**No Competition**

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**No Competition**

by [AnyaMcL](http://archiveofourown.org/users/AnyaMcL)

**Summary**

What if the Horcrux hadn’t quite been as contained by the Blood Wards as Dumbledore planned? Rather than influencing Harry’s personality, it darkened his aura. An aura already rather grey, despite his innocent nature. Grey with the darkness of his parents traumatic deaths, grey with his status as the last living primary heir of the Peverells, thusly a child of Death -- and that made him something warm, endearing and adorable to the dark creatures of the magical world.

Man, wouldn’t that suck for any other wannabe dark lord trying to make a comeback!
Chapter 1

The bowing and scraping was pleasing. It was a feudal sign of homage given to the Lord. There, in this modern age, it was combined with soft murmurs of awe arising from the dark-robed crowd as they stayed on their knees, a murmur their Master indulged this one time, as he enjoyed their impressed awareness of his immense power. That he was the greatest and strongest magical being in their lives. And he was, truly, the most powerful alive. After all, from the cold fingers of death, he had escaped. HE had returned to flesh, and stood before them ready to reclaim his throne.

No other could show such glorious power! After all, HE, alone had triumphed over the cold fingers of Death! Well, if you subscribed to fables, the brothers Peverell had too defeated the Grim Reaper, but Voldemort was quite content to discount the myth. Especially when he considered where were the family Peverells were now? Extinct! HA!

Thusly, bow and scrape the Death Eaters rightly should. He was their Lord. He was their Master. And they were the slaves to his very being. Clustered around him on their knees, in a half moon, they were the beginnings of his legion. This was merely the start. Soon, all magical beings would bow their head to him.

Soon, the Wizarding World would feel his might.

But first, before Dumbledore and his crowd could do aught to stop him, they would lay low, and he would bring together all his mighty forces of Darkness. 'And the time was now to begin such’, Voldemort thought as he looked over his Death Eaters with something akin to pleasure. “MacNair – what news of Greyback – will the werewolves align themselves to my regime?’

Silence reigned for a long tangible moment, and in the gloomy environment of Riddle House, a sepulchral feel stretched through the aged house, with the mould, mildew and other signs of abandonment staining the former ebullient lavishness his muggle father had enjoyed in life. The murder of that bastard and his family had tainted the house forevermore.

It was an environment that the Dark Lord enjoyed. Proof his darkness could destroy any site of joy and happiness forevermore.

“MACNAIR! SPEAK!” The Dark Lord roared, eyes roaming the sea of dark robes, looking for his servant.

“Ah, Master...” The hesitant voice of Titus Nott spoke up, muffled somewhat as the man’s head still faced the floor. “MacNair is no longer alive to be with us. He... well... he went off on the wrong werewolf, and is... well.” Nott stuttered, but since the Dark Lord was looking in the right direction, he narrowed in on the cowering robe that had spoken.
“Soulless.” Malfoy muttered.

“You speak out of turn, Malfoy.” The baleful serpentine glare shifted to the bowed head of the blond. "Bearing only fortune that Nott did as well spares you from punishment. Mind your tongue lest I remove it."

“Apologies, my lord.” Malfoy murmured.

The Dark Lord’s mind swum, processing Notts news. Soulless? What did Malfoy mean? What had happened that MacNair would fall prey to the Dementors kiss as punishment, for it must have been Dementors for the Executioner to lose his soul. Had he foolishly attacked the wrong wizard at some inopportune moment, and been caught? He frowned, turning swiftly, and his robes fanned behind him in the same fashion of a great Emperor.

“What crimes did the Ministry accuse him of?” He asked after a moment of consideration.

Silence again rained down. Dammit. He’d never admit it, but he missed the olden golden days when the idiots had spoken up after he had issued a statement. Sure, cowing them into silence had seemed a good idea back then, but when he needed information, someone HAD to speak up.

“Someone had best start explaining, or my wand shall be felt.” He hissed.

“He wasn’t tried for a crime, Master. He was… it… MacNair spoke badly about the Potter boy, a werewolf there took exception, MacNair attacked the werewolf, and a Dementor kissed him for harming his Euchre buddy.” Nott explained in a rush.

Red eyes widened. That was the most ridiculous thing he had heard since his student days at Hogwarts. Had Nott taken a knock to the head? “Summon to me the L’oc Dama of the Dementors.” He ordered abruptly. "I will have the truth of this!"

“Ahh.” Nott stuttered, spittle hitting the stone floor. “That might be a bad idea, My Lord. They are in service to Potter, and would likely attack any emissary we send.”

The Dark Lord blinked – a fearsome achievement for a being who no longer had eyelids. “I...what did you say?” He didn’t stutter. That was NOT a stutter. He had simply changed his mind on what he was going to say, that was all. “The DEMENTORS are in service to Harry Potter?”

The bowed head seemed to totter side to side, waffling. “Well, “service” may not be the right word, per se, My Lord. But, it sounds bloody awkward to say they worship the ground the boy walks on, glory in the air he breathes...and well, have giving their loyalty to him. Sadly, kid actually enjoys being around them.”

The Dark Lord didn’t stumble. He had struck his toe on a protruding marble stone. However, in light of the fact this conversation was going downhill fast, he thought it best to re-assume his seat on his throne. Had he damaged the Potter boy that much with his killing curse? There had to be some sort of mental deficiency in oneself to enjoy being around Dementors.

Still, being around a child, versus having power in a new world order. “I will speak to the L’oc Dama.” He decided. “I will learn the truth of what befell MacNair. And, we will free our brethren incarcerated in Azkaban at the same time.”

“Ah.” Nott muttered sotto voice.

“Again, Nott? Speak!” Voldemort ordered.
“The L’oc Dama isn’t at Azkaban, anymore. He’s in Surrey.” Nott cleared his throat.

Had he eyebrows, he was sure they would have ridden up to his former hairline. Not that he had hair. “SURREY?”

“Mmmhmm.”

“Privet Drive, Little Whinging, to be precise.” Malfoy muttered. “Bloody residential Knockturn II”

“MALFOY! You forget yourself again, in my presence. Speak only when you are addressed.” The Dark Lord hissed, his wand emerging from the folds of his robe. One more little comment from Malfoy – wait – did he say a residential street in a muggle city? What in the name of Salazar had been going on in their world? “Nott. Rise. Speak. Tell me everything about this situation.” He ordered.

Titus swallowed hard and rose, eyes dropping to the wand clenched in his masters fist. “Well. It started with the werewolves, or a werewolf, to be honest.” He said after a long moment. “Apparently, Potter lives on Privet Drive...”

“We shall attack immediately and end the thrall he has on our servants!” The Dark Lord decided, rising to his feet. He froze as Nott winced. “About that, my Lord – perhaps you should wait until I explain it all – ah -- our attack would likely go very badly… for us… without all details being provided to you. Your plans are brilliant, Master, but as you have taught us in past, we must provide all details for your plans to truly show their glory.”


“Its just.. well...”

“Spit it out, Nott.”

“Ah, the ah, well, the darker creatures of the magical world have decided to claim Potter as their Dark Lord.” The man said in a rush, scarcely allowing for breath.

Voldemort gaped. POTTER? “WHAT?” Clearly, beyond a shadow of a doubt, Pettigrew had screwed up the ritual. He was trapped in a coma, or an alternate universe, or he was dead and this was purgatory --- which means his horcrux had failed and that was untenable. “Speak slower. Repeat”

“Potters the new Dark Lord.” Nott said succinctly. He caught the Master’s scornful expression. “It’s true, Master. See, it started with a werewolf, like I said. Apparently, he moved into Surrey, after he found he couldn’t get work in the magical world, and found a job in muggle construction – horrible, I know, he should have chosen to die first -- but, that’s what happened, Master. So, one night, apparently when Potter was about four or so, according to the information my sources gave me, Potter's relatives locked him outside for a night -- at winter-time-- and this wolf happened to have escaped his cage on that same night. Went on a hunt, as werewolves do, and found the Potter boy.”

Voldemort sat down with a near ‘thud’ onto his throne. “Potter’s a werewolf?” He asked incredulously.

Nott made a small considering face, “No.” He said after a moment. “Not so we can tell. I’m told
the wolf never bit him. It just... well... thought he was the best thing since featherbeds and cuddled up to the boy. Kept him warm.”

The ‘You’re Shitting Me’ went unsaid, but the look on the Dark Lord’s face was vocal enough.

“Well, the next morning, the werewolf in question was horrified, convinced he’d bitten the kid, and went back. Kid knew he had been the wolf right away. The wolf’s wife started babysitting for the Potter boys relatives – said the elder cousin was a tubby bastard, but the Potter kid was sweet. He just... well... it’s just...”

“Just?”

“Well, when it happened again, this time the wolf hunted down a rabbit and brought it to the kid for food.” Nott wrung his hands. “I’m told the kid was very kind, but rejected the offer because he doesn’t like his food furry. Well, I gather the werewolf was talking to a schoolmate, and before you knew it there were a few werewolves moving into the area.”

The soft snort of disbelief was impressive for a man with no real nose.

“Yeah, well, then the kid had a pack keeping him warm at night. A pack that went out before moonrise to pick up food for the kid, package it in a bloody doggy-bag, and then bring it with them when they went to check on the kid. Bottom line, the wolves are in cohorts with their other halves where the kid is concerned. Most of ’em can transform at will now, because wolf and man have found harmony.”

The dark lord blinked. This time, Nott saw it (unlike his other downward-facing dog compatriots), and he marvelled. Snakes couldn’t blink, could they?

“So... I guess it only made sense that someone in Knockturn would notice a change. Do you know the hag who runs the Shoddy Inn?”

“Do I, perchance, look like a being that would associate oneself with a hag or a run-down disruptable inn located in Knockturn Alley?” The Dark Lord drawled, his warning unspoken but clear.

Nott blinked, and gave a quick survey of the room around him, taking in all its wretched decay.

“No, then. Huh. Alright... the Hag who owned the Shoddy Inn noticed, and asked around. Went snooping, because obviously her clientele was dropping, despite the fact she’d not poisoned them. So, I’m told she quite liked the ambiance of Privet Drive. It was ripe with darkness, but warm, family oriented, if you were raising a litter of werewolves. She... ah... saw opportunity of a reduced tax rate, sold her old Inn, bought a property at the end of Private Drive, renovated, and opened up a bed and breakfast.”

The Dark Lord reached up for the bridge of his nose -- or where the bridge of his nose would have been if he had not modified his bone structure. Pinching flesh wasn’t nearly so satisfying, he noted absently.

“Well, logically, it only made sense that a vampire or two would rent out a room at some point. I’m told it was Judas who took a room first. Liked the area, and decided to buy in.”

“The Damned? The first true blood vampire has moved into a residential sector of England?” The slight shrill notes in his voice were just the effects of bad acoustics in the run down house. They needed a better venue, the Dark Lord noted. At least, for sound quality reasons, and no other. He gave himself a mental shake, if the Damned was in England, perhaps he could yet sway the
vampires to his banner...

“It seems Dark creatures are drawn to Potter. And they tend to stay after meeting the kid. They really like being around him. A lot.” Nott shrugged, as if unable to relate. Truth be told, with Voldemort’s fondness for the unforgivables, none of his people wanted to be a square mile in his vicinity, so relating to Potters dark creatures was difficult. Nott sighed, “So, after Judas took up residence, there was a flood of other covens of vampires moving in. The flops and hanger-ons, who like to toady up to their Lord, of course. Started a whole renovation upswing in the neighborhood, which brought out more werewolves in looking for work -- they’ve opened a construction firm in the muggle world, I’m told. Given their heightened strength and instincts, and reduced rates, they are making a killing. Well, monetarily, not literally. And I suppose that is when the Goblins got into it, financing it all.”

“You guess?”

“Please, my Lord, I’m using second-hand information, and doing this recap on the fly. It's not easy. So, where were we... ah, we have werewolves, hags, and vampires all living in Little Whinging, the nexus of the site being Privet Drive. What next, what next... Oh! Then came the lich.” Nott rubbed his head. “The retired headmaster of Scholomance. I’m told he, and I use that pronoun cautiously given that ‘he’ wears robes over ‘his’ body, so examination of the pelvic region is impossible; and confirming gender from a skull simply untenable; at any road, ‘he’ was curious about this new dark neighborhood in England, and during a poker tournament in Transylvania, the vampire Lord Judas was raving about this up and coming little dark prince to everyone and sundry, so ‘he’ came to investigate. Met Potter. Liked Potter. Bought the house next door.”

‘A lich lived next door to Potter.’ Voldemort pressed his thumb hard into his forehead, feeling the echo of his heartbeat in a throbbing vein. Oh, sweet Merlin. A lich who had been privately tutored by the Prince of Hell at the legendary demon school, and had rumoured to serve as headmaster for three thousand years at said demon school. Oh, merlin's saggy balls!

“Ah, I should add? Yes… I’d best. Well, after the whole farcas last year, what with the ‘Heir of Slytherin’ nonsense that went on at Hogwarts, Potter was quite unhappy at Hogwarts. And so too were his dark creatures. The lich withdrew Potter after the end of year exams, and enrolled him into Scholomance for this past year. He actually was awarded a scholarship by the Prince of Hell. I’m told he’s done exceptionally well. In the top three for marks.”

Truth be told, the Dark Lord loved his scaly appearance. He took pride in it. It was physical proof to the world that he was genetically miles above the plebeian muggles from which his father’s legacy came from. At this moment, what he loved most about his facial features was other than the widening of his eyes (and the small sounds he was inadvertently making, but would deny utterly), no one would know he was gobsmacked by looking at him. Which none of his servants, save Nott, were doing.

And Nott was mercifully expendable. He had an heir, after all, who could take his place.

“It was a case of happy neighbors after that at Knocturn II -- err, Little Whinging. But that seems obvious doesn’t it? I mean, who was going to piss off a powerful three-thousand year old, tutored by the devil, lich? No one -- weeeeeeell, there was a few small incidents at first. The... uh... vampires took exception to Potters relatives a few years back, and they would have killed them, but the lich got involved. Apparently, that’s when he became magical guardian to Potter. For the record, his relatives really didn’t like them, the vampires, I mean, and were antagonizing some of the vampires – something about their gardens being unnatural. I don’t get it. I mean, I’ve seen the nightblooms vampires use in the gardens, they are breathtaking, which is probably why they use
them. Bottom line, though, vandalizing a vampire's garden is never a good idea, muggle or no.”

Nott paused. “I digress, and I know you don’t like that. So, after the lich moved in, it was about this time that all the rest of the muggles, excluding Potters relatives, completely moved out. If we were to attack, there’s no muggles, just your run of the mill angry werewolves -- who can change at will, bloodthirsty vampires, a few rather nasty hags, and of course, a very powerful lich. Nothing a well construed plan can’t work around, my Lord.”

Voldemort leaned forward. “Right.” He said drily. “Potter is surrounded by werewolves, vampires, hags and a lich, and from your rambling tale, outnumbers us five to one.” He summarized. “That there aren’t any signs of friction I find doubtful. There must be a weak link, a chink in their armor. Has there been any rumors of dissention at all?” It was unfathomable that a vampire would coexist peacefully with a werewolf. And hags? No one felt comfortable around a hag.

“Well. No, frankly.” Nott scratched his chin. “I can’t say I’ve heard anything bad at all, other than they are tiffed off with the Ministry and Dumbledore for sticking his long whiskered beard into things he ought not. I mean, unless you try to remove Potter from the neighborhood, it’s very ah.. darkly zen. Some of my mates and I theorize it’s to do with Potter. They’re all so focused on the boy, you see, that there’s no time for infighting. The wolves and hags can watch the Potter kid during the day, but the vampires take up night duty. And Merlin help the sod that makes Potter bleed a drop. They bought out two potioneers for all blood replenishers and healing pastes, one day. Because the kid fell off something called a bi-cycle? The lich has Potters relatives trussed up in runes. Overall, they are all very focused on the boy, and terribly protective.” Nott paused, thoughtfully. “You know, I suppose the Dementors moved in shortly after Potter went shopping for school supplies in Knockturn, just before his first year.”

At this point, the Dark Lord’s brain short-circuited. This had to be a joke. He glanced around, and found none of his other servants were moving. Not even a twitch. Oh dear. “Albus Dumbledore let the hero of the light go shopping in Knockturn?” He asked dry-mouthed.

“Oh, no! Not at all, my Lord.” Nott hastily assured him. “I’m quite certain the Headmaster had NO IDEA that Potter was in Knockturn. I daresay, he didn’t have a clue until Potter left Hogwarts. As for hero of the light, that’s pure propaganda by the Ministry.”

Maybe getting rid of the eyebrows had been a bad idea. He couldn’t arch them to show his displeasure, or to make enquiry. Hrm.

“Ah, anyway, as I understand it, it was the Vampire Lord, Judas, and the Hag, Baba Yaga, who took Potter to Knockturn for his school supplies.”

“I see.” Voldemort said drily. “Baba Yaga is a myth.” Voldemort cut him off abruptly.

Nott made a small face. “Yeah. You know, I thought so too. But Greyback proved us wrong.” He rolled his eyes. “Not that I’ve seen evidence, but apparently the former alpha is now a carpet in front of Baba Yaga’s fireplace.”

The Dark Lord’s jaw ached from hanging so low, sure being able to disenstand his jaw seemed like a great idea originally, some of those stacked burgers were daunting. A serpent would be able to swallow whole, he had thought, but right now, it HURT to hold it so low, so long – even if it was an unconscious action. “A hag killed Greyback?” He sought confirmation, the information being too, well, ridiculous. Greyback, a fierce werewolf capable of shifting outside of the moon, and used to taking a half-form capable of savage attacks. He took joy in being a feral beast. Dead?
“Well,” Nott muttered. “He hadn’t met a hag like Baba Yaga before. She boiled his bits and pieces and made stew. The wolves loved it. And she adores Potter. Seriously. Fawns over him. I saw it myself at Gringotts. It’s bloody sickening.”

Sickening indeed, in so many more ways than just one. A hag fawning over anything was an experience left for those of stronger stomachs. They were hideous creatures, deformed, tainted and horrid smelling. Their fetid breath was enough to curdle milk.

“So, Potter was in Knockturn before his first year, and coincidentally the Ministry sent a few Dementors on a search for a werewolf. Ah, I guess the Dementors found their mark, and Potter stood up for the werewolf. Well, the Dementors are pretty single minded, so whether it’s kiss one body or two, they don’t really care. They swooped and gave Potter the kiss…”

“He’s soulless and still lives?” The Dark Lord openly squawked. He, who had walked further down the mystical road than any other was still searching for immortality, and a mere child already HAD it without any work?

“Ah. Well. You see, Master, we figured out how it was you preserved your incredible life, because of that moment. The Dementor swallowed the horcrux you had imbedded in the child’s scar. We suspected, then, you had used a soul jar to preserve your life, but feared it destroyed. After that, the kids aura took a big upswing. I can’t fathom how Dumbledore missed it. His eye prescription must be off.”

Red eyes goggled, and a choked yip escaped his throat.

“But back to speaking on the subject of your multiple phylactery method of great immortality, My Lord. Last year when Potter encountered Slytherin’s basilisk -- well, it was the destruction of your diary that confirmed to us that our Great and Terrible Lord had made multiple horcruxes. And so we searched for the rest of them, found the one in that awful shack down the road from here -- Slytherin rest Flint’s soul, how he screamed, Master, that was a truly nasty curse on it -- and of course you mercifully returned this summer to guide Pettigrew in how to use a horcrux to restore you to your Greatness.” Nott gushed. “But to mention the Basilisk… ah, it, ah, relocated itself. Moved into the sewers of Privet Drive to be closer to Potter.”

“It hunts Potter?” The Dark Lord sought hope. Any hope.

Notts head wobbled side to side. “Well, no, it would hunt FOR Potter, if the boy asked of it. I’m not sure how it’s feeding itself, but Potter told my contact that the creature decided the cold north of Scotland sucked, and in it’s old age, it sought a more temperate climate. Felt it would be far more beneficial. How Surrey is considered more temperate frankly baffles me, but it, ah, well, like all other residents of Knockturn II, it adores the boy. And after some research, our scholars, and some Gringotts curse breakers out of India have concluded that if the boys aura is dark enough to sustain a community of dark creatures, that ambiance would sustain a Basilisk regardless of other environmental factors.”

“Oh, bugger me.” The Dark Lord again tried to pinch the bridge (missing) of his nose -- and again failed. No relief was to be his. There had to be another way to ease the mental headache growing. His eyes glanced upon the bent blond head, and an idea glimmered in his mind. A good idea. A pleasant idea. Well, insomuch as it would exercise some of his ire. He was NOT pleased that another of his horcrux had been destroyed. That represented three gone. Sure, one had been made unintentionally, but still.. "Malfoy,” He hissed, letting anger bleed into his voice. “How is it the diary I entrusted into your care, and that you pledged to guard with your life, came to be destroyed at Hogwarts?”
“Master?” The Malfoy patriarch squeaked. “I… I… I… it… oh… My Lord, please….”

“I’m waiting.” The Dark Lord growled. Still the blond was stammering nothing of merit. Voldemort sighed silently, and cut to the chase, raising his yew wand. “Crucio.”

The sound of Malfoy screaming was the most soothing music to his ears. He let the sound rain down for a few minutes, and then let up. “Let this be a warning to all of you, those that I entrust with my precious possessions are to guard them with your very LIVES.” For good measure, he hit Malfoy with another Crucius. It felt good. Worked a few kinks out. He was willing to bet Potter never had done this before. Potter a natural dark lord, his arse!

“Nott,” He turned his attention back to the only Death Eater standing. “What of the Dementors who kissed Potter? Can they be swayed to our cause?”

“Ah, no. They moved, almost immediately after kissing Potter, to Privet Drive to take up roles as guards to Potter.” Nott rocked back and forth on his feet. “They actually reside in Potter’s basement. It’s been magically expanded.”

“Guards?” He was perplexed. “How do they feed, cut off from the horde?”

Nott blew out a breath. “Ah, well. See, the whole horde is there. In the basement. The L’oc Dama terminated the agreement with the Ministry, and set up shop in Little Whinging. Something like the basilisk where the boy’s aura is enough nourishment for their kind.”

Inarticulate disbelief squawked from the Evilest of Dark Lords throat.

Nott shrugged. “I’m not making this up, Master. Were it that I could, but I’m very sorry, it’s all true.”


“Now, technically,” Nott shoved hands into the folds of his robes, “Dragons aren’t dark creatures. They are just, magical creatures.”

Voldemort narrowed his eyes. “He has a dragon.” He concluded flatly.

“No, no, no... Potter doesn’t have a dragon.” Nott assured him jovially, before blithely continuing, ”He has at least a score of them. They took the park attached by the street, the lich bathed it in muggle repelling wards and other things to protect the Statute of Secrecy, of course,... and yeah, that sums that up. A few dragons moved in. They hunt off of local farms in the wider area of Surrey. But, they always come back to the park.” He gave the wide-eyed look of ‘what can you do? Argue with a dragon? Ha!’

“How many? You said a score. Define that.” it could be said the tone was conversational. It could also be said that the Sahara was in want of a little rain.

“Oh,well, ah… more than ten less than thirty. It’s awful hard to get an accurate count.” Nott was looking up at the ceiling, as if the flaking paint was the most entrancing thing he’d ever seen. “The Ministry sent some people to investigate. They never returned. It’s rather hard to say definitively that it was the dragons that got them. It could have been the basilisk. She seems to think the dragons are her grandchildren or some such. Or, perhaps, the vampires. They get tetchy about interlopers who show up at night. or it was the lich, who really dislikes the British ministry. And since the ministry agents prefer to do census counts on dragons when said dragons are sleeping, so at night....”
“I see.”

“As for trolls… well. They sent an apology for the one that Potter had to kill in his first year. Well. They sent a herd of cattle by way of apology. Potter gave the cattle to the dragons. Did I mention they let him go for flights on their backs? No? Ah.” Nervously, Nott licked his lips, sensing the flat glare of the Dark Lord wasn’t conducive for his continued good health.

“The giants -- we believe Potter hasn’t encountered any. But, Master -- he’s already got werewolves, vampires, dementors, hags, a basilisk, lich, dragons, succubi, incubbi, and inferi. I did mention the boy is in Scholomance now, right? The Prince of Hell offered Potter a scholarship -- and the brat took him up on it. Started his third there, heading into his fourth, now. Ah, now this is unsubstantiated, well, except it came from a letter Potter sent to my source, but Lucifer is considering making the boy his heir on earth. Keeps calling the kid his “nephew”. Knowing Lily Evans, anything is possible, I suppose. Fortunately, Uncle Luc hasn’t moved into Privet Drive too. Not enough brimstone, I gather. So, with all that said, I don’t think we want to squeeze Giants into that mix. And sure as it rains in England, if they have stray chance of meeting Potter, it’ll happen.”

Voldemort rose from his throne and stalked out of the room. A door slammed deeper into the house. And then another. Still, no one dared to twitch for the longest moment.

“Bloody hell, my back is killing me. Could he not just…” Someone groaned.

“Shut up.” Travers hissed. “Do you want to be the next one to dance to his cruciatus? Just… stay there. If he wants us to lick the floor, we lick the bloody floor.”

Silence reigned for a long moment.

“Potter doesn’t ask his people to bow and scrape. Or lick floors.”

“The wolves were licking the floor long before Potter came around.” Alecto Carrows hissed scornfully.

“I’m just saying, he treats all the dark creatures with respect. Courtesy.” The robed, bent over figure said. “He’s not asking his sworn followers to act like dogs.”

“Hey, Is it true he can remove the… you-know-what from our you-know-where?” Someone else muttered.

“I heard about that.” Montague muttered. “Nott, your contact say anything.”

“Remove the stick from your arse? Just reach behind yourself, you don’t need Potter to do it for you.” Nott said blandly, still not moving from where he had stood before the Dark Lord. Frankly, he’d rather had been sitting in his own study at home with a big mug of something hot and comforting in his hand, but self-preservation said, until the anti-apparition wards dropped, wards that Voldemort himself had set up, Titus was stuck catering to the whack-job he called Master.

Ah, the indiscretions of youth. If only the consequences hadn’t lingered.

- Fin -
Where Darkness Began -- or the cultural development of Knocktern II's beginning

It was cold. Really cold. A terrible wet cold, on top of the chill. It slicked snow already on the ground into ice, and made even the snowmen with cheery scarves look like cruel monsters of winter’s army.

The snow kept falling from the dark night sky, but either the way it fell or soaked up wet and icy from the ground the winter snow leaked abysmally through Freak’s crappy and holed trainers. Only Dudley got winter boots. Freak didn’t have boots. Or coats. Or warm blankets. Or even beds. Only special boys like Dudley got them.

Freak huffed out a tired sigh, watching the breath steam in the cold night air. He hadn’t meant to take so long getting the garbage from the garage to the front curb, but it had been so heavy, and hard to pull. He’d honestly tried to be quick, but Uncle Vernon had locked him out. Again. Freak knew from past experience no amount of banging on the door, or wailing would get him entrance. He’d have to trudge through the slippery ice-topped snow to the small shed in the back garden, and just wait the night out.

Pulling himself to his feet, and resigned to the likelihood of soaking his toes, Freak made his way around the house with bowed head and rounded shoulders. He stopped to try the back door, but it too was locked tight. The kitchen light was still on, and that just told him his Aunt and Uncle had knowingly locked him out. Again.

Freak let loose another long-suffering sigh Tiredly, he turned and continued his difficult trudge through the dark yard back to the small wooden shed where Aunt Petunia kept her gardening supplies. He huddled arms tightly around his cold body, and winced some more at the feeling of cold snow on what used to be warm toes. Making his way to the back of the shed and the sliding doors that kept it closed, Freak’s heart sunk as he spotted the new shiny brass lock gleaming on the handle. Cold fingers tested it, hoping it was open, knowing even before he reached out it was a silly foolish hope, more like a miracle if it was unlocked.

It wasn’t.

With a despairing moan, Freak sank down, back against the shed doors, despair robbing the strength of tired legs. Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon were trying to kill him. They had deliberately left him out in the cold, with no place to find shelter. They wanted him dead. A single tear escaped his tired eyes, and a soft sob tore at his throat. “Freak don’t wanna die.” He cried softly.

But it was so cold, and he was so tired. He huddled down, knees tight to cold body, his oversized sweater and threadbare pants getting soaked by the still falling snow. Head tucked low to breastbone, Freak tried to sniff away tears. But he was soooo very cold. Why couldn’t Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon love Freak even a smidgen as much as they did Dudders? Why did they have to hate him so much? Sobs ripped through him. Lonely, heart-wrenching sobs full of heartbreak.

Freak had no idea how long he’d been outside, nor any awareness of the passing of time since huddling at the small shed’s exterior. The storm of his tears had passed, leaving him still cold, stuffed-up and achy. It was darker now, the kitchen lights were turned off and shadows no longer had to fight for dominion. Only the full glowing moon above cast any radiance on the world below.

Freak distantly noticed when the cold stopped biting him. It was right about the time he started to
feel very sleepy. Just so tired, that if he let his eyes close, they’d stay closed forever, and he’d sleep perfectly. It was still, he knew, very cold, and he was, he understood, very wet. But, he didn’t notice anything else in the cold winter night.

So, tired, wet, and near death from hypothermia, it was completely understandable that a small four year old boy might miss the something like the big bad wolf that snuck into the yard, fresh on the trail of prey. The big bad grey brindled wolf, that literally flowed through the snow like a duck on a river. The big bad drooling wolf that saw the tiny dark-haired boy curled up like an offering, and it’s jaws opened with eager anticipation.

And then the wolf took a whiff. And sneezed hard.

THIS Freak, sleepy and near death as he was, did notice. And looking up to see the big bad brindled wolf with dripping maw just mere inches from his face -- well, that got the heart pumping and blood flowing again. With good common sense of any prey, he screamed, and scrambled for his feet.

The lock on the shed didn’t open, despite his desperate wrench on it. The shed’s shelter wasn’t to be his miracle then, but surprisingly another miracle did suddenly happen. For certainly, a big bad wolf would see a frozen child as a meal, but instead, the giant wolf’s reactions and actions became both puzzling and incredible.

The wolf sniffed up against the boy, chuffing against the sodden back of the small child, just above the waist. Freak spun around, eyes wide and scared. Amber eyes seemed to study him for a moment, and then the head darted down. Teeth snagged on the overlarge sweater he wore, tugging the boy up to his feet, and fair near dragging him to follow the wolf into the thick cedar bush at the very back of Aunt Petunia’s garden. Freak tried to fight free, but he was cold, near frozen solid, and the wolf certainly had the upper hand.

Freak thought he was dinner. As in, the main course. “Don’t hurt me. Don’t!” He pleaded with tears. The wolf huffed, but kept on tugging him into the shrubbery. “Freak too skinny. Skin and bones… oh, no… doggies like bones!” He near wailed.

The wolf gave one more savage pull, tearing the sweater, but tossing the boy down to a bare patch of earth, shielded from winter by weight of the plant above. There, under the cover of quality shrubbery, the wolf curled up into a protective ball around the boy, and tucked it’s cold nose under the boy’s shirt and got a big whiff of (too thin) belly. Freak supposed it was that really skinny belly that was the reason he wasn’t being eaten. The big bad wolf would want a fat little pig, after all.

In short order, his toes started to thaw out, covered by the living coat of the wolf. And then his hands. And then his nose. And soon enough, Freak fell asleep.

And thus is how Harry James Potter (“Freak”) survived that cold night in 1984 when his Uncle and Aunt locked him out. It was also the ignominious beginning of how Lord Voldemort was defeated before the second rise could even begin.

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Jasper Lockwood was Bannon Lockwood’s second son, and took strongly after Bannon Lockwood’s mistress. As such, that Jasper was his son was a fact Bannon tried not to recall, at least not most of the time. Oh, Bannon was happy to present his eldest son, Frederick. Delighted to show off his baby girl, Victoria, but he was inclined to forget the middle bastard child, especially after he had been bitten by a werewolf at the tender age of eight.
It meant, despite the glad-handing Albus Dumbledore was wont to do to those of Gryffindor tendencies, that in the long established Slytherin-based household of Lockwood which Jasper had been born into, Jasper wouldn’t be receiving concessions or placement for him at Hogwarts. It also meant, that Jasper would never own a home, or hold a good job. Or at least, not a home or job in the wizarding world, and Bannon Lockwood honestly did believe the world began and ended with the wizarding world.

The thing was, unlike his elder half-brother and younger half-sister, Jasper had to get his education through a hedge wizarding day-school. He wrote his exams at the Ministry at sixteen and eight months, and on the moment that the big hand struck to the hour when he turned seventeen, Jasper left the Lockwood home and never looked back. It was just as well, seeing as Bannon also forgot to give his middle child an allowance on a regular basis. Jasper was never quite sure if his father forgot him because he was the ‘bastard’ son or forgot him because he was a werewolf. Jasper often prayed it was that his father was ashamed by the events that happened to his child, and so horrified by the outcome, that he repressed all memory of the horror, which meant forgetting the child, which in turn meant repressing one’s duty to the child. Because otherwise, it was an ugly case of cruel neglect.

Either way, he was 17 when he escaped the magical world and made his way in the muggle.

By the tender age of 21, Jasper found and married an imminently beautiful and sweet girl, of squib descent, by the name of Allison Black. Allison was the granddaughter of Marius Black, and therefore, estranged kin to the old Black family. He and his wife found work in the muggle world. Fact was, he was a part-time construction worker by day, while attending college by afternoon and nights when he met Ally. And with his wiry physical strength that served him well, Jasper had been able to hold the same job with the same construction firm while attending school. It took 5 years, but he was now a construction manager for a well established firm, and Ally, bless her giving heart, was a full-on nurse at the local hospital.

The graduation gift that Ally had received from her family, in particular the gift from her very awesome grandfather, Marius, had been enough for a downpayment on their first house.

So, the first thing he and Ally had done with their more stable income was buy a home in a quiet little neighborhood that had an easy commute for them both.

Privet Drive looked like a bunch of clones, but that was perfect for a couple trying to avoid the magical world. There was nothing about Privet Drive that truly stood out, and as clone-like and repetitious as the outsides of their homes were, inside, with Allie’s vision of a home, and Jasper’s construction skills, there would be a wealth of differences from their neighbors. And, so, Ally and Jasper chose to make #6 Privet Drive their home.

It wasn’t all sunshine and buttercups. After all, Jasper was a werewolf. They had fortified a portion of the basement to serve as his “full moon den.”, Jasper applying everything he had to make it very tight, sound-proof, and yet comfortable for both he and the wolf. He’d also built a secondary exit so that after the moon, he left the basement den by a door and iron-gate into the backyard. This way, he wouldn’t break into the house proper and attack Ally, Merlin forbid.

In retrospect, a retrospect only taken the night after the full-moon when he had apparently escaped his den, putting in that exterior exit from this one room was clearly a huge mistake. Sure, the wolf didn’t have an opposable thumb, but it had still managed to take out the iron gates that was supposed to keep it securely contained. Jasper was pretty sure it was his magic that did that. Dammit.

“I don’t know I can live with myself.” Jasper found himself moaning into coffee, his body shaking
and tired from the strain of transformation. “Oh, Merlin… I’m a ruddy child-killing monster.”

Ally scoffed, returning to the small kitchen with a small vial of potion in her hand. “Well. Seeing there has been no emergency vehicles at their house, you are not, Jasper. Now stop with that nonsense.” She lay the potion in front of his empty breakfast plate.

“I am.” He swore, “You don’t understand, I probably bit that puir wee lad. And, what if there’s no call out because they can’t find the lad’s wee body.” His throat tightened awfully, and his stomach flipped. “Oh Merlin, what if I ATE him? I think I’ll be sick.”

She huffed, eyes rolling at his Scottish accent’s dustup. “Not on my kitchen floor. You didn’t eat him, Jasper.”

“Ach, I might have done, Ally! Or bit him, and turned him which is the damn same thing. God above, y’know that the Muggles da’nae take the curse well. Most die from it. And wee bairns? They die from it all the time.” He moaned, rolling the potion vial apathetically with his thumb from side to side.

“That potion works far better if you actually drink it.” His wife asserted, somewhat snarky in tone. Her eyes spoke differently, gentle empathy to his overwhelming dismay shining through. “Look, drink your potion, get some rest. I’ll go over and check on the boy.”

Miserably sad puppy-dog brown eyes looked at her. She smiled tolerantly, almost seeing an imaginary tail swishing back and forth in hope. “But, mind you, you’ll owe me flowers for this. For love of Merlin, if you MUST escape the house when gone ‘were’, could you kindly avoid the Dursley’s yard? She’s a ruddy nightmare of a muggle! And that’s saying something, given I’m just a squib!”

“You nae anything else but perfect in every way.” He assured her. “I’ll take my potion. I’ll even shower and clean up, tuck myself for in bed for a kip; I’ll be a good abiding little werewolf - just, please Ally-love, check on the boy. The skinny one, not the orca.”

And thus it was that Allison Lockwood nee Black, of THOSE Blacks, found herself primly knocking on the door of Privet Drive at eleven in the morning. Her pea coat was neat and tidy, buttons all in good repair. Her smart flannel cap kept the snow off and her ears warm, while stylishly complementing the coat -- something she was inordinately proud of. Her very shiny boots were both stylish and sensible, polished to utter smart perfection. It was, as she often described it to her very indulgent and loving mother, her Sunday best look fit for the Bishop, not that she and Jasper were terribly church abiding. Being raised from magical stock, Merlin was far more revered than Christ. Either way, her Sunday best was something Petunia Dursley scarcely deserved.

The orca opened the door a moment after she’d rung the bell. His rotund reddened face smeared with chocolate (and honestly, who gave a child sweets at this time in the morning?)

“Who’re you?” He asked, belligerent as only a four year old could.

“I’m your neighbor, Mrs. Lockwood.” Ally found herself pasting a sweet smile insincerely on her face. “Is your Mummy home?”

The orca blinked at her. ‘Fancy that,’ Ally marveled. ‘Orca’s can blink!’ She gave herself a mental shake, ‘Oh honestly, he’s the size of, not an actual Orca. Get your brain in the game, Allison Dorea Lockwood!’

“MUMMY!” The Orca bellowed.
His mother, in complete contrast to the monstrous size of child, was as thin as a rake, long-necked like a giraffe, but cursed with horridly sour expression. “Duddikins! What has Mummy told you. You don’t open the door, dearheart. You don’t ever open the door unless Mummy tells you that you may.” She hustled down and pulled her child back into the bowels of the house. “Go on with you, back to the kitchen. If you can wait quietly, Mummy will cut you another slice of cake.”

“Oh dear Circe and Morrigan, feeding the great big beast another slice of cake? Was the woman insane?” Ally watched all this with morbid fascination. Finally, when Mrs. Dursley had ushered her not-so-little sea-creature into the kitchen, she returned to the door, very cooly addressing her visitor. “May I help you?”

“I’m Mrs. Lockwood, from two houses down. Do you have a moment, Mrs. Dursley?” Ally asked politely. She had learned at her Nana’s feet how to be an imperious snotty pureblood, should need arise. Point was, need should never arise, her Nana had assured her. Seeing as Grandpapa Marius eschewed the ‘backstabbing morons of the magical inbred world,’ with the sole exception being his sweet baby sister Dorea, and her own Mum had been a muggle, Ally honestly never believed she’d set foot in magical London at any point in her life.

But Petunia? Well. She’d bring out the snot in any kind soul.

“I really haven’t the time for any door-to-door nonsense.” Mrs. Dursely bit out. “And a young childless woman like you likely has nothing else to bring to my doorstep.”

Right. Well then, pureblood sophisticate it was. “Indeed.” Ally let her smile go very cold. “Then allow me to be brief. I question why you are allowed to care for one child, much less two, seeing as you left a young four year old locked out of the house last night. My Jasper found the boy, we kept him warm and safe, before returning him in the morning. Jasper noted you unlatched the door at 6 am. Most reprehensible, Mrs. Dursley, for it tells me you KNEW the child was outside.”

Petunia Dursley sucked a breath in, her face going stark white. “How dare…”

“The lad has a touch of frost-bite.” Ally continued. “I note you’ve not left the house at all this morning, and wanted to confirm YOU gave him appropriate treatment, and didn’t just shove him into a cupboard somewhere.”

Petunia clutched at her chest, swaying.

“Madam?” Oh, honestly, the woman was too young to have a heart-attack. She couldn’t be thirty years as yet.

Yet, much to Ally Lockwood’s surprise, Mrs. Petunia Dursley did indeed have a minor heart-attack. Which was how Mrs. Lockwood found herself inside the Dursley house calling for an ambulance. The ambulance came, and went, and while Ally fended off the wailing whale (and she did not think that at all funny at the time), she could not find hide or hair of the other lad.

“Where is your brother?” She demanded of the whale.

“I don’t have one.” The boy said mulishly. “I want my cake!”

“There is another boy living here.” She snarled back, not caring that she was fair near yelling at a four-year old (orca). “Where is he?”

“If I tell you, will you give me cake?” The whale bargained.

Honestly, a four year old bargaining for cake? What was the world coming to? This was grounds
enough to swear off having children. She only hoped Jasper wouldn’t be too disappointed. “You may have a reward, yes, if you tell me truthfully.”

He pointed a pudgy finger at the cupboard under the stairs. “Freak is kept there when Mummsy doesn’t need him.”

Ally’s breath caught. Oh dear Merlin -- she had been completely facetious in her cupboard comment. Dear Lord and Lady, they hadn’t… trembling fingers lifted the lock on the door, and she opened it to find dozing on thin pile of blankets, threadbare, dirty and frayed, was the tiny boy who had been cuddled by her werewolf husband all through the cold winter night. His color was a bit flushed, but Ally strongly suspected that if the boy had a good bath, fresh meal, and some proper care, he’d be fine.

It was of course, at this moment, that Mr. Dursley, and the local constabulary arrived. And from there, it snowballed into one fine mess of catastrophic events.

Jasper woke from his potion induced nap an hour past lunch. Sleepy eyed, and sloppily dressed, but very grateful to have the day off, he shambled down into his kitchen, one hand reaching under his t-shirt to scratch at his belly as he plopped down into his usual chair, and reached with the free hand into the fruit bowl for a banana.

Then he heard a giggle.

Peeling his sleepy eyes to the fullest open, and firing up dazed mental neurons, he found the same little lad as the night before sitting plum on his Ally’s lap, eating scrambled eggs and apple slices.

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He rubbed his eyes. Looked again, and rubbed a third time.

“Oh, for heaven’s sake, Jasper. Stop that.” Ally growled.

There were times he honestly wondered who was the werewolf in this relationship. This was apparently going to be one of those times.

“Harry, this brute of a man is my husband, Jasper.”

Harry, with big green eyes, stared solemnly from under a shaggy mop of dark hair at his face, committing it to memory. He nodded after a long moment of pursed lips and deep consideration. “Doggy!” He declared. “You were the doggy last night!”

Jasper’s jaw fell somewhere to the floor. Ally stiffened too. “What doggy, sweetie?” She asked shakily.

“The big grey and brown doggy.” Harry twisted to look up at her, his hair shifting as he did to showcase a spectacular scar on the boy’s forehead. “I thought it was gonna eat me.” He told her confidentially. “But it sniffed me, and then pulled me to hide under the big green bush, and then kept me warm.” The child explained, looking at Ally gravely. “He was very nice doggy.” This he twisted his wee body to gift a sweet smile to Jasper.

“He can be.” Ally agreed faintly. She didn’t add how Jasper was sweet 99% of the time, just not the 1% that was the full moon. Oh dear.

“Did I… did… were there…” Jasper choked out a jumbled question.

“Well, Harry had a bad spot of a day.” Ally demurred. “This dear lad’s Auntie and Uncle had no appreciation for the wonders of a wee man like him. I found him buried in the cupboard under the stairs, Jasper. Apparently, that’s where, and I quote this not to be repeated ever, ‘freaks’ are kept. I
had to carefully explain to Mr. Dursley and his son that little boys are not ever freaks, and whether or not they like cupboards, they are to have a proper room and a well-constructed bed.”

Jasper’s eyes darkened, and Ally gave her husband a stern glare. He was not, under any circumstances, to let his inner wolf out for a snarl. She had a lovely oak rolling pin, and she had a deft hand in using it.

“So, while Mrs. Dursley recovers from her misfortunate coronary, and Mr. Dursley gets things sorted out that include a proper room and properly fitted clothes for all seasons for Harry, I offered to let this young man be our guest.” Ally blithely continued. “We’ve already had a bath, and gotten some warmer clothes on, and now finished a bite of lunch.”

“Bubble bath, I suppose?” Jasper sighed. His wife favored this wretched fruity smelling bubble bath. It made his nose itch fiercely when she indulged.

“It smelled like strawberries!” Harry cheered. “I like the smell of strawberries!”

Oh, the ruddy joy. She had an accomplice now.

“Strawberries are very nice.” Ally sanguinely agreed. “We had a bit of strawberry jam on toast, and Harry quite liked that, too.”

The lad nodded, and again the hair moved. Jasper squinted. It looked almost like a lightening bolt - - how odd was that. Why, he’d only heard of one lad… Jasper froze. “Ally, love, let me see Harry’s forehead?” He requested quietly, dread pooling in his gut.

Her hand brushed the wee boy’s head, and there in all it’s glory was the scar. “Oh, ruddy hell.” Jasper sighed.

“Jasper! Language! That happened when his parents died in a car accident -- he doesn’t have ought else but a few bruises on him.” Ally told him.

“Does Harry have any toys to play with?” Jasper gave his wife a most pleading look. They didn’t have kids. Hadn’t talked about having kids, really, so had never developed the covert code system of speaking glances that held entire and terribly involved conversations. Her parents were amazing at the system of silent conversation, and her grandparents had it made to artform..

“Harry is about to venture forth and watch his first ever cartoon.” His wife assured him. “But not until he’s finished his eggs.”

Jasper pouted. “Which cartoon… that’s not fair, love, you know I love the cartoons.”

“You’ve watched the Jungle Book a million times, Jasper” His wife told him in exasperation, “You can let Harry watch while we have a chat, and then you can join him.”

The pout was worthy a toddler, but so it went just as it usually did with toddlers -- ignored utterly. All in all, in scarcely a half hour, Ally had Harry curled up on a very nice sofa (to the wee lad’s dismay -- freaks weren’t supposed to get up on the furniture. Ally assured him that if Jasper was allowed on the furniture, then Harry was allowed too. And that Harry was not, nor was he ever, a freak, thank you very much, Mrs. Dursley.), bundled up in a soft wool blanket, Ally’s old ratty stuffed rabbit in the crook of his arm, and gazing rapturously at Baloo as he danced across the large screen tv.

Jasper was less entranced, seeing as he was now upstairs in the bedroom he shared with his lovely wife, pacing back and forth liked a caged wolf. “That’s Harry Potter.” He muttered. “That lad, the
one I nearly ate, is Harry ruddy Potter.”

Ally serenely sat on the bed and paired socks from the laundry. “I fail to see the cause for drama. It took me an hour to get the lad’s first name out of Dursley. Indeed, had not Constable Parker been there, I doubt I’d have had much success. Even that small orca that lives there calls Harry ‘freak’. And let me tell you, that boy will be dead of heart disease long before he’s twenty-five if they don’t stop spoiling him. He’s seriously in danger of losing the definition ‘small’ to his orca’ness!”

“But -- Harry freaking Potter!” Jasper ranted again.

“I’ll not hear that word, Jasper Lockwood. You mind me! There will be no more use of the word freak around that boy, or my rolling pin and I will be having a serious conversation with you.” His wife glared.

“He’s the Boy-Who-Lived!” Her husband prattled on.

“‘Well, obviously, he lived. I’m tell you, whatever may have happened last night, you did not bite him, or try to bite him.’ She eyed a dress sock heel rather critically. The heel was completely out of the poor sock. “Honestly, what do you do to your socks, Jasper? Gnaw on them?” She tossed the pair into a bin beside the bed.

Jasper closed his eyes and pinched his nose. “Luv, I know that your Da and Grand-Da did not speak much of the magical world, or your illustrious extended family, and well other than ensuring you learned potions and herbology… you’ve not got a clue on current events, but, you do know about the Dark Lord, right?”


“That lad downstairs is the very same lad who defeated Lord Thingamabob at fifteen months old, mere minutes after the Lord Thingamabob killed his parents. As Dark Lords went, this one was a bit overly fond of the killing curse.”

Ally blinked. She put down the socks she was examining, and stared at her husband. They’d been married five years now, and normally, while they acknowledged they did have magical relatives, they were pretty removed (with the exception of one night per month) from magic. Jasper was a wizard, yes, but he eschewed that life given the prejudice the wizarding world held against werewolves. “A baby killed the Dark Lord? What? Were his nappies radioactive or something?” She blinked. “Honestly? A baby?” She shook her head in complete askance, her mouth twisted in disgust. “Well, he wasn’t much of a Dark Lord then, was he?”

“Oh, he was.” Jasper rolled his eyes. “That’s why that lad is so celebrated in the magical world as the Boy Who Lived. And now, you’re telling me, he lived only to be placed with the worst sort of non magicals alive and has been treated far worse that a Black could treat a house-elf.”

Ally pursed her lips. “I don’t like the aspersions on my family, Jasper. They are your in-laws, not your outlaws. But, yes.”

“ Fucking fantastic.” Her husband threw up his hands. “If anyone finds out I got out and nearly attacked the Boy-Who-Lived, I’ll be kissed for certain.”

“I’ve never threatened to withhold sexual favors just because you escaped.” His wife said with exasperation. “You’ll definitely be kissed, because you didn’t eat the lad.”

He threw himself on the bed, making the laundry basket bounce, and buried his face in a pillow, shoulders heaving with laughter.
“This is a magical thing, this kiss, you’re talking about, isn’t it?” She guessed.

He nodded into the pillow.

“A bad magical thing?”

He nodded again, the head bobbing in the pillow.

“You could stop laughing at me at any time, now.” She poked at his backside. He still kept snickering into the pillow.

“Right. Well then. I’m going to abandon you in favor of Mr. Boy-Who-Obviously-Lived. He and I are watching Robin Hood next. Then we’re going to the park. We are ordering in for dinner.” She informed him haughtily. “Tonight, I’ll contact Grand-dad. And I’ll find out what he has to say about your attitude towards my magical naivety.”

If anything, the ridiculous man started laughing harder. Honestly. It was hard being the wife of a werewolf.

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It was the third full moon since the first encounter with wee Harry Potter, and Jasper was at his wits end. Firstly, his wife was beside herself when she had to return Harry to his ruddy relatives. How the constabulary could have forgotten the cupboard under the stairs, or the condition of the boy, she had no idea. Jasper reckoned magic was involved.

Suffice it to say, while his wife hadn’t been a big fan of witches and wizards prior, she definitely wasn’t now. He thanked Merlin daily she hadn’t been born a witch. Fate must have been looking out for England, for certain, because Ally had the Black mindset for vengeance that would have made Dark Lords everywhere quake.

As it was, since the boy had been returned, Allison had channeled her inner dark lady, and used every trick genetically ingrained into the Black family for pretentious snobbery to ensure the now recovering Mrs. Dursley knew someone was watching her. Wee Harry was a regular lunch visitor on the weekends, seeing as Allison had blackmailed and goaded Mrs. Dursley into registering the wee tot into primary for week days. He often accompanied the Lockwood family to the movies. Actually, Harry was a bit of a blessing, Jasper found. People always looked at them oddly going to films for children -- but the movies for children indulged the child in Jasper muchly, and he liked them far more than the ones that blew things up left right and centre. Muggles were scary with guns. When Harry accompanied them, usually skipping happily while holding Ally’s hand, most parents indulged the ‘family’ with a soft smile as they went to the cinema.

Sadly, it wasn’t all sunshine and roses from there on out. Once again, after the passing of a mere twelve weeks, it all went to pot.

He was utterly confounded by those bloody Dursleys and their less than rational thinking process. Once again, wee Harry Potter had been locked outside, after dark. On the full moon. AGAIN. And this time, the overly trusting wee lad hadn’t stayed in his own yard, no, of course not. He’d come over to the Lockwood House to find his favorite doggy, opened the bloody gates, and crept down to cuddle with a man-eating, drooling werewolf. It had never occurred to the lad to go knock on the front door and be safely ensconced in the house-proper with Ally.

What was really utterly insane was that his wolf had been delighted -- and Jasper the man could vividly remember it. The bloody wolf was prancing from foot to foot when the boy had crept
down. It had been beyond ecstatic to snuffle, cuddle and play with the boy. So protective, and... he distinctly recalled hearing the child’s stomach rumble -- which had sent the wolf out on the cold spring night to track down a rabbit, and bring the dead rabbit back to the boy as an offering.

And bless the boy’s little dark head, the child had scratched behind his ears, told him thank you, very much, Mr. Wolf, but that he preferred his food cooked, if that was okay. Mr. Wolf should eat the bunny, then that would be quite fine, and prevent fact it was dead now from being wasteful.

Lord help him. The boy didn’t have an ounce of common sense. One did not cuddle up to a werewolf. Or say ‘no’ to a werewolf. There was no negotiation with a bloody werewolf! And, honestly, his damn werewolf really needed to make up its mind. Either it was an angry insane ravenous beast bent on destruction and chaos, or it was a placid golden retriever rolling over for a belly scratch. This fluttering between the two was ridiculous. He was developing a complex!

“I gather we had an unexpected visitor?” His wife said, leaning on the gate and peering down into his little den. Her naked husband was pressed against the back wall of the den, a wall that bordered onto the house, and was likely the warmest. In his arms, quietly sleeping, lay Harry Potter. Her lips were quirked in that way that told him she was very near laughing.

“I could have hurt him.” He whispered, the thought scared him so badly. “This has to stop.”

“I don’t see it can, short of us moving. Your wolf likes him. Not a howl all night long, Jasper.” She said, opening the gate wider and tossing him a pair of trackpants. Soft gray eyes swept around the room, looking for damage. “Is that... fur?” She asked with a frown.

“I tried to feed him a rabbit.” He sighed.

Ally blinked, looked at the crumbled bloody mess of fur, and winced. “Oh, Jasper!” She shook her head, lower lip trembling with instantly suppressed tears. “A poor little bunny?”

He rolled his eyes. Of course she’d get all upset over a bloody rabbit. The boy hadn’t been, but his wife? “Focus, Ally.”

She sniffed back tears. “Give him here. I’ll get him a bath and a meal, then we can see about terrorizing his relatives again. You... clean up those remains -- I want them buried properly. And with respect, Jasper, do you hear me?” She gave him a glare for good measure, before it faded away suddenly. “Oh, and don’t forget, we have dinner tonight with Anton and Mariella.”

Jasper sighed. What really sucked the most was since meeting wee Harry that first cold night, his transformations had changed. The pain was easing, more and more with each moon. Oh, it was still uncomfortable, but not the sheer agony it had been pre-Harry. Almost, if he had to liken it to something, his shifts were become more like the animagus transformation. As if the wolf was giving his body some concessions provided that he got to sniff and cuddle up with wee Harry.

But the cost of such ease of shifting was that he couldn't even weasel out of socializing around the full-moon.

Anton, however, could still cancel. He and his wife were both werewolves, and the change was still a struggle for them.

Jasper had met Anton during primary. They’d suffered together, once they had realized each other was a were. And while his father had been more inclined to pretend his son didn’t exist, Anton’s parents re-shaped their world to support their son.

“They’ve not called to cancel?” He asked, as the sleepy boy was transferred easily into his wife’s
arm, and she gave a cursory exam of arms and legs. No bite marks or bloody wounds visible.

“No. But, they’ve likely just crawled out of their den, too. Give it an hour or so.” His wife minded him. She cuddled the little boy close, dropping a soft kiss on his dark head, as she carried him out of the den and into the house.

Jasper followed along after shovelling up the remains of rabbit, burying it in the garden, he could feel Ally’s eyes on him from the kitchen, so dutifully paused a minute over the fresh grave, and contemplated his options for breakfast. If she saw it as prayer, more the better. Finished with that chore, he hosed down the bloody mess he’d left behind in his den, and locked the gates closed.

By the time he’d gotten in the house, he was quite ready for his tea, a bite of food and a long shower. Harry was curled up on the sofa in the corner that he favored, watching some educational children’s video that Ally had purchased. He was rosy cheeked, sleepy-eyed, and smiling sweetly as he glanced over at Jasper, waving his little hand.

“I don’t get it.” Jasper muttered. “The wolf adores him.”

“So do you.” His wife told him. “Even if you want to say you don’t, you do. And don’t think you can fool me, Jasper Lockwood -- I know full well you’ve been meeting Harry at the fence of his primary and walking him home each day.” Her glare spoke volumes.

“Yes, dear.” He slumped, busted.

“Drink you tea.” His fierce spouse ordered. She was digging through the massive pile of coats hung by the door to the backyard. The facial expressions she made as she critically evaluated each were killing him slowly.

She hefted a dark black mid-length trench, and gave a huff, tossing the apparently offending garment aside. Finally, tea finished, a plate of steak and eggs consumed, and too ruddy tired to mentally leap hurdles, Jasper found himself unable to resist asking. “What on Earth are you doing?”

“I need the perfect coat. Not too heavy, not too light, but distinctly sophisticated.” She told him.

He blinked. “Are we going out somewhere today? Luv, I’m really not up to it. I need to get some work done here, and squeeze in a nap, before Anton arrives.”

The sour frown she levelled was almost enough to make him take a step backwards. Sitting made that difficult, so he manned up and stayed where he was.

“We,” the love of his life stressed, “Are not going anywhere. Rather, I am marching myself over to the Dursleys to give Petunia another heart-attack. Maybe this one will be fatal.”

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Anton Spekotor was a man very in touch with his inner wolf. It helped that he had grown up a member of a large German pack of werewolves. His parents had regarded his bite as a mere application to a unique club, and rather than ostracize the boy, they had dropped him on the local alpha, and told him they wanted him to spend time with the pack -- especially around the full moon. It had worked beautifully to control the wolf pup, and Anton had grown up well-adjusted as a result.

Gregor Spektor, Anton’s father, had written a series of books on the process of rearing a werewolf child in the home, and with the assistance of a local pack, and the dramatic effect ‘pack’ had on a
werewolf’s overall behavior. He’d theorized that lycanthropy was a social disease. Isolating the werewolf made it aggressive, hostile and more likely to attack with the goal of creating a pack. They were, after all, creatures of dark magic. Giving a werewolf a pack of werewolves had so many benefits. It made the change easier, since there were others around to give comfort, and a hierarchy all wolves fell into.

In the course of Anton’s life, his father’s research had become German Policy. In Germany, and Romania there were reserves where the afflicted went for the change, or to live if their family’s couldn’t accept them, there were programs for children that were afflicted to be fostered if their parents could not accept them, and as such the spread of the disease had dropped within German borders by 78%. In fact, the last identified werewolf child had been found twelve years ago.

That heightened and progressive attitude towards werewolves was one of the many reasons that Anton felt so badly for his brother-at-heart, Jasper. First, for his family’s lack of support -- something Anton never had experienced even once, and second, for the way Britain treated victims of other werewolves. The pain of transformation was shared when in a pack, and somehow was therefore diminished. The agony of the wolf was lost when they had a pack to run with, and the damage to the body lessened when man and wolf could commune and find common ground.

That wasn’t to say his wolf was safe to be around. Oh no. He respected that aspect of his wolf, but recognizing it, meant living in a pack, hunting for rabbits or deer on the full moon gave allowance for the predator living under his skin. And in return, the predator co-existed in complete peace with him.

So, as a man very in touch with his inner beast, taking a tour of the den Jasper had built for his wolf was interesting. Very interesting. Because, the clever nose of the wolf was telling the man a great deal. “What or who on earth is providing that delectable smell, Jasper?” He found himself asking, head tilting back as he took a deep breath.

The smack at the back of his head took him by surprise. “What?”

“Don’t.” Jasper warned him lowly. “Look, we… Well. There’s this kid.”

“Someone bit a child in your neighborhood? I hope you ripped the asshole to shreds!” Anton growled.

“The kid’s not a wolf.” Jasper sighed in exasperation. “He’s.. oh hell. You can’t tell anyone this, but Harry Potter lives a few houses down.”

Anton blinked. His jaw opened. It closed. He blinked again. “Potter?” He asked. “I’m scenting Potter in this room with your wolf?”

“We, uh, we like him.” Jasper rubbed the back of his neck. “He was here last night. Well, this morning. His relatives keep locking him outside at night. If it weren’t for the fact the kid keeps wandering into play with my wolf, and it’s downright abusive to lock a small child out at night, it’d be amusing. Because it’s letting Ally really channel her inner Dark Lady. She’s terrorized Harry’s aunt into two heart-attacks already.”

Anton snorted. Allison was the sweetest, most gentle soul that he’d ever met. The complete antithesis to everything the legendary Ancient and Noble House of Black had ever produced. The mere idea she had terrorized anyone into near death was amusing to the extreme. She cried when animal rescues put out their charitable drives, for Merlin’s sake. But, moving past Ally’s affection for muggle-baiting these specific people-- “And your wolf has not mauled the boy?”
“He REALLY likes the kid.”

Anton breathed again. “Me too. You do realize why, though? There’s a delicious darkness around the boy, it’s warm, inviting, comforting. It feels like pack.”

Jasper stilled. He thought about it, and then immediately banished the thought. Harry was a surprisingly cheerful wee lad, sweet as could be. He was sincerely thankful for everything Ally or Jasper did for him, and was remarkably quiet and cooperative. He wasn’t annoying, or pestersome. The boy was fair near an angel. And, if one subscribed to the British Ministry of Magic, he was the Light bearer of House Potter.

But, the truth was, his wolf was more settled in and around the full moon since meeting Harry. And, as the curse was a dark curse, since it transformed even the lightest wizard into a dark creature, it reshaped the wizard’s magic as dark, too. No matter what he wanted or tried to avoid, he had to admit he was part of the darker side of magic. But, just as he was, so too were many other creatures and aspects of magic that were not evil, just dark.

Was a Potter, one of the most preeminent houses of Light, actually a dark wizard?

Anton prowled more. “I would really like to meet this boy.”

“You’re not biting him.” His brother-in-heart said baldly.

The startled look in Anton’s eyes spoke volumes, and Jasper relaxed. “Of course not! But… Mariella wants to move. She’s got a job offer here in England with a PR firm. Leaving the pack would be dreadful, but this is a good opportunity with flexible hours, so…” He shrugged, “But perhaps… perhaps we could move here. She could hop the train into London.”

Jasper frowned. “But the laws of the Ministry prohibit you from working here.”

“In the magical world. You do not work in the magical world, but you work.” Anton waved a hand. “I don’t need a fixed address for what I do. I just need a phone line and a computer. Honestly, Jasper, let me meet the boy. Perhaps he is enough to fulfill the need for pack.”

Jasper reluctantly agreed, reluctant not that he did not trust his best friend, but reluctant because his inner wolf was convinced Harry was his. HIS. Well, his and Ally’s, because even the wolf knew not to get between a bitch and her pup. He sighed, wanting nothing more than to keep Harry safe, after all, the little boy already had a challenging life.
The Further Commercialization of Knocktern II

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Prudence Charnel, the Hag, was a sad disappointment to her father, well, in the sense her birth had been an unexpected, and unwanted consequence of youthful foolishness. In all truth, her mother had been the most incredible traumatic disappointment to her father’s life, too. He probably lost a good twenty years of his life when he realized exactly who and what he had slept with.

It was well known that sex between a wizard and a hag only happened only when a hag decided she wanted a child of her own to raise. A bit unusual, in many respects, since hags atypically preferred dining on children -- roast leg tasted a lot like veal -- and thought wizards in general were only good for hexing.

Suffice it to say, Grizella Charnel, Prudence’s hag-mother, at age eight-seven had for one reason or another decided to start a family. She’d used potions and magical illusions to seduce a young wizard for stud service, and then let the wizard see exactly where his wild seed had been sown. Why her dame, Grizella, thought telling Haron Potter that she was a hag, after conception had been achieved, was beyond Prudence’s understanding. Why even admitting to her conception was a bit of a puzzle altogether. Even so, Grizella had outed herself (and Prudence), and her father, being a good wizard he had stayed very involved and supportive in Prudence’s life. He hadn’t stood by Grizella. In his defence, though, what sane man would wed a hag?

Tragically, Papa had only lived to sixty-two. And, as much as Pru would have liked to blame Papa’s untimely death on the fright her mother had given him as a young man, the truth was, he went out and dueled a Dark Lord. He’d won the duel, but died from his wounds. Very sad. (Honestly, it was a mystery why Potter men kept taking on Dark Lords, since most times they ended up dead. The Potter men, that was. As a family, it seemed they couldn’t learn from past mistakes. Generation after generation, the Potter males always stepped up and took on some of the most malevolent wizards in their history.)

At any road, Pru had been born in the early eighteen hundreds. She sadly, took physically after her mother, but in one way she took after her Papa. Magically, she was more witch than hag. As such, Papa had paid for her to go to a Hogwarts for her first year. Pru hadn’t liked it. She hadn’t liked all the perfect little witches and wizards with straight backs, and perfect teeth. She hadn’t liked their snide comments, and cruel taunts. Nor had she been particularly thrilled when some seventh year students tossed her over a railing. She would have died had Hogwarts not moved the staircase, as it was, she’d broken her tailbone, her right arm, and her collarbone. Papa had been incensed. And, Papa, thinking more of Pru’s needs rather than his reputation (which frankly, having a hag-born child had put it in tatters), pulled her out of Hogwarts after the Christmas hols when his little girl wept, and sent her off to a very good hedge-school in Ireland.

Papa was the reason she had bought the Shoddy Inn when old Hepezah Frump had put it up for sale. It had been a nortious place of ill repute -- and not for the whores, but for the bar fights, demonic deals, vampires, werewolves, ghouls, and a few zombies. All in all, you had to be of dark bloodlines to want to step cross the threshold.

Still, when Hep had put it up for sale, Prudence had wanted the Inn. And since Papa had wanted his little hag-girl to be financially independent and never lacking coin for the things she wanted, though he had also provided the traditional Potter-trust, and had her half-siblings swear wizarding oaths to never cut it off, he had agreed to finance the buy.
Papa had looked over the financials of the old disreputable inn, he’d stood out like a sore thumb (pureblood wizard amongst the dregs of Knockturn) as he had meticulously examined the property, spent months there teaching his little Pru how to run and business, and a few werewolves how to keep their paws of his baby girl (who frankly at eighteen had been enough of a hag to scare a werewolf off on her own, but Papa was a gentleman like that.) And, when he left her to manage her own business affairs, Papa had gifted the business to her, then told her that he didn’t care how full the inn was, or how busy the bar was, she was to be at his table on each New Year Day!

Thus, for one hundred and sixty-four years, Prudence had been the proud proprietor of the Shoddy Inn, and by using Papa’s lessons had kept the Inn in the black. Sure, it was dive. Sure, the Shoddy Inn lived up to it’s name -- it was where the uncouth of society went to hang out (at the bar), where prostitutes brought their clients, and vampires met with goblins to do business. It hadn’t mattered to Pru, and it hadn’t mattered to Papa -- the Inn had been profitable!

Until… now. Oh, it hadn’t happened overnight. No, it had happened gradually, she supposed, over the course of a year, but regardless, the change in her customer traffic manifested in ink come the end of the first quarter, when her revenues dropped twenty percent. That had brought her out of her office, ready to rip a shiny new asshole in her zombie bartender. (A pointless endeavor. Grog would never realize he had a shiny new asshole, because he didn’t use the one he already had.) Walking through her own property, on a night not illuminated by the full moon, it had been quite obvious what was wrong -- vampires, hags, ghouls, a few dark wizards -- but not a single werewolf was to be seen. What. The. Hell? Like they had anywhere else better to go for a bite and brew? It wasn’t like the vampires drank her ale -- her clients yes, her ale, not so much. And ghouls didn’t carry much in the form of currency…. She needed those damn wolves and the beer money!

Problem identified, it then took her three damn weeks to track down one single werewolf, one in particular, actually, one Louis Halffang who had yet to clear his six month old tab.

And after three miserable weeks of trawling Diagon Alley and haunting Gringotts she was irritated – and if she had to hear another mother hush her child and whisper “that’s a hag, dear”, well. Dark Lady Prudence didn’t have a nice ring, but it would go down in history when she burned Diagon Alley to ash, people, buildings and all. Auntie Yaga would be terribly impressed if she went that route. At any road, she finally stalked the wolf down, and in her usual way of collecting debts, strung him up by his feet until he paid up – this time with info.

“You’ve been avoiding me, little fang.” She cackled to her prey.

Blue eyes were wide with terror. “No, no, I swear Ms. Charnel, I’ve not… been working, you see. Busy. Very busy.” Louis had babbled. He looked rather more like a baboon than a wizard, hang upside down from the ceiling fan in the centre of the bar. “Honestly, I swear -- I thought I’d paid my last bar bill clear, your Hagginess”

She let her wand whip at him – she one of the few hags capable of using witch magic – and hit his nuts with a minor hex. He yelped like a pup.

“Where are all the wolves? Why have my revenues dropped?” She growled.

Louis jaw fell open in a silent ‘O’. “Well… that’s really unfortunate, Ma’am. But, you see… we’ve had a turn of luck, it seems. You see, one of us, Jasper Lockwood, found work in the muggle world, and well, you know how it happens -- he told a friend, Anton, who told a friend Caspian -- and so on, so you see -- we all saw opportunity here -- and now we’ve all gotten jobs in the muggle world. Construction. Have to be on the job at half past four in the morning… means we’re all getting to bed real early.” He told her. “It’s not a reflection on your business, Ma’am. No. Nope. Not at all. It’s real sad, truthfully --we’ve been going dry. But, I can pass word that… some of us
could come around after work on Friday..."

Prudence frowned, while the wolf babbled. Construction? What the…. “Construction?” She growled. “Explain.”

“It’s a muggle company -- they build large buildings, or many houses in communities. Or roads.” The back of Louis’ head answered her, seeing as the front of his head was going the other way as he spun around, upside down, in tune with the fan he was tied to.

Prudence blinked. So, it wasn’t her beer that was the problem, or her firewhiskey. Nor was it the zombie dropping off bits of flesh into the stew. It was about jobs. Huh. It only went to show, the impossible did happen. The laws that prevented werewolves from getting jobs in the wizarding world were twenty years old, but it was only now that the wolves realized that those laws didn’t apply to the muggle world. That still didn’t explain why all of them were gone – they had money now, after all -- they should be spending more with their limited time! “What about weekends?” She hexed him again, mostly because the yelping amused her.

“It’s… Well --we’ve got homes, now! Real homes. Houses. Have to do the upkeep. Grocery shop. Cut lawns. Chase cars.” He whined. “I mean, it’s a really nice neighborhood, well, once we finish chasing out the last of the muggles -- it’s cozy. We’ve got two packs there, forming one giant pack.”

Houses? They had homes? NICE homes? So, shacks with roofs? Just how lax was the muggle world if they were selling homes to werewolves? Her eyes narrowed. More importantly, could a business savvy hag profit off of this, somehow. How?

She mused this idea, watching Louis spin, her wand tapping thoughtfully against her extended chin. Was it a werewolf that owned the company? What happened on full moons? What about, when their families came to visit, or their friends… the Crone knew that wolves were were pack animals. They had friends. And, half the reason her bar was so successful was that they came there to drink, where their significant others and families weren’t watching.

But, the biggest plus – it wasn’t in Knockturn Alley. The Alley had taking a bad turn since Albus–has-too-many-names-Dumbledore became Chief Wizard, before, it had been a clean area for werewolves, vampires, hags, zombies, demons, gargoyles and the like to hobnob. They had respectable businesses like potion shops, herbalists, clothing stores that did custom work for the type of clientele, runemasters, and a small banking exchange from Gringotts. Nowadays, her business, a few other shops with dark arts trinkets, and derelict properties was all that remained of the alley, thanks to the ridiculous taxes the ministry was levying in them.

“Uh? Madame Charnel? Can you let me down?” Louis whined. “This is real fun and all, but I really need to pee.”

With her luck, he’d piss on her ceiling. Eyes narrowed. Wait a tick….why should she care? She could sell, and move into a new property… get that old Runemaster Heinrich to put up an arch, or run it by portkey-invite only, and then people could portal in. Oh! Papa would have been so proud to see her migrating out of the alley!.

“Madame?”

“Piss on the ceiling. It’s fine.” She muttered absently, turning around to pace as her brain raced. She needed to check her books, see how in the black she was. The money would make it a question of whether she kept the Inn, or downsized for just a portal. Oh, the potential!
“On the ceiling?” Louis squeaked. “Please, no… I’ll end up pissing all over myself… and then my wife will be mad, because this is my best suit! Please, I’ll give you everything in my wallet, only, it’s all in pounds sterling, but please let me down.”

But, where to start in the muggle world. She’d be the first hag to ever establish a business there. A revolutionary. How exciting. Oh--- “Where are all these wolves living?”

“Surrey, Little Whinging.” He squeaked. “Look, I really, REALLY, need to go potty!”

Where the hell was “Little Whinging? And wow, she hadn’t realized how appropriate a place the wolves had to settle in, though there was nothing little about their whinging. She cancelled the sticking charm and let him fall to the ground. “Piss, but don’t you dare leave -- I’ll cook your gonaids if you do! You’re going to take me this ‘Little Whinging.’”

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Ally Lockwood adjusted the silk scarf around her neck, positioning it so that the black diamond and gold broach she’d used to tie it was shown off properly. With her hat tilted to sit perfectly on her french twist up-do, and the smart french-cut day-dress with matching coat, she looked like a true noble lady. A lady of good breeding. From high society. A lady who never committed any mischief.

Which was good, because she was in dire need of visiting Mrs. Petunia Dursley, who, in Ally’s firm opinion was in desperate need of yet another well administered heart-attack.

Giving her appearance another one over, she stepped back into her kitchen, gave her darling husband Jasper a quick peck on the lips, and then brushed her lips over wee Harry Potter’s forehead. “Now,” She said briskly, pulling out her dainty white gloves and slipping them on. “You boys behave. I don’t expect to be long. But, if I should run over time, Jasper, there’s a new vid sitting atop of the machine -- you and Harry might enjoy it.” Both lads, one a grown man the other a wee slip of a four year old, perked up immediately like pups smelling steak. She knew that the telly would be on nearly the second after the door closed.

Well. There was nothing left to dawdle at, she decided, taking leave of her boys. She fetched her purse (a lovely and smart looking Louis Vuitton that Mummy had bought her), and set herself out to cause bodily harm to another. Honestly, no one had told her being a grown up would involve the sheer amount self sacrifice that she endured. It was utterly ridiculous. Beyond her job as a nurse, and her role as a loving young wife, it was rather unseemly that she, a girl of twenty-four years, should have to play the role of social conscience to a rather vile, giraffe-like middle aged house-wife.

But needs must, and Petunia Dursley certainly pushed the envelope of Ally’s tolerance. The nerve of Dursley, sending wee Harry off to playschool unprepared for the weather outside! That woman had dressed the boy in naught but a worn thin t-shirt that hung to near his ankles, ratty trousers held up by twine, and a pair of trainers meant for an adult, riddled with holes in them. It was just a scarce few degrees above freezing -- and the child had been shivering himself silly. Plus, there were puddles EVERYWHERE for a boy to soak his feet in. It was like they were trying to kill the lad again.

Just thinking of it got Ally’s dander up all over again, and set her resolve to induce yet another coronary in Petunia Dursley. With long strides taken in three inch heels, Ally stomped along the sidewalk and up the drive to Number Four, Privet Drive, and in very short order, an index finger tipped with a pink manicured nail daintily pressed the doorbell.
The Orca, as always, answered the door. “Oh.” Blinked the overlarge four year old. “Mommy doesn’t like talking to you.” He told her, his face flush, and mouth messy with what looked like caramel sauce.

Good gravy, it was scarcely seven in the morning – and why was it the Orca wasn’t walking off to school like wee Harry had been? “Lovely. Where is your mother?” she asked, voice tart.

The Orca stared, confused, and then shut the door. She heard a howled “Mummy! It’s the dragon lady!”

Well, honestly!

Petunia shortly reefed the door open, shooing her son behind her. “Listen, missy, I’ve not time for you.” Said the Mrs. Dursley with great hostility. “I’ve got to clean up my little Duddikins, and get him dressed in coat and boots before I drive him to primary. And, frankly, that doesn’t leave me any leeway of time to deal with you and your nonsense.”

Ally gifted her with her best smile, she thought it a stunning smile full of white straight teeth, so she had no idea why Petunia paled so dramatically. It was a little early in the conversation for Petunia to have her regular bout of cardio-attacks. “My Jasper bought me one of those wickedly expensive new cameras. And, when I saw wee Harry this morning, I said to myself, this would be the best time to take some pictures, Mrs. Dursley.” She said oh-so sweetly.

(In Petunia’s point of view, it should be noticed, that she likened Allison Lockwood’s smile to that of a hungry shark, and her sweet tone of voice to that of a serial killer.)

“Pictures?”

“Oh yes, I took many snaps of wee Harry when I spotted him walking to primary this morning; pictures of the lad with his arms wrapped tightly around himself for warmth. A scrap of a four year old, walking ALONE, at half past six in the morning, the three and a half miles to primary.

Dressed in nothing more than a ridiculously oversized and threadbare t-shirt, and trousers that would be best condemned to the rag bin. I took especially careful pictures of the goosebumps on his arms, and the trainers that don’t fit him -- adult trainers full of holes.” Ally lifted her chin imperiously. “I’m getting copies of my photos, Mrs. Dursley. After I finish sending them to the Children’s Welfare Association with a complaint, I’ll send them onto the Ministry of Magic Aurors division.”

Petunia’s eyes shot wide. “YOU! You’re one of THEM!” She gasped, clutching at her chest.

“Oh, don’t be a ninny. Your heart is fine.” Ally scoffed at the feigned signs of heart pains. “I’m not one of ‘them’. I’m a squib, and a nurse -- and a squib can not serve as an Auror without magical training. My husband, however, is a wizard -- and a werewolf, so he too is not an Auror.” She tilted her head. “Frankly, given your gossipy nature, I thought you’d be more frightened of what the neighbors will think when the Children’s aid group come calling with the police in tow… what with PHOTOS to back it all up this time.” She tapped her chin thoughtfully. “I think I shall send copies of the photos around in a newsletter to the gardening association ladies.”

Well, there went the rest of the colour in Petunia’s face, and she gave a strangled gasp, before falling backwards and striking the ground.

“Oh. Bother!” muttered Ally. “I hadn’t even gotten to my demands, yet.” She stepped over the fallen woman, checked her pulse, and ‘tsked’ in disappointment to find one. She made for the kitchen phone, her eyes rolling. The Orca was sitting on the floor with a fist deep in a jar of
caramel sauce. Really? Poor wee Harry didn’t even get crust off a toast, and this beached whale was eating caramel sauce for breakfast? It boggled Ally’s mind on how Petunia could ever consider this an example of good parenting.

“Oh, stop that.” She told the Orca. She hefted him to his feet -- and goodness, he weighed a TONNE -- and pushed him into a corner. “Stay there, and don’t you move an inch!” It was galling how often she had to step up and do herding of Petunia’s beastly child. Really, quite vexing -- if the woman would just quit dropping every time she heard something she didn’t like -- or even better, stopped doing things that Ally would have to come and rub her nose in -- then the giraffe could herd her own whale.

Eye watching Dudley with prejudice, she picked up the phone and quickly made a call for the ambulance. Frankly, Ally couldn’t even imagine what the Dursley’s medical bills were like. That task done, and off her plate, she grabbed up the tea-towel, dampened it and scrubbed the squirming orca clean. He fled willingly to fetch his coat and boots when she told him to, apparently fearing more of the dreaded cleaning cloth.

Task done, she checked on Petunia -- still not dead. The amateur. Still not conscious either. The shame. Mercifully, Petunia did rouse when the ambulance arrived, and with hysterical wails about her Duddlikins was whisked off to hospital.

“The children will need minded.” Ally informed the two constables who looked like they were fit to flee, as well.

“Children?” The one, a tall dark skinned man, with brighter teeth than Ally’s. She was dreadfully envious.

“The Orca.” She pointed to Dudley. “And her nephew, who is at my house.”

A quick game of rock, paper and scissors happened, and one constable returned to the car, the other stepped back up to the front door with rounded shoulders. “Uh, why is the nephew at your house? Are you the Auntie?”

Ally’s lips thinned. “No. Petunia Dursley is. I’ll have you know, when I came over here this morning, it was to give that woman a piece of my mind. You should see the way she dressed her nephew! And then pushed him out the door and told him, a four year old, to walk to primary! Without an adult accompanying!”

The constable gave a cluck of his tongue, clearly disapproving.

“I know!” Ally crooned. “So, I took pictures. Many pictures. I’ll have the film developed today. And I wanted Petunia to know this was the last straw -- she locked the lad outside this winter on two occasions. If my my husband hadn’t found him, he would have frozen to death!”

Again, the constable clucked, but this time, he pulled out his notepad and started writing things down. “I see.”

“I can’t see how I can be held responsible for Petunia’s poor heart, if that’s what you’re thinking,” Ally informed him “If she wasn’t exercising such poor decisions in caring for that child, poor decisions that need to be called to the carpet.” She frowned. “Frankly, she should listen to her conscience, it’s clearly the cause of her medical issues.”

“I agree, ma’am.” The constable nodded.

“Oh.” Ally blinked. “Well, good.” That cleared up, she started pulling on her gloves, which she’d
taken off initially to wipe up Dudley’s filthy hands and face. “Well, I’m off to make a snack for wee Harry -- the nephew --and you have a nice day.” She paused. “Uh, do you have ear-plugs? Might I suggest you get them, Dursley, the father, is not a quiet man.”

The constable huffed. “You’d think they’d kit us with those, but no. Look, ma’am, don’t leave me here alone with that unholy spawn. It’s bad enough my partner’s escaped.”

“But…”

“T’ll take your film off your hands, develop it for free and put pictures into evidence.” He offered.

“I need copies -- I was going to submit these to the children’s advocate, and well, the garden society’s newsletter.” She told him seriously, smirking. “I want to make sure they understand that Harry’s the victim here.”

The constable brightened. “I’ll have three additional sets run.”

Ally pursed her lips, and considered. “Done.” Holding out a gloved hand, they shook on it. And she pulled the roll of film out of her purse, and handed it straight over.

The constable extracted a plastic baggy, and inserted the film, labelling it carefully.

Hopefully, having the police looking in on the situation would give Petunia cause enough to stroke out, the silver lining in the proverbial grey cloud. “Oh.” She pointed at the sedan coming up the road. “That's Vernon.”

Typically, Vernon arrived with a head full of irate steam. And he verbally went at the constable first, for calling him out of work.

Ally just sank down to sit on the front step of Number Four, Privet Drive to wait out the tirade, when she spotted the strangest thing walking up the road. So strange, she had to rub her eyes (and thankfully, she’d used smudge-proof mascara), and stare again.

In one of the bizarrest moments of Ally’s life, and there had been a few such strange moments since moving to this blasted street, she watched a honest-to-Merlin hag walking down the sidewalk of Privet Drive. A real life, true, child-eating hag -- or so Grandpapa had always said of hags and their dietary habits. Good. Gravy. Ally looked up to the clear blue sky of the lovely spring day, and frowned. Where was lightening to strike the child-eating hag down, when you needed it; a little divine wrath and all that rot? In a street full of preternatural creatures (being werewolves), why was it always she, the squib, that had to deal with these problems? Bugger. She squared her shoulders, reminded herself not to be prejudiced, and left the good bobby to his fate with the walrus and the orca.

“Excuse me, Miss…” she called, waving a white gloved hand. “I have to ask, Miss, are you completely lost?”


The hag gifted her with a narrow eyed gaze. “You are?”

“Allison Dorea Black-Lockwood” Ally promptly answered. “Resident of this lovely street.”
The gaze narrowed more. “Hmm. Which part of the Black family? The insane, the drooling, or the merely inbred?” She barked with a voice like sandpaper.

“The Squib side.” Ally snarked back.

The gaze relaxed. “Ah. Well, if you were of Cygnus’ line, I’d have to hex you on principle.” She tilted her hat back so that the brim didn’t shadow her face so much. “Prudence Charnel. I own the Shoddy Inn in Knockturn Alley.”

Ally blinked. Well. This was a fine how-do-you-do. No wonder children got eaten by hags – they were so well mannered! “Ah. I’m afraid I’ve never been. Sheltered upbringing, you understand.”

“Quite.” The now named Prudence agreed. “Tell me, Mrs. Lockwood, would there be a number of werewolves living in this area?”

Ally sighed, this was happening far too often of late, her representing the werewolf community. It wasn’t as if she was a professional in the field of public relations, she changed bedpans for a living. “Yes. Three packs, presently.” She pointed to a series of houses, all in the process of being repainted, gardens ripped up and re-done, amongst other work being done on the properties – like secure cellars. “This street, and the two over.”

“Hrm.” Prudence nodded, stroking that very prominent chin of hers. Ally was dying to suggest waxing for the small beard she seemed to be growing. “And, I understand there have been no maulings, or other such untowards behaviour during the last full moon, here?”

Ally nodded. “Quite.” It went without saying, the last full moon the wolves had played fetch and tag with Harry. She’d been livid, those idiots keeping that boy out of his bed so late into the night, and on a school-night. “Ah. No problems then, with their shifting? No screams, or howls?” The hag asked, numbering things off on gnarled fingers.

“Well, some howling does occur,” Ally admitted. “Ah. Well. Isn’t that interesting. You see, werewolves are dark creatures, my dear. In a typical muggle environment they should suffer more for lack of darkness. It’s why they rarely leave the magical world... “

Ally arched an eyebrow. “Is that so?” She murmured faintly. “Oh yes. They are dark creatures, after all, and dark creatures are naturally attuned to dark magic. We need to be surrounded in it to be at our peak. Otherwise, it’s like having a dreadful itch you can’t scratch.” Prudence scratched the side of her long beaky nose. “Rather makes a wolf irritable.”

“Huh.” Ally let it go unsaid that the wolves here were far from uncomfortable. The entire pack had a lottery going to see who got to spend the moon being closest to Harry. And the lottery was her fault -- if she hadn’t put her foot down, and insisted that only five wolves could be in her husband’s basement den at a time, she’d likely have had nearly eighty crammed in her backyard on the moon. Now wouldn’t that cause a rise in noise complaints?

“But, the wolves here aren’t, are they? And small wonder. This neighborhood is utterly steeped in such delicious darkness, you can taste it in the air. True wild magic saturates the earth and air... not that wishy washy magic that Dumbledore would like wizards and witches to think was all there was.” She pursed her lips, and gazed thoughtfully at each house. “It’s coming from there.” She said, pointing to Number Four, Privet Drive, just in time to see Vernon Dursley, face all shades of...
puce, still roaring at the poor constable, and flapping his arms like he was about to take flight.

Ally chose to stay with the hag rather than getting involved. The odds of being pissed off were lesser here. “Dursley?” She asked incredulously.

Prudence smacked her arm with her walking stick. “Don’t be daft, lass. That muggle idiot has less magic than a lump of coal. But, be that as it may, I can smell the darkness that dwells in that house. There’s a dark lord living on this street, and in that house!”

Ally’s lips twisted and eyes narrowed. Frankly, she felt Prudence needed a visit to a good doctor. She wasn’t sniffing darkness, she was smelling the wretched stench of child abusers. Still, she was slightly wary, seeing that only one magical child lived in that house. And little Harry was anything but a dark lord. He’d kicked the arse of the last dark lord using some nasty contagious nappy; so obviously he couldn’t be Prudence’s source of darkness. REGARDLESS of what Anton said about Harry..

It would be best for everyone if they just burned number 4 down. Then Harry wouldn’t live there, and the Dursleys would be forced to move. Not with Harry, of course. Ally had ever intention of blackmailing Petunia to letting her and Jasper keep Harry – if the police weren’t capable of containing the situation.

“Auntie Ally! Auntie Ally! Auntie Ally!” Little Harry’s young voice called out, triumphant and joyous. “Uncle Jasper says we can go to the market, and see about getting the next movie! Can we go? Can we? Are you done making Aunt Tunia’s heart stop?”

The hag snorted, slanted a look her direction. “Ah. So, training up your wee dark lord in the traditional Black family way, are we?”

“That’s presumptuous, I believe. The Black’s don’t have a dark-lord training method. From what I can tell, my distant kin like to kneel and drool on the hem of dark lords.” Ally demurred with a haughty sniff. “Having said that, I don’t kneel and drool, but should consider dining on that boy, my dear Ms. Prudence, let me advise you, I am indeed a Black to the core of my soul. And my wrath will make your magic wither.”

The hag barked a laugh. “Indeed. Well, since I’m basking in his presence, and he’s off the menu -- do Introduce me to the young dark lord.”

Ally pressed her lips into a firm line, even as Harry, mindful of the road, stopping and looking both ways overly carefully, before darting across. “Harry James Potter is not a dark lord.” She hissed.

Prudence’s eyes went wide. “Potter?”

Again, Ally’s lips thinned, dangerously giving her a resemblance to Cassiopeia Black in that moment. “Mine!” She told the hag.

“Yes, yes…” The hag patted her arm. “But, if he’s a Potter, then he’s also my great-great…” Prudence paused, lifted a knobby hand, and started counting quietly. “Great, great great grand-nephew.” She rolled her eyes. “We hags are terrible predators, yes, but we don’t eat kin. Your own blood never tastes quite right.”

Ally sighed. Well, really? She wasn’t in a position to preach -- she was related to the likes of Bellatrix LesStrange, after all -- now there was a whack-job. So Harry had a hag in the family, on top of the giraffe, walrus and orca. It was sad, but things like that happened. Speaking of which, “Don’t eat the orca, either. It’s fat content would give you a coronary.” She advised, as the orca
came outside to see what his father was howling about. “He’s also Harry’s maternal cousin.”

The incredulous look on Prudence’s face gave Ally a bad case of the giggles. It was just so hypocritical of the hag to condemn the orca, when she herself was a hag.

“Auntie Ally!” Harry gasped as he ran up to her, eyes glowing and face alight.

“Are those your indoor slippers?” Ally asked, head tilted.

“Uncle Jasper said I could wear them outside, because…’the shit that the Dursleys gave me was ruddy crap and fit only for the bin.’” The dark-hair parroted Jasper’s tone perfectly. He was also wearing one of Jasper’s old hoodies, and the damn thing came down to Harry’s ankles. Certainly it was warmer than the t-shirt, but fit as poorly.

“I see.” said Ally, casting a baleful eye towards the twitching curtain in her front window of her house.

Prudence, beside her, coughed.

Ally rolled her eyes. “Harry James Potter, I’d like to introduce you to a hag --hags eats small children, Harry, do keep that firmly in mind -- Prudence Charnel.”

“Prudence Potter-Charnel.” The hag interrupted, beady eyes studying the little Potter closely. “A distant cousin of yours, young Harry.”

Green eyes shot wide. “Oh. Nice to meet you.” He twisted fingers in the fabric of the hoody, and forehead furrowed. “Does that mean I have to live with you?”

“No.” Prudence replied slowly. “Would you want to?”

“I want to live with Ally and Jasper.” Harry replied, earling a soft stroke of his dark hair by his Auntie Ally. “But, if I can’t, anywhere that isn’t Aunt Tunia’s house would be better.”

“Even with someone that might eat children?” The Hag queried.

The child shrugged, then cast hopeful eyes up at Ally. “Did Aunt Tunia have another heart attack?”

“She likes shrugged.” Ally replied drolly.

Prudence snorted, her eyes catching on the famous scar on the boy’s head. One twisted finger with a blackened claw of a nail came out to stroke the lightning-bolt scar on the lad’s forehead. “Hrm.” The grimace was ugly. “That doesn’t seem right. Does your scar ever hurt, little wizard?” She asked.

Harry blinked up with big green eyes. “Nope.” He said, turning again to look hopefully at Ally. He was done with the meeting new people.

“Fine.” Ally said, as the puppy-dog eyes got too much. “Scurry home to Jasper, my heart, and let my darling husband know that we will be indeed going out, and taking you shopping for proper fitting clothing and shoes. If time permits, we will stop for the second film.”

The beaming joy in the boy’s eyes at the thought of new shoes was heart-breaking, but, like the good lad he was, he turned around, and gifted Prudence with a sweet smile. “Bye, Ms. Prudence!” he said, before racing back to the house.

Ally turned on Prudence, “Now, do you see? That sweet boy is sunshine and joy. There’s nothing
nasty or evil about him.”

The knobby hand waved airily. “Oh, of course not, dearie. He’s dark magic, not evil. Two very different things, entirely. Now, that bit of soul trapped in his scar that’s evil. Darkness is an affinity to wild magic, and the wealth of his darkness, well – I’d not be surprised if he wouldn’t become a dark lord outright, although nothing shameful about having a runelord, or a dark necromancer in the family, either – they use their own blood and personal sacrifice -- a far nicer bunch of wizards than white necromancers who sacrifice anything with a beating heart.” She counselled. Turning around, she surveyed the neighborhood with new eyes. “Well, now, doesn’t that explain so much.” The hag continued, conversationally. “I think I shall roust the people out of that home at the end of the boulevard, and set up a new Bed and Breakfast. There will be visitors. Many visitors who wish to court the new dark lord.”

“Oh, you can’t be serious…” sighed Ally, seeing no good to come of this situation. “Honestly! This street would be the worst to have a rooming house in... we have howl-alongs on full moons, now. And the garden society -- those women are a nightmare. I can’t see their harping and wailing about the state of their roses and whatnot being a good thing towards a successful magical business venture.”

Chapter End Notes

These two latest incursions into "No Competition" happened because my mind was left unattended for too long. Don't expect more at any great haste. Oh, and it's unbetaed, and you can make all the suggestions you like about plot, but don't be at all surprised when I completely ignore your ideas. I'm very mean that way.
Tourism in Knocturn II

Chapter Notes

Seriously, truly, utterly, unbetaed. Read at your own risk (of typos).

Tourism in Knocturn II

“So, after Judas took up residence, there was a flood of other covens of vampires moving in. The flops and hanger-ons, who like to toady up to their Lord, of course. Started a whole new renovation upswing in the neighborhood, which brought out more werewolves in looking for work -- they’ve opened a construction firm in the muggle world, I'm told. Given their heightened strength and instincts, and reduced rates, they are making a killing. Well, monetarily, not literally. And I suppose that is when the Goblins got into it, financing it all.” -- No Competition, Part 1

Jasper Lockwood returned home, after a very long day in what felt a very long week at work; he was all sweaty, terribly grimy and truly ready for a good hot long shower before eating a warm meal and falling into his bed. Werewolf he might be, but even so, a week sitting in endless meeting after meeting, and then more meetings with Goblins, and the reams of contracts that he and Anton had to sign, tied to the financing for their new construction firm, it was enough to break the strongest of men.

However, as tired as he was, he was also innately pleased that the week had netted such a solid result. After the next full moon, Howl Construction would be up and running, taking over the physical assets and tenders of Digimar Construction Firm, which had just filed for bankruptcy. It also meant, they could acquire the existing contracts for Digimar that were in progress, and finish them for the continuing revenues as contractually obligated.

Sure, the Goblins owned a good portion of the new company – but at the end of the day, werewolves now had their own business. Werewolves being the wolf packs of Privet Drive. Their own business, with their own days off – those being the full moon – and the ability to truly chart their own course! It was that no werewolf alive had never thought to have in the course of his own lifetime.

At any length, after such a long tiring week, it was excusable that Jasper should not be quite on top of his game. And certainly, popular myths always said that werewolves, in their human form, had higher sensory skills than any other human, but as many werewolves desperately tried to convince wizards and witches that wasn’t at all true.

After all, here was a strong, healthy, young werewolf, worn down by Goblins, and completely unaware that a vampire was strolling up his drive.

“A-hem.” The voice behind Jasper seemingly came out of nowhere, and since it wasn’t the soft tones of his beautiful wife, nor the childish tones of little Harry, and he was tired, and out of sorts…. Jasper spun around, and then screamed like a girl.

The vampire, a tall pale man with blond hair, and red eyes took a step back, as if appalled by the
response. “Well, aren’t you the jumpy type!” He muttered, hand pressed to his chest and looking rather shocked.

Safety being relative, Jasper thought having his physical body (and neck) with a vehicle between him and the vampire to be of a prudent decision. “I’m not jumpy!” He said defensively. “You just caught me by surprise.”

“Like I said, jumpy.” The vampire smirked, a flash of fang catching the light. “I’m Judas.”

Now, Jasper was a well-educated werewolf. He had his muggle undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. He had a hedge-wizard’s education in magic, which had earned him 7 NEWTs overall, and while certainly he wasn’t a big fan of care of magical creatures, but he had paid attention to dark creatures in defense. And Judas was a rather infamous vampiric name. And, this was cause for great alarm. “The Damned?” He squeaked, suddenly realizing his lovely truck really wasn’t shield enough, but wrapping hands around his neck to safeguard that precious flesh wasn’t likely to help either.

The aforementioned vampire rubbed the back of his head, mouth twisting in distaste. “Really? That’s probably the thing that irks me the most out of all this rot. I hadn’t been named Judas the Damned by my mother, may her bitchy-soul wither in hell.” He muttered the last sotto voce, but Jasper WAS a werewolf after all, and heard it clear as a bell.

Fabulous. The Damned had mommy issues.

“In fact, the evil bitch named me worse than that. I legally changed my name to Judas at fourteen when I was old enough to do so. But, in terms with how history refers to me, yes… I am Judas the Damned.” He said it with so much disgust, as if saying History was an unreliable bitch, and she and him were on the outs.

“The first vampire?” Jasper gave a good look at his front door, estimating it to be fifteen feet from his current position. The backdoor was a good forty-feet away. At his fastest, he couldn’t outpace a vampire, unless he was possibly in his werewolf form – and given it was barely 7 at night, and the sun was still up – hold up! The sun was up! “Wait! The sun is up! Aren’t you supposed to be comatose in your crypt right now?” Jasper tried.

“Pretty much, yep.” Judas agreed, leaning on the side of the truck. “But, the darkness in this community is rich, and such rich darkness will sustain me in daylight. It’s awesome, being able to hunt under the sun’s light. Wickedly cool.” He blinked as Jasper twitched. “Do relax, man… Geez, you really are the hyper-nervous type, aren’t you?” He observed with a smirk. “One would think you’d never been stalked before.”

Jasper shuddered. Stalked? This couldn’t end well -- he was too young to die from exsanguination, dammit. “I… look… I’m a werewolf. My blood has a dark virus, and that can’t be tasty.” Jasper tried to argue, not liking the way this conversation was going. He adored wee Harry, but really? Did he have to promote a strong healthy dark atmosphere all through ruddy Little Whinging?

“No, no, you’ve got it all wrong, werewolf blood is quite good, actually. Little more robust than your average inbred wizard. Got a bit of kick to it.” Judas disagreed. “But, chill, wolfman, I’m not here, at least right at this moment, for your blood.”

Jasper wasn’t sure if he should feel relieved. “You swear?”

“Every damn day.” The vampire confirmed with a nod, a fang flashing as he grinned.
“That’s not what I meant.”

Judas shrugged, stuffing hands into the pockets of his jeans. “I can make an oath, but really, if I am ‘the damned’, who is going to believe my oath will stick?” The vampire took a few steps towards the bonnet of the truck, pausing to glance in the mirror, and tsk at what he didn’t see. “Y’know, one day muggles will create a mirror where I can see my reflection in.” He predicted. “I just hope they do it soon. Do you know how hard it is to floss your fangs when you can’t see them?”

“Not really a problem, so, no… can’t say I relate.” Jasper was walking away from the bonnet on the far side. Sadly, it increased the distance to his front door, and also meant that should he run for it, he would directly cross the vampire’s path. Darn it.

“You can’t? Not even try to imagine? Just a little bit?” Judas countered. “It’s not hard… just… think about it. Trying to find that back molar with no clue if you’re getting there or not, because you ruddy can’t see a thing… all done by feel, not sight. You try finding a dentist willing to work on these teeth! It’s a nightmare!”

“Sounds dreadful. But, I daresay, the blind can relate.” Jasper agreed. “Mind you, I’m not blind, and have no desire to be blind.”

“Don’t go spotting a gorgon, then.” Judas airily advised. “Honestly, they aren’t great conversationalists anyway, what with their damn hair interrupting all the time.” The vampire took another step around the car. Jasper did the same. “So… the reason I spooked you…”

“Yes?” Jasper asked warily.

“The Magical Ombre Bed and Breakfast? It’s somewhere around here, I’m told.”

“Ah.” Jasper relaxed marginally, just a fraction really. “Yes. It is. You are aware it’s run by a hag, though.”

Judas waved his hand, completely unconcerned. His eyebrows rose, and mouth pursed expectantly. Jasper sighed, shoulders slumping. He raised his arm and pointed down the street. “It’s the black painted house – end of the boulevard.” Jasper twitched a finger to the left of the intersecting boulevard. “The one with the headless rose-bushes, and the nightbloom foxtails.”

In a flash, the vampire was beside him, peering down the length of Jasper’s arm towards the house that Prudence the Hag, a distant cousin of Harry Potter, had bought and then paid the wolves top-dollar to convert to her specifications. She was nice enough, for a hag, Jasper had learned. Learned second hand, mind you as it was his lovely very-squib wife who regularly took tea with Prudence, which really was just one more thing leaving Jasper to worry increasingly about Ally’s mental state. Blacks were notorious for their insanity, after all.

“Eek!” Jasper squelched up against the side of his truck, practically trying to scale the damn metal beast.

“Mmm…” Judas took a sniff of Jasper’s neck. “You’re absolutely drenched in wild magic, darling, it’s all over your skin and hair….” He breathed deeply, savoring the smell. “So very delicious!” A swipe of a cool tongue swept along Jasper’s jaw.

The whimper escaping Jasper’s throat wasn’t manly, and in the years that followed, no matter how much Judas gloated about it, Jasper would deny emphatically that any whimper had ever happened.
Mercifully, at least for Jasper, Ally chose that moment to open the front door of their home and step out to give him hell for being so tardy. “Jasper Myron Lockwood! What do you think you’re doing?” She growled, stalkng out in a pair of tan slacks and a navy blouse.

“Myron?” Judas snorted.

“Shut-up,” Jasper hissed. Oh, they were in so much trouble. Ally was going to flay them both alive, and really – that was so unfair. He hadn’t DONE anything!

Stomping down the driveway, she went nose-to-nose with the vampire. “MINE!” She told Judas quite firmly. “And he’s not into boys!” Of course, Ally completely ruined this last part by cocking her head with narrowed eyes as she looked carefully at her husband, “Are you? On occasion? Because watching that might be hot.”

This whimper he would later own up to. “No.”

Ally’s eyes narrowed more, “Are you SURE?” She pushed.


She blinked, gaze swinging from her husband to the man holding him dreadfully close. “Are you really?” She asked all curious, her grey eyes dropped to the vampire’s lips, narrowing as she waited for evidence of vampirism.

Judas bit his lip, eyes alight with laughter. “I really am.” He said, fangs completely on display. He released Jasper utterly, straightened his jacket.

“Huh.” Said Jasper’s naïve but lovely wife. “Fancy that. Just upper fangs? What about lower? And, how much of that Dracula crap is bunk? The sunlight, garlic, holy symbols, and whatnot?” She blinked. “Do you have a dental plan to look after those teeth?”

Judas blinked, looked at Jasper in confusion, and then back at Ally. “Uh. Well. It’s… vampires are… we’re the apex predator. Most dentists aren’t keen on giving us a checkup, you understand.”

Ally rolled her eyes. “Puhleeze. There is no such critter as "apex" predator. There’s always a bigger bad waiting to get you.” She folded her arms, and huffed.. “Listen, Mr. Vampire – my husband, the werewolf, is not up for sale, rent or dinner. And I’m not above having some priest come bless our water tank so I can hose you down.”

“She’s good.” Judas said admiringly, stepping back from the werewolf. He swung the red-eyed gaze back to Ally. “Judas Iscariot, apparently, the Damned.” He held out a hand.

Ally, his beautiful, naive squib wife, took the hand firmly. “Allison Dorea Black-Lockwood. And, yes, I’m a daughter of THOSE Blacks.”

“You don’t say?” Judas grinned, fangs glinting. “Well, well…. Old Sirius Black must be spinning in his grave, and that damn well serves him right, the old prejudiced bigot of a coot!” He lifted Ally’s hand to his lips and gently pressed a kiss. “I must say, my dear Lady Black… you smell much like your husband, simply dripping wild magic. But,” He smirked over her hand. “You aren’t the source of it.”

Ally’s expression hardened. “Indeed. I’m a squib, Mr. Iscariot – and really? That Iscariot? Bit of a tattle-tale aren’t you. Now, Mr. Iscariot -- do you need a map back to Transylvania? Or, perhaps a bit of sunblock? Can I call you a cab back to hell?”
“Nope.” The Damned winked. “I’m right where I’m supposed to be. I’m staying at the Ombre
B&B, darlings. I’ll be here abouts for a few weeks; perhaps we can have tea one afternoon?” He
slipped past them, to the end of the drive and a dark trunk that had been sitting forlornly there.
“Tah!”

It was at that moment, that Jasper decided that tired or not, new business or whatever, they were
going on a two week vacation post haste. Far, far away from Little Whinging and the oldest most
deadly vampire known to magical history, who seemed to like licking people.

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The problem with new business ventures, especially partnerships, was that impromptu vacations
couldn’t be arranged on just a mere whim. The partner always had a say. And when it was a start-
up, especially one working in conjunction with the Goblins who had assisted in financing the
venture, there was a great deal of work to be done out of the gates.

But, it was even more difficult when the vacation request being difficult to accommodate wasn’t
about the business side of things, but rather there was the custody dispute over a minor child, that
in truth didn’t belong to either of the two wolves arguing the matter. For, no matter how much he
begged Anton, his new business-partner was having no part of Jasper’s escape plan if it included
Harry.

“So, a vampire is staying at the the B&B?” Anton had asked, yet again. It was a question clearly on
repeat. “An elder vampire?”

“Judas the Damned. The FIRST vampire.” Jasper repeated. He was going to have nightmares
tonight, he just knew it. Some bizarre dream where he and Anton engaged in a tug-of-war contest,
with the vampire presiding as the judge. Winner didn’t get eaten.

“Huh.” Said Anton. “So, like I said, an elder vampire.”

“Really? We’re going go through this entire conversation again? And precisely what bearing does
the vampire have on what I’m asking for? Look, I just want to take Ally and Harry away on a wee
vacation to Majorca. Tonight. For two weeks.”

“While the vampire is here.” Anton said slowly.

“Merely coincidental.” Jasper lied blithely.

“I really think not.” His longtime friend buddy countered, sensing the fib. “You don’t even like
water, Jasper, so I’m thinking the vampire has great bearing on the subject. Besides, you can’t take
Harry. The lad needs to stay in school. I mean, by all means, if you and Ally must go off for ONE
week, then I’ll make do with the business, and I’ll be sure to meet Harry at the gate of his school
and walk him home after classes in your absence.”

See, that was the deal breaker. Ally would move heaven and earth to get time off from her clinic
but only IF Harry was coming along. But to just leave Harry to the mercy of Petunia Dursley for
two weeks, well, then there was no way Ally would leave town. She’d already changed her
hospital shiftwork to ensure she was home before Harry went to school, and by the time his school-
day ended.

Frankly, her maternal instincts were on fire for that lad, and she worried about the child plenty. In
truth, Jasper was hard pressed to disagree with her concerns. “Harry’s only four years old, and the
school year as nearly at an end. There won’t be an issue pulling him for a mere two weeks.”
“Come now, what you really mean to say is that you’re going to use memory charms extensively on the teachers.” Anton clucked his tongue in feigned disapproval. Feigned, because anyone who knew Anton knew the man was shameless in how he memory charmed muggles to meet his ends. “All the books on the subject say any interruption in his school year is detrimental for his academic development.” Anton argued.

“Oh, for love of Merlin -- you can’t keep him.” They both knew what the tug of war was about. His wee neighbor was the source of wild magic in this neighborhood. It had been quite a surprise to realize it, in truth, but after a few months of retrospect, Jasper understood. You couldn’t knock a Dark Lord off his throne as a toddler without being something of a magical miracle.

“Really, Jasper? You’re going to try for that vein, when the lad clearly veers to your house as soon as school is done, and it’s his first stop as soon as Petunia opens the door every morning. Besides, no one ‘keeps’ a Dark Lord. They are never pets. We just serve them.” Anton argued loftily.

“Right.” Jasper snorted. “And where were you in the puppy-pile last moon? Oh, that’s right, you were lying at Harry’s feet. That boy is ruddy worshiped by all the wolves that have moved to Privet Drive. Every single one of us with a house in the neighborhood has a spare room done up for the lad to use. He has toys to play with, and all his favorite movies in every wolf’s home. Yours included. The last full moon, we had eighty bags of take-out ready for the boy, in the event the Dursleys locked him out again. Now, precisely how is that serving? That’s keeping.”

“Po-tah-toe. Po-toh-to.” Anton huffed suddenly. “No. You can’t just scoot off for two weeks with Harry. I’ll have the whole pack parked on your driveway to block you in. AND I’ll tell Prudence you’re kidnapping her cousin.”

The bastard would, too. Alright, time for Plan B. “He licked me!”

“Harry?” Confusion abounded. “Well, that only makes sense. We wolves practically lick him to the bone on the moon.”

“No, dumbass, the vampire. He licked me. Said werewolf blood was tasty. Robust. Think about that -- can you imagine what he’d do to Harry? Those damn Dursleys are well known for keeping the lad locked outside to all hours of the night…. At night, Anton! A time when vampires are known to hunt for prey! Our lad’s prime pickings.”

A growl echoed on the line.

“That’s why I want the lad to come with Ally and I to Majorca. To keep him safe from predators that don’t understand, the child is not to be harmed. Besides, the pup’s not been out of that house or on a vacation since he was placed there. He doesn’t even know how to swim, or what a sand-castle is. Think on it, Anton. It’d b a good experience for him.”

Another growl, then a huff. “Wait until school lets out then. We’ll send enforcers along to protect the lad.”

“Oh, for love of…”

“No!” Anton huffed. “Look, we have nearly eighty wolves living here in Little Whinging, Jasper. All of them have moved here because they want to be closer to Harry. Now, I get your concerns, and I don’t disagree that this vampire is a problem, but I’m not explaining where the pup has disappeared to without warning, and then deal with a pack of sulking, whinging grown wolves for a fortnight straight. The pup stays.”
“Fine.” Jasper growled himself. “But then, something has to be done about that damned vampire!”

“Agreed!” Anton all but snarled. “I’ll start the calling tree. Meet in my yard. Your wife will have our pelts for carpets if we damage her new vegetable garden, and I’m not dealing with her gone all Dark Lady. I’m sure I’m developing an ulcer already from it all.”

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Ally poured the tea in Prudence’s cup before filling her own. “So, your first guest.” She began carefully. “Congratulations!”

“I’m so stoked!” Prudence gushed, fair near cackling like the wicked witches in Shakespeare’s MacBeth. “This is very auspicious, you know. The Shoddy Inn never had a celebrity stay, but for my new B&B to have the Damned as my first celebrity guest, ever! I can’t even put into words how pleased I am to establish a reputation with just my first guest.”

“Hmm.” Ally sipped the strong brew carefully. With Prudence, one had to be certain that it was nothing more than black tea leaves, and not some concoction designed to wither skin or whatnot.

“And, I’ve heard him on the phone with some of his cronies, he’s thrilled with his little stay with us!” Prudence continued, picking up one of the short-breads Ally had gifted her, and eyeing it curiously. “What are these again?”

“Butter. Sugar. Flour.” Ally summarized to the lowest common denominator.

“Interesting. So simple.” Prudence murmured. “But, not something I should eat regularly?”

“Certainly not. That much sugar and butter is not good for your body.” Although, truthfully, Ally was making assumptions here. Hags were magical creatures, and not really all that typical to a human body. For all Ally knew, Prudence had one kidney and two livers, and rat poison was good for her.

“Hmm.” Tentatively, Prudence nibbled. “At any rate, so Judas was on the phone with his cronies, telling them all about the ambiance of our little community. He’s loving our spring weather. Just calls for a smattering of sunscreen, dash of sunglasses, and he’s gallivanting about like a regular tourist, bringing back bags of shopping, and has suggested I put in a pool for the B&B. I think I might!”

Ally blinked. “I thought he was a vampire?”

“He is, dearie.” Prudence squinted at the cookie, and took another careful bite, chewing thoughtfully.

“So how is he going about in daylight?”

Prudence frowned, setting down the cookie before standing up and wandering to her private library. In short order, she returned with a thin blue book, which she slid across the table to her guest, a knobby finger tapping on the cover.

Ally puled the book closer, and shifted it to read the cover, “Magical Theory: the nature of light and dark magics” by R. Ravenclaw. Oh, here they went again.

“Allison, my dear girl. I’ve half a mind to track down your granddad and turn him over my knee. The point is, young lady, every magical squib should be taught the non wanded classes like potions, herbology, arithmancy and runes, as well as be taught the basics of magical theory.”
“I was taught such.” Ally argued. “But, if you’re going to spout the aura of darkness nonsense, then I’m going to have to politely disagree.”

“Oh for the Crone’s sake --- does your husband seem ill after his transformation, nowadays?” Prudence countered.

Ally frowned. “No.”

“Howling and screaming during the transformation?”

The furrow in her forehead deepened. “Well, no.”

“Unable to move from his bed the next day, exhausted beyond measure?”

“No, he’s up and moving shortly after dawn.” Ally worried at a thumbnail.

“He’s a dark creature, dearie.” Prudence moved over to her new gas stove, possibly the nicest muggle invention a Hag could ever have. And her double oven? So awesome. It made her quiver to think what she could bake in it. Roast leg. A herbed and cheesy heart. “In a light magical atmosphere, his wolf would make him suffer something awful because it needs the wild magic to effect the transformation; wild magic being the primal natural living magic of the Earth, in environments where the Earth has been starved and can’t produce that magic, the werewolf suffers. But, despite the village, asphalt, electricity and whatnot here, and in Knockturn Alley where the wild magic has been secured by the runic magic running under the cobbled road, and in the buildings, here the wolf is surrounded by that magic. It literally flows around our young dark lord, and that he lives here under blood wards that reach out to the edges of the local park, means that he’s fueling the wild magic native to the park. All we need is a few magical creatures to take up residence, and the magic should fill the entire town. So, dark magic, being the use and ritual of the wild magic connects to the wolf, which makes the transformation easier, and so Jasper is rewarded.”

Allison blinked. “I thought Jasper WAS the wolf, and that the change came from Jasper’s magic being twisted in him.”

“Pish.” Prudence waved that off. “That’s pure wizard hogwash. Wizards have so inbred, and so classified things, that they’ve strayed away from the wild magic. Essentially, they’ve tied themselves to the limit of their internal magics, and that’s just pathetic. Magic is a gift from the Earth. It’s wild life energy. And life is about living and dying. Wizard’s conjecture those two elements as light and dark, and that’s wrong. Light meant “light of use” in the olden days, magic that could be done from the wizard’s core without use of ritual, runes, or tools.” She stirred her latest concoction on the stove, a little nutrient restorative for her wee cousin. “Do trust a hag. After all, I’ve dissected wolves in my time, studying them, and I know what I’m talking about. Bare bones about lycanthropy? It’s creating two separate beings in one physical shell. Wolf and man, two very different souls.”

Ally sat back in her chair. “Huh. Fancy that.”

“Read the book. Rowena was a famous dark witch, brilliant, skilled and so forward thinking. You could learn a thing or two about magic. Lord and Lady knows, you might become the first Black in the past three centuries to properly learn about magic as a result.”

Nowadays, Harry gave his Aunt and Uncle little to no thought at all. Ever since Auntie Ally and
Uncle Jasper had come into his life, he’d not needed to fear his uncle’s wrath, or his Aunt’s pettiness. Uncle Jasper often offered to become the wolf and eat Uncle Vernon, and Auntie Ally made regular work of sending Aunt Tunia to the hospital for a wonky heart. That kept his blood relatives on their toes, as Auntie Ally said.

Additionally, the influx of more wolves to the neighborhood meant there were more people minding exactly how Aunt Tunia and Uncle Vernon treated him. And Harry knew well how little they liked that. It was easier for them to ignore his existence utterly, then pay him mind given these new conditions they found themselves in. That worked for Harry just fine.

On school-days, Auntie Ally had him come over to her house as soon as Aunt Tunia sent him out the door. There, he’d find breakfast waiting, a packed lunch for his schoolbag, and Auntie Ally would drop him off at school on her way to work. After school, usually Uncle Jasper but sometimes it was Uncle Anton would be at the gates with a small snack ready for him, and walk home with him. Most nights, Aunt Tunia fed him dinner, just for fear of Auntie Ally coming calling. And then he’d go to his new room, curl up in his bed, and work on his assignments quietly if he couldn’t be outside with the wolves. So, now the occasional full night in Caer Dursley wasn’t too bad. He just kept his head down, did what he was told, and ignored everything else.

Sometimes, though, Aunt Tunia got notions into her head. Ally said it was a sign of brain damage, not enough oxy-something getting to Aunt Tunia’s brain, and causing her to not think right. And on those nights, when Dudley was being very fussy, and Aunt Tunia wasn’t coping well, she tended to slip into old behaviors. Uncle Jasper said that Auntie Ally just needed to apply herself more to the situation. Harry wasn’t quite sure how that worked, but he accepted it as truth.

So, it was on grounds of Aunt Tunia’s wonky brain that Harry found himself standing in the front yard with Uncle Vernon’s gargantuan lawnmower, and struggling to turn the beast on, but failing miserably. It had taken him forever to get it out of the shed, and it was so heavy, pushing it to the front yard had near exhausted his little body. Then, there were these levers, and buttons, and this pull thingy… and of course, no manual. Harry felt if there was a manual, he might be okay, because he was getting really good at reading. But, without the manual, all he could do was push, pull and beg for the machine to magically just start.

It was looking more and more like this chore was going to cost him dinner, he just knew it.

Sighing, and squinting up at the setting sun, he circled the big lawnmower, eyeing the bits, pieces and parts. He was missing something, and he didn’t know what. Why was cutting the lawn such a big chore? And where was one of the human wolves when he needed them? He looked sulkily at Aunt Ally’s dark house, and then around the barren street. What really sucked was that he actually liked Aunt Tunia’s meatloaf, too.

Huffing, he went back to the pull-cord thingy on the right side of the motor. He knew it was the motor, because Uncle Jasper had explained his eleck-ric motor on his own lawnmower to him. He had been allowed to help rake up the cuttings. Uncle Jasper said cutting the grass was a big person’s job. Apparently, no one had informed Aunt Tunia of such.

So. The pull-cord thingy was pulled, but all that happened was the wheel inside the motor spun, it didn’t roar to life. Yup. This was not going well.

He scrutinized the handle, that he could barely reach. There was a lever there. Did it have to be pushed down to make the engine start? He tried that. Nope.

“Please start?” He asked the engine, wishing with all his might, and pushing down on the lever one more time.
The motor ROARED to life and jumped a foot ahead of Harry. “Eek!” The boy yelped, chasing after the suddenly wandering beast. It veered on it’s own haphazardly across the lawn – and that was bad. Uncle Vernon hated it when the lines of his lawn weren’t perfect. Running, he caught up to the machine, and maneuvered himself between the top bar with the handle, and the middle cross bar, and began the onerous task of pushing the lawnmower back to where it should begin on the lawn, and starting from that point to cut the evenly spaced lines.

Between grunts of effort, Harry kept praying the engine kept working until he was done. By the end of the first row, he was huffing and puffing from fighting to keep the machine on the straight and narrow. By the time he’d made it to the other side, he was ready to fall down and nap. This was work what with the machine vibrating hard against his tummy, fighting him on direction with each step.

No wonder Uncle Jasper said this was a big person’s job!

“Hey there, little bite.” A cheery male voice interrupted him. “Does your Mommy know you’re outside at this time of night? And does your Daddy know you’re playing with his lawnmower? I don’t think that’s right, bite-sized.”

Harry craned his neck and looked up at a big person, standing on the edge of Uncle Vernon’s driveway, and frowning at him. He was tall, like Uncle Jasper, but bigger, he had dark blond hair, a slight beard, and strange red eyes. Strangely, he was dressed all in black from neck to toe. “I don’t have a Mummy or Daddy. An’ Aunt Tunia told me I don’t get dinner if I don’t get the lawn cut.” Harry replied, taking the opportunity to catch his breath.

The tall man frowned, red eyes looking up to the front door of the house. “She did, did she?” He mused aloud. “Just the front lawn, then?”

“An’ back. An’ I have to get the clippings tidied up. An’ put the bag of clippings to the garage.” Harry pushed on, pulling with all his might to turn the beast around for the next struggle across the lawn. He had three passes done. Only a million more to go.

The man heaved a sigh, looking up to a rising quarter moon, and then around the dead quiet of the neighborhood. There wasn’t a house in sight with a light on. “Here, bite-sized, let me do that.” He stepped up to the mower, gently extricated the child out of his way, and in short order, started mowing the lawn while Harry stood there and stared, flummoxed that a stranger should step up and help him. It was so weird!

He only stared for a few moments, before shaking himself from his reverie. Initiative took hold, and Harry darted to the garage to grab the rake. Bringing the long-armed rake back, he quickly started cleaning up the clippings the mower left behind, following the strange man row by row, and pulling the clippings into a single pile.

In no time at all, or so it seemed, the front lawn was cut, as was the back lawn, and the strange man had rolled the lawnmower to stand in front of the garden-shed, and was staring at the roaring machine in perplexity. “How did you start this thing, bite-sized?” He called out to the boy, who was lifting grass cuttings into a paper yard waste bag. “There must be some trick to turning it off.”

Truthfully, Harry didn’t. He carefully put down the rake, and came over to the lawnmower, eyes studying the beast considering options. Operating under the same principle of how he begged the machine to start, he reached out with his left hand to the top of the motor, right reaching for the pull-thingy but screamed when tender fingers and palm encountered hot, hot, burning metal. Reflectively, his hand jerked back with a whimper, and he cradled the wounded hand to his chest, tears welling in his eyes and breath heaving in his chest as he fought down the urge to cry.
The man was crouched down in an instant, pulling at the wounded hand to examine it. He pulled out a handkerchief out of nowhere, and strangely, bit his own wrist to make it bleed, before soaking the blood into the white cloth. Then, even stranger, he gently placed the bloody cloth into Harry’s blistering hand, pressing the blood onto the screaming skin. “Hush, little bite.” The man gently said, “This will heal the skin.”

Coolness seemed to sweep icily over his skin, chasing away the incredibly burning prickle of his flesh. And then, like magic, his hand stopped feeling bad altogether. The strange man kept rolling the cloth all over the skin, coating it liberally in the blood, before lifting it, and Harry’s mouth formed a silent “Oh” of wonder to see his hurt flesh all better, and the blood all gone!

“Better, bite-sized?” The man asked, folding his handkerchief and shoving it into a pocket. Slowly, he stood, looking over to a lawnmower that had suddenly died with Harry’s first yelp. He cocked his head to the side, and gently rested a hand on top of Harry’s hair, thumb sliding across his forehead, parting the dark strands that hid his scar. “Ah. I see.” He said.

“My scar?”

The man laughed lightly, teeth flashing in the darkening night. “That too, bite-sized.” He walked over to the lawnmower, and rolled it up into the open shed.

“Oh.” Harry protested. “But, I have to rinse green off the blades with the hose and then dry them, too!”

The blond man shook his head, “No.” He argued. “Absolutely not. Take from me, because I’m an expert on things that cut – and sharp things like those blades are not something little nibblets should touch. I think it’s past time that I had a small word with your Aunt about the kind of chores she’s giving you. Bite-sized boys might help rake up cuttings, but doing the work without an adult supervising or helping? No.” He huffed a moment. “Come here, nibblet.” He sank down into a crouch again. “I need you to be honest, do you get chores like this a lot?” The big man asked quietly.

“No. Not anymore.” Harry still held the formerly wounded hand, curiously pushing at the skin experimentally, amazed it was all fixed. “Cause Aunt Tunia knows Auntie Ally will come over and make her heart stop again if she does stuff like this too much. But, Auntie Ally isn’t home, cause I checked. And Uncle Jasper is probably out with Aunty Ally, even if their car is home. Auntie Ally and Uncle Jasper always help me when Aunt Tunia gets her notions or I’m locked outside at night. And sometimes, when I’m locked out I just stay out and play with the wolves.”

“I see.” The strange man looked over to the red truck in the neighboring drive, and then at the dark house attached to that drive. “Well, come along poppet. Let’s just see if I can work the same magic as your Auntie Ally. And then we’ll go track them down.”

Hand in hand, Harry walked up to the front door of Number Four, curious to witness what was going to happen. He’d heard all about Aunt Tunia’s issues with Aunt Ally’s visits, but never SEEN it before. The first time, he’d been locked in his cupboard and asleep. The second, he and Uncle Jasper had been watching the cartoons, while Aunty Ally went over to scare some religion into Aunt Tunia.

The strange man pressed the doorbell, four times, quickly. Harry winced, that kind of stuff always irritated Aunt Tunia and Uncle Vernon.

The door reefed open in such a sudden rush, Harry knew Aunt Tunia was very angry about the doorbell. He could hear Dudley howling in the background. “WHAT are you doing? You’ve just
gone and woken up my little boy, you insensitive....” Her voice dropped at the stern glare the strange man gave her, and then the sight of her nephew at his side. She sighed, a hard put-upon sound, and her hand went to her forehead as if pushed beyond measure of patience. “What has that boy done now, the little felon.”

One blond eyebrow arched. “Madam.” The stranger began, voice very cold and hard. “I have never, in my life, been as appalled as right now. I witnessed your very young nephew struggle to cut the lawn, with a gas powered lawn-mower. A mower that should only be used in the hands of older teens and adults. A piece of lawn equipment that is dangerous and should be used only by those who have been taught how to use it, and are responsible enough to use it correctly. And I heard with my own ears his honest confession that he had to get his chores done or a child, probably not more than five years of age, would not be eating. And you call ME insensitive?”

“He lies.”

“Hardly.” The man sneered, “The fact is, I can hear the child’s stomach growling. And in the past half hour, not a curtain on this house has stirred, nor have you been calling out for him – which tells me you knew where he was, and what he was to be doing, and didn’t care.” He smiled coldly, and to Harry’s astonishment, fangs glinted in the light. “I should call the Aurors on you!”

Aunt Tunia gave a frightful squeak, and fell backwards in a slump.

The man with fangs shook his head in disgust. “She’s fine.” He told Harry. “I can hear her heart beating. What a waste.” Stepping over the woman, he suddenly barked a laugh, looking at the door, and the unconscious woman, and then the house interior. He turned to Harry, eyes dancing in mirth. “Seriously kid, I love this neighborhood. I don’t need an invitation to cross the threshold here – this rocks.”

Jerking his head, he led Harry to the kitchen, and yanked the fridge open. Rooting about, he found some leftovers, and set about making a plate up. After a few abortive attempts with the microwave, one death-threat administered to Dudley who turned right around, raced upstairs and was likely hiding under his bed, and Harry found himself sitting at the table – THE TABLE – eating his dinner.

“Don’t you want some?”

The blond man waved his hand. “Nah, I’m good. Wild magic here is thick, and it helps with the appetite.”

Harry didn’t understand, but he let it go. Uncle Jasper had long told him that there was milestones in a pup’s life, when new things were learned, and it was only at those milestones that a pup understood. (Harry hadn’t been sure what a milestone was, precisely, but Auntie Ally had said it was like reaching certain ages.)

So, he counted what the strange man was saying along the same lines as when Prudence said that magic was everywhere and in everything, but Aunt Tunia said there was no such thing as magic. He didn’t understand, but accepted that, and just let lie.

Wolfing down his bit of meat-pie, and savouring having a full meal when he’d not expected to have any tonight, Harry made short order of his dinner. He slid off the chair, gathered his plate and cutlery, and scuttled over to the sink, while the strange man poked around in the hall and living-room of the house.

Harry fetched the small stool from beside the fridge, and set it up in front of the sink. Then, getting
up, he turned on the water, found cloth and soap before starting the scrub his plate and knife and fork clean. He set each item in the drying rack carefully. Once done, he rinsed the cloth, turned off the water, and set about wiping down the counter as far as he could reach. He stopped, instead of leaning precariously on the stool, got down, moved the stool, and continued to clean the rest of the counter.

He hoped down to move the stool back to the sink, when the cloth was plucked from his hand by the stranger. “You do this often?” He was asked.

“Yup!” Harry crowed. “I’m good at cleaning!”

The man huffed, casting a withering look in Petunia’s direction. Aunt Tunia hadn’t moved at all yet. Harry wondered if maybe the emergency people should have been called after all. “How old are you, lad?”

“Four!” Harry told him, holding up the corresponding fingers. “I’ll be five soon, Auntie Ally says.” He added the extra digit, in case the man didn’t understand.

The man snorted. “Right. Well, it seems to me your Aunt is best keeping at playing possum. I’ve half a mind to re-educate her on chores appropriate for little boys. Climbing up to wash dishes and mop a counter is NOT appropriate. You don’t clean it until you can reach it with your feet on solid ground.”

Harry blinked. Huh. Aunt Ally got all growly when he tried to help do dishes at her house. Harry just thought it was ‘cause Aunt Ally liked doing dishes.

“What’s a possum?” He asked, focusing on what was really important.

“Small arboreal marsupial native to Australia.” The stranger said. “That means, a small furry animal that likes to live in the trees of Australia. Likes to pretend to play dead to evade predators.”

Harry blinked again. “O-kay.”

“Come on nibblet, let’s go find Ally and Jasper. I think I need to let them know what kind of shite your Aunt’s been pulling here.” He held out a hand.

Harry’s shoulders sagged. “I’m not allowed to go places with strangers.” He said sorrowfully. “Mrs. Peabody says that children should never wander off with people they don’t know.”

The blond man snorted. “Right. Well, easily fixed, nibblet. My name is Judas Iscariot. I’m the first guest at the new Ombre Bed and Breakfast down the road.”

“Pru’s house!” Harry nodded eagerly. “I helped her cut the rose-heads off the bushes.”

“Very good!” The vampire smirked. “So, you’ve been there before?”

“Aunt Ally takes me. We visit Pru for tea on the weekend, and Pru’s teaching me how to make potions!” Harry told him.

Again, the man snorted in amusement. “Well, there’s no one finer in the world but a hag to teach a lad potions, that’s for sure.” He agreed, rubbing a hand through his goatee thoughtfully. “Though, finding a hag to teach a child rather than eat one is quite a trick…. at any road, now you know who I am. What’s your name?”

Harry pulled himself away from the subject of Pru and potions. Yet something else he’d have to
learn at his ‘milestone.’ “I’m Harry Potter!”

The man, Judas, clapped his hands. “Excellent. See? We’re not strangers anymore. Come along, nibblet. Let’s go find your better smelling Auntie and Uncle.”

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“We can’t set the B&B on fire, you bleeding moron!” Jasper yelled over the rowdy voices of the packs. Seventy-six men and women, all of them werewolves, most of them born or raised in Britain’s magical world, but chased out of it by the restrictive laws on them all. “Do you really want to deal with Prudence if you did or do you secretly have aspirations to be a floor rug in her sitting room?”

“If she didn’t turn you into stew.” Anton added, absently cleaning his nails with a barbecue skewer. “And wouldn’t that be lovely -- having our pup dining on that stew.” He cast a withering glance at Walloby Davis, the idiot who had made the suggestion.

Walloby kindly paled. “Well, maybe she’d die too!” He blurted.

“You’re a moron.” Chet Halfner slammed his elbow into Walloby’s gut. The nearly bald man bent over, clutching his belly. “Merlin save us -- Prudence is well known in the magical world -- she’s the daughter of some wizard, and can do wand magic. That means, unlike other hags, the flames wouldn’t touch her.”

“I didn’t know!”

“He lived under a rock.” Said Siena Gingras. “Literally. Just outside of Perth. Small cave. So, when he says he didn’t know, that’s what he’s really saying.”

A snicker ran through the group.

“Okay, back to it. We have to protect the pup. How do we do that with the vampire running around?” Jasper asked wearily.

“Kill the Dursleys, and put the pup in a different home.” Siena suggested.

“Love to. Blood wards.” Jasper sighed. “Ally is working hard to give Petunia a honest-to-god--it-killed-her heart attack. The wretched woman keeps surviving.”

“Give Ally some digitalis, and have her poison Petunia with it?” Someone suggested.

“I’d like my wife not to be arrested on the charge of murder.” Jasper frowned. “Besides, that doesn’t roust the vampire. Worse, if the Dursleys expire, and wouldn’t that be lovely, it’s very like Dumbledore would sweep in and take the boy elsewhere.”

“No. He’d not get away with that We’d eat his ruddy goat-loving heart.” Chet growled.

Lovely thought, but unlikely. Jasper gave Anton a look, the one that said,’See? You should have let me take Ally and the lad away for a fortnight.’

“Prudence might have a claim to the lad’s custody.” Anton mused.

“The vampire’s living under her roof.” Jasper pointed out.

“Ah.”
“We could ask him?” Siena suggested.

Jasper rolled his eyes. “Yes, because all of you were so eager to go home after one visit.” He said snidely. “Besides, I’m not going to be the one to ask him to leave the B&B, and not go back. The idea is to make the area uninteresting for him.”

“Too late. Far too, too late.” A cheery voice sing-songed, wandering into Anton’s backyard with Harry holding his hand. “See, Nibblet -- I told you I could find your uncle.” The vampire said looking down at the boy. “Go tell him how nasty your Aunt was.”

Harry grinned, and ran off, leaping up into Jasper’s open arms. “Aunt Tunia sent me outside to cut the lawn with Uncle Vernon’s big new mower. I couldn’t turn it on for the LONGEST time.”

Despite the fact the lad was safe in his arms, Jasper (and seventy-five other wolves) all growled. “She what?”

“Tol’ me to cut the lawns. Both of them. But, Judas came around, and he helped.”

Jasper outright glared at Anton. He just KNEW this shit would happen.

“An, I burned my hand, but Judas fixed it!” Harry continued eagerly, happy to tell his tale. Judas, when everyone glanced his way, gave a merry wave.

“Then, Judas told Aunt Tunia off, and she fell down -- but unlike when Aunt Ally does it, her heart didn’t stop. She started playing…” He looked hopefully over at Judas.

“Possum.” The vampire supplied helpfully.

“Possum.” Harry frowned. “What’s a possum?” He whispered to Jasper.

“I’ll show you later.” Jasper whispered back.

“Right. So, Judas made me dinner.”

Everyone glared, and there was a frantic shuffle, as seventy-six werewolves tried to sniff around Harry for any unauthorized puncture wounds in the boy.

“Meatloaf. Some beats, and a small pile of potatoes. Very boring. And way too much butter in that meal altogether.” Judas examined his nails, plucking the skewer out of Anton’s hand, and having a go at some perceived dirt.

“Then, Judas said we’d come find you. And we did!” Harry concluded.

“Back and front lawns are cut. I didn’t trim the edges. That was pushing my limits.” Judas smiled urbanely, fangs on display. “But, I must say -- this was awesome. So many dark creatures in one neighborhood, the ambiance of darkness that lets me wander around in the day -- and a small dark lord. Good gravy, I think this place could be an absolute mecca. I’m going to invest. Open a few shops, maybe a tourist attraction or two, buy myself and a few friends a place to stay -- I’ll help make Little Whinging into a central mecca for the Dark Creatures. Lucifer only knows, the weather in Romania is NOT all it could be.”

Jasper could only groan.

“Hey,” Judas paused mid-turn in his departure. “I hear you wolves have your own construction firm -- who should I contact about a new building job?”
Seventy-five traitorous hands all pointed straight at Jasper.

Judas grinned evilly. “Oh, that’s excellent!”
There's a comment of sexuality in this chapter. I want it known, I don't care about anyone's sexuality. You can be homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual -- don't care. It's none of my business. But, for the sake of this story, Jasper is firmly heterosexual. Unfortunately, he keeps getting into trouble because he's just so darn pretty.

“So, where were we... ah, we have werewolves, hags, and vampires all living in Little Whinging, the nexus of the site being Privet Drive. What next, what next... Oh! Then came the lich.” Nott rubbed his head. “The retired headmaster of Scholomance. I'm told he, and I use that pronoun cautiously given that 'he' wears robes over 'his' body, so examination of the pelvic region is impossible, and confirming gender from a skull simply untenable; at any road, 'he' was curious about this new dark neighborhood in England, and during a poker tournament in Transylvania, the vampire Lord Judas was raving about this up and coming little dark prince to everyone and sundry, so 'he' came to investigate. Met Potter. Liked Potter. Bought the house next door.” - T. Nott, No Competition, Part I

The site of Scholomance was shrouded in ancient mystery. The ancient citadel far older than any other magical school, and a place of legendary darkness; the school was founded by the fallen-angel Lucifer who served as its first headmaster in the ancient times of the world. Word of Scholomance was never carved in stone or writ on paper, it was communed only by word of mouth. And so, it remained nothing more to the mortals than a dark myth, to be found only in folklore, and thereby a legend never discovered by the Catholic Church.

Oddly, the lack of advertising worked well for the school’s purposes. It helped keep class sizes down. Only those that truly wished to learn the depths of their magic came to Scholomance. And it required commitment -- the journey TO the citadel often times weeded the weak from the strong.

Some say the school was hidden in the treacherous heights of the Southern Carpathian Mountains. Others claimed the school was to be found on other plane of reality, connected directly to hell. The truth was far more complex, and no muggle science would discover the school behind the complex wards that hid it from visibility.

Not that any of that mattered. To enter the doors of the Citadel one had to be a student, or a former student, or Lucifer himself. No tourists were ever permitted. Once a student enrolled in Scholomance, they were bound to the school until graduation. And the per annum mortality rate of the school was frightfully high.

As legend suggested, Scholomance was a school of dark magic, but the description was a little peasant; Scholomance was more apt to be described as a school of magic for dark creatures; those more dangerous, more powerful magical beings with greater connection to the wild magics of Earth. Werewolves, vampires, incubi, succubi, hags, goblins, merfolk, fae and demons. The school motto was ‘learn, or die trying’. There wasn’t any fuzzy hand-holding by sympathetic teachers, no cheerful after-school groups, or social gatherings of like minded friends. And visitors simply didn’t happen.

Except on the solstices. Poker night.
“Fold,’ Judas threw down his cards in disgust, casting a withering glance at Lucifer. ‘Seriously, who said you could deal? We all swore some few hundred years ago that you were never to deal again. You cheat outrageously.”

“I’m the devil. It’s what I do.” Said the fallen angel rather indifferently, pushing an ridiculously tall stack of chips forward. “Raise.”

Glowing green balls of magic, in lieu of eyes, from within a flesh-barren skull glared at the devil. “Because you don’t have a royal flush in your hand after dealing the cards.” said the eight-thousand year old Lich. “Contrary to your ridiculous notions, I wasn’t born on the last new moon. Fold.”

The devil pouted, tossing down his cards, which were, indeed, the predicted Royal Flush. “You poofs are utterly no fun.”

“Poofs?” Judas snorted. “People in glass houses, should not be throwing stones. You’re well known as an equal-opportunity player, Lucky. Seriously, it’s very well advertised, everyone knows that that you’re shamelessly indiscriminate. Male, female, goat…. Indifferent. Shameless.”

“These are my adolescent years.” Lucifer frowned severely, pointed a black-tipped finger at him. “I can’t be responsible for my hormonal urges.”

Both Judas and the Lich, whose name was long forgotten to time, snorted at that. But, all the same, the Lich gathered the cards, shuffled them in his skeletal hands, and proceeded to deal again.

“So, my students tell me you’ve abandoned Romania.” The Lich began as he sorted his cards into some order. “Moved to England. Doing that Dracula schtick, are you?”

“Hmm?” Judas reached for a blood-pop, stripping it of it’s wrapper and popping it into his mouth. “No. Please. I went for a vacation to see this new bed and breakfast some hag had set up in a residential area of muggle England. I mean, the wards that were advertised to be on the place were perfect for a vampire, she’d listed a great selection of bloodwine, and then there was a muggle all-you-could-eat-buffet of a small town outside of the Greater London Area. It sounded like a great idea, and I was craving a bit of English blood.”

“Sucked, then?” Lucifer asked. “Small town paranoia, no threshold invitations, and boring bloodwines?”

“Oh, hell no!” Judas grinned, “It was AWESOME. Best vacation I’ve had in three thousand years. Seriously, they have this little tiny dark lord growing up there. He’s the bomb! I swear. The power he gives off, and his aura, honestly, if I didn’t know better, I’d think he was your long-lost son, Lucky. Except, you’re a hormonal teen that practices safe sex with goats.”

The Lich started laughing despite his best efforts otherwise.

“Oh for…” Lucifer threw a poker chip at Judas’ head. “One time. I was higher than a kite, and made a mistake.”

“We don’t let skull-boy forget sinking Atlantis, do we?” Judas asked, smirking at the still laughing Lich. “So, we don’t forget things like you and goat-fucking.”

“When you finally expire, and come to my domain, I’m going to do dreadful, horrible things to your immortal soul.” Lucifer promised loftily.
“So you say.” Judas gave his hand a good look, nodded to some silent conversation in his head, and promptly stacked three chips, including the one Lucky had thrown him, and pushed it forward. “Raise.”

The Lich matched. “A immature dark lord, you say. A real one, or the puffed up mortal wizard wannabe types?” He turned his head expectantly to Lucifer, jerking his chin at the cards.

“I’m thinking!” The devil said. “And really? Puffed up mortal wizards? Did you think you were BORN all bone-and-magic?”

“I was. As far as anyone is concerned, that’s precisely how I came to be. Think faster.” The Lich replied.

“Fuck you, too.” Lucifer flicked his eyes to Judas, who had pulled the blood-pop from his mouth, and was examining it. “So, dark lord?”

“Oh, real one. Blackest, beautiful, black aura. The wild magic is seething around him in such strength it’s amazing. Though, giving the stench of death I get from tasting his aura, I’m pretty sure he’s a Peverell.” Judas gave his bloodpop a lick. “These aren’t the wonko's blood pops, are they? They’re quite good.”

“No.” The Lich gave the devil a kick to get him moving. “I got them from a local village in northern Italy. One of our former students become a confectioner and opened shop after graduation.”

The devil rolled his eyes. “Seriously? This is the epitome of an education from Scholomance? Our students are being shopkeepers? Are you telling me my school is emulating the watered-down bullshit of Hogwarts now?”

“Yes. This is the epitome of a Scholomance education. He’s making millions, and putting potions into his concoctions to subvert the masses. He’s caused three wars in the middle-east, and amassed himself a world-wide network of slaves dependant on his control-potions.”

Judas spit the blood-pop out, and pulled a neutralizing draught from an inner pocket of his jacket. “Fuck! Why didn’t you warn me, you jackass!”

The devil blinked, watching the vampire chug down the potion, grimacing the entire time. “Oh.” Lucifer spun a chip like a top, head tilted. He considered the green look sliding over Judas’ face, before nodding, suddenly stilled the spinning chip and stacked it. “Okay then. That’s alright.”


The vampire ignored him, rising and fetching a bottle of blood wines -- one of the bottles he’d brought with him, and chugging it down. He returned to the table, sitting and giving a slight shudder at the blood-pop he’d abandoned. A flick of his fingers, it turned to ash.

The Lich sighed. “Judas, the Dark Lord?”

“Hmm,” Judas discarded a card, and pulled another. “That sounds nice, actually. Judas the Dark Lord. But no. I’m not. Tragically, as awesome as I am, I’m just a vampire. Ah.” He moved his card into a new position in his hand, and then looked up again and found himself being glared at. He sneered back, “Not that you two deserve to know anything after that shit with the blood-pop, but the area is being called Knockturn II by the locals moving in. About eighty-wolves thus far, although that number is steadily growing. One hag, because the other that tried to move in was killed by the first. It’s only a matter of time before we get the Goblins, I’m sure.”
He frowned as Lucifer dropped another card. “Sunny, very residential with these adorable cookie-cutter clones of houses, lots of tidy green spaces for children to screw around in, and yet a thriving rich wild magic -- which surprised me at first. But then I bumped into our little dark lord, cutest little monkey and so very polite, and it all made sense again. The Niblet has the oddest curse scar on his forehead, but I haven’t been able to study it yet -- he’s living with the most vile muggles – I truly don’t want to taste them, I’m pretty sure they’ve gone rancid. Anyway, in addition to the muggles, he’s surrounded by a wicked set of blood wards, which must be amplifying his aura’s projection, because it’s plastering the town. Kid hangs with the werewolves on the full moon – there’s a neighbourhood howl-along; it’s kinda fun. Of course, my posse of vampires, vampire servants, and vampire wannabes had to follow as soon as I announced I was buying a property. But, all in all, with the dark creature population upswing, I think the Hag was right… It’s a good spot for some business ventures. The Hag has her B&B, the wolves opened a construction firm, another has opened a landscape company. I’m in process of opening a new spa, and butcher’s shop, but my funeral planning business is already launched and thriving.”

“Funeral planning?” Lucifer tossed two cards, and pulled two more. He glared at one of them, tossing it, and pulling a third.

“Muggles on painkillers are just like candy!” Judas smiled brightly. “Tasty and full of zip. I’m buzzing after a few sips. And with my Funeral Planning business it means I get a heads up on the ill and the dying. I make a point of visiting my customers in the hospital; I read to them, socialize for a bit, brighten up their day with my sparkling wit and personality, and then leave after the nurse has administered their pain meds and I’ve had a bite.”

The Lich looked at the devil in askance; it was the same silent question as every time before: Why do we invite him to these games?

The devil’s usual response was, “We needed a third.” Suffice it to say, after six-thousand games, card games only for the past one hundred years, the conversation had been reduced to a silent glance.

“Do you and your sycophants not find the ‘sunshine’ to be a bit burdensome?” asked the Lich, pulling a cigarette from his robes and lighting with a flick of power. The fag hanging between the fleshless lips of the skull was rather odd to see, but no worse than anything Judas had seen on MTV.

“Nope. The Niblett's dark aura initially covered three streets and one play park, but since the influx of dark creatures, it’s grown to cover the town as a whole. And this is what tells me he’s the real deal -- I can wander about in daylight. Hell, I’m even starting to get a tan.” Judas leaned back in his chair, fanning himself absently with his hand of cards. “Seriously, I forgot how nice it was to soak up the rays – and I do make sunglasses look good. I’m thinking of putting a pool in my backyard. Something extravagant, done up with a grotto, and a very natural feel. It’ll definitely need a pool bar, and a hot tub.” The distant look in the vampire’s red eyes spoke volumes about where his mind was at. “Hot sexy blood donors in little tiny bikinis, ooh, or better, nude, running around, lounging around…”

“Those are some serious potions your student is putting into those blood pops.” The devil muttered, looking very curious about the shite coming out of the vampire’s mouth. “A suntan?”

Judas rolled up a sleeve. “You can’t see it in all this gloom – the sun hasn’t shone in this corner of Romania in what, a thousand years?”

“Closer to seven thousand.” The Lich corrected, pulling out spectacles to perch over his glowing eyes, and examining the arm curiously. “Huh. You might have a tan. Or that could be a rash.”
“It’s a tan. You should see my chest. It’s awesome. I look Italian.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes, and swapped a card when he was sure no one was noticing. “You’re Jewish. You can’t hide that nose, no matter what color you charm your hair.”

“You’re just jealous.” Judas said, “And would you kindly stop cheating? It’s ridiculous, because it’s not like we don’t know when you pull this shit.”

“I’m not cheating.” Lucifer protested, wide-eyed angelic innocence on display. “I’m just… thinking.”

“You stole a card.” The Lich hexed him for good measure. “You’ve already taken three. We’ve played twenty-seven hands, and you’ve been cheating every play.”

“Oh bite me.”

The Lich puffed his cigarette. (Judas had always wondered how that worked. It wasn’t like the Lich had lungs, though really, he’d never cross examined the Lich’s physical body… actually, he’d never seen it without his robes. There could be lungs under there, trapped inside a rib-cage… And wow, that was a creepy line of thought. For the most part, the Lich seemed to like doing a stellar impression of the grim reaper.) “Your blood doesn’t interest me.” The Lich informed Lucifer. “And your flesh serves no lasting purpose.”

“Says the animated skeleton.” Judas quipped, rising to his feet, and laying down a flush. “Right. Well. If this is what poker night has degenerated to after six hours of playing, I’m heading home. I want to stop in Paris on my way, and pick up a few books on blood wards while I’m out and about.”

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Ally walked in the door, arms laden with grocery bags, and dropped her keys and purse on the small table by the door. She toed off her shoes, and with a bit of a bag jostle, made her way towards the kitchen, only to stop sharply and scream in pure horror, causing bags of produce to go flying through the air, at what she saw in her living-room.

The cost (and cause) of her scream, however, was that her wolf-shaped husband’s body, formerly sprawled on his back with paws akimbo in the air, woke suddenly and fell promptly off the couch only to yelp as he slammed his fuzzy head into the top of the coffee-table as he tried to roll to his feet. He collapsed to the ground, whimpering in pain.

“MY COUCH!” Ally howled like a rising storm. “I HAVE DOG HAIR ON MY COUCH!”

Wounded, he may be, but the wolf in Jasper looked at her in affront. Dog? He wasn’t a Dog! Was the woman blind? Delusional? Stupid? He was an apex predator! A killer! A dangerous piece of the magical world!

“Oh, this is awful.” She ignored the wolf utterly, surprising since he was, as a were, a significant bit bigger than the average grey wolf. Ally swept right past him to examine the grey hair donning her lovely, relatively new, off-white couch. A shuddery sob rippled through her, as she swept a small (few) hairs off of the cushions. Another sobbed breath hitched as she spotted a wet-spot of drool, and she swung her gaze to the cowering wolf in front of her. “BAD Jasper!” She told him,
finger pointing. “You know I don’t allow pets or shoes on my furniture – and I don’t care the excuse. You look like a wolf, a since a wolf is a canine, and therefore is akin to a dog which is in turn a pet – and to make it clear I won’t have dogs or WOLVES on my brand new couch! Do you hear me?”

She grabbed the wolf by the ruff of the neck, and dragged him from the living room, thru to the kitchen, and shoved him out the back door. For a smallish woman, Ally was surprisingly strong, the wolf thought, far too shocked to offer resistance.

“Stay there until you’re man enough to face me!” She yelled. “I’m going to clean up your mess!” The door, slammed shut with a bang, loud enough for the wolf to wince.

The werewolf heaved a sigh, head falling onto his paws, and he stared dejectedly at his house. It was official. His wife was a nutbar, she was completely lacking the common sense to NOT antagonize dark creatures. Merlin, he’d warned her, warned her so many times about what to do if he ever lost control of his transformation and she was about. But, Ally lacked all sense of self-preservation. First it was Prudence, well… okay, no, first it was himself. She’d looked at him like he had lost his mind when he’d confessed, on their third date, that he was a werewolf. And despite his efforts, Ally’d never taken his disease as seriously as any sensible witch, wizard or squib would. He should have had a clue then that his beloved wife had not a drop or lick of survival skill.

“Uncle Jasper?” Wee Harry’s voice sounded a mite confused, but he bounded over from the backyard of the Dursley’s home, behind the broken hedgerow defining and dividing the lot between the Dursley’s and Lockwood’s yards without a care in the world about his trespass. Jasper was reasonably certain that Edith Miller, who was his direct next door neighbour wouldn’t be thrilled with the way Harry traipsed through her gardens. Fortunately, she was practically blind, and tended more to mind her front window than the back.

“Uncle Jasper!” Harry lunged for the furry shape of his adopted Uncle, arms wrapping around the wolf’s neck and face burrowing into the very ruff Ally had so savagely grabbed and dragged through the house.

Immediately, the wolf (and Jasper) felt better, and though Jasper was self-aware while inside the wolf’s body, he recognized he was far more a passenger than driver. Wolf instincts and intellect ruled most of his body in this state, as exemplified when his tail started wagging happily at having his wolf’s favorite human wrapped around him. “Arrooo.” The wolf part of Jasper howled to Harry.

“I thought you could only come out during the full moon!” Harry scratched behind Jasper’s ear, and the wolf moaned in ecstasy. “It’s not the moon-time, Uncle Jasper. The sun is up!”

This was something Jasper was very aware of. In fact, his last memory before Ally had gone postal on him was settling down, as a man, on the couch to indulge in a wee Sunday afternoon kip. Waking up a wolf had been a bit of a shock. In more ways than one.

“But I’m really glad to see you!” Harry continued, having pushed past the whole daylight confusion, as only a newly achieved six year old could. Over a year ago, the lad’s birthday, a much celebrated thing in the wizarding world had almost passed unknown in the muggle. Ally and Jasper had yet again shamed the Dursley’s, and insured their favourite lad had a proper birthday party in their bark yard. Complete with bouncy castle, and ice cream cake. Harry had been the birthday hit of his primary class.

They’d not made the same mistake this year, and bypassed the Dursley’s utterly. Ally and Jasper
had taken the lad and a few classmates up to Windsor, and celebrated Harry’s sixth birthday at Legoland. Certainly, to the other patrons of the theme park, it had looked odd, what with four young children, and eighteen adults surrounding only one child at all times, but really it could have been far worse. After all, the whole pack had wanted to be in attendance so they’d resorted to a lottery for the rights to go with. Harry had picked the names from a witch’s cap to avoid accusations of favoritism.

“Arrooro?” The wolf didn’t really care what Harry wanted, it was just elated that the lad was happy to see him all furry.

“The Dursley's have gone up to the specialist in London, for Aunt ‘Tunia’s appointment with her car-di-ologist.” He said the word carefully, sounding it out. “They took Dudley long too, but kicked me out so I wouldn’t make a mess.”

The urge to bear teeth was strong, but Jasper reminded the wolf he wasn’t annoyed at the lad, but rather at the Dursley’s. And really, biting them was pointless. Two of the Dursleys were all fat, the other was all bone. Not really appetizing at the best of times.

“I think they plan to get dinner in London, and won't be home ‘till late.” Harry confided. “But, there’s this strange man poking around the house, and I’m not sure what to do.”

Strangers, sadly, were very much the norm in Privet Drive. Anton had done the numbers, at some point, and in the past twenty-three months there’d been an influx of one hundred and five werewolves (of which eighty were employed by Howl Construction), thirty-seven vampires, a Hag, and one establishment wherein thirty goblins now lived and operated a local Gringotts bank.

The human population was moving out in droves, and the local primary was in danger of closing if the population continued to drop. Which meant that Harry would have to be bussed to out of area. No one had liked that effect of the evolution of Little Whinging from a non-magical community to magical.

Fortunately, they had a long-term plan in the event that happened. Dudley Dursley could be bussed out of area; actually everyone was really keen on that idea. Harry, however, would be privately tutored. Judas had proved useful for once in his creepy life, putting forward an education fund for the lad in the event it was needed.

So, strangers? Not new. Something about Harry’s magic just drew strangers in. They might come initially to visit, but invariably, they stayed.

“He’s wearing this dark robe -- and all I can see as bones for his wrists and hands. It’s like he’s a skeleton. Or!” Harry paused, and eyes grew wide, “I know…. Maybe he’s the grim reaper!”

Jasper would have rolled his eyes if he were in control of the body. The grim reaper was five years too late where the lad was concerned, and a damn good thing that was. Still, teaching Harry to be wary of strangers had been ruddy hard. The lad’s open and cheerful nature, coupled with his curiosity, made it difficult for him identifying strangers and keeping to the rules of stranger-danger.

“Do you suppose he’s here to take Aunt ‘Tunia? Should we let him know when she’ll be back?” The child wondered aloud.

Jasper rose to his feet, shaking off the boy. Turning around, he went through the path Harry had initially taken to get into the yard, trotting casually through the Miller’s vegetable patch (the bunnies were obviously reproducing again based on the state of the lettuce), and into the Dursley’s
yard. Invariably, Harry was on his tail.

He prowled around the Dursley’s back yard, through to the front yard, and down the far side, which neighboured onto the Lovett’s place. It was behind a mulberry bush that he found Harry’s ‘stranger’ bent down, a staff with a glowing green stone mounted in the mouth of a silver skull at the pommel touched the foundations of the house.

What was interesting was that Harry’s description had been bang on. Their pup was getting better at observations, it seemed. Only, this wasn’t the grim reaper. This was a creature far more dangerous than just ‘death’. Jasper pushed Harry behind him, hackles raising and lip curling away from his teeth.

The Lich, for that was what this creature was, turned, it’s skull eerily shadowed by its hood studied the wolf for a moment. “You do know, werewolf that not only is it daytime, but the moon is a waning crescent at present?”

Jasper added a good “Grrr” to his imposing stance.

“And you’re defending a dark lord against me.” The Lich continued. “I freely admit, I am terribly fearsome. It’s not often one faces a six-thousand year old immortal sorcerer such as I… But be that as it may, I’m not a Prince of Darkness, just his lowly student. And, I strongly suspect that Death himself would gather me to his bosom were I to touch that lad with intent to harm.”

Okay, sure, the Lich was saying the right words, but… LICH!

“If you persist in attacking however, you will not survive.” The Lich wrapped a skeletal hand around the middle of the staff, setting the silver clawfoot of it on the ground. “And that, my dear werewolf, would likely upset the young prince.”

It didn’t matter if he would be exposed and vulnerable -- hello, mere werewolf against a Lich. But, words were necessary. That was something both wolf and man were in agreement about. The shift happened awkwardly, some bones lengthening, others retracting, his hips reshaping, his maw shrinking. Behind him, Harry demonstrated his understanding that the situation here wasn't safe, and ran off to get help.

“What do you want?” Jasper rasped as soon as he was able, hoping the help Harry fetched was Anton and not Ally. Ally would skin him for wandering about naked.

“Judas spoke of the little prince, and the blood wards. I came to see for myself. Judas has been known to sip drugged-up bloods on occasion, after all.” The Lich seemed to lean his weight onto the staff, though Jasper was sure a skeleton didn’t have much weight to need supporting.

“That doesn’t explain what you want.” Jasper realized he was being stupid, standing outside the Dursley house all naked, no wand, and facing an immortal sorcerer of the darkest sorts. With his luck, a patrol would come by and arrest him for public indecency. Oh hell, what if Harry called for the constabulary? That would be fabulous; the Lich would kill the cops, and he, Jasper, would take the fall for it.

Today was shaping up to be a dreadful day all around.

“What do I want,” The Lich sounded almost conversational, which made the hair at the back of Jasper’s neck stand up straight. “I swore nearly five thousand years ago, that the next dark lord that rose…”

Oh fuck, he was going to kill Harry. Or, he was going to TRY to kill Harry. The pack would jump
in front first.

“...that I would have a hand in shaping him, ensuring his sanity did not crack like the last one.”

Wait up… That didn’t involve homicide. “The last one?”

“He’ll be along shortly, I’m sure. Just to find out what’s so damn interesting about ‘Little Whinging’ that caused me to relocate here too.” Weariness seemed to pour from the Lich’s body. “Just lock up the goats when he comes.”

“Excuse me?” Jasper couldn’t help his confusion. How did we go from evil super-ancient sorcerer Lich killing Harry to locking up goats.

“You’ll see. I give it eight months, tops.” The Lich sighed, the green gem in his staff flickering, and then going dark. “In the meantime, would you happen to know what hack set up these blood wards?”

Jasper blinked. “Err. Albus Dumbledore, I assume. The wards were there when me and my wife moved into the neighbourhood. And I’m reasonably sure we were the first, or I was, at least, the first dark creature to move into Little Whinging.”

“Ah.” The Lich tapped his staff against the side-wall of the Dursley’s house. “He’s an idiot, then, this Dumbledore. These wards depend on the love and stability of a family, a magical family. The wards have been starving for some time, so they hooked into a magical child. From what I can see, the wards have developed a limited sentience, and became aware they were harming the very person they were designed to protect, so they began siphoning wild magic, but they couldn’t directly use wild magic, because they are blood attuned wards.”

Jasper groaned, with sudden understanding. “So, rather than take Harry’s own innate power to fuel themselves, the ward fed the wild magic through Harry first, and then harvested it as blood-attuned. All the while, exposing him to wild magic.”

“Precisely.” If the Lich could beam, Jasper had a feeling he’d just earned a gold star. “Now, the interesting part, the little prince’s connection to death, which seems to be linked to the sacrificial magic I can find in this ward. Had wild magic only gone through a magical child with no connection to death, then no harm, albeit a stronger than usual neutral magical child with a propensity for higher ritual magic. But, the lad is touched by death, which is a primordial force of order. Order is…”

“Dark. Still. Structured. You get a Dark Lord.” Jasper rubbed a hand through his hair, feeling a headache coming on. “Bugger. The lad’s the sweetest kid. Kind, thoughtful, a bit shy… How do we get an insane serial-killing Dark Lord out of that?”

The staff came bopping into his skull, and therein was the headache in all it’s aching glory. How did the damn skeleton know exactly where he’d banged his head into his coffee table? Ow.

“The mortal self-labelled dark lords that you wizards have had crop up from time to time are no more a dark lord than I am a dryad.” The Lich told him, scathingly. “And since I’ve never had an urge to climb a tree, I think we can rule them as false dark-lords. I doubt any of them could actually do a necromantic ritual if it would save their lives -- they certainly lacked the power for it. There have been TWO, and only two true Dark Lords, at least to my knowledge in the past eight-thousand years. The first, well, he’s a hormonal teen of an estimated twenty-thousand years with a propensity to cheat at cards. The second is that young lad that just ran off.”
“Harry’s going to grow up to be a card-shark?”

“Are you brain damaged?” The Lich leaned forward, peering at Jasper a little too intently. What with the glowing green that seemed to emerge from vacant eyeockets, Jasper was seriously creeped out. “Seriously? Are you even paying attention to a word I’m saying? I have had students give up their souls for tutelage with me, and you’re getting a free discourse, and this is the kind of shite you produce?”

“I’m a construction worker.”

“Yes. Menial labor is probably best for your limited intellect. Don’t ever change trades.” The Lich took a deep calming breath in, and blew it out. “Your boy is in no danger of becoming an insane serial killer, well, assuming he doesn’t suffer some major mental schism or an incredibly trauma, he shouldn’t become a serial killer. Environmental factors can not be predicted. What is guaranteed to happen is that the will be a Dark Lord. A guardian, defender and master of the wild magics. Possibly a necromancer, if he’s not too squeamish - it happens. Definitely capable of killing in defence of his dark creatures.” The Lich huffed suddenly. “The education system in magical Britain is really poorer than I ever suspected. I thought it sucked, I apparently had no idea how badly. That lad can’t go to school here. It would be an embarrassment of epic proportions for a true Dark Lord to be so poorly educated and delusional about what dark magic was.” He sighed. “No choice, for it then. I’ll have to start tutoring him now, and enroll him into Scholomance when he’s older.”

Oh, fuck… Ally would lose her shit at the thought of sending wee Harry to demon-school for a hundred years, with his soul being the cost. Assuming, at minimum, that she didn’t erupt at having Harry tutored by a skeleton. Jasper had the sudden urge to retreat into his wolf form and stay that way for at least the next decade.

“He’s already in school.” Jasper tried to interrupt the Lich’s planning carefully.

“Meh.”

“No, seriously, he’s in primary. And, the muggles get weird about pulling children from the school system.” Logic, Jasper prayed, could be his friend. Lord knows, it was rarely his friend, though, when he talked with his wife.

The skull seemed to emerge from the hood, rather like a tortoise from it’s shell. “As if I would have problems dealing with muggles.”

Oh Lord. There went all the muggles. Dead, dead, and deader… Oh, that would include the Dursley’s. And the vampires would have to move if their food supply suddenly dropped off. Huh. This was looking up.

“Oh, my stars! Look at that fine tight pale arse!”

It was the most unwelcome voice in all of Little Whinging. Jasper cringed instantly.

“When Harry told me you were out here all naked and shit, I scarce believed it. But lookie here! MmmmMmm.” Judas sashayed between Jasper and the Lych, red eyes sweeping up and down Jasper’s naked body.

Jasper’s hands came in front of his privates immediately.

“Oh, now let's not be shy.” The grin on Judas’ face was unholy. Seriously, unholy. It was manic, with fangs exposed, and way too wide. “I truly had no idea you had a thang for bags of bones.
Clearly I wasn’t thinking this through. I mean, canines, bones… It’s a given. I just didn’t realize you wanted to hump the bag of bones. Darling, I can provide you with something far superior to hump -- maybe I’ll even hump back.”

“Seriously, Judas?” The Lich sighed. “I thought you were the straight one. Can you not let the poor man be? He’s a werewolf. They don’t transform like animagus -- you KNOW this.”

Judas waved his hand dismissively at the Lich. “Later! I’m busy!” He sang.

“Apparently, I’m the only one who doesn’t think with his dick.” The Lich muttered.

“You don’t have one, darling. Hardly an issue for you, in that regard, so I doubt you can speak with any degree of authority on the subject.” Judas replied cheerily, taking a step closer to Jasper, and watching Jasper take a step back. “Now, now….”

“Where’s Harry?” Jasper asked defensively, looking over his shoulder for signs of the lad, of Anton, of anyone who could help extricate him from this situation.

“Oh, I sent him off to tea with Pru.” Judas smirked. “He’s much too young to watch me seduce you. Where’s the wife, sweet-cheeks?”

The whimper, this time, was debatably Jasper’s. He was pretty sure the Lich whimpered too. Likely, for many widely different reasons.

“Judas. Let the wolf be.” The Lich ordered.

“No-can-do,” The vampire’s grin hadn’t relaxed an inch. “Why, even his wife is on board with me getting a leg over this big hunk of a wolf.” The smirk was dangerously epic. “She wants to watch,” He said in an aside over his shoulder to the Lich.

“You poor mutt. Your wife too?” The ancient sorcerer said with a shake of his hooded head. He levelled his staff at Jasper. “Honestly, I recommend you run for higher ground.” And with that, he cast at Jasper.

A bolt ripped through him, and suddenly Jasper had four paws again, and a tail firmly tucked between his back legs. He bypassed marvelling, and went straight for running straight through Judas’ legs, tripping the vampire and hearing him fall on his ass. He didn’t stop to look, the sound was comfort enough. He ripped through the Miller’s garden, spooking a bunny mid-nibble, jumped the dying hedge to land back to his own yard, raced up the three steps, and skid through the dog-door that led to the kitchen.

It was far better, he reasoned, to face the wrath of Dark Lady Ally at the muddy paws he was leaving on her kitchen floor, than the seductive wiles of an alarmingly bi-sexual vampire.
Knockturn II: The Muggle Exodus

Harry James Potter jumped off the last step of the bus and raced up the front walk to Aunt Ally’s door. He paused, in his run, to politely knock on the door, but vibrated where he stood until Uncle Jasper answered.

“You’re late, pup.” His pseudo-uncle smirked at him. “The pizza’s all gone.”

Harry feigned a scowl, “No it’s not! Auntie Ally would never allow you to eat my pizza!” He sternly informed the older man.

“Sure she would.” Jasper grinned shamelessly. “Auntie Ally loves me to bits and pieces. She only loves you to bits.”

“And I’ll rip you into pieces if you don’t stop hazing Harry. Come in, sweetheart. I have the pizza here, and a chocolate ice-cream cake magically appeared in my freezer just a little while ago. You need to investigate it!” Ally called out from the kitchen.

“Told ya.” The eight year old grinned impishly, scooting around Jasper.

Jasper hung his head, woebegone. Such was his lot in life. To be undone by an eight year old, and henpecked by his wife. He toddled behind the child, unsurprised to see Harry deep into the ice-cream cake, the pizza waiting to the side. “We’re doing this backwards,” he declared after a moment’s consideration. “The reward is supposed to follow the good report. So, hand it over.”

Harry giggled, but dutifully dropped his spoon, and went digging into his backpack which he’d carelessly slung on the floor. A few seconds later, his mid-term report was on the table.

Ally smoothed the slightly crumpled document out, and Jasper made a show of putting on fake spectacles before they both sat down to scrutinize the document. “Well, O’s for his maths and sciences.” Ally noted. “And his English and language scores are very good. Although, I see his art score is quite a bit poorer.”

“Mr. Fletcher says I’m too macabre.” Harry informed her, swallowing down a big lump of chocolate ice-cream. “He didn’t like my portrait of Jasper with his werewolf form superimposed, and Mrs. Michaelson said my story about the vampire coven had nothing to do with the concept of family.” The child huffed. “I think Mr. Fletcher is just jealous, cause he’s losing all his hair, and getting a real big belly, and Mrs. Michaelson’s upset because her husband ran off with his secretary; it’s clear that vampires stay with their sire, and their families are eternal. And since none of werewolves or vampires are fat, and they all have hair…. well except Phineas, but I think he shaves his head on purpose.”

Jasper’s nose twitched, but he firmly pressed his lips together, and did not laugh. He was very proud of that accomplishment; the child’s indignation was just too funny. Laughing, however, would earn him a clip of Ally’s rolling pin.

“Well, fortunately that’s just one story judged by someone who clearly can’t rationalize symbolism, and as for your art class… who cares.” Ally brushed that off with aplomb, running a hand through the unruly hair of the child. “No artist is truly famous unless they are dead, so it scarcely matters while you’re alive.”
Jasper shook his head, still silently laughing. Ally’s prejudice against art class was a phenom in her family. She was such a practical woman, with the only exception to that being her outerwear. She had to have the perfect compilation of coat, scarf, gloves (if weather called for, or event required), hat and bag for every outing. If that wasn’t some sort of art, Jasper didn’t know quite what to call it other than insane.

But Harry -- eight years old now, and that lad was nothing like the shade he had been at age four, to everyone’s -- save the Dursleys -- joy. Much of that, Jasper felt, was a kudo to both himself and Ally. And, yes, the rest of the pack. And Prudence, he supposed. And, a little bit due to Judas, oh, and the Lich. But, mostly he and Ally.

Regardless of where credit was due, where once there had been a very thin, underfed, under-loved child who took such comfort just from sparse crumbs of kindness, now there was a healthy, growing child full of joy and eagerness to learn about his world, who gave as much as he received in terms of love.

“Well.” Jasper cleared his throat. “I suppose a star needs to go on the chart, then. First quarter done, and you’re on your way to a new bike next summer.”

Harry grinned, jumping off his seat and racing to the fridge, where Ally met him and handed him the gold star sticker. He affixed in under the “GOAL – BIKE” chart in the first square, beside the existing black star which represented his magical studies. There were three more empty squares to fill – the next being for his winter report, then his spring mid-term, and the last for his final marks for the year. If he maintained passing grades, and his magical tutors gave him a pass, the reward was a new BMX bike. “YAY!” The eight year old did a small victory dance.

Ally laughed, dropping down to hug him. “Yay indeed! Go on, have your cake. I’ll warm your pizza back up shortly.”

“Cool!” The lad scrambled back to his melting ice-cream cake.

It had been quite a tumultuous couple of years, Jasper reflected, as he took a seat beside Harry, ruefully noting that the tiny little boy he’d met four years ago was now a tall thin lad, nearly fifty-four inches tall, with good color on his cheeks, a healthy appetite, and a ready smile. Yes, life had improved dramatically for Harry since that first night he, as a werewolf, had stumbled upon the freezing tot trapped outside in the cold. It had made leaps and bounds in the years that followed. The community itself, Jasper mused as Ally set a slice of cake in front of him, had also changed in leaps and bounds. It had been funny to walk about the town after the Lich had moved in. Realtor signs had sprung up all over the place almost overnight, and the only houses that had gone up for sale since then had been muggle ones.

The flurry of incoming dark creatures to the community, and stream of outgoing muggles had been something of a whirlwind. It had settled down, now. But, the population was such now that a vampire was mayor for the town, and an incubi was serving as deputy mayor. It certainly made the inauguration party entertaining and just a sliver towards disastrous; unsurprising with an incubi in a position of authority. Jasper had kept a firm hold on Ally all through the night. As it was, the influence of the incubi on the female population was such that the former mayor’s wife had started a strip tease in honor of the newly elected deputy mayor. Mercifully, every male kept in mind that their favorite wee Dark Lord was running about the party, and there were something’s that no child of his tender years was meant yet to experience.
“…and Mud says I can start carving the bridging runes now.” The shining star of Little Whinging was saying. He was blossoming greatly in his magical knowledge, as a result of several private tutors, not the least being the Lich, and Prudence. The Lich was teaching the lad runic magic, and magical theory; and Prudence was teaching him potions and how to bake the most awesome chocolate brownies ever.

“Mud?” Jasper broke from his musings, the name finally catching up with his brain. “Who’s Mud?”

Two pairs of eyes, one pair hazel the other a vibrant green, stared at him in clear consternation. And that set off a red flag in his mind. “Uh.” Harry hemmed.

Ally tried for innocent nonchalance. She’d have had a better shot selling innocence to a unicorn, given that expression on her face. He just knew his wife too well for it to get past him. “Allison Dorea.” He said firmly.

“Oh, bugger – that wasn’t supposed to get out. We learned by accident, Jasper, and promised to tell no one. He’ll be so cross!” His wife said, picking up Harry’s finished plate, and turning towards the sink, thereby hiding her face by showing only her back.

“He’ll be fine. It’s Harry who let the cat out of the bag. Who is Mud?” Jasper repeated, he rose to his feet and took position beside her, watching her closely as she made far more production out of cleaning a fork than needed done. She did skittish so obviously, it was no wonder his curiosity wouldn’t abate.

Oh, he knew his wife wouldn’t cheat on him. That was something he never worried about. But, Ally had a disturbing propensity to be the first to run into the dark creatures that gravitated to Little Whinging. It was Jasper’s secret terror that one day his wife would stumble upon a dark creature that wouldn’t see her naiveté as charming and sweet, or realize she fell under a young dark lord’s protection as his surrogate parent.

“We wouldn’t have known were it not for the goblins… surly little buggers, aren’t they?” She tried to divert him. But, Jasper was werewolf to the core, and was quite good at being a wolf with a juicy bit of bone.

“Who. Is. Mud?” He repeated, nearly glaring at his wife.

“The real name of one of our neighbors.” She prevaricated desperately. “You like him heaps more than you like Judas. Who, by the way, is quite charming and incredibly elegant. I don’t know why you insist on hiding behind me when he’s about.”

‘Charming and elegant, my merry ass!’ Jasper scoffed silently, then shuddered. He strongly suspected that his ass was precisely what Judas was after – hence why he hid behind his wife’s far more beautiful form. After three years, seven months, and eight days of Judas making passes and being rebut, one would have thought he’d back down. But that vampire seriously didn’t understand the word no.

It would take a Harry intervention to make the Damned find a new target. And, as desperate as Jasper was for Judas to just give up, he wasn’t quite ready to explain the situation to Harry, and beg for the child to put an end to it.
And saying he liked someone heaps more of Judas was damnable praise. He didn’t like Judas at all. Sighing silently, Jasper mentally ran through his neighbors, on both sides of the street. Phin, Saulter, the Hickory’s, Dursleys, the Lich…oh, hold up. No. Way! “The Lich’s real name is Mud?” He asked incredulously.

“Well, small wonder why he prefers to be known as the Lich.” Ally muttered, red-cheeked in embarrassment to have given the secret away.

“MUD?”

“He said it was a long time ago, and had a very prestigious meaning in the language of his people.” Harry piped up, mid-slice of his pizza. The bliss on the kid’s face was amusing. “Kinda like ancient Egyptian, and hieroglyphics, and the names of Pharaohs.”

“MUD?” Jasper just couldn’t fathom. Were it him, the moment there had been a government of law established, he would have legally changed his name.

“It’s the nearest approximation to his birth name.” Ally said primly. “Not literally M-U-D. The cuneiform evolved after he was named -- see, it was a pre-literate society -- so his name was difficult to shift to cuneiform, and then when you convert to modern English, it just doesn’t translate well, you see. And, Jasper – you’d do well to forget that name. I mean, do you really want the Lich to come down on you if you mock him? He might transfigure you into a small rat, and set the neighborhood cats on you.”

Oh, Jasper saw plenty, he just didn’t care. ‘I wonder if Judas knows.’ He’d have to ask, as long as Ally and Harry were in the room with him when he did, this might be enough dirt to get the vampire off his back. At least for a month.

“And really, had the Goblins not insisted on his true name be on the legal statement of work between he and they, we’d never have learned it.” Ally finished babbling whatever it was she’d long since tuned out.

Wait? Statement of WORK with the Goblins? A contract? Jasper narrowed his eyes. “Mud hired the Goblins to do some work on his place?”

“They had to quote on the job, first.” Harry piped up, in the middle of a slice of pepperoni pizza. “Mud wants the goblins to dig out the basement of Mud’s house, expanding the foundation. He said Goblins are the best tunnel diggers. He’s building a ritual room under his back-yard that will link to the gate structure in the yard, and a tunnel to the Dursleys house.” The lad supplied helpfully. “Mud says I can watch the Goblins do their work, cause it’s really delicate, and complicated. Ritual room can’t have any space enlargement runes, the entire space has to be done with tools, not magic, but the TOOLS can be magical. The Goblins said I can ask questions during the process, and maybe do some of the enchantments consecrating the ritual space. It’s so cool!”

Jasper grunted. The Lich was a terrifying creature, for certain, but he was a damned fine educator in spite of that. The quality of education Harry was receiving in magical theory put to shame anything Jasper or his more acceptable brothers had been taught. In fact, Jasper was rather hesitant to suggest Harry go to Hogwarts after realizing just the breadth of education gap between what witches and wizards of England learned, and what was being taught in other academies in the world.

He still wasn’t keen on sending the pup to Scholomance. But, none of that was relevant right now.
In fact, Scholomance was really a distant side issue. What was more important was that the Lich was hiring for construction work to be done by the goblins, instead of the werewolves of Howl Construction. How was that for solidarity? How was that for supporting Harry – all that was doing was bringing yet another species into Little Whinging, and as equal opportunity as Jasper was, eventually the magical governments were going to cotton on and try to claim Little Whinging as a district of magical Britain, which would see all the wolves kicked out of their homes. It was a dangerous Catch-22, but more importantly, the Lich was getting Howl Constructions competition to do the job! He didn’t even let Jasper quote on it!

“He never asked Howl Construction to quote.” Jasper growled lowly, just so Harry could understand why this made him irate. Always keep the dark lord, (even if he was just a kid) on your side. “The bleeding traitor.” He abandoned the remains of his ice-cream cake and made for the front door, suddenly so incredibly irate at the thought of the Lich going outside of the community for help renovating his home. He needed to have a stern word with ‘Mud’ about this failure. The Bastard! Whoever said dark creatures made good neighbors was on crack.

He stormed through the front of his own house, stomped along the side-walk, and scowled his way up the drive of the Lich’s house. The house formerly occupied by the Millers. The poor bunnies that had so enjoyed Mrs. Miller’s garden had been unduly traumatized the very day the Lich had moved in, and the Millers – as well as the bunnies -- had vanished. The garden had been completely dug up, and a strange arched monolith had been set up in its place; a gruesome piece of art made of volcanic rock and granite. Even after two years, Jasper still had no understanding of what the hideous thing was for.

“MUD!” He roared, banging on the door. “Open this damn door, you prehistoric goddamn boneyard!” It wasn’t like the Lich hadn’t known he was coming, or that he couldn’t kick his ass. Well, in truth, he probably couldn’t kick Jasper’s ass, but that was only because it would irritate Harry and upset Ally. His life, devolved to existing at the whim of the two most important people in it. And pureblood wizards thought the male was the head of the household. HA!

But a werewolf’s temper tantrum deserved some minor indulgence, even if by a Merlin-only-knew how old eternal sorcerer. The bastard probably knew he was at his doorstep, and was laughing his ass off at him.

The jerk!

The door creaked open on its own. Jasper stepped inside and gaped. Two years, the Lich had lived in Little Whinging (most of the time), and in all that time Jasper had never been into what had once been a house the mirror image to his own. The interior had been gutted, fluted pillars of marble rising at critical structure points to support the roof. Somehow, the roof had been lifted, to form vaults with gold forming to the shape, and gold leaf pattern on a white patina filing between the ‘lines’. It was terribly impressive, paired with heavy gold candle-lit chandeliers that dropped from the cross-sections of the ceiling. Six of them. Merlin, if one of them fell and landed on a man, they’d be crushed.

The floor was all marble, white tile on the outer edges, and a man-made tile of gold geodesic patterning forming a ‘carpet’ down the centre of the house. Either way, the floor was so glossy Jasper knew that anyone who tried to run on the floor would end up flat on their face with a very broken nose.

The interior side walls were tall, thanks to the change to the roof-line, a change not reflected outside, and here too gold was a heavy element of decor against a white back-drop. But, it was
ornate, not at all gaudy, elegant and visually powerful. At the back, behind two imposing columns was a dark wine wall, with a white canopy spreading out from a central point to frame an imposing throne made of black stone and gold.

Of course the damn creature would have a throne. Jasper wondered if Harry had ever been allowed to sit in it. Probably. The magical creatures of Little Whinging catered to the good-natured lad something fierce.

He passed through what should have been the living room, and cringed at the sound of his sneakers squeaking on the tile. “LICH?” He shouted, seeing no signs of life. Or unlife, such as it were. “Where are you?”

The being known to most as The Lich seemed to emerge from shadows at the back of the throne. “What did you call me?” It hissed, rising to its full height to loom.

Jasper scowled, unimpressed by the Lich’s stature. Time had evolved man’s height from the past, and usually, modern day wizards were somewhat taller than most muggles. That said, the Lich’s stature had him at sixty-five inches, in ancient times, he was a giant to most, but as centuries had rolled on, that had faded. He was somewhat short, by modern standards, but still imposing given the fleshless look of the creature. Jasper who was broad shouldered stood much taller at seventy-five inches. “You’re bringing Goblins in to do construction?” Jasper spit out, condemnation in his tone. “Werewolves aren’t good enough for you? Can’t lower yourself let a wolf do the digging?”

The Lich’s green gaze, which was nothing more than a demonstration of power as his actual eyes (of unknown colour) had rotted out of his eternal skull likely several millennia ago, shifted to red with temper. “We are discussing two separate things, cur. What did you call me?”

“If you don’t want your name getting out, you shouldn’t have told Harry.” Jasper sniffed haughtily. “Hype the child up with sugar heavy ice-cream cake, and it’s like veritaserum. He literally babbles without a filter.”

The Lich cursed impressively in a long dead language. It took him a good three minutes to finish. “And you can’t be pissed about it, cause it’s HARRY.”

“Hadrian is young, but not foolish. He knows the power of names.” The Lich summoned his staff, and blasted at a column in temper.

Jasper snorted. “Power, when a name that evolved in a pre-literate era has a slightly off written form, when truthfully only a verbal form due to a dead language, and can’t be properly communicated in modern language? Your true name is lost to time, MUD.” He glowered. “And you call yourself a magical theorist.”

The Lich froze, considered it, and then fixed his pillar. “I had forgotten that.” He mused. And then started cackling. “The contract with the Goblins won’t hold magical weight because of that. HA!”

Jasper growled lowly. “Yes, the contract with the Goblins.”

“Oh, get your tail out of it’s twist, wolf.” The Lich turned and walked back to his throne, dropping into it as if it wasn’t rattling his bones. He waived a skeletal hand in dismissal. “I couldn’t hire your pack of laborers. It’s a magical construct. Had I done so, when the ministry comes sniffing around, as they eventually will, they could argue that Howl Construction was a magical business not properly registered with the Ministry of Magic and in default of the ministry laws regarding hiring of werewolves… I hired the Goblins to protect the wolves of Little Whinging, not because I
like the backstabbing little money grubbing cave crawlers.”

Jasper froze. “Oh.” He thought about it, it was true, the pack did work around Little Whinging, but it was straight labor. Installing drywall, building on extensions, pouring concrete -- about the only wand waving that happened was to lighten a load for carrying. But, the British Ministry of Magic did have a tremendous hate on for dark creatures -- and werewolves had been especially hazed by the law. “But, ritual rooms have to be done by hand tools, no magic involved.”


“Right.” Jasper looked at the ornate roof. “Where did the second floor go?” He asked, before his brain could engage ITS filter. Geez, and he criticised Harry for not having one.

“I vanished it.” The Lich huffed. “Damn roof nearly fell in on me, hence the pillars.”

“Ah.” Jasper shoved hands into his jeans pockets. “Okay. Well. There are new struts you could put into the ceiling that would have taking the weight. And, for the vault, a cross beam should have…”

The Lich’s teeth clenched as he glared.

“I’ll shut up now.”

“No. What you will do is swear upon your magic and hide to never tell another living soul my name.” There was the threat of “or else” silently implied, and Jasper had no problem hearing it.

“But… Harry.”

“Hadrian is a child.”

“Well, yes…”

“I could not force a magical oath on a child. He'd lose his magic by age ten.” The Lich loftily informed him.

Jasper rolled his eyes. “You can’t force Harry to make a magical oath, but would any other magical child, because they don’t matter and serve greater purpose as carrion for birds of prey.”

“Or in Prudence’s oven.” The demon sorcerer agreed.

“Charming.”

The Lich handed over a bone-handled athame. “I am what I am. Now, the oath, if you please?”

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They crept out early Saturday morning, when few things moved on the streets of Little Whinging. Armed with pruning shears, knives, and a small can of petrol, the trio of boys made their way quietly through the houses of Little Whinging, having a go at destroying the freak gardens that had popped up.

Dudley knew the score. He’d heard his Mum and Dad talk about it enough – werewolves and vampires. Freaks of nature that didn’t belong amongst good God-fearing people. It was the mark of the apocalypse, his Dad said, and Dudley believed him. It was up to them to chase the freaks out, and show they weren’t welcome amongst them.
And so, as good ringleader to his gang of friends, Dudley whipped Piers, who was his best friend, Malcolm and Gordon into his random acts of chaos. He knew who was who. The weird black and purple flower that only bloomed at night, and sealed up tight during the day was the first to meet their knives. Every freak had these plants, so it was easy to find. They cut these ones low, right at the root of the plant. They poured petrol over the weird swaying trees that had branches that looked like fingers, long fingers which drifted down to stroke the ground. They took out that snapping plant that lunged for them, Dudley distracting the plant, and Piers taking an axe to it. And they used pruning shears and scissors to bedraggle hedges.

It was chaos and destruction, and you couldn’t miss it. They were so proud of themselves, giggling madly as they went from house to house. The damn freaks were asleep, and wouldn’t know who done it. But they’d get the message.

“The last one… with the thorny hedgerow. Let’s use the rest of the petrol on it! I have a match. We can light it up!” Dudley whispered.

Malcolm paused, concern edging into his thought process. “I dunno, Duds. The house might catch fire, too.”

“Good.” Dudley said decisively, liking this idea. “Serves the Freaks right!”

His three friends exchanged a nervous glance. “No, Dudley – I mean, this no one will report to the police, but if we do that…” Malcolm looked around skittishly.

Dudley's eyes narrowed in his fat florid face. “Scared, piggies?”

Gordon picked up the thread, huffing. “No. Dud. Just thinking we don’t want to be caught.”

Dudley snorted. “Like the Freaks would ever figure it out. They are dumb, guys. Animals.” He marched boldly across the street to the black-painted house with the sign “Ombre Bed and Breakfast.” Uncapping the petrol, he began drenching it thoroughly over the shrubs. The thorns shivered and stirred, twisting sinuously as if uncomfortable.

Malcolm and Gordon exchanged a look, and tightened their grip on their mother’s gardening equipment. “No.” Gordon said quietly. “We were okay with poisoning the plants, and cutting off flower heads, but this… I don’t want to get arrested.”

Piers snorted. “Like my Dad would let that happen.” He scoffed.

“Don’t matter. My Da will have my arse if we’re caught.” Malcolm shifted uncomfortably, as Dudley made his way along the hedge. He shifted from foot to foot. “Let’s go Gordon. We’re not caught yet, and I don’t want to be.”

The two boys gave one more glance at Dudley, who glared at them, turned and ran.

“Chickens.” Piers sneered at their backs. “Come on, Duds. That’s enough petrol. Light it up. Let’s get this done.” He encouraged his friend. He moved closer, the stench of petrol getting stronger as he did. “Did you want me to go and damage those weird sunflowers of hers, the ones with fanged faces?”

“Yeah. But, do it now. I’ll light the match after. I’ll throw the match in so it burns up to, and then
no one will know it was us.”

Piers scrambled off, stepping inside the lawn, and heading for the garden up against the front of the house. The scissors made short work of the flowers, that made tiny screams as they fell. It was a massacre, he thought with a grin.

He sprinted over to the side of the house, and committed plant-icide there too. Then, jumped the petrol covered hedge, and tearing the bottom of his trousers by way of angry thorn. “Light it! Light it!” He hissed to Dudley, coming up to hover by his friend, his slight body, and Dudley’s bulkier body. Dudley fumbled in his pockets, pulling out a small book of matches. He struck the head against the strip of the booklet, and cackled as it lit. “All right!” He cheered. “Let’s watch it burn!”

“The only thing that will be burning here, if you do anything but blow that match out right this moment, is yourselves, boys.” A cold hard voice said from behind them.

Dudley and Piers froze, and with terror on their faces, slowly turned around to find Phineas Leon standing behind them, arms folded over his broad chest, and face set in a very angry scowl. “I believe the word you’re looking for, boyos, is busted.”

“We didn’t do it.” Dudley blurted.

Phin, a tall vampire, had such a mixed ethnicity no one quite knew where he hailed from. His shining pate was hairless, but the dark stubble on his jaw spoke of dark hair, paired with dusky skin, and dark hard eyes. Most of the women in the neighborhood described him as built like a brick shithouse. To all appearances, Phineas Leon was a hard man, and not one to suffer fools gladly. But, most importantly, male as he might be, he was also a vampire of nearly four centuries. And he was happy to exsanguinate any fools he encountered.

“There’s a gas can at your feet, a book of matches in the Orca’s hand, and you’re holding a pair of shears, and I’m supposed to believe you didn’t do anything?” Phin glowered at them.

“Err.” Piers looked over at Dudley. This was bad.

“EEP!” Dudley yelped suddenly, the match having burned down to his fat fingers. He threw it, out of instinct… and sadly, it hit the trail of petrol. The bushes lit up with a ‘whoosh’ – and so too did Pier’s trousers at the back, where he’s brushed against the shrub jumping over it.

Piers howled, frantically hoping about. It drew people from their houses, even as Phin cussed under his breath, grabbed the screaming child and tossed him to the ground and rolled him with one foot to stomp out the flames consuming his pant leg. “Idiot children. The lot of you should have been drowned straight out of the womb.”

Prudence came out of her Bed and Breakfast, blinking wildly in the early morning light, a garish green house-robe hastily belted over her boxy body. “Oh, bugger.. my hedge!” Her wand whipped out the sleeve of her robe, and she deftly cast the flame freezing spell, absently striking Piers with it too. “Phineas, what the devil?”

“What’s going on here?” Vernon Dursley came blustering up the street, overpowering Prudence’s voice with his own. “What are you doing to my son?!”

Phin turned slowly, ignoring Piers who was sobbing – his pant leg smoking but no longer on fire. “Is that your can of gas?” He asked lowly.
“My what?” Vernon blinked.

“He spoke English, Dursley. Is that your can of petrol?” Prudence snarled adding one plus one, and coming up with the appropriate two.

Other neighbors were coming outside, a few muggles, as well as vampires and werewolves. And the vampires were noticing the state of their gardens and lawns as they went. Vernon looked at the petrol, at his son’s stained clothes, at the pruning shears lying by Dudley’s feet, and paled. “N-no. Never seen that before.”

Phin’s glare upped it’s wattage, but Prudence openly bared her teeth, uneven yellow teeth that needed serious dental work. “You lie. I can taste it.” The Hag snarled.

Vernon took a step back with wild eyes. Prudence’s alleged affection for human flesh wasn’t a story kept quiet in the community. Ally Lockwood had been only too happy to tell Petunia all about the owner of the Bed and Breakfast. “It’s not… no. I’m telling you, I’ve never seen that can before. That Freak must have done it. It’s his!” He said, pointing to Phineas.

“Oh hell.” Someone muttered in the crowd. “There goes the neighborhood.” A general murmur of consent to that epithet followed.

Phineas sneered, “I don’t use ‘Petrol’, you fat tub of lard. I have an electric car. And your bloody name is on the side of the can, jackass!”

“They’re vandals, the little bastards!” Someone else called. “They ruined my garden!”

“I can smell petrol in mine!”

“Little monsters – and they call US Freaks? My nightbloom roses are dead!”

Phin growled “Let’s kill ‘em all.” He proposed. “I have some cousins that want to move in, anyway. Need to open up some space.”

The rumble of agreement was making the few muggles in the crowd very nervous. Most were backing away quietly, and running for their homes. Only Dursley, stuck in the middle with his son and Piers, and Piers’ mother seemed inclined to linger.

It was into this mess that the Lich strode, robes streaming as he moved, strongly leading the impression of the Grim Reaper himself. “Hold.” It ordered.

Everyone stilled.

The Lich looked at the two boys, and then the adults, and absorbed the general anger of the vampires and werewolves around him. “What do you have to say for yourselves?” It demanded of the two boys. “Confess, or face the consequences.”

“We did it! We did it!” Piers blubbered, leg hurting from the burns. “Me, Dudley, Malcolm and Gordon -- our Mums are so mad about the garden club being corrupted by the Freaks -- we wanted to scare them out. Make ‘em know they aren’t welcome here.”

The Lich turned its head, green glowing eyes glaring at Dursley, then Mrs. Polkiss. “Indeed,” It hissed malevolently. “I should think it clear to such weak creatures as yourselves, that it is YOU
who is not welcome any longer.”

“Why should we move -- you’re the interlopers!” Vernon bellowed, clearly one of those ones that blustered in the face of near death.

The Lich laughed, “Do you realize, that were it not for the cruelty you showed your only nephew, for the harm you did him, that we would never have been drawn here?” It waved a hand at Mrs. Polkiss, modifying her memories as it did so.

Mrs. Polkiss swayed for a moment, and then stood straighter. “Piers… come here, right now! You’re in so much trouble, young man.” Her son apparently didn’t move fast enough for her, she stalked over, grabbed her son’s left ear, and hauled him to his feet. “Move it!” She hissed. “Your ass is requiring one fine tanning! I’ve never been so embarrassed, and given some of your nonsense, that’s saying something! I’m telling you now, you’re NEVER going to talk to or see Dudley Dursley again, do you hear me?” Her strident tones faded as they Polkisses walked away.

“You are problem for us, Dursley. You and your family.” The Lich glanced at Prudence, who nodded, and Phin who just growled at the boy again for good measure. “And I have exercised far more tolerance at the request of your nephew than I should have done.”

“Kill them.” Prudence suggested. “We don’t need the blood-wards. Not any longer. There are enough of us here now, and the wild magic is well rooted in the ground.”

“Agreed.” The werewolf voted. “I’m sure Jasper would agree too. The Pup can live with him and Ally; I’m quite certain it’d be easier for them just to have him move in full-time instead of this half-assed thing they are doing. Breaks Ally’s heart everytime she has to send the pup back to their miserable house.”

The Lich stared thoughtfully at a now frozen and shaking Vernon Dursley, The slight tilt of its head indicated serious consideration was being given to the extinction of all things Dursley in Little Whinging. “Dumbledore.” The Lich finally said.

“Oh, him.” Prudence huffed. “Let him come. We’ll let Judas drink some aged blood.”

“We’d be thrilled to rip the old goat apart.” Phin volunteered.

“It invites the Ministry, far sooner than we are ready to repel them. Hadrian must reach eleven to claim his first inheritance.” The Lich reminded them, his tone still thoughtful, as if he could see a thousand options, and was winnowing them down to the right one.

“Dumbledore!” Vernon squeaked. “He’s the reason the boy was dumped on us!”

The Lich nodded, “Yes. I am aware.” He hummed, and then sighed. “I must discuss with Judas.” He decided. “And with Jasper. But, I believe I have a solution. Prudence, if you will accompany us? Bring the rubbish.”

The Goblin chieftain took great interest in the modifications the Ancient Lich had done to the Dursleys. “Very interesting.” He declared, circling around the floating bodies of the adult Dursleys. Dudley, the Lich had decided, could be potentially redeemed in time, and having some of Hadrian’s mother’s blood surviving might be beneficial down the long road. As such, the obese child had been sent off with modified memories to Manchester Grammar School, as a boarder. His summers were already planned for a series of strict disciplined summer camps. He would come out reformed, or he would become a dropout. It mattered not to the population of Little Whinging.
“How did you carve the runes on the bones without disrupting the flesh?” The Goblin asked, leaning closer to study through a spectacle. “Most fascinating.”

“Sympathetic magic.” The Lich modestly claimed. “A process remarkably misunderstood in the modern magical world. I have a paper on it, that I will share with you later. Much later. It seems the little prince is coming up the walk, you would do best not to mention what has been done to his relatives. He is…far more tender-hearted than most.”

The Chieftain grunted. “He is an exceptionally powerful sprog.”

The Lich folded hands together. “Indeed.” He agreed.

“He bears a foreign soul in his curse-scar.” The Goblin added, one hairy eyebrow arching in challenge.

“Hence my need of a ritual room.” The Lich replied mildly to the silent question.

“Ah.” The Goblin smiled then. “We shall expedite this job, then. And, if you agree, we will have our War Goblins come and do the ritual carvings in the floor for a ritual space best suited to soul and blood magics.”

The door to the Lich’s house open, and Harry bounced in, with Jasper behind him. “Why is Aunt Tunia and Uncle Vernon here?” He asked, spotting his maternal relatives, and taking a step backwards into Jasper’s protective grip.

“I’m afraid your Aunt and Uncle had a magical accident, Hadrian.”

The Lich sounded so solemn, and regretful. Jasper was terribly impressed.

“Oh. Will they be okay?”

The Lich sighed. “No. They’ve lost their souls.” He waved over towards Petunia and Vernon. “Notice the absence of expression, and vacance in their gaze?”

Jasper could smell more than just souls missing. There was the early sweet smell of rot happening too. Although, that could be just Petunia and Vernon. He tried often to avoid getting downwind of them before. Petunia liked her perfumes too much, and Vernon stunk of old sweat more times than not. Maybe this was just them clean.

“Oh. What about Dudley?” Harry’s voice had gone quiet.

“Dudley has been sent off to his paternal aunt.” The Lich lied.

“And me?”

The Lich hummed as if thinking. “Well, perhaps Ally and Jasper would be willing to make their guest room yours permanently?”

Jasper blinked. “What about the wards?”

“They’re fine.” The Lich said.

“We extended them to function with Potter living at your house.” Chief Ragnok chimed in. “In exchange for doing so, the Goblin Nation would like to open a branch in Knockturn II.”

“Little Whinging.” The Lich and Jasper corrected in a single voice. Harry snickered, even as he
cast a sad eye at his Aunt’s wavering body.


The Lich huffed, tossing a stinging hex at Jasper. “Shut up. And stop tempting fate, wolf.”
Knockturn II - The Economic Cost of Dark Creatures

Chapter Summary

Well. No, frankly.” Nott scratched his chin. “I can’t say I’ve heard anything bad at all, other than they are tiffed off with the Ministry and Dumbledore for sticking his long whiskered beard into things he ought not. I mean, unless you try to remove Potter from the neighborhood, it’s very ah.. darkly zen. Some of my mates and I theorize it’s to do with Potter. They’re all so focused on the boy, you see, that there’s no time for infighting. The wolves and hags can watch the Potter kid during the day, but the vampires take up night duty. And Merlin help the sod that makes Potter bleed a drop. They bought out two potioners for all blood replenishers and healing pastes, one day. Because the kid fell off something called a bi-cycle? The lich has Potter’s relatives trussed up in runes. Overall, they are all very focused on the boy, and terribly protective.” Nott paused, thoughtfully. “You know, I suppose the Dementors moved in shortly after Potter went shopping for school supplies in Knockturn, just before his first year.” - Titus Nott, No Competition Pt 1

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Woohoo!” Harry screamed joyously, his feet pressing hard on the pedals, and and hands tightening on the handlebar as his new bike sailed through the air after a small ramp jump. He braced his knees, lifted his arse off the seat, and grinned wildly at the ‘bump’ as the wheels hit terra firma. Immediately, two thin but tanned legs pumped feverishly, as he made his way along the trail, preparing for the approaching uphill portion.

He loved his bike. It was like flying, in some ways, though Harry strongly suspected FLYING would be better, and he couldn’t wait to find out if that was true. Unfortunately, Ally wasn’t having any of that in such a small area as Privet Drive, though. She was all for magic, but wasn’t ready to see her pseudo-son darting in the sky on nothing more than a stick with twigs.

Mercifully, Mud had promised to take Harry to the dragon reserve in Romania as a reward for passing his academics, and Harry was confident a bit of broom flying would happen. Mud was convinced his recently discovered parseltongue skills would transfer to speaking with dragons. Another thing Harry couldn’t wait to experiencing. Dragons!

But, his new bike was made of awesome, and he wouldn’t putting it aside just for a broom. It had amazing suspension, the best breaks, and was painted to look like flames. Best of all, it was HIS. There was a lot of things in the world now, truthfully, that he could claim ownership to, and it still, as it did the first time he became aware of it, amazed him. He had his own room, his own bed, his own clothes that fit him, his own books, his own toys, his own seat in the kitchen, his own chores shared with Ally and Jasper. He had his own cauldron at Pru’s house. He had his own etching set for runic studies. And he had his own bike.
Life, he figured, couldn’t get much better than it was now. He didn’t even mind that he no longer saw his Aunt and Uncle – okay, truthfully, he LOVED that he didn’t see them. They were little better than zombies now, after the ‘magical accident’ they had theoretically experienced.

Harry crouched low, and pedaled harder as he reached the crest of the hill. He panted a little, but it was rewarded instantly when he plateaued at the top.

It kinda sucked that everyone – everyone adult, that was – thought he was too stupid to realize the truth. The magical accident his Aunt Petunia and Uncle Vernon had experienced hadn’t been any sort of accident at all, and he knew that to the core of his soul. Maybe the Lich thought he wasn’t that far along in his magical studies, but… that was a puzzle to Harry on it’s own, seeing as Mud was one of his primary magical tutors. He could feel magic, sense magic, SEE magic. How did the Lich think he couldn’t see the chains of runes that were somewhat similar to the runes on the Lich’s body, chains enslaving the Dursley’s bodies, but leaving the minds trapped and gibbering inside their heads. For all intents and purposes, Petunia and Vernon were transformed into zombified puppets. Yes, their souls were indeed missing, but not dead or destroyed. Their minds would not have survived had their souls been destroyed.

What stayed his tongue on the subject was just how SATISFIED he felt at it all. He’d had pieces of happiness before the Dursley’s zombification, nice big chunks of happiness, actually, with all the time he spent with Ally and Jasper. It just got better and better since encountering wolfie-Jasper at age 4. Shortly after, Ally had taken up the role of a vengeful mother figure; then came weekend tea with Pru, who told him stories about his paternal family -- albeit his paternal family nearly two hundred years ago. (Pru was convinced he was named after her father, which only endeared Harry more to her.)

Shortly after all that came the rest of the wolves, Judas, and the vampires. And Mud… Mud was awesome. He was so smart, had such a devious sense of humor, and was so patient teaching Harry things about magic.

And of all things, Harry LOVED magic. It was that warmth deep within him, the comfort on cold nights, the soothing coolness on his skin during warm nights. Magic was limitless, and it whispered to him at times.

So, yes, he didn’t regret the Dursley’s zombification, because amazingly, since then, his life had become nearly perfect. Now he LIVED with Ally and Jasper, and he was constantly surrounded by support and love. The only thing that could have made it utterly perfect, would be if he could have Ally and Jasper as his Mum and Dad.

He was good with almost perfect, though, because he really didn't want to be ungrateful for everything they did for him. But, a kid could dream, couldn't he?

The plateau ended in the trail ahead, a sudden drop looming which sent butterflies of thrill through Harry’s tummy. It was like a free-fall… he pedalled just a bit harder.

The scream of hooting joy tore from him as he rolled down the hill, at incredible speed; it echoed in the small valley hiking trail that existed in Little Whinging.

Of course, Murphy, being both Irish and deviously cruel, decided that his peals of joy and the thrill of the ride the lad enjoyed should be opposed by a challenge. As such, a young male adult Gryphon, elected to land right in Harry’s path at the WORST possible moment to investigate the strange sounds.

“Nooo!” Harry’s eyes shot wide, he tried to find a space around the Gryphon, jerking the steering
hard to the right, and partially succeeding, but the terrain wasn’t the same as the asphalt, and there was a slight gully hidden by the deeper grass that he wasn’t prepared for. His front wheel hit gully, and the bike flew up in the air throwing Harry off the bicycle. He went flying arse over teakettle a good six feet. After a good couple rolls, Harry ended up flat on his back, groaning. He took a long moment staring at the sun wondering what he had done wrong to earn karmas revenge. His poor bike. His poorer tailbone. Oh, boy, Ally was going to really flip.

Sighing, Harry flipped over to his stomach and surveyed the damage. The bike was somewhat crumpled. The front wheel mangled and the steering column bent completely out of alignment. Six days in his possession, now ruined. His gaze swept past the wreckage and his eyes fell upon the gryphon. From his magical studies you had long since learned about magical creatures. The gryphon was one of the few creatures not native to earth. Rather it had been a construction of wizards. This one appeared to be adult with the mature head and wings of a powerful eagle and the strong body of a lion. It was breathtaking. Oh, and very feral.

The large magical creature took a few steps towards the bike, eyes darting between him and the mangled mess. Gryphons could be fierce predators when defending their territory, mate or nest, but overall, avoided wizards and witches as a rule of thumb. This one had to be fairly young, still. It was curious, more than defensive, and as long as Harry remained a non-threat, it would move to satisfy its curiosity.

Slowly, Harry crawled to his knees, and then pushed upright. He stood to his feet, and took a couple of steps back, not wanting to antagonize a magical creature with talons, a hooked beak, and a powerful hindquarter. Being ripped to shreds was not one of Harry’s life goals.

Mentally, he ran through what he could do to extricate himself and his bike from this situation. Options included: climbing a tree – redundant, since gryphons could fly. He could try hobbling the other way through trees and back towards the residential streets – it wasn’t that far way, the bike train ran mostly around the residential area, but connected into three of the town’s parks, but would the Gryphon pursue? Or, he could just stay still, and use magic if necessary.

Given the Gryphon hadn’t taken any hostile action, and his right leg was throbbing, and torn up a bit – he’d obviously rolled onto a stone or something sharp, since his pants were torn too, he opted for staying still. With that in mind, he gave up on this standing thing, and sank down to sit on the ground, keeping a watchful eye on the feathered danger.

It poked with its beak at the bike, and the metal quite obviously had no reaction. This emboldened the creature enough to walk in a semi-circle around the wreckage, poking at the bike periodically; the curiosity of the gryphon quite wild. It made Harry laugh silently, from where he sat, aching and very watchful.

Satisfied the bike was inert and really, not worth of its interest, the Gryphon changed its attention to Harry. Eagles, Harry knew from his studies, didn’t have much in the way of sense of smell, poorly developed olfactory glands and their heightened sense of sight gave validation to that. They wouldn’t need to pinpoint a fish at two thousand metres visually, if they could smell prey. So, it wasn’t his scent the bird was noticing. It would the way the breeze moved his hair, the respiration of his chest.

Damn it. He should have hobbled away after all.

Discreetly, Harry dropped his right hand beside him, and let his index finger dig into the dirt, hastily scratching a rune (without seeing it). He let his left hand do the same. And then, slowly leaning forward, he did a third rune. He’d have to leave his back somewhat undefended, not wanting to take his eyes off of the slowly approaching creature. “Unus , duo, tres incipere!” He
pushed his magic out, forcing it into the runes. They lit up instantly, and a field of magic formed a rather shoddy, but fundamentally strong enough to resist a push, ward.

The gryphon sank flat on its haunches, giving out a strange series of chirps, strange for gentle a sound in such a massive predator. It wasn’t an angry, or hostile sound, rather the chirps seemed curious and puzzled, and surprised. It slunk forward, belly on ground, beak tentatively poking at the ward. It chirped again, backing off and just waiting.

Gamely, Harry took a chance. “Uh, hi?”

The Gryphon gave a trill, bobbing its head.

“Uh… you aren’t going to eat me, are you?”

To Harry’s utter astonishment, the gryphon shook his head in the negative. This was blowing Harry’s wee mind – he couldn’t wait to tell Jasper – Jasper would plutz! For years now, the only sort of creatures that popped up in Little Whinging had been traditional dark creatures. But, a gryphon wasn’t so easily classed. It was like… dragons. Or, despite what most wizards thought, unicorns. So! Very! Cool!

“I’m Harry.” He continued, as if this was an everyday occurrence and he wasn’t about ready to go racing into town and shrieking his geeky joy about having met and conversed with a gryphon. “I’m so pleased to meet you! Seriously, very pleased. I mean, I’ve read about gryphons, in school, you see; I never thought I’d ever get the honor of meeting one!”

The gryphon gave a funny snort of sorts.

“Umm… would you like to come home and meet my family?”

And so, the first ‘beast’ not of humanoid sentience to come to Little Whinging was, contrary to Jasper’s expectations NOT a dragon.

 Ally Lockwood was in the midst of the spring and summer Argos catalogue, hunting for the perfect birthday gifts for Harry when the lad in question stumbled through the front door, caked in dirt, jeans torn to shred, bruised and very bloody. Her first thought was that new jeans were definitely a must for his birthday list. Her second was that he was bleeding out on her carpets. Thus, with that pairing of thoughts, Ally was inherently proud of herself for not screaming. She was a nurse. Wounded patients were her bailiwick. And she hated that carpet, anyways. She could handle this. He was limping but still breathing and capable of speech, which meant, he’d live.

It was the gigantic gryphon sitting on her front lawn that made her shriek and fall upon her arse. “That. That’s. Harry – no! Absolutely not! No pets! We’ve discussed this, Harry, we can’t bring another pet into the house. We already have Jasper!” She reminded him, finger pointing. “And for the record, that is not some cute, tiny doe-eyed puppy!”

“He’s just visiting.” Her foster-child said cheerily. “I ran into him when I was out riding.” He paused, his expression falling into dismal tragedy. “Uh, almost literally. The bike didn’t survive the experience.” He told her with big sad green eyes, and the look of a downtrodden wet pup. The big old scrape on his cheek added some authenticity to the look.

“I’m sure we bought it under warranty.” She muttered absently, staring at the eagle-headed gryphon that was poking at the roses in her garden. Not harming them, but definitely sticking his nose -- err—beak into them. Frankly, if he wanted to rip out the dogwood, she’d be fine with that.
She hated that damn bush – a gift from her great-aunt when she and Jasper had gotten married. What was wrong with giving a big old gaudy silver teapot, dammit? At least that she could have pawned.

“Gryphons are carnivores.” Her foster-son – and Good Merlin, but did she love thinking of that term. HER foster-son. If she had her druthers, he’d be her son – but Mud said they had to wait another year before they could push that through. Harry had to reach the first stage of his claim to his family estate at eleven, and then, if he was adopted, there was nothing the wizard world could do, because his status of heir to House Potter would protect his right to choose his own family.

“Uh-Huh.” Ally tilted her head thoughtfully. The gryphon had amazing colors. Truly beautiful pairings of color in his feathers -- gold, brown and faint hints of blue. What an amazing look it would make in a coat – not the gryphon’s pelt, but the colors. Or a silk scarf. She nearly swooned at the thought.

“We have those spicy pork sausage you dislike so much.” Harry suggested.

The sausage that Jasper loved, Ally thought with a smirk. It was a splendid good idea, to be honest. Kill two birds with one stone – not that she was trying to kill the gryphon, because she wasn’t. She was of a mind to make friends. And if it liked the sausage, well, there was no accounting for poor taste in birds, now was there? Sometimes, it was like the universe had created Harry and put him in her life just for moments like this. She turned to the lad, wincing at the bruising coming up on his face. “You are so right, luv.” She praised him. “Go scrub up as much you can, and put on a pair of shorts and a clean shirt – I’ll get the ointment and bandages and patch you up after you introduce me to your feathered friend.” She paused, weather eye casting on the gryphon. “It is a him, isn’t it?”

Harry huffed, folding arms over his chest and looking a tad indignant at the question. “Unlike a puppy, I can’t just lift a gryphon up and have a look.” He’d been on about a puppy for months now, and it was a subject Ally wasn’t going to back down on. Puppies SHED. Besides, having a puppy dominate Jasper would just be the utter end of her poor husband. And it would happen. As sure as muddy paws.

Ally hummed under her breath, eyebrow arching higher as she studied the gryphon, dismally disappointed to see that the dogwood was still intact. Maybe she ought to start pouring motor oil on it.

“I’ll ask.” Harry sighed, reckoning rightly that a quiet unresponsive Auntie Ally was an Auntie Ally scheming up ways to get the answer to her questions on her own. It was his duty, in Jasper’s absence, to try and keep Auntie Ally out of trouble. Harry frankly thought Jasper expected too much from him.

“Get changed first.” Ally decided, heading towards the kitchen where lived both the damnable sausage that Jasper insisted in throwing into their grocery cart, and her first aid kit. She heard Harry scamper up the stairs, even as she pulled open the refrigerator door and liberated the sausage package already open, and then the freezer to grab the frozen packages, as well as two freezer packs for Harry’s face. She tossed the sausage – frozen and defrosted both, into an aluminum lasagna pan, and then juggling that along with her small bag of bandages, ointments, and other paraphernalia for mending up ragged werewolves and little boys, she met Harry on the front porch.

“This is my foster-mum, Auntie Ally. She’s awesome.” Harry was telling the gryphon. “Seriously, super-awesome I couldn’t ask for a better Mum if I tried.”

Aww, the sweet little ragamuffin – she’d have to see about getting him that trampoline he wanted.
He’d just have to get used to jumping on it wrapped up in cotton.

“Ally thought you might like these sausages. If you don’t, let us know – politely – and we’ll see what else we have.” Harry continued on airily, as if he hadn’t crowned her with the “Mum of the Year” tiara. He was such a good, good lad.

“Auntie Ally,” he turned to her, “Come meet my friend. He’s a gryphon…” Harry turned around, “Err, no offence – are you a boy gryphon?”

The gryphon snorted, but nodded.

“Okay, good… I honestly didn’t know. I mean, I suck at telling the gender of snakes too, and kittens. Really bad there.” Harry confided. “So, Auntie – sausage?”

Ally blinked, having been far too memorized by the way the gryphon was non verbally interacting with her foster-son. “Oh.” She stammered. “Yes! Ah, here.” She stepped down, amazed the creature wasn’t attacking her – really, this was too surreal. She set the pan of sausage down with great care, pushing it towards the gryphon with one foot. The head dipped, snagged the pan and pulled it the rest of the way, before dipping in to grab a sausage; it swallowed whole.

“So?” Harry asked.

A soft chirp came by way of reply.

“Oh then!” Harry grinned. “Auntie Ally wants to patch me up, so you eat up, and then… maybe I could show you around? We have some really cool vampires and werewolves here – oh, and my great-aunt Prudence – she’s a hag! And the Lich. He’s the retired headmaster of Scholomance and he’s BRILLIANT!” Harry enthused, stepping backwards until he hit the steps that led to the porch. He sank down onto his bum with a wince.

Ally shook her head, bemused. Only Harry. She turned, but this time towards the driveway, and spotted the ruins of the bike. “Good gravy!” She forced her gaze from the mangled wreck, and onto the boy who had been riding it. “Did you hit your head?” She asked, suddenly anxious. The only way the front wheel and handlebars could look so crumpled is if Harry went flying head over handlebars…. Dear sweet Merlin! Maybe she should take him to the hospital for an x ray.

“Nope. I ducked and rolled like Phin has been teaching me.” He said, speaking of his hand-to-hand combat lessons with Phineas.

“Are you certain?” She dropped her medical case, and began gently palpitating limbs, noting wincing, but never hearing him breathe in sharply or cry out in pain. “You’re never riding a bike again unless wearing a helmet.” She swore quietly, finding a scrape on his ear of all places. That wasn’t to say he wasn’t scrapped up elsewhere. His knee was a swollen mess of bruises and scrapes. His left shin looked like he had dragged it over asphalt for a mile or two. He hadn’t cracked his collarbone, from what she could tell, but his back was already starting to bruise. What a splendid mess. He wasn’t going to be fit for walking, much less running come the morning.

“Oh, Fiery Hell – that’s a gryphon!” Judas the Damned suddenly shouted.

“We know.” Harry called out. “He followed me home.”

Judas stepped around the creature, giving it a hugely wide berth by using the Lich’s lawn, and came over to the steps, eyes firmly on the large gryphon that was lying sphinx-like on the lawn, with an empty aluminum pan between its front limbs. “Dear sweet hellfire, kid – couldn’t you find a kitten instead to bring ho…” He was just about to finish his statement, when Judas turned to look
at Harry. Ally, who was dabbing ointment on his left shin, was paying the vampire no mind at all, just muttering about helmets, knee pads, elbow pads, and hockey protective equipment as she did so. “What the hell happened to you?” The vampire was sitting on the step beside Harry, sniffing around. “You didn’t try fighting that critter, did you?”

Ally snorted. “No. He wrote off his bike making friends with the gryphon, instead.”

“You're a mess, Hadrian! An utter bloody mess….” Judas shook his head. “Leave off with your muggle ointments, Allison. I’ll send the minions out for bruise balm and the like, before our little Dark Lord bleeds out. It’ll heal him up in a jiff.” He pulled a mirror out of a pocket, a ridiculously oversized mirror better suited for a theatre production of Snow White than a vampire’s pockets, but with a few short words, he had his second, Phineus audibly on the screen -- seeing as vampires couldn’t see each other via mirror-- and was issuing instructions.

Ally sank back to sit on her ankles. “Oh, thank goodness… I’ve been meaning to make some balm up, but it stinks up the house something dreadful.”

The vampire smiled, his fangs on full glorious display. “No worries, poppet. That’s why I have minions, lots and lots of minions. Do feel free to order them around when you need anything.”

(It should be noted, that the ninety-three or so vampires running around Little Whinging developed an incredible shiver down their immortal spines at precisely that moment, and had no idea why. It was thought by some to be an effect of that blood keg of the night before… Lucas had sworn it tasted off anyway… and brushed off as unimportant. Other far older vampires knew it to be a premonition of great evil.)

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Lindham’s Apothecary, established in 1812, was a grand old store in Diagon Alley. Well respected, with buffed wooden floors, good air filtration, and skilled potioners providing their wares which were displayed on custom temperature controlled shelving, they did brisk business and had been in the black, on their books that is, for the past one hundred and seventy-six years. Brandon Lindham had grown up in the store, with his Da and Grandad teaching him everything about the business ever since he started toddling. He was a steady man, sole owner since his Da’s passing, in his mid-forties, and not one given to panic.

Of course, there was panic and then there was, “Merlin save me!” hysteria.

Today was a definite day for hysterics. “I… they came in a swarm.” He told the young dark skinned auror. “A swarm! There must have been thirty vampires in my store, just appearing out of nothing – they cleaned me out of bruise balm, and then came another batch purchasing all of my blood replenishing potions, and then more grabbing the ingredients to make both. I know it was vampires – they had red eyes and fangs – but I think they were foreign. Their skins were tanned, you see.”

Kingsley Shacklebolt hadn’t been an Auror for much more than two years, but even he was somewhat jaded by babbling witnesses. “In total, how many vampires were in your shop today?” He asked calmly.

Brandon ran two shaky hands through his thinning hair. “I… ninety? And then there were the werewolves. I think they were wolves. The vampires seemed friendly with them, or at least, a friendly rivalry.”

That would be the day. Wolves and Vampires were known to be long-standing enemies.
“I heard one of them ask if the entire pack was in the Alley, and the reply was obviously not. That they couldn’t all come, the Alley wasn’t big enough for them all. The Alpha only permitted sixty of them to come to Hogsmeade and Diagon for the potions.” Brandon visibly shook. “Can you imagine? That’s only a portion of a werewolf pack? SIXTY is a portion of a pack?”

“They didn’t harm you?” Kingsley made the statement a question.

“No. No. But… my stock is… depleted.” Brandon looked around his glaringly empty apothecary. When he’d sold out of bruise balm, and blood replenishing potions, they had bought the ingredients, and then the tools, and then the other potions. One vampire had bought the eye-repair potion – which BOGLED Brandon’s mind. Vampire had perfect vision!

“But they paid, didn’t they?” The auror sought clarification.

“Oh yes.” Brandon nodded, gaze absent. “Full price even.”

“Then there are no problems here.” Kingsley concluded. “No one was hurt, no one was robbed, no damage was done.”

Brandon looked around in empty askance at his empty shelves. It was the swarming of so many dark creatures that had undone him, Kingsley understood. If they had any hostile attempt, Lindham wouldn’t have had a chance. Patting the troubled wizard on the shoulder, Kingsley closed his notepad, and left the shop.

Mad-Eye was standing near the center of Diagon Alley, Aurors approaching him to give a quick verbal report before heading out to the next retailer. Kingsley joined the queue. It was the same story, over and over again, approximately ninety vampires, and some sixty or so werewolves, all of them descending within the same thirty minutes and proceeding to clean out the apothecaries, herbalists, and potioners of Diagon Alley. Further, from what Kingsley heard Mad-Eye report, Hogmead and Kirkcaldy was also hit hard.

What the hell was going on?

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They closed the site early, not something Jasper worried about at all, given they were about four weeks ahead. Werewolves made awesome construction workers. They were brawny, and quick, and hungry for work after decades of struggling. Many of them were skilled enough wizards to use their magic to make things a bit easier. A little feather-light on beams, a bit of levitation on parts… and it made the job go a lot faster.

The wards the Lich had taught him for the site made a big difference too. No risk of break in or vandalism with the wards up. It didn’t hide the construction job, but it gave the urge for those not connected to the ward-stone to just walk away. The drop off point for the materials coming in by lorry was of course excluded from the ward.

So, letting the boys go to scratch their itch wasn’t a problem. Rather, what sucked was that Jasper himself couldn’t leave until everyone else had. The burdens of responsibility. And he really, REALLY, wanted to go check on the pup himself! “You’re sure he’s okay?” He asked his wife again, the phone on speaker and making her voice a little bit tinny.

“He’s fine. We have bruise balm, and Pru gave him a muscle-relaxing potion.” Ally assured him. “The bike, on the other hand, is quite dead.”
“Ah, well. I’ll have one of the boys scoop it up. We’ll replace it on the sly and call it magic.” Jasper said. “I’ll be home as soon as I can. Anything I need to pick up? Ice Packs? Bandages? Chicken soup?”

“Hmm?” The distraction in Ally’s voice didn’t bring him any degree of comfort. A distracted Ally was a dangerous Ally. It invited trouble into their world. And really, Little Whinging was troublesome enough.

“Ally, love, do I need to pick anything up?” He spaced the words out to assist in her comprehension.

“Four roasts -- large ones, would be nice.”

He blinked, spinning around to stare in askance at the phone. “What?”

“Four beef roasts.” She said primly. “Sirloin tip, if it’s all the same. Buy more if they are on sale.”

“Do we have guests? Oh, lord and lady -- tell me your Da and Grandad aren’t coming over!” He pleased. He loved his in laws, he did indeed, but he liked a bit of advance warning before they descended. Time enough to hide things like -- the Lich. The zombified Dursleys. The nearly One hundred vampires in Little Whinging. Prudence, and her visiting Auntie. (And wasn’t her Auntie enough to give him fits. He thought Judas was a nightmare -- Baba Yaga made Judas look like a Saint.)

What disturbed Jasper was how GOOD he had gotten at hiding the evidence of dark creatures. The phone tree of Anton’s was a blessing. One call to the tree, and word was out.

However, phone trees only worked if everyone was home to take the call. And with a third of the pack scouring England for bruise balm and whatnot, that wasn’t going to work.

“No… well. One sorta guest. But, not really. Harry’s made a new friend.” Ally reported absently. “Just… well. Pick up the roasts, Jasper. Oh, and five lamb chops.”

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Lucius Malfoy sauntered into the Minister of Magic’s office with arrogant casualty. His long blond hair swept back, and his elegant robes pressed perfectly so that the folds fell to show off his strong shoulders, and slim build. With the slight tilt of his head, and turn of his body to best show off the robes ( a trick he learned in Milan) arrogance and elegance fought for dominance. “Cornelius, I understand there was a bit of a ruckus in Diagon today.” He said, as if the Minister reported to him.

“Oh, my, Lucius – ruckus? I’m afraid you severely understate the situation.” Fudge wringed his hands, clearly very upset. His florid face was paler than norm, and the pacing back and forth gave clear frustration and stress the Minister was under. “This is a disaster, Lucius! An utter disaster! We were invaded by dark creatures, and then I learn that we weren’t just invaded – they cleaned us out!”

Lucius eyes widened. “Minister, surely you misunderstand… I know for a fact that the volume of dark creatures in Knockturn has dropped significantly. I believe they have fled our shores, given
the light and guided goodness of our Ministry.”

Fudge shook his head. “No, no, no signs of portkey or international apparition. Worse, my revenues are down twenty-eight percent, Lucius. TWENTY-EIGHT PERCENT! That’s approximately thirty-nine millions galleons lost, because the werewolves, vampires and hags have left Knockturn. We’ve lost retail income taxes, personal income taxes, rental income… it’s a nightmare.

Lucius manfully withheld rolling his eyes. “Might I seek clarification, Minister? Which are you more upset about – the loss of tax revenue, or the deluge of dark creatures on Diagon Alley?”

Fudge looked like a fish out of water, unable to prioritize his concerns.

“Might I suggest, we locate where the dark creatures have fled. Perhaps, if they are still living on British soil we can then make a case that they have clearly failed to pay their taxes. I see penalties therein, Cornelius. Lots of penalties. Moreover, if we can identify the individuals, you could place a lien on their Gringotts accounts for the amounts owing. Consider it.” Lucius suavely advised.

Fudge chewed on his finger. “Yes.” He thought, eyes glazed with greed. “Penalties. Lots and lots of penalties.”

“IF they live on British soil.” Lucius reiterated. It was more a case of curiosity for himself. The runemaster Heinrich had closed up shop, and no one knew where he had gone, nor did anyone know where the Hag of the Shoddy Inn had moved. Her venue had served as an excellent base for some of his more clandestine meetings. Remarkably, under the hag’s iron fist, it was a safe place for a wizard to meet a dark creature and do business. Now, however, there was no safety. The Shoddy Inn lay abandoned, and the only beings trundling in and through it were not the type to agree to parlay.

“Oh, of course – but they must, mustn’t they? If they didn’t come from international portkeys or apparition…” Fudge trailed off. “I shall form an inquest!” He decided. “We shall identify where these dark creatures came from, how to contain the situation, and recover the missing tax dollars!”

Lucius smirked. How narrow minded the Minister was. If they contained the dark creatures, how would they earn income to pay taxes? In truth, it was Dumbledore’s stratagem to control those not of ‘the Light’, and all it did was weaken their economy terribly. Lucius scarcely feared. His monies were earned from international connections. The Malfoys could weather this storm.

Suffice it to say, Harry, while grateful for the care and love being shown him by… well, everyone, he was quite done in by it all. “Seriously,” he said to Mud, “They can all go home. I’m okay. My friend, the gryphon, is okay…”

“You could have broken your neck.” The ancient Lich said. “And then where would we be?”

Harry blinked. “Well,” He said slowly, “As per your theories, you’d have a young dark lord with a broken neck who should be dead, but isn’t.”

The Lich’s jaw tightened. It might have been a grimace, but without facial musculature and skin, it was very hard to tell. There were drawbacks to securing your immortality through soul jars. In dark ritual, the mortal soul was removed and frozen into a moment, while the skin and organs of the body wither and die. Something about it all didn’t appeal to Harry, and as such, Harry made
mental note not seek immortality on the grounds of he liked breathing. Like, really breathing. Respiration in all its glory.

“The theory has not been yet proved, little Prince.” The Lich said after a long pause. “And your connection to death,” His bony index finger stroked gently along Harry’s scar, “is one such theory not yet proven. On or after your eleventh birthday we can deal with that scar, and the truth will be revealed.”

“Pru says it’s a soul shard from Voldemort.” Harry scowled, he hated that thought. It made him feel dirty.

The Lich hummed. “Perhaps.” The skeletal sorcerer looked out to the full yard of werewolves and vampires; someone had shown initiative and rolled out a few kegs of beer, wine and bloodwine. The trick was not to accidentally drink the bloodwine. It was definitely an acquired taste.

The gryphon was clearly being influenced by the wild magic in the area. It had relaxed tremendously, far more than the Lich could believe possible. Surrounded by humanoids that had been known to hunt their kind, it should have panicked and flown away. Instead, it was at the heart of the party, dining down on roasts that Allison had ordered Jasper to bring home.

They would need to speak to the butcher about securing large sources of meat for the beast if it intended to stay. He slanted his glowing gaze to the nearly ten year old boy beside him. Hadrian had grown much in the past few years. He was slender, but tall for his age group. Strong in body and spirit, and very magically adept, which surprised the Lich not at all. The child was a dark lord, of course learning magic would come naturally. He was a sponge, soaking in the magic constantly, small wonder he should master it.

The results of his fall today had been the scourging of Diagon Alley, Hogsmeade, and Kirkcaldy of every potion they could land their hands on, and potion supplies, as well as cauldrons, scales, stirrers, and measuring cups. They’d also kidnapped one Severus Snape, a young potion master whose vitriol that had caught the attention and interest of several werewolves. His language and poor manners, however had caused Snape to be trussed up, silenced, and blindfolded and left to sit on the Lich’s front porch. The Lich intended to merely obliviate the man and send him back to Hogsmeade. Kidnapping him had been an action of an over-eager and foolish werewolf.

Jasper was wandering around, dazed under the input of a calming draft. The man truly was easily excitable, unlike his rather pragmatic wife. Allison was a touch naive, but like the rest of the Black family, inherently ruthless.

“Do you think he’ll stay?” the little prince asked, eyes fixed on the gryphon.

“Probably.” The Lich grunted. “Didn’t we all?”

“Yes!” A new voice popped in. “And don’t I find it curious!” A male, with short dark hair, deep green eyes, and a wild grin seemed to step out of nothingness. He looked around, one eyebrow arching as he spotted the gryphon accepting scratches on his hindquarters from a vampire. “This is different,” He said admiringly.

“Lucifer.” The Lich sighed. “You’re supposed to give warning when you come and visit. So we can hide the livestock.”

The man, named Lucifer, airily waved his hand in dismissal. “Pish.” He said blandly. “You wouldn’t own goats if your life depended on it.”
Harry leaned forward in interest. “Are you the devil Lucifer? The fallen angel?” He asked with a hint of excitement in his voice.

The fallen angel in question straightened his shoulders and puffed up his chest. “I am.” He gifted Harry with a movie-star smile, the one of a snake-oil salesman. “And you are?”

“Harry Potter.”

“Hadrian James Peverell.” The Lich corrected abruptly. “We’ve had this conversation, lad. You can’t go around being called the Dark Lord Harry. It’s tacky. Dark Lord Hadrian sounds…”

“Manly.” Lucifer nodded. “I agree. It’s a name with power, energy. It can inspire terror. So.” He studied Harry with a little more interest. “You’re the little dark lord.” He shifted, eyes scanning every inch of Harry. “Awfully pure soul in that one for a dark lord.”

“Taste his magic.” The Lich suggested in a tone that gave clear indication that if he had traditional human eyes, he’d be rolling them. And then look at the magic around the town.

The devil gave a sniff in Harry’s general direction, eyes narrowing, and glowing, as he spun around and did a semi-circle. “Is that Judas?” He asked suddenly. “Doing jello-shots?” He huffed, spinning around. “Why wasn’t I invited? I LOVE jello-shots!”

“We didn’t know you’d slipped your cage.” The shrug was a bit hollow, lacking muscle tone to give it pronunciation, but the Lich managed all the same.

“Bah.” Lucifer sniffed in disgust. “Like Dad’s old cage was anything to hold me in. I skip out of it regularly, and you know that. Who do you think has been minding Scholomance since you’re sudden retirement -- which I so did not approve!”

The Lich shrugged again to convey his indifference.

“So. A mini-me. A little dark lord. You must tell the Lich to do something about that nasty soul shard in your scar. It stinks something wretched, and frankly, I think I should have dominion over all souls. I am the devil after all. But, aside from that…” The devil moved quickly, coming up to Harry’s other side and dropping down to sit. “Tell me, how do you feel about world domination?”

Harry blinked, but was saved by Judas from answering.

“LUCKY! Darling! You’re here!” The vampire crowded into their little group, shoving a jello-shot into the fallen angel’s hand. “What a beautiful surprise!

“I wasn’t invited.” Lucifer muttered sulkily, but still taking the shot, and pulling it close to his body for protection.

“You never are, darling.” Judas assured him with wide eyes and a vapid grin, “No one invites the devil to their party. It’s just assumed he’ll show. Half the deadly sins happen at parties, Lucky. Parties are practically your bailiwick!”

Lucifer considered that, and brightened. “Yeah!” He threw back the shot, and shuddered.

“Mixed with fire-whisky for a bit extra kick.” Judas was telling the Lich. “It’ll put hair back on his chest, for sure!”

“Can I have one?” Harry asked.
Two adult voices, the Lich and Judas, immediately said, “No.” The devil, being the devil, of course said, “Sure!”

“Two to one. Motion denied.” Lich summarized in case the little prince wanted to capitalize on rank, rather than volume. Harry was crafty like that.

“Oh.” The lower lip pouted out, and slump was a trifle overdone.

It was of course, to this picture of miserable dejection that Jasper had the ill-fortune of appearing. “Hey, you okay, pup? Need more pain-relief potion? We’ve got plenty, now.” The sandy-haired giant crouched in front of the boy, and gave the pout a good look. “Hey, no sad eyes! Don’t worry about the bike.” He assumed that was the cause of pouting.

“I’m sorry for breaking it.” Harry mumbled. “I really liked it.”

The Lich, beside the boy, snickered at the child’s quick shift to opportunism, but waved off Jasper’s inquiring glance. He would not betray the little dark lord. Besides, snitching was Judas’ wheelhouse.

“Accidents happen. Usually with cars, not gryphons, but I think we should be glad it wasn’t a car.” Jasper ruffled Harry’s messy head. “Look, Ally’s got Phin manning the barbecue. Do you want a hot dog or a hamburger?”

“Hamburger.” The lad decided after a moment. He paused, head cocking to the side as he considered the situation. “Uhh, should I help Phin?”

Jasper shrugged. “Only if you don’t want charred meat.”

The pint-sized dark lord jumped up to his feet, and ran off. Jasper took the moment to glance at Judas, frowning darkly, and then spotted the newcomer. “Oh, hey -- I don’t think we’ve met.” He rose to his feet with slow easy grace.

“We haven’t.” Lucifer smiled slowly. “But, would you be Jasper? Judas has been telling me ALL about you.” He drew out the word all dramatically.

The half-smile on Jasper’s face fell immediately. “Uh. None of it is true.”

Lucifer cocked his head to the side, “Oh, I don’t know. I’m Lucifer -- the devil, yes. Judas said you were hot, and had a fabulous ass. And you, Jasper Lockwood do indeed have a spectacular arse. Seriously spectacular! MmmMmmMm! I’d like to tap that! Tell me, how do you feel about a ménage-a-la-devil?”

Chapter End Notes

I'm thrilled people are enjoying this story. It's fun to write. But, keep in mind, this is a hobby, not a job. And my job can have times to be taxing. And then there's my family, and my home which I have to maintain, plus meals to feed said family. I have a plot outline, and know where this story is going.
Dragons as pets. Not exactly recommended.

Chapter Summary

And lo’ there were dragons. And goblins. But mostly, dragons.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The La Om Basin Reserve in Romania was just as it was named, a dragon reserve located in the basins of the Piatra Craiului Mountains. It was a beautiful broad green valley, and heavily warded to keep away any muggle hikers, or foolhardy skiers that tended to wander through the Carpathian Mountains. Occasionally, one slipped past the wards – but the dragon-handlers in La Om were quite adept at finding these folks -- since inevitably they ran into a dragon and would start screaming their fool heads off -- and dragon-handlers were all trained to obviate any memories of the dragons in these screaming fools. All burns earned were converted to memories of a very good time with the game Twister done inebriated, and with poor coordination on a particularly ugly orange bit of carpet.

Natural thermal spas were located in the middle of the reserve, and were very well enjoyed by the dragon handlers and, in truth, the dragons themselves. The trick to it was that dragon handlers had to get the hell out of the thermal spas when a dragon was in-coming – no one was quite sure what would kill you first– having a dragon’s full weight bear down on your body, or drowning, trapped at the bottom of the waters with a dragon on top of you. Sadly, none of the handlers had a scientific bone in their body, or a wish to find the answer to that mystery.

The mountains, rising high around the basin served the reserve by providing a wall, and offering up deep caves. Several species of dragons made their homes in those caverns, and though many a dragon-handler itched to go explore, none of them were foolhardy enough to do so.

For wizards that made it their duty to tend to and protect the dragons, they dwelled in wooden huts that were heavily fortified with runic protections against fire and pests. Those shacks spread to create a small circular village at the foot of Mount Lo Om, a bit away from the reserve, but near enough that a truly pissed off dragon could attack without too much trouble. The peace between dragons and handlers was, at best, fragile. Handlers served the dragons, and the dragons considered not eating them.

Given all that, and the proclivities of dragons in general, visitors to the La Om Basin Reserve were rare. As in, almost non-existent. Other dragon handlers, ministry officials, and the odd student from Scholomance, but overall… a dragon reserve was not a tourist attraction. Which was good. They certainly didn’t have a hotel or a restaurant to offer. Though, they did have a heavily stocked bar.

And, of course, tourists who hopped on a broom and flew right up to the most temperamental of the dragons and started hissing at them were… uh, well, this had never happened before. And none of the handlers knew quite what to do, other than stare and gape.

“They’ll eat him.” Ally feared, wringing her hands as she watched Harry flit around the face of a particularly fierce Norwegian Ridgeback. “Oh, this is a bad, bad idea.” She spun, the magazines
that spoke of the reserve rolled in her hand, and using it to slap the Lich hard with it. “This is YOUR fault. What was wrong with taking him to Disney or some such?”

The Lich had accompanied them, but done so clad in an elaborate glamour. To any mortal eyes he appeared an oriental, with long dark glossy hair tied back with simple black leather tie. and a strong, unusually taller-than-was-normal frame, just sighed. “Hadrian wanted to see dragons and to fly. Look at him, Allison, he’s fine. The dragons are not being aggressive.”

Jasper frankly didn’t think directing his wife to watch Harry flit about on a broom, acting like an appetizer for these dragons, was what she needed to hear. “Here love,” He pressed a vial into her hand.

Ally stared at the cloudy potion, and then narrowed her eyes at her husband. “What is this?”

“Calming draught.” Jasper shoved his hands into his pockets, and rocked on his feet, eyes straying to watch Harry who seemed to be in a semi-serious conversation with the big black-scaled dragon. A second dragon, looking much like the first, but scarred flew over to join in. Merlin, Ally was right. This was a bad idea. Such a very bad idea. Where they hell were they going to stash dragons in Little Whinging? “Seriously, Love. You need to take it before you give me an ulcer.”

Ally huffed, popped the vial and slugged it back, offering a grimace and a glare at Jasper. She tossed the vial back to her husband, and then turned and swatted the Lich again, for good measure. “If he dies,” She warned ominously, “I will utterly ruin you. I shatter your skeleton into two hundred and six pieces, and will bury most pieces of your bony remains in scattered graves all over the world – after I feed some of the larger pieces to some very big, very hungry dogs who shall shit your remains out.” She huffed her frustration – the calming draught apparently not nearly strong enough, and turned back to stare in vexation at her foster child.

The Lich had no doubt whatsoever that Allison Dorea Black would do just that. She was everything a woman of House Black usually was…temperamental, stubborn, and utterly insane. Mercifully, Ally’s insanity manifested in the way she took dark creatures at par value. “Perhaps we should have left Ally exploring the town.” He muttered sotto voce to Jasper.

“Maybe we should have sent her on an all-inclusive, all expenses paid cruise.” Jasper replied dryly. “With me accompanying her. Just -- for love of sanity, do not try to sleep tonight. You might find yourself waking missing everything from pelvis down.”

The Lich snorted, but turned his unnatural gaze back to the young dark lord, that had taken as naturally to a broom as most birds did to wings, and was dancing in the sky above.

Around them, although, not within earshot, various dragon handlers stood about, like useless bumps on a log, staring in complete puzzlement at what they were seeing. Only the foreman for the reserve had the balls to step up to their… guests. “Err – yer boy not safe doing that. Dragon may just snap and bite ‘im in half, if he ain’t quick enough.” He wrung his hat as he stared at a woman whose grey eyes were trying to light him afire. “Jest saying.” He twitched like a nervous schoolboy having been caught pulling some girl’s pigtails.

“I KNOW.” Ally grit out, she spun and whacked the Lich, and then Jasper with her magazine. “This is a BAD idea!” she reiterated for the millionth time.

“Harry’s fine. He’s having fun. And really, I don’t think the dragons are going to… uh… eat him.” Jasper tried feebly, and then gave up. “Listen, love, would you like another calming draught or two?”
Her burning gaze swept to Jasper, and her husband to a nervous step backwards. “Right. Never mind.”

Ally spun back to the foreman. “What happens if one of the dragons snaps at him?” She asked baldly. “What can the reserve do?”

The foreman blinked, his face and forearms scarred with many burns from his years working on the reserve. “Uh, if the dragon bites? Well, he gits eaten. Not much more to it den tha’!” The look on the woman’s face had him too stepping carefully backward.

“Der boyd word nicht getten eaten. Der boyd is gut.” The Lich put on a brilliant performance of German for the foreman’s benefit. “Der boyd ist un parselmouth.”

The foreman unravelled that string of slaughtered language, and blinked. “Oh! A parselmouth? Ah, well then, doesn’t that explain it all. He’s fine.” He nodded, slapping his cap up on his head. “Likely, only problem you mighten git is keepin’ dem damn dragons off of him. Parselmouths are like catnip to ’em. They’ll want to cuddle up and keep him.”

Ally utterly snapped at that, nearly screamed in rage. “This.” She grit out between clenched teeth. “IS. A. WRETCHEDLY. BAD. IDEA!”

“Hadrian ist gut.” The Lich stared at her hard.

“THIS ISN’T ABOUT HARRY!” Ally raved. “AND STOP with the FREAKIN German! You look Asian, you useless bag of bones, and your accent is utter rubbish. Speak one of those tongue-twisting Asian tongues, if you have to babble in anything but ruddy English! At least then I won’t have to hear your deplorable plebian accent!”

And really, it had been said before, but it was due saying again, there was nothing as cruel as a woman from the House of Black. But, Ally wasn’t anywhere near done.

“And what do you think will happen, MUD?” Her arms were flying all over the place, and it was at times like these the men in her life took great pains to sincerely thank the powers-that-be that Allison Lockwood was NOT in any way, shape or form, a witch. God knew, she’d make Voldemort look like a mischievous puppy.

The foreman, well experienced in caring for dragons, knew when danger was around him. And, as a foreman with decades of experience in surviving dragons and their rather shifting temperament, he did what a wise dragon-keeper did in the face of such rage -- he fled. Jasper frankly envied him. Clearly, that calming draught hadn’t had enough punch. Either that, or she was developing a tolerance. He shuddered at the mere horrible notion.

“I think, Allison,” The Lich said congenially. “That you demonstrate a terribly prejudiced attitude against Asians. It’s deplorable, I must say. I’m utterly shattered. I frankly feel that the societal achievements of the Asian world and the evolved culture is incredible, and worthy of respect. Furthermore, I speak German flawlessly, and my accent was of high culture in the society of 1325, I’ll have you know. Only my Romanian is better, but it is my preference that people in Romania have no idea where I’m from. The former headmaster of Scholomance is a well known legend, and I do hate pitchforks and torches. Besides, look up there-- Hadrian is having a wonderful and educational time learning about the social strata of dragons.”

“His name is HARRY.” Ally growled. “And I don’t care if he’s chatting up dragons. They are significantly bigger than him… he’s like a piece of shrimp being served as a flying appetizer. We
don’t want Harry fried to a crisp, do we?”

“Oooh.” Lucifer’s voice suddenly popped into the conversation, as did the devil himself. Stepping out from pure nothingness, he leaned forward to stand somewhere between Ally and the Lich, completely unconcerned about their little disagreement. “I love roasting people! The smell, the screams… it’s the bestest kind of fun. For me, at least. And the demons. Not so much the people being roasted. Ooh, and look …dragons – do you know how awesome dragons are? Like, seriously, they have such a fascinating outlook on what it means to burn something up.”

“Go to hell.” Ally spat.

“Soon, darling. Very soon!” The devil sing-songed, checking his pocket watch. “I figure, I have eighteen minutes and forty-one seconds before dear ol’ Dad figures out I’ve slipped my cage again. Being grounded for eternity really sucks” He tucked away the watch, looked around brightly, and grinned. “So. How’s the tour going? I can see our little dark lord is having a gay old time of it with the dragons. Did he like the broom? I had it very custom made for him. Deceased broom-maker. Ruddy genius at brooms, but a bit of a pedophile, which is how I got him. Oh, but don’t worry, he only preyed on little girls.”

Ally turned sharply on her heel, and shifted her ire towards Lucifer, stared with utter and absolute disapproval at the devil.

The Lich took great comfort in having that look casted anywhere but at him, and quite enjoyed watching Lucifer squirm under that hard glare. Pain was best when it was shared, he mused absently.

“You know.” Lucifer said slowly, taking a few broad steps backwards, and then circling around to hide behind Jasper. “I do think I should toddle off and see the world a bit. After all, I wouldn’t want to make it too easy for Daddio to find me.” He vanished in a puff of brimstone.

Jasper yelped, and spun around. “He pinched my butt!” He said in outrage.

The Lich closed his eyes, and sighed. “I’m utterly certain he was dropped on his head when the host was created.” He muttered. “His Father, as much as he would like to pretend otherwise, is God. And God can find his child anywhere on Earth in the blink of an instant. Moving about doesn’t help.” Shaking his head, he moved closer to the rail, still muttering. “Ten thousand years, and the devil still hasn’t learned a damn new trick.”

“He pinched my butt!” Jasper repeated, still outraged, and still rubbing his sore butt. “I don’t care if he learns that dear old Dad can stalk him anytime, anywhere – he needs to learn he can’t molest me!”

Ally snorted. “That is scarcely molestation, Jasper. Do get your priorities… oh, my God… HARRY! Don’t YOU DARE!” She shouted. The lad, in midst of a wicked dive, with two dragons diving alongside him, didn’t hear her. Her hands came up to cover her eyes, and then, when she couldn’t keep herself from peeking, she spun and buried her face into Jasper’s chest. “I can’t watch.”

“He’s fine. Pulled out of the dive.” Jasper assured her. He pulled out two of the calming draughts he had left in his pocket. “Seriously, love, take one of the draughts. You clearly need some calm. Probably by the bucketful.”

Ally shuddered. “This trip is giving me grey hairs, I know it. I’m losing decades by the minute! This was such a bad idea. Horrible idea. Wretched idea. We should have gone with Pru’s idea
and visited her Auntie in Russia.”

Now, both Jasper and the Lich stared at Ally as if she was a complete nutter. “Visit Baba Yaga?” Jasper sought clarification. “The one who tried to cook up Hanzel and Gretl? You want to take our ten year old lad to visit a hag with a notorious affection for eating children?”

“Myth.” Ally waved that off. “Hags are very misunderstood. Pru is a lovely example of such.”

“Truth.” Both Lich and Jasper replied. They gave each other a speaking look. Jasper fetched yet another calming draught from his pocket, and fisted it at the ready.

“Well, if not there… we could have taken him to…. The World Quidditch Cup.” She personally thought Harry watching OTHER idiots diving about on a broom while he sat on terra-firma to be a far better exchange.

Jasper closed his eyes, and envisioned that madness that would result from Harry watching professional daredevils on brooms. Harry, whose love of being in the air transcended everything else. Harry, watching the likes of Rutger Hammon jumping off his broom at 3000 metres up in the air just to grab the snatch, and for the life of himself, Jasper couldn’t fathom how not to anticipate everything that would fall out from THAT. Dragons showing up in Little Whinging was so the lesser evil. An expected evil, but the lesser one for certain. How could his little wife think watching the Quidditch Cup was a better idea than Harry flying with dragons? At least the dragons would be drawn to Harry as a Dark Lord, and make it their business to keep the lad from crashing into the ground.

It was official.

His wife was nuts.

“Love, have you ever been to a Quidditch Cup?” He asked carefully.

She hitched breath, as Harry did some aerial dive underneath a dragon, whooping in joy the entire time. “No.” she admitted, once again turning to hide her face in his chest. “I really can’t stand this.” She moaned. “My heart is going to give out.”

Harry, of course, chose this moment to give such a shrill “Wooohooooohooooo!”

“Gimme that.” Ally grabbed the two potion vials her husband had fisted in his hand, and slugged both down.

That made three calming draughts in twenty minutes.

Oh, dear sweet Merlin, but he really truly hoped she wasn’t actually developing a resistance to calming draughts. This batch just had to be a weak one, or a bad run, or maybe some expired ingredients. Ally resistant to calming draughts would be the end of everyone in Little Whinging. Everyone liberally dosed her with the damn shit when they offered her tea or whatnot. What they needed, okay no… what Ally needed, was a good distraction. And it might as well be a self-serving one. “So, wife, tell me – what do I have to buy you in order for you to tell Lucifer and Judas to keep their mitts and designs off of my body?”

“Nothin.” Ally slightly slurred – and it was about bloody time the ruddy draughts hit her system. “Doan need nuthin. They’re jist joshing.”

“The bruise on my arse says otherwise.” He told her wryly.
“Nah, is all good.” She told him, reaching around him to pat his arse proprietarily. “Is nice arse. Verra hot arse. I can’t fault ‘em fer wanting to touch it. Sides, sometimes, when dere drooling on you, I kin to’lly ‘imagine it all. Weally good kinky stuff. Is totally smoking hot. I’d watch.”

“All!” Jasper gasped, completely horrified.


Jasper was turning green. “Pru writes porn? About me?” He squeaked.

“Yeah! Weally dirty stuff.” Ally muttered wetly into her chest, drooling a little now. “Is so awesomely hot! Pru’s ah-mazing writer. She lets me proof-read it.”

“PROOF-READ?” He whimpered. “Whatever for?”

“Everything written needs proofread!” Ally slapped his chest. “Specially if it’s gonna be shared.” She then turned around from abusing him to gently pat Jasper's chest soothingly when he whimpered. “Pru shares her awesome smut with lots of Hags and Squibs. It’s been verra pop’lar! So that’s why it needs proofreading.” Her eyes closed for a moment as she leaned more of her weight against him. Reflexively, he wrapped an arm around her to hold her up. “Ohh, “ Ally murmured patting his chest with one sloppy hand, “And Pru’s readers all think you’re a hottie too, by the way. Finger lickin’ good.” She burrowed closer. “But, Pru knows yer all mine. I don’t share well.”

“Thank Merlin for the Black family penchant not to share!” He still had the powerful urge to puke. “Dear Sweet Merlin on a bike -- stories of me doing the nasty with Hags?” He sought clarification, just so that he understood precisely what his nightmares would contain to traumatize his nights from here on out.

“Oh yes.” Ally assured him somewhat muffled by his shirt. “Lots and lots of differin’ hags. ‘Course, is all Pru with different names, and hair colors, and stuff.” (Jasper gagged). “Is very sad. You usually don’t survive, though. Very black widowish.” She patted significantly lower. “Made her delete part where a hag bites that off. It wouldn’t go over well. There’s a great many people fond of your dick, you know. Even if they’ve never seen it.”

Jasper could only wish a dragon would sit on him.

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Arcturus Orion Black, son of Sirius Cygnus Black, was, in his own right, a very old man. He’d weathered much in the last eighty-eight years, but until now, he’d never felt so old in body and soul.

His aging was premature, at least for a healthy and strongly magical wizard, and mostly caused by heartbreak compounded by further heartbreak as his family fell apart. He’d lost first his beautiful wife, Melania. Her death had been the first rendering of his heart, sending him into a depression that had lasted nearly a decade. That cold spot on the side of the bed she had once slept in just seemed to consume his ability to sleep, and the missing warmth of her smile over the breakfast table left his poor hard heart so chilled. Theirs had been a most unusual matching made by their parents, unusual in that their parents had actually approved of where his heart had led, and so matched him accordingly to the witch his heart had chosen. In his pained eyes, Melania should have outlived him, but… sadly, she had not. And in dying, she took a big part of his soul with her.
Shortly thereafter, he had lost his only son, Orion. Certainly, there had been suspicion on how his lad had died, but it was unconfirmed. Arcturus was never sure if those forays into matricide were some kind of strange foreplay between Orion and Walburga, or something of more malicious intent. Merlin knew, the girl had been a Black through to her soul, and pairing his son with her had been a grave error. Regardless of the way Orion had died (by poisoning), there should have been a rule that no parent should live so long to bury their child. But, Orion had died, so young in Arcturus’ eyes, leaving his poor heart-broken father and sister to bury him. And only after Orion had been interred had Arcturus then condemned Walburga for Orion’s murder and bound her to the limits of Grimmauld House. The woman was a ranting madwoman with her husband’s death, proof enough that she’d broken her marital vows and done ill upon her husband.

Sadly, at the end of it all, it wasn’t truly her fault she was insane. Black women born into the family were all doomed by some strange family curse to that insanity. Could he fault Walburga for it? She wasn’t the first, and she certainly wasn’t the least – Bellatrix was proof of that. That insanity was why most Black men prayed for sons the way they did.

Still, the final straw that had pulled Arcturus from public life, and caused him to slowly rot away to death in his own home, was the loss of his heir and grandson, Sirius, due first to Walburga’s machinations and then to Dumbledore’s. Sirius, such a handsome magically strong lad, blessed with such a quick agile mind, and the stubborn tenacity to outlast the old codgers around him – Sirius was exactly what The Black of House Black was supposed to be – and they had utterly lost the lad.

Walburga’s unchained cruelty to her eldest son had begun shortly after Regulus’ birth. Oh, in retrospect, if only he had done more for the lad. Muzzled the bitch, or put the insane woman down like the rabid dog she was. But, he hadn’t. Fool that he was, he hadn’t caged the foolishness of his children when it came to rearing the next generation. Narcissa – vain as her name, and prissy as it got; Andromeda – a strong-willed rebel much like Sirius. Bellatrix – beautiful and a complete nutbar. Regulus and Sirius had been shining stars in the house. They had been the true future of the house. And yet, the delicate cards that built the house had fallen to dust when Walburga, Sirius’ mother, had used the cruciatis curse on him in order to make him yield to Voldemort. Siri had chosen to flee instead. Regulus had knelt, and died for the sake of his yielding to the would-be Dark Lord.

Perhaps it was his training, at the hand of his demanding father, but Arcturus well understood Voldemort was no dark lord. Nor was Grindelwald. They were puffed up wizards, and nothing more. Maybe the mistake was in his generation, not teaching the truth of dark and light magics to the next generation the way they should. Or perhaps, it was as Dorea had once decried, in-breeding was going to be the death of wizarding kind.

Truthfully, some of his heart had survived the loss of Orion, and of Regulus. He’d survived Melania’s death, and would have been more bitter had it not been Dorea who picked up the pieces of Sirius’ life after he’d fled his birth family. His cousin had mended Sirius’ wounded soul, smothered him with love, and sent pictures and cards speaking of Sirius to Arcturus right up until her death.

And then Dumbledore and his damn games happened, and Sirius became ensnared. There was no way Sirius had betrayed the Potters. He was the bloodsworn God-father of Harry James Potter. It would have cost his magic to forswear his oaths to that lad. Was everyone in the Ministry corrupt or stupid? Could they not feel the magic still in Sirius? Dumbledore had to have known who the real secret keeper was – but he’d done NOTHING to protect Arcturus’ boy, and just tossed Sirius aside like dust when his savior had been found and chosen.
And so, the true heir to House Black was rotting in Azkaban, and no one in the bloody ministry would listen to him, Arcturus, requesting time and time again that the boy be given a damn trial.

Which all led to this moment, with him sitting cold and imperious in his study, feeling beyond ancient and weary as he stared impassively at that puffed up pretentious peacock his niece, Narcissa, had married. Small wonder such a vain little princess had picked such a peacock. Like to like and all. “Let me see if I can summarize your request concisely, Mr. Malfoy.” He stressed the title. Despite all else that Malfoy might pretend, his house was noble, but far from ancient.

The house of Malfoy only been in the United Kingdom for the past one hundred years, and received Noble status when they’d married into the Black family. The absurd entitlements this young head of house openly entertained were frankly pure fantasy; perhaps no one amongst Lucius’ peers was willing to school him, but Arcturus wasn’t a peer, and was far from willing to indulge the puffed up peacocks delusions.

“You wish for me to disown my grandson, and rightful blood heir, Sirius Orion Black, and instead name your minor son as heir to House Black.” He continued in that same laconic tone he had started with.

The blond peacock smiled slightly. “Yes, I think it would behove well for the Ancient and Noble House of Black to have my young son as heir. My ability to guide and mentor my son would lead the House of Black to a greater future.”

Arcturus arched an eyebrow, but stayed his tongue. There was much he wanted to say, a caustic comment on the peacock’s ability to mentor dragon dung being first and foremost, but it wasn’t worth getting into a duel right here and right now about. “I see.” He let his fingers steeple, and pressed them under his chin. “The House of Black has long prided itself on it’s ancient roots, and connection to our beginnings of the magical world.” He said carefully. “We understand the truth of dark and light magic, work to ensure that the heritage of our world is not lost, and are magically strong, stubborn, and politically sound. You believe you can mentor such?”

“Yes sir.” Lucius preened. Arcturus could actually envision the fussy pretentious feathers of a peacock’s tail fanning out behind the idiot.

“How?” Arcturus narrowed grey eyes, and made challenge of the word. “How would you guide the child into understanding the proud history of our world, and how to lead in it? How to maintain it? How to be the best representative of it?”

That flummoxed the moron for a moment. He railed, but in a dumb way, “My Lord, please, you’re being argumentative unnecessarily. We wish for the same future, you and I. And your grandson, imprisoned in Azkaban, can never be a leader to such future. It is foolish to condemn the house to a lord that is going drooling mad inside of that prison.”

Seriously, Arcturus missed the days when he could just kill the vapid idiots like Lucius Malfoy at a whim. Narcissa would make a lovely tragic widow, after all. And, killing this idiot would have been a boon to magic, Arcturus was certain. But, Malfoy had Fudge on puppet strings by way of healthy bribery, and killing him (while also very emotionally satisfying) would cause Fudge to send Arcturus to join his grandson in Azkaban. Dammit. He was between the fire and fry-pan, and didn’t like this at all. “My grandson is not guilty of the crimes he’s been blamed for. His incarceration is illegal. He never served YOUR Dark Lord. Nor did he betray his cousin and his cousin’s wife to the Dark Lord. You know this. I know this. If Fudge hadn’t gotten his head stuck so far up his arse, even he’d acknowledge this. Barty Crouch deserves to die for the cruel indignity he’s given to the House of Black. But, furthermore, my grandson’s godson is his heir.”
Lucius sneered. “You are an old man.” He said baldly. “And won’t live forever. But, Sirius Black will rot for eternity in Azkaban, and the Potter whelp is under Dumbledore’s thumb. Moreover, after you fall into your grave, when it comes time to divvy up the Black estate who do you think will gain under the laws I’m having Minister Fudge generate?”

The bastard.

“You house, Malfoy, gained noble status as a cadet of House Black. I can cancel that.” Arcturus said easily. “And, by that I mean, do not be so foolish as to threaten me in my own home. The wards would not take kindly to any action against me, the Head of House.”

Malfoy snorted. “You think this threat?” He rocked on his feet. “I see this as prophecy. So be it, Black. I will patiently await the day you no longer breathe the same air your niece and I do.” He turned with flourish, robes flying gracefully in the air behind him, and stalked back to the reception room and floo therein.

Arcturus closed his eyes, the moment he heard the floo activate, and let his head fall fully between his hands. What a fucking mess, and all of it, he felt, lay at his feet. If he’d only contained Walburga earlier. If he’d only forbidden any of the house from serving that puffed up would-be dark lord. If only he’d taught Orion and Lucretia the truth about the magical world. He’d left education his training to Melania, and his love for his wife blinded him from accepting Melania didn’t have the heritage or knowledge that he did about the origins of magic.

Sighing, Arcturus stood up, wincing at the pain in his hips and knees. He moved away from his desk, and made for the library on the main floor. More importantly, for the tapestry that depicted fully just how broken the Black family was. The winnowing of their family showed that soon, too terribly soon, there would be no Blacks left at all. Even if he could free Sirius from Azkaban, it was likely his grandson would be infertile as a result of his incarceration.

Sighing, Arcturus stood up, wincing at the pain in his hips and knees. He moved away from his desk and took slow steps out of his office and across the grand foyer of his home into the library. It was a massive room, heated by warming charms and a elegant fireplace. The family tapestry hung massively above it, and all around the other three walls of the room were bookcases reaching up to the ceiling, and heavily loaded with old and rare tomes.

Libby and Furry, the two house elves that attended to his home, kept the library dust free and maintained the fireplace at all times. He’d no sooner stepped into the room than a tray with a teapot, a cup and a small plate of biscuits appeared.

He ignored the tea, choosing to bypass the large wooden table in the centre of the room, and instead stepped up towards the hearth, his eyes scanned upwards with trepidation, looking at the blackened line that listed Melania’s death. It didn’t need to be written on the tapestry, Merlin knew it was engraved in his being, being the day his very heart died. From that horrid line, his eyes flew down to his son’s name, and again, the ache was keenly felt. He’d not shown Orion how precious his boy was to him, and as such, his son died without knowing just how much his father loved him. There were miles of recriminations that haunted his every conscious moment.

His eyes left the written suffering of his own direct bloodline, and strayed to the lines of his cousins. Of Pollux and his thrice cursed daughter Walberga, and Pollux’s son, Cygnus who birthed Bellatrix. No one in recent history had cast as much shame on the family as Cygnus’ daughter had.

And then, from that shining silver name of ‘Draconius Lucius Malfoy’ Arcturus let his gaze sweep back up to the space Cassiopeia’s name occupied. Cassiopeia who suffered from the family madness, but had mercifully never wed or produced children, and of Dorea, whose marriage to Charlus Potter had come as such a surprise, as had her son James. But no greater surprise was
young Hergest Iacomus Morrigan, commonly known as Harry James Potter who had defeated the would-be dark lord.

Ah, Dorea would have been horrified at the books and news articles written about her grandson. The rivers of blood that would have flown from the Ministry over the matter of the lad if she had but lived so long… he supposed it was a mercy she and Charlus had died before her son and daughter-in-law had been slain. Outliving one's children was purely evil.

Sighing, he considered wee Harry, the only Potter left alive. Dumbledore had indeed hidden the boy somewhere, and he was growing up likely brainwashed into the Dumbledore cult, as Lucius claimed. And though the lad was Sirius’ named heir, Arcturus feared what could happen if the wealth and history of family Black were left to lie in the Potter heir’s hands.

There were literally three thousand years of magical history wrapped up in this library, and under Dumbledore’s mentorship, a light follower would simply toss a match in and watch it burn.

He closed his eyes, wishing beyond all else, that the Lady of Magic were there to guide him. But, alas, there was no one in the room besides the grim specters of the past.

Heaving a heart-felt sigh, he opened his eyes, and his gaze fells on the blackened threads that should have read as ‘Marius’, his squib cousin, and Dorea’s elder brother. Marius who had been struck off the family tree by Sirius Arcturus Black, for the simple crime of not being magical. Dorea had not spared any one sharp words against such action, blasting her great-uncle with her acid tongue just as freely as she had done her father, and her cousins. In the end, she had sworn they were all idiots and making a big mistake, and had rebelled when the rest of the family preferred to forget Marius existed.

Curiously, he noted that while Marius’ name had been burnt off, his record continued to be updated on the tapestry. Apparently, Marius had married, and indeed had a son to follow him, and a granddaughter who had married a wizard by name of Jasper Lockwood. ‘Huh. Fortwhitker’s grandson?’ Arcturus wondered. Fortwhitker had been a third year when Arcturus had graduated from Hogwarts. A bright young Slytherin, his family had been a part of the house for nearly a hundred years. He just couldn’t recall the name of Forts son, for the life of himself, though he recalled the announcement of the lad’s birth. He wondered if this was Forwhitker’s grandson, or if the son had deigned to take a much younger girl to wed.

Well. Wasn’t that interesting? A pureblood wizard marrying a Black squib. Brave man that. It made him wonder if perhaps this girl, Allison, was actually magical.

It made him wonder if losing contact with the family squibs was a mistake. Arcturus groaned. Did Dorea have to be right about everything ALL the time, even after death?

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In retrospect, the plan to take Harry to the bank, after letting the lad spend most of his day gallivanting around with dragons, was poorly thought out. As a result of the lad’s normal good natured attitude, and cheerful willing compliance given freely to those adults he respected, those self-same adults tended to forget that the lad was, fundamentally, still a child.

Oh, Harry was certainly a mature child, being nearly eleven years old; his gravitas at certain times put the devil himself to shame. Everyone deemed that understandable, for in most certainly, Harry at ten and three quarters was infinitely more mature than Lucifer. (It was noted by the Lich, however, that a newborn goat was far more mature than Lucifer, so as a benchmark, that wasn’t one to work by.)
Still, their normally obedient and complacent lad was so amped up from a morning spent flying with dragons, exploring caves full of dragons, and subverting young dragonettes with inane ideas of what was ‘fun’ (i.e. tormenting the dragon-handlers). Truthfully, they really had no proof of the later, seeing as none of them spoke parseltongue, but the lad had spent a good hour and a half just talking with young dragons before the little blighters had started dive-bombing the lunch-hall the handlers had set up. (The handlers were stupefied by that -- dragons NEVER let a handler get near the young. Ever! And here the little monsters were scooping up their trays of eggs and sausage not five feet from the handlers!)

The portkey back to England hadn’t fazed the lad as it normally did. He’d bounced up to the rope and seized hold of it when summoned, a backpack loaded with dragon scales, claws, and dragon TEARs (leaving the Lich envious), with his broom in his free hand, and then had bounced away from the rope on English soil, his green eyes wide and staring at everything in Diagon Alley. Not a stumble was to be seen in any aforementioned bounce. Frankly, the raw energy literally vibrating the child inspired pure terror in the two adults accompanying him. Nothing good, experience told them, could come of this.

“And, I was worried about the dragons.” Jasper muttered.

“You were worried?” The Lich asked. “We had to send Ally straight home to bed after you overdosed her on calming draughts -- I don’t think, in the scope of all things related, that you get to say you were worried.”

Jasper frowned at the robed skeleton. “I didn’t overdose my wife.”

“You were carrying eight calming draughts in your pockets. Did you think I’d need ne?” The Lich persisted.

Jasper blinked. “Can you take potions? I mean -- you don’t have a digestive track.”

The Lich snorted. “I got rid of that two millennia ago. Rotted right out, and I’ve never had a flu or digestive issues since!”

“Nor have you had prime-rib, or creme brulee, or strawberries with fresh cream.” Jasper pointed out.

“Jasper,” The Lich told him seriously. “I am over 3000 years old. We didn’t HAVE creme brulee or prime rib to miss. Therefore, not a concern.”

Jasper blinked. He thought about it. “No prime rib?”

“No.”

“What about beef wellington?”

“No.”

Horror welled in his devout carnivores heart. “Chicken? Salmon? Pork?”

“My mother was a streetwalker.” the Lich informed him tartly. “I was fortunate to receive a single bowl of rice and a single ounce a fish a few days a week.” He kept a weather eye on Harry who had come to a stop in front of Flourish and Blotts. “By the time I killed the bitch, I was enrolled in Scholomance -- and meals there were... self-acquired. Prey and predator, for the most part.”

Jasper stopped dead. “And you want to send Harry to school THERE?”
“Hadrian will never be considered prey at Scholomance.” The Lich said, airily waving skeletal hand. “He IS a Dark Lord. He is the penultimate predator.”

A passerby froze, and then scurried off in a panic, overhearing them.

Jasper rolled his eyes. “First, his name is not Hadrian. Second, why not just take an ad out in the Prophet and announce it to all and sundry?”

The Lich glanced up at the late afternoon sun. “I suppose you think his parents named him Harold.”

“Does it matter?” Jasper asked acidly.

“Of course it does.” The Lich cocked his head as Harry began to bounce outside the bookstore. The Lich frowned, insomuch as a skull lacking flesh or muscles could frown. The last thing he wanted was Hadrian exposes to Ministry propaganda, and that was all Flourish & Blotts was allowed to sell. “Dark Lord Harry. Good gravy, he’ll have to slaughter thousands at Scholomance just to stop their laughing. And that’s not acceptable -- I spent far too long and invested far too much in training my replacement as Headmaster to actually see him slaughtered.”

Jasper scoffed. “Harry wouldn’t slaughter…”

The Lich snorted. “He’s a Dark Lord. He won’t have to actually wave his wand, or twitch his nose. MAGIC, the wild magic itself, will actively defend him. And if his feelings are hurt, or he stubs his toe as a teenager, well, someone might end up eviscerated.”

Jasper spun about, “You’re not serious?”

The Lich shrugged -- that motion easy to see, thanks to his robes. “Well, it’s’ possible. Harry’s a rather pragmatical lad. I doubt evisceration will likely happen unless his life is placed in any danger.”

Jasper worried at a his index finger in thought. “Is it safe to send him to Hogwarts at all?”

“No.”

“His magic could act up there?”

The Lich snorted. “Probably. But, more concerning is the brainwashing that Dumbledore will attempt. Or the Ministry getting their paws on him.” He paused. “Mind you, if he kills the entire wizengamot, life will be easier for the Dark Creatures.”

“Oh Lord.” Jasper groaned.

Harry, himself, was paying them no mind, other than to turn and look at them expectantly, before turning to stare in the window of the bookstore. His lithe young body was still bouncing, even while standing in one spot.

“Hadrian, lad, there are better bookstores in Knockturn. There are even better ones in Rome. Come along.” The Lich told the boy as they neared.

“They have books about ME!” Harry told them, pointing a finger. “Look!”

Sure enough, standing in the window was a tall display of at least eight different books proclaiming the Adventures of Harry Potter. The cover images, while somewhat but not precisely similar to
Harry, showed him as young child of Light.

It was definitely enough to turn Harry’s lip up in a disgusted curl. “Vanquishing the Werewolf?” He snarled. “Someone needs to die!”

The superior look that the Lich gave Jasper was pretty damn snotty.

“Yeah, yeah. No one stands a chance at Scholomance. I got it.” Jasper sighed, tugging on the shoulder of the furious child. “Let’s go see the Goblins, buddy. Maybe they can find out who the publisher is, and screw their thumbs to the walls.”

Harry snorted. “Pru could torture them better than that.”

“So can the Goblins.” The Lich assured the lad, guiding him to the large white building at the top of a series of rather impressive stairs. Gringotts London looked like a Roman Fortress, hard lines of heavy marble and granite ensuring her strength, and warded to hell and back.

Harry peered around the Lich to get his first look at the Goblin guards, until the Lich and Jasper each dropped a hand on a shoulder of the lad, and steered him straight between them. The large bronzed doors opened as they approached, and they stepped into the gold gilt and marble bank.

Harry stared at the vaulted ceiling, and the chandeliers, his gaze swept to the row of tellers, and then behind, to the corridors that led to the executive offices. His mouth stayed closed only due to extraordinary practice. (Pru often tried shoving horrid concoctions into his mouth when it fell open.) “Wow.” He murmured, instead of gaping.

“Yeah.” Jasper grumped. “Nice to see where the bank fees go.”

The Lich ignored them, steering their small party to the queue. The Asian guise had been dispelled immediately after the portkey had landed them on British soil, and instead, it was his hood that sheltered his face from most. A damn good thing, given the conservative nature of the Brits and their tendency to run screaming from walking skeletons.

That didn’t mean, of course, that a few of the patrons weren’t squinting at the skeletal hand curled around a human child’s shoulder. But the trio ignored those looks all the same.

“Next.” A goblin bellowed, and a matronly witch and her incredibly hag-like daughter scurried off to the teller.

The Lich pushed Hadrian forward. “Do let me do the talking.” He advised both the werewolf and the wee Dark Lord.

“Sure.” Jasper shrugged that off, unconcerned. It wasn’t like he banked at Gringotts. His father hadn’t left him with a knut, much less a galleon, and all his money came from the Bank of England anyway.

Harry just nodded, a bit wide-eyed.

“There is nothing to fear.” The Lich assured the lad.

Harry blinked. “Oh, of course not.” He agreed. “But, look at the enchantments on the tellers windows, and the ones on the walls behind. That is so awesome!” His finger waived in the general direction of what his mage-sight was seeing. “Oh, and that head teller…. He has a charm that lets him shut down the entire bank in a moments notice. It’s all done by runes, Lich! I’ve never seen runes like those… I have to learn them!” He paused, head cocking to the side. “Oooh,
it’s done with a different language.”

The Lich snorted at the wide-eyed look all the goblin tellers were now casting at the boy. Dark Lords, he mused. They always stirred up such trouble.

“Next.” The head teller bellowed.

The Lich took the lead, Jasper and Harry following behind. The brass nameplate read “Lockjaw”, and goblin in front of them had a pugnaciously large lower jaw, which likely earned him the name. “We wish to speak to the Potter account manager.”

“Potter account manager doesn’t see anyone but Potters.” Lockjaw fair near snarled.

“How fortuitous.” The Lich murmured, reaching behind him to fetch the only male Potter yet living. “I happen to have the account holder right here.”

The goblin scoffed. “Do you know how many morons have come through our doors and pretended to have Harry Potter with them?”

The Lich dropped his hood, enjoying the squeak of fear that rippled through the bank. “Do tell,” He purred.

Lockjaw blinked. His little beady eyes went up to the Head Teller, before skittling back to the Lich standing in front of him. “Ah.” He swallowed hard, looking from the child to the skeletal being in front of him who could only possibly be one… uh… person in legend. “One moment please.”

He vanished from his stool, and scurried up to the Head Teller. Immediately, a whispered argument in Gobbledegook ensued.

“Are there books on that?” Harry whispered.

“Probably. Somewhere.” The Lich murmured, watching the conversation happening. Arms were flailing. Those were always the best discussions, when someone was so worked up that their actual body conveyed more than their words could.

“I’ll ask my account manager.” Harry sighed, reading the disinterest in the Lich’s tone.

“You do that.” The former head-master of Scholomance agreed, head tilting as he studied the Head Teller’s body language. “Ah. Here we go.” He turned suddenly back to the teller's desk.

Lockjaw scurried back to them. “If you’ll step to the side by the Head Teller, a runner will escort you to Rotgut’s office.” He paused, eyeing Harry as the boy moved around to stand in front of Jasper. “Although, be mindful, we will be conducting a blood test to ensure you have the Potter heir with you. If you are trying to rob the bank, your lives will be forfeit.”

“Excellent.” The Lich snapped his skeletal fingers. “I love it when people try to kill me. It means I get to kill them, their families, friends, and pets.”

“He doesn’t mean that.” Jasper muttered, as the Lich strode off.

The child nodded, and smiled cheerfully, as if not in the company of a serial killing Lich. “He’d never hurt someone's pets. That’s just mean.”

Lockjaw took a deep breath, and slapped the closed sign up on his till. “I’m not paid enough for this shit.” He muttered, scuttling down one of the corridors behind the tellers benches.
Jasper snorted, and steered Harry towards the Lich. “He’s a little excitable.” He murmured.

The wait was short, a minute or two, before a goblin runner approached to escort them. They went through a large archway, and from there, down what felt like a glamorized mine tunnel. It was a good five minute walk, before the runner turned, and knocked on an imposing black lacquered door. “Rotgut’s office.” He told them, pushing the door open. “Please go through.”

Harry, of course, now determined to have a book, or SOMETHING about Gobbledegook, bounces right on through. Jasper follows more hesitantly, and the Lich, well, he pauses at the door, casting a withering glare (complete with glowing red eyes) at the goblin runner. As there are no wails, screams or somesuch from Jasper, he follows more sedately.

Rotgut, it seems, was quite used to Potters, and Potter behaviours. Or, so the Lich had to assume, seeing as Harry had commandeered the goblin’s attention to go over his private library within thirty seconds of being in the goblin’s office. “Hadrian.” He sighed.

“But, is there like a primer? For little goblins?” Harry persisted, even as Rotgut made a half turn to give the Lich a most puzzled look.

“Certainly. But, not in MY library. I’m well past primers.” Rotgut assured the boy.

“Oh.” You could almost see the disheartenment in Harry, his shoulders dropped, his cheerful smile drooped, and the wobegon in his green eyes was enough to send the entire pack in Little Whinging out to fetch the lad pizza.

Lord knows, NOBODY wanted to deal with that again. Eight hundred pizzas all dropped off on Jasper and Ally’s door in the space of forty minutes. And none of them personal sized. Each damn one the party-platter. God, it had been a cheesy mess.

“Be at ease, young master. I could request one of our best primers for you, Lord Potter.” The goblin assured him. “So long as you understand, such a book may not be found in the possession of any other wizards except you.”

“AWESOME!” And just like that, Harry brightened up immediately.

“Hadrian, come, sit. Let’s work through our agenda, and then we can return home to check on Ally.” The Lich wasn’t really thinking he had control of this meeting. He just preferred to pretend that when Harry was involved, he had some small measure of control at all.

The goblin again gave him a funny look. Jasper snickered.

“What?”

“You persist in calling Young Master Potter by that name. He was not christened such.” Rotgut informed him. “His grandsire brought him in and opened his trust vault on the very day, and had his name sealed by goblin magic.”

“Hell save me -- he wasn’t actually named Harry, was he?” The Lich asked plaintively.

“No.” Rotgut pulled up a large black ledger, and thumped it down on his desktop. “Of course not. His grandmother would have had his grandfather and father’s balls in the palm of her hand had they done such. And Lilly Potter? Would have done even greater damage to their bodies.” He gave a twisted sharkish smile. “Young Master Potter’s mother was a fearsome witch. We had her blood and magic tested at least a half dozen time, but somehow it was always the same result. We were certain she was some foundling of House Black.”
“She wasn’t?” Jasper leaned forward, keenly interested.

“No. She was a daughter from the house of Fey.”

The Lich snorted. “Of course she was.”

“From who?” Harry asked.

Jasper heaved a sigh. “Harry, remember the book we read, Le Morte de Arthur?”

“Yeah.”

“Remember Morgana Le Fey?”

“She was the bad witch.” Harry frowned, thinking.

“Yeah.” Jasper just waited.

There was a moment. Just a few brief ticks of the clock, and then Harry brightened. “WICKED!” He cheered, turning to the Lich. “Hey, maybe I inherited my magic from my mum, then!”

“Undoubtedly. And your father. The Potters weren’t always the sweet house of light that people assume they are.” The Lich muttered. “So, what is not-Hadrian’s name?”

“Hargest James Morrison Potter.”

“Seriously?”

“Mostly. I did say the lad’s name was sealed. Only a blood family tapestry would show his true name.” The goblin muttered. “Now. Since you’re here, I suppose you’re wondering about the estate.”

“Yes.”

The goblin arched a rather rabid eyebrow. It certainly was bushy, and very wild. “There is three accounts in the Potter name, and 2 in the Le Fey name, 1 in the Black name that Heir Potter is claimant of. However, as neither of you are his magical guardian, I can release no further details.”

Jasper exchanged a look with the Lich, and then at a very confused Harry. “Begging your pardon, then, but could you tell me WHO is the magical guardian of Harry?”

The goblin frowned. “You do not know?”

“Nope.”

His gaze turned to Harry, who squirmed in his seat. “Young Master Potter, on your eight birthday, did you not meet with your magical guardian?”

Harry blinked. “Uh. No. On my eighth…” He cocked his head glancing at Jasper. “There was a full moon, on the night before my eighth birthday. So, we had a big howl-party the night before, rather than the day of. The vampires created a magical pool, complete with a twister waterslide, the wolves provided the barbecue, and the Lich but up noise wards, so the police didn’t both us. In the morning, we had ice-cream cake for breakfast, and then slept until noon. Um. Aunt Ally gave us breakfast for lunch. And, I had tea with Auntie Pru and her Auntie Yaga.” He squinted up at the ceiling. “I made home-made pasta with Jasper in the afternoon, and there was pasta for dinner.” He frowned. “Nope. I mean, Lucifer popped in and all, but he was more there to cause
trouble than anything else, and NO ONE would ever make the Prince of Hell a magical guardian.”

“Amen.” Jasper and The Lich both muttered.

“And at no time have you seen or met with Albus Dumbledore?”

The Lich’s hood caught fire. That was the first warning that the ancient sorcerer was pissed. The second warning was the malevolent green that lit up in his eye sockets. “DUMBLEDORE? That blighted wart on a dessicated inferi’s ass?”

Rotgut offered a sly smile, “The very same.”

“How the hell did he get named Hadrian’s..”

“Hergest,” Jasper, Harry and Rotgut all chimed.

“.... whatever… guardian?”

The smile shifted, becoming something truly evil, “Why, he sealed the will, so that only a direct heir in the will could open it, and then named himself magical guardian.” Rotgut steepled his long fingers over the ledger.

“Hergest,” Jasper smiled at Harry nastily, “Would you mind?”

“Account Manager Rotgut, I am Hergest James Potter. Could you unseal my parents will and have it read to me?” Harry smiled sweetly.

Rotgut’s face lit up. It was truly gruesome. “Certainly, Heir Potter. One moment, please.” He vanished out the door of his office.

“Hergest” Harry muttered in dismay.

“Dark Lord Hergest.” The Lich tested it out, and found it lacking. “Dark Herg. Ugh.”

“Ally will love it.” Jasper mused. “Maybe we should lie to her.”

“Yes.” Harry agreed. “Let’s tell her my real name is Harley.”

“No.” The Lich retorted.

“Harold.”

“Oh hell no!”

“Eanraig?”

The Lich dropped his head into his hands. “How is that better than Hergest? And, how is this my life?” He asked.

“That is a mystery only you know. Every other attempt by other mages to do what you’ve done -- well you’ve gone off and slaughtered them.” Jasper reminded him. “Something about patenting the process?”

“Shuddup.” The Lich growled. He pointed a bony finger at the werewolf. “You I can live without.”
“Eanraig will protect me.” The werewolf smirked, pulling Harry out of his seat and into his lap.

“No. No Eanraig.”

Harry was undefeated, “What about Heimirich, or Heinrich, or Henricus, or Henrick.” He paused for a breath, “Or… umm…Endika, or Enric Hey -- Hynek, or Heiko, or maybe… Dark Lord Henny, or Lord Enzo, Mr. Anri, or Arrai, or… ooooh… Enrico, or… I know… Dark Lord Herkulus”

“It’s been done!” The Lich bleated. “So overdone! What about Hadrian!”

“Nope.” The boy said cheekily. “Dark Lord Arrigo. How’s that?”

“No.”

“So, we stay with Harry for now.” The child decided.


“Nope. Nope. Nada. Nope. “ The lad sang cheerfully. “You can call me that all you want, but when I turn seventeen, I’ll legally change my name to Dark Lord Henny.”

“Over my dead body!” The Lich roared.

“Dessicated body?” Jasper moderated. “Technically, you’re all skeleton. I don’t think we can really have a viable living body argument.”

“Shut up, wolf!”

The door thumped open, and Rotgut returned with the Bank Manager, resplendent in furs and silks in tow. “Lord Potter, may I introduce you to my manager, and the Chieftain of the Hord, Ragnock.”

Jasper and the Lich rose to their feet, pulling Harry up as they went. “Hi!” The boy gave a grin and a wave.

The Chieftain gazed at the child for a long moment, appraising what he was seeing, before turning yellowed eyes to the Lich and Jasper, respectively. “Welcome to Gringotts, Headmaster, Lord Potter and Mr. Lockwood.” He inclined his head slightly with the greeting. “I am given to understand that the Heir of House Potter has requested the formal unsealing of his parent’s will.”

“Yes.” Harry nodded.

“Furthermore, that there has been no contact from Young Master Potter’s magical guardian since his fifteen month.”

“I can’t say for sure prior to his fourth year,” Jasper said steadily, “But, I do know Albus Dumbledore has not been in Little Whinging since such time.”

“He did have an agent in Little Whinging, however.” The Lich leaned back in his seat, now feeling more control when both gobins in front of him had been former Scholomance students. Still, as reclined and relaxed as he appeared, he watched the two gobins closely. They hadn’t been students under him for a few centuries, and everyone changed if given enough time. “Once I realized that she was a squib, with an overabundance of kneezle cats which she sent out around the Dursley's property to monitor the family there, I captured and investigated her. She was a plant,
though mostly harmless, and dealt with.”

By dealt with, Jasper and Harry both knew that the Lich meant that Mrs Figg’s mind had been closely examined, as if through a strainer. Some joker named Lockhart had scrambled her memories up something fierce, because once fixed, she’d cursed Dumbledore out in a blue streak, packed up and left for the Americas.

Ragnock stroked his chin with clawed fingertips. “Well then, we will set up a formal will reading for July 31st, however, the most interesting part to my mind is that nowhere in the will is Dumbledore named as a guardian be it physical or magical, nor were these Dursleys that you name, though we, the nation, are aware of their relationship to the Potters.”

Jasper’s inner wolf perked up. Wasn’t that a neat tidbit.

“If we open the will, this will jeopardize the custody structure for the young Master.”

“Who should have had custody?” The Lich leaned forward, his casual ease disappearing.

“First, Alice and Frank Longbottom. Both are incarcerated in St. Mungos having been driven insane via the cruciatus. Mrs. Longbottom was the lad’s godmother. Second, Sirius Orion Black, the lad’s godfather. Hergest is also the heir to Mr. Black. Black was incarcerated in Azkaban without trial, and therefore unavailable. Third, Remus Lupin, excluded under Ministry Law for being a werewolf.” Rotgut answered.

Jasper cleared his throat. “Would custody not fall to a near relative if prior candidates were not available for whatever reason?”

Ragnock smiled. “Yes.”

“My wife is Allison Dorea Lockwood, nee Black. Grand-daughter of Marius Black, who was brother to current Lord Black.”

Both goblins grinned. It was a gruesome display of small sharp teeth.

“Would your wife be available to attend the will reading?” Ragnock asked mildly, walking around to take the seat of Rotgut’s desk. Manager prerogative, Jasper assumed.

“Yes. She already booked the day off for Harry’s birthday.” Jasper nodded. Would Ally be happy about having her schedule adjusted? Probably not. Such were the pains of marriage.

“I will prepare the necessary paperwork. Will she serve as magical guardian?” The Chieftain of the horde pulled Rotgut’s agenda out of his desk drawer, and made a note on it.

“No. I will.” The Lich decided.

Eyebrows rose. “You… Will?” The Chieftain asked carefully, slowly.

The green in his empty eye sockets shifted to red. “Is that a problem?” The ancient sorcerer growled.

“No. But, when Dumbledore finds out, I do wish to be there.” The Chieftain snickered nastily. He made a few more notes. “Excellent. Well then, when the young Heir arrives with Mrs Lockwood, and yourself for the reading, we can change both physical and magical guardians at that time.” He looked up and over at Harry. “If we do it earlier, the Ministry can protest, but after his eleventh, by the time it’s filed with the Ministry, it’s far too late.” He sneered slightly. “We file
with the ICW, ensuring that it takes another thirty-one days before the British Ministry of Magic receives anything. And the British Ministry of Magic never reacts to anything with any degree of swiftness.”

Both the Lich and Jasper smirked. And Harry dutifully fistbumped them both. If the Ministry didn’t receive the notice of change until August 31st, then Dumbledore wouldn’t find out until after September 1st. He would be in no position to fight, then. He’d be busy starting the school year, and would be trapped at Hogwarts. And after sixty-days of no contention, the guardianship would be inviolate unless the heir came to harm at the hands of the named guardian.

Ally would love that little twist.

But, the goblin chieftain wasn’t done. “Also, as Heir Potter will be at his first stage of magical maturity, his core is deemed stable. We can therefore remove that little soul shard from his scar at the same time.”

The Lich stiffened. “What?”

“The horocrux in the boy’s head. You did know about that, did you not? We knew the moment he walked in the bank.”

“WHAT?”

“Removing it would take nothing. We could do it now, but my potionmasters advised that we don’t have the required potions ready. It’s a simple potion, but doesn’t keep very well. Our potionmasters have instructions to make it, and that plus a small five minute cleansing ritual will take care of it. It’s just a wee bit of soul magic. Nothing big.”

“WHAT?!?”

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“It’s just a wee bit of soul magic…” The Lich snarled nastily as they walked through the wards that protected Little Whinging from detection. “Nothing big. Nothing significant, just a little itsy bitsy thing like soul magic… those fucking little ground crawling… I’ve taught goblins for over three thousand years, and did one of them mention the goblin nation specialized in soul magic? Those fucking little snotty…”

Jasper sighed, tightening his hand on Harry’s shoulder as they walked through the darkened streets of Little Whinging towards Private Drive. They could have apparated. Hell, they could have taken a portkey home, but the Lich’s foul mood required a bit more walking off than such immediately would allow.

“I’ve spent three years setting up the ritual to remove that shard, and they can do it in five fucking minutes? Those wretched…” The Lich descended into what Jasper suspected was Romanian. It was probably best the Lich used other languages. Harry had been fascinated when the ranting. had started, and was likely making mental notes.

“I thought they were really nice.” The boy chimed, which just set the Lich off in more explosive, more exotic languages, rants.

“They’re getting me a primer and a learning orb for Gobbledegook.” He reminded the ancient sorcerer with a smile.

The Lich glared, a growl emanating from his throat.
Jasper stiffened. “Hey, now, don’t go snarling at Harry.” He said.

The baring of the teeth was less impressive when there wasn’t a lip to curl up from it. Still, the Lich did a credible job of imitating a werewolf there.

Jasper huffed. “Look, isn’t it better that they do this? They are EXPERTS in soul magic.”

“WHICH I PIONEERED!” The sorcerer howled. “Those filthy little maggots could have told me they were expanding on my original work. They should have SHARED what they learned, instead of leaving us fumbling in the dark!”

“Oh.” Harry said quietly, going to a dead stop, and driving Jasper to stop too. Jasper’s gaze swung to the boy, and then up to where the boy was looking. His eyes widened.

“I spent centuries researching soul magic. Taught those filthy worms everything I knew at Scholomance, and they have the audacity to go behind MY back and…” Whatever else the Lich was going to say stopped abruptly when he walked right into the scaly side of a Hebridean black dragon.

The dragon, peered down at the skeleton assaulting it’s flank, and snorted. Sixty-five other dragons all crowded up the streets of Magnolia and Privet drive huffed back in response.

Jasper sucked in a breath, and craned his head to look around. “Oh dear.” He muttered.

The Lich, on the other hand, took one look at the dragon, cast a withering glare at Harry, and then spotted the rest of the herd from Romania. “Oh. Crap. Not again, Harry!”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for your patience, and support. There were a few questions raised, here and there, but I reserve creative freedom to write this the way I want. So, you know, in all good spiritedness -- neener-neener.
Lessons, Black family reunions and Dementors. Oh, and the mayhem of the magical government.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

The first clue, the very first tiny itsy-bitsy inkling, actually, that something had gone terribly awry came when Ally, who had cheerfully seated them around her kitchen table and then kindly poured both of them a dreadfully sweet tea in her best fine china -- the ones she reserved only for the most hoity toity of guests (mercifully, no in-laws had ever visited because while they suited the term hoity-toity, Ally would have been too tempted to stab a butter knife through their wretched hearts) - - set out a matching plate of her best lemon-shortbread. They immediately froze in their seats, Judas’ cup near his mouth…. And understood with utter clarity just exactly how prey felt.

Ally, of course, smirked at them, and disappeared down into the hallway. An almighty crash filled the house for but a moment, and then the clear sound of something being dragged. Judas winced, wondering if they were being set up for body disposal. Lucifer seemed to relax, thinking that a little death and dismemberment was no big deal between friends, and that Ally was trying to hard. Sadly, when she returned dragging an easel-chart, rather than a body, behind her, they felt that cold chill of prey again.

“Ah, aren’t we birthday planning? It’s running a little late, luv, seeing as tomorrow’s our boy’s birthday.” Judas hedged carefully. “If you were planning on invites, you know they don’t happen by osmosis.”

Lucifer rolled his eyes, it was as if Judas didn’t remember issuing invites already. Vampires, bah. It was of no matter, he had a far more pressing concern. If he was going to burn in the fires of Ally’s insanity, then others should so suffer alongside him. “Where’s the Lich and the hag?” Lucifer asked bravely, head craning to see the back door window, as if the Lich would be standing right there. (To be fair, he wanted to spread pain. It wasn’t as if he hid behind the younger being, far from it. Especially as there wasn’t enough meat, or any meat, on the Lich’s bones to truly hide behind. Hiding behind Pru made infinitely more sense.)

“Busy, Gentlemen, and I do use that terminology loosely. The Lich is going through that Goblin contract about that ritual room with a silver comb. And Pru is minding Harry this morning” Ally smiled.

Judas thumped his head on the kitchen table. “He’s still on that? It’s been three days.”

“It’ll be three centuries.” Lucifer grumped. “I didn’t hire him as headmaster of Scholomance because he’s the laid-back, easy-going type, you know. That sack of bones can really hold a grudge.”
“Which is why he and I get along so very well,” Ally smiled broadly, her teeth glinting just like a shark’s wound in the sun right before a deep killing bite. “Regardless of the Lich’s grudge against the Goblins, we who are all here have other matters to discuss.”

Lucifer shifted in his seat. “We’ll, Ducky, that sounds lovely, I must say… but you know, I’m on a deadline. Dad’s going to be shunting me back down to my cage in about five minutes.”

Ally’s smile, if anything, widened. “Oh darling, five minutes is MORE than sufficient to my requirements. But, just in case, I got down on my knees and said a prayer this morning, to your dear Dad, humbly asking if he could spare a bit of time for me to have this very important discussion with you. Being a just and benevolent God, I’m sure he’ll allow a few minutes leeway.”

A shudder ran through Lucifer. Just and Benevolent? His Father? Maybe she hadn’t read the old testament. Judas reached out to softly pat his shoulder. “Relax. Lucky. We’ve both survived centuries of torture. We can handle ten or so minutes of a lecture.”

Clearly, Judas hadn’t really met Ally before. Lucifer closed his eyes and took in a breath. He squared his shoulders. (The whimper which escaped the Devil was forevermore disavowed. He hadn’t whimpered for Daddikins, so there was obviously no whimpering over whatever torture Ally had devised.) “I’m ready. Do your worst.” He said.

“Quite.” Ally nodded. “My husband and I took wee Harry to visit the dragons at the reserve the other day. A dreadful idea really, I must say. We’re never doing that again. Dragons, I tell you -- do you know how big there are? How many teeth they have? THEY BREATH FIRE! And there’s Harry, flitting around and teasing them like some sort of fluttery aperitif!”

Her hands were in the air waving, and her tone was growing more strident with each second. Judas pursed his lips, and thoughtfully cocked his head, “Do you need a calming draught?” He asked curiously. “And yes, we’re aware. They’ve moved in, after all.”

“No!” Ally snarled. “I do not… look, my husband made a request of me that I dismissed at the time due to the terrible influence of such calming draughts.” The matriarch of house Lockwood, or at least, this cadet house of such, flipped the standing easel around. “Upon later consideration, I must admit my own shame for doing such. For you see, gentlemen, it’s a terrible thing I had done. Terrible and inconsiderate. Not right of a wife. And, now I must make amends.” She flipped the first page of the chart, and in bold red letters

“BULLYING IS WRONG!”

The Devil slunk lower in his seat. Chin barely above the table-top.

“Jasper asked me quite plainly to make Lucifer and you stop harassing him. And I ignored him, without giving it a fair and unbiased consideration. But, upon reflection, it’s not even arguable. It’s quite blatant what you two do to my poor sweet husband. It’s reprehensible, appalling, and unacceptable. And, not only is behaving in such a fashion immoral, it sets a bad example to Harry. We wouldn’t want that, now would we?”

The shifting and wary gazes coming her way made the Black blood in her purr in pleasure. “So, today, we are going to have a very thorough discussion on what it means to bully. Why we do not like bullies, and what shall be the further consequences for anyone in Little Whinging who opts to bully another person in Little Whinging.”
Where she got the long wooden pointer from, neither Devil nor vampire knew. But, if she rolled out a chalkboard next, Lucifer decided he was voluntarily sending himself back to hell.

“The classic definition of ‘bully’, per Websters is, as a verb, to use superior strength or influence to intimidate (someone), typically to force him or her to do what one wants: and as a noun, someone who uses superior strength or influence to intimidate (someone), typically to force him or her to do what one wants”

Ally went through each word slowly, her glare fierce and hostile.

“Harassment is another word that falls under the bully umbrella, and it is any act or aggression that is unwanted and uninvited. Harassment can be emotional, intellectual, physical, or sexual.” With aplomb, Ally flipped to a new page on chart. “We, specifically, are interested in discussing the badness of Sexual Harassment: the unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature.”

“Point of interest, Ally…” Judas raised and waved a hand. “You do know that he’s the very Devil of biblical legends. The original bad guy. Evil is what he does?” Judas suggested carefully. Lucifer nodded fervently.

“Yes, and I so don’t care. It’s not my fault his Father hadn’t turned him over His knee.” Ally sneered at the very-nearly-under-the-table-Devil. “However, to clarify things for your pitiful little minds, we are having this discussion because when my darling Jasper made his wedding vows to me, with full awareness that I descend from House Black, he swore upon his magic to be faithful and true in body and mind to me. Only me. By legal full name -- ME.” She tapped a marker against the page. “This means, gentlemen, that any sexual advance on him is utterly unwelcome -- by me, never mind Jasper’s thoughts on the subject. Though, to be on the up and up, he would expressly like you to both ruddy stop rubbing up against him, touching him, pinching him, leering at him…” She gave Judas a firm glare…”Licking him. He does not like it.”

“I’m just being friendly! Dogs do it all the time to one another…” the vampire protested.

“Suffice it to say, your attempts to seduce my man are a blatant slur against me. You can just be grateful that my Jasper is a smart man. He understands precisely what a cuckolded wife of House Black would do. And, he wants his tackle to remain intact.”

Judas raised a hand, “If we didn’t stop, and say, Jasper has a bad bought of potioning and succumbs… what would you do?”

“Pickle your prick, and serve it to you, all nicely diced up at the next bank holiday barbecue.” She didn’t even blink.

Judas straightened, and crossed his legs. “Right.”

“So.” Lucifer rubbed his jaw. “You want us to stop mentioning how hot he is? Or good his ass looks. How much fun we could have boinking.”

“No comments verbal or written, allusions, or leers.” Ally continued blithely. “No drooling over, or any such act that could be construed as either a) physical interest, b) sexual interest, or c) malign
interest. Now, I recognize the pair of you are morally bankrupt and haven’t met an ethic that you
didn’t trod all over with muddy boots, but the bottom line is -- I can make your lives more hellish
than you’ve ever known if you don’t stop.”

Lucifer and Judas snorted in tandem at that. “Now, Luv, pickling pricks aside, do think about who
you’re threatening.” The devil sat up straighter, and leaned back in his seat before airily waving his
hand at both himself and Judas.

Ally sneered. “That, gentlemen, is a lovely if pathetic attempt at intimidation. For the record,
gentlemen, those cups you’ve been drinking from? I rinsed them quite thoroughly with holy water
before setting them out. I let them air dry to coat the inside of the cup. The vicar at St. Mary’s, by
the way, was most helpful when I asked for a few bottles. I used another bottle to make the tea.”

Lucifer bolted for the sink, dry retching into the basin. Judas just sat stone still, looking at the
human woman in pure horror.

Ally smirked, quietly counting to ten in her head before cheerfully admitting, “Just kidding.”

“Sweet Mother of Sin.” Judas breathed, shoulders slumping. “Why was the Black bloodline
allowed to flourish for so long?”

“Who knows. Maybe it’s all a part of God’s great design to whip you and his errant child into
shape.” Ally smiled toothily. “In all truth, though, you boys slip up once and harass my poor
Jasper, and you’ll be bathing in holy water. I wasn’t kidding at all about getting holy water from
the vicar. I’m quite serious there. And the vicar was lovely and most helpful. Blessed the water
again after I bottled it. Offered to come along and bless my water-tank if I so desired. So, tow the
line, or it’ll be raining holy water all over your pretty lily white arses. Should that not effect a
change in behaviours, I’ll sic Harry on you. He’d be most disappointed.”

“Oh, now, Ducky -- don’t you think you’re being a wee bit extreme?” Judas whined. “I’m sure we
can resolve all this without involving wee Harry.”

“No.” Ally tapped her chin thoughtfully. “I’m quite sure Harry would love to assist. He’s terribly
fond of Jasper, you know.”

He winced. “You’re so mean” He whinged. “I mean, you could have just asked us nicely…..”

Ally snorted in pure derision. She strode over to the sink, where the devil was still gargling his
mouth out with tap water, and smacked him upside the head. “Oh seriously, do stop, you
pretentious drama queen! You’re a fallen angel, not the undead. The worst holy water might do is
make you a tad bit nauseous.” She grabbed him by the nape of his neck, and dragged him back to
the table. “Now, keep up. Take notes if you must. The final exam will be a doozy, and there is an
essay portion. To clarify, classify, and make short: there will be no more harassment of any sort
you can conceive of where myself, my husband, my husband’s pack, or my foster-son is concerned.
None. EVER.”

The beaten down look on the pair was gratifying. She had much more to expound on them, on the
subject of their immoral and uncouth behaviour, and the future repercussions for any infringement
upon the newly set down rules, but as things were, they were off to a fine start.

Inconveniently, of course, the door bell would peal at that precise moment. Ally narrowed her eyes
at the pair, wondering if they had abused their magical powers to create an escape. “Stay.” She
ordered. “Should you leave, I shall tell Harry you weren’t interested in participating in his birthday
celebrations today.”
Dejection, thy slump and name was the Devil.

Ally strode off, back straight, chin up, and quite firmly confident that the emotional blackmail would keep the dastardly duo butts in their seats, and with that confidence in her control of her own universe, went forth to shoo off whoever it was ringing the bell of the front door.

She checked her hair as she passed a mirror, touching a curl back behind her ear, and deemed herself put together enough to open the door. She could spy, through the patterned glass on the door, an older man waiting patiently on the front step. Odd. They didn’t often get the Jehovah’s Witnesses in their neighborhood, and usually when they did, they travelled in pairs or trios. Still, individual or not, Little Whinging was mostly avoided by the various missionaries or pandlehanders. (Vampires took too much pleasure in talking to them about religion. Far too much pleasure, truth be told, keeping the poor men and women of that church tied up on doorsteps for hours. And when Lucifer had a run in, well… he treated such encounters like it was Christmas and his birthday all in one. Psychological torture wasn’t just a wartime hobby. It was the devil’s raison d’etre.)

“Hullo?” She cocked an eyebrow as she opened the door.

The old man, and he was old, sucked a breath. “Allyson Lockwood, nee Black?” He asked in a querulous tone.

“Yes. You are speaking to her.” She frowned now. “And you are?”

“Lord Arcturus Black.”

Ally froze stiff for a bare moment, running that name -- THAT precise name -- through her head, and then… blinked. The door promptly swung shut immediately after her eyes reopened and confirmed the boogeyman was indeed on her doorstep. Seriously, this shit just wasn’t happening today. She had the Devil to tame, THE vampire to pull teeth from; and a birthday party to organize. She couldn’t be expected to wrangle the Black Family into shape too. It was all too much to even contemplate..

Lord Black raised his hand, and rang the bell again.

“Go away.” Allyson shouted through the door. For good measure, she turned the lock. “Grandfather Marius warned me about you. And, whilst I am being infinitely more congenial than my grandfather would ever be, I’m telling you that we want nothing to do with your pureblood nonsense.” Allyson strode down the hall to the handheld phone fretted as she dialed the phone. Oh, dear, oh dear, poor Grandpapa Marius was going to have rabid kittens!

“Problems, luv?” The Devil slunk up behind her and whispered in her ear.

“Bugger off. You’re supposed to be sitting on your arse in the kitchen memorizing definitions.” She muttered, foot tapping as the phone rang. “I’m not giving a multiple choice exam, you know. I’ll be wanting essay answers.”

“Photographic memory. Perfect eidetic. It’s not like I don’t know what bullying and harassment is, luv. I practically invented the whole genre, granted I’m more on the pro side more so than anti. Either way, I’m going to totally ace your precious little exam. Ace it like I wrote the questions myself. Because I likely did. So, now that’s established… who’s knocking at the door, poppet?” Lucifer continued, a devilish smile on his face.
She rolled her eyes. He hadn’t even fathomed the word exam yet. Ha. “Lord Arcturus Black.” She answered in a mutter, all the same. “I honestly thought the old goat was dead. Isn’t he like two hundred years old, or some nonsense? How old does a magical reprehensible goat have to be before it dies?”

“Goats? Fifteen years, whether or not magical. Blacks? They tend to avoid death like the plague. They all know precisely which way they are going.” The devil gave a disdainful sniff of his nose, and then suddenly brightened as a new thought occurred. “So, under the new terms of appropriate social behavior, are we allowed to pick on him?” He grinned. “Maybe he’ll have a heart-attack and I can save Death a trip, and just nip his soul straight down to Hell.”

Ally hummed under her breath, and hung up the phone. The doorbell yet again peeled. Good gracious, didn’t the man understand “Go away!”? And, where on earth was Grandpapa? The man was retired, for heaven’s sake, it’s not like he had anywhere to go! He should be forever at his beloved (and only) granddaughter’s beck and call, dammit. “No. Not yet.” She decided, clicking the phone off, and tapping it on her chin. “But don’t you and Judas dare leave.” She cast a glare at the Devil. “I may need backup.”

And with that, Ally reached for the door again and faced the family devil. Present company notwithstanding, of course.

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Ministry of Magic
London
July 30, 1991

Cornelius Fudge rubbed his eyes, and then stared back at the report again. “This can’t be right.” He muttered, looking up in askance at his undersecretary. “How do we not have enough revenues to cover this expense?”

Umbridge tittered, “Well, my dear Cornelius, it would seem that our tax revenues are down.”

“I can see that, Delores.” Fudge stared at the pitifully revenues total on the page, and then glared at Delores. “My question is, WHY are the numbers so low?”

Delores fussed with her tea cup. “Well, my dear Minister, we have had several stores close in the past two years. And, many mudbloods are retreating to the muggle world as they ought. Plus, as you know, the dark creatures aren’t paying taxes for their purchases since we can’t find them. It’s well… just a shortfall of people to pay tax.”

Fudge took a deep breath. “I know all this. I do read the reports, Delores! Year to year, our revenues have plummeted. We were down 28% four years ago, and now are short G51,000,000 in overall tax revenues from the decade previous. We had better revenues when Voldemort was killing people all willy nilly! We need that gold! And if I recall correctly, we set up a task force to solve this problem well over a year ago!” Fudge whimpered.

“Well, yes, you did set up a task-force a year ago. I’m chairing that task-force.” Umbridge agreed.

“So, why hasn’t the task force SOLVED the problem. Why are the revenues STILL down?”

“Well, there’s been much discussion and analysis.” She hedged.

“Yes, I can see… discussion and analysis which costed me G180,000! What has the Task Force decided?”
“Well, you see, it’s a lot of data to consider, so...we haven’t reached a complete solution as of yet.”

“Not yet?” Fudge pulled as his hair, wondering if he’d have any left by the time he left office. Honestly, this office was not supposed to be that hard. All he was supposed to do was shake hands and kiss babies, for Merlin’s sake! “Why on ever not?” He pressed his fists against his aching head. This was... terrible. “The Wizengamot will have a vote of non-confidence in me if we do not solve this problem! Post haste! And they will know there’s a problem when the Wizengamot can’t have TEA with their sessions. We simply can’t wait!” He cried.

“Oh, I do understand, Cornelius, but... immaterial of all else, solid and stable solutions take time!” His undersecretary whinged. “I’m sure you understand such.”

There were times he regretted appointing Umbridge to the role of Undersecretary. Her affection for the color pink, her adoration of ‘kittens’, and her voice notwithstanding, she was exemplary at executing his wishes. Except this one. “No. There’s no more time. I need a solution right this moment, or else, I shall disband this task force, and refuse to pay their wages.” Which, in his eyes, was a great idear, since he didn’t have 180,000 Galleons to pay the bleeding task force.

Umbridge’s already thin lips utterly disappeared she pressed them so firmly together. “Now, my dear Minister... you can not do such. You must pay the task-force for their work.”

“What work?” He threw his hands up. “It’s been a year, Delores. A year, and our coffers are still bare! The Ministry will be unable to pay the wages of our employees if we don’t get this riffraff taxed and monies flowing back in. Now, what has the task force thus far concluded.”

“Well.” she hedged. “That the Ministry needs these revenues collected.”

Fudge rolled his eyes. “You don’t say.” He drawled, waving his hands as if to say, ‘get on with it’.

“And, that we don’t know where the dark creatures have gone, there’s no indication of immigration. No other country has informed us of a surplus of such unwanted creatures.”

“We want them. All of them. Regardless of blood status. We want their galleons. We want the dark creatures monies, we want the half blood and muggleborns monies. Oh, and don’t be so daft as to use that dreadful ‘mudblood’ word in my office or in the Ministry, Delores. Don’t think I missed that.” Cornelius lectured her sternly. “We need every drop of magical blood to pay taxes on every knut they earn, and every knut they spend. Every single one of them, well, except for the wealthy purebloods. I mean, honestly, we can’t ostracize my backers. But... back to the dark creatures -- if they haven’t already, they might actually ruddy leave our shores ... And why would another government tell us of a influx of magicals? Another government would just see these people coming and think, ‘Oh, looky, extra tax revenue. Lovely!'”

The woman blinked at him. That she didn’t stick out a tongue to snap a fly out of the air continuously surprised him. “Are you finished, my dear Minister Fudge? Could we be perhaps serious for just a moment?”

“Are you ready to give me something of substance?” He retorted.

“We need to capture a werewolf and question that creature with veritaserum about their locations and numbers.” She stated.

“Excellent idea. Took a year and $180,000G for a panel of eight to cook that one idea up? So? Why haven’t you yet caught a werewolf and asked these important questions?” Fudge tapped a pen on his desk.
She blinked again, and still no toady-tongue snap happened. Most odd. “We’ve not concluded how to do so. We could solicit a bounty-hunter…”

“That costs money. No.”

“Or, authorize the aurors to do a manhunt.”

“That would blow the Auror budget… no.”

“Or send Dementors.”

“That would…” Fudge stopped. He paid the Dementors by way of what they fed on -- the worst emotions of mankind. That he had plenty of. “That’s rather brilliant.” He concluded softly, eyes brightening as the thought endeared itself more. The cheapest labor costs of all. Emotions. And a few unwanted souls, but mostly, emotions. Ruddy brilliant. Crap. He might actually owe Umbridge a raise.

Umbridge simpered. “But, that requires ministry authorization.”

Fudge nodded, “Yes, yes… of course. I’ll notify the warden to accept your instructions.” He mused, thinking it through. This allowed him an out, if anything went wrong. He could foist all blame on Umbridge, and protect his own position. Brilliant. Clearly, such decisive and brilliant thinking proved he was the most brilliant Minister in the history of the Wizarding World. Goodness! Doing the nasty dirty backstabbing work of a politician, and still coming up smelling like roses of a caring Minister, which reminded him: “But, please do be explicit in instructions. I need an answer post-haste, and monies back in the coffer by September, but not at the cost of the souls of wizards and witches in good standing with us. We’re coming up to an election year, after all.”

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Arcturus looked in askance at the tablemates in front of him. He was right now of the firm opinion that he’d finally bitten off far more than he could chew by trying to deal with yet another insane Black female. But admitting to all here that Allison was a nutter, much like her cousins Bellatrix, and Narcissa, would be like asking for evisceration. Dammit. “The Devil?” He asked, doubtfully. It was wretched to see the curse at work in his great-niece, quite tragic at this tender young age. Whoever had in ancient times cursed the family had certainly known what they were doing.

“He sure is. Your niece won’t allow him in her home unless he washes off his brimstone glory. Oh, and of course, I am Judas. Judas the Damned. You may have heard about me. Badass boy betraying Christ. Good times.” Judas grinned at him, his face alight with gleeful perkiness, and proceeded to flash white long fangs into full glorious display. The stutter in old man Black’s heart made his day.

Lucifer rolled his eyes, leaning back in his chair with complete nonchalance as he picked up the thread of the conversational goal to shock the old wizard senseless, “Our dearest Ally is not nuts. Well, subjectively, I suppose, we can confirm she’s not a lunatic like the rest of you Blacks, at least not yet, though I’m certainly at work of pushing that envelope.” He assured him. “Still, sadly, it’s more of a lottery with bad odds that. The Dark Lord’s power keeps her from going nutters completely. Though, I try. Oh, how I try. Failure is not normally in my wheelhouse, you know, so I’m told by the Dark Lord to consider this a growing experience. Anyhoo, we are who we claim to be. And, as such, welcome, Wizard Arcturus Black, to Knockturn II. Home of the Dark Lord, the alternate digs of the Dark Prince, and the preferred den of the dark creatures of Britain’s magical world.”
“Don’t forget the gryphons.” Ally sighed, returning to the table with a fresh pot of tea in hand. “Or the dragons. Technically, they aren’t dark creatures.” She poured for her Great Uncle, and then deliberately poured onto Lucifer’s hand instead of his teacup. “You will not be driving me nutters.” The devil whimpered clutching his wounded hand to his chest. The burn healed immediately. “I can try!”


“And gryphons. Hags, a few bansidhe, scores of vampires and werewolves, oh, and one Lich.” Ally nodded.

Oh, sweet Merlin. Arcturus felt his heart pound in near terror. “A Lich?”

“The Lich.” Lucifer clarified tartly, eyes flashing red with his power. “Call him ‘A’ and you’ll be stuffing your intestines back into your belly. The one and only, and my finest production of pure soul corruption. Thus far, no one has successfully duplicated the Lich’s existence, though that’s mostly due to the Lich getting to them before they finally succeed. The Lich is of the mind no one else should have such power or immortality.”

The wizard’s faint moan had the plate of biscuits thrust his way. “Do have a biscuit. The sugar will perk you up.” His great-niece assured him, lifting the teapot to top off his cup. “Chin up. Devil and Damned aside, they are so very not the scariest thing you’ll ever face, Lord Black. I rather suspect my grandad will be an utter terror. He’s a mite beyond pissed with the family, to put it mildly, and now that he’s a grumpy old man, he has no filter left when it comes to sharing his feelings on any subject.” She paused. “Or any restraint from lobbing things at your head. I do hope you have good reflexes.”

Both Lucifer and Judas smirked evilly at him.

There was a ruckus in the front hall, and a black messy haired lad scuttled through to the kitchen, throwing himself at Ally for a hug. “Auntie Ally! Uncle Jasper and Auntie Pru are taking me now to get my school supplies.” He told her excitedly.

“Wonderful!”

“And we’re stopping at Gringotts to do all those nasty things you want done to the utterly wretched people on your list.” He assured her.

“Politely, of course.” His foster-mother required. “Don’t irritate the goblins. Heaven and Hell both know the Lich is doing that in droves already.”

Harry smiled toothily. Despite only being a pre-teen, he definitely had the smarts and wit to put all other teens to shame. This was the cost of letting their sweet little boy hang about with a multitude of vampires, the Lich, Hags, and a fallen angel. Fortunately, he learned how to be a good pack member and a part of a larger team from the wolves.

“I’ll be good.” He promised, planting a kiss on her cheek. “So, for the record, if you should be planning my birthday celebration, I’m thinking waterpark. Particularly Waterworld? Using portkey to travel there and back?” He cocked an eyebrow at Judas and Lucifer. “Hint, hint.”

Before any of them could reply, Jasper called from the front. “Car’s leaving, Harry. Hustle.”
The boy was gone in a flash.

Arcturus swallowed. He was old, not senile, and he hadn’t missed some salient points during that flyby visit. Firstly, the child who was not of her blood, was quite comfortable in his grand-niece’s arms. Secondly, the lad was casually saucy with two of the most feared pinnacles of evil. Thirdly, he had a lightening bolt scar on his brow and lastly, the lad, who was just now dawning eleven it seemed, was called Harry. Sweet Merlin, Circe and Hecate….Harry Bleeding Potter was living in a Dark Community.

Dumbledore would have a ruddy stroke if he only knew!

It blew Arcturus granted old, but far from feeble mind. Harry Potter was in league with the Damned and the Devil. A Potter gone dark. His heart sunk. Dorea must be spinning in her grave!

“We can’t possibly accommodate a trip to Waterworld.” The Devil groused. “It’s his eleventh birthday. Besides, I’ve invited the sidhe. You know how they feel about chlorine, the ruddy purest snobs.”

“The Sidhe?” Ally moaned. “Oh, Lucifer -- why would you -- surely they’ll think you’re teasing them.”

“Nope. No, no… I assured them it wasn’t a trick on Ol’ Nick’s part.” Judas added, around nibbling a wafer biscuit. “Mind you, I had to give up a FANG to convince them I was serious. A fang doesn’t grow back willy nilly.

“No.” Ally agreed with a sigh. “But it does grow back after a day.” She sipped her tea thoughtfully, and then frowned. “Hold up, which Sidhe did you invite?”

“Oh,” Lucifer airily waved a hand, “You know. All of them. Our boy only turns eleven once. He should get all the loot he can whilst everyone likes him. Puberty will put an end to that nonsense.”

“All of them?” Ally thumped her teacup down hard. “ALL of them? For crying out loud -- the Seelie Court are all a bunch of bleeding organics-only vegetarians, Lucifer! I’m not prepared to deal with that on a lark! I’ve nothing against vegetarians, but they want certified PROOF it’s organic on everything. That’s ridiculous! And outside of the chemicals in the water, Waterworld is the centre of fast food for the universe, I’m sure they wouldn’t know what to do with a vegetarian if we gave them an army of nutritionists to help.” Ally chewed her thumbnail thoughtfully. “What if we made our own water park here? Transfigured a few slides, I’m sure the dragons won’t mind loaning their lake for the day.”

Lucifer’s eyes lit up, “Oooh, a dragon slide into the lake. I bet I can get the Swedish Snoutnose to help with that. And, what if we had airborne dragons drop people in…”

“We need to deepen the lake. It’s too shallow for a good drop.” Judas rubbed his jaw. “Maybe a runic spatial distortion. I’ll have to check with the Lich when he gets back.” He made a small face. “You know, I can steal some of the WaterWorld rides using time-shifting, and then put them back when we’re done.”

Lucifer gave a small eyeroll and huffed. “Oh please, that’s a lot of work and fuss. Just Bermuda Triangle it. They’ll never figure it out. It’ll give the Met something fun to do for the rest of the year.”

Arcturus’ eyebrows were making homes in his receding hairline, and the urge to verbally blister immature morons for even contemplating using magic that might get their magical world exposed
was building in his chest. What did they think they were doing? He opened his mouth to ask, when a teacup was forced into his hands.

“Don’t.” Ally shoved the teacup again towards Arcturus, with a roll of her eyes. “If you even start, they’ll talk you around to their way of thinking, and then before you know it you’ll be on calming draughts endlessly. It’s far better to just ignore, and go with the flow. Accept that which you cannot change. Personally, I think I compartmentalize far too much of my life nowadays.”

“Ah.” The old man nodded understanding, after all, he’d lived his entire life around Black witches, and there was no other group that required serious mental compartmentalization than those women; still he kept a careful eye on the vampire and hypothetical devil.

And geez, he was going to have to give Christianity some serious thought as a real religion, not just some nonsense the muggles came up with.

“Oh, it’s one of many real ones. And I am NOT hypothetical. I’m the real deal too. Christianity isn’t fiction at all, if you must know, although that bible… well, I don’t know what Daddy Dearest was thinking. That entertaining little read is the first good example of the “telephone” game. Prophets are only communicated when they are HIGHER than kites, you know. Brains would implode otherwise. Also? Going back a bit -- He’s not.” The Devil pouted in his direction. “In league with me. Can’t be, Ally here keeps beating me black and blue with rules, and ethics and moral requirements before I’m allowed to associate with him. It’s all so very discombobulating, being me and expected to abide by ‘rules’ of all things. I mean, really? Me? Ethical? Moral? She’s delusional is what she is. Oh, and, by the by, I must say, for an Lord of an Ancient and Noble Bloodline, your occlumancy is pure shite.”


He cringed backwards. “I’m behaving!” He defended.

“And I’m the sugar plum fairy.”

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There were sixty-four dead already, and it wasn’t even time for morning tea yet. And since the maids hadn’t successfully slinked (as Dormettes tended to do) off with the breakfast dishes before Her Unearthly Majesty had started another day of mayhem and slaughter, tea was likely to be late this morning. Basically, it should be noted, that nothing really new was happening in the Unseelie Court. Just another day, like any other, full of the same shit where the servants and subjects of a very demanding and frankly terrifying Queen struggled to survive under her incredibly oppressive thumb.

Or, at least, that was the perspective of the minions. And were one able to ask one of the recently departed minions for their perspective, they would have admitted that Her Majesty’s body count was running a mite bit higher than usual for a Wednesday.

Fortunately, and that said was incredibly subjective, because not a living subject felt fortunate, but as per Her Darkling Majesty, neither living nor dead minions were entitled to a valid or considered opinion. As far as the Queen of Air and Darkness was concerned, the peasants were pathetic whiners whose lives were sworn to her. That mean she could kill them if she ruddy wanted to. Neener.

As it were, on this particular Wednesday, Her Majesty had a small problem. Or, perhaps, it was best to claim that to the average individual it was a small problem. For Her, it was epic problem of
colossal scale, a MOUNTAIN to overcome, and apparently none of her demented useless moronic underlings had a ruddy clue how to fix it. They were to serve and advise her, and they were all fundamentally useless. Honestly, she had more than three quarters of a mind to kill the whole lot and start over.

(Eh. She might keep the hellhounds. They had worked out well, if one ignored the scratches on doors and shitting in the throne room. Minor inconveniences, really. The blood of an bogie was infinitely harder to get off stone than hell shit was.)

Be that as it may, She had requested, over a poached egg, a ridiculously simplistic thing, it was almost embarrassing to ask, but she’d braved up and put it out there.

What would be the penultimate gift that One such as Herself might give an 11 year old boy for his birthday?

The idiot flock of minions had utterly disappointed Her. First it was something absurd like a muggle Super Nintendo Entertainment System (and what the deuce was that? Stupid minions!). Then it was suggested a cricket bat and ball, or a football. Really? SHE didn’t run, so why would a Dark Lord like little Harrikins? Now, maybe a football team, but that would be a bit too frivolous a gift, when She didn’t know if the Dark Lord even liked football.

It was disappointment after disappointment, and completely ruined her breakfast. Clear as mud, someone(s) had to die.

Was it too much to expect the demented throng manage this one itsy bitsy easy-peasy task?

“The next fool to not deliver a most pleasing answer shall be drawn and quartered. So. Tell me now, and be careful with your words if you wish to keep your head on your neck-- what magnificent awe inspiring, indebting-to-Us gift does the Darkest Queen of all gift to the Dark Lord on his eleventh birthday?”

For purposes of clarification it should be noticed that in the highly sexist and discriminatory magical world, a true dark lord trumped queen any and every day. And yes, that did miff the Queen of Air and Darkness tremendously, but what could a girl do? Eviscerate everyone (male) just to reach the top? Tempting, but too time consuming. Besides, then she’d be listening to females whinge about not having men to service their needs (that of changing light fixtures, plumbing repairs, drywalling and such, because sex stores had toys in plenty, as far as She-of-Air-and-Darkness was concerned).

She shifted in her throne, fist clenching her scepter like a mace (because it was), and red eyes gleaming with menace, “Well? Silence will see you all slaughtered.”

There was a stirring in the crowd gathered before her dark throne, a restless shifting, and some yearning looks towards the two exits. Sure, every stupid answer would result in death, but how was that unreasonable? All She wanted was the BEST EVER gift idea; how hard was that to deliver?

Very, apparently.

“ANYONE?” She roared, her scepter with a wicked sharp curve to it, that no one dared. “I don’t want a suggestion like ‘scooter’, or ‘computer’, or ‘candy’. Nor do I want something about sports, or gaming --- really, gambling at eleven? That is a suggestion of that damnable Lucifer’s character. I need unique, one of a kind, un-trumpable gift! A gift that would never be forgotten, something that will keep the boy forevermore grateful to US! A gift neither the Lich or Lucifer himself can best.”
“Give him the secret.” Shouted one minion at the back of Her hall. Hidden by the bulk of others, and shadows, as if that would protect him from Her wrath if she was not pleased. “Package it up in a box, a whisper to his ear alone, and thus neither Lich or Lucifer can ever best it, for once given, it can never be replaced.

Okay, that all sounded good, but… She was a busy Queen, and from time to time little details escaped her mind. Like this one. Still, appearances being what they were, she sneered “What secret?”

“THE SECRET.” The minion shouted hoarsely, skulking deeper into shadows.

Idiot. She could summon him by his very bones. Still… a secret. If there was a secret, and shared, that was… hm. “I’ve a lot of skeletons in closets, dead-weight. Which secret?”

“He’s mortal. Give him THE Secret.”

Huh. Oh! Wait! Well. Now there was a thought. She could get the jump on the rest of the Powers that Be with that one, and it’s the kind of gift you just couldn’t beat. No way to top it, no replacements possible. Hmm. Yes. It would certainly solve a number of problems on her end of the spectrum too.

“You all owe your lives to this unnamed cretin.” She declared. The original reward she had first offered to the court for giving her a good suggestion had been a year free of the court, but that had been hours ago, and since the winner of such price had chosen anonymity, well. Wasn’t that a pity for him? More minions to torture and torment! She swept off her throne, her gown swirling in shadowy inky darkness around her feet, and with a mere moment of thought, vanished into the Air and Darkness she was Queen of.

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Harry skipped along, his stomach happily full from lunch, although Pru had scowled fiercely at her plate. The small pub Jasper had led them to was located on the corner of Knocturn Alley and Dinural Court, in an dingy old building. The pub itself was a bit tired looking, but meticulously clean, and the smells from the kitchen delicious. The old barkeep, Jonesy had sure been happy to see their party trudge in, very welcoming. And just like everyone else Jasper had ever seen, Jonesy took a real shine to Harry. The lad had that kind of impact on people.

Still, their party had been good for clearly a waning business. “It’s the lack of dark creatures doing business in ol’ Knockturn.” Jonesy had commented early upon their arrival, whilst bringing over four ales, a tray of butterbeer, and a pot of tea. “I rather preferred them as clients than the few dark wizards who stray through here. Uppity bunch.”

Still, whether it was that Jasper and his four mates were werewolves, or that Pru was clearly a Hag, Jonesy was right happy to have them in his pub. Well, the fact five werewolves, a hag and a young lad had ordered a heaping table full of food, and a large bill, probably endeared them even more. They’d nearly licked every plate clean. (Pru had stopped Harry from trying. Hags were notorious for eating small children, but they were damn fussy about table manners. Who knew?)

“That was great!” Harry nearly sang as he skipped along happily behind Ralphie and Jock, two of Jasper’s pack that were nearest the door. “I’m so full I could just burst.” For good measure, he patted his little food baby belly.

“Lovely image, dearheart. Please don’t.” Pru humped along behind him. Her head was cocked
awkwardly, as if listening for something distant. “Does anyone hear…”

Ralphie had pushed open the door, and a trio of Dementors swooped down on him. It was a furious flurry of a moment, Pru raising her cane, Jasper dropping his money bag and launching himself to the door, Jock, Artie and Loki pulling Ralphie back out of the clutches of the Dementors… but Harry… in that frantic moment, made a funny sound of both fear and fury, and literally threw himself forward, tackling the Dementor with all his strength. They fell, a tumble of robes, and boy.

To Jasper’s horror, though, the Dark Lord and the Dementor landed in a bad position, causing the larger figure, being the Dementor to plant a soul-sucking kiss on Harry’s head.

The world seemed to come to a complete frozen stop then. Harry shuddered once, and then seemed to crumple inwards, eyes closed, and Jasper… well, he wasn’t sure if he was really moving, or breathing, when he swept into the fray of five Dementors swarming around their unconscious and possibly unsouled Dark Lord.

Behind him, he could hear Pru’s incandescent rage in form of a screech that could shatter glass. Jasper and his boys paid that no mind, they were focused only on Harry.

And then… the world moved, Harry moaned, and the dementor… seemed to choke… his shoulders moving in a heave of some sort, as if nauseated beyond endurance. Jasper didn’t care. He no sooner scooped Harry into his arms, when Pru’s gnarled hand clutched at him, and they vanished by portkey.

The Dementors left behind watched as one of their own began to retch black ichor on the ground.

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BREAKING NEWS - DAILY PROPHET SPECIAL EDITION!

Boy-Who-Lives survives the impossible again!

Witnesses in Knockturn Alley watched in horror as Dementors swarmed the Boy-Who-Lived who had clearly wandered down the wrong alley whilst shopping for school supplies.

Described as a rather tall, slender young lad with his father’s famous hair, and his mother’s glowing green eyes, Barkeep Jonesey declared the lad was well mannered and very considerate of others.

It was as the lad left the pub, clearly having sought direction, that he was accosted by a swarm of Dementors. Witnesses say that the lad was surrounded, and kissed on the spot. He seemed to fall unconscious for a moment, but was seen to move independently.

Sadly, his trauma did not end here, as witnesses further claim that the famed Baba Yaga swooped in to grab the lad during his moment of weakness, and vanished to parts unknown! Will we see the Boy-Who-Lived ever again?

Chapter End Notes

Obviously I’m not dead, and still writing in my very little free time. The story is not
abandoned, but don’t expect rapid updates. It happens when it happens. Thanks.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!