was the only truth he could produce.

"I don't doubt that he does," Remus' voice was like a healing balm, the wolf's wild magic felt like understanding.

The hard wood of the table bit into Draco's elbows and he let his head fall into his hands. He loved his father, even if he was wrong.

"How do you always do this?" he asked while pressing his palms into his eyes. Over his time in this house Remus had pounced on Draco with topics like this many times.

Remus chuckled, it was warm.

"I understand the need for approval."

Draco looked up into the man's gold eyes, simply having those eyes meant rejection… Remus really did understand, and it was presumptuous to think he wouldn't. Life as a werewolf put him in a similar situation as someone who grew up with Death Eaters.

Draco was very suddenly tired, "What does any of this have to do with Severus? What were you two bickering about?" He asked warily, Very aware that this conversation was just as much about Severus as if was about Draco for the wolf.

Remus sipped his cooling tea, "It's not my place to tell you about Severus' business, but I will tell you the general idea. He is someone who had found the acceptance he needed when he was young. It saved him, then shortly after the same acceptance turned to rejection. I was trying to persuade him to do something, but his fear of rejection was stopping him and he was making excuses. His excuses have stopped the progress of many… endeavors."

Draco wondered who it was they had to thank for making Severus the man they knew today, but he knew Remus would never tell him. He could conclude that since Remus knew about it, that it probably happened during Snape's Hogwarts years.

"I'm tired," Draco stated without any pure blood etiquette.

He stood and turned to leave, barely catching Remus nodding in response. When he reached the stairs he stopped and spoke without turning.

"Thank you." He meant it, these nightly conversations helped him understand himself a little better.

"People like us, we have to stick together."
Draco imagined Remus lifting his cup as he spoke.

The walk to his room was consumed with pondering those parting words. People like them… it was a descriptor that blanketed almost the entire Method, in some way or another they were all outliers looking for some place they fit.

Draco was sure that he wasn't the only confused member that found themselves having tea with Remus and talking. It reinforced a dynamic that he had figured out early, becoming a trusted member of Phoenix Method wasn't just a matter of getting Harry Potter's approval. You also needed the acceptance of Remus.

It was Harry's organization,

But it was the wolf's pack.

Chapter End Notes

"There are two main types of computers. The first are PCs, or persona computers. Personal computers know your name, and things about your life, and are casual and friendly. Sometimes they're overly personal and you end up having to say, "This is all too much. Back off, computer." The second type of computer is the house cat. These are ambulant robotic quadrupeds used by the Secret Police to monitor our domestic behavior and try to understand why people like to stroke robots and talk in high voices to them."

~Night Vale

A/N- I have probably spent more of my life looking at some type of computer than anything else… I'm not sure how I feel about that. In the end though it makes sense that google knows so much about me, but sometimes I think that my phone and my computer talk about me behind my back… and Facebook is one nosey piece of software. It's always bothering google until its gets my photos from my phones and asking me if I want to post them. On the other hand googles not that much better, like an OCD friend following me, always organizing my pictures by locations and trying to force me to name the album what IT wants… computers am I right? And don't even get me started on my cats!
Monday morning dawned snowy and cold. The curtains were closed around Hermione's bed, they held in the warmth and made it very hard to find a reason to get up. She was over tired and stiff, she knew she had to slow down or she would crash, but there was simply too much to do.

Her eye lids felt like someone was holding them closed, the late night meeting had not done her any favors.

She fought against her desire for sleep and pulled herself to sitting.

Monday meant Double Potions followed by DADA after lunch. She couldn't miss class today, she had somehow finished all of her homework to her own standards, and since it was the final week before winter break, every day meant midterms.

Her eyes were dry and she was sure they looked red and swollen, rubbing them didn't help but she felt compelled to do it, as most tired people do.

Her body was heavy as she dragged herself out of her bed and into the bathroom. Once she was in class she would feel better, today was the Potions midterm and she had to show Professor Jigger how much she learned, after that she could relax in the DADA review.

Clean and dressed, Hermione walked down the stairs to the common room later than she normally did. She was not surprised to find Ron and Harry waiting for her with concern on their faces.

"You OK Herm?" Ron asked softly when her tired eyes met his.
"Yeah, just didn't sleep well," She replied.

Harry gently grabbed her shoulder and began to steer her towards the portrait hole, while he smoothly covered for her exhaustion. She also felt a small bit of his magic soothe her own, hopefully Ron didn't notice.

"You know how Hermione is, she probably stayed up all night fretting that she didn't study enough."

Harry dodged Hermione's halfhearted swing at his arm. Although she didn't like that he used her studious nature as an excuse, she appreciated his quick thinking. She was too tired to find a believable reason for being so run down, and definitely didn't want the explosion of Ron finding out about their secret meeting last night.

The walk to the great hall was quiet, they took their normal seats and were promptly surrounded by Method members from their house.

Hermione reached for the pot of coffee closest and poured herself a cup. Coffee was not a common morning beverage so she was disappointed when her first sip was weaker than she wanted. The cup met the table with a clank and she sighed.

"This coffee is terrible," She mumbled.

Harry stole the plain mug from her hand faster than she could react, she let out a surprised squeak as it was swiped.

"Harry!"

He didn't respond to her aggravated snap as he made up a new cup of coffee from a carafe closer to his seat. She glared at him as he handed her a new mug with a smug smile on his face, when she took the cup her glare moved to inspect the coffee.

"What's in this?" Obvious distrust in her tone, as if she was taking a drink from the twins.

"Just drink it," Harry instructed with a smile.

Hermione took a small sip, a very strong blend of coffee filled her mouth. It was exactly what she needed to get through the morning, but it was much too strong for every day consumption.

"I asked the elves make this coffee for me at the beginning of the term."

Hermione swallowed another mouth full, "This coffee is too strong to drink every day," she illustrated her point by putting the half drank cup down.

Harry laughed lightly, "Dudley told me the same thing over the summer."

Ron's voice joined the conversation with a slightly disgusted edge, "Well he wasn't wrong."

Harry looked around Hermione and burst out laughing.

Ron was holding the coffee that Hermione had placed down and his face was scrunched up like he had eaten a lemon.

"That is too strong, Mate."

Harry shrugged, "To each their own, I guess."
Hermione grabbed Harry's wrist and looked at his watch, then she took the cup back and finished it off.

"It's almost time for class."

"Come on! We have ten more minutes…" Ron whined.

Hermione grabbed his sleeve and began to drag him behind her, "We should be early, there's a test today."

Harry smiled at his friends as he followed without complaint.

"Hello, class." Professor Jigger's smooth voice came from the darkness in the back of the room.

Ron began to snort, but choked on it when Hermione's elbow connected with his ribs. Every class since his gift was unlocked Ron would snort at Jigger's little act at the beginning of each lesson, because he could clearly see where the man was hiding. It irritated Hermione beyond belief, and she was too tired to let it slide today.

The Professor materialized from the dark corner.

"Today you will be participating in a practical test."

His focused gaze slipped across the room, Hermione smiled when his eyes paused on her for a moment before moving on to Ron.

"I dare say, some of you will do better than others," He smirked and turned on his heel.

Jigger pulled his wand and cast the instructions on the board.

"Begin," He commanded in a stern tone that imparted the seriousness of the test.

Hermione moved swiftly to the front of the class to gather the needed ingredients closely followed by Harry, but they were the only ones. The class behind her murmured to each other while some pointed to the board. She ignored them and gathered the large quantities of Salamander blood needed for the test.

As she returned to her seat she noticed that someone was standing at their work station with their hand raised.

Ernie Macmillan became tired of waiting to be called on and yelled out to the Professor.

"Sir, we have never practiced this Potion."

Professor Jigger looked up from his seat at the front of the room, "And?" He questioned casually.

Ernie looked nervous but didn't back down, "How are we supposed to do well if we never learned the potion?"

Jigger stood slowly, he kept a light hearted smile on his face that some might have found unsettling.

"This is a 6th year potion, a very important one. You have learned all the necessary theory to create this potion. This is a tested of your ability to apply theory as well as you over all potion skills."
As he spoke Ernie visibly calmed down, "Oh… OK. I am just worried about the amount of Salamander blood needed for the Wiggenweld Potion… its dangerous if overheated."

Jigger's smile widened, "You might one day be forced to make a dangerous potion you have never made before, and this is simply a real world test. I trust that all my students are competent enough not to make such a rookie mistake, But to be fair I will allow everyone in the class to look at their books and help each other. Is that fair?"

Ernie smiled due to the indirect complement, with his ego boosted he drop his complaints and nodded happily. He began to gather his ingredients, the rest of the class followed him.

Hermione ignored Ron as he whined under his breath, she was engrossed in her work. When the red head returned she heard Harry offer to share Severus' old potion book. She didn't stop him since it shut Ron up, but she did distantly wonder how Harry convinced Severus to let him continue using the book.

The class worked with continuous, quite whispers, they were taking full advantage being able to get help from each other. Hermione was the only one who stayed completely silent, she tuned out Ron whispering back to Harry for help and focused only on her potion, because she wanted to prove she could do it alone.

A voice from the back of the room steadily became louder until it was a "yelled" whisper. Hermione was on the brink of complaining to the professor when a true yell rang out. The voice was filled with so much panic that it stopped everyone in the room.

"Turn it off!"

"I can't!"

"NOX!"

"AQUA ERUCTO!"

Hermione turned around to see Ernie's magic bunsen burner turned up far too high while nearby students tried to put it out. The potion was heating up at an alarming speed and if her calculations were correct Ernie was on the third addition of salamander blood.

Harry was already running over to help before Hermione could stop him, and Ron was close behind.

"HARRY NO!" She yelled as she bolted out of her seat.

Before she could make it even half way there a hand grabbed her and threw her back against her work stool, she looked up to see Professor Jigger's black robes whip by as he ran over, then everything happened at once.

Harry was closest to the fire casting high level freezing charms to slow the heating of the potion, but his efforts failed as the potion turned the one color it should never turn, magenta. Harry's face registered what was about to happen and he began to cast a shield charm, but before he could finish Jigger collided with him, knocking him out of the way while simultaneously casting a shield Hermione had never seen before.

Hermione threw her own shield up over herself and anyone nearby.

The BANG of the potion explosion was deafening and caused dust to rain from the ceiling, at the
same time the white fire of the burning salamander blood flared like a thousand camera flashes. The magical shock wave that followed threw all the students to the floor as Jigger's shield shattered like glass.

Hermione's shield did nothing to stop the magical backlash and she was thrown to the floor. The magic overwhelmed her, and everything went black.

The sound of a door hitting the stone wall with a CRACK jolted Hermione back to consciousness. Her vision was blurry and her ears rang, through the high keening she could hear muffled voices as feet covered by black robes swam in and out of her vision. Everything was covered in a layer of stone dust, a haze hung in the air, people coughed, yelled and cried and it mixed together into seamless sound.

Her eye sight returned rapidly, she recognized staff members as they rushed through the carpet of students on the floor looking for the most injured to take to the hospital wing.

Snape's dark form was hunched over Harry who was awake and following a light at the end of Severus' wand with his eyes.

Hermione sat up, the ringing in her ears was fading.

"Hermione!" Ron's voice ran from her left.

His yell caught Severus' attention and he was upon her with his lit wand tip.

"Ms. Granger, look at me," He instructed while shining the light.

"You don't have a concussion," he concluded after watching for a few seconds.

Hermione looked around and saw that most of the students were sitting up and talking, "Was anyone seriously injured?"

Severus looked grim, "Only Professor Jigger, he has been moved to the infirmary already."

Her heart skipped a beat at the news, "is he going to be OK?"

"I don't know," he replied honestly, "He used the correct spell and saved his class, but it was a big explosion and he was very close."

Hermione remembered how her shield did nothing to stop the shockwave. That explains why he pushed Harry away to use his own spell, Harry's would have done nothing. Her eyes burned, she looked down to hide her tears. She wanted to yell about how it was unfair, and about how the Method was wrong about Arsenius Jigger and they should admit it now.

Instead she looked up at Severus, whipped her tears away and asked, "Can you teach us the spell he used?"

Severus put a hand on her shoulder and nodded, then he turned to attend to the other students. Hermione looked around the room and caught Professor McGonagall looking at her and Severus oddly. She pulled herself to her feet and went over to the Professor to offer help and maybe distract her from the strangely friendly interaction she witnessed.

On her way across the room she spotted Dumbledore speaking to Harry while personally checking him for injury. Since Harry was closest to the scene it was a great excuse to talk to him while
asking him question about what happened. It seems Severus was correct in guessing Harry's lessons would resume after the Holidays.

The DADA class review was canceled along with the Potions midterm, but the rest of the week went as expected. Severus' DADA test was very challenging and every member of the Method was prepared and did well, although Hermione didn't seem to enjoy herself as she normally did with a difficult test. Ever since the accident her mood had been somber, she took a short break from her work on the Method and her class work outside of the tests, and so she was once more well rested, but her emotional state was rocky.

Draco sat alone with her in the Kitchen of the safe house. She was writing in her objectives binder quietly, but the entire aura around her was sullen and even a bit pouty. Professor Jigger was will in the hospital wing and had not woken up yet, no new was released to anyone but the Headmaster, sometimes Hermione would go there to check on him.

Draco had heard all about the potions incident earlier in the week, the entire Method had gathered to talk about it. The situation devolved into Hermione advocating for Jigger, arguing that he saved Harry and the entire class and thus couldn't be the Darkness in the prophecy, and Ron continuing to distrust their newest Professor.

Ron's opinion of the situation was that the entire thing was a set up to make Jigger look good. Hermione told him he was being paranoid and asked him if he saw anything unusual when the burner went out of control. Ron admitted while grumbling that it just looked like the magic went wild from over use or the charm wearing off.

Normally Draco was someone who was always on the side of being slightly paranoid, but even with their past animosity aside, he couldn't side with Ron. No one in their right mind would put themselves in such a dangerous situation to throw people off their trail. Salamander blood exploding is as dangerous as standing in the path of a dragon breathing fire and there is only one difficult spell that can stop it. The spell takes tremendous power to keep up through the explosion, Jigger was lucky he held it long enough to dampen the blast as much as he did, and at such close proximity he is lucky to have survived.

Severus, who is the most paranoid person Draco had ever met, besides Moody, chose to stay silent on the topic. He probably wasn't ready to rule out any possibility, but didn't seem to be taking Ron's side even with his body language.

A long sigh came from Hermione, Draco refocused on her and brushed his thoughts away.

"I think I am going to take a nap before the meeting," She wasn't really speaking to Draco, but she also didn't seem to be speaking to herself. It was more like she was just making a statement simply because she felt someone should know where she was.

Draco didn't bother to respond and she slowly left, he cast tempus.

The meeting wasn't for another hour, it was just a review between himself, Harry, Severus. Remus, Hermione and the Twins. They were going over the final plans for the next day.

Today was the last day of classes, tomorrow was Saturday, and the day he was going back to his home to save his mother. He was nervous, his mind was swimming with all the possible outcomes and he often found himself slipping into day dreams of his triumphant return only to have the image ripped away by a wave of panic.
Thinking about Hermione was a good distraction, but now she was gone and he couldn't stop worrying. He thought about everything else he could. When this was over they would start their real plans, over break they were going to the Chamber and Harry was going to remove more curses.

He wondered what other people's gifts would be…

His heart rate dropped as he began making up silly powers for the Method members, he was snickering to himself as he imagined Longbottom having the power to puff up like a puffer fish and float away.

He must have lost himself in his daydream for longer than he thought, soon the first flair of the floo announced the beginning of the Methods arrival.

"You should probably get some sleep."

Draco looked up from his tea, "I will… soon."

Pansy sighed, she was spread out on the couch in the Blue room, and Draco was curled up in one of the arm chairs cupping his tea close. The meeting ended an hour ago but he didn't feel tired.

"Do you think Narcissa would like to fix up the conservatory with me? I am sure we could also get Longbottom to help." Pansy was struggling to find something comforting to talk about, he appreciated the gesture but she was horrid at being comforting.

"Maybe."

Pansy sighed again, but this time it was slower.

"Sometimes I think about what it would be like if the Dark Load didn't exist."

The words called back to a dark night in the Slytherin common room, to when Draco had spoken to her about the same topic. She took another breath to continue speaking.

"I imagine an entire life without him and it makes me happy. I picture every detail, I try to live it moment by moment like real life, but it's only in my head, it's hard to see like looking through water and just like water it evaporates away."

Goose bumps ran down Draco's arms as Pansy spoke, it was pure honesty. He responded with equal honesty.

"I do that too."

Pansy rolled to her side to look at him better.

"In my fantasy life I think Hermione and I would have been friends."

Draco tipped his head to look back at his childhood friend and smiled.

"I think everything would have been different, maybe I would have been friends with…"

He was interrupted by a light knock on the door. There was a pause before the door slowly opened and a mop of black hair poked through. Harry peered around the room looking uncertain, until he saw Draco, but when he noticed Pansy he began to back out of the doorway with a muttered apology.
"Sorry, didn't realize…"

"No, it's OK," Pansy called out.

Harry moved back into the room looking much more uncomfortable than when he first entered, and even though Pansy had called out for him not to leave she looked confused about what to say next. She glanced between Draco and Harry at a loss about what to do, it was obvious that Harry came to say something to the other boy but was uncomfortable with her being there. She didn't want to intrude even though she was curious and a little irritated, but she understood that Draco had been here longer and had formed a bond with some of the members.

"I think… I am going to bed," Pansy spoke slowly as if she was forming the thought as she was saying it. She got up from her seat and hugged Draco.

"Good luck," She whispered.

Harry kept perfectly still as the events unfolded.

Draco watched her leave in silence, the light click of the door behind her cleared the room of tension.

As if someone pressed the play button on Harry, he unfroze.

"I just wanted to talk to you before tomorrow," He moved to take Pansy's spot.

Draco was immediately interested, Harry didn't often seek him out alone to talk. They weren't at odds anymore, but they also didn't spend much time together. Their closest moment was when Harry pushed the Dark Lord from Draco's body, and one would think that moment would help them bond, but all it really did was end the anger.

Draco didn't want it to be that way. He was closer to Remus and even Ron than he was to Harry right now, and something about that felt wrong; especially with the bond he had formed with Remus, it felt like Harry and himself should have become better friends.

Harry made himself more comfortable before continuing.

"I just wanted to tell you to be careful tomorrow, and…"

Draco didn't try to provoke Harry when he trailed off but waited attentively as he could.

"I just feel like I missed an opportunity by not getting to know you better. Remus has sorta taken you in and you are close with Severus, which means that even if the Method separates I am probably still going to see you sometimes… so."

"I…” Draco tried to pick up Harry's lingering sentiment, he tried to say the things he had thought only moments before, but the words stuck in his throat.

Harry continued as if Draco had not made a sound, "I just think we should maybe, be friends. Like real friends and not just people in the same house or organization… that's all."

Draco clench his teeth together in frustration, he had so many things he wanted to say but they were all fighting to come out at once leaving him silent. He managed to nod and Harry looked slightly disappointed but understanding, he stood from his spot on the couch.

"Well, good luck tomorrow."
Draco could only watch Harry leave the room as he grappled with his minds chaotic thoughts and grasped for something, anything to say.

"I want you to be here tomorrow when I get back," words were strained and sharp. It was much harder than it should have been for Draco to express what he wanted, to many years of pretending to be something he was not.

Harry stopped at the exit, the door open and the handle in his hand, he looked over his shoulder and smiled. It was a warm expression that reminded Draco of Remus, and it caused his chest to explode with anxiety and something close to pride, he made progress. He changed something about himself and defied what was expected of him, just like he did when he became friends with a werewolf.

"I can do that."

Draco desperately wanted to clutch his chest when he comprehended the response. His anxiety rose to new levels and he had to bite back a reflexive insult that would invalidate the entire exchange. This was new, and new was scary.

The door closed behind Harry and closed off any chance of screwing it up, Draco let his tense shoulders fall and the breath he was holding leave him slowly.

A light drizzle of rain dampened what could have been a beautiful morning, but Remus found the weather quite fitting for the mood that settled over the house. Less than ten minutes ago Draco left for his manor and the rescue plan for his mother was in motion. No one knew how long it would take, on paper it was a very simple plan, but no plan would have been simple or safe enough to stop Remus from worrying.

Draco was simply going to arrive at his home as expected, Voldemort would think he was arriving from his hiding place with Severus where they were training. He would settle in as if he was staying, then he would take a spare moment to bring the special Port Key to the source of the wards and he would key the Port Key into them. Then it was as simple as finding his mother before the marking ceremony and leaving with the port key…

It was supposed to be simple, but Ramus wondered of Draco would leave his father behind or try to take him or at least warn him. As much as Draco disliked his father's life choices and the repercussions those choices had on their family, it was hard to stop loving a parent. Remus truly hope that Draco could let his father go, he had become rather attached to the snotty but charming boy, much like he had with Harry and Hermione. He assumed he couldn't fight his need for a pack forever and this was inevitable, but at lease the people his wolf had chosen seemed to have accepted him back.

Remus sighed as he stepped through the door of his favorite tea shop in Diagon Alley. It was decided that no one except Severus and Harry would be there when the Malfoys arrived, it was probably for the best because they couldn't predict Narcissa's reaction. On top of that Remus suspected that Severus was thinking along the same line as himself, and was preparing for the possibility that Draco did bring his father, it could end up a mess.

Pansy had insisted on also being in the house to wait but Draco refused saying it was dangerous, he shivered at the memory of their fight that concluded with Pansy reluctantly agreeing to stay in her room. The fact that Draco thought it would be dangerous only cemented in Remus’ mind the idea that Draco was going to try and get his father as well.
Remus took his normal seat after ordering his regular drink and pulled his current book out of his robe. He decided that if he wasn't to be in the room when the new arrival or arrivals showed up he might as well leave the house rather than being banished to the second floor.

After a few minutes he realized reading wasn't distracting enough to take his mind off the events of that day. So from his robe he pulled a muggle pen and some rolled up notes, Hermione had some ideas after going through the things Sirius had left for him from their research on the marauders map and so she wrote a "a few" notes…

Remus unfolded the twenty page role of parchment with tiny writing and began reading the first line, the moment Hermione's hypothesis registered in his mind he was hooked. He pulled out a bank paper and began taking his own notes on Hermione's well laid out thoughts. This was exactly the type of distraction he needed.

Harry hated waiting, his entire childhood was filled with waiting. Waiting to be let out of his cupboard, waiting for the day he got a real birthday present, waiting until everyone was asleep to steal food…

Now he was waiting some more.

Draco had left only minutes before, and Severus sat in the kitchen looking just as annoyed as Harry felt. Both of them were worried that the plan would fail and they were both slightly concerned that Lucius Malfoy would suddenly be in their kitchen.

Harry was nursing a cup of tea he had poured from the pot on the table, a loud clank made him start and he sloshed tea over his hands. He glared at Severus, who had slammed his own cup onto the table, and waved his wand to clean the mess up.

"Breaking my cups isn't going to make this go any faster." Harry didn't even try to cover his snarky tone, an action he almost immediately regretted when dark angry eyes turned on him.

A soft flutter of wings proceeded Fawkes landing on Severus' shoulder. The calming aura of the bird did wonders, his shoulder un-bunched and his angry face was replaced with a sad and worried one. He turned away from Harry without any response.

They sat in silence, Harry slowly drinking the same cup of tea and Severus' stroking Fawkes chest. Minutes passed and it felt both like seconds and hours at the same time, Harry's chest burned with anxiety, it strongly reminded him of what it felt like to hold your breath too long. He checked to make sure he was remembering to breathe, but not to breathe to loud, he wasn't feeling very secure about Severus' stability.

A loud vocal sound with a sharp movement scared Fawkes into flying across the room and surprised Harry from his worried mind. When he turned to see what was wrong his worry was stampeded by sharp, bitter, fear.

Severus was tightly holding his forearm, he glared at it, willing it not stop hurting.

"Are… you being called?" Speaking was dangerous by look in the older man's eyes, but Harry felt like he had to say something or Severus might have stayed that way, staring at his burning arm in fear and denial.

Snape stood sharply, his chair wobbled back on two legs threatening to fall over, and before it even settled back to four legs Severus was walking to the door.
Harry stood and went after him, "Severus! It might be a trap, you can't…"

The next words were immediately glued in Harry's mouth when Severus turned in the kitchen doorway, there was nothing that was going to stop him from going to his godson. Normally Harry would have argued more, risked being strangled by the angry professor all in a vain effort to keep him safe, but a small part of Harry deep down wanted to let him go. The slim chance that both Draco and Severus would come back alive whispered in the back of his heart and told him not to argue. He had told himself he wouldn't listen to those rash impulses anymore, but maybe people couldn't completely change… or maybe his Slytherin logic was telling him that this was the only available option that had a chance of a happy outcome.

If Severus didn't go, Draco would definitely die. Voldemort would realize Severus was a traitor and by extension Draco.

Draco stood before two large, white oak doors. Doors to the place that was his home. He was slightly put out that no one came to greet him but he didn't give a time for his arrival so he couldn't really complain. As far as anyone knew he was training his gift with Severus and could leave at any time.

He reached into his inner robe picket and squeezed the portkey. It was made of a pure silver rod about the length of his hand and the thickness of his thumb. According to Longbottom silver amplifies core magic, and he was willing to take the boys word for it since his family used to be well known for their metal work, a gift Longbottom surly would have once he was curse free. Luckily there was a lot of finery left around the safe house that they could melt down to make the rod.

Around the rod was a complicated net of knots made from a thick thread that Draco created himself. It was made of wool for durability, so it could withstand the strong magic, also wool held onto enchantments well, and hemp to focus the magic that would be amplified by the silver. The thread was colored white to indicate Draco's sincerity in his desire to save his mother. The Net around the silver came together in the middle of the rod and formed a rope made from complicated shield knots that was about five feet long so it could wrap around at least two people.

Draco grabbed the elaborate handle and pushed, the heavy door made no sound. His heart jumped at the thought of seeing his parents again, but then it sped up as the open entryway revealed a suspiciously dark house. The sound of his shoes on the marble floors was very loud in the silence and echoed ominously as he walked farther into the manor.

The only light was coming from the partly open double doors to the dining room, he approached slowly.

"Mother?"

Draco called out and listen hopefully for a response.

His mood lightened when he heard his mother's soft voice respond.

"I… in here Draco…"

Without hesitation Draco pushed the dining room doors open, only once he entered and his eyes adjusted to the much brighter light, did he realize the mistake of his brash and trusting actions.

Every inch of the large room was lined with Death Eaters, each with their mask off to expose their faces, except for five who were lined up at the front of the room. Behind the five masked Death
Eaters stood the Dark Lord in all his glory, on his flat face was a smile that sent chills down
Draco's spin. He looked around the room, remembering when his own blood covered the shiny
floors, he hated this room.

In the very center of everything was a small person on their knees, they stood out because of their
while clothes and platinum blond hair. Narcissa Malfoy was hunch over in a simple white dress,
like something a virgin would wear when being sacrificed. Her hands were tied together in front of
her with magic rope, her arms were positioned with her forearms facing up. Her skin was so pale
on her arms that it was almost translucent, and Draco could almost see the mark that was going to
be burned there.

When the entire scene registered, Draco's stomach lurched, almost causing the little breakfast he
had eaten to come up. Behind his mother was a large squatting figure who was holding her in
place. Fenrir Greyback had his mother firmly between his legs, her back was pressed to his front
and his arms were around her. One arm was around her middle and his long yellow nails were
cutting into her skin, slowly racking cuts across her side, creating scars that would never heal. His
other arm was around her chest, and his hand was on her breast squeezing hard, blood was dripping
from cuts Draco couldn't see.

Although the cuts were upsetting, what made Draco want to be sick was the slow rocking of the
werewolf's hips. His mother's backside was firmly pressed against the wolfs groin and Grayback
was enjoying his task of restraining her more than he should have been. From his angle Draco
couldn't see exactly what was being done to his mother… His only consolation was that Greyback
didn't seem to be missing any clothes.

A small sound of dismay escaped Draco before he could stop it, in reply a high cold laugh filled
the room. He couldn't look away from the almost glowing figure of his mother. She looked back at
him from behind a sheet of hair that was covering her tear streaked face, her mouth was tight with
shame and her eyes were wide with fear, but the word she spoke made it clear she was not afraid
for herself.

"Run…" She pleaded against logic, because it was too late.

The door slammed shut behind Draco with a loud BANG that shot through his chest like a stinging
hex and he couldn't help but wince.

The high laughter stopped, Draco pulled his eyes from his mother to look up at Voldemort.

"Hello young Malfoy, I apologize for the sudden gathering." Voldemort hissed his words in a tone
that made it obvious he wasn't sorry at all but was actually enjoying himself.

He stepped down next to the line of masked Death Eaters.

"You see, I wanted to surprise you with this little event. One among us is missing in order to
preserve that surprise, I think it is time he joined us."

Voldemort reached out to the closest masked Death Eater and took their arm in his hand, he pushed
back their sleeve. A very fresh Dark mark was revealed.

Voldemort pressed it with his fingertip and took delight in the bright red it burned when he called
his follower. A small sound of pain came from the new Death Eater and when the Dark Lord was
finished he threw them to the ground.

"Weak," He growled.
The Death Eater simply got to their feet and fell back into place like a drone.

"Now we wait." The excitement in Voldemort's voice was almost Draco's undoing.

He knew that the person summoned was Severus, it only made sense. It would be a few minutes until the man arrived, he had to get out of the safe house in order to apparate and Harry was probably freaking out.

"While we wait, why don't we show Draco his extra surprise?"

Voldemort waved his hand at the five followers next to him, they all reached up and removed their mask. Theodore Nott, Blasé Zabini, Millicent Bulstrode, Gregory Goyle, and Vincent Crabbe stood before him in varying states of distress. This was one more failure to add to the pile…

Draco felt his face crumple as his will was bending to the breaking point, and Voldemort was eating it up, his high laugh filled the room again.

Draco looked everywhere but back at his mother or at his friends while they waited. He scanned the smirking faces of the room and found one that was not smiling at all. His father was in his normal place in the circle, his face was completely blank, but the horror etched into his eyes was not missed. He was staring directly at his wife and didn't look as if he even registered his son was in the room.

The entire plan was destroyed, he wasn't sure if there was anything he could do to stop what was going to happen.

Draco heard the doors to the dining room open.

"Ah, Severus. How good of you to join us."

Voldemort greeted, confirming Draco's assumption that it was Severus who was called, but he didn't look away from his father's face to see his mentors reaction to what was happening in the middle of the room. He could hear Severus walking to his place in the circle, probably looking completely calm as he always did under pressure.

A sharp whine pierced through Draco and he watched his father's face contort in agony. Unable to help himself he turned and looked where the sound came from.

Greayback had pushed his mother forward, bending her arms out in front of her and pressing her face into the floor. He was covering her with his body, hunched like a dog mounting a bitch, making disgusting sounds. Narcissa began sobbing, her strong exterior shattered.

Something inside Draco broke, he swore the entire room could hear the snap of it.

In that moment he made his decision.

He reached for his wand to blast that disgusting creature off his mother, but before he could even completely draw his wand a burst of wild magic exploded from Narcissa. Greyback was thrown so high he slammed into vaulted ceilings with a sickening crack.

Before the werewolf had even hit the ground Draco was moving, the confusion gave him his only chance. He ran to his mother while pulling the portkey from his robes, he could hear Hermione's voice in his head warning about all the things that could go wrong if he used the device without properly connecting it to the wards, but he had no choice. Voldemort was pulling himself together and reaching into his robe for his wand.
He put the silver rod in Narcissa's hand, she had not gathered herself together yet but grabbed hold of the metal.

Draco looked up as running steps came at him, his father was running to their side and without missing a beat he threw the end of the rope out in his direction.

A rage filled scream that was almost inhuman ripped through the air, the password to the portkey was on the tip of Draco's lips, when his father caught the end of the rope he screamed the activation word.

The sound that followed the portkeys activations was deafening, like the crack of lightning directly above them and the shattering of hundreds of windows at the same time, the air was charged with so much magic his hair was on end. Unlike a normal portkey experience there was no hooking feeling, only his entire body tingling.

Bright green light filled Draco's vision, and then his father's face was all he could see, before sudden blackness.

Fawkes squawked and jumped around the table top in irritation, it was a big sign that situation was bad when the bright red bird couldn't compose himself. Harry understood the feeling, he was on the brink if ripping his hair out. He had considered sending Fawkes to get someone, maybe Remus, but he didn't know how it would help, it might make things worse. All he could do is wait and suppress his instinct to react in some way, to do something, anything but wait.

The thought of barging into Malfoy Manor crossed Harry's mind, but he knew that was a bad idea. Voldemort might know that Draco and Snape are traitors and called Severus to lure Harry out… He really was becoming a paranoid Slytherin… there were a million reason that could explain why Severus was called, it didn't have to be a trap.

Harry forced himself to sit down at the table but Fawkes continued to shuffle around across the top. Ron and Hermione were at the burrow, Dudley was in his room and Pansy was pouting in her own, this was the first time in a long time he was the only person in Grimmauld Place kitchen, and although it wasn't dark and gloomy any more it was still unsettling and called back to darker times.

The light clicking of Fawkes scurrying around became a hum in the background as Harry focused on his magical core. This type of meditation helped calm him down and focused his mind. He followed the strands of magic that now connected his core to Ron and Luna ever since he removed their cures, Ron was feeling irritated and Luna was calm but worried. Harry told them about how the connection worked recently, just like the inner circle planned, and they took the news better than expected, but Ron was a bit peeved that Harry didn't tell him right away.

The sound of bird talons on the wooden table stopped. Harry looked at the red bird that was standing directly in front of him, and Fawkes turned his head so one of his bead black eyes met Harry's.

The soft caress of the Phoenix's mind touching his own almost shocked Harry right out of his chair. It was very different from the touch of a human mind, the link felt like a thin spiders thread, the message that came across was a single image. A silver candle, it was beautiful with lovely patterns carved into the wax, the flame on its wick was small and fluttering in a breeze that threatened to put it out. Harry was mesmerized by the struggling little light, then suddenly it was gone, and a thin thread of wispy smoke was the only thing left.

BANG
The fragile connection was broken by a loud sound, something hit the floor hard to Harry's left. He scrambled around the table and ran to the three, tangle bodies on the kitchen floor. He wasn't sure what to do and stood over the mess of pale limbs and blond hair.

A small sound and a bit of movement prompted Harry to rush forward and help whoever was conscious, He reached out to grab a white arm that was attempting to detangle itself from the pack.

Narcissa Malfoy recoiled from Harry's touch on her arm so violently she pulled herself free of her husband and son, both of which didn't even stir. Her eyes were wild and wide, her white clothes were cut up and stained with blood. Harry could see she was covered in angry red cuts and her eyes were red from crying.

She stared at Harry like a cornered animal, her breaths became heavier as adrenaline no doubt flooded her body. Unsure of what to do Harry simply backed away and allowed the woman time to get her bearings, though he desperately wanted to check on Draco who was becoming paler by the moment.

The sound of the front door opening and quickly slamming almost caused Harry's heart to stop from shock. Running feet pounded on the wood hall floor and was quickly followed by Snape's entrance, He was sweaty and his cloths were disheveled and burned. Harry wanted to ask what happened at the manner and how he got here but held back, now was not the time.

Severus spotted Narcissa and made a beeline for her, the moment her eyes landed on him her entire body sagged in relief.

As Severus did a quick check over of Narcissa, Harry moved to Draco's side. He didn't know any medical spells so he did things the Muggle way and pressed his fingers to the other boy's neck, the light pulse he felt eased the painful tightness in his own chest.

A firm hand gently pulled Harry away from his friend and his place was taken by Severus who began a real examination. From the corner of his eyes Harry could see Narcissa crawl across the floor to Lucius, he ignored them in favor of watching Severus work.

With a flick of Snape's wand all the complicated symbols and charts that were floating around Draco vanished.

"He will be fine, he is just magically exhausted. He is lucky the Portkey didn't suck him dry after…"

A deep, rough whine rang from besides Harry, causing Severus to cut his sentence short. They both turned to where Narcissa was crouched over her husband. Harry could only see part of her face, her skin was paper white, and her eyes were wide, they didn't seem to be looking at anything, instead they were directed at the floor slightly to left of Lucius's face.

Harry was confused about what was happening, but Severus seemed to understand something.

"Narcissa…" He whispered and reached out.

A sharp snap of magic pushed his hand away, and he hissed in pain.

Harry could feel fear rising as the air began to smell crisp with magic, he watched Narcissa place a hand on her husband's chest and that's when he noticed… Lucius wasn't breathing. The realization had only been floating on the surface of Nacissa mind the last few minutes, refusing to be absorbed, but Harry saw as it began to sink in. Her eyes glossed over, her shoulders sagged and began to shake.
Understanding came down on her like a heavy rain and saturated her being. The hand on Lucius' chest clenched shut with a fist full of his robes, she pulled on them, and when he didn't rise she brought her face down to his chest.

The awful, pained, sound became higher and louder, it filled Harry's chest with sadness and resonated with the sound his own heart made when Sirius died. When the clear, high note broke and evolved into terrible, erratic cries, the impact enveloped Harry's entire body, he shivered and his hair rose on end. It felt like the sound was a cold and heavy wave crashing into his body, and he knew instinctively that the person crying was feeling more pain than he had ever known. He had loved Sirius, but this was something different.

A wind picked up and it swept magic around the room. Narcissa was in the eyes of the storm as the wind increased and her screaming cries became louder.

"Narcissa!" Severus yelled and rushed forward to grab the distraught woman, but his efforts were fruitless, a strong shock of something like electricity pushed him back.

"NO!" Narcissa screamed, she was crouched over her husband protectively and looked up at them with electric blue eyes that almost glowed.

"I WON'T LOSE HIM!" She continued to yell as the magic storm grew stronger.

Harry saw the wild abandon in her eyes, she wasn't seeing Severus or himself, she was protecting the man she loved from something that wasn't here, from demons in her mind. Something terrible happened to her and she couldn't deal with this grief as well, she was losing herself.

Blood wept from the many cuts on her body and as it dripped to the floor it shined and became dust that was swept away in the wind.

Harry called his core magic up and tried to go to her, he could help her with his gift, but Severus grabbed his arm and pulled him back.

"I can help!" Harry struggled to pull away. He needed to help her.

Severus held on tighter and pulled back harder.

"Not now," He wasn't yelling over the wind but Harry could still hear the words clearly. He let himself be pulled back, at the same time he saw Fawkes flame away, if the Phoenix was leaving then it was a good sign that they should go too.

As they backed up to the door against the wind Severus threw ward up around the fireplace. He turned his wand on Draco to levitate him but faltered as silver eyes slid open. Draco looked at Harry and Severus with cloudy eyes, and as they cleared he became confused about his surroundings.

Draco turned to his Mother and Fathers, He began to crawl toward them faster then Harry thought possible in his state.

"Mother, Father?" He called out.

Narcissa didn't seem to hear her son's yell, the magical storm continued to rage and was increasing in power. Draco moved closer and was rebuffed by the same magic that had pushed Severus away.

Harry ducked a tea cup that went flying by and shattered on the wall besides him. He looked back at Severus and saw he was watching Draco, who was now staring at his father with dawning
realization. The man's dark eyes flickered to Harry's for a moment and whatever sad spell was keeping Severus from acting, broke. He flicked his wand and cast a levitation spell on Draco.

"Mother!? MOM!" Draco reached out as he struggled against the spell.

It was no use, he was too weak to resist Severus. He continued to struggle in vein as he was slowly pulled through the door along with Harry.

When they were safely in the hallway Severus placed dozens of wards over the kitchen door.

As soon as the sound of breaking glass and furniture was silenced by the wards, the dominate sound became the breathy cries of the distraught boy on the floor.

"Narcissa cannot control the magic she is invoking, I do not think she means to but she is using blood magic and we cannot stop it, we have to wait for her to burn out."

Severus began explain to Draco who had not attempted to pick himself up. Harry understood that Snape was trying to explain in order to comfort Draco and himself, but it was a poor attempt. The man simply lacked the social skills to handle this situation, and to be honest Harry did as well, but Harry's lacking skills were still more useful than Severus'.

He reached down to help Draco to his feet, but Draco didn't put any effort into standing and slumped back to the floor and turned silent. Severus leaned down to help and together they were able to bring Draco to his feet.

"Draco, you must rest, come,"

The deep voice of his mentor revived the pale boy slightly, but rather than follow as he was told he stood in place with surprising strength. He turned his head and looked at the door, and without a sound he began to cry again, no sobbing, screaming or airy cries, just tears sliding down his face.

He was an ivy statue in the rain.

Severus began to pull on Draco's arm and ever so slowly the crying boy followed them away from the door. Together Harry and Snape took him to the blue room and sat him on the couch.

"Draco," Severus kneeled on the floor in front of his godson.

There was no response, Draco's pupils were dilated and his breathing shallow. Severus reached out and put his hands on the boy's shoulders, and Draco leaned forward until his forehead was on his godfather's shoulder.

The sound of people running on the second floor reminded Harry that they were not alone in the house, the foot falls moved to the stairs and then the hallway. The door burst open revealing Pansy and Dudley, if the moment wasn't so heavy Harry would have laughed at the sight of the unlikely pair.

Immediately upon entering the room they seemed aware of the mood and composed themselves. Pansy went directly to Draco who didn't respond at first but slowly shifted from Severus to her. She didn't pressure him for answers and simply comforted him silently.

Dudley on the other hand became increasingly uncomfortable, Harry beckoned him over.

A soft note warbled through the air as Fawkes revealed himself in the corner of the room.
Severus glanced at the bird, "I must go and sort out the situation in the kitchen, I will need help."

Draco tried to stand up at the same time Harry stepped forward. Severus used his hands still on Draco's shoulders to press him back onto the couch next to Pansy who looked like she was going to explode with curiosity and worry.

"Not you two."

"But…" Harry began to argue.

"No, Draco is weak and Narcissa will not trust you. I need someone more experienced." Severus' tone was very final, and with a glance at Draco, Harry knew it was not time to stand his ground.

Harry nodded.

"Thank you," Severus acknowledged Harry's self-restraint, "Now, I need a way to fetch Remus, quickly."

In answer to the request Fawkes flew into the air letting out a short song and then in a flash of fire, was gone.

Chapter End Notes

"The Living tell the dying not to leave, and the dying do not listen. The dying tell us not to be sad for them, and we do not listen. The dialogue between the living and the dead is full of misunderstanding and silence."

-Night Vale

AN- I… hmmm… I feel like, if I say the wrong thing then I will ruin the quote… I hope you understand.
AN- HELLO, sorry again about the long wait…..

So back to the adventures of life with Deets.

So last time I updated, I and my roommates were looking for an apartment because the house we were living in was being foreclosed on…

Well…

It went up for auction while we were squatting living in it…

We started getting people coming to our door asking questions and trying to get us to let them in so they could look around, it was not cool. One guy we learned later claimed to have broken in through the second floor apartment when we weren't home.

The landlord who owned the house next door (he bought it last year) showed interest in buying ours so we told him about the auction and he asked us to stop mowing the lawn and to make everything outside look shitty and not to let anyone in.

In the end our neighbor won and got the house, he's super nice and everything has worked out. My only regret was spending all those months stressed and worried only to have nothing really change.

P.s. We found out about the guy who broke in because he bragged to our current landlord at the auction about it. After a description, we realized that he was one of the people who tried to get us to let him into the house (he did the foot in the door so we couldn't close it thing… super creepy)

Thank you to my Beta minijaxter

Summary- This is a story about people, feelings and corruption. This is most definitely a story about magic. Because there is a lot more to the world of magic than just silly wand waving. When Harry decides to start making choices independent from Dumbledore’s influence he discovers much more than he expected. Perspective changes everything. It can also make things weird.

Warning- This chapter contains strong friendship between men, could be considered implied m/m, I'm not stopping you

Also character death

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.
It's Not Funny, It's Stupid

The cozy café was beginning to feel less comfortable and more confining, with its mood lighting and kitsch covered walls closing in. The rain had let up and so Remus thought he might take a walk to clear his head. He had finished looking over and notating Hermione's work a short while ago and packed all his belongings away.

It was taking longer than he expected to get word from Harry or Severus; he didn't want to panic but he was becoming concerned. Possible scenarios were rolling around in his head concerning possible reasons why they had not contacted him. Maybe Draco brought his father and a battle broke out… or maybe Draco didn't make it back at all.

Remus shook those thoughts away and stood up, he swept his bag over his shoulder and stretched, reaching for the ceiling. With his arms still in the air, a bright flash blinded him; he threw his arms over his face and clamped his eyes shut against the searing light.

A pair of talons clamped down on his shoulders and he felt what he could only describe as a wave of warm feathers washed over him. Remus wavered in surprise and became unsteady; he then he felt a large hand slapped him on his back. The force of the slap caused him to topple forward and he took a step to keep his balance.

Remus heard a familiar barking laugh, he whipped around to see who it was,

"Siri…"

The name died in his mouth when he found himself in the blue room at the safe house, Fawkes fluttered away to settle on the back of a chair. Five pale faces were turned towards him, and Remus knew something had gone wrong.

"What happened?"

Severus stepped forward, "I need your help, I will explain in the hall."

He strode by with determination that put the wolf on edge, whatever was going on it was serious. Remus followed Severus into the hallway and waited for the explanation, when Severus didn't stop walking Remus fell into step behind him.

"Draco was over all successful in his mission, but there was an unexpected secondary problem," Severus began in a tight voice.

Remus had an idea of what the problem was and fully expected an angry Lucius behind the kitchen door that they now stood in front of. He could feel the layers of wards, he knew Lucius could be dangerous but this seemed like over kill.

"There is no time to explain everything that has happened," Severus raised his wand to begin
dismantling the wards.

Remus prepared his own wand in anticipation of a fight, but Severus wiped away any preconception he had about what was behind the door with his next words.

"Narcissa is in this room, and is not in control of her magic, its blood magic."

Remus' heart jumped.

"I am hoping she had mostly burned out by now, but be ready for the worst," Severus warned.

The last ward dropped. Remus could feel the quality of the air shift, it felt heavy with magic and there was a metallic scent lingering. Severus slowly opened the door, the air was still.

Remus followed his friend into the kitchen. Broken furniture littered the floor, shards of china covered everything and crunched beneath their feet that carried them closer to the pulsing red bubble of magic.

Through the haze of blood and magic Remus could see Narcissa crouched over her husband. She looked confused and scared, her hands were tightly gripped in Lucius's robes and she her head was turned away from his slack face.

The sound of the two men approaching caught her attention and she backed up as far as she could in her bubble. Remus caught a good look at Narcissa eyes, she was frightened and sad but she seemed to have her senses about her. She glanced at Remus and then at Severus, the presence of the second man calmed her slightly, she crawled back to her husband body.

Severus kneeled in front of the bubble and Remus stood awkwardly behind him. Narcissa was no longer completely out of control so he felt like he was unnecessarily invading a personal moment, but he was also unwilling to distract them by leaving.

Narcissa curled her hand in Lucius' robe once more and looked up at Severus through the red tint of her magic.

"Severus…" She croaked in an overused voice.

Severus reached out to take his friends hand but was stopped by the protective bubble, it no longer shocked him but it also didn't let him pass.

"He's gone," Was the quiet reply.

Narcissa choked a sob as she slowly nodded. She lifted her hand not holding onto black robes, it trembled wildly. She placed her hand on Lucius' pale face and caressed downward closing his blank eyes.

"Narcissa, let down the barrier," Severus asked softly.

"I can't." She looked away from Lucius and up at her friend, the skin around her eyes was raw red and it almost made Severus flinch, "I can't control it."

Severus looked back over his shoulder, "it seems the danger has passed, get Draco."

Remus startled at being spoken to, he had been quietly standing away from them hoping to not be noticed. He was glad he had a task now and quickly left the kitchen. With hurried steps he made his way down the hall and entered the blue room.
Harry, Draco and Pansy were all on the same couch, Pansy had her arm around Draco. Dudley was in the chair kitty corner to them, looking as awkward as before.

"Severus wants Draco to come to the kitchen," Remus announced.

Pansy stood and took Draco's hand as he got to his feet. Remus was glad to see that Draco seemed a bit more aware of his surroundings, the shock from magical drain was wearing off and reality was sinking in.

"He asked for only Draco." Remus directed at Pansy.

"I am not letting him go alone." Pansy didn't wait for a response and began to walk to the door with Draco.

As Draco was being led away from the couch, he reached back and tightly grabbed Harry's wrist, dragging him after them as they left the room.

Remus sighed as he watched the door swing closed and then he glanced at Dudley, "Well?"

"I am good where I am, thanks." Dudley pulled his legs up onto the chair.

Remus felt sorry for the boy, the topic of dead parents probably didn't sit well with him but unfortunately there were more important matters at hand. He nodded in understanding and followed after the other children.

Pansy's previous show of confidence faltered as they stopped in front of the kitchen door. Harry looked between her and Draco, he was uncertain about what they should do. On the other side of the door, a mere piece of wood, was the dead body of Draco's father and the cloudy fate of his mother.

Harry had been in many bad situations, faced death and disaster, but he doubted any of it could hold up against what Draco must have been feeling at that moment.

Without so much as a thought Harry placed his hand on Draco's back, his muscles were knotted and his entire frame was shaking, all his energy was focused solely on continuing to stand. A wave of core magic flowed down Harry's arm and seeped into Draco, his trembling lessened and his back became loose. Silver eyes met his green and a small nod of thanks was exchanged.

With the crutch of Harry's magic, Draco gathered his will and placed his hand on the door, it swung open easily. The scent of pennies was almost overpowering, only rivaled by the strong magical charge that danced across their skin.

Particles hung in the air and became bright, like fireflies, as is they drifted close to lights around the room. Harry held back a cough as he breathed a mouth full of dust. Everything in the room looked like it had been picked up and thrown against the wall. All of Luna's beloved cups were shattered on the floor, the crunch of the rent glass beneath their feet was the only sound in the room.

"Draco!" A woman's voice called out, slightly muffled.

"Mother!" Draco called back and took off across the broken room.

Harry and Pansy stood back and only watched. Narcissa was inside a red bubble of her own magic, and Harry could feel fear coming off the bubble in waves. Narcissa was still not in complete
control, this room was a dangerous place.

A choked sob echoed in the musty room. Draco dropped to his knees in front of his father's body, he reached out but was unable to touch as they were separated by his mother's fears in magic form. Pansy covered her own sobs and looked away, even Remus looked down respectfully, but Harry watched, and from the corner of his eye he saw Severus watching as well.

Harry felt immensely separated from what was happening, he probably should have been upset for Draco, but he couldn't help the cold thoughts that went through his mind. Draco was probably better off with his father dead. He swept his green eyes over to Snape, they made a short connection and Harry knew he wasn't alone in his opinion.

Pansy began to move forward as the height of the situation passed. She slowly approached the mother and son.

"Pansy?" Narcissa sounded slightly confused.

Pansy got on the floor behind Draco and placed her hands on his shoulders, he leaned back into her slightly accepting the comfort, but still looking at his father's body.

"Is this where you have been? Your Lord was not pleased with your absence." Narcissa continued, her tone was detached.

Pansy looked at her best friend's mother through the haze of magic. Her face was firm and cold as she spoke her allegiance out loud for the first time.

"He is NOT my Lord."

Narcissa slowly nodded, understanding fully that she was among those opposed to Voldemort. Her eyes flickered to Harry for a moment and he knew she still did not fully trust the situation. Just because they were against her enemy did not make them friends. Her mind was still in fight or flight mode and Harry wasn't sure what to do about it.

Severus was the next person to approach, he glided over the wreckage as if it wasn't there and stood on Draco's right.

"Narcissa, we need you to take control of your magic," he was blunt as always.

The red bubble flared and a heavy, fearful magic flooded the room, the idea of taking down her protection caused her unconscious to become even more protective.

The pressure of Narcissa's magic pushed against Harry's core and he responded on instinct. He began to walk across the room leaving Remus the only one staying back. Small amounts of soothing magic came off Harry in waves, as he got closer to those around the red bubble they became more and more relaxed.

As Harry's magic came up against Narcissa's shield, it broke like a wave on rocks. Unable to feel the calming effect, Narcissa's agitation increased and her bubble pushed out against what she thought might be a threat.

"Harry, this is dangerous, she could lose control again," Severus' deep voice warned.

Harry ignored his mentor, and he released a large wave of his core magic in response to Narcissa. He didn't often intentionally allow his magic to run free in the air to this extent, he preferred to use touch because it gave him more control and didn't invade everyone near him. He also didn't like
showing how much power he held, after months of training he had almost perfect control of his ability and access to a very large supply of core magic that was only growing with time and training.

The wave of soothing core magic washed over everyone outside the bubble, even Severus sank to the ground, every muscle in his body becoming relaxed. It was so potent that it was visible to the naked eye, it shined gold and shimmery as it crashed against Narcissa's red shield which responded with more pulsing fear.

Neither magic was going to win, so for a minute they were in a stalemate. Harry had never encountered anything that could completely stop his core magic from winding its way in and loosening the knots of turmoil. This was his first encounter with blood magic being used this way, it seemed that maybe this type of magic being used with a truly singular intention or instinct, such as fear, was able to counter his own ability. He hoped that it wasn't easy or common for circumstances to line up like they have now.

The air in the room began the to stir as the clashing of magic continued, Harry had to do something before a full on hurricane occurred again. He was out of ideas, he should have listened to Severus and stayed back, but he was over confident in his magic's ability, he never imagined that there would be something that could stop it. He was afraid that increasing the amount he was using would only cause more damage, but he didn't know what would happen if he stopped completely. Was his magic holding back Narcissa's? If he stopped would it be unleashed again?

The stalemate turned into a tense indecision for Harry, he was about to just let his gut make a snap choice when he felt something warm on his finger. He raised his hand in front of himself, for the first time since he obtained them, one of the head of house rings was reacting.

The metal of the Black ring was warm and vibrating, it felt like it was moving in time with the vibrations of his very molecules, it made his finger feel a bit numb. He was so surprised, he forgot his situation for a moment and could only focus on the odd feeling he was experiencing. Then the silver stones that circled the black metal band began to glow, they became so bright that it hurt to look but Harry couldn't turn away.

Why was it reacting now?

The gold magic and the red magic were becoming entangled in the increasing wind and whipped in front of Harry's face. He looked past the ring and magic at Narcissa, she was curled up in a ball, the cuts covering her body still weeping small amounts of blood to fuel her magic.

"Blood…” Harry whispered out loud. How could he forget what family Narcissa came from?

No matter how hard Harry tried, he couldn't seem to escape situations that lead him into doing dumb things, like what he was about to do. He walked forward through the storm of magic, he could feel the eyes of everyone in the room following him, but no one moved to stop him immediately. They all looked equally peaceful and helpless in the face of the situation and the conflicting magic washing over them.

Harry stopped walking when he was right in front of the bubble, Draco was on the floor to his right and Severus to his left. He took one last look at the glowing ring before moving to touch the red magic, just before his fingers made contact he felt a hand grab his wrist. Harry looked down at Draco who was looking up at him, his eyes were pleading.

Draco didn't say anything, but Harry understood. He was asking Harry to help his mother. If this worked and everyone came out safe, there would never be a moment of double doubt about Draco's
loyalty ever again from anyone in this room.

Harry move his fingers the last inch and touch the red magic.

There was no explosion, no light or sound that indicated that any sort of spell had activated. All the red magic simply dissipated in the span of a second, like a candle being blown out.

Harry's magic filled the void, flowing into the space it was previously unable to reach, the golden wave of fluid magic washed over Narcissa. Her eyes became glassy when the extreme shift in her magic and emotions overwhelmed her mind. Harry would normally never use this much of his ability on someone, but he really didn't want the distressed woman to have an outburst again.

The vibrating ring on Harry's finger pulled forward like it was drawn to Narcissa; he moved closer to her, she was still on the floor so he easily placed his hand on her head where the ring was directing him. When he rested his hand on her disheveled white/blond hair, the glowing ring became brighter, it vibrated more fiercely and even grew warm, a small burst of magic left the metal band and then it stopped. Harry took his hand from her head and looked at the completely dormant ring.

"What…” His question was interrupted when Narcissa began to slump over unconscious.

Harry moved to grab her but was beat to it by her son, who had crept up to them unnoticed the moment the bubble was gone. Severus appeared by the mother and son as if he had apparated, his wand was out and he was scanning them both.

Harry's eyes moved away from them and floated over to the body of Lucius Malfoy, he was pale and stiff looking. Although this was not the first time he had seen a dead body, it was the longest, even though he did not like the man he thought he should feel something being so close to a dead person, but he didn't. The only thing going through his mind in relation to Lucius' death was how it happened, what happened at the house to cause this mess… and what were they going to do with a dead body?

Harry assumed Severus had the answer to those questions, even the latter one. He was not so naïve to think that Snape had not dealt with a body or two in his past.

Soft and low toned singing drew Harry's attention back to the current events. He watched as Draco healed his mother's wounds with the Leighs Song, under Severus' super vision supervision. He looked so protective, sad and worn, Severus probably did not approve of Draco using that spell in his weak state but couldn't stop the determined son.

A layer of cold anger filled Draco's eyes and they became ice over a grey lake. Harry understood where the anger was directed when he looked at Narcissa, her wounds were closing as Draco continued to sing but everywhere her skin knitted back together, there were left ugly raised scars. The powerful core magic was enough to overcome the human/werewolf's claw marks, but it couldn't stop the scarring. Greyback's ability to use his wolf claws while human was unusual and there was a chance that even the Leighs Song wouldn't have worked, but Harry kept that thought to himself.

Draco focused on his mother while Severus moved to Lucius. Without even flinching, Snape began to organize the askew body into a more respectable pose, and then with a flick of his wand he levitated his old friend out of the room. Draco didn't even turn to look as his father's body rounded the doorframe out of sight, but Harry saw the skin around his eyes tighten as he continued to softly sing.
The quiet that hung in the room was heavy. Narcissa was asleep in a spare bedroom with a charm on her that would go off if she woke and everyone else was still living was sitting in the Blue room. Harry glanced at Dudley, he looked nervous and seemed to understand something big happened. Harry wished he could just tell him to go to his room to escape all this but as part of the Method he couldn't hide.

Draco was sitting with Pansy, pale, quiet and looking at nothing in particular on the floor. No one seemed to know what to do, not even Severus, so Harry decided to take charge.

A small amount of calming magic leaked from Harry as he began to speak,

"What happened?" He made sure to direct the question at Severus and not Draco.

"It was a trap," Was the simple response.

For a moment Harry began to try and figure out how someone could get past the blood contract and tell the Death Eaters their plan, but Severus' smooth voice extrapolated on his statement.

"They didn't know our plan of using the portkey, but they had set a trap for Draco's anticipated return. It was simply dumb luck that it interfered with the first part of our plan, keying the Portkey into the wards."

"I think… the others should be here for this." Harry hesitated to suggest calling the others, he was worried about overwhelming Draco, but if he was anything like Harry he would want it done all at once.

Draco looked up for the first time since sitting down in the blue room, as if he could hear Harry's intentions, he nodded his approval.

Everyone felt their coins heat up as Harry called the others.

"I think I will try to scrounge up some tea," Remus announced before fleeing the room. Harry couldn't blame him, it was truly the most uncomfortable atmosphere he had ever experienced.

Sooner than expected the sound of commotion could be heard from the hallway. The door to the Blue room opened and revealed the pale faces of the Method members as they filed into the room, and Remus brought up the back, with a tray of tea. The beat up metal tea pot and mismatched or chipped cups Remus was setting down on the table, reminded Harry of what the arriving members must have seen when they flooed into the kitchen.

Nobody asked a single question, they just found a place to sit and waited for an explanation. Everyone looked as if they were trying to breathe through a heavy syrup. The twins looked especially worried and Ron's freckles stood out against his pale skin.

When everyone was settled and tea had been handed around, Severus began to speak.

"In anticipation of Draco's arrival to the Manor, the Death Eaters had set up a trap, although I was not there for the initial execution, I can guess at what happened." His smooth voice floated across the room and held everyone's attention, except Draco's.

Harry watched as Draco stared at the floor while Severus explained.

"The trap interrupted the very first part of our plan, Draco was unable to Key his Portkey into the wards."
The Twins both took a sharp breath and one of them began to protest, "But that…"

"Please do not interrupt," Severus' tone sharpened and then smoothed as he picked up where he left off.

"While I was waiting with Harry, I felt the Dark Lord's call, I left for the Manor and when I arrived it was very obvious Draco had not had a chance to do anything. Every follower was there, including some new recruits and Narcissa was held in the middle of the circle, she was being… tortured."

Harry caught a brief glance that Severus directed at Draco, who stiffened up at the mention of what happened to his mother. There was much more to that part of the story, but it was probably unnecessary for anyone else to know or Severus would have explained despite his godson's feelings.

The rest of the room paled further, Hermione grasped Harry's sleeve for comfort.

Severus skipped over much of what Harry assumed was Voldemort monologuing, as he is prone to do.

"The Dark Lord revealed some new recruits to be the Slytherin's we hoped would turn from his side, some looked like they wanted to be there, while others looked as if they were going to be sick. After that, Narcissa's torture… intensified… causing her to have a bout of accidental magic. During that disturbance Draco got to his mother with the Portkey."

Severus paused, He looked worried about explaining the next part, his gaze drifted over to Draco, the most likely source of his concern. To everyone's surprise Draco spoke up before Severus could continue, his voice was low and raspy but steady enough to understand.

"I… I wasn't fast enough. Volde… He recovered too quickly and my father was trying to get to mother and I… I threw him one end of the portkey, but the Dark Lord had cast… I don't know if father meant to but the spell it… " Draco's voice cracked and he fell silent, ; Pansy's arm came around his shoulders.

"He meant to," Severus assured, "I saw it, he deliberately moved in the path of the killing curse aimed at you Draco, do not belittle his sacrifice."

Harry though Severus was being a bit harsh, but Draco looked comforted by the words. They were the only words of comfort he received, as the rest of the room occupants could only give sympathetic looks.

Before the story could pick up, one of the twins asked the question he had previously tried to voice.

"So the Portkey was activated without being keyed in?"

Severus nodded.

"What happened?" Despite the severity of the situation the twins looked genuinely curious.

Severus used this as a jumping point to get back on track.

"The wards shattered, it was ear splitting and blinding. Everyone in the manor was disoriented, but it only lasted a few seconds. Upon recovery, the Dark Lord was furious and he began cursing everyone in sight. It only lasted a minute before the wards being down came to the attention of the
Order and they began apparating in. It was chaos, but many of the senior Death Eaters disapparated as soon as the fighting began, along with their lord. I choose to leave shortly after them and come back here."

"I didn't know about the raid, I wasn't there," Remus spoke out, he sounded confused.

"Dumbledore has been monitoring Malfoy Manor for a long time and mobilized as soon as the wards fell, I am surprised you were not called."

Remus clenched his first in his lap, "He does not trust me anymore because he noticed me growing distant."

Severus' hummed in agreement and looked at Harry in order to spark their connection, they agreed it was risky but Remus would probably have to completely disconnect from the Order. That was a conversation they would have to save for later, the wolf would not be happy and would see it as being benched.

While the mental connection continued, Draco's raspy voice broke the silence, "What happened to my friends…?"

Severus's jaw visibly tightened, and Harry was hit with a flood of images. A sharp taste he could not describe filled his mouth while screaming and chaos filled his vision, Harry's heart was racing as bright spells flashed in rapid succession.

Severus looked away, breaking the connection with Harry's mind, and as suddenly as it had started the screaming and chaos was gone, although a bad taste lingered in Harry's mouth.

There was a heavy moment of silence as Severus hesitated, he almost never hesitated before speaking, as he was a man who knew what he wanted to say and said it.

"Severus…" Draco pleaded, he understood the meaning of Snape's hesitation as well as Harry did.

"Some of them…" Severus began, his eyes turned to the floor, "apparated away as soon as they recovered from the wards dropping."

"The others?" Draco's voice was tight, as if his body was waiting for impact.

Severus kept his black eyes on the floor, he didn't want to see his words hurt Draco as he explained what happened to his classmates.

"Millicent Bulstrode… was the first killed by the Dark Lord when he unleashed his fury, it was a clean killing curse. Vincent Crabbe was hit with an array of deadly curses right after."

It was Pansy that let out a shocked cry, Severus ignored her and continued speaking.

"Gregory Goyle… was his hit with a stray Cutting Curse, to the neck, as soon as the fighting broke out when the Order appeared."

Draco didn't yell or cry, he was obviously sad about his friend's deaths but it was as if he couldn't physically become any more distraught. Harry hoped there was some good news so that his friend didn't dip so low that he couldn't recover.

"What about Theo and BlaséBlaise?" Hope wavered in his the words.

Severus finally looked up at Draco.
"They disapparated before the Dark Lord finished speaking his first Avada Kadavra, it seems they understood the implications of you being able to Portkey and were not keen to stick around."

A weak shadow of a smile lifted Draco's mouth, "out of the five I suspected they did not wish to be Death Eaters, the other three were scared but I think they more willing. We have to find them, they are probably hiding."

"Yes," Severus initially agreed, "But not yet, there is much that needs to happen first."

"What?!" Draco sat up, showing more life that he had all evening.

Severus pinched the bridge of his nose, "At Any any moment now the Dark Lord could call, once the dust settles he will regroup his inner circle and I must go. Afterwards Dumbledore will expect me to report and…"

"You are NOT going to go to Voldemort after this! He will KILL you!" Harry's interrupted loudly. Was Snape crazy? The risk was too high, Voldemort could easily conclude that Severus was disloyal after everything that happened tonight.

Snape turned on Harry with a fierce glare, but Harry did not back down. Through their connections they battled with feelings and images since they were unable to speak directly into each other's minds. Everyone stayed silent, even Draco knew not to get between them.

Harry could feel the frustration building in Severus as they pressured each other with their wills, he was sure he was going to win this battle as Severus was about to reach the end of his rope.

Severus opened his mouth to speak and Harry's heart leapt in anticipation of the concession.

"Tecet," Snape's low voice rumbled the word like an angry wolf.

Harry couldn't process what he heard for a moment, and then he realize that Snape was escalating. Harry was cornered, he could either give up or escalate as well.

"Arx," Harry responded.

The magic of their Oath bloomed, shrouding their words from the Method.

"You can't go back to Voldemort, he will kill you." Harry reiterated his point before Snape had a chance to speak.

"I must, we need inside information," Severus' words were stern.

Harry sighed, "We won't have a spy if you go back because he will kill you. He thought Draco was training with you while he was gone, and then he shows up with a super portkey, he is going to know you were involved."

Severus stood up from his seat on the couch, "You do not understand…"

Harry was also standing now, and his eyes were bright with anger and worry.

"NO! You don't understand! Is there is a higher risk of you dying if you don't go? Will the Vow strike you dead or something?!"

"I do not have to answer to you," Snape's voice was low and dangerous in a way Harry had not heard in a long time.
"That's true…” Harry sighed and his shoulders relaxed as his anger deflated a bit, "You don't have to answer to me, but as a friend I'm worried, is the Vow a threat?"

Severus let himself almost fall back into his seat as if Harry’s words knocked him over, they knew each other too well for yelling and arguing at this point. Harry could see his mentor understood that hiding the truth was not possible because their lives were far to intertwined.

"The Vow is not going to kill me if I leave the Dark Lord. Draco's task is to Kill kill Albus before the school year ended, as long as he or I does the deed, I will be fine, no matter the context of the death."

The rest of Harry's worry fell away, "OK, does this mean we can drop the vanishing cabinet plan?"

Severus ran his hand through his long hair, "I would prefer if we didn't, I was planning to fulfill the Vow by using Draco's plan as a distraction, it also would have been an easy way for us to capture some Death Eaters… but now, without myself or Draco in the fold I do not think it is possible."

Harry let a shallow smile lift his mouth, "I'm glad, I was never very comfortable with the plan to begin with."

Severus nodded, "I was aware of your discomfort, but I thought it was necessary."

His tone shifted suddenly, it sounded as if he was restraining some emotion he did not want to display in front of the others even if they couldn't understand his words.

"What am I supposed to do now?" He asked.

Harry opened his mouth to respond but found he had no immediate answer.

Severus filled the void with his own worries, "I was useful as a spy, without that…” He stopped, anymore words and all the people watching would see more than he was comfortable displaying.

There was some deep guilt burning inside Snape, Harry could feel it when he looked into his friend's eyes. He didn't mean to glimpse it, but sometimes when emotions were high thoughts simply slipped between their minds. He was trying to make up for something, Harry wasn't sure what it was but the feeling was unmistakable. Whatever it was it didn't matter to Harry, he just wanted Severus to make it to the end of this war.

"You are more than a spy, you have taught the Method a lot, and without you none of the Slytherins would ever join us. I need you alive, when I remove the curse from the others you will have to teach them about their powers." Harry needed Severus to understand that the Method would not function as well as it did without him, he hoped it was enough to stop the man from doing anything stupid.

Severus' eyes flickered between more emotions than Harry had ever seen, and he was silent for a long pause.

"Albus will need to think I am still spying," he finally said.

Harry smiled, "We will figure that out."

"And I will need to figure out a new plan for the Vow," Severus' tone was back to its normal snark, "I cannot simply walk into the headmaster's office and Avada Kaedavra him in the middle of the day."
The dark and dry humor was so sudden, that Harry couldn't stop himself from laughing, he knew it was inappropriate but he didn't care, it felt like he hadn't laughed in years.

A sharp grunt cut Harry's mirth short.

Severus clutched one of his arms to himself in pain.

They managed to break their Oath magic just as the rest of the Method closed in on them.

"What's happening?" Hermione was the first one the at Snape's side

"He knows…" The words were squeezed between Severus' clenched teeth.

Harry clamped down on his desire to say 'I told you so', instead he turned to a very pale Draco.

"Can you stop this like you did when Voldemort was possessing you?"

Draco looked surprised at being put on the spot. He looked at his own arm where the mark would be.

"Since I am not being tortured maybe my wards are stopping it?" He looked around at all the faces in the room that were looking back at him for answers, "I can try."

"Do it," Harry ordered taking on his leadership persona.

Pansy shot up from the couch, "I'll get your supplies!"

She sped from the room, slipping slightly on her sock clad feet, only moments later she was running back with an old wooden box.

Draco took the box and set it down on the coffee table in front of Severus.

Draco began taking out different colored fibers from the box and Harry watched with curious eyes, he assumed each string was made of a different material.

Severus waited with his teeth clenched, sweat was forming on his brow as he withstood the torment he must have been feeling from his mark.

Draco was also beginning to flush do due to concentration and stress;, all thoughts of his previous sadness were pushed from his mind, as he weaved together his fibers into a rope. He pushed back his sleeves to keep them from getting in the way of his work; it was not something he often did as it revealed his own mark that was bordered on the top and bottom by knotted ropes.

Severus was beginning to unintentionally let out small sounds of discomfort, his pale skin was turning red in his effort to keep his composure. Harry wanted to tell Draco to hurry up but he knew the blond was already working as fast as he could.

An incredibly thin gold strand was being wrapped around the outside of an intricate knotted rope, Draco seemed to be holding his breath as he tucked the end of the thread into the knots and pulled it out again until it was completely entwined into the pattern. When he tied off the end of the golden string he let out his breath in a huff.

"Hold out your arm Sev," Draco instructed.

Reluctantly Severus obeyed.
Everyone in the room sucked in a breath at the sight of Snape's arm, the skin around the mark was an angry red and the black of the mark looked as if it was slowly boiling. The part that made Harry's stomach churn, was the blood dotted all over Severus' skin. There was no open wound, it looked like the blood was coming out of the man's pores instead of sweat.

Draco hesitated, his hands were shaking and his face was tinged green at the sight of Severus' arm.

Harry moved behind Draco slowly and subtly reached out with his magic to calm him, the effect was instantaneous. Draco's hands became steady as he reached out and looped his knotted rope around Severus' arm above the mark. He tied the rope off and then laid it across the mark cutting it down the middle so that he could tie a loop around the bottom nearer to Severus' wrist.

The end result looked just like what Draco had on his own arm, a loop of rope above and below the mark that were connected in the middle covering the part of the brand, it created what looked like a capital "I" when looked at from above.

To finish his work, Draco muttered a quick incantation while holding his hands over the ropes; they glowed bright and then quickly dimmed.

Severus' relief was immediate, his entire body sagged the moment Draco finished his spell. Harry moved around the coffee table to his mentor's side, the mark had settled down and no longer bubbled, becoming smooth and flat once more. Unfortunately the skin around it was still red and angry.

With a flick of his wrist, Harry conjured a damp cloth and began to gently wipe away the blood to see the damage. Remus hovered nervously behind Harry trying to get a closer look.

"Remus?" Harry spoke without looking up from his work.

Remus jumped a bit, "Yes?"

"Could you take a look at this? I don't think magic healing will work, not even the song."

Harry gave Remus the opening he was looking for. He wasn't sure what was going on between the two men, but he was sure they had overcome their differences if Remus' worried fretting was anything to go by.

Remus jumped on the chance and dropped to his knees besides Harry, with a gentle touch he took over the task of cleaning Severus' wound.

"It seems that the skin all around the mark has been infected with what looks like the same venom that kept Authors Arthur's bite wound from closing, only less of it. You were quite right Harry; this wound will need to heal on its own."

Severus let out a small groan at the news. He was looking away from his mark and the people around him. The muscles of his arm were twitching, most people would assume from pain but Harry knew he was suppressing the impulse to rip his arm away and cover his mark in shame.

Harry watched as Remus chuckled good-naturedly, completely unconcerned with Snape's shame. He looked over his shoulder at the crowd of concerned Method members, "Can someone please grab some healing balm and bandages?"

Every person in the room moved to respond to the request at once, but the twins who were closest to the door were the first ones out. They stumbled over each other in their haste to help.
Remus finished cleaning the wound.

"We need to get this patched up so everyone can stop worrying," he mumbled so low that only Harry, Draco and Severus could have heard.

Severus verbally scoffed at the idea that everyone was worried about him.

Almost before the sound had finished leaving Snape's mouth, a small voice from the back of the room spoke up to prove him wrong.

"Is the Professor going to be OK?" Luna's soft voice was surprisingly easy to hear.

With the tension broken by the words of concern, everyone began coming closer to the couch with Severus seated on it, voicing their own question.

"Will the spell Draco did last?" Ron asked.

"It doesn't hurt now, right?" Neville's voice didn't even waver.

"Can I help?" Pansy offered.

"We need to find a way to permanently fix this for Severus and Draco," Hermione was as pragmatic as always.

Harry noticed that Severus didn't look away from the spot on the wall he had been staring at since he was forced to reveal his mark. It was obvious that the man didn't know how to respond to the care that was being shown for him, and Harry could honestly relate.

"We may already have a solution," Remus spoke up.

Severus finally looked away from the wall and placed his angry eyes on Remus, he opened his mouth to spray what Harry assumed would be venomous words, but they never came out.

Remus had placed his bare hand over Snape's Dark Mark, something most people would never do and from Severus' reaction it was obviously the first time for him. The expression on Remus' face was so completely open and earnest that it stopped Snape's anger short.

They stared at each other, and everyone waited for the moment to break, very confused about what was happening.

*BANG*

The Twins came busting back into the room and ran directly to Remus with their arms full of first aid supplies. They dropped them to the floor in a pile while trying to catch their breath.

"We... Didn't know... which balm... or bandages..." one twin managed to say between gasps.

"So... we brought... them all..." the other finished.

When no one responded they looked around, "Did we miss something?" they asked in unison.

A small sound began to rise and grew into a rich, warm laugh. Remus had to grab his sides he was laughing so hard.

"I'm... Sorry," He gasped for breath between his words.
"This isn't…. funny… but," He was beginning to get his laughter under control.

"It's just so… STUPID," The word burst from his mouth as a half of a laugh.

Remus wiped his teary eyes.

"What's so stupid?" Harry was thoroughly confused along with the rest of the Method.

Remus sighed and grabbed some of the medical supplies.

"The idea that anyone in this room doesn't care about each other, that we need to hide things to protect each other or be embarrassed of anything."

He was slowly dabbing ointment onto the raw skin as he spoke, still chuckling.

"The idea that Severus could doubt that everyone cared, the fact they some of us worried about Draco and Pansy joining, or that we are all worried about Ron's temper…"

"Hey!" Ron Yelled.

"It's all so stupid," Remus continued ignoring Ron, "Severus came up with a theory to remove the mark using Harry's ability, but he didn't say anything because he was worried Harry would get hurt trying."

Both Severus and Harry began to respond but were cut off abruptly before they could make a sound.

"NO, you two don't get to say anything," Remus' tone became sharp, he was wrapping the bandage around Severus' arm a little bit tight in his frustration.

"Every time anyone in this house opens their mouth and says anything about the war or this organization or our plans, it goes wrong. New secrets are created, misconceptions are formed, or someone has to be tip toed around, it's STUPID."

Remus tied off the wrapping of the bandages and stood to his full height.

"Everyone in this room can try to defend themselves, but I know the truth. I have been in this house the entire time, watching and listening. Our priorities are all mixed up, we were supposed to be less like the Order of the Phoenix but we have only become another version of them."

Harry went to Remus' side, he agreed with the man completely. For quite some time he had been unhappy with they ways things were going and how slow their progress had become.

It was time for change.

"I agree with Remus, I think it's time we corrected this problem."

Harry looked around the room at the various reactions to his statement. Many faces looks guilty or concerned, but Dudley and Ron were just confused.

"What?" Ron asked bewildered.

Chapter End Notes
"Regret nothing. Until it is too late. Then regret everything."

-Night Vale

A/N- HELLO! I have not come to the white space in a while… not as long of a break as last time but long enough that my mind feels backed up. Like a clogged pipe that's attached to a full bathtub. All the water and garbage wants to drain out but it can't because I don't take care of my pipes!

In this metaphor are psychologist plumbers of the brain? I have a friend that's a psychologist, I should ask.

What I am trying to say is, clean your bathtub.
AN- It's not as long as I wanted but it's here! Things are going to speed up a bit from this point on… I hope. I have started another story that probably won't be posted until it's done, something shorter and a bit more character focused to let me work more on my writing. My actual writing is something that gets left behind in this story, I feel like I am very focused on the plot and I sort of lose everything else. I am trying to find a happy balance.

Also! Thanks to all my readers who put up with some of my trash chapters, as I approach the home stretch of this story I want to make sure I have everything organize. I will be going through my chapters and making style corrections and deleting rambling I feel are cluttering the story. Along side this my Beta will be cleaning up my shit grammar :)

Because if this, chapters will probably be slowing down even more, BUT I swear this long ass story will be finished!

SIDE NOTE!

The Coffee Shop is pretty much on hold until I feel motivated to write it… I will think about doing something with it this week, but it's really just a side thing.

ANOTHER SIDE NOTE!

Got my wisdom teeth out on Friday, I was planning to finish this chapter and update sooner but then I was stoned out of my mind, and you know what they say… write drunk, edit sober, and do nothing but stare at the TV when on Hydrocodone… heh.

ANOTHER, ANOTHER SIDE NOTE!

I am obsessed with VOLTRON, my every thought is somehow entwined with this wonderful show! I can't take a breath without at least one syllable about this show passing between my lips, I could fucking INWARDS TALK about this show so that there is no break between caused by my inhaled breaths to interrupt the flowing river of words I have to say about this show. Every word I say that does not involve Voltron like holding a cigarette and not taking a drag (I don't smoke but I imagine that's what it's like)...

My roommate is sitting in the room with me and when she found out I was talking about how much I like Voltron again she sighed and said "I know Deets" in the same way you would placate a child, but I don't care because VOLTRON.

So if anyone wants to say something about Voltron to me, go ahead! I don't care if you say one single thing about my story in your review if you are talking to me about loving Voltron.

Thank you to my Beta minijaxter

Hermione's Magic Array Drawing http://i.imgur.com/UUjT9xj.jpg
Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas

Chapter 28

Purpose

Draco Malfoy looked scared, he was a lamb in a room of hungry wolves, all of whom were about to realize that he was the only prey left. After everything that had happened in the last 24 hours he could barely register the words Remus spoke, but the moment Harry stood up and agreed with Lupin the situation became clear. Draco could already feel the sharp teeth nipping at his heels.

Harry was about to spill all the inner circles secrets, including the most important one… the plan to kill Dumbledore and how it was Draco's fault that they had to. He tried to listen as the events unfolded, the Method's young leader was talking about trust and truth, but the words were all muffled by Draco's raging panic and an undertone of hurt that Remus would out him like this. He tried to arrange his face into an innocent expression, but it was skewed, a neatly organized desk that someone jostled.

Now someone else was talking, Longbottom maybe, he was saying something about Slytherin's and trust… Draco chanced a look at Severus but couldn't catch the older man's eyes, he was staring at Harry with a blank expression. Draco continued to watch as Severus stared at Harry, who was nodding while members of the Method droned on about their petty issues.

Then Harry glanced at Severus and Severus' expression shifted ever so slightly, Draco thought that most people wouldn't notice, but he did. He wasn't positive, but there seemed to be something else going on… and then it happened again, but this time it was Remus who looked at Severus and they both nodded very slightly.

Definitely something going on…

"WOAH, WOAH! WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY TEMPER?!!" Ron's familiar and angry voice jarred Draco out of his thoughts.

Apparently he missed something while he was panicking. Ron was standing with his hands clenched at his sides and Harry had his own hands up in front of himself in a calming gesture.

"Ronald, we both know that you have a short fuse, remember fourth year?" Hermione spoke up in Harry's defense.

Ron backed down a bit, he looked decidedly ashamed, "yeah…"

Harry stepped around Hermione, "There are just a couple of situations we weren't being completely honest about with everyone… mostly due to some tension that we worried would cause problems."

"Tension?" Ginny questioned.

Harry nodded, "Yes, you for example, have not been very trusting with the Slytherin, starting with
A jolt of surprise went through Draco, what was going on? When was Harry going to tell everyone that they had to kill Dumbledore because of him? He tried to keep his face blank as he listened carefully to the events as they unfolded.

Ginny's face immediately contorted into something ugly in response to Harry's comment.

"I don't know what you're talking about," She firmly crossed her arms.

Harry sighed, "Oh, come on Ginny. You and Neville have been throwing looks at Draco since he joined, and when it seemed to be getting better Pansy came and you guys reverted to your old behavior."

"I have to agree with Harry about this," Hermione once again backed him up, "And I also have to point out that Draco and Pansy have been very mature about it as well."

Whispers of agreement ripped through the room.

"Even I learned to get along with that blond git, and Pansy's not bad too." Ron puffed his chest out and looked at his sister with a superior air.

Draco almost smiled when Ron insulted him, it had become almost like terms of endearment for them since they became friends. Even though everyone of the "inner Circle" was worried about Ron's temper, there was no denying he was a true friend and would throw himself into danger for Harry.

"Fine! Maybe I have been having trouble adjusting… it's just hard after all the years of animosity."

There was a hint of tears in Ginny's voice. Neville put his hand on her shoulder while nodding in agreement.

Hermione stepped forward and took control of the situation, Harry looked a bit relieved.

"This is exactly why we kept things from you guys. We have responsibilities and goals that we can't stop just because one person has qualms about it based on old hatred, which will cause problems within the Method."

Draco once again felt dread, what truth was going to be revealed? He tried to trust Harry and Hermione, they were his friends. He would have to dig deep down, very deep… and find his Hufflepuff loyalty.

"So what have you been keeping from us?" Neville spoke up, his voice was steady.

Before Hermione could answer Harry took the attention of the room back. Draco felt his heart jump, if Harry was going to take the control back from Hermione then he was going into leader mode. His shoulders straightened, his head was held higher and everyone in the rooms felt their eyes drawn to him.

"I should have told everyone, I was worried about how it would be received… and so when I learned the truth I kept it close to my chest, like Dumbledore would have."

The strong statement from their leader was met with silence, but he didn't look nervous and simply explained.
"After Draco joined the Method, we learned what his mission from Voldemort was…"

"We know," Fred interrupted.

"He was going to let Death Eaters into the school," George other finished.

Harry nodded.

Draco felt his insides squirm as he waited for the final words to cast his fate. He remembered when they told everyone the partial truth to cover up the larger problem of his orders from the Dark Lord.

"What I didn't tell you…" Harry continued.

Draco's entire body clenched for the blow.

"…is that we were going to continue with Draco's plan of using the vanishing cabinets in the room of requirement to set a trap for the death eaters."

Draco let out a very large breath into the silence. Maybe his trust wasn't misplaced, maybe the looks he saw going between Sev and Harry really meant they had a plan.

The first person to break the silence was unsurprisingly, Ginny.

"You were going to endanger everyone in the school so you could set a trap?!" Her voice was filled with righteous anger, "Did you even think of what would happen if something went wrong, what if someone got killed?!" she continued to rant, but Harry endured it like a stone tower in a storm.

Draco simply tuned her out as he absorbed the fact that he was safe, he glanced at Severus who was looking directly at him. The older man gave a small, rare, smile which only irritated Draco, Sev knew exactly what was going on and let Draco hang in suspense.

"This is the type of idiotic plan that almost got you killed…" Ginny was red faced and throwing flames from her mouth when she was interrupted.

"What do you mean you were going to use the plan to trap Death Eaters," Ron's completely calm voice and absolute dismissal of his sister threw everyone off balance, and effectively shut Ginny up.

Harry recovered quickly, "Well, now that Severus and Draco can't spy there's no one to tell Voldemort when the cabinet is done… well, no one he would believe."

Ron's eyes took on a faraway look that meant he was using his great knowledge of strategy, "So all you need is a spy?"

"That is what Harry said, I am astounded by your ability to retain what you hear Mr. Weasley," Severus' comment caused a small wave of chuckles, and the tension in the room melted a bit.

Ron on the other hand completely ignored him. His expression was one of someone doing a very complicated puzzle.

"Couldn't we just… you know…" Ron, looked around at everyone waiting for him to speak, his face became the same shade as his hair.

He took a calming breath, "Couldn't we use Pettigrew?"
Hermione smacked her fist down on her palm, "That's brilliant! I can't believe we forgot!"

"Can someone fill me in?" Harry asked.

Hermione jumped at the chance to explain something, "Pettigrew owes you a life debt Harry, you can give him any task you want and he has to do it! We can use him to get information… although I don't think he can help us with the vanishing cabinet plan."

"Why not?" Neville asked, he got a sharp glare from Ginny.

Severus moved his hand to his head catching the room's eyes, and tapped his temple.

A sound of understanding came from Ron, "I forgot, legilimency. If Pettigrew suddenly brought up the cabinet, Voldypants would probably get suspicious."

Ginny turned sharply towards Ron, "Why aren't you more upset about this? Harry was making plans to let Death Eaters into the school! He was hiding things from us! He…"

Ron grabbed both of his sister's shoulders and turned her to face him, she went silent in surprise. He bored into her with his startlingly blue eyes.

"Ginny," his voice sounded more mature than anticipated.

Draco watched as Ron told his sister an honest truth that she still hadn't comprehended.

"We are at war."

The words rang in everyone's ears, it was something everyone knew and no one had voiced. Draco was grateful that someone had finally said it; with his father dead and his mother defeated it was more apparent than ever what was at risk.

Ginny turned pale, Ron took his eyes off her and looked over her shoulder at Draco, "It's time to stop acting like this is a schoolyard rivalry and look outside of Hogwarts."

Everyone looked at Draco when it became apparent that Ron wasn't speaking directly to Ginny anymore.

All the sad and understanding faces made Draco want to duck away, but he stood still and fought down the wave of emotion that washed over him, and in a clear voice responded.

"There are lives at stake."

Ginny looked as if she had been slapped in the face, and Neville was pale as paper, they had both forgotten that someone died that night, and left behind his son, and it wouldn't be the last time it happened.

Everyone settled down after that. For the rest of the evening the Method simply talked. Remus had meant his outburst but he had unintentionally almost revealed larger secrets, but he wasn't wrong. Draco realized it was quick thinking that turned the mistake into a good excuse for dirty laundry to be aired and the long standing problems between members to be fixed. He was almost impressed by the Slytherin maneuvers that took place.

Draco was grateful that he wasn't alone as the evening went on; they all just continued to talk and learn about each other, except Severus, who slipped out after everything calmed.

Draco had been afraid of being alone, going to bed and seeing his father's body behind his eyes or
dreaming about his mother's torture.

This distraction was good.

Severus quietly closed the door to Narcissa's room. He was sure she would sleep for a while longer. Halfway down the hall to the stairs he stopped briefly. The door before him was the same as the others; it was what it blocked from view that made it ominous.

Severus' hand made it to the knob but was unable to turn, instead he placed his palm to the door and said a silent goodbye to his misguided friend and moved on. He slowed only once more in front of the door to the blue room, he heard voices but no yelling and decided it was okay to leave everyone in Remus' care.

Although he was released from his place at the Dark Lord's side, he had another master that he was still tied to for the time being, and he needed to report in.

The kitchen smelled of ceramic dust and old wood that floated in the air. Severus moved smoothly over the wreckage while he looked for the object of his desire, and he found it in a pile of broken tea cups. He picked up the small wooden container that was sealed with magic.

From inside he pulled a pinch of floo powder, and with a flash of green he was gone from the safe house.

He knew the path to his destination by heart, he could walk it with his eyes closed from any part of the school, including from the Come and Go Room. The gargoyle moved without even needing a password and granted access to the golden, swirling stairs.

The large door at the top of the stairs also opened without knocking or prompting.

"Severus, I expected you sooner."

The voice came from across the room; as usual Dumbledore was at his desk, looking as if he was waiting especially for whoever entered.

Severus crossed the room and took the seat opposite from the Headmaster.

"I am sorry Albus; I had to stay behind to secure my place in the Dark Lord's ranks." The lie flowed smoothly as it had many times before.

Dumbledore looked over his half-moon glasses, but he did not try to look into Severus' mind.

"Of course, can you enlighten me as to what happened earlier this evening to bring down the Malfoy wards?"

Severus jumped into a half lie, half true story. He explained that the Dark Lord planned an impromptu marking ceremony for Narcissa that Draco and he did not know about… which was half true. He also made sure to speak as if Draco was at home and recovering as Albus believed him to be. He told Dumbledore that he was called to a Death Eater meeting and was blindsided… completely true. He explained the happenings up to Narcissa's magical outburst exactly as they unfolded. Instead of finding a way to explain the portkey, he told the Headmaster that Lucius used the emergency spell to drop the Malfoy wards and save his wife and son from Voldemort. The emergency spell did exist, but had never been used by a Malfoy before, so it was the perfect cover. Severus then explained that the three Malfoys apparated away to parts unknown and described the aftermath as it actually happened.
Dumbledore placed his hands together under his chin, his blue eyes held sorrow.

"I am sorry for the loss of your snakes Severus, they were too young," he said earnestly.

Severus genuinely appreciated Albus' words and he felt a spark of his old affection for the Headmaster, warm him inside.

"Thank you, hopefully we will be able to find the ones that escaped."

"Yes," Albus agreed, "But I did not only want to speak of the events at Malfoy manor."

"Oh?" Severus was legitimately surprised, he wasn't sure what to expect, which was his least favorite feeling.

The Headmaster's blue eyes became dark and the hands below his chin laced together.

"I wanted to have a talk with you about what is to come after I am gone."

A chill went up Severus' spine, the reminder of what he had to do hit him harder now that he was in front of the man he would be killing. He was also confused, he already had this conversation with Albus shortly after he had taken the Vow, and a second one earlier in the year… was he going senile?

"I know we already spoke about what you must do to help Harry after I depart," Albus began, already confirming Severus' thoughts.

"But there is something else, about Harry that I need you to know. He has a destiny that you will need to make sure he fulfills. This task may prove the most difficult of them all, even more so than sending me away."

Surprise gave way to a sick feeling deep in Severus' chest. They had already talked about the horcrux's, only weeks after Harry had brought news of them to the Method, Dumbledore revealed their existence to Severus and explained his role in helping Harry find them from behind the scenes.

Albus was putting a lot on his Spy's shoulders, and now there was more. Something that was apparently worse than having to kill his old mentor and that was hard to believe.

Dumbledore returned to the topic at hand after his short silence.

"I am sorry to have to ask this one last favor, but you are the only person I can trust with this information."

The sick feeling seeped deeper, spreading from Severus' chest to the pit of his stomach. This was information that Albus held close to his chest the entire war, something no one else knew… it could not be good news.

Dumbledore took Severus' silence as acceptance.

"Harry is more important than I have let people know," The look on Severus' face must have clearly stated his thoughts, because Dumbledore sighed and started again.

"I know you probably don't believe that he can become more important after the Prophecy was revealed, but it is true. The Prophecy is not going to be fulfilled because Tom has an obsession with killing Harry; it is being fulfilled because of Harry. Neither can survive this war, Severus."
Now Severus wanted to be sick, his mind tried to wander back to the day Harry unlocked Ron's ability. When he confronted Harry in the infirmary and learned about what Ron had seen in Harry's scar, and his suspicions... NO! He clamped down on those thoughts, he did his research, and there had never been a human one! What Ron saw was only the connection between the Dark Lord and Harry due to the killing curse... it had to be.

Albus waited, Severus knew he wasn't hiding his thoughts very well; his face probably gave away everything he was thinking. The Headmaster watched as he made the connection and then rejected his conclusion.

"I am Sorry Severus, but I must ask you to make sure Harry fulfills his destiny. He is a hocrux and must die at Voldemort's hands, or all is lost."

Snape reacted before he could stop himself; he stood violently, knocking his chair to the ground as he rose.

"NO!" The word came without permission.

Albus looked down at his desk, his eyes were tired, and his silence was heavy. It was obvious how much this situation weighed on the old man... but Severus didn't give a fuck!

He marched over to the headmaster's desk and slammed his hands flat on the surface. He leaned forward so that he could hiss his fury into the old man's face. Anger was the only thing keeping the rolling nausea at bay, and he grasped onto his anger to keep his panic down.

"Are you telling me you knew this whole time, ever since he was a baby?" Severus' words were almost a whisper between his clenched teeth, but they conveyed his rage with more efficiency than yelling ever could.

Albus looked up from the desk, there was no shame on his face like Severus expected, only righteousness, and this brought his anger to levels he thought impossible.

"I had to keep it a secret Severus, understand that he could not die before it was time and he had to be raised to be willing."

Raised to be willing?! Those words ignited a flash of blinding rage in Severus, the very notion that Harry was raised just to die burned him from the inside out, Harry was worth so much more than being a sacrificial lamb! Severus was made of nothing but rage and darkness, and he wanted to turn it all outward at the old man.

Before he could completely register what he was doing, Severus let his rage fly from his body as a physical release. He swept his arms across the top of the Headmaster's desk with the momentum of his entire upper body. Papers, books, ink wells, quills and delicate silver gadgets crashed to the ground. The sound was awful and sharp but at the same time loud and rolling, and it was somehow only a small fraction of the roaring in Severus' ears.

After the deafening crash, there was an eerie stillness, Severus now understood why Harry had destroyed the Headmasters office last spring, it was very cathartic.

Angry, heaving breaths filled the void left by the ringing sound of metal and glass colliding with the floor. Severus stood tall and recollected himself.

"He had to be raised to be willing?" The deadly whisper was back, threatening to over flow into a violent rage once again.
Harry's deepest memories, ones only shared with Severus, flickered in the back of his mind. Isolation, hunger, pain, but most of all the feeling of being worthless and unnatural—feelings Harry only allowed Severus to know because he had no choice in their occlumency lessons, feelings purposely instilled in him by the headmaster to make him easier to manipulate. Everything was falling into place; all of Dumbledore's moves in this war game came together with the revelation of Harry being a horcrux. The only reason Severus didn't see it before was because he simply refused to admit it was a possibility to begin with, the soft spot he had formed for Harry was blinding him.

"Yes, he needed to become the type of person that would give up his life for those he loved, someone who would put others before themselves." Dumbledore's calm never wavered, even in the face of Severus' violent outburst.

"You mean someone with NO SELF WORTH!" Snape's hands were slammed back onto the now empty desk.

Dumbledore did not react, but his silence only confirmed what Severus had deduced. He let out a sound that was almost a growl.

"You left Harry with Tuney," He practically spat the pet name, "and her orc of a husband, knowing how they would treat him. Knowing that they would grind him down to fit into the slot you made for him in your little game."

Albus folded his hands slowly, "I did not make that slot Severus, it has always been there. I simply facilitated his ability to fit into it."

Gone was the calm façade that Albus used to keep control of a situation, and in its place was cold calculation. Severus knew this side of the Headmaster well, it always came out when he needed to have an iron grip on his emotions, it let him know the old man wasn’t an emotionless monster—but it was almost worse knowing that he did feel and went through with his "for the greater good" plans anyway.

"I am surprised," Albus continued in a cool tone, "That you know so much about Harry's home life."

Severus almost faltered, "I am not an idiot Albus, and I knew Tuney growing up. I know what she could be like; I have also had the displeasure of meeting her husband."

"Then you understand why he was left there, Harry could not end up like his father. He needed to be humble and pliant." Dumbledore's tone sounded final, as if his explanation closed the subject.

Severus' was having none of it, his anger still hot in his chest.

"HUMBLE AND PLIANT?!" He yelled.

Then he leaned farther over the desk, "Do you know how dangerous your decision was, what Potter could have become?" his words were pushed between his teeth in a vain attempt to control his temper.

"He would not have become that," Dumbledore did not speak the word, equally unwilling to say it as Severus was.

"You don't know that for sure Albus, you dropped a potentially magically powerful infant into the perfect environment to turn into one of those… he could have taken out half of London." Severus couldn't voice it; the thought of any child being that tortured inside was horrendous.
"But I do know," there was complete certainty in the Headmaster's eyes, "Tom would never have let that happen. The piece of him in Harry needed the boy whole and sane."

Severus doesn't respond, his normally sharp tongue was without words, the old man was crazy.

Albus must have taken the silence as a sign that his spy was seeing reason.

"Will you fulfill my final wish Severus? Guide Harry, help him fulfill the prophecy."

There was nothing Severus could do, arguing was pointless, and he needed to keep the Headmaster's trust. Without another option or any outlet for his continuing rage, Severus dragged it deep into himself. He looked straight into the blue eyes of the man he was going to kill, who was asking him to help a teenager commit suicide, and reinforced his mental shields.

"Yes."

Fluffy flakes slowly fell, there was no wind and so they went straight down creating the idealistic image of what winter should look like. It wasn't too heavy or too light, and was exactly like Harry always imagined when he thought of Hogwarts in the winter. He sat in shorts and a T-shirt with his legs hanging over the edge of his doorway, bare feet swinging free. His dogwood tree was bare of leaves and flowers, but the snow was so light that it piled up on the branches like cotton.

It had been a while since Harry had spent an entire night in his mindscape and not let himself dream. He touched the glass bead on his necklace and admired how the strings of magic flowing off of it shimmered in the snowy air. The three strings told Harry that Luna was still sleeping, Ron was just waking up and Hermione was already wide awake. Ever since Harry unlocked Hermione's core abilities she had been sleeping less. Most of her time was spent in the small private Library behind the creepy bookcase; the only person who dared to enter her new domain was Remus. They were working on a few things, but had only revealed one of the projects they had brewing. They were compiling all the information they could from the secret library and from the Method members about Core magic, creating a reference book like no other that's ever existed.

Harry was slightly worried about his friend's obsessive research, but he hoped that once it was out of her system she would scale it back a bit. Ron on the other hand seemed perfectly fine with Hermione practically locking herself in the hidden office. He said something about there being worse places she could be hiding in, and Harry had a suspicion he was still on edge about her time spent with Professor Jigger… for who know what reason. The potions professor was still in Hogwarts infirmary in a coma.

Harry let his mind wander, in general things were calm with the Method, and the only thing bothering Harry was the slow speed of their progress. He needed to remove more curses but the magical strain held him back. He needed to keep tabs on Voldemort but they had yet to make contact with Peter. He needed to recruit more members but school was out and they had no way to find trustworthy people. Harry felt like he had a sharp blade pressed against him and one false movement would be the end. That was probably the reason he withdrew to his mind scape this time, it helped him relax.

Harry continued to swing his legs; he enjoyed the peace that filled him while he was safe in his tree. He let his mind become blank and every corner of his psyche relax like tense shoulder muscle getting a good massage. Maybe he was getting the hang of this leader of war thing, after the crisis with Draco's parents, things began to smooth out. Well... Narcissa still didn't really interact with anyone except the Slytherins, and the disposal of Lucius' body had been weird. They cleaned him of all evidence and left him in Diagon Alley to be found when the shops began to open, leaving his
death to be interpreted as a warning from the Dark Lord. It made Harry feel like a mob boss from one of those movies Dudley used to watch. Draco and Narcissa were surprisingly OK with this plan; overall it gave their loved one the best chance of getting a proper burial, even if it was from the ministry.

Besides all that mess he felt like he was starting to really get into the core of his role. Now he could begin freeing all the method members from their curse, slowly, as his magic allowed.

Things were finally settling-

BANG!

"HARRY!"

Harry flailed to a sitting position with half a scream in his mouth. His hand clutched his chest while he breathed heavily to calm his heart.

Hermione stood in the doorway of his Grimmauld place bedroom with her arms wrapped around a book held to her chest, the door she slammed open was slowly creaking back towards her after bouncing off the wall. She was smiling brightly, obviously very excited, and didn't seem to care that she just barged in without knocking.

With a skip in her step, she rushed over to his bed and hopped on with nimble grace that she always seemed to have when she was happy.

"Oh good, you're awake!" She was either being facetious or she was so excited she really didn't notice he had been sleeping.

Harry blinked slowly at her, still not completely aware of his surroundings. He was still half asleep and now on the tail end of an adrenalin spike.

"Wha..?" Harry couldn't vocalize his confusion.

Hermione held out the book she was hugging, almost bouncing in excitement.

Harry slowly looked down at it, the first thing he noticed was that it wasn't a regular book, it was a sketch book. He leaned in closer, squinting through his sleep fogged eyes he could see intricate line work, symbols and writing. His sleep addled mind tried to make sense of the information on the page, but all he could think was that it looked kind of pretty.

"It's pretty," Harry mumbled the only thing his mind was telling him. He really needed a cup of coffee.

Hermione's radiant smile settled into a thin line and she slapped Harry's arm.

"It's not just pretty; it's the solution to our problem."

"This drawing is going to kill Voldemort?" Harry yawned, covering his mouth with the back of his hand.

Hermione huffed and slapped Harry's arm again, only harder this time.

"Ooowww," Harry whined and rubbed the red mark forming on his skin.

Hermione sighed, "Will you be serious?"
"I was being serious, killing Voldemort is sorta our biggest problem," Harry shrugged as he spoke.

Hermione smacked him one last time and then ignored his comment, choosing to move forward with her explanation.

"This," She pointed at the drawing, "is part of my core ability, and it's going to allow us to speed up removing people's curses."

Now Harry's attention was fully focused on Hermione and her crazy looking sketch. This was something Harry had been yearning for, his need to move forward and go faster. The feeling was a knife's edge pressing against his skin, just hard enough to hurt but not break the surface. He had put a lot of effort into keeping the sharp edge from cutting into him; the last time he gave in it almost killed Ron.

But here was Hermione, like a shining light in the darkness, offering to pull Harry's hand off the knife handle and help him turn it against his enemies.

"Tell me everything."

Those three words lit Hermione's face like a lumos spell and she leapt into her explanation, the knowledge flowed from her naturally, as important to her survival as the air she breathed.

"Ever since you removed my curse, my mind has been moving so fast I can barely keep up!"

Harry held back a snort, and almost choked on it. If she could barely keep up with her thoughts, then they would probably explode a normal person's head. He kept his thoughts to himself and listened as Hermione continued to explain, so enthralled that she had missed him laughing at her expense.

"I have figured out a magical array we can use, I can activate it with my magic and it will amplify yours. I tailored it specifically to you and your magic and core ability. By amplifying your magic you can use less to remove people's curses and thus less recovery time!"

A sweeping excitement rushed through Harry, he felt like there was a clear path for him, a job to do. He had a clear objective handed to him in a way that only Hermione could accomplish. He smiled, and she smiled back, the golden morning sun from his window set her frizzy halo of hair alight. Her eyes shined in the way they always did when she solved a puzzle, only brighter now with her magic unlocked, and she was flushed with the rush of discovery. The soft spot in Harry that loved Hermione, in a way he thought loving a sibling would feel like, grew larger. He clung to it and to her; he could always count on her to keep him on his feet and walking towards his goals.

The part of Harry that knew he needed help, because he was human and all humans needed help sometimes, came forward and he hugged Hermione.

He let out a breath he felt like he had been holding since the first time he removed a cure, the ill-fated night that almost got him killed in Hogwarts great hall.

"Thank you," He whispered in the same relieved breath.

Once again positive he couldn't do this without Hermione.

Later that day in the blue room, Hermione played with a tiny glass jar that was tied around her wrist with a leather cord. Inside the jar was an impossibly small copy of Hogwarts: A History.
Harry had to smother a laugh that tried to escape when Hermione's anchor was her first magical book; it was so fitting it almost hurt. Ron had been less tactful and did laugh, earning himself a slap on the arm and an irritated Hermione.

Harry pondered his memories, his friends and himself as he watches Hermione transfer her drawing onto the wood floor in large scale. His mind was in a state of half an occlumency trance and half aware of his surroundings as he sat on one of the couches pushed against the wall to make room for the magic array. Harry was idly flipping through his recent memories and self-discoveries, filing them away here and there, or he would putz around with his barrier.

His eyes were glazed while he simultaneously took in every detail of his friend on the floor happily working and organized his mind. Being only half a part of the present caused a muffled sort of viewport for Harry, like watching everything through an old camcorder.

This was a rare moment, it was quiet and warm, just two friends sitting in a comfortable silence. Hermione was bent over a small part of her array, trying to get it just right, content and fulfilled were the only words to describe her in that moment. She was made entirely of curiosity and determination, all of it pointing outward at every challenge she took on, it was in every swipe of her hand over the floor and each thoughtful pause she took to collect her thoughts.

Harry found himself filing this memory away in a safe place as it played out before him.

The door opened, and grabbed Harry's attention. Severus walked in, he looked tired, Harry unconsciously noted. In his half trance, his mind was on autopilot, he tended to absorb environmental information and pull up facts about everything he was seeing.

Severus was a man made of rough edges and sharp glares, he turned them to face anything new or that even slightly annoyed him. He threw sarcasm and biting words from a distance and let very few people get close.

But right now, he was just tired and strangely vulnerable. It was more common to see the man's outer defenses lowered a degree when he was in the safe house, surrounded by people he chose to trust, but this was more than usual. Harry filed these observations away in his section for Severus.

He also noted that this was the first time he had seen Severus in several days. It wasn't uncommon for the older man to be gone for a few days, but since classes were out Harry expected him to be around more.

When was the last time he saw Severus?

Harry turned even more inward, his meditation deepened as he looked through his memories.

Ah, Severus slipped out the night Draco retrieved his mother. Harry was one of the few to notice but assumed the spy left to report to the Headmaster. It was strange that he didn't come back to share what happened with the Method.

Severus's black eyes suddenly blocked Harry's view, a pulse pushed against his mind, almost like a sharp jab that was distinctly Severus. The sudden mental push broke Harry's trance.

"You shouldn't spend too much time like that," Severus' words rang clear through Harry's forced awareness.

He cringed at the sharp clarity of his surroundings, "Why not?"

"Do what?" Hermione looked up from her work.
Severus didn't answer either of them, and Harry saw that his normal defenses were back in place like they had never left. Maybe they were never gone and Harry only saw what he did because of his mental state, he could have picked up on micro expressions and body language.

He wanted to ask if something was wrong, but he didn't, Severus would only lie, and he was very good at lying. Harry was irritated for a moment, but he let it slide. Severus would tell him eventually, or considering the vulnerability Harry had seen, it could be personal.

"Do what?" Hermione repeated.

Severus sighed and looked at her, "Harry was in a meditative state used for occlumency."

He looked at Harry, "A state that can cause a person to become too inwardly facing if they are not careful."

Hermione hummed to herself but didn't inquire further; she was drawn back to her work like a magnet.

Severus joined Harry on the couch and watched the array practically materialize from Hermione's hands.

"What's this?" he asked pointedly.

Without looking away from her work, Hermione explained, this time in more detail than she had given Harry. She told Severus about each piece of the array as she drew it.

An hour later, Hermione's work was finished and she declared it as she stretched her sore back.

A wave of anticipation flows up from Harry's toes to meet the burning excitement in his chest. He wanted to grab the first person he saw stilled cursed and drag them into the room to try out the array.

Hermione beat him to the punch, "I want Remus to be next."

Ron played with the trim of his robe, he sat next to Harry but his eyes were transfixed by the large drawing on the floor. The unnaturally bright blue eyes traced each line as if he were watching a mouse scurry around a maze.

"That's cool," He muttered.

"Isn't it?" Hermione preened, and they struck up a conversation about what he was seeing and how Hermione created the array.

Sometimes Harry wished he could see what Ron did, everything to do with magic fascinated his friend ever since his gift was unlocked.

The door opened quietly and Remus poked his head in, he opened his mouth to speak but quickly lost his words when he caught sight of Hermione's work.

He fully entered the room and smiled, "Oh, Hermione, it came out wonderfully."

Hermione beamed, "Thanks, Remus!

Remus moved to the couch with Ron and Harry.
"I'm looking forward to seeing it in action."

Remus sat forward in anticipation.

"Well that's good," Harry placed his hand on Remus' shoulder, "because you are the first person it's being used on."

Chapter End Notes

"One day you will discover your purpose, and then you will tell no one, and then you will die."

-Night Vale

AN- Do you ever think about time… and also like… death? (both are scary) Not death as in what happens after you die, but like as a deadline? (forgive the pun) I am very stressed out by deadlines, both in school and the symbolic ones in life that I am only aware of because of the social construct of society which dictates what ages I am supposed to have completed a certain task by. Anyone else think about this as much as I do?

A third deadline that's always on my mind is debt, which seems like it is on everyone's mind lately… death is literally my deadline for this (Pun intended). I feel like I don't have enough time to do all the things expected of me (Even if I have already rejected some of them, like having kids) and also pay my debt. All of this is monumentally STUPID because money and debt are also things that only exist within society. The only things that are real out of all of this trash are time and death, and time is probably not linear, we only perceive it like that so our heads don't explode or something. The deadline is not approaching like a fish being reeled in on a line, its swirling all the fuck around us and we just have to hope we don't smack the fuck into it.

Where was I going with this? I can't remember…

All I know is that if I were immortal I would have no debt deadline… or no deadlines at all if I wanted.

(PUN INTENDED)

(NOT SORRY)
Last one Down

Chapter Summary

Down they go!

Chapter Notes

A/N- I AM BACK. I’m sure many of you never thought this would update, and I don’t blame you. But editing is almost done, and I am posting this before minijaxter gets to edit it... But moving on!

Life has gone a bit nuts for me, so don’t expect fast updates, but this story will be back on my regular roster. Ignoring some one-shots I have planned or have already posted, and some original work… I am focused on the Voltron fic, It’s OK. That story is on its final chapter, and after it’s completed HPMOP will be number 1 again! And my number 2 spot will be filled with a Merlin fic I have been cooking up. I am jumping fandoms again!

These chapters will be a bit shorter, more like the early chapters. Things were getting a bit outta hand… 30 page chapters are a bit much at the moment… *ignores 40+ page Voltron chapter I recently posted*.

Life update: No roofs have collapsed this year, but I will likely be moving again. Although this time into a house… hopefully.

Disclaimer- I own nothing in this story that is from the Harry Potter Universe. It is all owned by J.K. Rowling. Anything original in this story that may be similar to another work is coincidence and not intentional.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry Potter and the Magic of Perspective

Or (A.K.A)

Verum Inhereditas
Heat. It pressed against Harry’s skin and excited the air. Remus’ magic was an open flame, and smelled like a burning forest. Harry's hand hovered over Remus’ sternum, with his gem ready, waiting for Ron's cue.

He tried to ignore Severus’ eyes on his back, and the damp smell of his magic as it clashed with Remus’.

The rune array on the floor shined bright, almost blinding. Ron stood at the very edge of the glowing circle, with his blue eyes locked on Harry’s green ones. Then the moment arrived, and Ron nodded.

Harry touched the gem to Remus, and magic unfurled in a rush. It was familiar at this point, but also different. It was easier. Hermione’s magic held the door open and escorted Harry to Remus’ core. When Ron indicated it was time to touch the curse, it wasn’t as overwhelming as before. Hermione’s runes weaken the curse magic, and helped pry it from the core, shuffling it along into Harry’s crystal.

It was all rather simple compared to previous attempts.

Harry was about to break contact with Remus and pull the gem from his skin, but something fierce brushed his magic. He would have been scared, but it was almost comforting instead, it recognized him. The feral magic was twisted, and in pain. It wasn’t Remus, but it was permanently affixed to his magic, not just attached to his core, but a part of it. Harry couldn’t take it away, but he wanted to calm it, and take it’s pain.

The tangled magic didn’t pull away when Harry reached out, it actually seemed to reach back. When Harry plunged deeper he knew what it was. The wolf.

“Harry, what are you doing?” Ron hissed, but it was almost resigned. They couldn’t seem to get through one of these rituals without Harry doing something crazy.
“What is he doing this time?” Severus asked, also with a resigned sigh.

“He’s going back in, but I’m not sure….” Ron’s response faded away.

Harry felt like he had gone into a closet and slowly closed the door. He was in a dark room. For a moment he thought he might be alone, and trapped, but a low growl echoed. It vibrated, and pressed against Harry’s skin, and he could feel it’s suffering. It was warped, this wasn’t what it was supposed to be. It was a mistake, but it didn’t want to die.

Harry put his hand out into the blackness, bravely offering it to the unknown. At first there was nothing, and then it was cold, and wet, followed by soft and warm. Harry reached with his other hand, and trapped the large furry object between them. He ran his fingers up and discovered pointed ears, then ran them down a long snout and over damp, hard fangs.

The wolf cried. It begged, and Harry answered. He poured magic into the darkness, filling it, opening it to the light. Hermione’s runes formed on the black floor and he could see.

It was terrible. A perverted and distorted mockery of a noble wolf. Its eyes were milky and blind from the dark, its fur, patchy and dull, its legs, so deformed it could hardly stand, but it still whined for affection.

Harry could fix this. It’s what his power was meant to do. It pushed at his skin from the inside, begging to do its job. Harry knew that this was him reacting, it wasn’t a part of the plan, but maybe that was OK. Maybe, instead of always trying to plan ahead, he just needed to make better judgment calls, and to learn from his mistakes. This wouldn’t be one of those mistakes.

Harry’s magic surged forward, and he let it.

oOoOo

Harry blinked, and was in his tree. A white blanket of fresh snow, and the soft hooves of his thestral’s was comforting, but it didn’t help him remember how he had arrived here. He rolled his crystal between his fingers, and was relieved to see there was a new thread, it felt like Remus, and wasn’t distressed in anyway. Maybe Hermione’s circle didn’t compensate enough, and he was just recovering?… Milky eyes flickered in front of him, and he remembered.
Harry needed to wake up. He needed to know what had happened after he’d encountered the wolf. He hoped this worked and he wasn’t in a coma or something. He climbed to his feet, went into his cupboard, and closed the door.

Harry blinked, and this time he was looking at the ceiling of his room in the safe house. At first he thought he was alone, but someone shuffled at his bedside.

It was Remus.

Harry shot upright. “Are you OK?” he asked immediately, and then regretted his hasty movement when the room spun. He flopped back into his pillows and groaned.

“I think I should be asking if you’re OK,” Remus countered, and through wavy vision Harry saw his bright smile.

Something was different. Remus still looked tired, but it wasn’t in his bones any longer. It was more like a late night than a plaguing disease. Harry sat up again, slower, and Remus adjusted his pillows for him. “What happened after…?” Harry waved his hand, gesturing at Remus in general.

Remus smiled, and in a flash he was gone. A huge, but otherwise completely normal, sandy brown wolf leapt onto the bed, and stood over Harry. It would have been intimidating if the wolf’s tongue wasn’t hanging out of his mouth and his tail wasn’t wagging.

“Remus!?” Harry yelled, and his heart jumped.

In another flash Remus was back, sitting cross legged on the bed in front of Harry. “I’m an animagus now… well sort of, I guess I’m the first lycan.” he shrugged, more relaxed than Harry had ever seen him.

“That’s… Merlin that's great,” Harry breathed, overwhelmed with relief. He took a calming breath and addressed the hanging question in Remus’ answer. “What do you mean by lycan?”

Remus’ seemingly permanent smile widened. “You know that werewolves were the product of a botched attempt to create an animagus potion, right? The potion trying to force a wolf
transformation on people who might not be a wolf animagus caused a backfire.”

Harry nodded, he kinda remembered that.

Remus continued to explain. “Well when an animagus spends too much time in their animal form, they can get stuck or take on more characteristics of the animal. Even when I was in human form, I was much closer to the wolf than an animagus is to their animal, so I’m likely to be more wolfish because of it.” He didn’t seem upset about it, it was better than being an actual werewolf.

“So, kinda like Sirius after he got out of Azkaban?” Harry remember how dog like his godfather could be.

Remus nodded. “Yeah, but even more so. I can feel the wolf like I did before, but it isn’t angry. I do feel the desire to be the wolf more strongly than an animagus would, but it’s not in control anymore. I feel like I’m something new.” He seemed to bask in the idea of control, and after so many years it must have felt wonderful.

The impact this would have on the world was just starting to sink in for Harry. Remus was following his train of thought, and said out loud. “When the Method is fully established, we can offer a solution to all the werewolves, even the ones that have created an identity around it.”

A sudden thought came to Harry. “Do you think it's still transmittable by bite, and if it is, will the person be like you are now?”

“I…” Remus started, but then stopped, and looked stumped. “That’s a good question.”

They both knew Hermione would be on top of it, and Remus would help her figure it out. A silence fell, and they enjoyed it together for a few minutes. Harry didn’t feel guilty, which was a new experience for him lately. He might have jumped head first into a dangerous situation, but it had worked, he made the right call. But he imagined Severus would still be angry with him…

“Harry,” Remus called for his attention softly. “Since we’re alone for the moment, I was hoping I could talk to you about something… delicate,” he was beating around the bush, but Harry let him. He could see how nervous Remus was, and a blush was forming as he continued. “Severus and I… we… I care about Severus a lot,” his explanation was garbled, and his face was red.
It only took a second for Harry to put it together, and he decided to let Remus off the hook. “I get it,” he assured.

Remus’ blush grew, “Are you sure, because I didn’t really explain well, and-”

“Trust me, Moony,” Harry interrupted. “I get it,” he doubly assured, more firmly. He was happy for them, but he didn’t want to hear about it, they were like his family.

Remus nodded. “Right,” he squeezed the word out around his embarrassment. “But there's another reason I brought this up,” he explained, and his blush drained away as he became serious. “The ropes binding Severus’ mark aren't a permanent solution, it will kill him eventually.” The topic took a grim turn.

“You mentioned I could help, whatever it is, I’ll do it,” Harry offered without hesitation.

“I know,” Remus said. “But that isn't the problem,” he sighed, as if this was some old argument he was recounting. “The problem is Severus. He doesn’t want to put you at risk for himself, but I think that’s as much your choice as it is his.” guilt lined his voice, but he remained firm. “I don’t want to risk you either, and maybe I’m being selfish, but after what you did with my wolf, and with Hermione and Ron’s help, I think the danger is minimal. I just—”

“Moony,” Harry interrupted before Remus devolved into rambling. “It’s fine, I understand,” he insisted.

A long breath calmed Remus, and he nodded. “If it goes well, then maybe we can help others,” he suggested.

“Like Draco, and maybe the other Slytherins if we find them,” Harry agreed. He didn't want Remus to feel bad, this was what Harry wanted to do, help people, and create a world where he could rest after he was done. He didn’t want to be a hero, but ever since his curse was removed, he felt like his magic drove him in the direction of peace at any cost. “We can’t tell Severus until we’re ready,” Harry assumed with a sly smile. Just because he wanted peace, didn't mean he couldn’t have some fun.

Remus smiled back, like a mischievous wolf. “Of course not. Can you imagine the fit he’d throw?”
Harry shivered. “I can.” And together they formed a plan.

oOoOo

Harry was left alone to sleep. Not that people didn’t try and disturb him. As soon as Remus had walked out the door, Harry could hear him shooing an indignant Hermione away. He tried to drift back to his dogwood tree, but he couldn’t seem to make it there. He lay on his back, staring up at nothing, and cleared his mind for a long time.

Harry didn’t flinch when a ball of flames flashed above him, and Fawkes appeared from it. The bird landed on Harry’s chest, a warm and comforting weight.

“Is it time already?” Harry asked.

Fawkes blinked down at him, locking eyes. The image of a long table, set for tea at every place blinked into Harry’s mind. Each setting was different, representing a member of the Method, except one spot which was empty.

Harry sighed. “All right.” He sat up and grabbed his fake glasses. “I guess Mrs. Malfoy still won’t join us,” Harry muttered and looked down at the bird now in his lap. “It’s still weird when you communicate like that,” he told Fawkes, and got a calming note in return.

oOoOo

It was a full house. The newly mended kitchen was clean, but emptier. Many of the shelves were bare, their delicate china had been pulverized into dust beyond repair. Each member of the order sat and chatted, their mismatched tea cups filled and steaming. All of them were bright after the success yesterday, especially the unexpected one of turning Remus from a Werewolf to something resembling the mythical lycan, with the ability to control his transformations.

Harry sat at the head of the table, quietly, just watching the Method members interact for a calming moment, and surveyed how Dudley was coping. His cousin smiled at him and then returned to his conversation with Neville. Reassured that everything was well, Harry stood, and silence fell. It still astounded him that this was his reality, and he wasn’t sure if he liked it. People look to him, and silenced themselves at the very idea that me might speak. But he accepted it for what it was, at least for now, and he would use it to his advantage.
“I’m sure you all heard by now that we had a smooth curse removal, and about the unexpected turn of events that lead to Remus, more or less, being cured of his werewolf curse.” Harry waited for the cheers to die down, and continued. “We do plan to find a way to bring this cure to more werewolves, and although we haven’t had much time to talk about how we can do that yet, I’m sure Hermione’s already all over it.” Everyone laughed and Harry smiled at Hermione on his right, who was holding up a new and fairly thick binder labeled ‘Lycan’, and smiling back.

Harry waved at the binder. “But that folder isn’t the topic of this meeting. I wanted to put into action something that we have been putting off.” This was a bit of a lie, but Harry knew he could smooth it over. “I want to hammer down the plan to go into the chamber of secrets, and execute it,” he announced, fibbing about needing a plan. They had a plan, it was devised by Hermione and the inner circle, with minimal information being leaked to everyone else.

Harry looked at Severus, and got a sullen eye in return, but also a small nod. Without meaning to, Harry glimpsed a moment of Severus’ emotions, and they were as sullen as his look. Not irritated with Harry, as expected. He had been that way since resurfacing yesterday in the Blue room after almost a week of being MIA.

Harry glanced at every member, but shared a knowing look with the inner circle. Back when the idea of going into the chamber had been brought to the Method in general, Draco had asked to be a part of the team, and people had been skeptical. Now, he was more accepted, so the inner circle came up with a new plan of cutting Ron out of the mission, allowing Harry and Draco to thoroughly check the Chambers wards. There was a possibility that it might be a way into the school undetected, but Ron needed to be kept in the dark for security reasons. But that was before Ron had proved himself level headed... and some other facts had came to light...

Harry looked at Remus, and when their eyes met, Remus winked. Harry was hit with how complicated his web had become. He had a plan he built with the Method, and a plan made with the Inner Circle, and now he had a plan with only Remus. And his plan with Remus was the opposite of the one with the Inner Circle. Harry pulled his shoulders back, and buckled down.

“Originally we had decided that a small three person team would work best, and settled on Ron, Draco, and myself.” Harry gestured at Ron and Draco. “But, I would like to take a larger party, for safety,” he announced, and saw Hermione’s smile wilt. He was going off script for both plans, and she didn’t know why. Harry tried to smile at her reassuringly. “I would like to include Hermione and Severus on this mission.”

Hermione’s eyes widened, and Severus stood up. “What brought about this change?” he asked sharply.

Harry let his magic settle over the room, and Severus glared at him, rebuffing most of the calming
effect with his own abilities. Harry sighed. “I realized that we don’t know what’s down there now, and I thought Hermione’s knowledge and your dueling skills could come in handy,” he shrugged.

Everyone quickly agreed with Harry, except Severus and Hermione, who remained silent, but didn’t argue. And Pansy, she didn’t seem suspicious, or upset, but she was looking around at the group as if cataloging the responses. It was something Harry wouldn’t have noticed before his time spent training with Severus.

Harry nodded to thank them for trusting him, and went on. “I want to set this plan into motion tomorrow.” He knew it was short notice, but that was a part of the plan with Remus. This idea was full Gryffindor, half gathered information, and half on the fly planning. Severus was going to blow his stack.

“When tomorrow?” Draco asked, oddly calm. He didn’t seem to care about the changes as long as he was still included.

“Very early, before sunrise. Even on break the school is watched, but I know for a fact that the four AM shift belongs to Severus.” Harry smirked, and Severus scowled at him.

Without much effort the conversation shifted back to Remus’ new non-werewolf status, and everyone celebrated.

oOoOo

The sun was only a faint idea on the horizon when Harry woke up to his alarm. A small glowing bell floated above his head, ringing incessantly. He reached for his wand blindly with his eyes closed, and cringed when he nudged it with his fingertips and heard it fall off the bedside table and roll on the floor.

He heaved himself up with a groan, and threw his feet over the side of the bed, bending over to grope around for his wand. He snatched it up, and dismissed his bell with a little too much force, sending it across the room where it bounced off the wall.

In the blissful silence Harry regretted agreeing to Remus’s plan, because waking up this early was inhumane. With a heave he managed to roll out of bed, and began preparing. He didn’t need much for himself, but very quietly, he gathered some things he knew Hermione would need. With a leather messenger bag, and a whole lot of anxiety, Harry made his way down to the kitchen.
He wasn’t the first one there. Draco waited at the table, hands folded, smirk on display. “So, what have you got planned?” he asked, completely casual.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Harry bluffed, but his hand went for his bag nervously

Draco, ever observant, didn’t miss the tell. “Don’t treat me like I’m stupid Potter. If you won’t tell me what’s going on, then tell me what’s in the bag,” he bargained.

Harry may have embraced his Slytherin side, but he was nowhere near as practiced as Draco. He sighed and gave in. Draco would find out soon enough anyway. “I have some supplies for Hermione,” he revealed carefully.

Draco glanced at the bag skeptically. “Why doesn't Hermione have her own supplies?” He questioned. It didn’t sound like he thought Harry was lying, he seemed was more intrigued about the situation that led to Harry having Hermione’s supplies.

Before Harry could come up with an excuse, he was saved by footsteps coming down the stairs. Hermione came around the corner with messy hair and sleepy eyes, followed by an even sleepier looking Ron. She went right to the tea pot without offering a morning greeting, and Ron sat down and rested his head on his folded arms.

Harry glanced at Draco, giving him a significant look, trying to convey silence. Draco nodded, and Harry hoped his curiosity was enough to keep him quiet. He began helping Hermione, putting out cups for the three of them and for Severus when he arrived.

Just as the tea whistled, Severus floo’ed in, looking awake as always despite the hour. He sat at the table and accepted the offered tea. He didn’t look directly at Harry, but instead he met Draco’s eyes, and received a shrug. Harry was shocked that Draco continued to play along. But decided not to question his good luck.

“So,” Severus broke the silence, and took a sip of tea. “What is this all really about?” he asked in a smooth, deep voice. His tone didn’t betray any emotion, but Harry would bet he was very irritated.

“Yeah!” Ron agreed, muffled by his face being nestled in the crook of his elbow.
“Just like I said yesterday, we are going to the chamber to get the fangs, that's all.” Harry lied, focusing on his tea and hoping Severus would just go along.

With a thick layer of skepticism, he did go along. Severus finished his tea, stood up and announced. “Let's get this over with.”

Harry was so surprised by his lack of argument that he looked directly at Severus. It would have been a grave mistake any other time, leaving himself open to a mental search… But Severus avoided eye contact completely, which only worried Harry further. But he didn’t have time to figure out what was going on right now.

They left through the floo one by one. Hermione passed Harry on her way to the fireplace, and shot him a confused look, but remained silent.

oOoOo

The school was dark and quiet. The marauders map provided Harry with the perfect path to their destination. Using Severus’ patrol route as a hole in the system, they made it to the girls bathroom that hid the Chamber’s entrance without issue.

“This is the entrance to the famed Chamber of Secrets?” Draco drawled disapprovingly. He stood next to Harry in front of the sink that Harry had indicated.

Ron shivered. “Yeah, I know it doesn’t look like much, but trust me, this is it.” He had shuffled away from the sink, still wary after all these years.

Harry on the other hand, the person with the most traumatic and personal experience, didn’t really feel anything. The sink didn’t cause any flashbacks, and if he was being honest, much of what had happened was a blur. He had been young, and there had been a lot of adrenalin involved… also powerful poisons.

Everyone watched silently as Harry crouched down to look at the small snake etched into the pipe. He heard Draco take a deep breath and hold it in anticipation.

Talking to the snake was easier than it had ever been. Harry hardly had to imagine it moving. “Open.” The word was smooth and drawn out at the end.
Ron moved even farther away as the sink distorted and the pipes moved to form the entrance. Nobody tried to enter, not even Draco. “Come on Weasley, weren’t you gloating yesterday that you’ve already been down there?” He mocked, but it was good natured.

“I don’t see you moving to the front of the line, Malfoy,” Ron countered with a smirk.

Draco sneered, but it was almost a smile. “Maybe I would if your fat head wasn’t in my way!”

“My fat- you! I bet you’re going to feel right at home in a dank hole!” Ron stood his ground, holding back a laugh.

Draco hesitated for a moment, searching for a come back. “Your face will feel right at home!” he shouted. It was very un-Malfoy like.

“That doesn’t even make sense!” Ron threw back immediately.

Draco crossed his arms, and looked as smug as could be. “It’s a muggle thing I learned from Dudley, you wouldn’t understand.”

Their strange banter continued, and Ron relaxed, but neither of them volunteered to jump in the hole. It was surreal to hear Draco try and act superior due to his muggle knowledge, but also oddly fitting because Draco acted superior about absolutely anything he could.

Hermione stepped between the arguing boys, fed up. “Oh, for goodness sake! I’ll go first!” She snapped as she approached the hole. She looked over her shoulder. “Don’t forget the cushioning charm,” she warned, and then jumped in.

Severus’ went next, silently, and it unnerved Harry.

Draco and Ron looked at Harry, and he shrugged. “got to make sure it closes behind us,” he explained.
The remaining boys looked at each other for a tense and quiet moment. Then Ron suddenly made a move towards the entrance while yelling. “Last one down is a coward!”

“Damn it, Weasley!” Draco shouted and sprinted after Ron.

They practically fell in the hole while trying to shove each other out of the way, but in the end Ron got down first and Draco’s cursing echoed after him.

Harry was still chuckling as he approached the entrance, but the reality of what he was about to do sank in, and he fell silent.

This was for Severus’ own good, he reminded himself.

Harry took a deep breath and whispered to the snake carving. “Close behind me, and open for nobody else but me.”

Harry jumped down into the Chamber of Secrets.

The last one down.

oOoOo

Chapter End Notes

“Confused? At a loss for what to do? Wow, sounds like you're human. Good Luck.”
~Nightvale

Lycan- Actually a subsection of werewolf that can control their transformations. The more you know!

A/N- YOOOOOOO its that white space again. Someplace comforting, and less confusing than real life. Lets all pretend to be something not human. I think I will be a dog, or maybe a fox. I just want to take a nap in a sunbeam. Or I can be a house, yup
maybe a house.

There’s a house down the road in a cul-de-sac I grew up near. That’s me. The one that is uninhabited, with the missing shutter, and the paint chipped door. The identical houses around it are well maintained, while the house that’s me stands abandoned. My green door has a crack in the middle. A thin line that is only as long as both my hands put together, and it leaks. Clear, salty water flows from it and pools on my slanted porch. I saw that house every day as a child riding my bike, until we were indistinguishable. Now I think, and dream, and wonder if I’m still filled with the ocean.

I long to be free of the water. Drained because I’m tired of drowning. I would be lighter without it, and could walk without swimming, and breath without it burning. I imagine the house feels the same, if houses can feel at all. I dream that I go back to myself, and walk up the stoop where the air gets colder. I knock and wait, just like I did as a child. The door either opens and overwhelms me with its flood, or it doesn’t and for some reason I’m disappointed.

Once I might have gone back to see if the I was still alone, maybe even knock like I do in my dream. But now I wouldn’t dare, because I don’t want to see what I’ve become.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!