# The Avalon Seven

**Rating:** Teen And Up Audiences  
**Archive Warning:** Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Major Character Death, Underage  
**Category:** Gen, M/M, Multi, F/M  
**Fandom:** Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling, Sherlock (TV), Merlin (TV), British Royalty RPF  
**Relationship:** Harry/Harem, Lucius Malfoy/Narcissa Black Malfoy, Sirius Black/Remus Lupin, Sherlock Holmes/John Watson, Anthea/Mycroft Holmes, Andromeda Black Tonks/Ted Tonks, Draco Malfoy/Original Female Character(s), Merlin/Arthur Pendragon (Merlin)  
**Character:** Harry Potter, Original Male Character(s), Original Female Character(s), Original House-Elf Character(s), Original Holmes Character(s), Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes' Mother, Sherlock Holmes' Father, Anthea (Sherlock), Mycroft Holmes, John Watson, Sirius Black, Remus Lupin, Severus Snape, Draco Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Arcturus Black, William Windsor, Bill Weasley, Blaise Zabini, Charlie Weasley, Cedric Diggory, Seamus Finnigan, Amos Diggory, Arthur Weasley, Molly Weasley, Albus Dumbledore, Amelia Bones, Nicolas Flamel (Harry Potter), Neville Longbottom, Viktor Krum, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbott, Luna Lovegood, Adrian Pucey, Andromeda Black Tonks, Perenelle Flamel, Original Goblin Characters, Tom Riddle | Voldemort, Monsieur Delacour  
**Additional Tags:** Powerful Harry, Magically Powerful Harry, Alternate Universe - Harry Potter Setting, Political Harry, Pureblood Harry, Pureblood Society, Pureblood Culture, Pureblood Politics, Manipulative Dumbledore, Once and Future King, Grey Harry, Slash, Pre-Slash, Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence  
**Series:** Part 1 of The Empire of Avalon  
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**Summary**

Major Non-Canon A/U, Harry is treated for abuse and massive injuries by John Watson as a John Doe. To help solve the mystery of the battered boy John calls in his partner Sherlock - whose father has much more information about his patient than John ever thought possible. Turning to an old acquaintance, Siger Holmes contacts the Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Wallace...Harry's rightful guardian.
First several chapters will be covering Pre-Hogwarts years, story starts with Harry at age four so it'll be a while before any sort of slash or real conflict happens. Very political fic with lots of twists and turns. Because the plot-bunnies won't leave me alone!

Notes

This is a Slash Harry/Harem that features canon characters, original characters, and usage of some of the celebrated British Royals.

Disclaimer: This is a work of fan-authored fiction and is not meant to infringe on the rights of the rightful owners of any of the stories used herein nor to cause harm or embarrassment to the real life characters used.
Prologue: Finding Harry

Chapter Notes

Edited: 2 February 2016; minor clean-up of errors.

Author’s Note: Here we have the first installment of my new story the Avalon Seven. This is a Slash Harry/Harem that features canon characters, original characters, and usage of some of the celebrated British Royals.

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The Avalon Seven

Prologue: Finding Harry

John Watson strode down the corridor of the free clinic he made a habit of donating his time to, his jaw set in grim lines and tension radiating from his every move. There was little that phased the war-worn doctor and former combat surgeon however there were two things that never failed to get under his skin and raise his often-overlooked and formidable ire: child abuse and/or molestation. Thankfully for the poor mite lying too-still and quiet in his OR sleeping off having his skull stabilized from a nasty blow – and he didn’t need his partner and lover Sherlock to tell him it was from a heavy pan, likely cast-iron – and surgical pins being implanted through more than a dozen bones in his too small body, this case was an open-and-shut child abuse with no molestation or rape markers to be found.

Though that prognosis could always change depending on the little one’s behavior once he awoke. Tiny and underfed, the wee mite could have been assaulted in other ways – ones that didn’t leave marks but told a world of tales by behavior. Which meant John needed to call in the big guns.

Sherlock was already on his way.

If there was anyone who could get to the bottom of the John Doe sleeping in a medicated haze, it would be the infamous consulting detective who happened to hate child abuse as much as if not more than John himself does.

“What do you already know, John?” Sherlock snapped out as he slammed open the clinic door and started down the familiar halls with Watson at his side.

“John Doe.” John obediently began rattling off the confirmed information the staff had collected both from the boy and the officers that brought him straight to the clinic for help. “Found by patrolling foot-officers in an alley of a London suburb. Brought directly in for care after they confirmed he was still alive.” Here John sighed, that being the end of the verifiable facts. “From my
analysis he’s been horrifically abused and/or neglected for several years and could be anywhere from two years of age to much older depending on his current levels of food deprivation. He has scarring over seventy-five percent of his body from knife wounds to burns to lash marks. Honestly Sherlock.” Gentle brown worried eyes met their icy-green match. “I’m shocked he’s still alive, let alone that he survived his surgery.”

“A survivor then.” Sherlock muttered to himself as he stared through the glass window that looked into the room.

The genius quickly catalogued the various markers that upheld John’s appraisal of the situation before moving quickly into the room and taking a closer inspection both of the sleeping child and his belongings.

It wasn’t until the lanky man placed one long-fingered hand gently on the boy’s brow that he got the shock of his life. Literally. An arc of power jumped between the boy and the grown man.

Jerking his hand up and away in surprise Sherlock snapped an order at his partner before striding from the room.

“Keep an eye on him John. Don’t leave him alone, not for any reason.”

“May I ask why?” John called out at the retreating back of his temperamental lover.

“I need to make some calls. Urgently.”

…

Within the hour, John hovered nervously nearby as the formidable sight of the three Holmes men congregated around the waifish form still sleeping quietly in the hospital bed. Never, outside of Sunday dinners presided over by the indomitable Lady Holmes, had John ever seen all three of the infuriating geniuses in the same place at the same time. And even the Lady herself had to beg, borrow, and threaten to make her beloved dinners possible.

On this occasion they’d all just…shown up.

First came his lover Sherlock returning from making his calls – presumably to the other two Holmes men or at least Mycroft – who took up his standard seated lotus position in the rigid visitor chair, fingers steepled under his chin. He sat in uncharacteristic silence, forbearing even to mutter deductions under his breath, eyes firmly fixed on the abused boy in the bed. A shadow would cross his handsome face every now and again as the child would whimper from either nightmare or memory-induced fear even in sleep.

John knew that the boy would have an effect on Sherlock, children abused and otherwise tended to do so either to good or ill, but never would he have suspected such thoroughly baffling behavior.

Behavior that wasn’t alleviated upon the entrance of his older brother, who behaved nearly identically as Sherlock first had: examining the boy, touching him carefully upon the brow after a prompting look from his brother, then sending his shadow “Cynthia” this afternoon a speaking glance. The shadow merely nodded before hitting keys on her ever-present cellphone and backing out of the room to take up vigil in the hall. Mycroft rather than speaking to anyone leaned stoically against the wall, hands gently crossed and resting on the hook of his umbrella, and joined Sherlock… in whatever it was they were doing.

Now and then they would share a look that for once John couldn’t decipher, talking in that not-speaking way the genius pair had, and ignoring any of John’s attempts to catch either of their gazes.
It wouldn’t take a standard-fare genius to conclude that the Holmes brothers knew something they weren’t as yet inclined to share, nor one of their caliber. And John for all his faults could often keep up with the duo. When he felt like it which wasn’t often. The way their minds worked was simply too exhausting on the day-to-day.

But for once they’d successfully out-paced him without so much as a word.

It was as fascinating as it was troubling, especially since it all revolved around the too-small boy on the bed.

Siger’s arrival – John had met the patriarch before and one wasn’t likely to mistake a Holmes – was unexpected to say the least. He’d thought they were waiting for one of Mycroft’s government people or perhaps one of Sherlock’s less-than-savory contacts to come and answer their questions about the child. Even their friend DI LeStrade. Instead it was the elderly but imposing Lord Holmes, Viscount of Ravenscroft, who strode elegantly through the door.

No one who saw the three together could doubt their close relation, both Holmes boys taking drastically from their father’s noble heritage, Siger being the 21st Lord Ravenscroft to hold the title. While Sherlock was made handsomer than his father or brother from the introduction of blood from his Hawkins mother whose own mother was a particularly lovely Stuart, they all were Holmes’s to the bone.

Something easier to forget with Sherlock who preferred science and deduction to statesmanship unlike his father and brother: the British Government and the former British Government.

It was a post that they’d held since the 1st Lord Ravenscroft who legend had it served under Richard the Lionhearted – and kept the country solvent while the King went off on his Crusade.

Siger took one look at the child and sucked in a shocked breath.

“It can’t be.” He whispered, brushing the fringe of the boy’s unruly hair off of his forehead and revealing a particularly nasty scar that John was at a loss to explain the origin of.

“Who is he, father?” Mycroft prompted when Siger seemed content to stare in a bewildering combination of fury, disbelief, and awe.

“He can’t be squib-lineage.” Sherlock announced abruptly from his side of the boy’s bed. Squib-lineage being the Holmes name for a muggleborn witch or wizard. It simply made no logical sense to any of their genius minds that power would suddenly spring up from nowhere. Neither nature nor magic functioned in that manner. That they were the products of generation after generation of squib children being cast-off from their magical families made much more sense.

A supposition supported by the few experiments Sherlock had performed on the matter. All three of the Holmes men were barely more powerful than Squibs after all, their inherent magic instead being directed towards powering their intellects rather than their magical cores. A quirk of the Holmes line that allowed for someone magic-born to manage the mundane government that went back twenty generations to the last Magical monarchy.

It was the last known descendent of the Slytherin dynasty who cast the spell that made the Holmes’s brains a wonder of analytical thought, the now-defunct liege Lords of the House of Holmes.

One line of the House managed their Magical affairs while another managed the mundane ones. When either line is in danger of dying out, the other line will produce a “spare heir” who will have the requirements to take over the other. A safeguard most recently coming into play with Siger,
Viscount Holmes, and his older brother Sherrinford, Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Holmes.

“He’s too powerful for that.” Mycroft agreed. He still wasn’t sure of the child’s heritage but no magical child born from a squib could leak power the way this one did. A half-blood could, most in modern times being far more powerful than their “pureblood” peers, Dumbledore being an excellent example of such. “Which leads to the question, what is a child who is powerful enough to send shockwaves through myself and Sherlock doing in a mundane hospital, let alone in this condition?”

John quickly brought both of the elder Holmes’s up to date on the little one’s medical status, otherwise content for now to simply watch the byplay between the brothers. He knew of magic, Sherlock had told him of that world, but it’d never crossed his mind that such a thing would be what was behind his lover’s odd – even for Sherlock – behavior.

A forlorn look crossed Siger’s implacable face at the update from his son’s lover. He quite liked Dr. Watson and approved of him for his finicky younger son. He simply wished the man had better news.

“He’s neither squib-born,” Siger said at last after clearing his throat, his voice gaining strength as he squared his shoulders and face the others. “Nor is he a John Doe. Who he is, is the victim of a kidnapping more than two years ago after his parents were brutally murdered by a Dark Lord and terrorist.”

Mycroft frowned. He remembered his father getting him up to date when he took over his post after the end of the last wizarding war. That would make this child…

“The Potter Heir?” Mycroft asked, shocked to the bottom of his custom Italian-leather loafers. “There’s never been a report of the child being kidnapped.”

Siger snorted, rolling his eyes at his child. “There wouldn’t be, would there?” He asked with the exquisite sarcasm he’d passed on to his sons. “When the man doing the kidnapping was the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot.”

“Dumbledore?” Mycroft felt like someone had smacked him in the face with a three-day-old salmon. “What on earth…?”

His father explained. “In the absence of their parents or godparents, Heirs to any of the seven Royal, seven Utmost Ancient and Noble, or seven Most Ancient and Noble Houses are entrusted to the care of their House Stewards. It’s one of the most ancient of our laws, dating back to before the Founding of Hogwarts. Back to the seven kingdoms of Avalon in fact. Dumbledore,” Siger sneered at the name. “Is a commoner for all that he holds himself as a beacon of power and virtue. He had no more right to give the child to his mother’s adoptive sister than he did to attempt to appoint himself the boy’s magical guardian.”

His sons ignored the “adoptive” part of their father’s statement in favor of focusing on the current problems they faced in light of their father’s information. However before they could continue John broke in.

“As fascinating as this all is.” He said dryly. “This Dumbledore is most likely searching for him as we speak if he’s behind this – at least as far as his placement with abusive caretakers goes. I can’t think that a man as much a career political force as you make him sound will be happy that the child he kidnapped and hid away in the mundane world is missing or dead. It’s a reputation disaster in the making. We need to get the little one somewhere safe before we do anything else.”
“Yes,” Siger nodded with a sigh. “Yes of course. The shock of the situation as obviously affected me more than I’d thought possible.”

Sherlock locked eyes with his partner, devious mind spinning.

“I’ve an idea…”

…

Hours later in a lonely castle overlooking the turbulent North Sea, a weary Lord lifted his head from the work cluttering his desk and a tapping could be heard at his study’s window.

Reaching over, Lord Gawain Wallace, of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Wallace and Steward for the Potter Holdings, opened the sash and allowed the tawny-feathered owl into the room and relieved the exhausted creature of its burden. Flipping it over, he raised a brow at the sight of the rarely-used sigil of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Holmes’ Mundane Title, the House of Ravenscroft. If he remembered correctly it was currently held by the younger brother of the current wizarding Lord Sherrinford Holmes, Siger.

Excitement raced through the Lord as he remembered exactly what interest he shared with the House of Holmes.

Breaking the seal his excitement was trebled by the words on the page written in an elegant script, one he’d only seen once before in his life.

_He’s been found._

Was the message.

And that was all that was needed.

The Heir of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Potter had _finally_ been found. Now it was time to bring Harry Potter, his sworn Lord-in-Waiting home. Dumbledore be damned.

…

_A/N 2/2/16: I’m going through and editing these, trying to clean up the chapters and make sure they’re consistent before publishing the new ones. There will be minor tweaks for the most part that should make them a cleaner read and clear up a few confusing points. Now would be a good time to go through and re-read them before the new chapters are posted. ~ Sif_
Chapter One - The Regent of House Potter

Chapter Notes

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Edited for minor errors 2/2/16

The Avalon Seven

Chapter One: Regent of House Potter

Boy was lost in a fog. He was confused, he’d never had troubles waking up, usually from Dudley or Mr. Dursley jumping on the steps above his cupboard or Mrs. Dursley pounding on his cupboard door for him to wake up and start breakfast. Pain was there, just under the daze. It gave him a comforting sense of familiarity. Boy knew pain, he didn’t know this fog.

Sounds started to penetrate the fog, coming hand-in-hand with the pain.

“…tter?”

“I think he’s coming around.” Dr. John Watson called out to the hovering men which had grown in number by one in the two days since the child – now known as Harry James Potter – had arrived in his operating room.

The Holmes men had taken turns sitting by the lad’s bedside, with Lady Holmes, Mrs. Hudson, and Anthea-not-Anthea swinging through with provisions or dragging one of them off to the residents’ lounge to kip on one of the cots. They’d been joined by a formally dressed man who brought to mind a gentleman from before the industrial revolution. He’d been introduced to John and the other younger men as Gawain, Lord Wallace. And the true guardian of the little one in question.

It’d been explained to him – the kidnapping, falsified records, etc. – when Lord Wallace arrived.

A weight was lifted off his shoulders when he realized that the heavily muscled Lord wasn’t the author of the marks, scars, bruises, and breaks that riddled his patient’s body and were consistent with damage from a large male – with a few exceptions.

“Mr. Potter.” Bright, striking green eyes fluttered open as the bed instantly became ringed by the anxiously waiting group. John honestly wasn’t sure if the child would ever wake up without magical intervention. For his health they needed to wait until he was stabilized before moving him so a Healer could take over his care.

If they could even find a Healer they could trust with the Potter Heir.

“There you are.” The tender-hearted man smiled down at the pain-medication hazed eyes. “Welcome back.”
“Where am I?” Boy asked with a tremor apparent in his dry throat. One of the men watching him – tall and lanky with a scarf knotted nattily around his neck – reached over and snagged a covered glass, holding the straw up to his mouth. Boy drank thankfully, giving the tall man a small smile. Frowning he looked around, failing to recognize anyone he was surrounded by. “Who are you?”

Several pairs of eyes carried on a silent conversation before Siger stepped forward and took the lead.

“You’re in the hospital, Mr. Potter.” He said with the firmness of a two-time father. “You were found – hurt – by the police and brought here. Dr. Watson,” He motioned to the nice man who was there when Boy first woke up. “Contacted my son Sherlock to help find your family.”

Sherlock was the man with the water glass, Boy gathered before shaking lightly from fear he couldn’t quite control as what the man had said.

Doctor Watson.

Police.

His family.

Three things Boy had been told Freaks like him either weren’t allowed around in the case of police and doctors or didn’t deserve in that of family.

He’d made the mistake of called Mrs. Dursley “Aunt” one time when the cat lady from Magnolia Crescent told him they were his Aunt, Uncle, and Cousin.

Mr. Dursley hurt him worse than ever before or since for that.

Freaks didn’t have family and were not allowed to call normal people Aunt, Uncle, or Cousin.

“Easy little one.” The nice Dr. Watson interrupted Mr. Sherlock’s father. “You’re not in trouble.”

John soothed the visibly panicking child. And no wonder. Lord Holmes would’ve been well served by leaving out the part about Sherlock looking for his family.

“Indeed you’re not.” Siger agreed, nodding his head at Dr. Watson. “Nor do you have to worry about returning to those people.”

Frowning, Boy tried to understand. Finally, unable to make head nor tails of it, he voiced his main problem.

“Who is Mr. Potter?” He asked innocently.

“You are Harry.” Lord Wallace said hoarsely, hanging onto his temper by a thread. What had been done to his future Lord? To the child he’d long thought of as an honorary son? “That’s your name. Harry James Potter.”

“I have a name?” Green eyes widened in awe.

John took over for the others, all of them needing time to rein in their tempers. Sad as it might seem, that wasn’t even in the top ten of horrible things John had ever heard between his military career, time spent helping Sherlock solve cases, or working at the free clinic. Though his wounds were some of the worst he’d ever seen on a child outside of a warzone – and some within.

“Yes, Harry.” John confirmed as he checked his pulse. “No matter what you were told before, your name is Harry James Potter. And we’re all here to make certain you’re taken care of.”
The newly-dubbed Harry beamed up at the nice Dr. Watson.

“Okay.” He agreed sleepily as he fell back under the influence of his medications. “I can be Harry.”

Out in the hall, Gawain paced furiously, trying in vain to expend some of his rage before his magic escaped his control along with his temper.

The Holmes men on the other hand were quietly seething against the wall, all of them banished from the room while John examined his patient to decide whether or not Harry could be safely moved via magical means to Ravenscroft Hill, the seat of the mundane Holmes Lordship.

Once Harry was cleared for travel Lord Wallace would be transferring him via medical port-key. It was tentatively agreed that Siger and Margeux Holmes would take guardianship so Harry could stay under Dr. Watson’s care until a Healer could be found. Not to mention that no one in the mundane world could keep him safer. With help from Siger’s brother the magical Lord Holmes as well as the Potter Regent Lord Wallace he would be as protected magically as he could be made in addition to the physical protection offered.

Which was all moot if they couldn’t get him well enough to go to Gringotts and confirm with the goblins that Lord Wallace is the Potter Regent and was legally supposed to have custody of the Potter Heir.

Without that step being taken there was nothing to stop the Ministry or Dumbledore from trying to throw him back with the Dursleys.

Trying being the operative word.

If they thought the war against Voldemort was bad they had no idea the level of damage the Most Ancient and Noble Houses of Holmes and Wallace could unleash upon them.

And that was before one counted their respective allies, Holmes being a traditionally Grey-to-Dark Family and Wallace being Light-to-Grey.

The three Holmes men: Siger, Mycroft, and Sherlock, in addition to Lord Wallace all turned to face John as he joined them in the hall. A veteran Doctor with a decorated military career, he still felt a chill tingle down his spine at being the focus of four such intense men with their hackle raised. Running his hands wearily through his hair he gave a soft sigh then gave them what they were waiting for.

“It’s close.” He said, exhaustion dogging his heels, having taken care of the child day-and-night for sixty hours straight with only short naps and food breaks. “At this point all we’re doing is managing his pain and praying he doesn’t come up with an infection. He’s…plateaued. If I had any other options I would say that he’s not to be moved since it runs such a risk of destabilizing him. But I don’t.” He shrugged then nodded towards Lord Wallace. “You can move him to Ravenscroft in the morning. Any longer and the risk of infection or sepsis outweighs the risk of the port-key causing complications.”

“Thank you, Dr. Watson.” Gawain said formally then turned to Siger Holmes as the doctor was dragged by Sherlock away towards the residents’ lounge to get some sleep. “If you would key myself and Heir Potter into the Ravenscroft wards I will return tomorrow with the port-key.”

“You’ll be keyed in.” Siger agreed. “When my son returns I will adjust the wards personally. In the meantime Mycroft has filed – and buried – temporary guardianship papers in the mundane world
giving over guardianship of one ‘John Doe’ until his situation can be reviewed.”

“Thank you, Lord Holmes.” Gawain gave him a deep bow from one Lord to another. “The House of Wallace is in the debt of the House of Holmes.”

The two Lords clasped hands then Gawain disapparated with a barely audible “pop”.

Mycroft who’d been working on his cellphone and staying conspicuously quiet during the preceding conversations, looked up once he’d been assured privacy with his father.

“This is a political nightmare.” He noted casually. “I’ve seen this Dumbledore in action – as well as the newly-minted Minister for Magic Cornelius Fudge. If either of them catches wind of Harry Potter being removed from his so-called guardians before Wallace can get the boy to the goblins it’ll be a minefield. The Lords haven’t actively managed the magical world in years, since before the rise of Grindelwald.”

“Mmm.” Siger hummed in agreement, wanting to see where his son’s incisive political mind had gone. Holmes men who were involved in the mundane world focused their talents in certain areas. Sherlock used his magical ability to see and deduce connections and facts, solving crimes that baffle police. Mycroft however took after himself, using a complex combination of insight and foresight to prevent wars and conflicts before they could even begin. He trusted that his son knew how to avert the disaster none of them wanted to happen.

His son nearly growled at the non-answer, stabbing his umbrella downward and shoving his phone away.

“If that happens.” He nearly bit out, temper getting the best of him after two days of worry and machinations. “If the Ministry and Dumbledore try and interfere further with Heir Potter, the Lords will lose their collective minds – including Uncle Sherrinford. It’ll be the coup Voldemort wished he could orchestrate.”

It was little known – especially to the British magical populace at large – but the Ministry only serves at the leisure of the Lords.

And not any Lords.

No.

Originally there was seven Royal Houses – nicknamed the Avalon Seven – who each controlled one of the seven kingdoms of Avalon. After they disappeared the Wizarding World was ruled jointly between the seven Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses who’d served the three oldest of the Avalon Seven as Stewards. Once those were pared down to three themselves – the Potters, Ollivanders, and Longbottoms – a Privy Council of the three Stewards and the seven Most Ancient and Noble Houses who’d served the four younger of the Royal lines was created.

The Ministry and Dumbledore – who was a commoner – trying to control the Potter Heir would be the one thing that would force the constantly at-odds Lords who had held hereditary positions on the Privy Council into re-forming and then reforming the Ministry.

Destabilizing an already-unstable society after only two years of peace.

“What’s the solution?” Siger asked with faux-idleness.

Mycroft looked off down the hall at seemingly nothing. However his father knew that he was likely examining what his gift was showing him to protect Britain as a whole – magical and mundane.
“An illusion.” He said after several long moments. “We convince Lord Wallace – who clearly wants blood – to wait to seek vengeance against Heir Potter’s former guardians. Then we cast an illusion over his former residence,” Mycroft couldn’t bring himself to call a place where the child was brutalized a home. “That makes whoever comes to check on Heir Potter believe that he’s still there and that all is well. Better yet, if young Mr. Potter has someone in his life who is an obvious plant to keep an eye on him, they can either be subverted or Confunded. Letters to mundane-born or raised children don’t go out until eleven for the Hedwig Institute or the other educational options such as private tutoring and study groups to prepare them for Hogwarts at thirteen. Mr. Potter also can’t be confirmed as Lord Potter until eleven. That gives us just over seven years to train him for the political hurricane he’ll be in the eye of when his caretakers’ abuses come to light.”

Siger only had one thing to say about his son’s rather thorough plan.

“Us?” He arched a brow. After all, Lord Wallace was the boy’s rightful guardian.

“Us.” Sherlock echoed his brother, having returned after settling John into one of the cots for some much needed sleep. “Who else but the Holmes’s could prepare an innocent, deprived child for the rigors this one was seemingly born to?”

Mycroft smirked genially.

“Quite right. Now who wants to tell Mummy?”

…

It took another three days, numerous Anti-Infection and Pain-Relieving Potions (they couldn’t use any other magical remedies due to fears of the now-temporary metal pins becoming fused with muscle or bone), and countless hours of hovering on the parts of John and Mummy…also known as Lady Margeux Holmes nee Hawkins, of the Aged and Honorable House of Hawkins, for Harry to recover enough to survive flooing to Gringotts – a courtesy the goblins were only extending because the Potters were one of their oldest and richest clients.

Portkeying was out of the question and apparation wasn’t even thinkable, the goblins weren’t about to alter their wards even for a second, no matter who it was for.

As it was, flooing was the sole privilege of the Gringotts employees and only their best customers in unusual circumstances – which definitely applied.

Young Harry was quite taken with both “The Nice Doctor Mr. John” and “The Cookie Lady Maggie” which made explaining what was going to happen easier than it would’ve been otherwise, though the only one of the Holmes men he’d relaxed around even a little was Sherlock, due no doubt to his being abused mostly by a man and Sherlock’s uncharacteristic gentleness with the injured boy.

Minutes before their departure through the floo, with Lord Wallace meeting the Holmes party at the bank along with Siger’s brother Sherrinford or as Sherlock put it “the other Lord Holmes”, John crouched down next to the chair that held the stubbornly-upright Harry.

“Do you remember what we talked about, Harry?” He probed gently as he reached out and took one delicate hand in his – checking the child’s pulse while he was at it. Doctor-habits being hard for him to shake.

Harry nodded solemnly. He’d been told a lot of things since waking up in the hospital, many he wasn’t sure that he believed just yet. But he was clean, and fed, and had his own bed to sleep in with blankets on it. And no one had hurt him, beyond what they had to so he could use the
bathroom and other necessities.

Little things to most people that meant the world to Harry.

“What did we talk about?” John prodded for a verbal answer, something the little one had obviously been trained not to give. His caretakers must have preferred him silent as well as broken. Until they broke him too well and he wound up in John’s care.

Honestly, as harsh as it might sound, that was probably the best thing they ever could’ve done for him.

“Hang on tight.” Harry repeated dutifully though still being as quiet as he could manage and be heard. “Close my eyes and hold my breath. Be polite to the goblins at the bank. Wait until we’re home to ask questions.”

The existence of goblins – complete with moving pictures in the book Mr. Holmes the eldest showed him – was a revelation to Harry, doing more to damage the hold the Dursleys had on him than any amount of tender-loving-care could have. Goblins flew in the face of everything Mr. and Mrs. Dursley had pounded into his head about what was “normal” and “real”. Plus Dr. John hadn’t lied to him yet, even when he said things would hurt he didn’t lie to make Harry feel better.

“Good lad.” John praised, gently rubbing one hand against Harry’s stubbled head. They’d had to shave it to piece a portion of his skull together. A bloody miracle of the child’s magic that he had survived. A less powerful boy wouldn’t have and a mundane child would’ve been dead long before the final beating.

Harry beamed up at him at the praise and then lifted his arms – slowly as he’d learned it hurt less – for John to pick him up and take him through the fire-floo.

He’d never been called a good lad before.

…

When the head of the Potter Accounts at Gringotts received the request for a private meeting using the correct form, manners, and form of address from a wizard needless to say Goblin Account Manager Ragnok was surprised. The last communication regarding the accounts under his management was from that creature Dumbledore setting up the maintenance payments to Heir Potter’s guardians. A surprise – because all goblins from the oldest to the smallest goblick knew that certain Heirs were raised by their Stewards not some magicless relation – but not something Gringotts could interfere with without the Heir challenging it.

Though they were able to stop Dumbledore from accessing any and all of the accounts of the latest crop of war orphans. It was the least they could do and all they could do. Goblins may not like humans in general and despise many wizards and witches in particular but even they don’t prey on the innocent like the Chief Warlock was attempting. A disgrace to magical kind was that upstart. Ragnok was nonetheless confused over the meeting request. Heir Potter was supposedly hidden away where not even his bound House Elves could find him. And without him there was nothing Ragnok nor Steward Wallace could do.

Which explained why he was stunned – though he was an old enough goblin that he could keep it from showing – when the group making its way from the floo room parted upon crossing the wards of the securest meeting room Gringotts boasted.

All goblins to become Account Managers had to learn a form of mage-sight that allowed them to
read both power-levels of magical creatures as well as their magical signatures. A necessity to prevent fraud and the most heinous of crimes in the goblin nation – theft. Polyjuice and glamours could copy a person’s appearance – but not their magical signature. And rituals that could copy someone’s magical signature weren’t able to mask their power levels.

It was like muggle finger-printing combined with DNA analysis – simply impossible to beat but it only took a glance.

And Ragnok most certainly remembered the magical imprint of the child being held by no less than a muggle.

“Well.” He gave a sharp-toothed grin at the gathered assemblage. “Perhaps this won’t be a waste of my time after all.”

Once everyone was seated, Gawain got right to the point – something everyone included not just Ragnok and Harry appreciated.

“We need to confirm myself as Heir Potter’s legal and magical guardian.” He stated bluntly as Ragnok watched with cunning eyes. “And then have all the paperwork filed and immediately either sealed or buried.”

So nobody could interfere again, was thought by all but the child in question.

“Hmm.” Ragnok thought furiously for a moment. “This is no easy matter, Lord Wallace.” He said reprovingly. “With the Potter Wills sealed and the Lordship Ring retuned to the House Vault until the Heir is eligible to claim it at eleven there is no simple or easy answer. Especially with Dumbledore and the Ministry’s heavy-handed fumbling.”

“Understood.” Sherrinford nodded sharply. He’d only just met the boy but he could see why his brother and nephews were so attached. “But easy doesn’t matter in this case, merely thoroughness and speed.”

“There is a way.” Ragnok admitted after several long moments. “Besides simply absconding with the Heir until he’s eleven anyway.”

Smirks all around on the Holmes’s faces showed their goblin audience that they’d clearly accepted that kidnapping was still on the table and a viable option.

“Lord Wallace however is unlikely to like it.”

“Why?” Gawain asked, dread filling his mind.

“Because it is Blood Magick.” Ragnok’s smile was all teeth. “Olde Blood Magicks. And the Goblin Nation is well aware of your personal feelings about such things.”

Sherrinford manfully held in a snicker. That was an understatement. The entire British magical world knew how Gawain Wallace felt about Blood Magick – one of the three main branches of the Dark Arts – after all it cost him his first wife who was a practitioner who overreached herself during a ritual.

The then-Heir Wallace led a campaign to have Blood Magick outlawed, sending it into the ranks of its Darker two brethren Soul Magick and Animation, which was commonly known as Necromancy. He succeeded to some extent though not completely. Blood Magick was still used by goblins and
other magical creatures and witches and wizards could still learn and practice it – though only during a Master Apprenticeship either in Warding, Ritual Magic, or the Dark Arts. Even with the stigma of being “Dark” the Lords wouldn’t allow such a potentially useful branch of magic to be out of their reach.

“Which ritual?” Siger asked, cutting off the burgeoning argument between his Darker brother and the Lighter Wallace.

“The Ritual of Blood Inheritance.” Ragnok supplied. “It will show the young Heir’s complete magical lineage – both Blood and Blood-Adopted – and all Inheritances. It’s the only iron-clad way to remove Heir Potter from his present situation and place him with the appropriate Steward.”

“Sounds perfect for our needs.” Sherrinford said, resolutely keeping his eyes on the goblin rather than on the fellow Lord to his right who was clenching his jaw so tightly he could swear he heard his molars grind. “Are there any caveats?”

An excellent question when dealing with Olde Magicks, especially ones using Blood.

“Of course there are.” Gawain bit out. He’d researched many of the ways to fix his future Lord’s situation and had come across the Ritual in question. “He’ll be automatically bound to any existing contracts – be they Courtship, Betrothal, or Marriage – for any Line or House he ends up Inheriting through the Ritual. He’ll have to be confirmed as the Heir on the next Power Day and then Claim those same Lines or Houses on his eleventh birthday.”

“He will also have to abide by the results of the Ritual.” Ragnok added when Lord Wallace couldn’t bring himself to continue.

“What do you mean?” John asked. Most of the discussion was over his head but even he could see that the goblin was hedging.

The others looked around at each other in confusion. What more could there be to it than they’ve already discussed. Leave it to Sherlock to “deduce” the answer.

“Plural.” Sherlock looked up from staring at his steepled hands. “They both used the plural several times. Contracts, Lines, Houses, Results. Both of them – the Potter Account Manager and the Potter Steward – are inferring that young Harry could inherit more than one House, Lordship, etcetera.”

“Very good, Mr. Holmes.” Ragnok commented. “Those of us at Gringotts have heard you are excellent at seeing what others miss. I’m glad to know it wasn’t an exaggeration as humans are known for.”

“Please don’t compliment him.” John grumbled quietly – causing the sleepy Harry to giggle. “He’ll be insufferable for days.”

“Is it possible, Gawain?” Siger asked with a familiarity his brother wouldn’t deign to use. The two of them were too staunchly entrenched as opposing political parties for that. Siger as a mostly-mundane political force could appeal to his former contemporary on a much more even footing.

“Possible?” Gawain blew out a breath and shrugged, flicking his wrist. “Entirely. The Potters, according to the documents I’ve seen in my own and my family’s tenure as Potter Steward, are a magical Family dating back to before Christ. They pre-date Merlin and the Founders. They could be related and interrelated to hundreds if not thousands of magical and mundane families. Whether the relation is enough for Heir Potter to Claim an Inheritance?” He held up a hand, making a so-so motion. “It’s hazy. Impossible to predict. Even for your talented son.” He added the last as he
caught sight of Mycroft staring into the distance.

Lord Wallace had been around long enough to recognize when someone was Seeing something he could not – even if they weren’t a Seer per se.

“He’s right.” Mycroft admitted with a telling grimace. “Ever since Goblin Ragnok mentioned the Ritual the future’s gone blurry on me. I’m useless at the moment.”

“Surprise is good for the soul.” His mother soothed as the others devolved into a minor debate over the Ritual – and its possible outcomes.

“But bad for the economy.” Mycroft retorted good-humoredly as Ragnok brought the meeting back under control.

“As interesting as your points all are, gentleman.” Ragnok held up a hand in a silencing motion. Part of him hated to do so. He enjoyed a good blood-pumping debate as the next goblin and these wizards were excellent at it. Probably helped along by them actually understanding and applying logic to their arguments, unlike the majority of their kind. “It is all moot. The only one who can agree to the Ritual is Heir Potter himself. Otherwise it’ll be deadly. And not just to him. So.” He turned his age-wrinkled face towards the little one who’d spent much of the visit snoozing off and on until the Lords Wallace and Holmes started bickering like wee goblicks. “What questions do you have, young Potter?”

Harry was smart for his age. Something that had never failed to infuriate Mrs. Dursley but that made Dr. John and his Sherlock beam at him whenever he understood something they thought beyond him. But even a very-smart four year old would have trouble with the current discussion. Especially since it was mostly about magic – a forbidden subject at his old house.

So he asked the pertinent – to him – question.

“Will I have to go back to the Dursleys’ if I don’t do it?” Though what “it” was he still wasn’t quite sure. He’d never heard the word “ritual” before. Unfortunately he understood “blood” all too well.

“Probably not.” Ragnok answered simply.

“Will it hurt if I do do it?”

“It shouldn’t.”

Harry nodded accepting that it might, which led to his next and last question.

“Will it hurt more than when Mrs. Dursley poured the bacon grease on my arm?”

It was only through pure force of will that the gathered wizards, goblin, and witch didn’t pop away immediately at that innocently-voiced query. All the adults shared a glance over his head. Someday the Dursleys would pay for that question in rivers of blood.

“No, Harry.” John answered, seeing the question worried his charge more and more the longer the others took to contain themselves enough to respond. “None of us would ever ask you to do anything that hurt that much. Let alone more than that. Do you understand? Not ever.”

Grinning up at the nice Dr. John, Harry bounced a little before settling back against his warm chest. The brief period of activity cost him.

“Okay.” He agreed easily, worries removed. “I’ll do the rit-ual.”
With the needed permission, Ragnok immediately sent off alerts to the needed goblins to prepare the ritual room – and to have a goblin Healer on standby. At the moment there was nothing they could do to Heal the child’s injuries – which he’d needed a catalog of before the ritual in case he’d been given something that would conflict with it. There hadn’t been but until Lord Wallace was confirmed as his Steward and therefore guardian, the wizard couldn’t authorize a Healing.

Unfortunate because all the metal in Heir Potter’s body could be removed and the bones Healed in a matter of moments using a metal-inclined goblin Healer. Even a wizarding Healer would take a week or more to do the same. When they were finished he would still need to be under a Healer’s direct care for weeks if not years to stop and correct the damage done to his young body.

Not to mention Mind Healing from the abuse and torment he’d suffered.

Ragnok longed to soak his axe-blade in Dursley blood but like all the rest understood the need to wait.

The Ritual was simplicity in itself as all the best rituals were. Any witch or wizard with a modicum of understanding of Ancient Runes, Arithmancy, and some form of the so-called “Dark Arts” could create a Ritual. What sets apart a Mastery-level Ritual from just a ritual was two things: cost and consistency.

With a strong enough will and a surplus of magical power, anyone could do anything…at least once. Accidental magic was an excellent example of this. A true Ritual will consistently do the same thing no matter how many times you repeat it – as long as you repeat it correctly of course.

Cost is another matter entirely. Like-for-like is the general rule of magic usage. Small effect, small cost. Big effect, big cost. It was why most average wizards and witches couldn’t do magic on the same scale as the most powerful ones. They simply didn’t have the power reserves to pay the price. To know the laws of magic and to successfully utilize Runes and Arithmancy to power a Ritual to complete seemingly impossible magic was the mark of a Master.

If they used another – untried and untested – ritual to confirm Heir Potter’s inheritance, it would likely cost every drop of blood in the child’s body as it attempted to trace his heritage.

This Ritual only needed seven drops.

The Ritual Room deep within the heart of Gringotts was the only space large enough for the Ritual of Blood Inheritance to take place. As it traced one’s entire magical heritage, for a Family as old as the Potters they needed a lot of space and one very, very large blank tapestry. A nice side benefit of the Ritual was once it was done there was no reason to repeat it. The tapestry would be taken down to a special Vault that was opened specifically to hold it and would self-update every time someone was born or adopted of Heir Potter’s Blood.

If he was muggle-born they could’ve done it right in Ragnok’s office since it wouldn’t need to reach back two millennia or more to trace his magical Line.

Thankfully they wouldn’t need to inspect every inch of the tapestry – although he was certain there were some goblin historians that would approach Heir Potter for permission to do so – a special parchment and quill were linked to the tapestry and would record any valid Inheritances.

Which was the goal of this whole event in the first place.

“We’re ready for you.” Ragnok called to the child and his muggle minder once he was given the
signal from the Gringotts Ritual Master.

John immediately left the group of observing humans who were intensely cataloguing every movement of the gathered goblins and carried his charge over to the goblin-height table. Kneeling down, he rested Harry on his bent knee, steadying him with an arm around his waist. He still didn’t like the look of the curved dagger that Ragnok was holding…

“Seven drops.” Ragnok reminded them – more for the wary adult than the curious child. “Then we shall see what you’re made of, young Potter.”

Harry nodded solemnly and held out a steady hand over the prepared bowl of potion swirling in a mixture of opalescent-white and gleaming-gold as he’d been quickly taught by Lord Wallace.

Ragnok nodded in fierce approval of the youngling’s lack of fear. They’d make a warrior of him yet. Fitting for the Potter Heir. If there ever was a Family that goblins approved of it was the former Generals of the Pendragon Dynasty.

As gently as he could, the goblin pierced the child’s left hand just below his thumb and allowed the required seven drops to flow into the Ritual bowl. Once the last drop fell, the potion flashed red and the cut healed without a mark – appeasing the doctor in John. The potion swirled and flashed – as if the colors were fighting amongst themselves – then a bolt of pure magic exploded from the bowl and hit the tapestry. What was left of the potion was sucked up by the prepared quill as it quickly marked the parchment.

No one was paying the quill any mind as color bled from that bolt of magic that hit the tapestry dead-center. Color and words – names – flowed and swirled across the blank surface, leaving human and goblin alike in awe. Before long, seven names shone with fierce golden light, the only others that could compete with them were four in bright silver, one in unrepentant black, and the last in sapphire blue.

“Merlin and Morgana.” Sherrinford breathed.

“What is it?” Sherlock prompted his uncle, the rest were too busy goggling at the ostentatious display of power. Sherrinford had among other achievements a Mastery in History of Magic and was better prepared than anyone else for what might be revealed.

“Gold.” He nearly stuttered. “It’s gold.”

“Yes, Uncle.” Sherlock rolled his eyes. “Very observant.”

Sherrinford reached over and popped his impudent nephew on the back of his head at his patronizing tone.

“Let me repeat myself.” He said sternly. “There are seven gold names on that tapestry.”

The other Lord woke enough from his stupor to catch onto what has the perpetual thorn-in-his-side shocked nearly out of his wits and was likely the cause for the sudden flurry of activity among the goblins.

“What is the significance of gold lettering, Uncle Sherrinford?” Mycroft asked the question that his little brother was too busy pouting to voice.

“Gold.” King Ragnarok of the Goblin Hoard answered from the now-open doorway through which he’d entered after a manic summons from his Ritual Master. “Is the color of the seven Royal Houses. It’s the colors of the Seven Houses and Kingdoms of Avalon.”
You could’ve heard a pin-drop in the utter silence that followed that pronouncement.

“Oh.” John said eloquently into the quiet, before looking down into worried green eyes. “We’re going to have to get you some new…everything…little one.”

“Indeed.” Mycroft rolled his eyes in an unconscious echo of his brother’s earlier faux-pas with their uncle.

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After King Ragnarok’s startling announcement, the humans and Ragnok along with his King, moved into the safety and relative comfort of the meeting room and tea was provided to steady the humans’ nerves. The Goblin King had already given orders to have the tapestry secured in their highest-security Vault deep within the caverns below the bank and gave a blanket gag-order to all of the goblin personnel present for the Ritual. Not a breath of the events in that chamber would reach the outside world via a goblin.

Everything else was up to the humans and not their concern.

Snaping his fingers, Ragnarok wordlessly demanded the Ritual Parchment from the Potter Account Manager. Ragnok was an excellent goblin and very trustworthy. There were no concerns there, even if he wasn’t one of his own sons.

Another snap of his fingers conjured a listing of the now-applicable binding contracts the Heir would be subject to once he Claimed his Inheritance. As he was now required to Claim and fulfill according to the terms of the Ritual.

Seeing that the humans were once again capable of rational thought, the King began.

“According to the Ritual of Inheritance,” his voice was like two boulders grinding together but still somehow commanding. “Heir Potter – confirmed, is the Heir of Emrys, Pendragon, Gryffindor, Peverell, Potter – confirmed, and Valerius through his Patriarchal Line. He is also the Heir of LeFey, Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff, Pevensie, and Evans – confirmed, through his Matriarchal Line. He is Heir of Slytherin – confirmed, by Right of Conquest and Heir Black by Right of Blood Adoption.”

Gawain buried his head in his hands with a groan having been counting as the Houses were read off.

“Thirteen.” Siger shared a concerned look with his brother. He knew what was troubling Gawain – and it had nothing to do with that bit about Conquest and Adoption. “Thirteen Houses. By Antioch’s cursed Wand…thirteen lines he’s now bound to continue.”

“Godric’s Sword.” Gawain cursed himself as he pinched his nose between his fingers. “Give us the rest of it. With seven Royal Houses and another six of various nobility there has to be more bad news. For one I can’t be the only Steward which muddies up the whole guardianship issue.”

“Quite,” Ragnarok perused the files before him for a moment, obviously comparing information before giving them a summation of the size of the clusterfuck they’re dealing with. “Along with yourself Lord Wallace, the other possible guardians are Dowager Augusta Longbottom – ineligible due to guardianship of another Heir, Heir Eddard Ollivander, Lord Arcturus Black – ineligible due to infirmity, Lords Siger or Sherrinford Holmes – both eligible, Lady Amelia Bones – ineligible due to Vows of Office, Lord Severus Snape-Prince – ineligible due to Vow of Fealty to Lord Slytherin, now young Harry among other Vows which could conflict with his guardianship, and finally Lord Tiberius Nott – ineligible, serving life-sentence in Azkaban.”
“So other than the three in this room.” Sherlock summed up. “The only possible guardian that is eligible would be this Eddard Ollivander.”

“I know him.” His uncle said after a moment. “So does Lord Wallace. He of an age with Mycroft, maybe the generation older. More importantly he’s the Headmaster of the Hedwig Institute of Magic, a private school for pre-Hogwarts education. For those who can afford it.”

Gawain nodded, placing the name with a face. “It’s an excellent school. I’ve already reserved places for David and Rhys when they reach eleven.” His sons.

“Regardless.” Ragnok broke in before his King lost his patience with the pointless discussion. “As there are three out of four possible guardians present if you all come to an agreement now and create a contract accordingly there wouldn’t be anything Headmaster Ollivander could do about it even if he found out before Heir…Harry,” he decided for expedience. “Claimed his Lordships at eleven.”

Mycroft smirked. “Majority rules.”

“Exactly.” Ragnok nodded.

“Before you begin hashing out a guardianship contract.” Ragnarok set aside the files as he came to a conclusion. “There is another issue.”

“How bad?” Gawain asked, closing his eyes. This was the other-shoe-dropping that he’d been waiting for. He’d noted the color of the files the Goblin King had been comparing. They were the binding contracts they’d talked about earlier.

“It could be worse.” The King answered dryly. “Young Harry will be the subject of a mere six binding magical contracts upon being confirmed Heir on the Equinox next month.”

Harry had been found mere days after his fourth birthday and brought to John’s clinic.

“However he won’t have to actually start fulfilling them until the various Lordships are conferred upon him when he turns eleven.”

“That’s not that bad.” Margeux spoke up with an elegant shrug. “Unless some of them are from the far-distant past, they most likely won’t come into play until he’s at least reached the normal age of magical majority.”

“What types and with who?” Sherrinford asked succinctly. “We might need to start preparing for possible political suicide depending on the contract in question, despite your glass-half-full outlook Margeux.”

Ragnarok ran a hoary finger down the list, reading them off as he went:


John could barely hear the goblin’s final words over the groan from Lord Wallace and the gasps from everyone else.
“Must be fulfilled by his eighteenth birthday.” Still smirking the Goblin King rose waving them all back into their seats as they attempted to show him the respect due a King. “I hope for your sons’ sakes that one of them turns out to be…flexible.”

With that snarky comment the King strode from the room after waving goodbye to the sleepy boy still cuddled up in his protector’s arms.

It seems those big green eyes could melt even the fiercest of stony hearts.

Flopping back into his chair, Gawain stared up at the ceiling with unseeing eyes.

“How is your temperamental Italian bride?” Sherrinford mercilessly rubbed in his rival’s imminent tongue-lashing. “Thrown any pottery at you lately?”

“Boys.” Margeux cut the fight off before it could gain traction. “Shall we concentrate on our original purpose and leave the matchmaking for another day?” Or year.

“Excellent suggestion, Lady Holmes.” Ragnok said wryly, weary himself from the day’s revelations. Taking out a fresh quill he nodded, ready for them to inform him of their desired guardianship agreement.

“Since my parents are the only option without children still at home.” Mycroft was the first to speak. “I suggest they have full physical custody of young Harry with legal and magical custody split three ways between my father, uncle, and Lord Wallace.”

Sherrinford nodded slowly, seeing the many benefits of the plan.

“Margeux as I recall as a degree in elementary education, like many college-educated Ladies.” He commented. “Perfect for teaching Harry what he needs for a mundane education whilst the rest of us see to his specialized education: Governing, Foreign Relations, Languages…” He offered speaking for himself. “I could also help with Runes, Arithmancy, History of Magic, and Herbology when the time comes.”

“Chemistry.” Sherlock called dibs on the subject – not that anyone else really wanted it. “And deduction, combat skills if needed.”

John sighed. “I could teach him sharpshooting if we’re going that route. Literature and first-aid/triage as well, biology if needed.”

“As his Steward,” Lord Wallace frowned minutely. “I’m to teach him Estate Management, though I suppose on a much grander scale now than it was supposed to be. Fencing as well. Basic Potions.” He wasn’t in Lord Prince’s caliber of Potioneers but then almost no one was.

“Music, dancing.” Margeux said in the same no-nonsense manner she’d used on her boys when they were young. “He’ll need Deportment and Manners lessons as well.”

Studying the parchment he’d asked Ragnok for, Mycroft arched a brow. He’d just found an answer to the Healer problem.

“You’re all forgetting some key subjects as well as specialized ones.” He pointed out before tucking his copy of the parchment away in his hidden pocket. He had a visit to make while the others settled Harry into Ravenscroft or returned home. “But for now I suggest a standard guardianship contract for an Heir with the original phrasing I provided. The poor lad is probably insensate from exhaustion.
Mycroft expertly twisted the knife, fielding looks from his father and brother. They both knew he was up to something but not what. And that was all that mattered.

Signing completed courtesy of a Blood Quill and the magical guardianship contract filed, the Holmes’s minus Sherrinford and Mycroft left for Ravenscroft with John and Harry in tow while Lord Wallace made arrangements for the mountainous array of files to be sent to the secured lockbox in his home office. It was only a fraction of what he would have to slog through after Harry was confirmed as Heir to the rest of his Inheritance but better to complete it early than to add it to the upcoming morass. He shuddered thinking of the state the accounts for the Avalon Seven must be in after being thought lost for so long.

It was enough to give a Steward hives.

Meanwhile, Mycroft had taken advantage of his temporary use of the Gringotts floo system and departed for a magical hotel in a well-known mundane tourist attraction – mainly due to the massive water serpent that simply refused to keep her head beneath the water. “Nessie” was one of the single biggest Statute of Secrecy violations the Obliviators had to deal with. Sometimes hourly.

The reason the urbane Mycroft was about to soil his thousand-dollar plus outfit in the wilds of Scotland was simple:

Before The Blacks were Blacks, they were *Dubhs*. And before that they were likely some ancient dialect that translates to Black. However the *Dubhs* once made themselves a reputation for ferocity by fighting off invaders in remote Scotland – at the heart of which now stood the ancient and impressive Castle Black.

Home to the Black Lord and the House Seat, Castle Black was built solely to instill awe and fear in its enemies and to be an impenetrable fortress to protect the wild Family and their loved ones.

However, Castle Black was finicky as some ancient magical buildings could be, and to be a true Lord Black the Castle had to accept you. Once done, it was rare for a Lord to leave for any significant period of time. Meaning if you had business with Lord Black you came to him.

Only for his King would a Black Lord – and it was always a Lord never a Lady – willingly leave Castle Black behind for more than a day or two.

It was therefore unfortunate for Mycroft’s ensemble that he had business with Lord Black.

Business that he would never undertake if it wasn’t for his twin gifts of insight and mild foresight. For nothing less than the future safety of Britain would Mycroft willingly deal with the irascible Lord Black.

Though the safety and happiness of a green-eyed waif was quickly joining that rank.

Scratching his request on the back of his card, he sent it to wherever within his wards Lord Black might be as he accepted a cup of tea from the hotel’s proprietress.

Not five minutes passed before a House Elf wearing a pillow sham adorned with the Black Crest appeared at his side.

“Jack-Jack is to be taking the impertinent Mr. Holmes to sees the great Lord Black.” The elf
squeaked holding out one gangly hand.

He let out a smirk at the “impertinent” remark before blotting his mouth precisely with his napkin and leaving several sickles on the table. Taking the elf’s hand once he’d stood, Mycroft nodded in assent. Rather than being sucked through a straw, house elves simply “popped” from one place to another, leaving their rare passengers with a disorienting sense of being misplaced in space and time. Still, it was much more pleasant than most forms of magical transport.

Dropping the elf’s hand he nodded to it – him – politely in thanks then turned to look at the indomitable Lord Arcturus Black.

Seated with Lordly sternness behind a massive ebony desk, Arcturus Black had hair long gone white from age. His once-elegant hands were covered in paper-thin and spotted skin where they were folded upon the leather desk blotter. He wore clothes that were fine both in tailoring and materials – but that harked back to another era. All-in-all Lord Arcturus Black looked every decade of his nearly two centuries of life.

Grief had taken its toll on him, Mycroft’s keen eyes saw. It was there in the barely-curved line of shoulder, the weight of the gaze that spoke of soul-deep tiredness. Here was a man, a Lord, that had outlived his spouse, all his children, all his grandchildren, more than one of his great-grandchildren, and lost his youngest double-great as well as another to Voldemort along with his brother and cousin to Azkaban. He’d disowned only one member of House Black in all that time, for all that his rather-mad great-granddaughter Walburga liked to blast people off the Family Tree at Grimmauld Place.

Her feelings for her mother aside, Andromeda did require his permission to marry and lost her right to the Black name and Inheritance the moment she eloped rather than risk him denying his blessing. It was the disrespect of it that rankled him far more than her choice of spouse.

At least Ted Tonks made something of himself. It was more than he could say for her sister and her husband and brother-in-law now cozily ensconced and keeping company with Dementors.

“What brings you to my door, young Holmes?” Lord Black asked in an aged-cracked whisper. “Surely there’s not a Black left capable or willing to cause trouble in your domain?”

Mycroft had to chuckle at that. Something told him that once-upon-a-time Arcturus Black had received a number of visits from his predecessors. Blacks simply had a talent for finding trouble.

“Nothing of that sort.” Mycroft took the chair offered him and removed the parchment Ragnok had copied for him from his pocket. “Rather I’m here about business under your domain.”

“Are you?” Arcturus hummed under his breath once his Ring remained dormant. Whatever the parchment was it wasn’t dangerous to him in anyway.

The younger man nodded. “Second line from the bottom.”

Storm-grey eyes widened a fraction before all emotion was wiped from his craggy face. Quickly scanning the rest of the page, he set it aside after several long moments. Tapping one long finger on the compelling document, Arcturus locked gazes with the young statesman before him.

It was auspicious news indeed, news with the potential to raise the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black from the mud and mire it had fallen into with the choices his youngest descendants have made.

Hand-in-hand with that potential walked disaster.
If this young – a mere four years old! – child wasn’t raised properly or had the wrong temperament, confirming his place in the House of Black could be the worst thing he could possibly do. It was a gamble…

“No risk.” Mycroft said softly, as if reading the Lord Black’s mind. “No reward.”

“Quite so.” Arcturus laughed dryly. “Quite so. Tell me, what exactly is it you want of me?”

Leaning forward, Mycroft explained his plan.

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Edited 2 February 2016
The Avalon Seven

Author’s Note: This chapter has some massive time jumps as they settle in to as the title says “Raising Harry.”

Chapter Two: Raising Harry

“The Goblin Healers did an excellent job of Healing the most severe trauma.” Healing Mistress Andromeda Tonks nee Black, provisionally reinstated Daughter of House Black, gave her report to the three Lords who stood as guardians to her charge as well as her own Lord of House Black who was “conferencing in” via two-way mirror from Castle Black. “However, my patient will need daily sessions with both myself and Mind Healer Tonks for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately it’s not merely a case of sudden trauma but of consistent, systematic, targeted neglect and abuse.”

“We thought as much from John’s – Dr. Watson’s – analysis.” Siger sighed heart-weary. “I was hoping a Healer would be able to prescribe some potions and order bed rest and filling meals. Or something like that.”

“All of us hoped for better news.” Gawain responded. “But not even magic is a cure-all. How long until he’s on his feet?”

“With the best potions and care available?” Andromeda arched a brow. “Days. Until he’s a healthily-functioning child who doesn’t need Healing sessions; at least once a week, probably a year. Maybe more.”

“A year.” Lord Black’s crackling whisper came through the mirror. “So long?”

Andromeda straightened, stiffening her spine. She knew that her reinstatement to the House of Black was temporary and hinged on her care of her Lord’s newly-confirmed Heir. Ted’s acceptance was provisional on the same. That didn’t mean she was going to let these Lords – including her own – bully her when it came to the health and well-being of her patient.

“If he’d been found too much older the damage would’ve been irreversible.” She said firmly. “Hadrian,” she wasn’t about to call her future Lord Harry of all things. Harry James Potter might be the informal-public version of his name but it wasn’t the one on her Healing contract nor on the Family Tapestry. As far as she was concerned, his name was Hadrian Augustus Potter-Black, Heir Potter-Black. “Is still young, most of his bones have yet to start fusing. With the Goblin Healing of his trauma I can begin using Potions and gentle Healing Sessions to repair the abuse and neglect. I can even Heal or remove the majority of his scarring. It will just take time.”
“What Potions do we need to stock?” Siger asked mildly.

Handing over the list she faced Lord Wallace as she’d been informed of who held the purse strings until Hadrian came of age and Claimed his Lordships.

“Severus Snape is the best Potions Master in the country.” She admitted reluctantly. “He’s who I would use. In the future I can likely brew most of Hadrian’s Potions needs myself. But with the extent of the initial abuse and trauma I would go with Severus, expense aside.”

Gawain nodded, already writing up a Potions contract that was standard save for the binding confidentiality clause that covered Healer, patient, and financer.

“Skele-grow, Max-Strength Nutrition Potion, Max-Strength Stomach Soother, Max-Strength Muscle and Nerve Replenisher, Max-Strength Vita-Mix plus Calcium and Vitamin D, Medium-Strength Blood Replenisher, Medium and Mild-Strength Pain Potions – Dose Four Years, Medium-Strength Appetite-Stimulant.” Siger read off the list for the others’ benefit. “That’s quite the cocktail.”

“Some are precautionary.” Andromeda waved a hand. “The Appetite-Stimulant and Stomach Soothers for example. But better to be safe than sorry. I need a six-month supply of all of them except the two I just mentioned, three-month supply should be fine for those. Dosages as I wrote.” She handed off the actual order form to Lord Wallace. “I will be present enough for some time that I can handle giving him his Potions myself. It’s once I’m not needed daily anymore that I’ll leave a list with Lady Holmes on what he’s to be given and when.”

“Thank you, Healer Tonks.” Sherrinford dismissed her formally.

Bobbing a correct curtsy, Andromeda left the Lords to their plotting. If only she knew her patient was the future King of Avalon. It likely wouldn’t have affected her care of her patient but it might’ve affected her bedside manner, forcing her into a more formal and less nurturing countenance. Better for him that she didn’t know.

Not yet anyway.

In the wake of the Healer, Siger turned to face the two-way mirror.

“How goes freeing your rapscallion?” He asked after Sirius Black the so-called “White Sheep” of the Black Family – at least until he was shunted off to Azkaban.

Once Mycroft returned from his meeting with the Black Lord he explained to his father what he’d done – and the bargain he’d struck. One thing he’d reasoned out from the Ritual was that Sirius Black could’ve no more betrayed the Potters than slit his own throat. By Blood-Adopting Harry, he was magically bound to his protection. Such a betrayal would’ve been in utter conflict with his duty and his magic would’ve had his head for it.

Now Lord Black was pushing for a trial – as he’d discovered to his disbelief that Sirius hadn’t even received a tribunal let alone a trial fit for the Heir he was. The Inheritance Laws of most of the Olde Families didn’t allow for someone sentenced to Azkaban to inherit. A clause that stripped Sirius of his rightful Status without cause.

Lords of all parties and affiliations were raising hell and raining wrath down on the Ministry of Magic. Lords and Heirs were protected under the Laws of most Magical countries and provinces – Britain included. Only those of similar status could judge and sentence them. Something they’d overlooked in Sirius’s case, though it was the only one not presided over, at least in part, by Lady Bones as the Head of the Auror Department. Rather former-Minister Bagnold in conjunction with
Bartemious Crouch and Chief Warlock Dumbledore sent him straight from the holding cells to Azkaban.

A mistake that was going to cost all three of them significantly.

Arcturus gave what could only be termed a cackle.

“Oh, I’ve kicked over a hornet’s nest.” He reported. “My ‘White Sheep’ will be a free man within weeks and Dumbledore will have had that ‘heroic’ shine taken right off of him. If he doesn’t lose his positions on the Wizengamot and the ICW I’ll eat my cane.”

Sherrinford gave a chuckle of his own. “It seems a particularly vicious up-and-coming reporter has caught wind of a venerable statesman and hero trying to make fast-and-loose with the inheritances of several war orphans. By the time all the charges are levied he’ll only remain Headmaster because no one has the authority to remove him until Harry comes into his Lordships at eleven. Unless we can somehow force him to resign.”

Or make him disappear which had Sherlock and Mycroft’s vote.

“I’ve contacted Remus Lupin.” Gawain announced. The werewolf and honorary “uncle” of Harry’s turned out to be easier to find than he’d thought. “He’s been teaching for the last year at Hedwig. He’s tendered his resignation to Headmaster Ollivander and will be at Ravenscroft within two weeks. I’ve added Wolfsbane to the Potions Contract I’m sending Lord Prince.”

“Excellent.” Siger nodded. The Alpha werewolf would make a superb bodyguard/tutor for young Harry. And together with Sirius it was the closest they could come to seeing that the boy knew his parents.

Business adjourned they all went off to further their missions for the day or see to business.

For once in young Harry’s life, things were starting to go right.

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Months passed quickly for those at Ravenscroft Hill, though not smoothly.

While Hadrian – as they’d unanimously decided he should be called deeming it more proper for a future King – was back on his feet within days as Andromeda had promised, his Healing had merely begun and they had to place strictures on his behavior. Hadrian they’d discovered was mostly a biddable child who was merely in search of direction, which worked well in their favor. Using equal parts praise for good behavior and firm rules with fair punishments, the frightened boy came more and more out of his shell, even beginning to chatter and talk like a normal, never-abused child.

The Dursleys by their account had had Hadrian for around thirty-three months, just a season shy of three years. In that time while the neglect was constant and consistent from the beginning – Hadrian had apparently potty-trained himself among other skills such as reading to everyone’s shock – the systematic abuse had been occurring for less than a year. Granted they’d managed to nearly kill him more than once in that year, but one year was much better than three and a three-to-four year old was better able to recover from injuries than one under two.

In didn’t excuse them.

No.

The Dursleys would pay for what they’d done although the method of payment was still heatedly
But for the moment Hadrian’s guardians and caretakers were much more concerned with helping him recover from it than anything else.

Ted Tonks, Hadrian’s official Mind Healer who had turned over his other clients to his business partner to accept the exclusive contract with the House of Black, helped significantly.

Using a combination of Legilimency and mundane Psychology, Ted slowly probed deeper and deeper into Hadrian’s psyche, unwinding the unconscious chains the child had batted down his power with to prevent outbursts of magic – something the Dursleys swore to stomp out of him – healing the damage from the abuse and neglect where he could and hazing it over where he couldn’t.

“Hazing” memories over wasn’t the official term for the practice though to Ted it was the most descriptive. What he did was cast a net of time over the memory, softening the edges and blunting the effect. Making it seem as if a great deal of time had passed since the occurrence losing it to the “haze” of time.

Hadrian’s mind was harder than most to use this method on, requiring more session than most would, even most adults.

After a fascinating discussion with Sherlock Holmes regarding his “mental palace” Ted hit upon the problem.

Like Sherlock and his father and brother, Hadrian had an eidetic memory. Making “hazing” a workable tool…that simply took a great deal of time and effort to accomplish. Inspired by the genius’s interesting usage of rudimentary Occlumency, Ted began teaching Hadrian to meditate and sort his thoughts, after which his Mind Healing sessions progressed much quicker.

Eventually Hadrian progressed to only needing bi-weekly sessions, one focused on training his Occlumency skills and one on continuing to Heal the scars in the child’s mind.

Remus Lupin, Hadrian’s now-constant companion, took over meditation exercises with him allowing Ted to extend his focus onto the newest resident of Castle Black – Sirius.

Arcturus had been proven right.

No Lord or Lady wanted to run the risk of being stripped of their title over a technicality and Ministry fumble the way Sirius had been. Within a week a trial had been called and Veritaserum – a marvelous Potions discovery courtesy of Severus Snape-Prince – was administered. What was said rocked the Wizarding populace to its core.

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The Trial of Sirius Orion Black

Remus was antsy. He’d arrived at Ravenscroft Hill only yesterday and now he was seated in the front row of the gallery beside an old friend…and about to witness a trial that will either destroy him utterly or elate him completely. Sirius. His Sirius.

Abandoned.

Tricked.

Betrayed.
And lost to rot amongst the Dementors.

The wolf in him was pissed to say the least. Moony had never believed that his mate would betray their pack like everyone claimed. And was furious over what had happened to their cub in his absence.

He’d begged Dumbledore to let him take Harry away. Pleadeds. Even pointed out his legal guardianship according to James’s Will.

Nothing worked and all his persistence gained him was vaguely-worded threats.

With his mate locked away, his pack dead, and his cub taken, Moony and Remus gave up. The only thing that kept them from going feral was an offer out of the blue. Eddard Ollivander, the Heir of House Ollivander and Headmaster of the Hedwig Institute of Magic, offered him a job: teaching magic to wizarding youth of the highest class.

Not everyone had the credentials to teach the Heirs (and Spares) of the Nobility. It required friends in high places, exemplary education, and of course, the right birthright for the Lords to allow someone to teach their children. A headache for sure for Eddard.

Remus happened to have all three.

His father wasn’t noble but he was from a genteel branch of an Honorable House. He was known for being the best friend of both the Black and Potter Heirs and later the Potter Lord. And his NEWTS were outstanding with a dual Mastery in Charms and Defense.

The exact same qualifications which led to James’s Steward – now Harry’s Steward – offering him the most plum of positions: tutor to a future King.

Being a werewolf that would defend “his” cub to the death and stronger than a normal man with vicious reflexes was just the icing on the cake as far as Gawain was concerned. And his Wolfsbane was part of his compensation package.

Eddard wasn’t best pleased that his best teacher was whisked away after only a year. But there wasn’t anything he could do about it, most teachers only being willing to sign yearly contracts lest they miss an opportunity like the one offered Remus. He also wasn’t a fool. Remus Lupin would’ve left his service to help raise the Wallace-Holmes Ward (and Eddard was canny enough to guess who that might be) no matter what.

Remus was jostled out of his reverie when the doors of Courtroom Ten opened, allowing the aptly-named Lords Justice to file in. Outraged over the Wizengamot’s treatment of one of their own, the Lords pulled rank in the matter of Sirius’s trial. Rather than having to face a trial by the Wizengamot or a Tribunal made of members of the same, Sirius – though no longer an Heir – was going to face the Lords themselves.

At least the ones who weren’t locked in Azkaban like Nott and LeStrange.

Golden eyes counted the members. Twelve seats were empty from being unclaimed by Harry, several more sat empty for want of an Heir. Two more rotted in Azkaban. And several more were recused from the trail by virtue of the Dark Mark marring their arms – and honor.

Altogether, twenty of the forty-nine of the noble Houses were missing from the assembly, more than at any other time in history.

An occurrence one could lay on the shoulders of Voldemort. Without his Marked both inside
Azkaban and free, and the deaths of several Lords and Ladies during the war, the nobility was at an all-time low. Something that was sure to whip the pureblood-supremacists into a frenzy.

Remus gave a feral grin when he spotted who was presiding.

Dowager Longbottom was sure to give the Ministry hell after they fumbled the safety of her son and his wife and child.

_Bang, bang, bang._ Went the gavel as the Dowager called the session to order.

“Bring in the accused.” Augusta called after reading off the charges.

The doors creaked open and the ravaged form of Sirius Black shambled into the Courtroom and almost collapsed into the hard Accused’s Chair.

“Sirius Orion Black.” Augusta said. “You stand accused of murder, betrayal, and terrorism.” She summed up the charges. “How do you plead?”

“Not.” Sirius cleared his scratchy throat, lifting his head and glaring up at the gathered Lords – and Ladies – from burning grey eyes. “Guilty.”

Chatter filled the courtroom as the press and witnesses shifted and muttered, cameras flashing to try and capture the moment.

“Very well.” The Dowager nodded her head once, sharply. “According to the records – or lack thereof – Her tone was scathing. “You have never been made to answer the charges levied against you. To that end this assemblage requires you to either submit to Veritaserum or levy a guilty plea.”

“Not. Guilty. I’ll take the Serum.”

Augusta nodded to the waiting Potioneer – who was not Lord Prince. No one wanted to strain that man by asking him to help free the bane of his existence. Nor did they entirely trust him not to take the opportunity granted him and poison the poor bastard.

The Courtroom was nearly silent as the three drops were administered and the test questions asked. The Potioneer nodded at Augusta to continue her questioning.

“Sirius Black, did you or did you not, reveal the Fidelis-protected location of Lord James Potter and his family?”

“I Did Not.”

Gasps sounded through the Courtroom, quills scribbling furiously as they tried to record every second of the trial.

“Were you their Secret Keeper?”

“No.”

“Who was, if you know?”

“Peter Pettigrew.”

A new round of muttering picked up in the room and the assemblage before the Dowager held up one imperious hand to silence them.
“Did you kill Peter Pettigrew?”

“No. Wanted to.” Sirius grated out.

“Why?”

With that open-ended question Sirius was finally able to tell his tale under the influence of the Serum.

“Dumbledore told James and Lily Harry was in danger. Offered his home in Godric’s Hollow for a safe house. We trusted him, why wouldn’t we? James wanted me for the Secret Keeper. Too easy, I said. Everyone knew we were second cousins – close as brothers – closer even. I was too obvious. Decided on Peter instead. Mousy git. None would suspect. Dumbledore cast the Fidelis, forgot where I was…until Peter told me.”

If the previous gasps were loud the ones after Sirius stated under Veritaserum that Dumbledore – the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot - knew that Sirius Black didn’t betray the Potters were deafening. Undeterred Sirius carried on.

“Knew something was wrong. Felt it. Family blood, family bond. James was in trouble. Then nothing. Harry was in trouble, danger, afraid. Apparated to the Hollow, found the wreckage of the house. Found James dead. Lily dead. Blood magicks. Could sense it, smell it. Harry alive. Harry crying. Picked him up.” Sirius was almost in a trace as the Serum forced the story from him.


By the time he stopped there wasn’t a noise to be heard in the courtroom besides his panting breath.

“Administer the antidote.” Dowager Longbottom ordered harshly. “Master Auror Sirius Orion Black, you are hereby cleared of all charges and freed from Azkaban with your record expunged. You are awarded one million galleons for each of the three years you spent in Azkaban Prison and will be reinstated to active duty upon your request and approval from both a Healer and a Mind Healer. Master Auror Moody?”

The war-scarred Master Auror stomped forward, blue eye whirling wildly in its socket.

“Bring me Albus Dumbledore.” She snarled.

End Flashback

…”

Lord Black’s words ended up being prophetic. Before the day was over the Olde Families – not falling for Dumbledore’s grandfatherly-I-know-best act – stripped him of what titles they could. The now-only-Headmaster was barred from the Wizengamot, stripping him of his position of Britain’s representative to the ICW, and pulling his honor-title of Grand Sorcerer, a designation not dissimilar to a mundane Knighting.

Rather than a hornet’s nest, Lord Black’s ire had found a target on a bumblebee.

The first month of Sirius’s release was hard. He wasn’t well enough – or sane enough – to see Harry which was the one thing he wanted.
Remus visited him as much as his duties to their cub allowed, often bringing pictures of Harry playing or a blanket or toy that smelled like him to comfort his mate. Slowly but surely the magic of Castle Black and the Healing care patched the missing and torn pieces of Sirius and the rakish, playful Auror reappeared though tempered by his stint in prison. The first thing he did with his clean bill of health was resign from the Aurors.

His brothers-in-arms threw him away without a question or a sideways glance.

Sirius would never be able to trust them at his back again.

Instead he threw himself into learning all he could about Harry and everything Lord Black thought his pup would need to know. No one was sure how long the rapidly-declining Arcturus would last – whether a week or another decade – and Sirius wasn’t going to chance his pup being unprepared. Even if it meant learning all of the “pureblood-bullshit” he hated and disdained as a young man.

Watching Padfoot and Harry reunite would’ve warmed the coldest of hearts. Sirius in fine-form had decided to sneak up on his pup in his animagus form, thinking rightly that he’d be less afraid of a shaggy dog than a strange man.

Nobody was expecting Harry to remember Padfoot.

Except maybe Ted who’d spent enough time inside Hadrian’s mind to realize how amazing said mind was.

With a cry of “Padfoot!” The boy had charged the dog, throwing his arms around the thick neck and burying his head in the warm black fur.

“I missed you, Padfoot.” Hadrian said brokenly. “You weren’t there to scare the monsters away anymore.”

Sirius gave a whine and reverted to his kneeling human form, wrapping his arms around the little boy.

“I’m here now.” He whispered, blinking back tears. “The monsters won’t ever get near you again. I promise Harry-pup.”

Looking across the room at his golden eyed mate, Sirius repeated his words.

“I promise.”

…

With the addition of Remus and Sirius and the progression of his Healing Sessions, John and Sherlock were able to return to their home at 221B Baker Street, promising to visit every weekend as they could.

John wasn’t about to miss his one-on-one time improving Hadrian’s reading skills and introducing him to the wonders of C.S. Lewis and Tolkien while Sherlock was showing unusual patience in playing games with the lad – games which often turned into a class on deduction.

Which was fine with Hadrian’s guardians as there were worse skills for a future King to possess.

Margeux and Andromeda – with Gawain and Remus along for protection and to carry the bags – were able to take Hadrian on his first-ever shopping spree. Deeming Diagon Alley an unnecessary risk, they port-keyed instead to Paris’s Rue du Magique, spoiling the deprived child with toys,
clothes, and games both magical and mundane.

Magical toys that a child had to “push” their magic into to operate or fly or change colors. Mundane puzzles and educational games. Stuffies both soft and soothing – his favorite in the shape of a large black dog. Books of all reading levels.

Granted, some of those books could be considered a step back for him but they often taught fundamental skills both for reading and their subject matter. Such as the picture books filled with plants, animals, magical creatures, and potion ingredients. Or ones that started explaining more complex subject matter like the beginnings of magical theory, etiquette, or history.

Clothes were all custom-made and tailored for their charge with built-in spells that were frightfully expensive but that would make the garments both highly-durable and able to grow with him possibly for years until needing replacement.

Through it all, Hadrian simply watched in wonder that all of this was for him. At first he thought they were shopping for another boy. That maybe nice-but-firm Healer Andy had a boy at home like her daughter Dora she talked about sometimes. Dora sounded fun, even though she was older than him.

Anyone who could change their hair color to bright blue or pink sounded fun.

But no, they told him.

It was all for him.

He couldn’t believe it at first.

The amazing books. The neat toys. Soft, warm clothes. Even the Padfoot stuffy.

All for him.

After that discussion his bright green eyes were the size of dinner plates as he watched the two noble Ladies fill basket after basket with things.

Even for a very smart four year old…it was a lot to take in.

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The success of the Confirmation Ritual on the Fall Equinox was a relief for everyone. No one wanted to hazard a guess over what price magic would’ve extracted from Hadrian if he’d failed to complete it as the Ritual of Blood Inheritance required. With that relief also came a Quidditch-team worth’s of pressure.

Their little orphan waif, found in an alley by a passing police man and pieced back together like a jigsaw puzzle by John, was Harry James Potter no more.

No.

The little one now had a Name bigger than he was. And longer than he was tall.

While still Harry James Potter to the public – his name wouldn’t change on official Ministry records until his Claiming ceremony at eleven though it already was logged with Gringotts – now he had a much weightier lineage.

It was a lot to dump onto those tiny shoulders.
Harry James Potter, Heir Potter became Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon in short, the two most prominent names being given precedence.

The full thing was enough to stymie the most pretentious of wizards:


It was a paragraph, not a name.

Even worse if he actually had to name the seven Kingdoms individually in the order that they were added to the Kingdom of Avalon.

John said it best when his mother-in-law was fretting over how they were supposed to raise a Boy-King.

“Focus more on the former than the latter.” He advised with his gentle insight. “He’s just a boy still and will be for years. He won’t have to be a King, even a King-Apparent, for another seven years. That’s seven years we have to teach him everything he needs to know about being a man. Teach him that and he’ll become a King worthy of the name all on his own.”

“So.” Remus hummed under his breath. “What does our cub need to know before he becomes a man?”

And that innocent-seeming question re-sparked a debate that raged for nearly a month as every one of his guardians and caretakers weighed in – while the boy in question focused on playing with his new toys and reading his new books and practicing his table manners. The latter being quite the chore for a child that’d never even used silverware before coming to Ravenscroft Hill. But chore or not, he learned and quickly.

Hadrian much preferred praise and biscuits for a job-well-done than sighs and disappointed frowns.

... In the end they decided to start as with any other bright child, focusing on the basics of education. Mycroft more than any other had lobbied for Hadrian to receive an equal education both mundane and magical.

The British Government won the day with the argument that as a reigning monarch he’ll need a thorough understanding of the mundane government he’ll be expected to govern in tandem with. While the magical world had little to do with the mundane in most cases, Avalon spanned multiple countries and held alliances and ties with even more. A standard British magical education – even one of the caliber provided to Heirs – wouldn’t be enough for Hadrian to meet his peers on an equal footing. Plus with Sherlock around, he might need to be able to talk his honorary brother out of a prison sentence one day.

A task which would be infinitely easier if Hadrian had more than a basic understanding of how the mundane world worked.

In the end they decided on a combination of two methods: the Montessori Method combined with the traditions and education of a pureblood Heir.

Which Sirius and Remus were startled to find out he, in fact, was. Rather than being muggleborn like most everyone had assumed, Lily’s parents were actually purebloods from noble families that
had relocated to America before the Witch Trials. The magicless Petunia was a cast-off daughter of a former friend who was taken in by the gentle Rosemary Evans nee Pevensie, causing a huge scandal and precipitating the Evans’s relocation to Cokeworth, England.

Hadrian sat patiently through Healing Sessions – both body and mind – every morning before breakfast. Deportment and Manners were spooned up alongside every meal and snack, little lessons that the child soaked up like a sponge. Music, Art, and Dance were the province of Margeux and Andromeda, with either Sherlock or Mycroft assisting if they happened to be around – unless it was Art, then all the males quickly scattered leaving Hadrian to the Ladies’ tender mercies. He learned and played, transitioning between tasks easily as he taught himself, gently guided by Remus and Lady Holmes.

Chess was a favorite, and his one-on-one time with Mycroft on the weekends when the British government could take a break. Strategy and Logic were a bit over his head but at least Hadrian was learning the pieces and how they worked. Reading with John, deductive reasoning games with Sherlock, running and playing with Sirius – either as Padfoot or a man.

Tuesdays were spent with his new “uncle” Sherrinford learning languages. The two would stroll along, Hadrian sometimes walking and sometimes being carried if it was a difficult day, while the statesman pointed out various objects and named them in Latin or Gaelic – only two of the languages he’ll need to learn – and teaching him little phrases. Remus who spoke Latin fluently would often gently reinforce the lessons during his play times while Sirius helped with the Gaelic.

Thursdays quickly became one of Hadrian’s favorite days of the week since it started with a trip through the floo after breakfast to Wallace Estate. There he would meet with his new friend David who was much older than him at ten but very patient and have fencing lessons with David and his father and brother Rhys who at six was much closer to his age. Rhys and David would then join him for his horseback riding lessons with their Mama Giovanna, Lady Wallace who’d charged herself with teaching him to be a “gentleman of the first water” whatever that was.

“You’re matchmaking, diletto.” Gawain snuck up behind his Lady one day and wrapping his arms around her waist. He’d been lucky in his Giovanna. While his age wasn’t that great for a wizard, he was older than most young Ladies preferred their husbands. She’d seen past a number and saw the man he was and deemed him worthy of being hers.

Propping his chin on her shoulder as he held her, Gawain watched his sons romp about the green with Hadrian and a pair of hounds – one that looked suspiciously like a Grim. It was two days after the full moon and Sirius had taken up Remus’s position of bodyguard for the outing. A smile crossed his face as the formerly solemn and reserved child shrieked with laughter as the three boys pinned the animagus to the ground.

“You’re matchmaking, mi dulce.” Gawain guffawed as the Grim turned the tables on Hadrian and pinned him down, giving his ice cream smeared face a hefty lick. “Whatever you say.”

Outings became possible as Hadrian improved – both mentally and physically – and the younger generation took to squiring him around with verve.

While Siger and Margeux introduced him to the symphony via their box seats – sparking a love of
music that will last all his life – the younger set including their sons as well as Remus and Sirius swept him off to a rugby match.

Thus began the war of the outings that would last until he left for school.

The Ballet with Margeux, Andromeda, and Dora was answered by a jaunt on the London Eye with Mycroft and Anthea of all people.

A trip to the Museum of Natural History with John, Sherlock, and Remus meant a visit to Godric’s Hollow – and an explanation of Hadrian’s personal history – was in the offing with the Lords Black and Wallace.

Hadrian’s eager description of the animals at the non-magical side of the London Zoo with John, Sherlock, and Mycroft was matched with a trip to the magical side – he’d particularly been taken with the unicorns who crowded the fence at his approach – with Remus and Sirius along with the Wallaces.

All in all, a far cry from the battered life he’d had mere months before living in a tiny closet.

…

Hadrian’s fifth birthday was much celebrated.

He was healthy, only needing three session with Ted a week for Healing and Occlumency training and two with Andromeda, happy, and finally having a birthday party of his very own.

Everyone he’d grown to love was there – including his first ever friends David, Rhys, and Dora. Hadrian didn’t mind that they were all older than him, especially David and Dora who were set to start studies at either Hedwig Institute for David or Hogwarts School in the fall for Dora. Dora wasn’t happy about it, preferring her tutoring/study group that she attended with others her age. She was especially upset that her friend Charlie was older and therefore wasn’t going to be in her same class, among other issues.

At Hedwig Institute the curriculum was determined by the children’s parents which often led to three groups: A Week with Heirs & Spares, B Week with Noble Children, and C Week with everyone else. Hedwig was a private school so C Week was usually filled with kids from wealthier mundane families and magical families that weren’t nobility. B Week was where Dora would have gone while Charlie had been in A Week, the same that David was due to start.

A year ago she didn’t attend Hedwig, nor the year before that, making Hogwarts seem unfeasible. Or at least that’s what she thought.

No one from her play group usually went to Hedwig. The only one she could remember going before Charlie was his older brother Bill, and that was only because his grandfather insisted. Now she was a “Black Daughter” and Charlie’s grandfather had insisted again two years ago – creating a major education gap between the two friends.

None of the other Weasley kids would have to go. Just Bill and Charlie for some reason Dora knew her mother had told her but that she knew she wasn’t paying attention to

Besides the pouting-Dora, who wasn’t appeased that David had had to go to H.I. since he had was getting the same classes as Charlie had taken, everyone was having a grand time at the party.

Hadrian netted a massive tower of candy that he dutifully handed over to Margeux for her to keep
watch over. He was still on a restricted diet and taking potions though not as much as he once was. There were also books (mostly from Remus and the Lords), toys (Sirius, John, Ted) and games. The birthday boy and his friends opened up his new Exploding Snap deck and David patiently taught him the rules, finally putting a smile on Dora’s face and lighting her hair from black to a calm blue.

…

Along with his burgeoning health and quick mind came two new additions to his schedule: Andromeda had deemed him well enough to manage the two-way port-key trip between Ravenscroft Hill and Castle Black, signaling the start of his Lordship lessons with Lord Black, Andromeda, and Sirius. The second was the addition of French to his language lessons with Sherrinford, bolstered with help from Andromeda, Margeux, and Giovanna who as Ladies had all been taught French as a matter of rote.

Hadrian was still at the peak age for learning languages.

Most pureblood Heirs learn at least French from the cradle, and according to Remus and Sirius who would know, Hadrian was the same being tutored by his parents. However, all the progress he’d made was stultified by his time with the Dursleys, though he was proving to be a very quick study with French, better by far than he was with Gaelic.

His trips to Castle Black, while not as “fun” as the ones to Wallace Estate where he could play with his friends and ride horses and learn to fight, were still an interesting experience.

Arcturus Black, though not current on fashion or the latest broomstick, could spin a tale like no other. Hadrian would sit enraptured for hours listening to “Grandpapa” tell stories about the stars and the heroes they were named for or to the history of their family, liberally peppered with fights and battles and knights of old. It wasn’t a strictly-traditional way for someone to tutor another in Lordship, Rituals, or Astronomy but it was effective as proven by even Sirius sitting still and quiet during his “stories.”

With the gentle pressure of his elders and constant positive attention, Hadrian’s intelligence and sweet personality blossomed like a flower in the early summer sun.

…

Six brought even bigger changes than five.

His party was just as enjoyable as the last only with a wider range of gifts – and a happier Dora who admitted reluctantly when prodded that Hogwarts was so bad.

Along with toys, games, and books were an array of beginning course books and a manual on how to focus his magical core… and a beginner’s violin from Sherlock.

Magical studies had begun, allowing him to spend more time with Remus doing actual studies instead of simply playing and learning. They started small, lighting a candle with his breath, intentionally changing the colors on a wandless *lumos*, things like that. A lot of theory, history, and meditation with his Occlumency training continuing with his weekly Mind-Healing session being his only standing Healing appointment besides a monthly check-up with Andromeda.

James and Lily would scoff and call him mad for teaching his cub wandlessly but Remus didn’t allow that to stop him. He remembered Harry’s first ever act of magic: wandlessly and wordlessly summoning his “Moony” stuffy after Lily took it from his crib when he was a month old. His friends celebrated and doted on Harry for the act of “accidental” magic, proof that the Potter Heir was a
wizard.

Remus wasn’t so sure, that it was accidental anyway.

Baby Harry didn’t know he was still in the room when he summoned his toy, allowing Remus a clear view of him turning his head with a scowl and holding out one hand imperiously. Something about the motion and look had read like a habit to Remus. A controlled magical act beyond many adults being performed by a baby.

He watched the cub closely after that, seeing many events that his friends waved off as “accidental”. Maybe it was because he was a teacher at heart, used to weighing a child’s magical ability and tailoring their education accordingly, that he saw what Harry’s parents were blind to.

Even from the cradle Harry had control of his magic. Control that he later used to contain it and prevent outbursts when he’d be punished for it instead of praised.

It was now his job to remind Harry of that control, to nurture and coax it free.

A matter of patience that paid off when his young charge sent out a wandless/wordless red streak of magic at him when he was frustrated from his Charms lesson. The Stunner dissipated when it hit the shield Remus tossed up in reflex. But it was a wandless/wordless Stunner all the same, giving his tutor a guess as to where Harry’s magical talent might lay.

The next week Basic Defense was added to his schedule, with Sirius helping as part sparring partner and part training dummy.

His hunch proven, Remus gloated to Sirius until his mate tackled him into their bed, giving the hyper werewolf another way to work off his energy beyond chattering his ears numb.

... Another year flew by, as the wizarding world went about their day-to-day lives with no notion that everything about their world was going to change.

David started Hogwarts the September after Hadrian’s seventh birthday and was sorted Gryffindor, much to the dismay of the Hufflepuff Dora. His father was so pleased at David’s following in his boot-marks that his Heir was spoiled with his own owl to keep them company while he was away at boarding school and keep in touch with his friends and family at home.

Of the three children that had become his friends, they all were under a geis that prevented them from saying anything to anyone they might meet about him – one of Sherlock’s original objections to Hadrian being around children at all.

Children – in Sherlock’s opinion and experience – were often cruel, bragging creatures with little to redeem them. His “little brother” Hadrian was of course an exception. Sherlock was certain that one of them would let something slip.

Lord Black shared his caution, leading him to loan one of the infamous Black Grimoires to the Holmes’s. Inside it was the instructions for a geis. A strictly Black invention, Black Lords often used them on their Family or Allies to keep Black secrets, secret. They even used them on themselves in order to best protect the secrets of the Royals they served.

A geis when used properly, cloaked protected information inside someone’s mind. Not even the most skilled Legilimense or the strongest truth spell or serum could force a geised person to reveal the protected information. As a result everyone who was in Hadrian’s life was under one if they
weren’t an impenetrable Occlumense like Sherlock and Mycroft. Remus counted under that number as well, his wolf giving him a natural immunity to mind magics.

Secure in that the eternally-plotting Headmaster couldn’t pry into the minds of David and Dora, the adults in Hadrian’s life felt safe with allowing the Wallace Heir and a Daughter of House Black to attend Hogwarts which currently was Dumbledore’s lone source of power.

Rhys missed having his brother around though he was happy that Hadrian was spending more time with him at the Wallace Estate and his father spent more time tutoring him, filling in the gaps that were left after Remus and Margeux’s instruction. Their fencing lessons continued, with horseback rides happening weekly but Gawain took over Hadrian’s potions instruction (since Remus could melt cauldrons) as well as ramping up his estate management lessons.

His son wasn’t thrilled over having to join his friend in the estate management lessons with his father and the dancing lessons with his mother and Lady Holmes…but both of those were still better than having to sit through another History of Magic lesson.

Plus whenever Rhys thought about complaining he remembered how much more Hadrian had to learn than him.

As a “Spare Heir” he didn’t have to have a full muggle education like his friend. Nor did he have to sit with Hadrian’s scary Grandpapa Lord Black and have Lordship and Etiquette lessons. Nobody minded if Rhys sometimes forgot which spoon to use with soup and which to use with his ice cream.

People did notice and did mind when it was Hadrian.

Some were easier on his friend than others but for the most part, Hadrian didn’t get days “off” from being an Heir.

So when Rhys was able to skip a lesson with his mother because his brother was on break from school and wanted to go flying, he felt sorry for his friend.

Hadrian might have more interesting lessons than him and might get to learn boxing from his “big brother” John…but he also didn’t have someone to just go flying with either except for Thursdays with Rhys.

…

Nineteen Eighty-Eight heralded another coming change in the Wizarding World. On the other side of the country from Ravenscroft Hill in a Castle of his own, another Royal – though of an entirely different kind – was shocked out of his wits when in a fit of frustration with his little brother…he slammed his door closed just by looking at it.

…

“Your Majesty.”

Queen Elizabeth the Second was at her beloved Buckingham Palace, a red-and-white corgi tucked at her feet, reading from a book of poetry when the head of her security staff politely requested her attention.

“Yes, Mr. Hawkins?” She set aside her volume as he came around the divan to face her, bowing correctly before continuing with whatever business it was that brought him to her parlor.

“Mycroft Holmes has requested a meeting. Urgently.”
“Good gracious.” Her Majesty shifted as if to move. “Is it serious?”

“Only somewhat, your Majesty.” Mycroft eased her mind as his ignored her spluttering guards. The British government was a common sight in the Queen’s presence and her guards had finally stopped taking offense to his inability to simply wait.

Though they were still working on keeping their cool, especially the few select Aurors on Royal duty.

Such as his distant cousin, Danford Hawkins.

“Mycrof.” Danford nodded sharply before taking his leave and closing the door behind him. He could venture a guess that Mycroft’s visit had to do with the magic spike his forces had detected the day before and brushed off as nothing to worry about.

“Danford.” Mycroft responded idly before taking his customary chair and having his personal elf “pop” a tea service onto the low table.

He waited patiently for his true employer to serve herself and pour for him before doctoring his cup to his liking and taking a biscuit.

“To what do We owe the unexpected of your presence, Mr. Holmes?” Elizabeth asked indulgently. “We hope there’s not another missile crises.”

“Nothing of the sort, Your Majesty.” Mycroft waved an elegant hand. “I’m here with rather more celebratory news.”

“Really?” The Queen hummed under her breath. “Do tell.”

“As the Queen, one assumes you were made aware of the more…magical…side of the world, yes?” Mycroft waited for her nod before continuing. “Were you also made aware that while the Crown does hold authority over its magical subjects, that authority is subject to an old treaty?”

The Queen set her cup aside, giving her main statesman her full attention.

“I didn’t think so.” Mycroft set his own cup on the table, removing a file from his briefcase. “This file has all the particulars and I will leave it for you to examine at your leisure. It is charmed to be visible to your eyes only.”

“What is your opinion of the information it contains?” Elizabeth asked. She would of course read it for herself and form her own opinion however Mycroft like his father before him did tend to give excellent advice.

“If it weren’t an emerging issue I would say merely entertaining history.” Mycroft gave a quirk of his lips. “However as the Crown’s authority over magical Britain is currently under a deadline before it vanishes, I’d say this is one of the biggest issues dealing with your magical population you’ll ever face. Possibly even matching the upheaval of Voldemort.”

An always-poised Lady, Queen Elizabeth tramped down a gasp. Nothing any of her advisors regarding the magical world had ever mentioned in all her years as Queen even suggested that the Crown could simply lose Its Authority over Magical Great Britain. It was the sort of thing one would remember.

Taking her silence as a go-ahead, Mycroft wove his tale.
“Before the birth of Christ.” He began. “Magic was giving her Blessing to select Families all over the globe. Families that She designated as Blessed beyond all others. Then She spread another Blessing of her Magic to others hither and yon through those Families’ territories. Evidence of this is all over the globe.”

Mycroft gestured smoothly.

“Pyramids in Egypt and Latin America. Stonehenge. The Rollwright Stones. The Burren. And so on. Nine of the original Blessed Families were better at utilizing their power than all others. They were Japan’s House of the Rising Sun, Egypt’s House of Ptolemy, India’s House of Slytherin, France’s House of LeFey, Russia’s House of Hufflepuff, Scotland’s House of Gryffindor, House of Ravenclaw who united the smaller islands surrounding the U.K., and then there were the last two who in a combination of power, cunning, and honor rose above all the rest: The House of Pendragon who ruled England and The House of Emrys who controlled Ireland and Wales.” Mycroft took a sip of tea to wet his palette. “Now granted those are the modern names they’re known by. It is accepted by all that only the House of Emrys and the House of the Rising Sun have kept their ancient Names.”

“Merlin.” Elizabeth whispered knowing some of those names. “And Arthur. They were real?”

“Very real.” Mycroft nodded. “Friends and Scions of their Houses though not the founders of them the way some might think.”

“Gracious me.”

“Now as time marched on, those Houses realized that they would need to stand together against on coming threats from other Blessed Houses, human nature being what it is. Thus creating the first magical Empire: Avalon. House Emrys and House Pendragon joined together against the threat they faced in Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. As their combined might impressed their closest neighbors, LeFey was the first to approach Avalon with a treaty to join them under their Banner. Ravenclaw grew tired of predation from the North and came next. Then Slytherin, friends and trade partners with the House of LeFey, took up the Avalon Banner. Gryffindor was stubborn but was alone against its neighbors. Together the six Houses of Avalon stood strong for centuries. Hufflepuff was the last to join Avalon, bringing with it the vast expanse of magical Russia. Seven Houses ruling Seven Kingdoms.”

“What happened?”

“No one is quite certain.” Mycroft shrugged. “Most believe that with the Founding of Hogwarts Avalon’s Royal Seven had completed their work. Avalon was secure and they had an ironclad treaty and alliance with both Egypt and Japan – the greatest threats to the Empire. Eventually they simply allowed themselves to die out. Or suffered from infighting.”

“That’s not what you believe, Mr. Holmes.” Shrewd eyes that had been examining politicians for decades pierced her statesman in place. “Is it?”

“No.” Mycroft smiled sardonically. “I don’t.”

The Queen arched a brow, wordlessly asking for him to explain himself.

“If you’d asked me several years ago I wouldn’t have had much of a…” He flicked his hand, cup and all. “Belief about the disappearance of the Lost Families. They were gone and the people as a whole are still here.”
“What changed, Mycroft?”

“I met the Heir of the Avalon Seven.” Mycroft gave a self-deprecating laugh. “That tends to create belief.”

“Lost.” Queen Elizabeth took a steadying drink of her tea. “And now found.”

“Quite so.” Mycroft nodded. “More importantly, Confirmed. In the magical aristocracy anyone could be viable for inheritance of a Family. Even one as old and powerful as the Avalon Seven. What matters is several factors: Acknowledgement of their heritage and Blood. Confirming their Rightful Claim. And Claiming their Blood Inheritance. Without doing so this Heir would’ve been the same as his parents: a viable heir but not An Heir. Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon is the Acknowledged and Confirmed Heir of the Avalon Seven along with six other Noble Houses of various renown. When he turns eleven he will Claim his Inheritance and at thirteen he will be Crowned.”

“Crowned.” Queen Elizabeth nods carefully.

“Control of the Seven Kingdoms automatically reverts to Hadrian upon his Claim. The coronation is merely a formality.”

“You know this young man well then.” She pursed her lips. “I know what most magicals feel about their non-magical neighbors. Can We work with him?”

“Absolutely.” Mycroft didn’t even hesitate to answer. “Hadrian is a war-orphan from Voldemort’s reign of terror. He’s the last of all but one of his thirteen Family Lines. He’s being raised as we speak to be an exemplary leader and a statesman. I should know.” Here he smirked. “Your former British Government is the one raising him.”

Her Majesty the Queen threw back her head and laughed.

“You worried me, Mycroft.” She scolded him like a naughty child. “I was afraid that We were going to have another war on Our hands.”

“Don’t be fooled, your Majesty.” Mycroft cautioned her. “Young or not. Raised by the Holmes Family or not. Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon will be a formidable King of Avalon and he won’t be anything close to a pushover. It would be in the best interest of the mundane British Monarchy and the House of Windsor to form an alliance early. Because when Hadrian Claims his Throne, there will be massive upheaval in the Wizarding World.”

The Queen commanded him to continue.

“The Ministry of Magic – especially the Minister of Magic – in Britain won’t want to hand over power to Hadrian, his other territories won’t be nearly as problematic as they’re not as obesely corrupt. A political civil war could possibly break out between the every-day witch and wizard and the nobility. The mundane-born more than any one group will likely rebel against having an absolute ruler.” Mycroft locked eyes with the Queen. “Because that is exactly what the King of Avalon is. An absolute ruler and divine authority charged with the rule of his Empire by Magic Herself.”

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Chapter Three: Growing Pains

Mycroft Vanished the remained of the tea service after several long moments were spent in silence following his somewhat ominous news.

“You might want to send for your son and daughter-in-law.” Mycroft suggested when he felt the Queen had processed his words. “I didn’t only come regarding a matter of State.”

Eyes that had been looking off into the distance focused sharply on his cunning face.

“And which of Our children do you have business with, Mr. Holmes?”

“Charles and Diana. Regarding young Prince William.”

…

Watching his best-friend’s son coherently debate the values of a democracy versus a republic with his foster father Siger Holmes, Sirius Black felt a moment of disquiet.

Frowning deeply he met the golden gaze of his mate and called him from the study with a glance.

Out in the hall, Remus wrapped his arms around the lanky body he knew as well as his own hugging him tightly. Resting his cheek on the top of Sirius’s ebony mane, he asked.

“What’s wrong, love?”

“Did we do the right thing?” Sirius tilted his head back and looked up into the honey-brown eyes that had a hint of gold tinging them. Both Remus and Moony were listening. “Not contesting the guardianship.” He explained his meaning. “Going along with the Holmes’s plan. Letting Gawain be Harry’s second father.” He snorted, rolling his eyes. “Allowing my great-great-great,” he flung out a hand. “Whatever-grandfather school him in Lordships and Rituals and being a Black of House Black. He’s just a child.” Sirius’s normally barking voice was more of a whimper as he finished. “Just a child. Seven years old. A Second-grader in the States. And he can debate the values of various forms of government with a man who used to be a government.”

Remus hugged him tighter rocking him back and forth to soothe him.

“That’s not the childhood James and Lily would’ve wanted for Prongslet.”
His mate had to concede to that.

“No,” Remus admitted in his smooth growl. “It’s not. But listen to me lover.” Stormy eyes locked on his face. “No one could’ve anticipated that Harry would be who he is. No one, Pads. Not even Lily.”

Sirius choked out a laugh at that. Knowing Lily he wasn’t so sure.

“You’re right. If James and Lily had lived, Harry would’ve been the Heir Potter-Black. He would’ve had a normal Heir’s education and been friends with all of the Order children. And probably would’ve married little Ginevra Weasley with the notorious Potter attraction for redheads.”

Both of them chuckled over that. After Sirius’s innocence, they were able to reconnect with many of the former Order members – many of which now had children. Some like Molly Weasley resisted spending too much time with them after their public break with Dumbledore. However they’d still been introduced to her children through Nymphadora…needless to say they weren’t impressed with the lazy Ronald and entitled Ginevra.

“But they did die.” Sirius said brokenly, knowing already what point his mate was going to make. “And Harry’s lineage was revealed to protect him. I know Remy. It just twists me around when I see him acting like a little adult instead of a kid.”

“Unfortunately,” Remus sighed, turning them and escorting him to their room at Ravenscroft Hill. “Hadrian can’t afford to be just a kid. He’s,” Remus chuckled knowing pureblooded Sirius wouldn’t know the quote. “The Once and Future King. While giving him a childhood is important it’s equally important that he be ready to rule. Magic wouldn’t have put this on his shoulders if he wasn’t capable or worthy. Have faith in our cub, Pads. He’ll be okay.”

“I suppose you’re right.” Sirius sighed then smirked. “You always are, Mr. Perfect Prefect.”

“Git.”

...  

“Mother.” Prince Charles was the last of the requested royals to arrive. He strode to her side and bussed her cheek before joining his lovely wife on the settee. This being a summons to part of the “family” section of the Palace, no formality was needed or wanted between them.

Charles nodded to his father Philip and wound an arm around Diana’s shoulders before giving over his attention to the man who ran the government – and who hopefully still would be by the time Charles took the throne. The House of Windsor – formerly the House of Saxe-Coburg-Goth – had always relied on the Holmes men to keep the wheels of the government churning along. A duty they were simply superb at seeing through to the bitter end.

“Now what’s all this about?” He asked, directing his question correctly towards Mycroft.

“It seems.” The Queen spoke firmly with no trace of her earlier disquiet present anywhere in her demeanor. “That Our grandson William is a Wizard.”

Scoffing Charles rolled his eyes and made to stand.

“Don’t be ridiculous.” He chided his mother forgetting for a moment that she was also his reigning Monarch. “There’s no such thing as magic.”

“Actually, Charles.” Diana spoke in a barely-audible whisper looking up from her tightly clenched
hands. “That’s not precisely true.”

Prince Charles looked from one woman in his life to the other, searching for some sign that this was all a hoax. Turning to the other males for some type of masculine solidarity he found himself wanting.

Seeing that neither woman was inclined to explain, Mycroft took over.

“Alongside what you would term ‘normal’ society, Charles.” Mycroft said crisply, none of his familiarity with the Queen present in his tone. “Runs another society. Magical society. They would call your so-called normal people the “mundane” or the more patronizing “muggle” people. Non-magical. Not even capable of seeing most magic let alone using it. Before These Islands were fought over by Northmen and Saxons and Romans, a rich magical people, a magical kingdom flourished. And while it’s not nearly as robust as it once was, it is still there to this day. So I’m afraid that your assertion that there is no such thing as magic isn’t even close to the truth.”

Leaning back heavily in shock, Charles stared off at nothing. Realizing an opening was at hand Philip asked a rather pertinent question.

“I know why my Elizabeth is aware of magic.” He said frowning. “She was told by her father before he passed and then told me upon our marriage. But Diana,” he turned towards his daughter-in-law. “Why and how do you know?”

“I…” She sighed, laying her hands flat on her thighs and pressing down gently. “It’s a family story passed down. That Sarah Jenyns who married my ancestor the first Duke of Marlborough wasn’t the daughter of Frances Thornhurst at all but from another Line entirely. A magical one. She supposedly couldn’t do magic herself but she made salves and tonics that worked better than any medicine of the time. That there was simply something about her that made her a confidant and trusted friend of those who knew her. But it was just a story, no one from our family has ever had magic.”

“Do you have any idea which magical Line?” Mycroft asked pointedly.

“None.” Diana waved a graceful hand. “She was obviously noble-born but other than that there were only rumors and whispers like those that followed many of the early great women.”

“Yes, yes.” Charles broke in now that he’d wrapped his head around magic of all things. “But what is to be done now that we have an apparently magical Heir to the Throne on our hands?”

“Mycroft?” The Queen prompted.

“He has to be trained of that there can be no question.” The British Government insisted. “Now that he’s proven his ability and found his magic it will want to be used. And if he doesn’t learn to control it…” He trailed off, the others clearly taking his point. “The first thing that should be done at this juncture, for everyone involved,” he looked meaningfully at the Queen, alluding to their previous conversation. “Is for the magical security force here to take an Unbreakable Vow regarding Prince William’s magical status until he officially enters the magical world. Afterwards we need to seek out the Ritual Master at Gringotts Bank to confirm William’s magical heritage. At that point I will be able to best advise you regarding the young Prince’s magical schooling.”

The four Royals exchanged glances. However no matter what Charles and Diana liked to tell themselves, this was a decision that was going to be made not by the Royal Family but by the Queen for the good of the realm.
“Very well.” Elizabeth nodded with a serene air. Philip immediately was on the phone calling in the magical members of the security forces.

While they waited for them all to arrive Mycroft asked who would be accompanying him and the Prince to the Wizarding World.

“His grandfather would be best, I believe.” The Queen decided nodding towards her husband. “He has mostly the same information as We do and unlike my son and daughter-in-law, no obligations on his time.”

Taking that as a dismissal, Diana and Charles took their leave to make ready for the black-tie charity event they were to attend that evening. Diana broke off from her husband, seeking out her older son to send him to his grandparents for his coming audience.

Altogether eight Wizards and two Witches made up the security force surrounding the mundane Royal family split evenly between Aurors and Hit Wizards. Word had spread through their ranks and those off-duty had arrived from home. Upon entering the office of the Queen, some were surprised to see Philip there along with the Honorable Mycroft Holmes.

Only Mycroft’s distant cousin Danford was aware that Mycroft Holmes was actually a member for the Most Ancient and Noble House of Holmes being a relation from his mother’s Hawkins side.

Standing he eyed the gathered force before nodding once sharply, decided on who of this number would become William’s personal guard – a position not unlike Remus Lupin’s own in his father’s household. Simply without the tutoring requirement and honorary “uncle” status.

“Aurors and Hit Wizards.” He greeted, placing one hand on the end of his umbrella and drawing his wand – a finely tuned instrument that went along with the title of “British Government” it was the only wand that could take his altered magical core and use it in events such as this – to their discomfort. “You’ve been gathered because the Realm requires you all to take an Unbreakable Vow in order to continue serving the House of Windsor.”

Danford, the nominal head of the force, stepped forward. “To what end?” He questioned his cousin.

“To the safety and continued security of the Realm and Our Family.” The Queen chided as she rose.

Looks were exchanged all around before each of the ten nodded. One by one they stepped forward and clasped arms with the Queen as Mycroft served as Bonder. Each Witch and Wizard agreeing to the Vow Elizabeth and Mycroft had settled on.

“Do you _ hereby Vow to guard the Secrets of the Realm from all others, Magical or Mundane?”

“Will you _ Vow to hold the lives of the Royal Family as dearly as those of your own House?”

“Will you _ Vow to hold as a Secret of the Realm that the member of the Royal Family William Windsor is a Wizard and member of the Magical World and Keep that Secret until he officially enters the Magical World by becoming enrolled at either Hedwig Institute of Magic or Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, whichever occurs last?”

After the Vows were made, all but two of the gathered witches and wizards were dismissed, Mycroft having the two he’d tipped for personal guards remain behind.

Kingsley Shacklebolt, third son of Lord Shacklebolt of the Ancient and Noble House of Shacklebolt and one of the rising stars of the Auror Department remained as well as Durstram McGonagall,
nephew of Lord McGonagall of the Ancient and Noble House of McGonagall and eldest child of Hogwarts’ own Professor Minerva McGonagall, one of the finest Hit Wizards the Academy ever produced.

Between the two of them Mycroft was assured of both William’s safety but also an ironclad honor that both men were known for which would keep anyone William came into contact with safe.

“From here on out.” Mycroft stated as the Queen returned to her desk. “The two of you are the young Prince’s private security force. If at any time you would like to be reassigned you can come to me and I will take your situation under advisement.”

“And.” The Queen added, knowing that for the Vow to engage fully over what was about to be said that She would have to say it. “From now on anything and everything regarding the Prince, his magical abilities, his associates and friends, his education, everything is considered a Secret of the Realm and will not be made privy to any other besides Ourself and Our Mr. Mycroft Holmes.”

“Which means gentlemen.” Mycroft tucked his wand back away. “That you don’t even go to his parents. You come to me or the Queen. For now you can decide how you’ll rotate your shifts later, I’ve already had Danford informed of the new assignment. I need one of you to stay and start duty as the young Prince is expected any moment.”

…

William – Wills to his friends and family – entered his grandmother’s office with trepidation. Somehow he knew this was about the door that slammed on its own. Members of the security force had swarmed his bedroom afterwards, reinforcing that he hadn’t just imagined it.

He’d really made the door slam by looking at it.

And now he was in trouble with his grandmother – a position none of her children and grandchildren wanted to occupy. The Queen could freeze the very blood in your veins with a single look. And her scoldings left a more lasting mark than a caning would.

Looking around he spotted not only Grandmother but also Grandfather as well.

He must really be in for it.

Grandmother’s friend Mr. Holmes was there as well which was odd. Usually Mr. Holmes only met with Grandmother and usually alone unless his father or someone else was required. And that funny Mr. McGonagall with his thick brogue was there as well.

Mr. McG as he and his little brother Harry called him was one of the first responders after the incident.

Catching the look on her grandson’s face as he approached her desk, Elizabeth chuckled lightly before reassuring him.

“You’re not in trouble, William.” She told him gently as she waved him to one of the plush chairs at the side of her desk. “Not in the slightest.”

“What is it then, Grandmother?” The nearly-eight-year-old asked. And that nearly was very, very important.

“The other day you made a door slam, is that right?” She prodded him.
“Yes, Grandmother.”

“How, dear?”

His lip almost trembled before he remembered his Grandfather and the other men were watching. His father had been very clear about getting older and crying.

“I don’t know Grandmother.” He whispered, trying valiantly to keep his head held high. “I was just frustrated with Harry barging in and then leaving my door open wide when he left that it just…slammed when I looked at it.”

“That young Sir.” Mr. Holmes said firmly. “Is called accidental magic and is quite common for young wizards your age.”

“Magic?” William eyed him skeptically. “You’re having me on.”

“No, dear.” Elizabeth shook her head drawing her grandson’s gaze back to herself. “I’m afraid he’s not. Magic is real as all of us and now your parents are aware. You my dear boy have magic in your blood.”

“Magic.” He breathed, eyes wide as he looked between his grandparents’ faces. “Real magic?”

“As real as you are young Prince.” Mr. Holmes nodded. “Now you,” he pointed at the boy and then gestured between himself and the other men. “And we, have an appointment with the magical district so I’m afraid any further question will have to wait until after. I’m sure once you’ve seen some of what goes on in the magical district you’ll have plenty more that your guards will be happy to answer.”

Mr. McG rolled his eyes at Mr. Holmes, Wills spotted it out of the corner of his eyes.

“He means, me an’ Kingsley laddie.” McG rumbled. “We’re yer new personal guardsman. Either of us will be wit’ ya at all times not countin’ sleepin’ and in the loo.”

Wills did the only thing he could when faced with adults believing in magic and one of them being his Royal Grandmother. He agreed.

“Okay.”

…

After a few quick words between the Royal Couple, the foursome departed for Gringotts – Diagon Alley.

Mycroft’s wonderful assistant – today she was a he named Dennis for some reason, Sherlock suspected My’s long hours were making the poor thing have an identity crisis – had already informed the Holmes’s Family goblin Hammerhide of their needs and they were ushered right in once Princes Philip and William had recovered from their very first side-along apparation. Unlike when Mycroft accompanied his now foster-brother, the Windsor Family wasn’t important enough to the goblins to warrant usage of their floo.

Their royal training was serving them well as Philip manfully ignored the blatant displays of magic in the Alley before they entered the ivory marble edifice and William only paused for a moment at his first sight of a goblin.

The goblins all easily recognized the dubbed “British Government” as one of the King-Apparent’s
foster-brothers and protectors, showing the group an unexpected level of respect as a result, Goblin Griphook ushering them straight to Hammerhide’s office before returning to man the carts.

McG took up post outside the door as the other entered, being greeted and offered a chair by the waiting Account Manager.

“Gentlemen.” Hammerhide peered closely at the boy following along behind his older companions. There was hidden power in that boy. “How can Gringotts be of assistance today?”

“We need the Ritual of Blood Inheritance performed for young William.” Mycroft said at once, ignoring the looks from his royal companions.

“And is young William aware of what the Ritual entails?”

“I thought it best if that information was provided by an…unbiased source.” Mycroft admitted. “I wouldn’t want Magic to decided I’d tried to sway him in anyway.”

“Wise.” Hammerhide acknowledged. “Especially with your connection to the King-Apparent.”

William looked over at the goblin confused at that. He didn’t have any connection to Mr. Holmes. Not really. And if one was going to use that term for an heir to the Throne, it should’ve been towards his father, not him.

“Oh, not you young one.” The goblin chuckled shaking his head. “Your Mr. Holmes is the foster-brother of the King-Apparent of the Kingdom of Avalon. He isn’t quite unbiased when it comes to the fate of the Realms – magical and mundane.”

Philip frowned at that, not sure if he liked the way the goblin put that, but filing it away for further discussion at a later date as the creature continued.

“The Ritual of Blood Inheritance chronicles the entirety of a person’s magical heritage. It’s been used to settle inheritance debates for years among the wizarding aristocracy and most recently to identify the King-Apparent. It’s a simple Ritual requiring the use of seven drops of blood of the person in question and can only be authorized by that person – no matter their age.”

“What’s the catch?” Philip asked, knowing there had to be one.

“He’ll be bound to the magic of the Ritual.” Mycroft supplied knowing that clause quite well. “If there’s a Lordship he’ll have to Confirm and Claim it. A magical contract he’ll have to abide by it. The magic of the Ritual isn’t costly in blood or effort but has the potential to be devastating if one’s unprepared to pay the price.”

“What does it matter where his magical blood comes from?” Philip probed shrewdly, trying to present the fullest picture possible before his seven-year-old grandson had to make a potentially life-altering decision. “Where’s the benefit for him in doing the Ritual?”

“Respect.” Hammerhide held up a beefy hand, ticking off fingers as he went. “Honor. Gold. Education. All four are possible factors that could be improved through this ritual. As it stands, your Prince William has no more respect or honor in the Wizarding World than a chamber maid. And a good deal less than some of them, if they’ve ties to the right House. Without the proper lineage he won’t gain the right contacts to be accepted into the best schools without throwing a lot of money around. And the gold he could possibly inherit would help defray the expense of the best wizarding education – not a cheap thing in this world. Not at all.”

“You really think all of that would be helped along through this ritual?” The elderly Prince couldn’t
see how one bit of magic could change all of those things.

“To attend Hedwig Institute,” Mycroft explained when Hammerhide simply shrugged. “As what will be called a muggleborn, no matter how well connected in the mundane world, he’ll be placed with the other wealthy muggleborns and commoners from wizarding families. His tuition – which as a muggleborn will run around sixty-one thousand pounds per year for the private school – will only cover core classes and one elective. To have access to the other three electives it’ll be over one hundred-fifty thousand pounds per year. And he’ll still be placed with the other muggleborns and commoners – not with the noble children his age and definitely not with the Heirs of the Noble Houses. He’ll receive the same education for the same price – but not the same connections. And not even that tuition will get him into the Wizarding Traditions and Culture block – that’s strictly for the Noble born.”

Philip whistled under his breath. “And for Hogwarts?”

“Less expensive per year until he reaches Master-level then it could be more or less. Supplies are additional funds to the prices I gave you and increase almost every year as more are needed. There’s not as sharp a divide at Hogwarts, they don’t sort them into weeks the same way that separates the Nobles from the rest, but it’ll still be there just invisible.”

Hammerhide put it best: “To make the connections a future King of England needs with the Nobles of the Empire of Avalon, he needs a Name behind him. Being sponsored by the Holmes’s will help to be sure. But some doors will remain closed without a Wizarding Name.”

William spoke up before they could debate any longer.

“I’ll do it.” He decided, just barely not interrupting his Grandfather. “I’ll do the Ritual.”

“Are you certain, Wills?” Philip asked, still not sure himself if all of this was worth it.

“I’m sure.” He shrugged his lean shoulders. “It’s the one thing you and Grandmother and Mother and Father all always manage to agree on: getting the best education and learning about my people if I’m going to be King someday. How can I do that if half of them won’t even talk to me all because I didn’t want to give seven drops of blood?”

“How indeed?” Mycroft said under his breath.

“You understand child that no matter what the Ritual reveals you’re bound by it.” The Account Manager cautioned. “If it says your Family cleaned in a hotel or is an Ancient Family that’s it. If it says you’re a commoner or a Lord. If there’s property or money or even a marriage contract, you have to accept it.”

“I understand.” Though he wasn’t sure about the marriage-contract thing. His Mother said he should be free to fall-in-love and marry as he chooses. His Father and Grandparents tended to be more pragmatic about it. He couldn’t see how much worse letting a Ritual decide his spouse could be than letting his Father pick for him.

“Very well.” Account Manager Hammerhide rose and ushered them from his office, having already made arrangement with Mycroft’s assistant regarding payment for services if the Ritual ends up being a bust.

…”

Mycroft barely kept the smirk from his face as they walked back to the office of the aged goblin who met them at the doors of the Ritual room, no doubt sent for by Hammerhide as his duty was now
complete with the revelation of William’s magical heritage.

He couldn’t have made William be from a more perfect Family if he’d planned it himself.

This new goblin – introduced as the Nimue Account Manager Alderbaren – gestured them through into his office, allowing them all to sit before snapping his fingers and summoning the needed files to go over with the new Heir.

The British Government had been underwhelmed by the display in the Ritual Room – likely because Hadrian’s had been so dazzling it eclipsed anything less impressive – a bolt of magic in a pure silver had struck the prepared tapestry and quickly with little do-to and pomp revealed the Family Sarah Marlborough had been cast from – though not disinherited – the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Nimue.

“So,” Philip asked gesturing to the parchment in the aged goblin’s crooked hands. “What does all that mean?”

“The Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Nimue served the Royal Line of LeFey both before and after they joined their territories in what is now France and some of the surrounding mundane areas with the Empire of Avalon. Their origins like many of the truly Olde Families are lost to time however they were given their current Name after their liege lords joined with Avalon.” Alderbaren cracked a scary grin. “They like a few others like to poke fun at the stories of King Arthur told by the mundane masses. The Lordship will need to be Confirmed on the next Power Day which is the Winter Solstice. Once Confirmed and young William appoints a Steward, they can access the Nimue Vaults for expenses to cover his education. William will have to Claim his Lordship on his eleventh birthday like all who become eligible before that age.”

“Contract, Goblin Alderbaren.” Mycroft examined his nails idly.

“Ah yes.” The goblin peered over at Holmes. “The contract. You would be aware of it.”

“As I was present when the other party was informed of it, yes I am.”

“Which kind of Contract are we discussing?” Philip had a bad feeling about this. Holmes was looking entirely too pleased for his comfort and peace of mind.

“The kind you were warned about.” Mycroft smiled brightly. “The binding marriage kind.”

At that point Philip decided that upon returning to Buckingham Palace it was a good day to hie off to Scotland for a spot of hunting.

He didn’t want to be within a hundred miles when Diana discovered her precious boy was now subject to a binding magical marriage contract.

Anywhere. He thought firmly with a nod. Anywhere but within shouting distance of Londontown.

…

Shout she did.

And storm.

And rage.

But in the end that was all she could do.
William’s fate was set the moment he slammed that door.

The future-groom in question was blasé about the whole thing. The thought of marriage and contracts flying mostly over his head after seeing his blood explode and make a tapestry. Plus Mr. Holmes bought him a frog made of chocolate that actually jumped before you could eat it.

Finally when the dust settled on the results of his inheritance, the main adults in his life sat down to discuss the immediate issues. Of which his future marriage wasn’t one. Thankfully for everyone’s eardrums.

Arrayed around a meeting table were the Queen, her husband Prince Philip, Prince Charles and Princess Diana – still a furious red, Mycroft, and both of William’s new bodyguards.

“He’ll need a tutor.” McG said nearly in a grunt. “If’n it’s with the Heir’s he’ll be then it’s a tutor or no point at all. Might as well as call ‘im a muggleborn and be done with it.”

“He’s right.” Mycroft folded his hands on the table before him. “No matter how poorly phrased.”

“Lupin is the best.” Shacklebolt offered. “Even offered a position at Hedwig though I don’t recall if he took it or not.”

“Again.” Mycroft agreed with a nod. “You’re correct. However Remus Lupin is currently serving under a binding private contract elsewhere and is not available for our purposes. I suggest Andromeda Tonks nee Black. While not a formally trained tutor she is a Daughter of House Black and capable of teaching William how to fit in with the other Heirs. She’ll be an extra layer of protection for the Prince having a wicked wand herself and is a fully-qualified Healer in case of emergencies. I also have it on good authority that she has merely been keeping busy with assisting a study group of those William’s age and younger to stave off boredom now that her daughter is attending Hogwarts.”

“If she is, as you say, a Healer,” Diana asked, inclined to trust him if it meant extra safety for her son. “Why isn’t she already employed as one?”

“She is.” Shacklebolt supplied, knowing Andy and Ted well. “But it’s an exclusive Healing contract with her birth House. She has to be on-call twenty-four/seven in case they need her. It doesn’t preclude other employment but does keep her from working either in her own private practice or for a school or hospital. Andromeda is a grand Lady, Holmes is right about that. And she comes with valuable connections of her own that could help William when the time comes.”

“What kind of connections?” Charles’s interest was peaked.

“Black.” Mycroft answered. “of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. If you want William to portray himself as an Heir and properly fit in with his peers, there’s no one better to train him before he enters Hedwig than Andromeda.”

“Except Remus Lupin.” The Queen said drolly. “But apparently he’s already taken.”

Mycroft chuckled.

“Just so, Your Majesty. Just so.”

…

It was never a good day when Siger called a “family meeting” Hadrian decided.
The first time it happened was to tell then five-year-old Hadrian that Dr. John and Sherlock were moving back to London and would only be visiting on the weekends anymore.

That was a bad day.

Or when they told him about school and how David wasn’t going to be at his lessons with Rhys’s parents anymore.

Or when they told him about how David and Dora were only going to visit during breaks from Hogwarts when the time came for them to each go there.

Or that sliding down the bannister in his pajamas was not “appropriate behavior for a Young Gentleman” though that was mostly Lady Maggie.

Family Meetings were not Hadrian’s favorite things.

And keeping in that tone, he was not happy about the reason for this one either.

“What do you mean, I have to share Healer Andy?” He demanded imperiously, nose shooting up into the air. “I’m the Heir of her House. I do not have to share.”

Sirius swallowed an ill-timed guffaw with a cough, wincing at the sharp elbow-to-the-ribs he received for his efforts from his mate. That gem was all James at his same age. Pure arrogant Potter Heir.

Only he was pretty sure James’s issue was with sharing his prized broomstick with Sirius and his late-brother Regulus.

“Tone, young man.” Margeux frowned harshly. “Young Gentlemen do not take tones with their guardians and family.”

Dropping his chin, Hadrian scowled owlishly at the stern look on Lady Maggie’s normally benign face.

“The Honorable Andromeda Tonks.” Siger stressed. They’d been trying to cure Hadrian from using his childhood nicknames for the adults surrounding him in casual conversation. As a sign of affection between an adult and child it was fine but not as a form of address in public. “Has been offered a most prestigious position as a guide and tutor to another young Heir. A gracious Heir and future Lord would congratulate her and wish her well.”

“Healer Andromeda,” Hadrian mimicked just shy of mockery. He knew that would be a step too far as his bottom had learned the hard way. “Is my Healer. She can’t go off and take a contract somewhere else.” He sent a genuinely confused look over at his main tutor Uncle Remus. “That’s not how Lord Wallace and Grandpapa Black explained contracts work. That’s not how Papa Siger explained how contracts work.”

“Ah.” “Papa” Siger nodded, enlightenment dawning. Hadrian had begun pushing them more and more lately. He hadn’t been entirely sure what was precipitating this fit. Now that they had the crux of it a worse tantrum could be hopefully averted.

“They taught you rightly.” Remus calmed his cub before expanding on his answer, turning to face the child fully. “The key here is that Andromeda hasn’t accepted a Healing contract but a Tutoring contract. She’s irrevocably bound to the House of Black as Healer and cannot take another contract under that aegis, true. However,” he arched a brow at the little face with eyes that were trying to pin him to the wall. “Can you honestly tell me that you need Andromeda to wait on you hand and foot?
Do you want her hovering over you with cotton cloths and potions in the case you have a spill from your broom or split your lip boxing with John?"

Hadrian frowned then giggled at the image his Uncle Remy brought to life before clapping a hand over his mouth at the sound. He was a big boy. A Young Gentleman as Lady Maggie liked to call him. Big boys and Young Gentlemen don’t giggle.

“I didn’t think so.” Remus chuckled at the look on his cub’s face.

“Mrs. Tonks,” Mycroft – the barer of bad news – took a sip of tea before continuing. “Will still be available as needed for any accidents, emergencies, and general Healing needs. That will not change and the family she’ll be contracted to as a tutor understands that. However she will also be providing a highly valuable service both to the family in question as well as this Family.”

“How so?” Sirius asked suspiciously. There was just something about Mycroft Holmes that rankled him. Maybe it was that cunning statesman’s polish he had. Or that if he’d attended Hogwarts he most definitely would’ve been a Slytherin.

“The Heir in question.” The British Government studied the biscuit and cake tray with a canny eye before selecting a wafer-thin slice of lemon cake. “Is the Heir of Nimue.”

Those who were present at Hadrian’s Inheritance Ritual remembered that Name. It was on the sole inactive Marriage Contract their charge was subject to. Which had apparently just gone from inactive to active and binding.

They hadn’t informed Hadrian of that facet of his Inheritance as yet. There was no point as long as he still thought that babies were dropped off by a magical stork – John’s original response when first asked the dreaded “where do babies come from” question when Hadrian was five. Marriage, Betrothals, and Courtships weren’t even due to be covered in his government and Lordship studies until next year with “The Talk” coming sometime between nine and ten.

“That’s one of the Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses.” Hadrian said with a spark in his eyes. The rest of that elite group were either held by him or old people. “Andromeda is going to teach someone like me…who’s my age?”

Remus and Lady Maggie shared a sad smile, knowing that Hadrian sometimes felt burdened by his accident of birth and lack of companions his age. With his “cousin” Nymphadora and good friend David off at Hogwarts, Hadrian had become more and more withdrawn into his studies and music. The only time he really had that sweet spark they loved so much was when he went to see Rhys or when Sherlock and John visited.

Hadrian had never really lost his attachment to the “Nice Doctor John” who saved his life.

“Yes, dear.” Margeux answered, still smiling. “There’s actually two. Dowager Longbottom’s grandson who they keep tucked away at the Grange and now this young Heir of Nimue.”

“Can I meet them?” He asked tentatively. One thing that had been made very clear to him from the start was that they were extremely cautious about who they allowed around him. Even the House Elves were vetted before they approved them for service around him. “It’s just…”

“It would be nice to have more friends?” Remus finished with gentle understanding.

Hadrian nodded bashfully.

“We’ll see what we can do, little lad.” Siger sighed. “There’s no guarantee but we’ll see. Off with
you now, you and Remus are getting a late start for your afternoon lessons.”

The others waited until the boy and his werewolf were out of sight before trading looks.

“Where did that come from?” Mycroft arched a brow.

“You mean the mini-tantrum?” Lady Holmes – also known to Mycroft and Sherlock as Mummy - blew out an unladylike breath. “Morgana only knows. He’s been acting out more and more. Especially with David and Nymphadora having school and John and Sherlock having a rash of cases.”

“He’s testing the harness.” Sirius said with a shrug. “He’s a Potter. No matter what other titles and lines and duties he has hanging over his head, he’s a Potter first and foremost. They’re headstrong and tough little bastards.” He ignored the look from Lady Holmes. “He’s a Potter. No matter what other titles and lines and duties he has hanging over his head, he’s a Potter first and foremost. They’re headstrong and tough little bastards.” He ignored the look from Lady Holmes. “They are! That tone he took with you? James all over. I remember him saying something similar to my Aunt Dorea about the same age. She fixed it right-quick with a stinging hex to his backside. Potters are fighters and have been since they served the Pendragons.”

“He’s never acted this way before.” Margeux pointed out fretfully. His behavior had become a growing concern between herself and Lady Giovanna.

“Growing pains.” Sirius shrugged unconcerned. “He was still dealing with the scars left by those people. Now that he’s mostly recovered and is more secure he’s bucking at the bit. Stay firm and be consistent and it’ll blow over. In time. The worst thing you could do is coddle him or go soft on him because of what he went through.”

“That sounds like experience talking.” Siger’s voice was soft.

“Cause it is.” The animagus ran one hand through his shaggy ebony mane. “My parents were beyond controlling. So when I came to James’s house to escape, my Aunt Dorea was easy with me. James saw that and since Uncle Charlus didn’t think it fair for her to be soft on one of us but not the other she eased up on him. We were both right-little-toe-rags up until our late teens as a result. And then we only shaped up because the Auror Academy wasn’t looking for bratlings and Lily wouldn’t have anything to do with an arrogant git like James was at the time. Go easy on Harry and you’ll have a monster on your hands without the luxury of waiting for him to come out of it on his own with age. Firm but fair is the way to go, no matter how hard it is to get everyone on board.”

Things settled down after that, though to many of the adults in Hadrian’s life they likened it to the calm before the storm.

No one was fooled by the sudden cessation of temper from a child who’d inherited a formidable one. The only question was what would set it back off and when. There were some minor bouts of willfulness resulting in mild punishments like time spent with a nose in the corner or being made to write an essay on the dangers of flying his new broom without supervision but nothing major or shocking.

A time of relative peace and tranquility about to come to a jarring end.

It was the Outing-War that lit the powder keg.

Lady Margeux had cautioned for years since her boys and who were dubbed “Harry’s boys” aka
Remus and Sirius had begun one-upping each other when it came to Hadrian’s monthly outings.

If her boys took him to the zoo to see the elephants during his zoology course, Harry’s boys took him to the magical zoo to spend time with the unicorns during his Care of Magical Creatures module.

The Tower with Mycroft to see the Crown Jewels?

To the Black Vault in Gringotts with Sirius to see all of their heirlooms – which Hadrian will inherit in time.

John brings him an orphaned kitten for a companion?

Remus buys him an owl to keep in touch with his friends.

And on and on and on it went.

Over three years of competition with Hadrian at the center of it. It was no wonder the boy had started acting out. As far as he was concerned he was the center of the universe and nothing he’d seen so far had really contradicted that.

Even Andromeda’s new position had required his tacit approval hence why they even discussed it with him in the first place.

The tantrum-to-end-all-tantrums began innocently enough:

Rhys and David, without checking with their parents, invited Hadrian to the opening match of the Quidditch World Cup Series.

Opening day of the Series was a massive event and one that David had received box tickets to for his thirteenth birthday in November with the Match occurring in June just over a month-and-a-half before Hadrian’s own eighth birthday. Being a good friend and knowing that his father’s ward was an Heir though which Heir was a closely-held secret by the adults, David invited him as a sort of pre-birthday gift. Hadrian had never been to an actual Quidditch match before though he always loved review them on the Ominoculars the Wallace boys would bring him.

All three of them were nearly prostrate with excitement and since June was to be Uncle Remy & Siri’s month for an outing there wouldn’t be a problem.

Or so they thought.

“Out of the question.” Siger said from behind his morning paper the morning before the Match. It was a Saturday so only Hadrian and his two foster parents were present for breakfast, Sirius and Remus taking a lie-in.

“But Papa Siger…” Hadrian’s voice was perilously in danger of being a whine. “Uncle Remy and Uncle Siri go to Quidditch Matches all the time together. I’m certain they’d like to go to the Opener. Besides it’s with the Wallaces. They’re on the list!”

“The List” being the list of approved companions his guardians had hashed out. Both of the Wallace sons as well as Andromeda’s daughter Nymphadora were on it. So were Lord Sherrinford Holmes’s children but they were a little too old and a little too stuffy to make good companions for Hadrian. His guardians all worried about turning him into “a little old man” with everything he needed to learn before he Claimed his Inheritance. Having him spend time with a pair of children who preferred dolls to dogs in the case of Helga and books to horses for Hamish wasn’t a good idea.
He spent time with them as practice for meeting his peers in a formal setting but none of them really took to each other.

Hadrian needed childhood companions that actually acted like children despite their lofty birth rather than another person to remind him that he’s a Young Gentleman.

Which was one of the reasons Mycroft was stalling him on meeting the Heirs Longbottom and Nimue.

William lived under the same pressure of royal birth as Hadrian while Neville by all accounts was very timid. The danger there was William and Hadrian either feeding off of their “proper” public personas or rebelling completely – which Hadrian was turning out to be proficient at all on his own. With Neville they didn’t want the quiet boy to disappear completely into the background of Rhys, David, and Dora’s large personalities.

“List or not.” Siger folded down the paper to peer sternly at his charge. “You’ve asked and I’ve given my answer. No Quidditch.”

“But why?!” Hadrian jumped to his feet, blood rushing to his face, fists clenched tightly at his sides. “I never get to go anywhere with my friends. Other kids get to go places. Rhys gets to go places. He goes to Quidditch Matches. He goes to a play group. He goes to his other friends’ houses. He gets to go everywhere.” He gets to have more than one friend. Hadrian thought wistfully but didn’t dare voice. “I want to GO!”

At the shout of GO! Power burst from Hadrian’s body in an uncontrolled wave, shattering all the glass and crystal in the morning room and breaking the warded windows. Siger and Margeux were knocked from their chairs to the floor, Margeux casting a shield over herself and her defenseless husband as shards of glass and crystal rained down from the ceiling and walls.

Face milk-white and pale from shock, Hadrian swayed on his feet. His magic had never been outside of his control before. His magic hurt Papa Siger and Lady Maggie. He could see a bruise forming on the side of his Papa’s head and Maggie was cradling her arm.

Sirius, the former Auror, realized what happened first. His pup stood at the epicenter of the blast, nearly insensate from the aftermath. The boy was only keeping upright through sheer force of will. Reaching over, he laid one hand on his mate’s arm, shaking his head and forcing Remus to lower his wand.

With a flick of his wrist he repaired what he could and a swish vanished the rest. Leaving Remus to take care of Hadrian who his lover had already escorted from the room, Sirius crouched next to first the Lady then the Lord, helping each of them to a chair. After a quick diagnostic showing no real damage done besides a small bruise for him and a twisted wrist for her, he tucked his wand away.

Andy could dispense a few potions once she was finished with Hadrian, his connection with the wards of the House making him aware of both her arrival and current location.

“What happened?”

…”

Later that day after everyone had been healed and Andromeda had left, Lord Wallace and Siger’s brother Sherrinford arrived.
As one, Hadrian’s three guardians entered his bedroom, quickly spying the tear-stained face of the sleeping boy. Seeing them enter, Remus who had kept watch over the overwrought young wizard, closed his book and reached over, gently shaking his charge awake. Gritty green eyes blinked up at him before Hadrian rubbed the sleep from them and sat up. Giving his employers a nod, the werewolf stood and left the room closing the door softly behind him as he took up position in the hall.

The three Lords strode over to the bed and sat, Gawain choosing to summon an extra chair from the sitting room rather than perch on the bed.

“This can never happen again.” Lord Wallace said with utter finality.

“I know.” Hadrian’s voice was rough from his crying jag as he stared down at the comforter puddled on his lap. “I didn’t mean to.”

“We know that, Hadrian.” Siger sat forward. “We know, but it doesn’t change anything. Your magic is like a sleeping giant. It’s capable of doing great things when roused. Unfortunately it can also do terrible things as we saw this morning.”

Sherrinford nodded thoughtfully, unconsciously mirroring his nephew Sherlock’s favorite stance.

“I believe part of the problem.” He said slowly as he organized his thoughts. “Is that you’ve always had control of your magic. So when you lose it you don’t know what to do or how to handle it. And that’s our fault for forgetting that powerful you are but you’re still just a boy. And boy wizards have to be taught to control their emotions when they have great magic.”

“Am I in trouble?” Hadrian asked fretfully, worrying a corner of his blanket between his fingers.

“Oh, you’re in massive trouble lad.” Gawain said almost cheerfully. “As are my own boys. They never should’ve invited you in the first place without asking, then this whole…episode could’ve been avoided.”

“Our decision is thus,” Siger stood his compatriots joining him. “This is June and usually your summers are rather lax. Not so this year. You’re officially grounded. That means no owling friends, no visits, no horseback riding or fencing with Rhys. You’re temporarily banned from the Wallace Estate for the summer.”

“The summer!” Shocked green eyes looked frantically between the three resolute and diamond-hard faces above him. “That’s forever!”

“And your tantrum wasn’t worthy of such a punishment?” Sherrinford asked with an arched brow, looking down at the indignant face.

Hadrian subsided at that the picture of Lady Maggie cradling her arm to her chest flashing through his mind.

“Now.” Gawain crossed his arms. “Since you’re banned from my Estate, we’ll be having your estate management here instead. And as you’ve suddenly had some large chunks of time freed up in your schedule you’ll be spending an extra hour each week with Lord Black learning the basics of finance.”

Of all of them Lord Black for all his years had the canniest financial mind.

“That doesn’t fill all of your now-empty hours that would otherwise be spent with your friends.” Sherrinford added. “So we’ll be adding onto our language lessons. You’ve an excellent grasp of
Latin and French with a decent ability with German and Gaelic. You need Russian, Hindi, and Welsh before your coronation and possibly more after.”

It was only through not wanting to make things worse that Hadrian restrained his groan.

“However.” Sherrinford smirked. “If you apply yourself diligently to improving your German and Gaelic…” He was convinced the only reason the lad wasn’t fluent was because of pure laziness after how easily he’d taken to Latin and French. “And becoming at least conversant in Russian this summer we will revisit your grounding mid-August and perhaps allow Rhys and David to come over for a long weekend before David starts school again.”

“As another incentive for applying yourself to your studies.” Gawain added. “John has informed us that after watching a ‘documentary’ on the mundane Israeli Defense program you’ve expressed an interest in adding Krav Maga to your boxing and wrestling regimen.”

“And don’t think Remus hasn’t told me about your new fascination with sailing.” Siger rolled his eyes.

Sailing.

Of all the things for the boy to decide he wanted to try why sailing of all things?

“With your schedule already close to bursting at the seams.” He continued. “In order for you to add time for more hobbies you’ll either have to sacrifice some of your free-time…”

“He doesn’t have enough as it is.” Gawain repeated his constant issue with his future Lord’s schedule.

 “…or complete an area of study to everyone’s satisfaction.”

“Right now Languages is the only area where you’re slacking.” Sherrinford said pointedly. “Apply that prodigious mind of yours to them and I’m sure we can take some time in the Fall and see about things like sailing or martial arts.”

Sherrinford and Gawain bid Hadrian goodbye and then nodded to Siger, leaving him to inform their charge about the rest of his punishment. A young man’s pride could be a sticky thing, no need to possibly bruise it further when it was already stinging.

“You really worried us, Harry.” Siger sat on the side of the bed and drew his foster-son into a close hug. “You could’ve hurt yourself even worse than another person.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry.” Hadrian chanted softly, digging his face into his Papa’s shirt. “I didn’t mean it! I was just so mad and then upset and then my chest started to hurt and I just wanted it to stop hurting! I didn’t think it would hurt anyone.”


Several long moments later when Siger judged Hadrian ready to continue he spoke.

“The grounding is your punishment for arguing back and snapping at us. The extra lessons aren’t a punishment they’re to keep you out of trouble. We’re also going to be firm about your meditation exercises with Remus, I know you’ve been absent-minded about it, skiving off early for biscuits or to fit an extra half-hour of play with Rhys in. That stops now. You need those exercises to help control your emotions and magic, lad. We’ve just seen what can happen firsthand if you don’t keep up with it – at least until your magic smooths out and stops growing which should happen…”
“Ok.”

“Now Andromeda sent for Ted and we’ve talked it over with him. Starting tomorrow you’re having visits with him again during the week as well as on Saturdays. Hopefully between talking things out with Ted and him helping you with your Occlumency we can stop something like this from happening again.”

“What about using a focus?” Hadrian offered, trying to be helpful. “David and Dora both have wands now and Rhys uses a training wand. Don’t wands help regulate magic?”

Siger shook his head, sighing. He knew this would come up eventually. Had Remus not argued so ferociously when he started tutoring his foster-son Hadrian would have a training wand as well. But until today he’d never needed artificial means to wrangle his magic.

It’d been as natural as breathing.

“A wand or another focus would be a crutch for you.” He explained once he found the right way to put it. “You’re a true magical prodigy, son. The kind that only pops up every couple generations. Magic Herself has Blessed you. Using a focus would be like taking Her Blessing and shoving it into a box a hundred times too small.”

“That would be bad.” Hadrian observed with a child’s simple logic.

“Yes,” Siger chuckled at the thought of offending Magic Herself in such a way. “Yes it would. Now for the rest of your punishment you’re going to clean the breakfast room – by hand, no magic, and no elves – until it sparkles. You can ask the elves for direction but they are not to do it for you. Once you’ve finished you’ll write a formal apology to myself and Lady Holmes. It should be comprehensive and using your best parchment and finest penmanship.”

“Yes, Papa.” Hadrian winced at the cleaning but had thought it would be something like that.

Lady Maggie was a big fan of Like-for-Like.

He’d messed up the room so he wasn’t surprised he’d be expected to put it back the way it was.

“There’s my good lad.” Siger squeezed him tight before rising. “Now I believe you have a snack waiting in your sitting room and there is a breakfast table in need of a polishing before lunch.”

Rolling his eyes Hadrian gave him a half-grin.

“Yes, Papa.”

…

Thankfully for all that came into contact with him that summer, Hadrian mostly accepted both his punishment and the compromise from Sherrinford with his natural good grace.

While vocal about missing his friends and how much he loathed trying to make his quill form the Cyrillic alphabet for his Russian lessons, Hadrian had also been given something to strive for, something that had been absent with his life being so routine.

The biggest disappointment of the summer was not having an eighth birthday party and not being able to join John and Sherlock at the King Tut exhibit at the Museum before it left for its tour of
Though the party was cancelled the friend restriction was temporarily lifted so they could deliver their gifts in person a couple days before the end of July. And while the Wallace boys had been punished for their part in Hadrian’s bad behavior, their parents couldn’t justify taking away what had been a birthday gift of its own…so they were able to attend the Match and Hadrian got a pair of Omnioculars upon turning eight.

Hadrian’s guardians meanwhile had had another major meeting while the children were occupied and discussed what to do about the friend situation. Next Fall would herald Rhys’s first year at Hedwig and with David and Dora at Hogwarts, he would only be able to spend time with Rhys for an hour or two on Saturdays. Hadrian needed a bigger social group.

A plan was finally hatched to mimic the two play-groups that were already in existence: one run by Molly Weasley at the community center in the magical portion of Ottery-St-Catchpole and the other which tended to cater to the noble children of former Death Eaters and was in Wiltshire.

Neither group would be suitable for Hadrian to join, if for security purposes alone but did provide a template for them to use.

Using the Wallace Estate and a free time-slot in Hadrian’s schedule on Wednesdays, it would be overseen by Lady Wallace with help from Remus Lupin and Andromeda Tonks as available. Which as both of them had run such groups before made for an easy sell to the children they wanted Hadrian to meet and possibly befriend.

Rhys would attend for this year of course, the Diggory Heir Conan was a year younger than Hadrian but his older cousin Cedric was well behaved so they thought Conan would do fine. Convincing Dowager Longbottom to let her grandson attend was an…ordeal. But one that Margeux eventually won. Susan, the Bones Heiress, came along with her good friend Hannah and her younger sister Ester. Luna, the slightly dotty Lovegood Heiress came as well, her mother Athena being great friends with Giovanna. Adrian Pucey was the same age as Rhys and a last-minute addition, however as it turned out his mother was the younger sister of Gawain and thought her son could benefit from socializing with a new crowd since he usually attended the same group as the Malfoy and Nott Heirs.

Regina Pucey nee Wallace wanted her son to meet people besides the children of his father’s cronies. As it was she nearly had to fight tooth-and-nail to get Adam to agree for him to be allowed around her brother’s children and their friend. Honestly, if it wasn’t included in their marriage contract she didn’t think the man would even let her see her brother.

Politics were the bane of sensible women everywhere who had hide-bound husbands.

…

Eight turned out to be a much happier year for Hadrian than seven.

Even though he never returned to the cheerfully-biddable child he was during the first years of his new life, his guardians found themselves thankful for it, taking it as a sign that he was able to overcome the conditioning forced upon him during his “Dursley years.”

Instead his personality seemed to have found a happy medium – for the moment – between the cheerful early-Hadrian and the snarly seven-year-old-Hadrian. While some of the adults credited his growing maturity to his age and prodigious mind, Remus who arguably spent the most time with him, saw it differently.
Up until the “Quidditch Incident” every moment of his life was scheduled for him. Every decision was made for him by those around him before he even woke up in the morning. The only time his opinion ever truly counted was when it came to playing games with Rhys – the only person in his life who let Hadrian really make decisions.

It was well-mean-ed tyranny but totalitarian in the extreme.

Which wasn’t a problem when he was younger and still afraid he’d somehow screw up and they wouldn’t want him anymore.

The time was always going to come that he recovered enough from his trauma that he was going to want more control over his life…especially with all of them telling him that someday he was going to be a Lord and a King. When he was younger it didn’t matter because those were fuzzy concepts to grasp even for a prodigy. But by the time he turned seven he’d definitely figured it out.

And figured out that what they were asking of him wasn’t the same as how they were treating him.

Disciplining him and making him deal with the consequences of his actions – the “Like for Like” method Lady Maggie preferred and Sirius had strongly advocated – had helped immensely with Harry-the-Boy.

Talking to him rationally about what he wanted and how he wanted to spend his time – and then figuring out what was plausible and making it happen – showing him what he needed to do so he could learn Krav Maga and take up sailing…that all spoke to Hadrian-the-Heir.

Unfortunately the only people that easily reconciled the two were his foster-father and his werewolf-uncle.

The rest tended to only cater to half of his personality: either the sweet boy or the headstrong Heir. But that wasn’t working anymore. Hadrian had gained a taste of making an independent decision when he strove to master the languages set before him and succeeding then being rewarded with the martial arts lessons he so desperately wanted.

Thankfully by being exposed to a larger group of children, he’d also seen that while his education and how his guardians were with him could be a pain sometimes, he wouldn’t trade places with many of the others for all the gold in Gringotts.

While Lord and Lady Wallace seemed like ideal parents to him there was always a distance. Gawain couldn’t quite disassociate the child that needed teaching and guidance from his future Lord and Giovanna followed his lead.

Conan Diggory’s parents were okay but always rather stiff when they came to pick him up from the Wallace Estate…and Neville Longbottom’s Gran was just scary.

No. He decided with a nod. Even though his guardians made him study things like the differences between Marriage, Betrothal, and Courtship Contracts for a whole month, he wouldn’t trade places with anyone he knew.

Things were just about perfect.

…

It was during his weekly chess game and politics primer with Mycroft that he was tested on his knowledge.
Information new and old was always on the table for discussion, with the statesman often teaching him new ways to look at things or different ways things could have been managed from his history lessons to create a better effect.

Invariably, the discussion would wind its way around to whatever subject was currently preying on Hadrian’s impressive mind.

Hadrian studied the board in front of him with narrowed eyes. They were playing mundane chess today, with Mycroft taking the ivory pieces. He’d just made his opening salvo and his young opponent was trying to deduce his strategy the way Sherlock had been coaching him during their games after Sunday dinners.

Placing it as the opening for the Russian Game, Hadrian countered then glanced up with a Holmesian smirk.

“Feeling international today, My?”

The British Government chuckled. “Well, I did stop another potential Cuban-missile crises today.”

They played a few more moves before Mycroft asked the question.

“What’s bothering you, little King?”

Little King had become their code for Mycroft being willing to answer questions. Even ones the other adults in Hadrian’s life would rather he didn’t.

“You know how I remember things?” Hadrian winced at the poorly-phrased gambit that went with the misstep that cost him his Queen’s bishop.

“Hn.” His foster-brother studied the mistake with a shake of his head and nabbed the misplaced piece with a pawn before sitting back. “Very much so. Your memory is much like mine and Sherlock’s…though you don’t tend to ‘delete’ information you think is useless the way my brother does. What of it?”

“The Lords explained Marriage, Betrothal, and Courtship Contracts to me a couple months ago. Spent ages on them making sure I knew the differences, how to write them to the benefit of my Houses, when to approve them and when to deny them,” he waved his hand in a vague gesture before moving a Knight to guard his Queen’s flank. “Everything.”

“Well, I rather thought that was coming as I saw you were approaching magical contracts both binding and non-binding in father’s lesson plans.” Mycroft responded non-committedly – both in word and on the board.

“My.” The name was a put-upon sigh complete with an eye roll.

“Harry.” Mycroft mimicked, putting his little brother’s Queen in jeopardy.

“I remember.” Hadrian stressed, moving his castle to intercept his brother’s bishop and taking it for good measure. “When we were at the bank. When I was so sick and hurt. I. Remember.”

That had his brother lifting his head warily. Piercing blue eyes tracked every tiny movement of bright green, checked and cross-checked every twitch of the still-young face that as yet maintained a hint of baby-fat. So young. And so gods-damned smart.

Like Sherlock.
Though Thankfully not obsessed with death and murder.

One of those was enough in a family.

“You want to know about who exactly you’re contracted to and how.” Mycroft shook his head and rose, knocking his King over with an irritated flick of one long finger. “Checkmate. Come on, little king. This is a conversation that requires more people…and quite a bit of brandy.”

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Chapter Four: Little Phoenix

By the time they could organize everyone’s schedules for what Sirius had jokingly dubbed the “Incoming Apocolypse” – due to Hadrian’s imminent explosion over his future – Hadrian’s ninth birthday had come and gone.

John and Sherlock had a deluge of cases to handle with a serial killer on the loose – found and satisfactorily shot before being handed over to D.I. LeStrade – it was the middle of a Wizengamot session requiring Sherrinford and Gawain be present to protect their interests, and Mycroft had to deal with the rising tensions between the U.S. and the Middle Eastern countries.

Though as promised when the day did finally arrive – there was plenty of brandy on hand.

Ted and John had taken it upon themselves immediately following Hadrian’s ninth birthday to give him “The Talk.” Their logic being that it’ll be much, much easier to explain some of the details of the contracts if the boy at least understands the grittier parts of them. It was much less painful than the discussion regarding the contracts themselves were slated to be.

Taking advantage of his ability to comprehend subjects well beyond his age group, John and Ted each selected several books that would discuss the…mechanical…process of sex as well as the mental/emotional processes involved. Most adults would’ve simply left it as the mechanical/biological process and been done with what is stereotypically an uncomfortable subject. But with the contract discussion looming ever-nearer that wasn’t going to be enough.

John went with a volume usually used with college-level coursework titled: “Human Sexuality and Reproduction.” It was very comprehensive and covered most of the mundane side of things – including a fair and unbiased take on homosexuality and other preferences that were beyond “Insert Peg A into Slot B.”

Ted likewise had chosen what would be used as a teacher’s edition for sex education in a wizarding school. He knew Hadrian would be able to grasp the magical theory involved easily and it even
gave an overview on the various methods same-sex couples of both genders could use to reproduce. Interestingly enough in anti-creature Britain it also included information about creatures and creature mixes that could bond and/or breed with wizards and witches though unlike John’s volume it wasn’t anywhere close to unbiased.

The conversation that followed after giving him a week to read and process the volumes went something like this:

... 

Hadrian sat swinging his legs idly on the settee in his sitting room while Ted and John traded “go ahead, no you go ahead” looks. Finally making a decision – there might’ve been rock-paper-scissors involved – John caved and spoke first.

“Do you have any questions about the books we asked you to study, little one?” John winced as the pet-name slipped out. He knew Hadrian was old enough and mature enough for “The Talk” but it still felt wrong. All he could see was the little bundle of hair and eyes staring up at him, trusting him enough to carry him through his first floo trip.

“A couple.” Hadrian admitted with zero hesitance. He couldn’t understand why Dr. John and Healer Ted were being so…weird. If he was having his conversation with Sherlock they would’ve already had a logical breakdown of the issue complete with graphs and charts. Maybe an experiment dealing with brain chemistry.

Which was exactly why Sherlock had been outvoted when he lobbied to do it instead of John.

“Go on, then.” Ted smiled, leaning over to prop his bent arms on his lap.

“Boys.” Hadrian corrected himself remembering the phrase used in the text. “Magical Males...they can have babies but mundane males can’t...right?”

“That’s right.” The mind healer nodded. That one had thrown him during his own sex ed class years ago. Finding out that if he’d been bent he could get pregnant had certainly put a damper on any experimenting he might’ve been interested in doing.

“And I’m supposed to get married.”

“Yes, when you’re older.” John confirmed.

“And it’s ok to like boys if you’re a boy and girls if you’re a girl.”

“Absolutely, little one.”

This was where Hadrian actually had a question.

“…Does that mean I’m going to have a baby?”

John about spit his lemonade across the room.

And they thought giving him “The Talk” would be easier because he was smarter than most. Hah. It just meant he had more creative questions to ask and make them squirm.

... 

Full glasses of brandy in hand – except for Hadrian who was given just a tiny amount at the bottom of his glass – the needed persons gathered around the large table in the Ravenscroft Hill formal
Hadrian who had started his education about wines as part of his Deportment and Manners lessons, wrinkled his nose a bit at the smell that wafted up from his glass. It was much muskier than the sweet wines Sherrinford was starting him out with. He still didn’t understand the appeal but allowed that the “grown-ups” tended to like it.

Gawain in his Steward persona had claimed the seat at the head of the table, files denoting the binding contracts in question spread out before him. There were three piles. In the gold folders were the ones between two Royal Houses, in the silver between a Royal House and a Noble House, and the bronze were Noble House to Noble House. Thankfully that also separated the two betrothal contracts from the marriage contracts, allowing him to proceed in a logical manner.

Which will hopefully keep outbursts from Sherlock to a minimum.

“Well, Hadrian.” Mycroft said, swirling the brandy in his glass as he lounged in his chair to Gawain’s immediate left. “What questions do you have about what you remember?”

Mycroft had informed the key parties as to what precisely had been said between himself and their charge, John and Ted doing the same though the latter wasn’t present for this conversation.

“I know that I have to get married.” He said taking a deep breath. “And I know that there are contracts involved. Other than that, no one has ever said anything about this whole…thing.”

“We would have, pup.” Sirius said, rubbing one hand down Hadrian’s arm from his spot next to him. They’d placed the two people best at soothing Hadrian at his sides: Sirius on his left and Remus on his right. “When it was time. You just grow up too fast for us to always keep pace.”

“Now there’s an understatement.” Siger muttered into his glass, taking a swig. This year marked the tipping point. Hadrian had officially been in his care longer than he hadn’t been. Now they had to tell him a large facet of his life had already been decided.

Titles were one thing. People were born into titles every day. Marriage on the other hand was a personal, intimate decision.

Or at least it should be.

Hadrian focused back on his Steward who took a breath and put aside his personal feelings – very personal in one case – and gave his future Lord and King what he wanted.

“There are six binding magical contracts. Two are Marriage Contracts between Royal Houses, two are Marriage Contracts between one of your Royal Houses and a Noble House, and two are Betrothal Contracts between Noble Houses. All of them specify ages of fulfillment and all of them require Heirs to be born. You are also subject to the Last of Line laws. As a result,” Gawain took a deep drink of his brandy. “You will have to gain a total of thirteen Consorts either through the current contracts or by Courting or being Courted by suitable parties.”

That took Hadrian aback for a moment.

“Thirteen?” He echoed then frowned. “But I’m not that Last of several of those Lines…am I? I know I Inherited them but there’s other of the Blood out there. Like Siri and Dora for House Black.”

“You’re right, Harry.” Remus said, folding his hand on the table before him, ignoring his glass of brandy. “And you’re also wrong. We haven’t gotten to this yet in your lessons but when you underwent the Ritual of Blood Inheritance you didn’t just qualify and were immediately given
thirteen Houses. No. Magic Herself chose to bestow them upon you. You are the one Magic deemed worthy of renewing thirteen Magical Lines. Just as She decided others of the Blood were not worthy.”

The werewolf made no mention of the Houses Magic hadn’t entrusted to Harry for whatever reason. The magical Lines of Avalon were so tangled there were hundreds of defunct Lines waiting for an Heir or a renewal if they were magical but not Noble. Just as there were probably thousands of people who had the necessary lineage to Claim one of the Thrones of Avalon.

But Magic chooses.

Just as She chose Harry.

“What am I supposed to do with thirteen husbands or wives?” Hadrian asked weakly, eyes wide.

Sirius opened his mouth to give a snickering answer only to lose his breath with an “oomph” when Remus elbowed him in the stomach. Hard.

That was going to leave a bruise.

Ignoring that particular train-wreck, Gawain continued with his report.

“The contracts and details are as follows:

Marriage: House of Emrys and House of Nimue. The Crown Prince or King-Apparent of the House of Emrys with an eligible Heir of Nimue. The Heir of Nimue shall be Honorably Courted and Properly Betrothed to the Heir of Emrys and They Shall Be Bonded in Matrimony by the Coronation of the Heir of Emrys or the Heir’s sixteenth birthday whichever is first. Consummation must occur within one year with no less than two Heirs produced by the Heir of Emrys’s twenty-first birthday.”

Remus needed that drink now. His cub had to get married before he turned thirteen or lose his magic…or life.

“Marriage: House Ravenclaw and House Prince.”

“Prince?” Sirius growled. “My pup has to marry one of Snape’s get? Over my dead body!”

“No,” his mate snapped. “It’ll be Harry’s dead body if he doesn’t comply. Ritual of Blood Inheritance, remember? Even if breaking the contract would only render him a squib, the Ritual will take his life for the offense.”

The animagus slugged back the rest of his brandy before prowling over to the bar and pouring another glass. Taking that as a tacit agreement of silence – at least until later – Gawain continued.

“Marriage: House Ravenclaw and House Prince. To afford cessations of Hostilities between the Empire of Avalon and the Empire of Rome. The Heir of Ravenclaw shall wed with the Heir of the Ambassador to Avalon, House Prince.”

“Well, shit.” Sherlock said blinking. “How old is that contract?”

“Two thousand years…give or take.” Gawain said drily. “Apparently House Ravenclaw didn’t ever have another eligible Heir. I looked it up and the Ravenclaws used Marriage to stop wars…a lot. By the time Helena died without issue Prince was the last one in a long line of contracts, they raffled off their kids two hundred years before they were even born.”
“Interesting bunch, Ravenclaws.” Mycroft noted. “From a political perspective anyway.”

Snapping his wrist Gawain returned to his recital.

“It’s the same as the other except for the ages.” Gawain summed up. “Courtship, Betrothal, then Marriage which has to be done by Hadrian’s fifteenth birthday with the requisite two Heirs ‘once the Heir of Ravenclaw as finished their education’ which if Hadrian did enough Masteries could put off having Heirs for this contract indefinitely.”

“That’s something at least.” Sirius grumbled, pouting.

“The Marriage Contracts with Egypt and Japan are exactly the same and were made around the same time though with different Houses, Japan LeFey and Egypt Slytherin. Marriage by age sixteen, one Heir by eighteen with another by twenty-two.”

“And the bronze files?” Hadrian prompted brain busily lining the information up in his head.

“Betrothals.” Here is where Gawain became really, really uncomfortable. “Usually Betrothal contracts have an “out” clause if you will – which both of these do. However…” He trailed off, looking away from his audience.

“What’s the out?” Sherlock asked. “Must be bad if you can’t bring yourself to say it.”

Gawain scrubbed his hands over his face.

“The only way to break these Betrothals is if after the Betrothals are in place…Hadrian’s Betrothed’s are proven Unfaithful or Traitors to the Crown of Avalon.”

“I can see how that would make you uncomfortable, Gawain.” Sherrinford took a delicate sip of his rather excellent brandy. “Seeing as how one of those Betrothal Contracts is between Hadrian and whichever of your sons he decides best suits him.”

“What?” Hadrian asked icily, eyes glinting. “I’m supposed to marry David or Rhys?”

“Yes.” Gawain choked out. “You are.”

“They’re my friends.” He protested, looking to Siger for help. “My friends. And they’re boys. I don’t even know if I like boys…like that. Or girls. I’m too young for that. They’re my friends.”

“We know, lad.” Siger wrapped one arm around the shaking boy. “When Ragnok told us about your contracts and the Last of Line business we debated long and hard over how we were going to handle it. In the end we thought it would be best if at least in this one case you could know your possible spouse from a young age. We thought it would make it easier when you got older.”

“Easier,” Hadrian laughed much too bitterly for a child. “Right.”

Looking up at his Steward out of betrayed emerald eyes he gave the man his first-ever command.

“Finish it. Then leave.”

Lord Wallace clenched his jaw then nodded, speaking briskly.

“The Contract between House Valerius and House duLac is simple but binding. You’re expected to become officially betrothed by seventeen and married by eighteen unless the person you select proves unfaithful or a traitor to the crown. In the case of House Pevensie and House Wallace,” his breath stuttered before smoothing out. “You have to select your betrothed by fourteen and wed them
by eighteen.”

Leaving the files on the table for the others to study, Lord Wallace rose to his feet and gave Hadrian a crisp bow before taking his leave – as commanded.

Silence flowed thick in his wake.

“That was unkind, Hadrian.” Margeux scolded him. “He was only trying…”

Hadrian held up a hand, somehow coming across as imperious even while cuddled between his two appointed comforters.

“He’s been trying to rig the game.” Hadrian said, nearly in tears. “And has been from the first time I set foot in his home. Making sure Rhys was always the first one to see me, was the first one to become my friend. And Lady Wallace was just as bad if not worse. Forcing Rhys to partner me… even though he’d rather have a rusty nail driven through his eye than dance. They just didn’t want their precious Heir stuck in a marriage he couldn’t get out of without shaming their House.” He scoffed, rising to his feet and making his way slowly toward the door. “I can’t even blame them, not really. After all, what do I matter to them when weighed against the Honor of House Wallace?”

…

Rhys frowned, searching through the faces of his friends as they all gathered to celebrate his birthday. He’d finally gotten having his best-friend come approved for the first time ever. He was so excited to introduce Hadrian to Cormac and Blaise. Hadrian already knew most everyone else.

That’s if he ever shows up.

“Dad?” Rhys found his father staring broodingly at the fire in the floo room, still waiting on guests. “Where’s Hadrian? I thought you said he could come?”

Gawain startled at the sound of his son’s voice, turning to watch as his handsome child crossed the tiled floor in an athletic lope.

They all were growing up so fast…

“I did.” Gawain nodded as his son reach his side. “I did say that. But he might not come today.”

“Why?” Rhys asked, staring up at his hero with the black eyes he inherited from his mother. They were striking with his deep chestnut hair and pale skin. “Did he get in trouble again?”

“No,” his father chuckled with forced lightness. “He’s not in trouble, son. I’m afraid I am with him.”

“I didn’t know that was possible.” His son cocked his head to the side confused. “Adults getting in trouble with kids. I thought Hadrian was your Ward. Doesn’t it work the other way around.”

“Most of the time. But Hadrian isn’t your ordinary kid or ward.”

“Tell me about it.” Rhys rolled his eyes. “Sometimes he talks and it’s like an adult comes out. Or you when you’re being a Lord and stuff.”

Even in his present mood Gawain had to grin at that apt description.

“So what did you do? You know. To make Hadrian mad at you?”
Here Lord Wallace stumbled. He’d made an agreement with his wife not to inform the boys about the Contract. Not until Hadrian decides who to Court. They didn’t want either boy treating him differently because of an accident of inheritance.

“It must be bad if you don’t want to tell me.” Rhys observed knowingly. “Did you at least say you’re sorry?”

“I would.” Gawain said. “But I’m not sorry.”

“I know.” Hadrian said from behind them, face stony.

Neither Wallace male had noticed the fire flaring green and Hadrian and Remus stepping out, too involved in their discussion.

“Hadrian!” Rhys cheered. “You made it!”

Hadrian’s aristocratic face softened at his friend’s normal welcome. At least his friends weren’t in on their parents’ plot.

Seeing the tension between his cub and Lord Wallace, Remus held up the brightly-wrapped gift in his arms.

“Why don’t you show me where you’re stashing your loot, Rhys?” Remus suggested, ushering the older boy from the room. Leaning down he whispered in his ear: “You don’t want to know. Trust me on this one.”

Back in the floo room, Hadrian inspected Lord Wallace’s guilt ravaged face with his piercing green eyes. After several long moments he finally spoke.

“Don’t think for one second that my presence here means we’re ok.” He hissed, nearly spitting the words. “You may be David and Rhys’s father and the Lord of House Wallace and have a duty to them. I understand that. However.” His voice turned to ice. “I am the King-Apparent of Avalon and you are supposed to be my Steward. You are supposed to put the good of the Realm first. Not attempt to manipulate the future King into choosing a spouse as it best suits you.”

Hadrian took a deep breath, reining in his temper and counting slowly under his breath, Occluding his emotions.

“Hadrian and his guardian Gawain will probably recover from his.” He said in a flat monotone. “But the King-Apparent of Avalon and his trusted Steward might not. We,” he continued using the Royal We for the first time in his life. “Are now forced to give serious consideration as to whether the House of Wallace will remain a part of Our Privy Council once We Claim Our Throne.”

Message – and warning – delivered, Hadrian turned on his heel and strode from the room, bringing up a happy mask for his friend in the process.

He left behind him a shattered Steward and what little remained of the trust he used to have in him.

…

Nine was turning out to be better and worse than seven, his current barometer for how much a year sucked.

He hadn’t lost control of his magic again so from that perspective it was a total win.
But finding out about Lord Wallace trying to engineer one of the few choices he had as far as his own spouses goes...that almost slapped the top of his suckage-meter.

What really, truly, got under his skin wasn’t his Steward trying to advance his House or manage who his kids married. No, as far as he could tell that was normal Lord/father behavior. It was the underhandedness of it all.

If he’d been told: someday you’re going to have to pick either David or Rhys to marry; when they first met even if too young to really ”get” it, that would’ve been one thing.

Or.

If it’d never been mentioned but he wasn’t pushed into being friends with them either.

But neither of those things happened. He wasn’t told and David and Rhys were two of the only kids he was allowed to be around for years. It wasn’t just cunning – he was foster-brother to Mycroft Holmes, he had a deep appreciation for cunning. It was dishonest.

How could he as Heir to the Throne of Avalon trust his Steward if he was dishonest?

Sighing, Hadrian stood from the piano bench where he’d been making no more progress on his assigned piece than he was knitting. Walking over to one of the big bay windows he curled up against one of the fluffy cushions and stared out into the gloomy day. His mind churning the same questions over and over until he worried himself asleep.

…”This has really shaken him.” Siger commented to Remus as the two bedrocks of Hadrian’s life watched him curl up in the window seat from out in the hall.

“It was bound to.” Remus shook his head in disgust. “I was confused at first over why he was so upset. Then he told me about how Giovanna always pushed him on Rhys and separated him from David, forcing him basically to pick the second son instead of the Heir. And Gawain didn’t do a damned thing to stop her. I’d be pissed too.”

“Greater men than Gawain have fallen victim to the manipulations of a beautiful young wife.” Siger gestured for Remus to stay and watch Hadrian as he turned to leave. “I just hope Gawain fixes this mess before Hadrian’s trust in him in completely gone.”

“It’s already at the breaking point.” Remus said to himself after the older man was gone. “Wouldn’t take much at all to make it snap. And if that happens, Merlin help us all.”

…

Furious shouting and accusations thundered throughout the halls of the Wallace Estate as Rhys and David took cover from the hurricane in the warded library.

“What’s been going on?” David asked his brother harshly. He’d been gone a lot, hanging out with his friends from H.I. and Hogwarts. There had been something off between their father’s ward Heir Potter and their father on Rhys’s birthday but no one knew what.

“I have no idea.” Rhys turned to face his big brother. “Hadrian showed up late last week. I’d gone to find Dad and asked him about it and he told me he was in trouble with Hadrian. When I said I didn’t know it was possible for guardians to be in trouble with their wards Dad said something about how Hadrian wasn’t a normal ward and that he might skip my party.”
“He was there though.”

“I know, that’s the really weird thing.”

Both boys winced as their mother’s voice reached a crystal-breaking decibel. Rhys lowered his own to a bare whisper.

“When he finally got there Mr. Lupin left with me and Hadrian stayed behind. I don’t know what happened between him and Dad but it was bad. Really, really bad. Mr. Lupin said I was better off not knowing what was going on.”

“Well,” David drawled. “Whatever it is, it definitely led to this.”

They shuddered as a door slammed with a resounding crack! And the sound of a painting falling from the wall reached their ears.

“I hate it when they fight, Davie.” Rhys whispered, cuddling closer in towards his brother.

David swung an arm around him, holding him close as the battle continued to rage.

“She’s a boy. Buy him a broom or a horse and it’ll be all better.”

“Because of your underhanded matchmaking Giovanna.” His voice went flat. “I’m in danger of losing my Stewardship. How can any Lord have a Steward he can’t trust to hold his Lord’s interests dearer than his own? I’m not even sure that both of us making Vows – you to stop and me of Loyalty and Honesty – will save our family.”

“Haven’t you heard the rumors?” She was almost giddy with excitement. “Someone leaked a story from an informant inside Gringotts.”

Lord Wallace felt dread tingle down his spine as he sat heavily.
“What story?”

“That there’s been activity from the Vaults of the Avalon Seven.” She knelt down at his feet. “Don’t you see? David is beautiful, he takes after me.” She said with an utter lack of sarcasm or modesty. “He’s sure to catch the eye of the new King, whoever it might be. We just have to keep the Potter child happy enough until the King emerges and then use his Family’s deep connections to the Crown for our David. We could be the grandparents to the next King!”

Oh Godric’s Hairy Ass. His wife had gone completely ‘round the twist.

He supposed it was what he got for marrying a beautiful woman half his age. He knew she was ambitious. He didn’t think she was crazy with it.

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight.” He pinched his nose between two callused fingers. “You’ve, intentionally mind you, threatened a relationship that goes back for hundreds of years on the miniscule chance that: one there actually is an Heir to Avalon and two that he’ll be interested in David over Rhys and every other eligible person in his Empire?”

“Well when you put it that way…” She pouted rocking back on her heels.

“Screw the Vow.” He stood, shaking her off. “You’re hereby confined to your dower estate in the Italian Alps. Mitzy!” He called for a house elf. “Take Lady Wallace and the belongings she brought with her upon our marriage to her dower property. She is not to leave there under any circumstances nor is she to receive visitors or post besides myself or from myself.”

He ignored the screaming/shouting/crying/throwing-figurines-at-his-head as he continued down the hall in search of his sons.

…

Giovanna was removed – though David and Rhys didn’t quite understand the situation they knew their Dad wouldn’t have done it without cause – and Hadrian accepted the Vow of Loyalty and Honesty in all Dealings from his Steward.

Gawain also passed along to King Ragnarok via Goblin Ragnok about the leak occurring in Gringotts – bringing a swift halt to the speculations about what was going on with Hadrian’s Vaults.

And things settled back down for the most part.

Lord Wallace was a little more humble, Hadrian had learned a valuable lesson about blind trust – even with those closest to him, and his friendship with the Wallace boys bloomed anew, no trace in word or deed that Hadrian knew one of them was slated for his future Consort.

Time creaked on by, bringing Winter then Spring and another Summer.

Hadrian turned ten and with that came the knowledge that Rhys wouldn’t be around much with his H.I. schedule.

But he still had an overfull lesson plan each week and had continued see those in the social group Giovanna had originally brought together before her banishment.

Though with Rhys leaving the group for the most part, Hadrian and Neville were woefully outnumbered by girls, forcing them to grow closer. A feat which had some of Hadrian’s natural confidence rubbing off on the quiet, shy Longbottom Heir. But nothing could change the fact that both boys found Neville’s Gran too scary for words.
He also, as a reward for finally mastering Russian and moving onto Hindi and Welsh, added cello lessons with a master in London to his schedule. Lady Maggie and Mycroft had self-taught him piano and composition while Sherlock worked with him on the violin. Though Siri made jokes about the cello just being a case of Hadrian just “wanting the biggest out there”, he’d come through with one for his birthday while Remus agreed to ferry him back and forth to London for his lessons.

John told him when he ran over clutching his brand-new cello and the next size violin for his age that he was turning into a veritable Renaissance-Man.

The good doctor wasn’t too far off.

Hadrian’s life wasn’t without blemish.

Lord Black – sickly as long as Hadrian had known his Grandpapa – had held on longer than anyone would’ve guessed. Regrettably, he’d begun seriously declining. No longer able to tutor his Heir in Lordship duties, Ritual Magic, or being a Black of House Black, he’d turned his notes and journals written for such an event over to Sirius, trusting his once rebellious descendant to finish what Lord Black had begun.

That didn’t stop Hadrian from insisting on visiting as much as his lessons and studies allowed, sitting at his Grandpapa’s beside for sometimes hours at a time as the elderly man spun his tales of the stars and the gods, even of Lady Magic Herself. Sirius had been given control of the wards surrounding Castle Black, easing the stress on the patriarch’s magic, and together with Siger made the loving young man a two-way port-key that dropped him right into Lord Black’s bedchamber atop the highest tower in the ancient Castle.

That marked a charmed time for the two powerhouses. One an old tiger long weary of watching magic disappear more and more from the world. And the other a new hope, sent to revitalize and renew his people, a gift to them from Magic Herself.

It was over all too soon.

Hadrian was leaning on his Grandpapa’s bedside, forcing back sleep, when he heard it. The rattle. Turning his head as he sprang to attention he spied the clock.

Three in the morning, long passed his bedtime.

“Hadrian.” Arcturus Black called out in cracked whisper. “Hadrian?”

“I’m here, Grandpapa.” Hadrian answered strongly, no sign of the tears filming his eyes in his voice. Lord Black’s vision had been one of the first casualties of his failing health.

“Let me see you, my boy.” The dying many cracked a smile as his young Heir took his hands gently and lifted the age-cracked and spotted appendages to his face, letting them roam freely over Hadrian’s familiar features. “My beautiful boy. My lovely Dorea’s beloved Grandson. There is much of my Dorea in you Hadrian.”

Sightless eyes nonetheless tracked where his own emerald green would be.

“Much of her in you.” His hands fell down onto the comforter. “I looked to the stars once, when I was a young man, not much older than you. I read them clearly: and well. The best I ever did, a reading to rival that of the centaurs!” He boasted with an old-man’s pride. “But long did I await that future I read and mourn. For there was no sign of it.”

“What did they say, Grandpapa?” His voice wavered a bit under the strain of his grief. “The stars?”
Arcturus chuckled and gave a gummy smile.

“That the House of Black would give birth to the Heir of Avalon. To the hope of all magical Nations. That the star of the House of Black would rise high...only to fall so low it might never be reborn. Then like a phoenix from the ashes, we would be saved.”

The words smacked of prophecy.

“I didn’t share my reading.” The voice strong only moments ago, wheezed. “Not even with my father or my beloved wife. Not once in two hundred years. Until now.” His eyes fluttered closed before springing back open, the old man coming up on an elbow in a burst of strength and cupping Hadrian’s cheek – as if he knew where he was all along. “I would’ve died a miserable, miserly old man, dreaming of that day, and mourning. If not for you, my beautiful Hadrian. My long awaited Heir. My little phoenix.”

Relaxing back into the pillows, strength gone from him, Lord Arcturus Black closed his eyes and breathed his last at three-thirty-three in the morning on New Year’s Day, 1991.

…

While Hadrian was planning the funeral rites of his beloved Grandpapa, Mycroft was dealing with an issue of his own.

Nowhere near as heartbreaking as a funeral...though it had the potential to become one, his, if he didn’t mind his step. Plotting and planning the best route of attack, he finally set it all in motion the week before Prince William’s birthday on January 21st, a nondescript Tuesday the 14th of January at Sandringham House.

Andromeda was absent, still closeted in mourning with the other members of House Black as they traversed the ancient funeral rites of their Family.

The Royal Family was arrayed in a circle in one of the cozier sitting rooms of Sandringham House, a fire blazing cheerfully behind the grate. Present were The Queen and Queen Mother, Prince Philip, both of the young Princes and their parents Charles and Diana. The now-eight-year-old Prince Henry – Harry to most – had been deemed old enough to learn of his brother’s secret and due to the connection with the powerful House Nimue, was carefully monitored for any sign of magical ability.

For the moment it seemed that any power he had along those lines was latent but it could activate at any point up to eleven so the magical guards and Andromeda remained ever-vigilant.

“Ah, Mr. Holmes.” The lovely Diana was the first of the party to notice their stoic observer. “Please join us.”

Inclining his head slightly at the Princess of Wales, Mycroft stepped into the room and bowed low before the Queen and Queen Mother who were sharing a settee – the elder working on a piece of needlepoint while the younger lightly tossed a ball to one of her ever-present and beloved Corgis. After greeting everyone and settling into the chair offered him, accepting a cup of tea with a sliver of lemon cake from the Princess, Mycroft waited for one of the other adults to ask after his business there. There were some subjects one didn’t just blurt out with royalty, not even in relative private.

“How is Ms. Andy doing?” Prince Harry looked up beseechingly at the stern man, unknowingly giving him the opening he’d been waiting for.

“It’s Lady Andromeda, Harry.” His elder brother reminded him. “She’s from an old Family,
remember?”

Harry wrinkled his nose at his brother. It was hard enough keeping the regular nobles straight without having to remember all the magic ones now too. Plus Ms. Andy told him to call her that.

He knew better than to point that out in front of his father though. Prince Charles wouldn’t be pleased over the perceived lapse in manners. Especially with a Lady no matter who she was married to.

“Mrs. Tonks.” Mycroft winked discretely at the youngest Prince. “Is holding up well. Her Head of House’s health had been of concern for many years. Thankfully his passing was peaceful and attended by his Heir, as is proper according to the Black rituals.”

“Are they very different?” Princess Diana asked. “I’ve sat in on quite a few of Will’s lessons and for all the things that seem a little odd to me, many are the same.”

“I would venture.” Mycroft answered after a long moment. “That for the everyday witch or wizard the passing of a loved one is handled nearly identically to how you or I would deal with such an event. However, as I’m sure young William can attest, the ways of the Olde Families and the Noble Houses would be as strange to any of you as the dark side of the moon. Especially with what are seen as the three major milestones: Life, Marriage, and Death.”

“If Lady Andromeda needs any additional time for mourning or to see to the…Funeral Rites you called them? Simply let Us know.” The Queen stated, folding her hands regally in her lap. “She has been an excellent addition to the Household, both in tutoring my grandson as well as answering a multitude of questions from the rest of our family.”

“Quite the find, Mr. Holmes.” Prince Charles conceded. “Though how you manage to find the perfect solution to every situation that arises never ceases to confound me.”

Mycroft chuckled setting aside his cup.

“In this case no mystical powers or even extraordinary utilization of resources was necessary.” He waved a nonchalant hand. “As my foster-brother holds her Healing contract but no longer needed her as he once did, I both was well-acquainted with the Lady and her abilities and had possession of the knowledge that she was considering taking up teaching when not needed by her House as a Healer. I simply hoped that you would find her as suitable as I myself did.”

“Mrs. Tonks has never mentioned the connection.” Diana frowned lightly. She would know as she was the one who “dropped in” on Will’s tutoring sessions. “That is the sort of thing I would have recalled.”

“No,” The Queen faced her “government” with an arched brow. “She hasn’t.”

“Healers under private contracts are always bound by a code of confidentiality.” Mycroft waved it off. “She wouldn’t be able to tell you anything about my foster-brother without breaking it. Besides which, knowing Andromeda, she would never have mentioned it anyway as my father’s Ward is considered a member of House Black.”

“Most interesting Mycroft.” The Queen remained undeterred. “Though that doesn’t explain why you have requested this meeting.”

“Very well,” He conceded with a slight nod of his head. “As we are all aware, young Prince William’s eleventh birthday is right around the corner.”
“Next week.” William smiled charmingly at all present. “I really, really hope I get a broomstick. They sound wicked.”

His relatives all rolled their eyes at the by now worn-out request while his brother simply nodded along with his brother’s words. A flying broomstick did sound wicked.

“So I’ve been told.” Mycroft shielded a grin with the rim of his teacup. “However, upon his eleventh birthday he will be expected to Claim his Lordship of House Nimue and all it entails.”

Sitting straight, Prince Philip calculated the distance towards the door. They’d buried the issue of Wills’ marriage contract for the last two years, even going so far as to warn Lady Andromeda against mentioning to either her charge or the Princess of Wales. He was not looking forward to exhuming it.

“Yes, quite.” Charles looked towards his son. “Following the recommendations of both yourself, Lady Andromeda, and William’s two trusted guardsmen, we’ve left the financial matters of his inheritance in the hands of the goblin Account Manager. For dealing with the estates themselves and to help further William’s education in managing a magical estate, we’ve engaged the services of the Honorable Lord Hamish Stuart.”

“Stuart is an excellent choice.” Mycroft nodded approvingly. “Not overly aggressive with investments or ‘the latest thing’ but neither is he mired in the past or too conservative for the current wizarding climate. I can only think of two better, however they are currently engaged elsewhere.”

“That seems to be a recurring theme.” Philip commented drily, ignoring the look from his wife.

Here Mycroft couldn’t help but nod at the thinly-veiled accusation. He’d had to play a careful game these last few years between serving the Crown, the Realm, and doing his duty by his little king. It wouldn’t do to misstep now that the finish line of this particular footrace was at hand.

Especially since the next was likely to prove quite entertaining.

“We’ve been informed that there are no…” Charles waved a hand vaguely. “Exotic requirements for the ritual Wills will use to Claim his House. Only that a magical location was preferable and he’d need at least two witnesses of magical blood that were not immediate relations. To that end Lady Andromeda has informed us that her cousin, a Sirius Black, has renewed their late Lord’s offer of using the nearest Black property and it’s…Circle?” He looked towards his son to check the term, facing Mycroft once more when he received a nod.

Imagine that. Mycroft mused to himself sarcastically. The Queen of Slytherin during her Hogwarts years had preempted me.

“Most accommodating of them.” He nodded his head in a move only the Queen noticed was bordering sarcastic. “Ravenscroft Hill is also an option open to the Prince if there should arise an issue between now and next week. Did Mrs. Tonks offer witnesses as well?”

“No, now that you mention it.” Diana set her cup down with a click. “Which seems…odd now that we’ve discussed it.”

Not when everyone they’d offer is connected to the Prince’s future spouse. Mycroft’s thoughts this time had a definite inner tone of snark. No one wants there to be any sort of challenge to the legitimacy of William’s Claim.

The tie to the mundane Crown is too valuable to risk losing it over a matter of degrees of separation.
“McG and Kings are going to stand as witnesses.” William offered up for discussion.

“Both are from old Houses.” Mycroft nodded in approval. “Though neither is in the direct line of succession for the Lordships, they are very closely related to Lord Shacklebolt and Lord McGonagall. Younger son and nephew I believe.”

Moving on.

“Once the Lordship of House Nimue has been Claimed, he will receive his invitation to attend Hedwig Institute in the Fall. Mrs. Tonks can assist you with that process as she’s recently had a child go through Hogwarts’ process herself and the two are similar. Besides the matter of his education as a Lord,” he continued. “There are certain protocols that normally must be observed. However in William’s case they can be…delayed for a time. All but one.”

The Princess of Wales pinned him with an icy blue gaze.

“And what protocol might that be?”

“That of his marriage contract.”

To her father-in-law’s relief, no additional china was thrown at that moment…however he mostly credited that to her children being present and listening with big ears and bigger eyes.

“Marriage?” Prince Harry asked cocking his head to one side. Slowly but surely a devilish grin crossed his impish face. “Will has to get married and kiss a giirrrl….”

He burst into giggles, nearly rolling on the floor.

“Actually, young Prince.” Mycroft corrected, inwardly sighing. He just knew this isn’t going to go over well… “William’s future betrothed is a male…er…a boy.”

1…

2…

3…

“WHAT?!”

…

After the family had calmed and brandies were distributed – Mycroft’s go-to for calming nerves short of using a Potion – they reconvened, Prince Harry shuffled off to bed.

“Explain this to Us.” Queen Elizabeth demanded using the Royal Plural. The other adults all nodded, varying degrees of confusion and/or concern on their faces.

The only Windsor that wasn’t confused was William himself, as Lady Andromeda had covered the various types of relationships, partnerships, and marriages allowed in most magical countries with him last term.

“The limitation of marriage or sexual relationships to strictly male-and-female is an entirely mundane notion.” Mycroft said with patent nonchalance. He sipped at his brandy. “It rose to popularity alongside monotheism in the now-Middle East. And as clergymen became the arbiters of justice in the Western World, their ideas on marriage and sexuality became more and more mainstream. Their main speaking point being that as only male-female pairings could “bear fruit” they were the only
acceptable types of relations. As such is not the case in the magical world, there has never been a stigma or prohibition attached to love of any kind as long as the parties are of-age and consenting.”

William nodded along with the explanation, clearly showing the information wasn’t news to at least him.

“Then, if I take your meaning correctly.” The Queen stared at him with her perceptive gaze. “Same-sex partnerships are able to procreate in the magical realms?”

“Quite.” Mycroft toasted the Queen with his glass. “Love is considered a highly-potent form of magic. Regulating it to appease the mundane-born magics who enter that realm has never been an option among the ruling classes of the various countries. In fact, Avalon has an entire series of Laws forbidding such action as “against the Will and Blessings of Magic Herself.”

“Mrs. Tonks gave me a book about it.” William supplied helpfully. “When we covered the major Laws of the Nine Blessed during my history lessons last term. I can lend it to you if you’d like.”

“That’s very kind of you.” Diana smiled weakly at her son. “Thank you, dear.”

“When we first discussed this contract.” Charles gave his mother’s pet statesman a fierce glare. “You made no mention of this little…detail.”

“There was no need.” He stated unapologetic down to the soles of his shoes. “Tempers were high and flaring and young William’s magic had only just been discovered. Finding him a proper tutor and seeing to his protection were much more immediate needs.”

“Then why now, Mycroft?” The Queen Mother charged him. “Why not later, when he’s older and more mature?”

“It’s been delayed as long as possible. As I said earlier, certain protocols are required once he comes into his full Inheritance.” He looked from one to the other. “I know Prince Philip was given a copy of the contract, did not one of you read it?”

“We thought,” Diana waved a hand. “Assumed, we’d have until he was grown to worry about it.”

“Ah.”

Mr. Holmes was clearly not impressed.

“Let me inform you of what has been overlooked due to that assumption.” His voice was still within the bounds of propriety but the tone itself was glacial. “The contract in question is from an age when wizards, especially Heirs, married young. They still do for the most part. As it was made between a Royal House and that of a trusted retainer who’d become Nobility through services provided the Royal House of LeFey, it specifically states that the two fulfilling it must be wedded before the Heir of Emrys is either crowned or reaches sixteen, whichever is earlier.”

“How long, My?” Charles asked his schoolmate. “How long until my son and heir has to wed?”

“Wed?” Mycroft arched a brow. “Thirteen. He has until July to meet his intended and for his intended to initiate their Courtship and Betrothal. Or lose his magic and possibly his life.”

“Yes.” Diana stabbed a finger at his placid face, accusation in every line and curve of her body and voice. “You knew about this. You, you, erg!”

It was just shy of a shriek.
“Before you start in on my good china.” Elizabeth chided her daughter-in-law sharply, in no mood for tantrums of any kind, especially as the only one with real right to it is sitting as calmly as you please, studying one of his magic texts. “Perhaps you will allow Mr. Holmes to finish what he has come to tell Us.”

“The Heir of Emrys will be Claiming his Inheritance,” he shot Elizabeth a significant look. “At the end of July. On the Fall Equinox in September there will be a grand Lordship Ball at the House of Emrys’s former main seat: Snowdon Castle hidden in magical Wales. The new King of Avalon will be officially introduced though his coronation isn’t for another two years. Even in the magical realm such things are a massive undertaking. He would like to introduce William as his Betrothed and future Consort at that time.”

A light dawned on many royal faces.

“Wicked Mycroft.” Elizabeth murmured, the only one well aware of his relationship to the future King of Avalon. “No wonder you were so certain of an alliance being probable.”

“Mother?” Charles prompted, being the only other close enough to overhear.

“When Mr. Holmes first told you of William’s magic.” She explained briskly. “He’d come for a reason of State as well. As you all know the Crown holds a sort of executive authority over Our magical citizens. However, what We didn’t know until that day was Our authority was only due to the Throne of Avalon sitting empty. So long as Avalon was without Their King, authority over Their subjects reverted to their various Ministries and individual governing bodies with oversight given to the Head of each territory’s mundane government. In the United Kingdom that was, well is for a few more months, Us.”

“The King of Avalon is the single most politically powerful ruler in the magical world.” Mycroft fleshed out her explanation. “And that was when the Throne revolved between Seven different Royal Houses that had formed together over the ages to create the Empire and its territories. With the new King-Apparent not only is he destined to be the Sole Ruler…he also holds other Houses under him, consolidating power in a fashion other Kingdoms could only wish for.”

Though Egypt and Japan certainly came close. He mused to himself. They’d learned well from their close friend and ally and stayed strong when their mundane counterparts crumbled under tremendous pressure that came with the great Wars.

“And young William is going to be his first Consort.”

…and there was the second explosion, right on cue.

…”

Weeks later, a boy – too quickly becoming a man – turned to his brother and asked a question of the only person he could:

“My?”

“Hmm.”

“What’s my future husband like?”

…”

Edited 3 February 2016
Chapter Five: When Harry Met Wills

Wills was sitting in an arm chair much too large for his still-growing frame, feet up on the cushion with his arms wrapped around his bent knees when he sensed something strange.

He was dressed to impress in the finest set of Wizarding robes his tutor Andromeda could find. She’d taken him and his mother the month after his birthday and he’d Claimed his Lordship to the magical shopping district in Paris. He’d expected to do a bit of shopping for some formal robes and that would be that.

No.

Apparently that is not how Lady Andromeda Tonks nee Black, Daughter of the House of Black shopped.

It didn’t help matters that in Ms. Andy’s world the Lord of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Nimue must not be seen in something common.

Which turned out to be everything on every rack of clothes in the entire district.

Helped along by his mother – who shared similar views on attire – Mrs. Tonks dragged him into a small, dark doorway nearly hidden among the much brighter buildings and gleaming windows. Once inside his bad mood turned to confusion at the utter lack of clothes of any kind. Confusion that led to hope of getting out of the whole ordeal…right up until a little man with a tape measure around his neck bustled from the back and greeted his tutor with gushing adoration.

Though some of the sting of having to stand still and imitate a mannequin for the hours it took for
Wills to acquire an entire wizarding wardrobe was mollified by overhearing that this was the second time Andromeda had been to this particular tailor’s shop that week.

And the last time was for *A Most Important Person*.

Intuiting that his future-fiancé had been put through this torture as well – only with an entire entourage of guardians in tow to give opinions and use him as a dress-up doll – made him feel much better about only having to listen to Ms. Andy and his Mum.

The *best* news he got that day though was that all of his clothes would be handmade and spelled with a variety of charms – including some that would allow them to grow with him – so that he wouldn’t have to be as anxious about mussing them as he was his fancy dress for State events.

And that he wouldn’t have to go through the whole tailor-shop-ordeal for at least a year instead of every season like with his Prince clothes.

Sometimes he really loved magic.

All those charms meant that he could scrunch himself up in his chosen hiding place and stare out the window for some peace and quiet. His family was in a royal tizzy – bad pun aside – over the formal event taking place that evening. He was to be introduced to his…contract…person…that he wasn’t sure what to call.

They weren’t his boyfriend.

That implied a level of familiarity that was completely absent since they were strangers to each other.

But they weren’t betrothed or engaged or any of those “official” titles yet.

He couldn’t even call…him…his Lord or King or whatever since *he* hadn’t Claimed his Houses yet.

There just didn’t seem to be a proper title for this new person entering his life…not at the moment. And for an eleven year old about to meet the person he’s supposed to spend the rest of his life with… having something to call them seemed vitally important. Such a life-changing addition to his life should have some sort of word to describe them besides the heinously-long “Heir of the House of Emrys, Contracted-Intended of the Lord of House Nimue.”

*Intended.* Wills mulled that over. That could work. For the next couple hours before his intended became his betrothed. At least he’d finally settled on something…though now he had to figure out something else to obsess over to keep his mind off the fact that he was for all intents-and-purposes getting engaged at *eleven*.

Like whatever-the-heck-that-is that’s tingling at his senses!

Looking around, he searched the hiding places of the long gallery he’d hidden himself away in. Extending his senses the way Andromeda and McG had been coaching him, trying to refine his ability to use his magic as an extra sense, he brushed up against *something*…but he had no idea what it was. *It didn’t* feel like the normal culprits: McG and Kings had taken to disillusioning themselves and testing his ability to locate them.

And it wasn’t Harry running away from their mother who was determined that they all would put the best-foot-forward in meeting his intended and his train of guardians and retainers.

The two Families had settled between themselves – using Mr. Holmes as an intermediary – leaving him and his intended out of the discussion – that the initial introduction would be an *Introduction*. 
Though from what he could see it was more for the adults’ comfort with the situation being formalized and keeping it a political arrangement. Apparently they were all sticking their heads in the sand about the part where he and his intended would have to lose their virginities to each other before they turned fourteen. Which if they weren’t Lords in the magical world would be a massive case of underage relations.

Technically they both became/成了 legal adults on their eleventh birthdays.

Technically.

Little ease to paranoid and loving guardians who would keep them kids forever if they could manage it somehow…without resorting to deAging Potions.

Extending his senses again he felt it.

Just…there!

Whipping around in his chair he jumped to his feet and looked over the back, shoes firmly on the cushion. There staring up at him from a startled crouch was the biggest and brightest pair of emerald green eyes he’d ever seen. Hearing the rumble of voices from the hall, he turned his head towards the door as Kings called to him.

“Alright in there, Prince William? You haven’t seen anyone wandering about have you?”

Spying from the corner of his eye the other boy making frantic motions and ducking around the side of his chair to further hide himself from the view of the doorway, William kept one eye on him and answered his bodyguard:

“Just taking a few moments for myself before the big event, Kings. Haven’t heard a peep.”

Which wasn’t a lie, the boy-intruder had been quiet as a mouse.

“Ok, Wills.” Kings replied in his cheerful manner. “Let us know if you need anything. We’ll leave you be until it’s time.”

Both boys waited until they heard the steps retreat from the doorway and there wasn’t a chance of being overheard.

The other blew out a breath and stood, offering his hand genially.

“Thanks for that.” He smiled brightly. “It’s a madhouse out there. I’m Hadrian, pleased to meet you…William?”

Wills stared a moment before taking his hand and answering. Hadrian was probably the prettiest boy he’d ever seen.

Those eyes would make his mother green with envy over their bright color and thick black lashes. Ebony hair fell in soft waves from a tiny braid that kept it off his face and down his back. His face was pure white like his Grandmother’s favorite porcelain with sharp, clear lines making it plain he was from an aristocratic family.

And since Wills had never met him before and the only strangers about where there for the Introduction, he had to be magic…explaining why he could sense him before he saw him.

“Pleased to meet you to Hadrian, you can call me Wills.”
Hadrian had mutinied.

Most of the time he didn’t mind too much when his guardians turned autocratic.

They let him make his own schedule most of the time as long as he made sure and completed all of his studies both magical and mundane and let him choose his own hobbies.

The only place they’d ever really restricted him was with outings in the magical world and who he was allowed to be friends with.

Strictures he’d come to understand the more he studied his heritage and what it really meant to be King of Avalon both in the “King” sense and in the sense of being a monarch and sole authority in the modern age.

It certainly wasn’t an easy job Lady Magic had saddled him with. But it was a Blessing nonetheless and one didn’t just say “no, but thanks” to Lady Magic. There were no returns, refunds, or exchanges on gifts from Magic Herself.

Not unless you wanted to find out for yourself what it was really like living as say…a tadpole.

But this time he’d had it up to his eyebrows with the orders.

The last thing a pair of awkward strangers who were magically bound to marry each other needed was a massive audience of guardians, tutors, and family watching their every move under a microscope.

Small. He’d argued. Quiet. Private.

He’d been overruled at every point.

In the end he’d caved to the pressure from his foster family to just go along with how his elders wanted it.

Or he’d pretended to.

But he’d not begged his uncles Siri and Remy for tale after tale of their adventures with his father as the Marauders to no effect.

Hence his mutiny made possibly via a purloined bottle of brandy as a bribe to his Uncle Siri – who was supposed to be watching him but was his regular partner-in-pranking…when they thought they could get away with it.

Hadrian’s plan had exploited a major issue with the whole charade he was being made to perform: him and his family/guardians/etc. arriving early in the afternoon so Papa Siger and Lady Maggie could walk through the whole thing with his future-husband’s parents.

If they’d left him at Ravenscroft Hill he would’ve been stuck with sticking to their plan. There wasn’t an open floo connection in either Ravenscroft or Windsor Castle, none of his family really used port-keys unless they were taking him somewhere, and he couldn’t apparate – yet. He would’ve had no way to sneak off to the Castle short of taking the Knight Bus…and he liked being able to sit without pain too much to risk it.

Now sneaking away from his guardians while Siri looked the other way?
Easy as could be with a silencing spell on his shoes and a peek at a floorplan. All he’d had to do was use his magic to search for another magical signature on its own and he’d be sure to come across his future-husband…eventually.

Seeing his…William…for the first time without Lady Maggie hovering, worried about him behaving like a Young Gentleman, was worth the lecture he was in for when he got back home later.

William, Wills, was handsome with his tall, athletic frame – topping him by at least an inch and he wasn’t a short boy by any means – pairing well with his clear blue eyes and sandy-blonde hair. Wills wasn’t as…pretty…as either himself or his Wallace friends who’s Mum had blessed their superficial genetics but he wasn’t unfortunately pudgy as he newer friend Neville either. And he seemed about as thrilled as Hadrian was over the whole pomp-and-circus their elders were making of this whole thing.

As tense as everyone was you’d think they were getting married today instead of just meeting for the first time.

“Hiding?” Hadrian asked as Wills turned back around and sat in his chair, waving towards the other one.

Wills gave him a little half-smile and a nod. “You?”

“Same.” He sighed. “I don’t’ know why we had to show up so early. All the adults are running around like crazy people, making things just so.”

The blonde held in a snort. “It’s been like that for days here. Grandmother and her set haven’t been too awful but my parents are wound really, really tight.”

Hadrian grimaced in sympathy. “I know what you mean.” Digging into a pocket for a moment, he searched for something, entertaining Wills with his obviously much-larger-than-it-seemed cache of items. Holding up what looked like a pack of cards in triumph, he grinned. “Found it!” Busily opening it up, he gave the other boy a searching look.

“Ever played Exploding Snap?”

Wills shook his head, tilting it to one side. “Heard of it though, my guard mentioned it when I talked him into teaching me how to play poker. Show me?” He asked with a grin, coming down cross-legged on the floor facing his new friend.

They chatted idly as Hadrian walked Wills through the game, playing in earnest once the dark-haired young wizard was sure the other understood it.

“Snap!” Wills grinned up into bright-green eyes, face flushed with pride. “That’s the two games to me Hadrian to your one.”

“Rub it in.” Hadrian rolled his eyes jokingly. “You must’ve had a good teacher.”

“Sure, sure.” Wills mocked. “I’m certain that’s it Hadrian.”

“Of course it is, Wills.” His friend’s face was shockingly insincere.

The Prince frowned.

“What is it?” Hadrian asked with growing concern. Things had been going so well. Wills wasn’t a stuck-up toe-rag as his brother My had assured him, he was very nice and had taken his early loss
with good humor. He didn’t want things to get weird now.

“Well,” Wills said, clearly thinking hard. “If I’m Wills instead of William, then you need a nickname instead of Hadrian. That’s kind of a formal name and this isn’t a formal situation,” he arched a brow. “Right?”

“Hmm.” Hadrian nodded his head solemnly. “I see your point.”

“Well?” Wills asked impatiently. “What do people call you besides Hadrian?”

“Ah…” He ran one hand through his dark mass of hair, blushing lightly before looking up at the other boy through his lashes. “Promise you won’t be mad?”

Wills frowned but tentatively agreed.

“Harry.”

Well that was no reason to be weird that Wills could see.

“Or King-Apparent Emrys-Pendragon.”

Blue eyes shot to green.

“Oh.” Wills blinked at that. That meant…

This pretty boy who’d patiently taught him to play a wizarding card game and was hiding from the craziness was his intended.

“Well I’m not going to call you that.” He gave the patently-worried Hadrian a bright smile. “Not when we’re alone. And Harry is what we call my little brother…so that’d just be weird.”

Hadrian gave him one of his blindingly-bright grins. Wills wasn’t mad at him for not telling him right away. Hadrian still had issues over people keeping things from him after the Wallace-Contract fiasco so he might not have taken it nearly as well…a risk he was willing to take if it meant avoiding a ton of awkwardness.

Wills thought hard, turning several options over in his head before coming to a decision.

“What about ‘Rian?” He asked, head cocked inquisitively. “It’s short like Wills but not formal or weird.”

“Ree-an?”

His intended spelled it out for him.

The newly-dubbed ‘Rian smiled. “No one has ever called me that before. I like it.”

“Wicked.”

…

An easy hour passed, possible-crisis averted, with the boys simply sitting on the floor and playing Snap. They stayed away from the elephant in the room, talking mostly about little things like favorite foods/colors/games/subjects-at-school. Both agreed that they were looking forward to replacing some of their tutoring hours with actual school at H.I. and were both bashfully-happy that they’d be able to be in the same class since they were both Heirs…well…Lords by the time school started.
Before too long, Hadrian got a ping on the simple proximity ward he’d set up in the hall before making his way over to Wills’ chair.

Their quiet first meeting was just about up.

Which brought Hadrian to the other reason he’d turned mutineer.

With the way things were with their contract and how their separate sets of guardians decided they wanted to handle things, Hadrian wasn’t being given the option to properly Court Wills. If they’d been able to meet sooner they could’ve gone through the whole process, gifts and tokens and outings and all. But that just wasn’t possible.

Hadrian loathed that Wills wasn’t going to experience that.

It rankled at both his natural honorable nature and his nurtured gentlemanly behavior.

His guardians and tutors had worked very hard to make sure he was both Hadrian-the-Boy and Hadrian-the-King. Neither of those were okay with skipping a very important part of choosing a spouse…even when that spouse was chosen for you.

Wills wasn’t even allowed to choose Hadrian’s Cuff the way he was supposed to. Between his station and having to have thirteen consorts, Hadrian’s Cuff – the magical cross between a wedding ring and a declaration of Status – had to be specially forged by a Master Goblin Craftsman. Wills probably had never even seen it although he was supposed to give it to him before the night was over.

Hadrian was determined that his first…well…everything wasn’t cheated out of any more important traditions than absolutely necessary.

He sighed. “I have to go soon.” He said mournfully. “I can feel my Uncle getting closer.”

Wills nodded and stood, offering ‘Rian his hand and helping him to his feet. Only ‘Rian didn’t let go right away, keeping hold of him with his own hand that was curiously both smooth and rough with calluses at the same time. It gave him a strange feeling in his stomach, one he stored away for later inspection.

“If we were able to do all…” Hadrian flapped his unoccupied hand flippantly. “This the way I wanted…”

“I know ‘Rian.” Wills smiled squeezing his hand once. “The adults are kind of making a production of things.”

He shook his head. “Not exactly what I meant and so much all at the same time.” Reaching into his expanded pocket he released Wills’ hand, holding out a sheaf of papers. “My Courting gift to my future-husband.” He said simply…then started to babble after Wills took it and started to track the musical notes from page to page. “I asked My…I mean my foster-brother Mycroft about you. What you liked, what he knew about you, he said you like music and I play music and write sometimes Sherlock says they’re good and he’d know ’cause he’s amazing but I never know with them they can be weird about upsetting me and…”

Wills gently held a finger to Hadrian’s lips, stopping the word-vomit that was spewing all over them.

“I like music.” He said gently. “I can’t wait to hear it.”

Hadrian’s eyes lit up. He could do that.
“Do you have your wand?” He asked eagerly. “I know a spell that will make the music play without needing an instrument. Composers use it to hear the orchestration together and tweak the different parts. I could teach you,” he looked down, turning bashful again. “If you want.”

Way to geek out, Hadrian. He scolded himself. Great impression to leave him with right before he has to see you be King-Hadrian. Fantastic.

Wordlessly Wills held up the wand he’d removed from its holster under his robes, offering it to his intended along with the sheaf of music.

“No,” Hadrian shook his head and moved behind him, recalling his own casting lessons. Though they were very different in principle since he casted wandlessly. “It works better like this.”

Reaching around Wills, looking up into his face to make sure he was comfortable with the sudden closeness, he held him tight back-to-front. His right hand clasping the back of Wills’ over the wand and his left resting lightly on his hip. Moving Wills’ arm like an extension of his own he spoke softly as he rested his chin on the other boy’s shoulder, watching carefully for any discomfort.

“It’s a sensory-based spell.” His voice was very soft. “Very much about the intent you put behind it. You have to want to hear the music the way it was written…” He carried on, neither boy noticing that they’d gained an audience.

…

“Clearly our Future King has spent too much time with you, Siri.” Kingsley teased his former-partner as they peeked in on the two from around the edge of the now-open doorway. “That was smooth as silk right there. Reminded me of before a certain werewolf hunted your playboy-butt down.”

Sirius knuckled away a fake tear. “So proud of my little Prongslet.”

His mate rolled his eyes and smacked him upside the back of his head. “I can’t believe you let him bribe you into wandering the Palace. He could’ve ended up in Timbuctoo for all we knew.”


“Ah-hem.” The men looked hesitantly over their shoulders only to spy a foot-tapping and arms-crossed Princess of Wales. “Find something particularly interesting in the East Gallery gentlemen? Like my son perhaps?”

Gulping in unison they scrambled for an answer that wouldn’t have them in hot water when Remus heard something with his superior senses. Ushering her forward, he let her have a front-row seat to the tableau.

“Remy?” His mate asked confused.

“He’s done it.” Remus hissed, shushing them. “He taught the Prince the spell. Now hush. It’s not every day we get to hear one of his compositions.”

…”

Music flowed out all around them, leaping in gorgeous harmony off the page.
Wills closed his eyes and rocked a little on his feet, smiling at the smooth, gentle dance between the piano and violin before the rest of the orchestra joined them.

Opening his eyes he smiled back over his shoulder at his intended who’d taken a step back releasing him at the first resounding note from the piano.

“You wrote me a waltz.” Wills smiled. “What’s it called?”

“Just,” Hadrian coughed clearing his throat with a blush. “Just ‘William’s Waltz’, not the most original I know but it seemed to fit.”

The music faded away then gave way to clapping from the doorway, making both boys straighten up and turn.

“Very appropriate.” The Princess of Wales decided as she stepped into the room, giving her son’s intended a once-over. “Even if your presence here is not.”

“Mothe…”

“Say goodbye, William.” The Princess arched a brow, rolling right over her son’s objection. “You’ll see each other in an hour or so.”

Seeing that she wasn’t to be moved, William turned to Hadrian – who’d been flanked by a pair of rather intimidating looking men – and bowed correctly.

“Thank you for the Courting gift, Hadrian.”

“You are most welcome, Lord Nimue.” Hadrian’s voice was proper while managing to be improperly warm.

“Come along, cub.” Remus ushered him out, pointedly ignoring the look-over-the-shoulder and the mouthed words.

Princess Diana similarly ignored the exchange, taking firm hold of her errant child and personally escorting him to the alcove off the formal receiving room – where he should have been all along.

…

William and Hadrian’s fears were soon realized.

Not only was it An Introduction it was also An Affaire.

Both of their Families had given in to what seemed to be a flurry of madness, pomp, and preparations that William had only seen at the Highest of State Affairs while the Ritual of it all made Hadrian think back to his only real frame of reference besides the Seasonal Rites: his Grandpapa’s funeral that he’d presided over as the next Lord Black.

Their elders had decided upon performing the traditional Betrothal Ceremony first before anything else.

Perhaps out of fear one of their lambs might suddenly decide to buck tradition and duty and object to being led to the slaughter.

Ribbons hung with a festive air from the ceiling with flowers wound around them and trellises climbed up the walls in a wide array of colors with different meanings.
White, of course, for purity.

Purple in both a deep Royal hue and one a few shades lighter for Magic Herself.

Blue for peace, green life, gold prosperity, and a pale yellow for wisdom.

Tucked here and there were even threads of black, chosen in this case not for mourning or death but to offer wishes of stability to the joining of their Houses.

The flowers were both a nod towards mundane tradition and magical beliefs with garlands of orange blossoms for eternal love and fertility scenting the air alongside those of woven together rosemary, mint, and lavender to draw friendship and constancy between the couple as well as luck.

Though neither half of the actual betrothal was much consulted about the preparations both having made it clear they thought the whole thing patently silly when they would have to undergo a formal Royal wedding at a later date, it was tradition for each to select a personal flower to represent them in the decorations.

Which explained the painted daisies (William) and glossy magnolias (Hadrian). Lady Maggie having a dab hand with Herbology had grown both herself as was the custom as the “mother” of the event. Diana being wholly mundane despite her family history, couldn’t take on the traditional role not having any accessible magic to aid in the growing of the flowers.

Lady Maggie had never spent so much time in her greenhouses before though she acknowledged she would need to practice more so as not to exhaust herself. Unless Hadrian forbid making a “State Affaire” of his betrothals (no matter how much he protested his weddings would remain such) she’ll be growing quite a lot of flowers over the years. Enough for another twelve betrothals and thirteen weddings.

While not old for a mildly-powered witch, she and her husband due to their lower power-levels didn’t receive the same aging benefit more powerful magicals gained. They would still live well into their fifteenth decade but the two centuries the late Lord Black had lived was likely beyond them. That being said, both Siger and Margeux were just reaching the “middle age” mark.

At eighty, Siger had the energy and verve of a mundane man half his age and would still be fulfilling his former duty as “The British Government” if it wouldn’t have been a reason for talk. He’d taken over the post from his Great-great-Uncle Lord Sheffield Holmes during the reign of the previous monarch, the Queen’s father in nineteen-forty while the country was dealing with the Second World War. Siger spent a solid – but tempestuous – forty years in official service to the Realm before passing the position onto his heir.

Margeux was ten years his junior and while their match was arranged by Siger’s brother, it had been a comfort to the stressed statesman even before turning into a truly loving relationship.

Despite the mild-strain on her powers, Lady Maggie was well-pleased by how the flowers turned out, the glossy magnolias setting off the orange blossoms to a lovely affect while the daisies kept the herb garlands grand company.

An Alter had been set in the very center of the room and the normal furnishings removed, allowing four clear paths to the oaken table with the Ancient Emrys runner in watered silk, embroidered with the Emrys Crest of a crossed staff and sword, encircled by nine silver stars, all against the emerald green of the silk that took the place of the device’s field.

Resting on the Alter was a hammered silver plate stamped with the Nimue Crest, flanked by a pair of
closed boxes also made of oak and carved with runes for long life, protection, and truth. Inside the boxes were the bonding cuffs which would both change upon their marriage and solidifying the bond.

Standing across from each other at the North and South positions and separated by the perfectly square altar were Remus Lupin and Andromeda Tonks. Due to the secrecy still surrounding Hadrian and William, they were the only ones both capable of handling the magics of the ritual and without impediment due to their relationship with those to be betrothed. Remus while as close as Hadrian’s father had no official familial bond with the future King and while Andromeda was of his blood it wasn’t a close blood relation beyond that of Heir and House Member.

Thankfully once Hadrian Claimed his Lordships they wouldn’t have to make a massive Venn Diagram every time they needed a neutral party for rituals as he could call upon any of the Noble Lords and their spouses to preside in his stead.

At precisely sundown on the Summer Solstice, Hadrian stepped forward into the ritual space from the East symbolizing that he was the “protector and strength” of the pair while William entered from the West as the “wisdom and temperance” of the match. Both boys broke character enough to give each other a small commiserating smile before focusing on the ritual at hand.

Following tradition, Hadrian was wearing deep Royal purple robes with a heavy mithril men’s necklace that spanned along his collarbone from shoulder-to-shoulder and alternated between the Crests and Gems of each of his Houses. There was a ceremonial sword at his hip sheathed in mithril with an emerald – the Gem of House Emrys – the size of an egg on the pommel. His robes were edged with thread made through Alchemy from crushed diamond and pure gold again symbolizing purity and prosperity.

William’s robes were similarly ornate though not as elaborately embroidered and with a much smaller necklace. His robes were a gleaming platinum, marking him as a Lord of an Utmost Ancient and Noble House. The embroidery was done in crushed aquamarine – the Gem of House Nimue – while instead of a sword he wore a sash around his hips in the light blue and silver of his House. Around his neck hung a chain of platinum with a pendant several inches in diameter made of an etched aquamarine cabochon backed and with the etchings filled with platinum in the grape vine and staff of House Nimue.

His parents had been in awe of the jewels hidden within the Nimue jewelry Vault he’d gained access to on his birthday. He’d gained four: the Main Vault filled mostly with coins and chests of unmounted gems and raw metals, the Jewel Vault, an Artifact Vault with special preservation charms, and a Library Vault. Seeing it all for the first time, he was very, very glad his ancestors had had a grasp on organization. Goblin Alderbaren had told him that many Vaults were just a massive jumble of treasures heaped upon each other.

Arrayed behind them were the members and witnesses for each House included in the contract.

To even up the numbers due to most of the Royal Family still being in the dark regarding Wills’ status as a wizard, six members of the magical guard had been included for William including McG, Kings, and Mycroft’s distant cousin Danford. With the Vows Mycroft had insisted upon during the unveiling of William’s powers, including the guard wasn’t a risk for an information leak. This actually made the order of precedence more complicated since as it was a magical ceremony the order of importance was based on their magical status – not their mundane one.

For Hadrian that meant first came his godfather Sirius directly behind him as the Regent for House Black and his closest relation as his adoptive-father. Flanking Regent Black were Lord Wallace and the magical Lord Holmes: each being one of his guardians and a Lord of a Most Ancient and Noble
House. Behind those three walked the magical Lady Holmes who Hadrian knew but wasn’t close too or much involved with, escorted by her in-laws Lord Siger and Lady Margeux Holmes. Behind them was Ted Tonks and his daughter Nymphadora Black-Tonks, only because her age made her behind the elder Ladies in prominence despite being a blood-relation of Hadrian’s. Bringing up the rear were Mycroft, Sherlock, and John as the last was “merely mundane” for the purposes of the ceremony.

William’s order made less sense from a perspective of mundane station.

Prince Harry came first because though he hadn’t shown magic yet he was still nominally considered the Heir of House Nimue until another Heir was born or he failed to show magic by age eleven. Flanking him were McG and Kingsley as both were members of Ancient and Noble Houses. Following them were Danford and the other three guardsmen. Then bringing up the rear were the Queen, Prince Philip, the Queen Mother, and the Prince and Princess of Wales.

Charles predictably wasn’t pleased by the implied slight but was mollified by the knowledge that Mycroft was also at the rear of Hadrian’s assembled family despite being his foster-brother.

When everyone had entered and created the Circle with John beside the Princess of Wales at the Northern Point and Sirius coaching Prince Harry along at the Southern, Remus began as the Priest:

“May the place of this rite
be consecrated for Lady Magic.
For we gather here in a ritual of peace
With two who would be betrothed.
Hadrian and William please come forward
and stand here before us, and before the Lady of Magic.”

The boys took up their positions inside the circle, Hadrian at the Eastern point of the alter and William at the West.

Andromeda continued the Rite as the Priestess:

“Be with us here, O beings of the Air
With your clever fingers
Tie closely the bonds between these two.

Be with us here, O beings of Fire
Give them love and passion
your own all-consuming ardor.

Be with us here, O beings of Water
Give them the deepest of trust
and the richness of the body, of the soul and of the spirit.

Be with us here, O beings of Earth
Let your strength and constancy
Be theirs for so long as they remain as One.

Blessed Lady of Magic
Give to these before you, we do ask
your love and protection
Blessed Be.”
“Blessed be.” The others echoed, the Windsor’s having been coached previously by Andromeda in the ceremony.

Remus opened the box before William and Andromeda the one before Hadrian, revealing the Cuffs. Taking them with careful reverence from their velvet cushions they placed them on the silver plate, holding their wands over them. During this next part was where concessions had been made in the traditional ceremony as Hadrian was going to have multiple Consorts.

Their Contracts required fidelity however there were clauses regarding the taking of other spouses and consorts such as the case with Hadrian’s Last of Line requirements.

So the wording had to be very precise.

Remus and Andromeda spoke in unison:

“Place your right hands
over these wands and the symbols of your Bond
Hadrian’s over Williams.

Above you are the stars (the ceiling had been made transparent for the Rite)
below you are the stones
as time does pass
Remember
Like a star should your bond be constant
Like a stone should your trust be firm
Be close, but not too close
Posses one another, but be understanding
Have patience each with the other
For storms will come, but they will go quickly
Be free in the giving of affection and warmth
With each other and the others of future bonds
Have no fear and let not the ways or words
of the unenlightened give you unease
For the Magic Herself is with you
Now and Always.”

There was a pause then Andromeda continued alone.

“Is it your wish, William Lord of House Nimue, to become one with this Wizard?”

“It is my wish as Lord of House Nimue, to become one with the Heir of House Emrys.” William’s voice was steady and true despite the heavy magic in the air that was visibly affecting the mundanes and weaker mages present.

A flash of magic and the Cuff Hadrian had personally designed for his first Consort was around his wrist, welded by the magic of the ceremony and his response into a perfect circle. An inch-and-a-half wide it was made of platinum to denote William was of an Utmost Ancient and Noble House with a stripe of mithril running through the center for his Royal bondmate. Along the Cuff were cabochon aquamarines and emeralds and on the underside were the etched images of the Crests of Houses Emrys and Nimue.

It was all at once a gorgeous piece of jewelry and a statement both of William’s and Hadrian’s respective Statuses in the Wizarding World and of the value Hadrian placed on his betrothed. Tradition only dictated the metals and stones used, not the width of the Cuff and the amount of
decoration. By making it wider than normal for the “submissive” partner in the bond and using more than one stone each, Hadrian was putting all on notice that he highly valued his first consort and honored his bonded’s ancient House as much as his own.

Like the betrothals of old, they were legally binding. The only difference between their betrothal ceremony and their future wedding was the amount of guests/witnesses and after their wedding they would cohabitate. Other than that they were already bound as one.

Remus asked Hadrian the ritual question:

“Is it your wish, Hadrian, King-Apparent of Avalon, Heir of Emrys, to become one with this Wizard?”

“It is my wish as Hadrian, the King-Apparent of Avalon Heir of House Emrys, to become one with William, Lord of House Nimue.”

A small gasp went up at his adjustment from the script from those who realized the significance of it. Like his bonded Hadrian should’ve merely stated William’s title instead of naming him specifically. It was a political statement to his guardians that he might be going along but he would do things his way.

Such as slipping off to meet his intended and give him a Courting gift rather than keeping the situation purely political.

Hadrian was once more starting to buck the traces but in a much different way than his brief months of temper tantrums and sulks at seven.

Now he was turning into the man and King they’d raised him to be – only with that came his own opinions and ideas for how things should be.

The second Cuff clasped itself around Hadrian’s lean wrist, William peeking to get a better look at it. As another step outside of tradition, Hadrian had had to have a special Cuff to deal with all his bondings. Rather than try and force him to wear thirteen different Cuffs or attempting to weld them into one at a later point – highly difficult if not impossible due to the magic of the bonding ceremonies – this Cuff too had been custom-made by the goblin smiths. Lord Ragnarok had overseen the entire forging and embellishment process personally as a courtesy to his fellow ruler.

Two inches wide – the widest a Cuff can be without seeming overblown – it was forged of plain, unembellished or embossed mithril. Thirteen oval frames were set into the quarter-inch-thick metal, each currently containing the Crest of one of Hadrian’s Houses – except where the Emrys Crest should be in the top-center of the band. There instead was a cabochon aquamarine that like the jewels on William’s Cuff would instantly turn into a flawlessly faceted gem upon completing their marriage ceremony.

The spellwork woven into the Cuff was a massive undertaking to accomplish what was required. The Cuff had to be able to differentiate between a Courtship, Betrothal, or Marriage and respond for the correct House consort at the right time. For example, though no one was present to see it, when Hadrian gave William a Courtship gift of an original composition, the Crest of House Emrys had shifted into that of House Nimue only to turn itself into a cabochon aquamarine hours later.

Andromeda closed the ceremony:

“As Cuffs have been exchanged and vows given, I now proclaim this Bond as Sealed.” She hesitated a moment causing both young men to eye her curiously when she stopped.
Rolling his golden-flecked eyes Remus said what she wouldn’t, not afraid of risking the wrath of the guardians or his cub over it.

“You may now kiss your Bonded.” He charged Hadrian, bringing a blush to light both their cheeks.

Several of those present – and not just William’s family members – made to object only to be silenced by those near them with firm looks.

It was needed to Seal the Bond and Close the Rite.

Blushing fiercely over the audience, Hadrian quickly moved to Wills’ side never dropping his hand. Stretching up slightly as his Bonded was a little taller than him, he pressed a firm but gentle kiss on Wills’ light pink lips. Mouth resolutely closed – no matter what David and Dora had told him about kissing – he lingered for a moment over how soft the sensation was. He never knew lips felt like that, wondering briefly if his own felt the same to the bright-red William.

Stepping back he squeezed Wills’ hand once encouragingly as the magic that had kept their hands sealed tightly together released them and the heavy pressure in the air dissipated, the lit candles at the four corners of the alter extinguishing themselves.

Before Mycroft could step forward to handle the introductions, he was cut off by a furious blonde making her way full-steam-ahead towards Remus who was busy sending the Ritual tools back to their Family Vaults with a few flicks of his wand.

It wouldn’t do for the priceless heirlooms to be damaged because someone spilled a piece of the ceremonial cake – or worse wine.

Elf-wine was a bitch to get out of acromantula-silk without damaging the spellwork.

“Kissing?!” Diana hissed at the startled werewolf. “No one said anything about kissing! What did you think you were playing at, sir?” She sneered.

Rushing to prevent a possible disaster of Hadrian-proportions, or worse Marauder-proportions, she found herself quickly flanked by Mycroft Holmes and Kingsley Shacklebolt, Mycroft intending to prevent the former and Kings the latter.

Remus paid them no mind, merely arching a brow at the mother-wolf facing him down. Even Moony could respect her trying to protect her cub. A cub that was being quietly teased by his younger brother as his mother was occupied elsewhere and not able to save him from the pest.

“A ritual Kiss was required to Seal the Bond and Close the Rite.” He answered the accusation patiently. “If I hadn’t instructed them as such, they’d have their hands welded together until doomsday and all of the non-magicals present would’ve passed out from the pressure of the old magic.”

Diana growled low in her throat.

The Alpha sent an arch look at Prince Charles as he came up behind his wife, recognizing the Heir to the Throne from his mother’s mundane newspapers.

Casting for a scent he located Andromeda tucked safely away with her husband and child. Traitor.

“You were supposed to be informed.” He said finally. “By Mycroft if no one else.” Remus was no fool and shamelessly threw the British Government under the bus.
It helped that he was already in its path by trying to cut the Princess off.

Mycroft could’ve killed the damned mangy wolf for that. Instead he changed the topic completely, shifting to grab his littlest brother by the arm and subtly dragging him over to meet the Queen. Leaving the stewing Diana to be dealt with by her husband.

“No trailing list of titles.” Hadrian hissed at his smirking brother, overheard by an entertained Queen and her mother and husband. “This is my Bonded’s family not the leader of a sister nation at the moment.”

“No fun.” Mycroft complained lightly. “No fun a’tall. What good are all those titles if I don’t get to needle you with them whenever possible.”

Wills manfully swallowed a chuckle as his grandfather grabbed him and hauled him into the impromptu receiving line. With narrowed eyes and that hiss ‘Rian was giving quite the angry-kitten impression.

Spotting the action, the rest of the gathered – bar the guardsmen who had already returned to their posts save Kings who was on Wills-duty – arranged themselves appropriately for their introductions.

In this at least Prince Charles’s sense of “how things should be” was appeased since as the Queen was a sitting monarch and William a confirmed Lord, Hadrian was introduced to them and not the other way around as it would’ve been had the ceremony taken place two months later.

“Your Majesty Queen Elizabeth II of England, may I introduce the King-Apparent of Avalon: Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon, Heir of House Emrys and Bonded-Betrothed of the Lord of House Nimue.”

…

It had been decided – again not by them – that with Hadrian’s Claiming barely more than a month away the two betrotheds could wait to get to know each other better until they started H.I. in the Fall and their official introduction to the Wizarding World as King and Bonded-Betrothed.

Neither young man was pleased, feeling as if the adults in their lives were on the one hand expecting them to be adults and Lords and make decisions as such but at the same time trying to manage them like they would any other eleven-year-old.

Something was bound to break.

In the meantime things had returned to normal at Windsor Castle with the exception of a soon-familiar owl winging it’s way to the Prince’s quarters at all times of the day and night and Andromeda adding lessons on what was expected of a the Bonded-Betrothed of a Lord and of a King to William’s schedule.

And yes, to William’s dismay, there were differences between the two.

A dismay that was brightened by a letter from Hadrian complaining about his own Bonded-Betrothed lessons.

*Most occasions would call for Hadrian to be the dominant party in public however there were a few where William as the Lord of House Nimue was superior to even a King, all dealing with matters of his House.*

For one thing Hadrian would never be able to approve or assign marriages for members of House
Nimue even if they were his own children.

Nor could he contract or ratify an alliance between his Bonded’s House and another.

Little things to most people but important for the pride and self-esteem of William who’d been raised to rule from the cradle and was now mostly relegated to being a Consort until he assumed the Throne of England – hopefully decades away.

As his birthday approached, Hadrian’s letters and replies became shorter as his time was stretched thin by preparations of all kinds. While Claiming his Inheritance was a relatively simple Ritual there was a whole lot of baggage that came with it. Not the least of which was finding out where Avalon was actually located and activating the Ward stones that were supposed to protect the Kingdom and its Territories.

Without a King to charge them and ambient magic from the accompanying Household(s) to keep them powered, the Wards surrounding Avalon’s interests had weakened considerably.

The air-raids on London during WWII being an excellent example of a tragedy that would’ve been mostly averted if they were fully-powered. Great tracts of land that mundanes in the Avalon territories had built on actually belonged to the Empire and as such were under It’s aegis. While not all of it had simply been seized by mundanes, much of it was without the proper patents for usage from Avalon.

Balmoral Castle in fact stood on land gifted to the mundane Royals through an Avalonian patent.

Hadrian was not amused by the blatant land-grabbing that the various Ministries of Magic – charged with administering Avalonian rule in Their Territories – had allowed to go on.

And while he wasn’t about to boot all the squatters off of his land and use the Wards to keep them out, he was going to demand concessions from the ruling governments that were responsible.

In addition to dealing with that major problem, his guardians and later Hadrian himself when he was old enough, had begun a thorough review of the Laws that had been enacted in the absence of a King.

Again.

Not. Amused.

All totaled they had decided on splitting the issues and the needed and necessary reforms into seven categories for each territory: Administration (usually Ministry of Magic), Legislative body (i.e. Wizengamot), Legislation processes, Judiciary issues, Current Laws and regulations, Taxation and Spending, and finally Education.

Some countries had barely a sheet for each, such as India which under their Governor had maintained the same policies as the last appointed Viceroy for the Kingdom and House of Slytherin had enacted unless they were policies that needed changing to keep up with the times. Of all the Seven Houses, Slytherin’s Kingdom had flourished the best without a King in Avalon. The others…

Well.

It was hit, miss, miss so bad you couldn’t find it or summon it with an accio.

Russia for instance was mostly fine it just needed an update in their administrative policies following the upheaval of the mundane governments over the last century.
Hadrian pretty much wanted to toss Britain out and start from scratch.

It probably would’ve been easier than dealing with the mountain of issues they found.

And that was *before* Gringotts completed the ordered audits of each and every functioning government under Avalonian rule.

Though calling Britain “functioning” was being kind since that was about all it *did*.

The only area that seemed to work in the slightest way was the education system and even that needed massive upgrades and changes to regain the Top School position it had lost in the last fifty years.

At one point right before his birthday Hadrian had a dream that he was literally drowning in paperwork and dusty tomes filled with statutes.

Despite all the headaches and glasses of butterbeer and brandy, seven years of work came to a head on the night of July 31st, 1991.

...

*Edited for minor errors: 3 February 2016*
Dear Wills,

Things have been beyond frantic here lately.

Everyone is running around trying to make sure everything is perfect before the thirty-first. As if a candle in the wrong spot or the wrong flowers on the table or serving the wrong wine with dinner is going to make a difference when the time comes.

And if they’re not worried about all of those sorts of things they’re trying to cram as much into my head as possible.

Like the last seven years have just been a rehearsal for this insanity.

I haven’t been to my cello master in weeks. You better believe she’s not going to be pleased. And my form on my throws I swear is getting sloppy.

I hope they start acting normal again soon. If they don’t calm down after my birthday I’m going to abandon ship!

You think your Grandmother would mind a long-term houseguest complete with tame werewolf and a nearly-housebroken Grim?

Your Rian

…

‘Rian,

No, I don’t think Grandmother would be okay with the Grim.

He might ruin the furniture and scare the Corgis.

Otherwise I’d say go for it!

I’m sure it’ll calm down soon. Didn’t you tell me in one of your last letters that part of the crazy was because of moving house and needing to close up Ravenscroft for a while?
(I’m assuming Lord and Lady Holmes are moving with you, inheritance or not, I can’t see Lady Maggie letting you live alone somewhere. Not until you’re like thirty. Maybe older.)

So that’s probably a bunch of it.

Mrs. Tonks hasn’t been a cakewalk herself as far as lessons go.

Apparently I wasn’t versed well enough on the lineages of ALL 49 of the Noble Houses.

Did you know you’re related to the Malfoys, Weasleys, and Prewetts? At least distantly.

I didn’t but I do now…

I’ve met her husband Tedric. He’s taken over my meditation practice for controlling my core so I can learn Occlumency. Mrs. Tonks thought I’d finally mastered controlling my emotions enough to make use of it. And it’s one of those requirements I’m behind on from learning about my magic later than normal for an Heir.

Well, Lord now I guess though it still doesn’t really feel like it.

The day we met was really the only time I’ve felt like a Lord.

Do you feel that way sometimes? What am I saying, I know you do.

Anyway just keep slogging through and it’ll ease up…someday…maybe…not really sure.

Comes with the territory(s) I guess.

Can’t wait to see you again, I miss playing Exploding Snap with someone. I tried convincing my tutors or the guards but the only one who’ll unwind enough is McG…and he’s impossible to beat.

Yours,

Will

…

Head in his hands, Hadrian stared down at the list in front of him.

He didn’t need to be thinking about this now, strictly speaking.

But he’d just sat through a meeting at Gringotts discussing the coming hand-off of accounts and duties because of Lord Wallace taking his place as Avalon’s Lord High Steward on his Privy Council and his current Head of Accounts also moving up to be the Lord High Treasurer. With both of them leaving his personal service for service to the Throne of Avalon, that left him with some issues to think about. Thankfully who was going to manage his personal estates and assets wasn’t on that list.

Lord Tristan Bolyn of the Aged and Honorable House of Bolyn had been thoroughly vetted and interviewed before undergoing an Unbreakable Vow similar to the ones Gawain had taken a couple years previously. He would be joining the Royal Household after Hadrian’s birthday as his Steward, taking Gawain’s place in managing his personal estates. Which was basically his entire landed inheritance. Gawain would look after the Throne’s interests, a headache of a position involving oversight of the various Ministries and how they administered the land and estates of the Kingdom itself.
Head. Ache. One that Hadrian was ecstatic to leave in Gawain’s hands even if he does end up pursuing Masteries in Law and Finance the way he thought he might.

Remus had suggested those as highly valuable Masteries for a ruler and he had to agree. Plus while the Finances lessons were tedious, he really enjoyed the wheeling-and-dealing aspect and the arguing and debating involved with Law.

Tristan was only a third of the equation. Another third was selecting a goblin to take over as Hadrian’s Head of Accounts with Ragnok’s promotion to keeping an eye on the Ministries’ expenditures and funds management. Most of the audits were fine, just in need of some pruning here and spending there but Britain’s was ugly. Ragnok’s apprentice had proven himself with the Evans Accounts and so gained the Potter and Black ones as well as oversight over his accounts as a whole. The five other goblins who managed the remaining ten accounts would continue to do so…just with a new supervisor.

It was the remaining third appointment that was giving Hadrian a migraine.

He had to pick a chatelaine.

And not just one.

No.

He needed a main or Head chatelaine who would technically work for both himself and the Throne, taking charge of both his personal as well as the royal properties and managing the legions of house elves that came with them. Whoever he appointed would be charged with making sure that all of his properties (and he’d seen the consolidated list that was a lot of houses, castles, palaces, cabins, and retreats) as well as the royal ones were ready to be inhabited at a moment’s notice. That meant inventorying all of them and replacing what was needed in fabrics, furnishings, dinnerware, silverware, cooking appliances, and the list went on.

It was a massive task.

That he also needed another eight chatelaines to work under the Head to manage each of the official “countries” of Avalon’s homes as well as a territorial chatelaine was a total of nine women he had to find and raise to positions within the Royal Household. Less if a few of them could handle more than one area.

His first idea was Lady Maggie and she just chuckled, patted him on the cheek and told him he was “such a dear for thinking of her.”

Not that he could blame her, he didn’t want the job either.

Hadrian at least needed his Head Chatelaine selected and installed directly following his birthday. Otherwise she wouldn’t have enough time to get Snowdon Castle in order before the Ball and Avalon’s Skye Palace would need seeing to as well…since that was supposed to be his main residence…if he ever figures out where Skye Palace is.

Andromeda and Ted had already agreed to fill the positions of Royal Healer and Mind Healer so no issues there, a Secretary was in the process of being vetted heavily by both Mycroft and Sherrinford, and he’d made plans to…appropriate one of the guardsman he’d met at Windsor Castle for his own Captain-of-the-Guard.

That only left him with needing a Potions Master for the Royal Household in addition to the “Chatelaine Dilemma” and the empty slots on the Privy Council not being taken by one of his trusted
guardians and advisors. So, you know, no worries.

Just the “little” problems that came with becoming King.

And those were just the domestic issues.

…

Two days before his Claiming Hadrian had acquired a Secretary and was closeted with the Honorable Russell Davies, second son of the Honorable Lord Davies, going over a few of the still-murky appointments he needed to make.

Officially the members of the Privy Council wouldn’t be announced until the night of his Lordship Ball but while some were easy: Wallace as Lord High Steward, his Papa Siger as Lord High Ambassador, Mycroft as Mundane Liaison to the Throne, others were not.

Most of the trouble stemmed from his own thirteen Lines.

Traditionally Lord Potter would be the Lord Protector, Lord Pevensie the Lord of the Privy Seal, Lord Peverell as High Magister, and Lord Valerius was the Lord High Justice of Avalon.

All titles he now held.

Plus Wills as Lord Nimue should be the Lord Chamberlin but he was his Bonded Betrothed and Neville Longbottom who should be the Lord High Constable was underage and the Dowager Longbottom wasn’t eligible to hold the office as she wasn’t of Longbottom Blood.

It was turning into as big of a nightmare as the Chatelaine miasma.

And he still needed a Potions Master to the Royal Household.

Russell and Tristan were determined to help their soon-to-be Lord and King solve these issues. Both were from the generation that separated Sirius, Remus, and Andromeda from the Lords Holmes and Wallace, which helped broaden the pool of candidates considerably as they had some names in mind that wouldn’t occur to either set.

Hadrian underlined a name on the complete list of supposedly eligible Lords, Ladies, and Noble-born children. It was quite comprehensive. So much so in fact that in the beginning it had only made his head ache worsen.

Remus pursed his lips, determined not to say anything. If his cub was really considering him for a position there had to be a reason. One he’ll never hear if he shoots it down immediately. Harry still listened to himself and Mycroft despite the young man’s older guardians despairing over him growing hard-headed after his self-dubbed “Mutiny” before and during his betrothal ceremony.

As far as he and the younger men were concerned (they being the younger Holmes brothers, John, Sirius and Ted) Hadrian was simply trying to do what they’d been training and coaching and teaching him to do all this time: rule.

It was as if the older guardians were channeling Dr. Frankenstein: they made a “monster” from a hodgepodge of pieces (honor, duty, service, pride, power, etc., etc.) and then watched in equal parts awe and horror over that which they’ve created.

James and Lily would be so proud at Hadrian finally coming into his own instead of just going along.
But as the younger men hadn’t been open in their disapproval – if indeed they felt any at all – Hadrian still relied on them for advice and then actually took it under consideration instead of the “humoring” tone and stance he took with the elders.

His cub underlined another name and then another with his fountain pen – a reciprocal Courting gift William sent him with both of their nicknames engraved on the shaft – some in black ink others in red.

As he worked, Tristan had a look of understanding wash over his leanly-attractive and suntanned face. Tristan had the handsome face that won one of his squib ancestresses a Crown – and then cost her her neck – paired with the stocky brawler’s build of the men of his maternal line, the Smiths with their same blue eyes and russet hair.

Russell on the other hand didn’t take much from either of his families. His eyes were a plain, uninteresting hazel matching the medium-ash-brown hair on his head. Neither handsome nor plain, thin nor fat, short nor tall, he would’ve made an excellent spy with his meticulous attention to detail and his ability to blend in anywhere.

Hadrian of course had taken well to both of them after several meetings and the taking of Vows and Oaths – both to himself personally and to his position.

He would never chance a repeat of the fight with Lord Wallace again.

“You believe the story of the Imperious?” Tristan asked carefully, seeing the connection between the two names underlined in red.

“Not for a moment.” Hadrian set the pen in its ebony holder embellished with silver-leaf. “But I do believe that between my Conquest of the Slytherin Line and the ambitions of these two men I can make great use of them.”

“That could be, cub.” Remus stroked the light goatee he’d recently grown. “But how could you ever be sure of their loyalty? Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape were considered to be Voldemort’s right-and-left hands.”

“The same way their dreaded Lord was certain of them.” Hadrian smirked. “Through a Mark. He was hardly the first liege-lord to Mark his followers, it’s simply fallen out of use since ancient times. Remove his Mark and bind them tightly with the right Vows and a Mark to hold them and they’ll be more loyal to me than they ever were to him.” He sneered. “After all, I have no need of women and children to use as hostages over my people.”

Highly uncomfortable with the topic though he knew he might be privy to more of the same during his tenure, Russell changed the subject.

“What of the rest?” He asked mildly. “Armand du Lac, Sandringham Bones, Amelia Bones, Garrick Ollivander,” he raised a brow. “Sirius Black and Remus Lupin?”

“Cub,” Remus growled low. “I’m a werewolf and Sirius is an ex-convict no matter that he was wrongfully imprisoned. Neither of us are appropriate members of the Privy Council.”

Nor was Remus a Noble but he wasn’t going to get into that argument again especially with an audience lest his cub threaten to ennoble him...again.

The thought of it made his neck itch. Bad enough he was mated to a high-born he didn’t want to be one himself.
“You don’t say?” Hadrian gasped in mock-shock. “I had no idea after all these years…”

“Cub.”

This time the growl had a rough warning edge to it.

Hadrian sobered, squaring his shoulders.

“In the Royal Charter Section Five: the Formation of a Privy Council, it clearly states that if the traditional holder of a Privy seat is ineligible for any reason the King may fill it as His Pleasure. In subsection seven paragraph four there is no mention of lycanthropy being a disqualifying disease and in subsection seven paragraph nine it clearly states that only those ‘Rightfully Convicted of Offenses’ are ineligible for a Privy seat. Therefore I can make you my Lord Protector and Siri my Lord High Constable…and there’s nothing you can do about it.”

The so there was absent but implied.

“We can refuse to accept.”

“Until my birthday when I make it a Royal directive and you’re forced to accept or be labeled Traitors to the Throne.” Hadrian’s bright grin was total Padfoot. “But why go through all that when you know Uncle Siri is going to say yes and then follow you around with puppy dog eyes until you cave so that way he doesn’t have to be on the Privy Council all alone with Luscious Lucius Malfoy.”

Tristan just blinked.

That wasn’t even manipulation, that was blatant blackmail.

Were they sure he was only eleven?

“Where did you hear that name?” Was all Remus could say. “Lucius swore the entire school to silence after that round of spin-the-bottle Slytherin vs. Gryffindor.”

Hadrian chuckled to himself. Did Uncle Remy really think Siri limited his stories to pranks when there was so much blackmail material over current sitting Lords over what happened in those Prefect meetings? Though he could’ve done without hearing about the dare that led to the conception of Bill Weasley…

And that Lucius Malfoy had merely settled for Narcissa Black when he was really attempting to seal a Courtship contract for the then-Heir.

There was no way Remus would allow his mate anywhere in close quarters with the blonde who regularly topped “Witch Weekly’s” Hot-Wands list.

Gold-tinged eyes glared at him balefully.

Two less Council seats to worry about? Check and mate.

“When and where would you like me to arrange your meetings with the Council prospects?”

Russell thought it best for everyone if they could please Merlin finish with this topic of conversation.

“Most can wait until next week.” Hadrian decided with a nod. “But with my birthday the day after next I need to see Severus Snape and Lucius Malfoy tomorrow. Confer with Griphook and arrange one of their magic-neutral meeting rooms, not their best, I don’t want to seem like I’m showing off
with Potions Master Snape’s history with my parents hanging over us.”

His secretary nodded distractedly, quickly penning notes in his ever-present folio. “Who should I tell the Head Account Manager to expect and how would you like the requests worded?”

Remus cleared his throat sharply, arching a brow.

“Not in the meeting, Moony. Not with your history with both of them. This is hard enough to manage without adding in unnecessary distractions. No you and no Siri.”

“Who then?” His eyes flashed pure gold. “You cannot meet them without a guard. I don’t care if it costs you your plan. You will take a guard or you will not be going.”

“That’s what I have a Captain of the Guard for.” Hadrian grinned innocently. “McG should be here later tonight and will be staying until the Royal Household moves to either Skye Palace in Avalon Proper or to Snowdon Castle in Wales.”

“You stole your Betrothed’s guardsman?” Remus gave him a Look.

“No stole.” He shrugged completely unapologetic. “Appropriated and gave a promotion. With Wills about to spend days either at H.I. with me or being tutored in his general education studies he doesn’t need two guardsmen around the clock. Danford is moving one of the newer Hit Wizards assigned to the Royal family onto Wills when he’s in residence with the rest of his family and making Kings his bodyguard outside the royal residences. It’s all been arranged and Wills understands especially since he’ll still be able to see McG when he’s visiting me and after our marriage.”

The Captain of the Magical Guardsmen for the Windsor family Danford had been quietly assigned a few extra men after it’d been revealed to Lady Amelia Bones, who’d taken over as the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement after the scandal of Sirius’s false imprisonment had rocked the Department to its very core. Crouch had been quickly cast from the Ministry, thrown to the wolves to appease the public after two very damaging scandals.

Lady Bones had proven herself to be a stalwart crusader in the pursuit of justice, leading Hadrian to consider her seriously for the office of Lord High Justice to the Kingdom of Avalon.

The Alpha werewolf grumbled a bit as he sat back, not quite appeased but having his major concern soothed.

“As for wording.” Hadrian got back on point. “How about something along the lines of: The King-Apparent of Avalon requests the presence of (Lord Malfoy/Lord Prince) for a Meeting. For Lord Malfoy make it regarding his position on the Hogwarts Board of Governors and for Lord Prince regarding the Marriage Contract. Use the official seal of House Emrys and the Obligatio Parchment.”

Obligatio Parchment was strictly made and regulated by the goblins for usage in their official summons for business of the highest importance. The only people given a patent for usage outside of Gringotts were the Royal Houses of various countries who were on good terms with the Goblin Nation.

Such as the Kingdom of Avalon.

Severus Snape would recognize the potion used to treat the parchment and give it its legendary binding power while Lucius Malfoy would see the binding as a statement of power.
If the inherent binding of the parchment wasn’t enough to get them to the meeting, their curiosity would take care of it for him.

…

“Explain this to me, Hadrian.”

Sirius’s voice was dark and cold, forcing Hadrian to lift his head from the difficult translation he was working on for his Ancient Runes lesson the next day before his meetings.

Fire raged behind storm-grey eyes as the subject of their rage closed the book laying on the desk before him with a snap.

“Who else would make a better Lord High Constable…” He began only to be cut off when a callused, tattooed hand slammed onto the desk.

“Don’t fuck with me, Harry.” His godfather’s words were a nearly inaudible rasp. “I don’t give a shit about being Lord High Constable or Remy being your Lord Protector or you being the King-of-ruddy-Avalon. I’m talking, as a man, to the young man who is my godson. Now tell me. What are you playing at?”

Their gazes clashed in a titanic battle of wills while the very air seemed to still.

Eventually after several moments Hadrian simply knew he was going to win. And if he did he stood a decent chance of losing his godfather while he was at it. He’d still have a Regent Black and a Lord High Constable but not his godfather. This was one of those moments where you lose, not because you’re weaker but because the price that came with winning was more than you wanted to pay.

Standing he motioned silently for Siri to follow him, leading him down the hall to a room he’d never been in before. Once they’d stepped inside and Hadrian had sealed the door behind them, he spoke a Word and the cavernous room lit up. It was clearly a magically expanded Wizarding Space and they were standing on a balcony catwalk high about the floor.

Sirius canted his head from side to side trying to figure out what seemed familiar about the space below him but couldn’t place it.

Then Hadrian waved his hand and suddenly the connection he couldn’t quite grasp slammed into place. It was a giant chessboard.

But…not all at the same time.

Instead of two sides there were four, all connected at the center. And the squares weren’t all white and black nor did there seem to be a uniform number of pieces or even types of pieces.

The animagus couldn’t make heads or tails of it.

“Imagine the current Cold War going on as a giant chess match.” Hadrian’s voice spoke eerily into the silence of the massive chamber, the pieces marching to their starting points at the sound. “On one side you have Dumbledore.”

The White King changed to a view of a kindly-grandfather type seated on a would-be throne with a phoenix on his shoulder.

“The other Voldemort.”
The Black King shifted turning into the snake-faced effigy of the man who terrorized thousands, a viper wrapped around his shoulders as he stood tall and defiant.

“Many of them lost pieces: pawns and higher valued alike in their first confrontation and now they’re attempting to regain followers before the next salvo.”

Phantom figures of wizards, witches, and magical creatures of all kinds fought and fell in the empty open space between the two stationary would-be Kings.

“Now that peace has reigned for a time, the salvo draws near. But while they recovered other fronts arose.”

Two new sides – one in emerald and one a mottled mess of white, black, and emerald rose, marching into place.

“On one hand are the common people, the ninety percent that honestly don’t give a damn about who’s in charge as long as they have food on the table, their children are safe, and magic still runs in their veins. Most of these are pawns, they have no real King to order them into battle, and most of their loyalties sway with the changing of the wind.”

A massive set of pawns stretched back into the shadows, a few higher-level pieces scattered among them.

“Then there’s me: the King of Avalon in two days’ time.” The emerald King shifted into a slightly older version of the boy beside him, still narrating in that eerie voice.

“Dumbledore believes he has a spy in Voldemort’s ranks, though they each value him and play him differently and you never know what color he’s going to choose to serve at any given time. Voldemort treats him as his right-hand, to him he’s valuable, versatile, and extremely dangerous.”

The Black Queen shifted into a sallow-faced man with black hair, his cloak splitting turning half-white and half-black.

“Our venerable White King values him differently. Oh, he’s still valuable but expendable. Powerful but not overly so. Though very, very versatile as any successful spy must be.” A White Knight gained a Black base.

“Now the Black King has dozens of pawns to call up while the White King has few.” A double line of pawns advanced to the front of the Black side while a sparse single line made their way to face them from their side. “And ten of his most powerful pieces are imprisoned while others are missing.”

Bars shot up around ten pieces – a variety of knights, bishops, and rooks while others a combination of paws and rooks faded in and out of existence, there one moment and gone the next.

“And at the King’s left hand is another piece, capable, charming, and above all cunning.” A piece somewhere between a Queen and a Bishop gained Lucius Malfoy’s long blonde hair. “One never knows it’s next move or where it’ll strike.”

“And then there’s the White King’s pieces: a decent assortment and all highly powerful.” Knights, bishops, and rooks took the field. Sirius thought he saw a Knight with Flitwick’s face and a Bishop with Minerva McGonagall’s. “But the piece he prizes and covets above all else? His Queen. An extremely powerful piece that he sent – or so he thought – to be broken and forged and broken again. Dumbledore would hate to lose his prized weapon…but he would if it meant saving himself or victory.”
Sirius was unsurprised to see the Queen gain Hadrian’s face though not entirely correctly. There were ugly glasses perched on the soft face and livid scars standing out on the bared arms and forehead.

“The White King thinks he controls his Queen but in reality it’s not his to command at all.”

A sheen of emerald shimmered just under the white and the emerald eyes of the statue flashed.

Cocking his head, Hadrian waved his hand and the emerald pieces formed up – though in reversed order, the pawns behind the high-value pieces.

“Now our beloved emerald King has in theory hundreds and thousands of various pawns and more powerful pieces at his command – but they won’t fight for him. Not yet. He has to prove himself worthy of service before they will join his side.” Several pieces from the mottled and white sides moved to flank those of the emerald but with a clear line between them. “The emerald King has powerful pieces beyond that: Knights, Bishops and Rooks.”

“But no Queen.” Sirius commented seeing his own face supplanted that of a Knight standing shoulder-to-shoulder with his Mate’s Bishop.

“No Queen.” The emerald-eyed youth echoed with a small nod. “But.” He arched a brow.

Getting a feel for the magic in the room, Sirius waved a hand.

As one the Knight-Severus and Queen-Severus deserted their Kings, the mishmash-Lucius following at his back, the Knight and Queen merging into an Emerald Queen as the mishmash-piece did the same. At a flick of his wand the White Queen gave a devilish smirk and disappeared under a Cloak. A final flick had many of the emerald’s-in-waiting shifting over – and changing their colors to Hadrian’s.

“It will be quite the coup.” Sirius had to allow with a sigh. “In one move you steal Voldemort’s two most powerful supporters, undercutting his power base severely when the Knights and others realize they’ve deserted the field for another camp. And swiping at Dumbledore in the process as it’ll cost him more than just Snape if he defects.” Then he asked the pertinent question. “But is it worth it? Having tea and crumpets with Death Eaters just to gain a few more pieces in a game you didn’t even start?”

“I don’t know yet.” Hadrian admitted, worrying his lower lip between straight white teeth, canny eyes studying the board. “But the game is set. The only question is: Am I willing to show up? Or do I leave my people, all my people to their fates?” The young ruler shook his head. “I’m not willing to possibly cost the lives of hundreds or thousands of people, my people, because a pair of assholes decided to turn magical Britain into their chess game.”

“So you’re going to make it your game.” Sirius finished with a sigh.

“And make up the rules as I go along...if I have to.”

“I hope you know what you’re getting into with those two.” Sirius shook his head and closed his eyes tightly, pinching his nose between his thumb and fingers. “They’re two of the best and brightest minds to ever study the Dark Arts. That might be one rabbit hole you won’t make it back out of if they start playing their games with you. It’s a humongous risk.”

“It’s a risk I have to take.” Hadrian gripped with rail until his knuckles turned white. “Death Eaters or not. Murderers or not...they’re too valuable to simply relinquish them to another without even making an attempt at bringing them into my service.”
“I wish you luck, kiddo.” Sirius clapped him on the back. “I really do. Because I’m piss-poor at chess and even I know that’s one hell of an opening gambit.”

…

Dear Wills,

So…

I almost died by enraged-animagus today. I’d been making plans all day with new my staff and unwinding with some mindless homework when Remus…tattled.

There’s really no other way to put it.

I try not to think about what Remus and Sirius talk about for pillow-talk but right now I’m highly suspicious.

We did one of the stare-offs we have and this one I knew I was going to win but it would’ve damaged mine and Siri’s relationship so I caved and explained the plan…just to him though.

If it was someone else they would still be standing there trying to get an explanation from me.

But I figure if one of the most dangerous Aurors ever can’t get a confession out of me when he has leverage there’s no hope for the law enforcement system at all.

I’m only eleven.

Tomorrow.

Eleven, tomorrow.

I’m only freaking out…a lot.

About that and another thing and the thing that comes after that…

I really wish we had a better way to communicate sometimes. Those cellular phones I saw at the Castle (and the super-advanced model My and his assistant somehow have) would be awesome…if they could be adjusted to work in a magic-saturated place.

I’ll have to get someone to look into that…after tomorrow.

If Andy and Ted work you too hard you have Our Permission to prank them. Mercilessly. Especially Ted, he’s usually a good sport.

And if you need someone to play a Wizarding game with talk to Kings.

I have it on good authority (Siri and Remy) that he’s good at both gobstones and Wizarding Chess.

Before you say you don’t have sets open the package I sent.

You do now.

It’s not an official betrothal gift so don’t worry about reciprocating. Just my way of trying to help whilst still being locked down here.

I’ll talk to my unofficial uncles/brothers to see what we can do about the communicating thing.
Between the Marauders and the Holmes boys we should be able to figure out something.

Otherwise I weep for the future of Our Country.

Your ‘Rian

P.S. I’m trying out the “Royal We” thing your Grandmother does so easily and…not so easy. Is there like a proper usage of the “Royal We” manual you can get me or something….?

…

‘Rian:

I know this is brief but I wanted to send it with McG since I know he starts in the morning.

Thanks for the games! It’s only fair I think since you’re stealing my Snap partner to replace him with Kings and the tools I need to bend him to my will. Thanks again.

At least I might have a shot at beating Kings at something.

Getting your uncles and the Holmeses on the communication problem is a great idea! My Grandmother raves about Mycroft being a creative-problem-solver and I know Sherlock solves crime better than all of Scotland Yard so between them and your uncles they should solve it. Phones would be great, is there really no equivalent in the magical world but Floo?

Don’t worry so much, Claiming isn’t that big of a deal.

I was all worried and everyone was stressed but a lot of it was just getting and processing a magical boost and what I call a memory-upgrade. Sort of like a computer software download…but in your brain.

Things that didn’t quite “click” before about being Head of House and a Lord suddenly made sense. It was like I could see all the intertwining alliances my forefathers had made and why they supported who they did. I even discovered the real meaning behind our Crest and Motto.

It was so cool.

I’m sure yours will probably be the same just…more.

Like where your new “house” actually is.

Mum caved and now we’re supposed to see you right after your birthday so good luck and see you soon!

Yours,

Wills

…

Lucius Malfoy stepped elegantly into the foyer of the Diagon Alley branch of Gringotts, ebony cane tapping along graciously at his side.

The cool-blonde Head of House Malfoy was as stoic and icy as ever, not one iota of his inner tension and turmoil showing on his handsome face. He paused for a split-second as he caught sight of the back of his best-friend and sometimes-rival Severus Snape waiting impatiently at the Welcome Desk
that was Lucius’s own destination. While it was an open-secret that Severus was the Lord and Head of House Prince, almost no one treated him as such – which was exactly as the taciturn Potions Master wanted it.

In fact, the only time before he could recall seeing Severus arrayed like the Lord he was instead of as a simple Brewer in his Potions Robs was for the Wiccaning and Blessing of his godson, Lucius’s own Heir Draconis. The Wiccaning of Lucius’s twin godchildren Octavian and Livia born of Severus’s late wife was before he’d gained the Lordship as they were a good two years older than Draco.

He had to admit, cataloging him with a canny eye, that if Severus flaunted his status more often he would probably have women throwing themselves at him – and not just to become Lady Prince. His friend carried off the fine clothes in the Prince colors of dark Roman blue and oyster-grey well with his lanky body and stern features. He’d even deigned to rinse that horrible Potion that protected his hair from cauldron fumes from his fine black hair.

But then, Lucius smirked as his friend turned. One doesn’t meet the future King of Avalon with greasy hair.

Even the snarky Snape wouldn’t go that far in his stubborn refusal to conform to convention.

“Severus, my friend.” Lucius clasped arms with the taller man. “Enjoying your summer away from the Castle?”

“Indeed.” Severus gave a smirk. “At least my own children aren’t complete dunderheads. Though Draco…” he pretended to sigh regretfully and shake his head.

“There’s no need for that.” Lucius gave a small sniff. “My son is turning out quite enamored of potions thanks to your tutelage. If anything I’m sure it’s a relief from irritants who don’t know one end of a stirring rod from the other.”

“Quite.” Lord Prince barely held himself back from rolling his eyes.

“Gentlemen.” A goblin stood in the archway leading back towards the innards of the bank. “Follow me.”

Locking eyes for a brief moment they turned in unison and trailed sharply after the guide who stopped before one of the “neutral” meeting rooms though both knew it wasn’t the largest nor most comfortably appointed. The King or his agent wasn’t taking any chance with them turning on him… wise when dealing with them, they could each privately admit. Rather than being slighted over the implied lack of trust they were somewhat soothed by it.

At least this King – or whoever was managing him – wasn’t an utter fool.

What else he was or wasn’t they would have to discover for themselves.

Stepping inside at the goblin’s behest the came to an immediate stop at the sight of Hit Wizard McGonagall leaning nonchalantly against the wall. Severus being friendly-colleagues with McG’s mother Minerva was well aware of the power that laid in that bloodline. Lucius on the other hand had dueled the man back when the Dark Lord was still active and had nearly not escaped with his life.

“You may go, Captain.” A young voice ordered genially from under a concealing cloak. His voice was cloaked as well, giving no real information about the figure other than he wasn’t fully an adult. “I’m certain Lords Prince and Malfoy would not dare to harm Us while you are just outside the
“Your Uncle will skin me alive.” McG said with a sigh, no trace of heavy Scots accent anywhere in his voice. It simply wasn’t proper for the Captain of the Guard for the Royal Household of Avalon to sound like an uneducated bumpkin. His mother would have his hide. “If your werewolf doesn’t bite me first.”

“You can do your duty as Captain of the Guard as a werewolf.” The figure said musingly. “Without your skin however…”

McG rolled his eyes irreverently and gave a crisp bow, deeper to the seat figure and then to the Lords as their Houses dictated, and strode confidently from the room.

Only by force of will did the two Lords refrain from commenting on their little byplay. It read to them both as a farce put on for their benefit. Staged in part to put them at ease with their easy banter and in part as an intimidation tactic. Though there wasn’t much intimidation needed beyond having the infamous McG as the Captain of the Guard.

The Hit Wizard no doubt held the rest to the same high standard of performance as himself, making for a truly deadly force.

Under the cloak, hood still up and charms still in place to moderately disguise his voice, Hadrian stood and gave the Lords a small nod.

“Lords Prince and Malfoy.” He waved to a pair of chairs across from them. “Thank you for coming.”

Snape held in a snort.

If Lucius received a similar summons as his own there was no doubt in his mind that nothing and no one would’ve been able to keep him away.

“Lord Prince.” Hadrian folded his leather-gloved hands on the table before him. “We have more business to discuss than Us and Lord Malfoy. Would you be amenable to ceding your Right of Precedence to Lord Malfoy on this occasion?”

Severus gave a smooth nod, not even twitching when a silencing bubble shot up all around him without the cloaked figure moving a finger or speaking a word.

“Lord Malfoy,” Hadrian smiled under his hood. “I have to say I much admire your work in restoring your Family’s good Name after the…questionable choices of your Sire.” The and yourself was implied though for politeness not stated. “As such I have a question to put to you.”

Lucius took the back-handed compliment with good grace, restraining his desire to sneer at the cocky whelp. The wandless/wordless silencing bubble around his friend was an excellent motivator to be cautious with his dealings at this point. Either the would-be King had more guards stationed under some form of invisibility device or spell or he was powerful enough to do the impressive bit of magic himself.

Either one was a great motivation for patience.

“Yes?”

“Do you like being a Death Eater?” Hadrian asked bluntly, cocking his head to one side and ignoring the combination of rage and shock that crossed the man’s face before his icy mask went
back up. “I ask not out of some morbid sense of curiosity but because I genuinely want to know. I’ve made a study of it and from what I could deduce, the only people who actually liked, enjoyed, or wanted to be Death Eaters were…well…bat-shit crazy fanatics. And pardon the language, but that doesn’t seem to match what I’ve heard about the urbane and erudite Lord Malfoy.”

Plus the only thing Malfoys were known for liking more than power was money and Voldemort tended to treat his followers’ money like his own – which he didn’t have any longer after losing his title to Hadrian by right-of-conquest.

“I was,”

“Don’t say under the Imperious.” Hadrian snapped out, holding up a regal hand. “I don’t believe that drivel. At least not as far as Tom Riddle’s left-hand is concerned. I wouldn’t put it past him to use the Imperious to create cannon-fodder but not his most trusted advisor.”

“You are well informed.” For a child. “You must have had the best of educations and tutors.”

“Of course I did.” Hadrian shrugged, not fazed by the allusion to his age. “That however, doesn’t answer my question.”

“Did I like being a Death Eater?” Lucius arched a pale-blonde brow, eyes like glittering shard of silver ice. “I believe you said it yourself. I am neither insane nor a fanatic.”

“Superb.” Hadrian held out a contract, Lucius taking the folio with on elegant hand. “The file you have there is a binding contract. Within it are a variety of Vows and Oaths required by all members of the Privy Council,” silver-grey eyes shot up before he flipped open the leather folder and scanning the document frantically. “With a few extras for yourself.”

“You,” Lucius cleared his throat, feeling flat-footed and unprepared for this turn of events. “You intend to make me Lord of the Privy Seal?”

“Conditional on my being able to remove the Dark Mark and use a Mark of my own to anchor the list of additional Vows I require before allowing you into my,” his lips twitched. “Inner Circle. The Kingdom of Avalon has not had a King for hundreds of years, the world has changed. I find myself in need of a master of managing information, image, and the dreaded press. There is no one in the Wizarding World better at it than you. And with the taking of Oaths, there is no one I will be able to trust more to do this job than yourself, Lord Malfoy.”

Lord of the Privy Seal. Lucius sat back flummoxed. No member of House Malfoy had ever risen to the ranks of either the Royal Household or the Privy Council. Those were usually the domain of the Utmost and Most Ancient and Noble Houses.

Rumor and innuendo, he mused. There was much of it for a brief time a few years ago about traffic in the oldest Vaults of Gringotts. Vaults that hadn’t been open for years suddenly becoming active again. Perhaps, he thought with clarity as his Mark twanged in remembrance. There was a reason why the Utmost Houses weren’t available to fill the Council anymore.

Reasons connected to the young man in front of him.

“If you can remove the Dark Mark.” Lucius conceded, taking up the Blood Quill in front of him and signing on the dotted line, taking a deep breath as he felt the Vows and Oaths snap into place. Though not the ones that needed anchoring through another Mark. “I’m your man for life.”

“Excellent.” Hadrian hopped to his feet and rounded the table. “I’ll need to see it. I’ve never met a Death Eater in person before though my guardians all have.”
Well aware of Severus watching every move they made with his ever-calculating shark’s gaze – Lucius wouldn’t put it past the man to know who to read lips – he stood and shrugged off his elegant outer robe of silver-threaded silk and then doffed his underlying frockcoat of superfine linen. Undoing the cufflink on his left arm that was embossed with the Malfoy peacock-feather, he rolled back the pure-white sleeve, the faded-ink-black of the Dark Mark showing to stark relief against his pale nobleman’s skin. The younger man didn’t so much as flinch as he cradled the arm in one hand and leaned close to examine the Mark.

“Hmm,” he said lifting his head, revealing bright-green eyes hiding under that concealing hood. “It can’t be so simple…” Hadrian trailed off musing to himself.

Lucius flinched imperceptivity as the young man – a very young man judging by his hand once he pulled off a glove – placed a bare finger on the Mark and pressed both physically and with his magic which rose to suffocating levels. The Lord Malfoy could even see Severus reacting inside his little bubble and the Potions Master was one of the most powerful wizards Lucius knew outside of himself, their former Master, and that old goat Dumbledore. He held in a pained wince as the Mark reacted to the foreign magic.

“Ah,” the still-hooded young man said. “Of course.”

The would-be King increased the power he used against the magic of the Mark before speaking a Word that had Lucius nearly fainting in shock. Not because he understood what the young man said but because he couldn’t. Avalon’s new King was a Parselmouth.

“Finite Incantatum.”

There was a horrible shriek and then the Mark appeared to burst into flame on Lucius’s arm and around the King’s hand. But the fire wasn’t hot nor did it burn. The King’s magic protected them.

When the flames died down after a long moment, there was nothing left of the stain on the Malfoy Family Honor. Not even ash.

But the King didn’t let go of this arm, instead he shifted his grip and turned Lucius to face him head-on, his bared hand reaching up and with another display of his magic splitting the fine-Egyptian cotton right above Lucius’s heart.

Once more touching the Lord of Malfoy skin-on-skin, the King spoke another Word this time in an Ancient variation of Gaelic or Welsh Lucius should recognize but couldn’t translate and another Mark appeared on his skin.

Rather than the Crest of Emrys the King had used on his summons, the Mark was in the form of this King’s personal Crest appeared. A Mark made up of Crossed Swords surrounded by thirteen stars, used to bind his Lord of the Privy Seal to his additional Oaths and Vows. Very similar to the Emrys Crest but at the same time worlds apart.

Lucius gritted his teeth as the other required Oaths and Vows snapped like shackles around his mind. Any vague thought of twisting things to his advantage vanished as instinctual knowledge of how the Mark would punish him possessed his mind. No. Young he might be but the King was no fool. The House of Malfoy was all at once neutralized against him and set into play for him.

Cunning, Lucius smirked to himself. His new King was most definitely of the Line of Slytherin.

And so far much saner than the last King of the Snakes.

Hadrian repaired the damage to the shirt and bade the Lord Malfoy to retake his seat. Quickly they
Lucius raised his brow at the betrothal announcement. There was a rumor floating around that the House of Nimue had been renewed but no confirmation of it. And there in black and white was proof of an engagement between the Heir of Emrys and the Lord of Nimue.

Impressive political maneuvering before he’d even taken the Throne. Lucius thought he might actually enjoy his new position.

Another brow-raiser was a planned press release to Potion’s Quarterly discussing the youngest Potions Master in centuries joining the Royal Household as Potions Master and Researcher for the Royal House of Avalon.

“I assume Severus is unaware of his new position?” Lucius asked drily. “And I see several different betrothal and marriage announcements. How many should I plan for in total and what sort of timeline?”

“Thirteen total,” Hadrian admitted with a slight grimace. He still wasn’t happy with that. “Though several are subject to contracts from before my birth. And between now and my twentieth birthday.”

A nod from Lucius before he rose, gathering the papers and parchments together. He had quite a bit to accomplish by August First which was only two days away. Best not dawdle.

“Is there anything else your Grace requires before I take my leave?” He gave a smooth bow and used the honorific though it wasn’t strictly necessary until the First.

“One question,” Hadrian glared down at what he’d taken to calling “That Infernal List!” “Lady Narcissa Malfoy nee Black. Would she be more in line with her sister Bellatrix or Andromeda?”

Lucius was stunned by the question though he didn’t show it.

“Andromeda.” He nonetheless answered quickly. “She has never shared Bella’s…fervor…in matters of blood. She has been an exemplary Lady Malfoy.”

“Fantastic.” Hadrian checked off one line of his Chatelaine list and put a question mark beside another. “You have my secretary’s information. Owl him with a date and time next week which suits the Lady Malfoy for a meeting with Us and a few others. I find myself in desperate need of Chatelaines for both my personal and Our Royal residences and properties. You were the last I needed to speak with regarding Lady Narcissa’s suitability for one or more of those positions with the Royal Household. Have a good day, Lord Malfoy.”

A nearly gaping Lucius backed from the room with a bow before straightening and clutching the file to his chest striding from the back.

Narcissa was never going to believe this…

Severus waited with straining patience as the Heir of Emrys concluded his business with Lucius.

He’d tried everything to rid himself with the Dark Mark. Especially with the Dark Lord absent and
his last act being slaughtering his childhood friend. Severus loved the Dark Arts. But he would renounce them in a second if it would bring Lily back to life.

And with a few minutes, a few words, and an impressive display of magical force, his best-friend was freed from the Mark forever.

It made the spy wonder what exactly the cost had been.

And why Lucius had signed a contract in his own blood.

Death Eaters were bound to serve Voldemort, that was true. But not even that madman had used their own blood to bind them. That was solely the province of alliances between Houses – something the Dark Lord had never been able to prove and use to his advantage despite all’s assumption over him being the Heir of Slytherin. It had nearly driven the man mad long before his obsession with immortality did that he couldn’t call himself Lord Slytherin nor was he able to use the rites of nobility to bind his followers to him.

The Dark Mark was the best he could do and everyone thought it was permanent.

That was until today.

When the blonde had taken his leave and the bubble surrounding him collapsed, Severus immediately asked.

“How was that possible?”

“The former Heir of Slytherin used parseltongue to form the Dark Marks – as I had suspected from my research.” The much-younger man removed his second glove and placed them gently on the table, refolding his ivory hands beside them. “All you need is the ability to speak parseltongue and enough power to overload the Mark’s magic and done.”

Severus churned that little nugget of information over in his head whilst still listening as the would-be monarch got to one of the points of Severus’s presence.

“I would prefer my future father-in-law did not have the brand of a madman man on his arm.” Severus looked up sharply and slammed his hand down, catching the files that were slid across towards him before they crashed into his chest or the floor.

“Before you are two contracts. One is a copy of the marriage contracts binding the Heir of the Royal House of Ravenclaw together with the Heir of House Prince. It was formed as a surety of good-faith during a treaty. It is binding with very little wiggle room. Your Heir, Octavian I believe? Is bound to marry Us.” Hadrian’s voice went silky. “I will not have a Death Eater for a father-in-law. The second file contains a contract binding Severus Tobias Snape-Prince, Lord Prince, to serve the Royal Household as Potions Master and Researcher until released. It contains an identical set of Vows and Oaths that all retainers of the Royal Household must take. In addition are a series of Vows governing your former activities and ensuring your sole loyalty is to Avalon and Us. You will sign.” His very voice was a threat. “You will serve. And you will be loyal. Or for a wedding present I will present your son and Heir with your head.”

It wasn’t the best way to start a marriage but in this Hadrian the King took precedence over Hadrian the Person. No Marked Death Eater was going to mar the Kingdom of Avalon. Not even one who recanted and turned spy.

“You have me well-cornered.” Severus conceded as he raised a brow at the extravagant Potions contract. Nothing it contained was in any way objectionable. Nor did it require the teaching of
dunderheads. Instead it gave him nearly carte blanche to research and experiment as long as he maintained the required stock of potions for the Royal Household and made himself available as needed to the Royal Healer and his Grace the King. An enticing carrot just in-case he didn’t heed the obvious stick.

Though something told him this young man wouldn’t hesitate in doing exactly as he said. Tavi would hate him for it but what was the distemper and disdain of a single consort when you were King and had a riotous country to keep in hand?

In his position, Severus would do the same.

“There is one problem.” His legendary gaze was piercing. “I made an Unbreakable Vow to protect the child of a late friend. That cannot be overwritten with this.” Severus held up the contract with one lean hand.

“Who was the friend and child?” Hadrian leaned forward, having some idea of Snape’s background courtesy of his uncles. If it was a Death Eater and child that would be a problem indeed. But if it wasn’t…there was only one ‘late friend’ who came to mind.

“Lily Evans and her son Harry Potter.” There was a barely-audible sneer on Potter, amusing Hadrian. The Potions Master would know like all Lords that the Potters were closely aligned with the Royal Houses and didn’t want to piss off the new King over a childhood rivalry. But he couldn’t keep himself completely neutral either.

“That won’t be a problem at all.” Hadrian would chuckle if he wasn’t desperately trying to stay in character.

Sirius was going to have a coronary.

Severus nodded hesitantly before picking up the same Blood Quill as Lucius and signing as required. Better his dream job than a beheading. Besides Albus had grown extremely tiresome lately. Not having to return to the castle after break would be a relief.

Anything to get away from the Weasley Twin Terrors and constant offers of tea and lemon drops.

These Weasleys were smart and quite the brewers.

But insane.

So very, very insane.

After he’d signed they repeated the earlier process with Lucius only quicker as Hadrian knew what to expect. Once the Vows and Mark were in place, they sat once more. Severus’s insatiable curiosity got that better of him and he asked:

“How can you be sure my vow of protection towards Harry Potter won’t be an issue?” That would be impossible to accurately predict.

Hadrian grinned and lowered his hood, secure in letting Lord Prince in on the secret now that he was wrapped up in Oaths.

“Morgana’s Tits!” Severus gasped eyes wide. “Potter!” He was close to spluttering.

“Among many other things,” Hadrian smirked. “Yes, I am.”
Seeing that the boy wasn’t going to answer any of the multitude of questions Severus had regarding his latest *bombarda* to Severus’s sense of equilibrium, he returned to the topic at hand.

“What are the precise details of the contract with my son and when shall my duties as Potions Master begin?”

“We have to be wed – not just bonded – by my fourteenth birthday.” Hadrian replied promptly. He’d memorized the details of the various contracts. “With children once we’ve both finished our educations however long that might last. It was a contract with Ravenclaw after all.” He said jokingly. “As for your new position the Royal Household and Our retainers will be removing to Skye Palace in Avalon or Snowdon Castle in Wales sometime within the next month. You can expect an owl from the Royal Steward Tristan Bolyn with the details when We have settled on a locale. All members of the Royal Household are required to reside in the Royal Residence unless taking leave for some reason. Or when I attend Hogwarts. You’ll be given a choice between remaining at the main residence or living in your own at that time except during holidays from school. Your children and family are of course welcome. Some of the Privy Council will also be living at the Royal Residence for the first few years.”

“Very well.” Severus nodded, it was acceptable. “And regarding the contract…?”

Hadrian sighed.

“I’m in the process of Courting my Bonded-Betrothed and first Consort, the Lord of House Nimue. Until we’ve wed and I’ve taken the Throne and had my coronation I don’t really have the time to Court another. I would like to get to know your Heir before I spend the rest of my life Bonded to him. However what and when you tell him is entirely up to you.”

…

*Edited 3 February 2016 for minor errors.*
Chapter Seven: Claiming Avalon

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: This is a work of fan-authored fiction and is not meant to infringe on the rights of the rightful owners of any of the stories used herein nor to cause harm or embarrassment to the real life characters used.

Edited 2/3/16 Minor errors fixed and Hadrian's magical growth adjusted for believability.

Also since it's been asked several times, here are the 7 types of Noble Houses that the 49 different Noble Lines all belong to:

Royal, Utmost Ancient and Noble, Most Ancient and Noble, Ancient and Noble, Aged and Noble, Aged and Honorable, and Honorable.

The Avalon Seven

Note 2/3/16: Due to some issues with believability, I've adjusted how much height/weight/strength Hadrian gains during his Claiming. Otherwise mostly minor edits done.

Chapter Seven: Claiming Avalon

As anyone who planned a major life event such as a wedding or big anniversary party can tell you: it’s easy to obsess over the minutiae.

That’s how wedding and party planners stay in business after all: dealing and obsessing over bullshit so you can just show up and have the time of your life.

At least that’s how it’s supposed to work in theory.

In Hadrian’s world it’s like living with a phalanx of party planners who were the morbidly-cunning offspring of a vicious dictator and a unicorn-on-crack/cocaine.

Compared to the insanity of his betrothal he’d thought his Claiming wouldn’t be an Event.

Yes, it was one of the most important things he would ever do.

He understood that.

It’d been explained to him repeatedly at least once a month for the last seven years – more if he’d had a rebellious week and he was being tortured with lectures on birth-rights and duty.

However.

As he’d understood it his Claiming of his Lordships and Houses was just that: his.

All it really required was him, an atheme, a ritual site, and several witnesses who weren’t relations or bound into his service.

The latter being the reason he’d held off on contracting with the rest of the people he’d tipped for
filling the ranks of his Privy Council and his needed (please Circe soon) Chatelaines. It gave him a ready pool of witnesses to choose from who were theoretically impartial. At the moment anyway.

So when the adults all around him seemed to become infected with a singular form of rabies only without the frothing at the mouth – so far – he’d been justifiably confused.

What was there to plan?

He followed the debate over who to include as the “impartial” witnesses, that at least made sense to him. When they’d all agreed with Lady Amelia Bones, her younger brother Sandringham who held a duel Mastery in Magical Law and Estate Management & Finance, and Lord Garrick Ollivander, Hadrian had let out a breath. They were done, debate over, he could go back to plotting how deal with the various head of government both magical and mundane who managed his territories.

Apparently he’d stopped holding his breath a mite too soon.

Next the atheme came under discussion, mainly between Siger and Sirius arguing whether using the Holmes or Black Ritual Knife would be more appropriate. He’d used the first to Confirm his Inheritance and the second during the Funeral Rites for his Grandpapa so he was familiar with them. He found himself saved through the intervention of an unlikely source.

Lord Ragnarok had personally inspected the Emrys Vaults and taken out the ancient Ritual Knife used before the original founding of Avalon when the Emrys Family ruled over the majority of Wales and Ireland.

It wasn’t even considered previously as he couldn’t enter any of the Vaults and remove anything until after his Claiming.

Ok, they were done now right?

Witnesses chosen and secretly approached, atheme recovered, they were done.

Not yet.

The biggest debate of all wound up being over where he would perform the Claiming.

Sirius wanted Castle Black as one of the oldest residences Hadrian had inherited. Since Lord Black had turned over control of the Wards to Sirius before he passed they were still able to access the ancient Black fortress. All of the other inherited properties were closed to Hadrian until he Claimed his Lordships and was able to enter the Family Vaults to remove the ward stones and learn the locations of the unplottable residences.

Apparently Hadrian came from a very, very paranoid bunch. The wards on all Noble properties were set to turn unplottable if there wasn’t an active Lord. It was an ancient protection to prevent guardians from accessing their Ward’s vaults and removing valuables from their properties. The only money Hadrian has had access to were some very affluent trust vaults.

Though the goblins had found a loophole that let him inventory and audit all of his holdings, properties, and investments as well as his liquid assets.

Which also allowed him to order the audit on the governmental finances that were involved in the territories controlled by the Kingdom of Avalon. Altogether they started it on his fifth birthday and have continued to audit and monitor them for the last four years after the initial audit was complete. There were going to be some very put-out government workers when they woke up on August 2nd and were charged with theft, embezzlement, and in some cases high treason.
His Papa Siger wanted to use the ritual space at Ravenscroft Hill, Lord Holmes wanted to use Holmes Manor, while Lord Wallace wanted the ritual to take place at his estate.

It quickly became a popularity contest between his godfather and his three guardians.

Finally the day before his birthday they were able to all agree on using the ancient Druid ritual space at Stonehenge.

It only took two months and several uncomfortable family dinners for that arrangements to be finalized.

…

After Lord Prince left Hadrian alone in the meeting room at Gringotts Hadrian pulled off his concealing cloak, revealing mundane work-out clothes. Reaching into his pocket he took out a shrunken bag and enlarged it while McG looked on with raised brows. Slinging the duffle bag over his shoulder he wrapped the cloak into a bundle and stuffed it into a side pocket.

Striding from the room, Hadrian made for the Alley and the closest port-key point, his Captain of the Guard dogging his heals.

“And what might you be up to?” McG finally asked as his charge lifted a simple pendant with the Holmes crest on a braided leather cord from under this soft cotton t-shirt. That most definitely wasn’t the port-key McG had been briefed on that led directly to Hadrian’s quarters in Ravenscroft.

“Unwinding.” He said succinctly. “I haven’t been to a Krav Maga spar in weeks and John’s been so busy clearing his calendar at work he hasn’t been to Sunday dinner in a month even if Sherlock made it. My schedule is about to be tighter than a spinster’s knees: I won’t be able to visit London until after the Ball in September. I’m going. The only question is whether you’re going with me. If so you better grab on, I set the port-key on a timer when I took it out of my shirt and you have five seconds left.”

Cursing bodies that insisted on being impossible to guard, McG slapped his hand down on the medallion.

At the end of the day there’s one rule above all else when you’re being an active bodyguard: never lose the body.

You can always yell and scream later.

A fishhook grabbed him behind the navel and sucked him through the ether, dropping them both in the empty second bedroom at 221B Baker Street, London.

The massive Scotsman who stood well over six feet tall, glared with his dark brown eyes at the completely unrepentant face of the future King of Avalon.

“Yer gonna be a problem, aren’t ya laddie?” His burr was in full-force as he struggled with how he was going to explain this to Lord Holmes. The first day on the job and his charge was already giving him fits.

“Not a problem.” Hadrian said with a shrug. “We didn’t know how long the meeting would take so we cleared the afternoon. I have another three hours and,” he cast a Tempus. “Seventeen minutes before I’m due back at Ravenscroft for my purification ritual before the Claiming. I’m going to spend that last three hours and now sixteen minutes as I please before I give my entire life over to being the King of Avalon. So I’m going to go spend the next two hours with the people who saved
my life when I was a mess of bruises, blood and broken bones. Then I’m going to spar until I’m not forcefully restraining myself from exploding on the next person who tries to tell me how I’m not old enough to decide where my Claiming will be but still supposed to run a Kingdom starting at dawn.”

Without another word after that mini-rant Hadrian stalked off to find his brother and John.

...

Dr. John Watson looked up as the alarm ward Sirius had posted on their apartment dinged. Sherlock had arranged it so that certain people could pop in and out of the spare room and that was where the alert came from. If he had the meaning of the tone right it was one authorized person and one unauthorized person.

He tucked the pistol he kept in his desk drawer into the back of his jeans and propped one hip against the arm of his side-chair, making sure he kept a clear view of the archway leading into the hall.

It was probably Sirius or Remus bringing the new bodyguard by but with who they were connected to and Sherlock’s life mission of being an eternal annoyance to the criminal element of the United Kingdoms, it was better to be safe than sorry.

Sherlock had heard the alarm but immediately deleted the information from his brain, being busily working on an experiment of some kind in their kitchen/lab.

Turned out John was both right and wrong.

“Harry.” John smiled, walking over and giving the lean boy a hug then holding him out at arm’s length for an inspection.

He hadn’t seen his former patient/little brother in weeks and at his age that could make a massive difference.

The once-tiny waif had grown into quite the young man. Tall for his age but still not in the tallest percentile and with a sense of power from his years of martial arts, fencing, and horseback riding. All long, lean muscle at the moment he was destined to bulk out at least some with puberty. His raven hair was pulled back in the tight braid he preferred for physical activity.

Sherlock closed in on the two from behind, saber in hand, at the sight of the boy’s rather large shadow. Much too large to be Remus though the Alpha werewolf wasn’t small by any means. Proof positive that even when lost in his own mind his lover was aware of possible threats to his loved ones.

“Down, brother.” Hadrian said without even looking, knowing what was going on because of the look in John’s eyes. “He’s my new Captain of the Guard and I prefer him sans sword-wound and you awake instead of Stunned.”

“Blast.” Sherlock pouted. “I wanted to test his reaction time. Sirius’s is quite astounding. I’ve deduced that if McG was considered one of the finest Hit Wizards and Sirius one of the most dangerous Aurors that McG’s reflexes must be on par or better than Sirius’s.”

“No, Sherlock.” Hadrian turned laughing green-eyes on his brother. “Another day, perhaps.”

…

Watching the young monarch laugh and joke with his honorary brothers, McG finally “got it.”
Perhaps it was because the three separate occasions he’s been around the young man he was always surrounded by his guardians or they were important affairs that he’d never seen this person before. Kingsley had told him of the scene between the two betrothed before the ceremony and he hadn’t believed it. The boy was too formal he thought. Too much a King though he’d yet to Claim his Throne to unwind and play Snap and joke with his intended.

He even had serious reservations about his former charge’s happiness, bound for life to a “proper pureblooded” spouse.

The meeting he’d eavesdropped on between the Lords and Hadrian earlier and his interview for his current position had done nothing to alleviate that fear he’d had for young William and his future happiness.

He knew that many royals – magical and mundane – were often concerned more with duty and the stability and future of their countries than happiness.

It was almost as if happiness was to province of those not born to rule.

Then he had his new charge and King pull out a mystery port-key, rant at him twice, and scrap the rest of his schedule for the day so he could spend some of his last hours as a normal person being well, normal.

Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon rolled on the floor, being double-teamed in a wrestling-match/tickle-war, and laughing and giggling for all he was worth.

Perhaps there was hope for the boys after all…

…

“How goes the game?” Sherlock asked his little brother lowly while John was busy showing McG pictures from when they’d first found Harry.

Sherlock was the one who pointed out to Hadrian last year when they were discussing Britain’s First Wizarding War and the fall of Voldemort that despite common belief it was unlikely that the “Dark Lord” was truly dead.

He found the evidence entirely inconclusive.

Then casually mentioned at as far as he could deduce, the “Dark Lord” Voldemort and the “Light Lord” Dumbledore tended to treat their people more like pawns than people.

And the monster game was born in an empty ballroom.

Hadrian made an inconclusive sound deep in his throat as he studied the case file in front of him. Sherlock had put it in his hands as soon as he was done fooling around, wanting an actual mage’s perspective. Sherlock had no active magic of his own, his magical core rerouted to power his impossible brain. When it came to magic there was plenty that didn’t even follow the so-called “laws” of magic let alone physics.

His little brother had gotten excellent at spotting when a deduction was being thrown off because of magic flexing Her Will.

“The pieces have mostly been identified and chosen.” Hadrian said after a long moment. “But until the Black King makes his play we’re waiting to truly begin. Until then it’s more trading volleys between two sides of a four-player game.”
“Hmm.” Sherlock hummed. “So you’re in a holding pattern.”

“And you’ve got a case of accidental magic.” Hadrian looked back down at the crime-scene photos of a sinkhole that had appeared in a park overnight causing thousands in property damage. “A big one.”

“Walk me through your deductions.”

“The neighborhood is mostly industrial so it could’ve been a chemical accident but there was zero trace evidence. It’s an area that is also frequented by a generally benign homeless community. This,” he tapped a finger on the digital map and drew a line. “Is the distance from the sinkhole to the nearest magical home, business, or public area.” It was several miles. “The main thing however, and the reason I deduce the case came through your website instead of the police, is that the sinkhole has a perfect circumference.”

Hadrian grinned, beaming up at his brother. “While the laws of magic would say it’s possible to do that with a spell, the sheer size, makes it highly improbable. One spell couldn’t do it unless massively overpowered and several wouldn’t make the perfect circle.”

“How massively overpowered?” Sherlock demanded he prove his deduction.

“Myself, Voldemort, Dumbledore.” Hadrian grinned wider. “In that order could do this with a single spell and not still be there suffering from our core being critically drained when people came to investigate. Perhaps one or two others but not likely.”

“Why accidental magic?”

“Homeless population.” His brother responded at once. “Most homeless populations contain a certain percentage of children. One of the leading reasons for childhood homelessness other than the entire family being on the streets is fundamental differences with their family or caregivers. Accidental magic can begin manifesting at any age up to eleven and in rare cases as early as birth and up to the end of puberty. Extreme emotion fueling accidental magic is capable of creating a sinkhole with this circumference without draining the caster since it tends to draw equally from the caster and the ambient magic in the area.”

Sherlock grabbed another folder and handed it wordlessly to the future King of Avalon.

“Sally-Anne Perks, age seven, ran away from home last month after a fight that resulted in massive blunt-force trauma to her father and a shiner on her. Police and doctors were baffled over how the father sustained his injury. Picked up last week by police a half-mile from the sinkhole the morning after it appeared. She’s in a group-home at the moment and has been approached several times since age six by the Ministry to attend a Wizarding School. Her father has refused to allow it and she goes untrained. As of yesterday she was informed that she will be attending compulsory classes at the wizarding primary school in London and has been moved to Cole’s Orphanage, her father’s custody revoked.”

Hadrian snarled under his breath. He hated that magical orphans were slapped into the mundane system when the magical world had the resources to care for them. It led to incidents like the one Sherlock brought to his attention.

And likely riling him up was what his brother was after.

They were both aware that his guardians were going to push from him to start implementing certain revisions to the current laws over others. Sherlock wanted Harry to be angry over Sally-Anne
because he refused to be angry on his own behalf. Neither one of them wanted there to be anymore Harry Potters or Sally-Anne Perks being left out in the cold by the wizarding world.

Harry had someone to rescue him and became Hadrian.

Who did Sally-Anne Perks have?

A question Sherlock wanted at the very front of his royal brother’s mind going into the meetings with the governments he was about to control.

…

11:58 at night on July 31st saw an eclectic group standing in the gaps created by the missing stones at Stonehenge.

Everyone had come: Hadrian’s guardians, their spouses (save Lady Wallace who was still restricted to her dower house in Italy), their children, the newly-contracted guard, Hadrian’s new retainers, those that he’d marked for the Privy Council, even John and Sherlock.

No pressure or anything.

Just a large mashed up group making up some of the most powerful men and women in magical Britain, waiting for the clock to tick down one more minute and the show to begin.

Andddd….

He was naked.

“Skyclad” was the appropriate term but for an eleven year old boy no matter how smart, mature, or comfortable in his skin, it was still awkward standing in the middle of one of the oldest magical sites in the old with nothing but an ancient dagger and his own skin for company while people who’ve known you anywhere from years to hours stand around waiting for you to do something.

The site had been prepped, Hadrian himself had spent the last two hours painstakingly painting the proper runes for the ritual: Fehu for possessions won or earned, Uruz untamed potential and sudden change, Raidho seeing a larger perspective, Kenaz for harnessed power, Gebo for the gifts received, Nauthiz for recognition of one’s fate, Jera for the results of earlier efforts (in this case the Confirmation ceremony) realized, Algiz to ward off evil, Sowilo (a rune that mirrored the barely-visible scar on his forehead) for success, goals achieved, and honor, Tiwaz: honor, justice, leadership and authority, Mannaz for The Self, and then Othala for inheritance and ancestral property, finishing with Isa in the center to reinforce the others around it.

Thirteen in total each with one of his House Crests below it.

Thankfully Hadrian had been schooled in the Elder Futhark and art for years so it wasn’t too difficult but it was time consuming. Especially with how detailed some of the Crests were. Though he was able to do it clothed so there was that at least.

It wasn’t until the last seven minutes before the “seventh month died” that he had to strip down and wait, breathing deeply and falling into a meditative trance, knowing and trusting that his power would alert him when the time for him to act appeared.

(Author’s Note: I didn’t write most of this. From The Pagan Library)

Speaking in Ancient Welsh, he began:
“Black spirits and white,
Red spirits and grey,
Harken to the rune I say.
Four points of the Circle, weave the spell,
East, South, West, North, your tale tell.
East is for break of day,
South is white for the noontide hour,
In the West is twilight grey,
And North is black, for the place of power.”

Drawing the blade of the ancient dagger he dragged it with slow precision down the palm of his dominant hand, what would be his wand-hand if he had need of one changing to Gaelic as he spoke.

“As above, so below
As the universe, so the soul.
As without, so within.
Blessed and gracious one, Lady of Magic,
On this day do I consecrate to you: My body,”

Hadrian drew Uruz once more, this time in his own blood, on his left and right biceps to represent physical strength and masculine potency. His strong arm to be Lady Magic’s strong arm.

“My mind.”

Mannaz was repeated in the center of his forehead only for intelligence and forethought rather than The Self, again in the dripping blood from his bleeding hand.

“And my soul.”

To represent the connection and bond he swore to Magic Herself, Hadrian drew Algiz over his heart before moving on to the next and final step finishing the chant in Latin:

“Dark is the night as I reach this turning point
Here is a time of death, yet a time of rebirth.
Endings and beginnings
Ebbings and flowings
A journey done and a journey yet to start.
As the wheel turns, I see birth, death and rebirth
and I know that every end is a beginning.

On this night, that marks my birth, take my blood as sacrifice as I Claim that which those before me were born to, died for, and bled to see your Will done.

As Magic wills it, so mote it be!”

Hadrian took charge of the power that had been steadily building with each word and drop of blood, channeling it first through himself and then into the ancient dagger, the unadorned iron hilt heating unbearably as it nearly overloaded before he sent it out in a burst of Pure Magic at the rune Isa on the center Stone that he’d drawn earlier. The magic burst hit the charging rune and spread, channeled through Hadrian and the blood-runes and into the painted runes and the Crests below them.

At this point, if they were able to see it through the blinding wave of light and magic, the witnesses would have noticed Hadrian’s body being forced to grow as it attempted to channel the massive surge of magic as the last of the blocks in his Inheritance fell.
Without him having to charge the runes on the Stones, there was no way he would’ve been able to channel so much pure energy and survive. Not even Magic herself could have saved him by doing as she was now: gifting him with a magic-induced growth spurt to accommodate and leech off the excess his natural channels couldn’t handle without frying themselves. The carefully-chosen blood runes helped immensely creating a pathway She could use to save her champion’s life.

So as the Runes dictated so it was:

For Uruz he gained physical strength and speed matched with untamed potential, great energy and health. With Mannaz his intelligence, forethought, creativity, skills, natural abilities all gained a boost though not as dramatically as that he gained physically. Thank Merlin he chose Uruz and not Thurisaz or he could’ve wound up with a completely uncontrollable temper and the size of a giant. And with Algiz his natural inclination to defend others was bolstered along with his connection to Magic.

One of the last thoughts he had before the Runes all around him finished charging and the magic slammed back into him with the concussive force of a tank blast was that nobody warned him about getting struck by lightning during a Claiming.

…

Utter panic set in as the light suddenly vanished, taking Hadrian along with it.

There was a sense of a silent pandemonium slowly taking over their minds one by one as they processed what just happened.

Thankfully there was at least one person there who was able to not completely lose his mind when Magic decided to do throw a spanner in the works.

Leave it to the sole strictly-mundane person to keep their head in the middle of what could turn into a magical crises.

“Is the Circle still active?”

John’s calm Doctor voice cut through the mental chatter that was nearly deafening.

“I’m not sensitive enough to tell.” Sherlock answered his lover immediately, despite his currently residing in his mind palace as he went over every millisecond of the ritual.

“It’s not.” The silky voice of Severus Snape called out as he moved with his enviable grace inside the Stones and then touched where the Crest of House Emrys used to be painted under the Rune Isa to charge the Claiming. “And the site has been rendered inert. No residual magic remains.”

“No offense.” John nodded towards the black-clad man. “But I don’t really know you. Can anyone confirm?”

“If Lord Prince says the site is inert.” Lady Bones stepped forward, hands down at her sides. “Anyone I know would take him at his word. There are few with his abilities and none here.”

“Very well,” Sherlock gave an abstract nod. “Does anyone know what the bloody-fuck just happened? Because I keep going over what I know of Ritual Lore and am coming up blank.”

“A Claiming.” Lord Garrick Ollivander said in his whispery voice as he shifted to study each of the Stones in turn then looked at the spot where the boy disappeared from with his strange opalescent eyes. “A Claiming unlike that which has been seen in centuries. One for the Ages. And we were
“That’s all well and good.” John nodded patiently. “However that doesn’t help the problem at hand…”

“Does it not?” Ollivander mused quietly. “What would that be then?”

“Harry is missing.” Sirius growled out, his eyes taking on a gleaming cast as his Grim form rose in his mind.

“Ah…” The old wandsmith nodded. “I see. You all fear for the lad, and rightly so were the Claiming unsuccessful or Lady Magic displeased with his preparations. However, one thing has long been understood by those of us who have always Served the Houses Magic Blessed above all the others. A true Heir of the Blessed Royal Houses once Claimed for them and by them will be taken to the Ward Stones to fulfill His Duty to Protect Her People.”

“Meaning…?” John shook his head, sometimes being the lone mundane in a pack of magicals was like spending too much time spinning on an office swivel-chair. It did nothing but leave you light-headed and not knowing up from down.

“Skye Palace.” Remus breathed, eyes closing in relief. “He’s been worrying for weeks over how to locate Skye Palace. It’s not anywhere, not in any of the texts or documents or tomes he’s been given access to for tonight. The Ward Stones must be there. It would be the only place secure enough for the Royal Houses to keep them safe.”

“To recap.” John checked that he had the facts straight. “Harry, who just channeled such massive levels of magic I’d be surprise if they didn’t feel it in Australia, and was swaying on his feet from the attempt, was just magically whisked away, alone, to the mythical and legendary Capitol of Avalon. Which no one here or anywhere knows where it is or how to access it.”

“Right…” Sirius closed his eyes and groaned.

“And this is a good thing…?” John’s tone had turned mocking. “How exactly?”

…

He awoke in a strange domed room surrounded by crystals.

Blinking as he sat up, Hadrian lifted one hand to his aching head, his blood pounding away at his skull from the sudden influx of power. He stared stupidly at his bare feet. They didn’t look right. They looked…bigger.

Lowering his hand, he flexed it a few times stretching the perfectly healed scar in a silvery-cream that pulsed with a tinge of residual magic. Raising his other hand as he was finally confident his core would support him, he turned them over quickly back and forth several times staring at his hand in relation to the bonding Cuff that never left his wrist. It was smaller.

No, that wasn’t right.

His hands were bigger.

“What the bloody fuck is going on?” He breathed, staring around in confusion at the thirteen pillars with their dimly-lit crystals. Feeling behind him he reached back and hit a rough stone directly at his back.
Carefully pulling his feet under him he frowned a moment before waving his hand and fashioning a pair of light linen pants covering his nakedness. For a strange cavern located who-knows-where it was surprisingly temperate. Once he was sure he wouldn’t just topple back over like a felled tree – this time possibly seriously damaging himself without help in sight, Hadrian turned in a slow circle studying the room in its entirety.

What finally made it “click” for him was the one thing he hadn’t been able to see before: the rock behind him.

Or more accurately, the big-ass rough-cut diamond with a sword sticking out of it.


At least he finally discovered how he was going to find Skye Palace, he thought fitfully.

The pieces of a puzzle he wasn’t even aware he was trying to solve slid into place.

He was in Avalon.

The Sword was Ancuru, High-Elvish for Bright or Brilliant Magic and was forged for the first King of Avalon after the alliance of Emrys and Pendragon. From its legend that of Excalibur was formed, taking with it the phrase chiseled into the very stone in which it rested: “For If He Be Worthy, Let Him Draw Me From My Rest.” It was both warning and instruction.

No King of Avalon had ever taken the Throne without drawing Ancuru from the diamond it rested in.

Taking a steadying breath, Hadrian stepped forward grasping the hilt with both hands, ignoring the pain caused by the sharpened edges of the grip which sliced new wounds into his hands sending blood dripping onto the diamond below. As the Stone tasted his offering, it began to glow. At first it was as dim as the Ward Stones resting on their pillars that surrounded it then steadily stronger and stronger as the magic in his very blood powered the central Ward Stone of Avalon.

Tugging up sharply, Ancuru came loose in his hand with no more effort than he would use to draw any other sword from a sheath.

Knowing his job wasn’t quite finished, Hadrian walked to the first stone directly North of Ancuru’s Stone and let several drops of his blood fall onto the top. It was an emerald – the Ward for Wales and Ireland. Traveling clockwise which was also East-to-West, he moved from Stone to Stone powering each of the Wards for the Seven Kingdoms as well as another two for their allied nations. The remaining four powered Avalon’s wards and those of their territories that were added after the Kingdoms were allied.

No doubt Unspeakables all over the world had just gotten the shock of their collective lives.

The Wards of Avalon were unlike any others.

Feeling woozy and light-headed, Hadrian followed his instincts, exiting the Ward Chamber deep within the center of Skye Palace and moved steadily until he was able to see the outside world, Ancuru still clapped in his bloodied hand, though it no longer cut him, the sharp edges folding back into the grip once their purpose was complete.

Hadrian blinked as he moved out onto the first balcony he found then fell to his knees with a gasp.

“Well.” He mused with a rasping voice to himself. “I know why they called it Skye Palace now.”
As it took up an entire flipping floating island in the fecking sky!

And it wasn’t the only one.

Hadrian canted his head left and right, resolutely staying safely on the ground, er, floor for the moment.

All around him were floating islands, all filled with buildings and infrastructure and even some that seemed to be made up of nothing but fields or rolling hills.

All were silent, lying dormant and empty until another King took the Throne of Avalon.

It was the biggest secret no one had ever discovered.

The reason why no one could find Avalon was because it wasn’t possible for it to be found. Reaching out with his magical senses, he found the “floor” of the magic. The magic field that supported the dozens of islands and kept them afloat ended about a mile over his head and a quarter mile beneath him. Avalon was completely surrounded by a magical suspension field that mundanes could neither sense nor see and must interfere with their technology without frying it completely.

And that same field worked as a gigantic unplottable Warding structure.

Hidden entirely in plain sight: the legendary Kingdom of Avalon.

Hadrian let out a chuckle as he saw the island pass by over mundane London.

Rising to his feet he leaned on the railing, propping Ancuru next to him.

“Well, shit.” He sighed. “I found it. Now what the hells do I do now?”

“Mipsy can bes helpings, Master.” A piping voice came from behind him.

Looking over his shoulder he spied a mass of House Elves hiding in the shadows of the Palace, peeking around corners and statues and suits of armor to get a look at him.

House Elves.

The best friends of stranded wizards everywhere, he decided with a small grin.

“This should be fun.”

…

Mipsy, who turned out to be the sacrificial lamb the House Elves sent to greet the possibly-deranged new Master and not the Head Elf, popped him into a lushly appointed receiving-room. It wasn’t the Throne room or even one of the “best” receiving rooms for royal guests to Avalon but it was warm, the fire was lit, there was a steaming pot of coffee on the low table, and the larger-than-the-rest armchair was like sinking into a cloud. Since the Elves were delirious with joy over having a new King in the Palace – made even happier when they discovered he had the beginnings of a Household – they’d begun popping in randomly to see him as word spread from the Palace to the surrounding city.

According to the oldest elf Hadrian had ever heard of let alone seen – he was honestly afraid Lop would just fall over dead at any moment – when the Palace and the Wards running it closed after the death of the last King, the House Elves all stayed no matter what Family they were bound to in order to maintain the city. It was a relief considering that even with the best of stasis charms, fields still
needed to be rotated and tended, roofs needed repair, and preservation charms updated. He’d even had a bet going with Sherlock over whether he’d find a ruin or not.

Unsurprisingly Sherlock had won with his assertion that dead or not, no King would let their legacy fall to ruin if there was a way to prevent it.

And one thing they’d all learned with magic – especially Hadrian’s – was if there was a will there was a way.

For the ancient Avalonian Kings apparently that way was House Elves.

Avalon turned out to be completely self-sustaining according to Lop. Since the House Elves had been trained in all areas of making a house or farm run depending on the Family they worked for they were able to teach each other what was needed. The House Elves of Avalon had set up a communal society in the absence of a Master, one that worked shockingly well for them with the magic of Avalon itself sustaining them.

However, Lop was loathe to point out, the longer Avalon went without a King the less magic was available to sustain the Elves.

There hadn’t been an elfling born for over two centuries.

For that alone the Elves would adore him – and his surplus of magic – even if they weren’t bound to his service.

One thing he learned that was surprising was that the Avalon Elves could pop down to the surface of the planet – but that land-elves couldn’t pop up to Avalon.

Another of his ancestors’ protections.

Nor were they capable of making potions and their stores were long depleted so no blood replenisher or other magical remedy for his light-headedness and disorientation with his enlarged body was in the offing until the elves he sent down for his family and Household returned.

He sent Mipsy after his Lord of the Privy Seal.

It was time for an announcement.

…

“I don’t know which to yell at you first over.”

Andromeda’s tone was not pleased as his long-time Healer strode into the room, skirt billowing like a sail in full-wind.

At least she was concerned.

“That you’re ruining what is probably a priceless antique by sprawling there covered in blood and things or that you have a massive sword just idly resting on your lap.”

Or not. Not concerned worked too. As long as she had some potions on her. Hadrian had work to do and little time to do it.

“Why yes, Andy.” He mocked, cracking an eye open to glare at her balefully. “I’m perfectly fine. No, I wasn’t sucked into a magical vortex and dumped onto a cold stone floor after bleeding myself. And no, I didn’t then have to cut myself open again to pull a ruddy sword from a bloody stone and
then use the blood from that to power the wards. I’m just peachy. Do carry on with scolding me because I haven’t managed to find a tub and some soap yet.”

His Healer merely tsked, arching a brow. “Well as you were propped in a chair one would assume you were at least in an acceptable condition.” Flicking her wand, she cast a quick diagnostic the handed him a quartet of phials from the ever-present pack at her hip. “Nothing a few potions and some rest won’t cure, as I had assumed. They’re stronger than your usual,” she warned. “Your new Potions Master,” now he knew he heard tone. “Was quite efficient with getting me supplied previous to the ritual.”

Hadrian shrugged and knocked back the phials. He recognized a muscle-ease, mild pain-reliever, a headache potion, and the fruit of the gods at the moment: a blood replenisher.

“Pepper up?”

“I said rest, Hadrian.” Andromeda propped her fists on her hips. “Rest.”

“Rest, Hadrian.” The young man mimicked. “Never mind that you have to meet with your Lord of the Privy Seal, Hadrian. Just rest Hadrian. Or the half a dozen other things that need to be done before dawn. Rest.”

“Tone.”

“King.” Hadrian arched a brow and lifted the sword, jabbing it point-up towards the ceiling in a lackadaisical motion. “Got the pretty and everything.”

Growling low in her throat, she reached into the bag and all but flung the phial at him, Hadrian nipping it out of the air with the reflexes of a trained fighter.

“I’m worried about the magical growth spurt, Harry.” Andromeda told him seriously. “That had the potential to put a serious strain on your magical core and your internal organs. They’re just not meant to go through what happened tonight. You need rest and observation to head off any potential problems. I’ll give you two hours and then I want you passed out in wherever your new bedroom in this place is.” Andromeda looked around the room. “I’ve only seen the foyer and the path here, your elf Whimsy was quite insistent.”

As if Andromeda wouldn’t have marched right to his side, elf or no.

“A couple hours is all I need.” Hadrian soothed her gently. “I just have to head off the worst of the coming storm before I do anything else. People need sworn into my service, arrests need made, and several press statements need to go out. Everything else can wait for the morrow.” He looked out at the darkening sky – a tell-tale sign that the night was fading fast. “Or the afternoon.”

The arrests were one of the main issues. Lady Amelia had to be sworn in so she can sign the orders along with himself and Sirius as High Constable. He wanted his hands on a few people before they can disappear into their hidey-holes once the turnover of power is announced.

High Treason wasn’t something Hadrian could afford to dick-around with. Not at the onset of his rule. His coronation wasn’t for two years, but that was just so he had time to get used to the position and his people had time to plan it.

The moment Ancuru left the Stone, Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon was King.

Now he had to act like one.
Knocking back the Pepper-Up he rose to his new height – an astonishing five-two – four inches taller than he’d been that morning and putting him in the ninety-fifth percentile for boys his age, and gave Andy a buss on the cheek and a rakish grin, propping Ancuru on his shoulder before sauntering from the room.

“Surely you’re not going to run around with that thing all the time!” She shouted at his back.

“I don’t know.” He called back cheerfully. “It does make a statement…”

The meeting with Lucius was quick-and-dirty.

Thanks to the draft releases Hadrian had given him, the master of Image knew exactly what sort of tone the new King was looking for and had already prepared something for each of the key publications that would provide it. A quick picture taken of Ancuru laid out on a rich rosewood table with only a view of Hadrian’s hand – signet of Avalon in place on his left middle finger and his Cuff in full view – provided a visual confirmation of the story without revealing the face behind the revived Kingdom.

Lord Ragnarok had removed the signet Rings for Hadrian’s Houses. The new King was beyond pleased when his Lord High Steward thrust the box at him and gruffly told him to “put them on, they’re yours now.” The Royal Houses merged together when he slid them on his left middle finger, leaving only the Crest of Avalon showing though he could change it to show any of them at will. The same happened with the non-Royal houses on his right-middle-finger only showing his personal Crest that Marked his Lord of the Privy Seal and his Potions Master instead of that of Avalon.

Needless to say, it was the Crest of Avalon Lucius wanted highlighted in the picture, along with the easily-recognizable Sword.

The only other blade in magical history that neared Ancuru’s fame was that of Godric Gryffindor though it had belonged to his Royal House long before it came into the hand of the most-famed of the Lions.

Photo and minute corrections to the press releases in hand – and with a spring in his step as he’d won an argument over what to do with the Witch Weekly spread – Lucius was able to port-key back to his home courtesy of his new pendant that doubled as the sign of his Office. Made of rose gold to signify his status as a Lord of an Aged and Noble House, the Crest of Avalon was engraved on the face of the peach-sized medallion in mithril. It was one of a set that was given to each of the Privy Council as they were sworn into their positions though one remained empty for now. Each had the Crest of Avalon engraved in mithril with the face and chain of the medallion worked in the metal of their status.

All but Goblin Ragnok who had no use for such a thing, preferring instead a simple leather band with the two-way port-key anchored to a plain onyx cabochon.

Hadrian gave great thanks to Lady Magic that the two-way port-keys were already fashioned, simply needing to be keyed to the holder with a drop of their blood. The blood also acted as a test of their status, the plain-silver chains and medallions each morphing into the metal associated with their House. And for once that night, he wasn’t the one who had to bleed.

His newly-appointed Lord High Constable (Sirius) and Lord High Justice (Lady Bones) made quick work of signing the arrest warrants that Hadrian then sealed with the Crest of Avalon before handing the handful of parchments to McG to have the Guard around them up and make them guests of the
Realm in the bowels of Snowdon Castle.

Avalon had once used Azkaban Prison as both prison and jail until it was turned over to the Ministry. After hearing Sirius’s nightmares as a young child – a problem even now years later and with Mind Healing – Hadrian would rather tear the place down stone-by-stone than suffer anyone to play victim and lunch to Dementors.

Finished with his “short” list, he stumbled his way through the halls towards where he just knew his quarters were. Score one for inherited memory, he thought sleepily to himself. McG trailed along behind him, not entirely trusting that his young King would make it there upright.

The Scot wasn’t far off.

No sooner had he pushed through the door than he was face-down on the fluffy comforter of his bed, using what he had left in his reserves to pop over.

McG hadn’t even closed the door before he could hear snores coming from the weary form on the bed.

…

Edited 3 February 2016 minor errors fixed.
Wills made his way on Silenced feet through the elegant marble-and-gemstone halls of Skye Palace. *Elegant* was the only way to describe it, even his parents – who had swung between fighting with each other and over him being magically bonded to a *male* for the rest of his life – had found nothing critical to say about the capitol of Avalon when the House Elves had arrived for them early that morning. The whole family was here, staying in apartments that were more lavishly appointed than their own at Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace. Originally it was just supposed to be himself, Kings, Harry, and his parents but one of the elves had given Kings a letter and the next thing Wills knew his Grandparents were bustling into the room.

Any pique from the Queen was averted as soon as she saw her rooms.

Hadrian had given them an entire *wing* of his palace for their stay. Though Wills’s room was by far the nicest – something his father had grumbled over being a slight against him and his Queen but was silenced with the reminder that of them all only *Wills* had real status in Avalon. The rest of them were treated with the same courtesy was Wills because they were his family, nothing more.

His assigned personal-elf Mipsy, another special privilege of being Lord Nimue and Rian’s betrothed, had told him that otherwise when the Queen came for business she would’ve been in a public guest wing with the “other muggleses”. Her Royal accommodations were only Royal because she was *his* grandmother. It was a boggling twist to his world. Everything had always been the other way around. Special treatment provided because of who his grandmother and father were, not who Wills was.

He had to admit it felt *nice*. Being highly valued for himself instead of his family. Part of it was due to his House but that could’ve been anyone besides him. Magic *chose* him as the Lord of Nimue. And that just felt *good*, that Magic felt him worthy of leading a House as *him* and not “Prince William of Wales.”

Mipsy was also the reason he was now creeping through the halls. Kings had “warned” him that the Wards were so strong that there was no possible way for the Ministry of Magic to pick up his magic.
use here. After trying futilely to get some more sleep, he’d called for the lively little elf and asked her what Rian was up to.

Discovering that he was sleeping in the King’s Tower – a massive spear-like structure that made the highest point of the palace from what he remembered of the mini-tour they were given – he’d grabbed the shrunken gift box and Silenced his shoes before venturing out into the halls.

Rian had said he didn’t need to get him anything in return for the gobstone and wizarding chess sets but that didn’t feel right.

It wasn’t a matter of propriety – the excuse he’d used on his mother when she didn’t want to allow him to go shopping – but of what his magic was telling him.

Wills’s magic had always been like a gentle guide, especially with his magical tutoring. At least with some things. Charms his magic helped bunches with. He just got it. Transfiguration on the other hand…not his best subject.

According to Mrs. Tonks that was because most witches and wizards were predisposed to certain magics. They came easier, were easier to learn and understand. A “magical prodigy” was a magical person who had no predisposition. Those with a rich magical heritage were more likely to be magical prodigies than a person with a narrow heritage because their family magics and the instinctual knowledge that sometimes came with it had a broader spectrum to work from.

Along with the Nimue predisposition to Charms, he also had a good head for Herbology and potion making, leading Andromeda to the conclusion that perhaps he had the blood of one of the Healing families somewhere in his line.

A supposition they’d proven true when he’d gained access to the Family Vault and discovered that the last Nimue Lord before him had a Pevensie mother – a family that rose to the nobility as the official Healers of the Royal House of Pendragon.

Wills had chuckled about that.

His was definitely a Royal Marriage – his spouse was even his distant cousin.

Very, very distant.

But then from what had been explained regarding Rian’s bloodlines…he was related to just about everyone.

At least who were among the Noble Families of Avalon.

Outside of that not as much but his blueblood was so mixed his Bonded was going to have to be careful with who he wed within the Nobles of Avalon.

He was spotted at last by Remus of all people, sitting in a comfortable-looking chair with its back to the wall and facing the double doors that led to the King’s Tower, a book spread open on his knee.

“Lost, your Grace?” The golden-eyed man gave the young Lord his rightful honorific as his cub’s Bonded. Lady Maggie would scold and tell them Wills wasn’t supposed to be referred to as such until after the wedding. But as far as the Alpha wolf was concerned the only difference was a display for the public and a change in rooms.

The boys were bonded. William deserved the respect that came with it.
Wills gave him what his mother called his “charming” grin.

“No,” he said holding up the shrunken gift. “Have a present for Hadrian and I know the only chance I’m going to get to talk to him today once he wakes up is at meals. Wanted to at least drop this off before he’s caught up in Kingdom business for the next week.”

A week was the estimate he pried out of his Grandmother’s Mr. Holmes. That was how long his grandmother’s visit was supposed to last. He was supposed to be able to stay until the last week of August so he could leave and get ready for school to start up. With Rian busy getting the running of the Kingdom launched, he would mostly be getting to know Rian’s family and sneaking games of Snap with his Betrothed. If he wanted to give his gift to Rian, today before the insanity really began was his best shot.

Remus hummed non-committedly, tapping one finger on the open page of his book. Technically watching for Harry to surface was a job for the Guard but…he was hiding. As Lord Protector there really wasn’t much he could do until some of Hadrian’s meetings with the various Ministries happened.

Until his cub got done cherry-picking the best of the best from the Auror and Hit Wizard ranks from the different territories to create the standing-force the Lord Protector was in charge of…he really didn’t have a job since the Wards were powered by Hadrian himself and placing new ones required Hadrian’s approval. The office of Lord Protector was equal parts Warding and maintaining a fighting force. Neither of which was on the table at the moment.

That didn’t stop Sherrinford as the Lord High Chancellor from bothering him about it.

He could in turn go be a bother to McG as the Captain of the Guard since his position and the Guards they’d acquired were part of the Protectorate…but that wouldn’t be a good idea unless he fancied running around on four-paws after the Captain transfigured him into a wolf – the man’s running threat if bothered again.

Besides that McG knew more about running a Guard than Remus could learn in a lifetime.

Hence the sitting outside the Tower door…hiding.

“Go on up.” He sighed. “But if he hexes your eyebrows off for waking him don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Okay.” Wills shrugged. Since he wasn’t hauling his Bonded out of bed for training, meditation, or lessons, he figured he would be alright. For insurance though…

“Mipsy,” he called as he started climbing the stairs. “Breakfast for two in…wherever is set up for breakfast in the King’s Tower. With coffee. Lots and lots of coffee. And chocolate.” He added the last after thinking a moment.

Better safe than sorry.

The little elf nodded and popped away.

William climbed higher and higher, gaining peeks into floors decorated with a simple comfort and elegance that made the Palace surrounding him somehow change from a massive statement of magical and dynastic power into a place he would be perfectly happy to spend a Sunday afternoon playing Snap or Chess with his betrothed.

Outside the Tower the walls were made of solid cream marble ribboned with gemstone rivers in the
sparkling majesty of white diamond and turquoise, emerald beryl and tourmaline. More gems than he knew the names of created sparkling designs and intricate knotwork within the very foundations of the Palace. He stopped abruptly as something ‘clicked’ then gave a laugh as he continued his climb.

It was a focus.

Skye Palace was a massive focus.

Many people thought Godric Gryffindor mad when he used the stones from his own House’s ancient Castle in the building of Hogwarts. Generation after generation of his family had bled, and loved, and used magic freely within the confines of the stones, charging them with ambient power before the foundations of the school were even laid. In modern times many felt that Hogwarts had gained a kind of sentience from all the magic cast with the walls since its founding. Those who knew thought it was rather both.

Why Gryffindor tore down his abandoned family castle and rebuilt it beside the Forbidden Forest was now answered – at least to Wills.

What did Gryffindor need with a drafty castle when his real home was an unassailable fortress that was capable of being used to cast magic with devastating effect?

That also explained how the Wards were still functioning and Avalon was still safely floating in its magical field. Skye Palace was the giant battery that made the Wards strong and the city fly. It was the creation of a mad, impossible genius.

At least Wills knew Rian came by his quirks honestly.

Look at what his Family had done.

And what a legacy to try and live up to.

Jaw set, Wills at last made it to where the Bond told him Rian was, eyes widening a bit at the sheer size of both the room and the bed. Twenty people could sleep in that thing and not have to touch – unless they wanted to. Wills blushed bright red at the thought before banishing it.

Puberty had turned into the worst thing ever after meeting his Bonded and having to kiss him.

At least before his hormones didn’t have anyone real to fixate on. Just your standard athletes and supermodels and actors/actresses.

Now…

He was too young to deal with now.

Setting the box on a wide bench set at the foot of the monstrous bed, he took out his wand – vine and black unicorn hair, twelve inches even and moderately flexible custom-made by Lord Ollivander – the black unicorn tail-hair made for a more powerful wand than unicorn tended to provide, and resized the box, with a flick he freshened the slightly-squashed bow before giving a short nod.

A grumble came from Hadrian before he cracked an eye open and rolled to his side to look at the intruder who’d set off the alert ward on the last stair landing.

“Wills?” He asked in a sleep-fogged voice, squinting against the light-filled room.
“Good morning Rian.” Wills gave him a bright smile.

“What’re you doin’ ‘ere?” Hadrian wondered around a yawn before his brain kicked-in at the smell of coffee, his sleepy-green-eyes shooting over to the small round breakfast table sitting off in widowed alcove, a shining silver breakfast service the origin of the life-giving smell.

“Well Rian,” Wills explained indulgently as he hopped up next to the now-sitting King. “We were all whisked away from Buckingham Palace this morning by a troop of house elves. Including Grandmother for some reason that is yet-to-be-explained-to-me. Everyone else pretty much crashed once we were shown our rooms but I wanted to come surprise you.” He waved a hand at the box and the breakfast. “I even brought goodies…though Mipsy is responsible for the food and coffee, I just asked for it.”

Hadrian gave him a crooked smile before standing at his prompting tug and moving to the table. Inhaling a cup of caffeinated goodness he gave his bonded a genuine grin then said: “I love that elf.”

Wills gasped dramatically and shoved his shoulder lightly with his own, not spilling a drop of his own tea in the process.

The two young Lords dug into the full-English, William sticking to his tea while after a cup of coffee Hadrian switched to the chocolate, not wanting to fry his brain-cells on the caffeine before his meetings. They mostly chatted lightly as they filled their stomachs, Wills commiserating over the insanity of Hadrian’s guardians then Hadrian returning the favor – along with giving an unwanted apology – over William’s battling parents.

“It’s not your fault, Rian.” Wills told him with an adult sigh. “They were already bickering over my being magical in the first place – Father was never really too pleased over the issues it could cause the Monarchy – and other things. That you’re a boy and not a girl isn’t something you could help and isn’t the real issue anyway. So don’t apologize for making things difficult between my parents.”

His bonded agreed once he saw how much the topic was hurting the older boy. Changing the subject as their finished plates were whisked away by the elves, leaving only fresh pots of tea and chocolate in their wake, Hadrian nearly bounced over to the tempting box. All but dancing, he waited for Wills to join him and waved indulgently to the gift before tearing off the bow and paper and tossing the top over his shoulder.

“Excited Rian?” Wills laughed.

“Presents!” Hadrian gave him a big grin. “Presents are a serious business. Especially surprise presents. Those are the best kind.”

“I know you said I didn’t need or have to.” William gave him a quick side-hug before freeing his bonded to explore the various brightly-packaged contents of the box. “But I wanted to.”

Hadrian made an exclaiming sound as he lifted the packages one by one from their places.

William had gotten him a wide assortment of mundane puzzle games and mechanical toys. Things he’d mentioned he liked to tinker with in one of their letters. They helped him clear his mind and unwind from long days of lessons and politics.

Especially the dreaded “language days” he still had to put up with. Now that he was fluent in all the languages of Avalon Sherrinford had him working on those of his most important allies. Before he’d hated German, then Welsh. After learning both he had to say…not that bad compared to Japanese and Ancient Egyptian and Arabic.
The box had held several puzzles from the Perplexus line, circuit boards, a Rubix cube, and even an erector set.

It was once again a perfect reciprocal gift from his own of gobstones and wizarding chess.

“This is brilliant, Wills.” Hadrian said as they sat on the floor surrounded by the games and toys. “Thank you.”

Leaning over he gave his bonded a quick peck on the cheek, blushing lightly.

Despite the last two months of correspondence, this still was only the second time they’d met. He just wasn’t comfortable doing anything else, even though traditionally an actual kiss was the proper “thanks” for a Courting gift following a betrothal. It wasn’t like there was anyone there watching them from the shadows and grading them on their Courting Etiquette.

Thank Merlin.

Having an audience for their Bonding Kiss had been bad enough.

William finally addressed the hippogriff in the room.

“So…” He said looking over at the sword that was apparently unwilling to be farther than five feet away from Hadrian. At the moment it was propped up against the side of the massive bed in a basilisk-hide sheath that had an over-the-shoulder harness attached. The strap of the harness was embossed in mithril with the dual Crests of Avalon and Rian’s personal Crest. Hadrian in his cotton pajama bottoms with flying snitches and Puddlemere United top wasn’t exactly dressed to have it holstered at his back.

“How much did you geek-out over having to King-Arthur Excalibur over there out of the Stone?”

Hadrian collapsed in giggles onto the plush Aubusson green-and-blue rug.

“So much geeking-out on the inside.” He finally admitted. “On the outside I was exhausted from the Claiming, bleeding, and trying to find the energy after suddenly gaining four inches to not fall on my arse.”

William nodded sagely and challenged his bonded to a game of Snap.

…

Daily Prophet Headline: August 1<sup>st</sup> 1991:

_Corruption! Murder! Theft! Embezzlement! In the Ministry:_

_Is There Nothing Fudge Won’t Do?_

_For more the full list of charges – and those accused, See Page 2_

Below the Fold:

_Head of the DMLE Lady Amelia Bones Unveils Anti-Corruption Task Force!_

_Led by Former Master Auror: The Infamous Sirius Black!_

Full Story Page 6
Hadrian walked out of his “morning” planning meeting of the full Privy Council. With only one seat left open, he was able to get reports from the whole council at once instead of having to receive it piecemeal throughout the day. Everyone whose name made his list was in custody and awaiting charges. Lucius had so far proven his worth with the media-blitz that morning.

Everyone in the Wizarding World was up in arms over the British Ministry’s underhanded dealings with arrests ranging from the Minister himself to a lowly file clerk in the muggleborn registration office.

And not a word to be found out of place before the official announcement of Avalon’s return.

For a very-first Privy Council meeting it couldn’t have gone better. And thanks to his wake-up call from Wills he was actually in a good mood and revved to work instead of dreadfully the slog through to the end of this first week. While the first two days were vital to cementing his public image and control over the Empire of Avalon, really he had to go full-tilt until the first week was out. It would take at least that long or even longer for the delegations from Avalon’s closest allies Egypt and Japan to arrive and the treaties to be renewed.

Plus dealing with the Ministers, Presidents, and Department of Magic heads who thought that as they’d broken with Britain they were sovereign nations.

It didn’t quite work that way. Not with Avalon and the protections it placed over its territories. In some cases it was as simple as signing a piece of paper to officially remove them from the Empire now that there was a King to take it on. Others…not so much.

That and dealing with the mundane governments were slated to be the biggest headaches. Though with his betrothal at least he wouldn’t have to fight with Britain too hard. He didn’t expect to just get his way because of who he was going to marry but at least with Britain it was as much in their best interest as it was his for them to come to an amicable agreement.

The trials of those in the holding cells could wait until Amelia and Sirius were finished with compiling the official records and reports that went along with the evidence and confessions Siri and Mycroft had been years unearthing and gathering which could take months or more.

Next on his docket for the day was the meetings with the various mundane heads of state for Avalon’s territories.

For this meeting he didn’t need the full Council. His secretary Russell was shadowing him along with his new bodyguard Lionel Collins, a younger son of an Honorable House. All together Mycroft and Gawain had selected a starting rotation of twenty-one Aurors and Hit Wizards to make up the Royal Guard under McG and Remus. Lionel was one of the few Englishmen to make the cut and with the magical heads of state next on the list, Hadrian felt it would be better not to advertise he’d been poaching personnel before he took Ancuru from its resting place.

He was dressed like a young monarch should be: sumptuously. Dragon-hide trousers in the matte-black of a Hungarian Horntail was topped by a sleeveless Queen-acromantula silk tunic in emerald green. Overtop of the tunic were matching Horntail dueling robes that clung close to his chest before flaring out over his hips in stiff curtains that made for easy movement in a fight or duel – again sleeveless. Ancuru in its embellished sheath was over his shoulder and his chain of Office made of mithril with the alternating gems and mithril/platinum/gold and single rose gold crests.

His hair was pulled back in an elegant knot and his basilisk hide boots were polished to a high shine,
House rings in place and his Cuff gleaming around his wrist.

Hadrian cut an impressive figure.

Which was exactly what Lucius had been after, using Lady Maggie’s expertise to take photo after photo of the young King, though for the photos he’d also been adorned with a discrete mithril circlet with an oval emerald cabochon set in the center of his forehead. He’d also taken some with Hadrian upon the throne, astride a Pegasus, and dueling an invisible opponent with Ancuru. Lucius was determined that the witches of Avalon should be completely in love with their King.

A stratagem that based on observing the young King melt the stoicism right off of Amelia Bones’s face, had a high chance of working.

When Hadrian had finished the shoot between morning tea and meeting the Council, he could’ve sworn he saw his Lord of the Privy Seal rubbing his hands together in glee.

At least it was better than the annoyed expression he’d maintained through tea and the beginning of the shoot after Hadrian adamantly refused to have William join him for some “couples” poses. There wasn’t much even a King could do about securing the privacy of their family, but he didn’t have to throw his future consort headlong into the mess. It wasn’t the first minor scuffle he’d had with the Malfoy Lord over how to manage the press and public but it was the first that he’d refused to yield even an inch to the older man, no matter how persuasive his arguments became.

William was off limits until the Lord of Nimue himself declared otherwise or Hadrian’s Lordship Ball, whichever came first.

Striding confidently into the large conference room where the mundane heads of state were waiting on him; Russell, Lionel, Siger and Mycroft at his side, he greeted them.

“Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen and thank you for your patience this morning.” He smoothly sat down in the chair at the head of the table Lionel pulled out for him with a nod of thanks for the larger man. “Now let us get down to business.”

“What is going on?” The Premier of the Soviet Union demanded irately in his native language. “Where is the Premier of Magic? Who is this…child?” He all but spat.

Sherrinford who as Lord High Chancellor had gone ahead to ensure all the parties required were present, obligingly translated, not letting on that his former Ward could understand the Premier. The Soviet Union was in trouble both from within and without. If their magical community withdrew from helping support their mundane counterparts it could very well dissolve altogether.

“Your various magical counterparts are currently enjoying the hospitality of Avalon and are set to answer questions of their own with myself directly after this meeting.” Hadrian said mildly, showing no discomfort at the Soviet Premier’s behavior. “As for what is going on, it’s simple. Many of you are in direct violation of treaties between your mundane governments and their magical counterparts and the Empire of Avalon upon whose land and with whose permission your countries exist as a sovereign state. As for who I am,” he gave a glittering smile that was all teeth. “My name is Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon, Holder of the Throne of the Empire of Avalon and Lord of all Her Territories. Who are you, sir?”

Elizabeth looked on in stoic pride as her almost-grandson put the overblown politician in place. Though she was concerned by how blanketing his statement was over treaty violations. As far as she knew the United Kingdoms were having no issues with the British Ministry of Magic over treaty disputes.
Taking Hadrian’s question as permission, Mycroft and Siger proceeded to introduce him to the Prime Minister of France, the Premier of the Soviet Union, the Prime Minister of the U.K., the Queen of England who needed no introduction, the President of the United States of America, the Prime Minister of Canada, the Prime Minister of the Republic of India, and various other heads of state. Many of whom until that moment, had no idea their country had “set up shop” inside the borders of a magical Empire.

Rising to his feet amid the cacophony that followed as the various politicians and leaders bellowed both at each other – many of them weren’t friends any more than their countries were – and at the Holmes men, ignoring Hadrian altogether.

That was until he moved to Elizabeth’s side, and bowed accepting her hand, greeting her specially.

“Your Majesty.” The formerly cold voice was perceptively warm and welcoming. “It is wonderful to see you again, no matter the occasion. We do hope you are enjoying your apartment? William told me they were quite nice.”

The canny monarch returned his warmth with a genuine smile and a buss to his cheek after she waved him down.

“Always a pleasure to see you Hadrian.” She squeezed his hand. “And my rooms are lovely as I’m sure my grandson was accurate in his description. Have you met Our current Prime Minister?”

“We have not, would you deign to introduce Us, Our dear and gracious Lady?” He twitted her relentlessly.

“Of course, Your Grace.” Turning she waved an elegant hand, her PM conveniently both close and not participating in the contretemps with the other politicians. Though they had grown silent at the byplay between the two Royals. “King Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon, King and Lord of the Empire of Avalon, We would like you to meet the Right Honorable Prime Minister John Major. John this is King Hadrian.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance Prime Minister.” Hadrian smiled charmingly, holding out his hand to shake that of the older statesman. “Mycroft and Siger speak well of you.”

Thank you, Your Grace.” The polished statesman echoed the honorific he’d heard used by her Majesty.

“We do hope you find your stay pleasant here.” Hadrian continued, blithely ignoring the others in the room to focus on the British powers. He already had the alliance of the Royal House and the true British Government – past and present. All he needed was the PM and he’d have the hat-trick in the bag. “Much more comfortable than a man in a lime-green bowler hat tumbling out of your fireplace, don’t you agree?”

“Quite, young man.” PM Major chuckled lightly. “My room was most excellent and the food without compare.”

“Excellent.” Hadrian turned to address the room at large. “We do value and take pride in Our hospitality in Avalon.”

“Perhaps.” The heavy twang of the sitting U.S. President rang through the air. “We could continue the purpose for this meeting? I would like to be able to return to Washington at some point before the Mrs. Calls out the Marines.”

“Just so.” Hadrian led Elizabeth to a seat of honor at his left-hand, across from Sherrinford and
boxed in by Mycroft and Siger. He wasn’t taking chances with the family of his betrothed. “As We were saying. Many of you are here for no more reason than operating a sovereign state – however unknowingly – within Our Borders. In many cases this can be resolved with a few signatures being an issue of paperwork. However,” he tone grew stern. “Avalon will not simply be ceding rights to Our Lands. Particularly in places where we have made improvements and utilized Our proprietary security Wards to ensure the safety of Our Lands and Our People.”

“Shall we begin?” Mycroft asked rhetorically, flipping open a file and signaling for the others to do the same. “In the interest of not wasting anyone’s time we shall begin with the ‘signature states’ as we’ve called them. They will be officially stricken from the rolls of the Empire upon signatures from the King of Avalon and the Head of State of the countries in question they are: . . .”

Once the “signature states” had been taken care of and the Heads escorted back to their countries under Vow of Secrecy, mainly a score of countries that were former British colonies or protectorates who hadn’t received official entry into Avalon in the first place without a sitting King, they continued with the actual business of the day.

“Mr. President.” Hadrian folded his hand in front of him and stared down at the Texan. “The United States is in a singularly unique position as far as the magical community goes. You have only five magical communities in all of the United States: Seattle, Salem Mass., New Orleans, Honolulu, and Sioux Falls South Dakota. As far as education goes there are only two internationally-accredited schools: Merlin Academy of Magic in Seattle and the Salem Witches’ Institute in Salem. There is no independent magical governance to speak of with any issues with magical citizens or creatures being handled by independent contractors or the American Department of Applied Magic. This leaves Us in a difficult position. Our Wards protect your country Mr. President, placed there before your Revolution. By the standards of Avalon we have two choices: being added to the Empire as a protectorate state or an alliance.”

Mycroft jumped in after Hadrian sat back to allow the President to mull that over. The U.S. had just gotten out of an intense military operation in Iraq and Kuwait. The last thing they needed was to get into a pissing match with Avalon. And the President knew it.

“The preferred resolution is a combination of the two.” The British Government handed over a document that laid out the plan before explaining it. “The magical citizens of the United States become dual-citizens of America and Avalon. They’ll be able to attend our schools, live in our or your lands, and work within any Avalonian country without having to attain a visa or immigrate. In addition the A.D.A.M. or Adam will be able to call upon Avalon if there is ever a need such as a magical threat the magical police in a given magical community are unable to manage alone. Avalon will not however provide anything more in terms of men or protection than that which their formal allies enjoy: usage of the Avalonian Ward system.”

“What is so special about this Warding system?” The President asked. “It seems to be at the core of the issue but I haven’t heard an explanation for how it works.”

“At full strength which with my Claiming of the Throne they are?” Hadrian arched a brow. “Hiroshima and Nagasaki never would’ve happened. They can block any foreign threat be it physical or magical within their borders and any strike against a magical community from within or without. They are as perfect as a warding system can be. And they’re powered by Our magic and Our blood.”

“That is why Avalon as an Empire does not allow an unaffiliated country to possess those wards, Mr. President.” Siger Holmes leaned forward and tapped one finger sharply. “And why they are the
sticking point of these negotiations.”

…

Hashing out an agreement with the American President took another hour, bringing them nearly to tea time.

Leaning over to whisper in the ear of Mycroft, Hadrian suggested they divide and conquer for the rest of the mundane leaders. Mycroft would tackle the Soviet Premier since they were the biggest offenders as far as treaty violations went and the man had proven over and over again to be disagreeable. Hadrian simply didn’t yet have the patience to deal with him.

Maybe if he was lucky he’d get deposed soon and a more reasonable regime would be installed.

A King could hope.

With Hadrian pissed at the Soviets over all things nuclear: testing, waste disposal, the Chernobyl disaster; having the level-headed and pragmatic Mycroft deal with them was a good plan.

Canada was simple: they’d never endured a magical separation of government and were in compliance with the magical-mundane treaty so there were no problems to sort beyond the new change in leadership.

France was similar though with a few issues regarding an income tax the mundane had placed on their mundane-born magicals and an issue of territorial encroachment on a veela colony in Southern France.

India was a mess.

There was no other way to put it.

Thankfully that was the problem of the Indian Minister of Magic and not Hadrian.

By the time he came to Britain, the room had been cleared and Hadrian and Siger sat down to tea with Her Majesty and PM Major, Sherrinford off to grab the Indian MoM and get him to deal with his mundane counterpart while Mycroft was at loggerheads with Russia’s mundane Premier.

“You’ve handled yourself well today, Hadrian.” Elizabeth sipped daintily from her cup. “I find myself hopeful for the continuing prosperity of Britain with you and my Grandson at the helm someday.”

“Majesty?” PM Major asked, eyes flicking between the Royals. He’d been itching to get the answers behind their ease with each other since the beginning of the day.

Hadrian smiled into his cup and nibbled on a chocolate tea cake as Her Majesty explained the unique relationship between the future King of England and the King of Avalon.

John Major nearly choked on his no-cream, no-sugar, just-lemon tea.

“I would suggest.” Hadrian gave a little smirk. “That legalization of same-sex marriage become a priority Mr. Major. Unless England wants a King who lives in Sin with his male lover.”

…

Evening Special Edition Headline of the Daily Prophet and all known Wizarding Publications:
The special editions of the papers hit shelves and readers’ homes at precisely seven o’clock meridian-standard time. For those ahead, that meant they’d receive their copies with their morning paper. The Wizarding World was on tenterhooks, waiting for what the papers would say next…

“Gentlemen and Lady.” Hadrian nodded to his Lord High Justice Amelia Bones who was sitting in on Hadrian’s first meeting with the magical Heads of State of his territories. He’s informed her that morning that until the elections on the Winter Solstice she was Interim Minister. “We have a problem on our hands…”

Hadrian groaned into his pillow that night, feeling like he’d run a gauntlet.

To his shock – or lack thereof – the mundane heads of state were with only two exceptions were much, much easier to deal with than their magical counterparts.

Probably because while their governments operated on his land, they weren’t controlled directly by him.

The magical ones were – or were supposed to be.

It was one thing retooling a treaty that had been in place for centuries or even forming a new one like the agreement he’d made with the U.S. President.

Walking in and basically saying “Hi, I’m eleven and I’m your new boss,” was beyond difficult.

Thankfully with Britain nullified because of wide-ranging stupidity, he was able to focus and take his time with the others. That didn’t mean he was looking forward to several days of long, boring meetings that ping-ponged between the two holdouts on the mundane side and the passel of pricks on the magical one. Though the French Minister Delacour had been surprisingly pleasant considering how the French had been treated by the British Ministry over the years.

All he wanted was to sleep for the next two days straight and recover from his first gauntlet as King.

But he’s King.

And there was no time for him to recover.
As it was he needed to peel himself off the bed, clean up, and then present himself for a State Dinner including the pricks from the Ministries and the mundane holdouts along with his Council, some of his Household, and Wills’s family.

Joy.

Though if it let out quick enough he might have time to play a round of Snap with his betrothed before passing out and doing it all over again tomorrow.

It was a fool’s hope with all the politicians at the dinner, but it was what actually got him off the bed so he was going with it.

…

Morning Headlines of the Daily Prophet, August 2nd 1991:

Under The Axe: Former Minister Fudge

To Be Executed for High Treason

(Picture of a bewildered-looking Fudge and his bowler)

Full Story Pages 2-4!

Below the Fold:

Former Head of the DMLE Bartemious Crouch Charged!

Murder of Elaine Crouch Uncovered!

Assisting with an Escape from Azkaban!

Use of the Imperious!

(Picture of the Crouches before Barty Jr.’s Trial)

Full Story Pages 5-9!

…

Witch Weekly Special Edition! All About Harry!

Or Should We Say Hadrian!

New King of Avalon Subject to Last of Line Laws!

Hadrian Forced to Take Thirteen Consorts!

Meet the Hunky Heartthrob, Rich in Heritage!

…

Hadrian leveled a Look at his Lord of the Privy Seal over the “Hunky Heartthrob” line.

“I had nothing to do with that.” Lucius held up his hands in surrender. “I gave them the official release that we’d discussed and the pictures we took. They printed the official release on the back
“With some help, I’m sure.” Hadrian rolled his eyes, flipping through page after glossy page all featuring his features. “Basically every picture I sat for is in this rag.”

He tossed it at Sirius’s laughing head, beaning the animagus right in the forehead and ignoring “Oi!” the man shouted down the table.

Only part of his Council was present along with Wills as they would be taking their meals together while he was in residence.

So there wasn’t really anyone to scold him for trying to brain his annoying godfather and Lord High Constable with a glorified gossip rag.

Though Siger did look at him once in disapproval…mainly to keep in the habit.

…

Daily Prophet Special Evening Edition

Reforms Underway!

Interim Minister Lady Amelia Bones Takes On A Ministry In Shambles!

Arrests, Embezzlement, and Scandal

Can Even The Stalwart Head of the DMLE Fix the Ministry?

The Story and Our Take Starts on Page 2

…

Daily Prophet Headlines August 3rd 1991:

King Hadrian…Abused?

Former Muggle Guardians Charged!

Abuse, Neglect, Theft, and Attempted Murder!

Placed by Headmaster Albus Dumbledore with abusive guardians, what was the Headmaster thinking?

And what was there to gain?

Our thoughts and the Story begins on Page 2

(Picture of harried Dumbledore)

Below the Fold:

King Hadrian Announces Child Protection Decree!

(Picture from Press Conference)

Full Story Page 5
Late on August Second, Hadrian sent Lucius a disgusted look as he peeked from his hiding spot behind a curtain at Malfoy Manor. They would have had the upcoming announcement and press conference at the Ministry but it was a hive of activity as Amelia began putting it in order after Hadrian had thoroughly cleaned it out in no small part thanks to the blonde wizard at his side. Lucius and Severus had put their collective heads together sometime the day before and handed over a comprehensive list of every Death Eater they were aware of that had either escaped justice or slipped through the net following the war.

Hadrian had immediately handed it over to Siri to be crosschecked against those they’d already charged and had additional warrants drawn up against those that were merely under suspicion. With the dangerous duo’s testimony, they had reasonable cause for searches and seizures of accounts and property. Poaching them from Voldemort was turning out to have been a stroke of genius.

If he did say so himself.

But this press conference idea was going to drive him mental.

It was exactly the sort of thing he despised.

Not so much the explaining things and talking to the press part. No he knew that came with the territory. It was that so much of it was out of his control. Some of those reporters were known for being rabid and he didn’t have the long-term relationship with them Lucius used to constantly manipulate them.

Which since he was about to go out there and tell the world about how he got the shit kicked out of him as a small child by a pair of mundanes and then follow that up with announcing their arrest and the Child Protection Decree…he could really, really use some control over the situation.

Control that was missing since without a Chatelaine installed he had no one to open up and inspect his residences for events like this.

He really, really needed to make time to swear in the Chatelaines once he’s convinced the Head he’d selected to actually take the job.

It was a headache he wished he didn’t have to deal with.

But with everything else going on it’d simply fallen by the wayside in the wake of mundane Russian and Indian issues and trying to rein in Ministers who had never had any type of oversight in hundreds of years if ever…and Lucius commandeering him for a photo shoot of all asinine things.

Though he was right.

Russell had been inundated with fan-mail since the spread hit Witch Weekly that morning. It’d gotten so bad after the last two days of headlines that a troop of House Elves were now dedicated solely to sorting through it before forwarding anything that actually needed immediate attention to his Secretary. Even with that Hadrian had spent hours last night signing the form response letters Russell had come up with. The consensus was that since a copying spell would show, unless it was a simple thank-you, Hadrian signed the responses personally.

Generating good will was hard on his writing hand.

“I can’t believe I let you talk me into this.” Hadrian hissed at the platinum-blonde head of his Lord of the Privy Seal.
“Good will.” Lucius reminded him for the seventh time in an hour. “Right now good will towards you and the Kingdom is high. Especially with the scandals in the Ministry. But to keep it that way they need to get to know you Hadrian not some idolized image of a baby-hero or the scion of an ancient line. Hadrian, the honorable and decisive King. The wizard-next-door who every witch and wizard wants to date and every parent wants to marry their child. That is what we are trying to get them to believe in. Divine Right works with the Nobles. For the commoners we need you to be approachable.”

“I hate you.”

Hadrian said rolling his eyes and stepped onto the stage instantly swallowed by the wall of noise.

“Your Grace!”

“Hadrian!”

“Your Majesty!”

“Harry!”

“The-Boy-Who-Lived!”

...

August 6th 1991 Daily Prophet Headlines:

_Treaties Renewed!_

_Muggle and Magical Alliances Secured by King of Avalon!_

...

Edited for minor errors and tweaks: 3 February 2016

Chapter End Notes

For those who are unaware, the Soviet Union dissolved in December of 1991. No, magic had nothing to do with that actual historical event however it does lend itself well to the current events in this story. I apologize if I offended anyone who is Russian or of Russian descent over my using that historical event to enrich my storytelling.

Also, I have no idea who some of the mundane heads of state were in 1991 or if the Perplexus line of toys existed. Sorry if I got it wrong but there's only so much history research I can handle before my head explodes hence why I had to explain why Anthea and Mycroft had smartphones in the eighties and early nineties. It was lame but...I forgot those didn't exist back then.
Chapter Nine: Exploring Avalon

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: This is a work of fan-authored fiction and is not meant to infringe on the rights of the rightful owners of any of the stories used herein nor to cause harm or embarrassment to the real life characters used.

Edited for minor errors 2/3/16

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Nine: Exploring Avalon

“The-Boy-Who-Lived!”

Hadrian stepped up to the podium in Malfoy Manor’s main ballroom in the late evening of August Second. The reporters were rather resembling a pack of rabid dogs slavering over the same bone. For the last two days total control over the Ministry Scandal and Hadrian’s Royal Inheritance had laid completely with Lucius and they were eager to get a scoop on their competition.

Raising a regal hand, the immaculately dressed King waited until the reporters took the hint and gradually fell silent. Echoing the attire he wore for the pictures Lucius released, he wore black dragon-hide trousers and matching sleeveless dueling robes with a Royal-purple sleeveless acromantula silk tunic adding regal color. Ancuru was over his shoulder and his mithril chain of office was around his neck, Lordship rings on his hands and his Cuff blazing with the flashes from the cameras.

“Before any questions are answered.” Hadrian stared out over the crowd with his enchanting emerald gaze. “We will give a statement. However, it would be appreciated by the Throne if from now on We are referred to as: King Hadrian, His/Your Grace, Lord of Avalon or any of Our Inherited Houses, even simply Hadrian. The title of The-Boy-Who-Lived serves no purpose beyond that of continuously prodding the healing wound Voldemort” he ignored the shocked looks and gasps of the crowd. “Also known as the Half-Blood Tom Marvolo Riddle left on the collective hearts and minds of Britain’s people both magical and mundane.”

His face was solemn and clearly showed his grief and reverence for the dead.

“He killed my parents.” He switched to the singular, making it personal if they wouldn’t accede to a request from their King. “Tom Riddle killed my parents. He came into the safe-house provided by Albus Dumbledore and hidden under the Fidelius by the same after being given the Secret by the still at-large Peter Pettigrew. He cut my father down like a dog and forced my mother to beg for the life of her only child before slaughtering her before my crib. Nothing is accomplished by celebrating my survival except stomping on the memory of my parents and the hundreds of others who did not survive.”

“If you must celebrate something.” Hadrian’s voice gained a deep resonance as he continued. “Celebrate life by living yourselves. Rejoice in your lives because there are so many who no longer can.”
Waiting for the dict-a-quills and a notorious acid-green quick-notes-quill to finish scribbling he took a sip of the water Lucius handed him.

“Today We stand before you to announce the arrest of Vernon, Petunia, and Marjorie Dursley. For those of you who are unaware Vernon and Petunia Dursley are the adopted sister and brother-in-law of the late Lady Lily Potter nee Evans. Marjorie is Vernon’s sister and Petunia’s sister-in-law. Marjorie Dursley, mundane, stands charged with seven counts of abuse of a magical child. Vernon Dursley, mundane with magical knowledge, stands charged with fifty-nine counts of abuse of a magical child, four hundred and seven counts of neglect of a magical child, forty counts of embezzlement of funds for support of a magical child, attempted line-theft by misleading a magical child of their heritage, and attempted murder of a magical child.”

Hadrian paused several minutes for the uproar that had grown louder and louder to die down once more before finishing the charges against the Dursleys.

“Petunia Dursley nee Evans, an adopted squib to the Evans Line,” pause for the uproar. “Stands charged with three counts of attempted line theft by misleading a magical child of their heritage,” since Petunia knew about the Potter, Evans, and Pevensie families being magical and still lied. “Fifteen counts of abuse of a magical child, seven hundred and eighty-nine counts of neglect of a magical child, forty counts of embezzlement of funds for support of a magical child, and concealing the attempted murder of a magical child.”

Another several minutes of pandemonium and a cup of water later and Hadrian was ready to finish his announcement before taking questions.

“In the wake of these charges and the others logged every day in the Department of Magical Law Enforcement chronicling abuses against magical children in both the magical and mundane societies, We as King and Lord of Avalon do hereby announce the creation of the Child Protection Decree. The Decree will become the benchmark by which child abuse is investigated and prosecuted within the territories of Avalon. The full body of the Decree will be distributed at the end of this press conference. Questions?”

Hands shot up and questions were shouted in a jumbled. Hadrian simply stood silent until they shut the hell up. Pointing to a mousy brunette, Hadrian took the first question.

“Elspeth Smythe-Smith with Witch Weekly, Your Grace.” She was practically bouncing. “Yesterday we reported that you are subject to no less than thirteen Last-of-Line laws. Have you made any decisions about how you’re going to handle what amounts to a harem of spouses?”

Hadrian restrained the deep need he felt to curse both her and Lucius into oblivion.

“With my inheritance being of such magnitude I was made aware of the responsibility to my Lines and that I would need to take spouses. However in addition to the continuation of my Lines there were also binding marriage and betrothal contracts along with that same inheritance. So yes,” he smiled charmingly. “In that way six of my Lines already have contracts in place and I am actively Courting my bonded-betrothed of the House of Emrys. Next question.”

Steering clear of all women, Hadrian called on a bespectacled older wizard.

“Derringer Sweeps from Potions Quarterly, Your Grace.” The man’s voice was low and gravely. “Have you made any appointments to the Royal Household? Who will be the Royal Potions Master for your Grace?”

And the formerly safe question was gone.
“We have retained Lord Prince as the Potions Master and Researcher to the Royal Household. Lord Prince is the youngest Potions Master in a century and We have the utmost respect for his abilities.”

“No concerns that he’s a Death Eater?” The infamous poison tongue of Rita Skeeter called out. “Or about your pet Death Eater that keeps handing Your Lordship water?”

Hadrian arched a brow. “Ah you must be the slanderous Ms. Skeeter. Lord Malfoy would you mind…?”

“No at all, Your Grace.” Lucius gave a smirk before shrugging off his outer-robes and holding up his unblemished left arm for all to see.

“Any other questions?”

…

The next morning before heading into another day of trying to negotiate with the holdouts from Russia, Hadrian took some time to handle a housekeeping issue.

It was official he had to appoint a Head Chatelaine and another over at least his properties private and royal in the U.K.

He looked up as Russell announced his guest, who he’d sent Tristan to collect that morning.

“Dowager Lady Longbottom, your Grace.”

“Lady Augusta.” Hadrian came around the desk and gave her a kiss on the hand before pulling out one of the cushioned desk chairs in his formal Study in the State Rooms of the West Wing of Skye Palace. “It’s wonderful to see you again.”

Over the last several years Hadrian had grown close to her grandson Neville, Heir Longbottom, through their combination social/study group at the Wallace Estate. Though he hadn’t had much contact with the Dowager he had had occasion to meet her previously. And learn the story surrounding her son and daughter-in-law’s tragedy.

“Your Grace,” Augusta gave him a proper curtsy before taking the offered seat. “It’s an honor that you’ve requested a meeting at the dawn of your Reign. With how busy you must be between gutting the Ministry, seeking the blood of your abusers, and being named Witch Weekly’s “Most Eligible Wizard”. What can House Longbottom do for the Kingdom of Avalon?”

Hadrian hid a grin at the Dowager’s peppery commentary of the media blitz Lucius was orchestrating.

“House Longbottom can reclaim their empty estate in Avalon Proper.” Hadrian arched a brow. “However that is not the purpose of this meeting. Both We as a Kingdom and I as Lord need a Head Chatelaine. Desperately.” He added with a sigh. “I desperately need a Head Chatelaine.”

Augusta pursed her lips. That was no small thing. As a Dowager and a Daughter of House Prewett, she was well aware of the scope of what he was asking. And then there were others beside herself to consider. As Head Chatelaine she would be a member of the Royal Household and would need to live in Avalon and make herself available to the King. She would also have to coordinate with the other individual Chatelaines the King would appoint over certain residences or regions. No matter how she felt about them personally.

As well as dealing with the other members of the Royal Household and the Privy Council to prepare
the Royal Residences or assist with planning Royal Events at the locations under her purview.

Thankfully there wasn’t a massive staff to coordinate. House Elves tended to manage themselves once they were aware of where and what needed doing.

“I am hesitant to accept.” She began only to stop at a gesture from the young King.

“If your concern is for the continued health of your son and daughter-in-law rest assured that has been taken into account.” Hadrian told her before she could formally decline. “We are prepared to have them moved to either the Royal Infirmary or a suite in the Avalonian Longbottom Estate. The Royal Healer Andromeda Tonks nee Black is prepared to take over their care. Combined with the services of the Royal Potions Master and Researcher, We can guarantee they won’t receive better care even at St. Mungo’s.”

“Very well, your Grace.” Augusta conceded to the determined young man with a regal nod of her own. “I shall make arrangements with the House Elves for Longbottom Grange to be closed and the Avalonian Estate opened. Which of the Royal Residences needs seeing to first?”

“The Head of the Avalonian House Elves is Lop.” Hadrian smiled and handed over a thick file. “You will need to coordinate with Lady Margeux Holmes nee Hawkins who is the Chatelaine of Our Welsh properties,” though he hadn’t officially sworn her in to the office yet. “To prepare the former Emrys Seat of Snowdon Castle for the Lordship Ball on the Fall Equinox, and take a look at the Status of Skye Palace and the empty Avalonian Royal Residences. You will also need to meet with the Captain of the Guard to secure port-keys for the transfer of your belongings and people to the Longbottom Estate.”

One massive headache off his plate, Hadrian dismissed the Dowager with a smile and a polite goodbye before taking a few moments to send off notes to Tristan, McG, and Andy about the new Chatelaine before joining Siger and Sherrinford with trying to rein in the Russians.

…

By the time the press of the wizarding world had thoroughly danced on the corpses of the not-yet-executed Cornelius Fudge and Bartemeius Crouch, they’d overlooked many of the quiet political maneuvers Hadrian and his Privy Council had used to solidify his rule of Avalon.

No one was talking about the Lord High Justice of Avalon also being the Interim Minister for Magic. They were far too busy being outraged over the dirty dealings and blatant bribery of Fudge.

There was no discussion about the widespread reforms then pushed down the collective throats of the remaining ministry officials. They were too busy worrying over whether they would be keeping their jobs after the clean-out. Especially when many of the now-deposed officials had been brought up on criminal charges.

And the public was much too outraged over the abuse against their now-beloved King to care that he had basically created a blanket decree over how they were allowed to treat children.

When they weren’t being outraged over child abuse or the ministry scandals, they were in love with the young, regal, handsome King Hadrian.

Witches young and old either wanted to marry him or wanted their daughters or sons or grandchildren to marry him.

And he was so forgiving, taking on the tarnished reputations of Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape and raising them to the highest positions of service to the Throne.
Hadrian gave Lucius use of Slytherin’s Avalonian Estate named Basilisk’s Den for his family’s residence while he was in residence at Skye Palace and made Lady Malfoy Chatelaine of his English and non-territorial properties as a bonus for such exemplary execution of his duties.

…

The morning of the move from Prince Manor to Skye Palace, Severus Snape-Prince sat down with his twins at breakfast, prepared to completely upend their world view.

Once the plates had been cleared and his son and daughter were talking idly about school and their friends, Severus set down his cup of tea and cleared his throat.

Both raven’s-wing-black heads turned to face him, curious expressions on their fourteen year old faces. Severus’s twins were a Slytherin (Octavian) and a Ravenclaw (Livia) both going into their second year at Hogwarts. His lovely Livia was the picture of her late mother and was set on being a Charms Mistress and Researcher for the Unspeakables. However, his son who looked like a younger, much more refined and handsomer version of his father, wanted to study Alchemy and experimental potioneering.

And now he was going to have to tell both of them that those goals and dreams of their laid in the hands of someone else.

“As you are both aware,” Severus folded his hand in front of him. This wasn’t anything he was prepared for. His father wasn’t worthy of the name, being a drunken, abusive asshole. His mother was so beaten down the best parenting she was capable of was giving him her old potions textbooks. His wife dying giving him his children left him cast adrift. They didn’t come with a set of instructions or a manual. All he could do was his best. And right now that was put on his “Head of House” face and get it over with. “The Most Ancient and Noble House of Prince came to England’s shore as ambassadors. Part of that duty included a marriage contract that remained dormant for centuries after it was signed. In fact it went inactive for so long that neither I nor my predecessor were aware of it.”

Leave it to his clever girl to put the pieces together.

“Which one of us is the property of the King?” The Snape Snark was alive and well in his daughter’s hands.

Tavi and Livia watched him with the same narrow-eyed glare that he’d used for years on hopeless dunderheads in his classroom.

“Octavian.” Severus let out a breath. “After Hadrian met with me and informed me about the contract I went and searched through the Prince Family archives. The contract is binding and unbreakable. However,”

Livia who had let out a breath, whipped her head back around and stared at him with wide eyes. Octavian had lowered his head into his hands and hunched forward, removing him from blocking her line of sight to accuse her father with her mother’s eyes.

“It’s not the only contract the Prince Family had forgotten.” He heaved a sigh. “You know the story. Your Grandmother Eileen…”

“Ran off with a muggle.” Livia pressed her hands to her mouth, eyes tearing. “Rather than marry Abraxas Malfoy, the then second-son of the House of Malfoy. So I…”

“Yes,” Severus winced. “The contract was never fully enacted. My mother ran off before her
betrothal ceremony making the contract viable onto the next daughter of House Prince. No one knew. Not even your godparents Lucius and Narcissa knew. As of Draco’s birth you were bound to him. And no one had any idea. This isn’t what I wanted for you,” a damp-eyed Severus told his children. “Arranged marriages and binding contracts. Neither of us wanted this for you,” he said referencing his late wife. “But it is what it is.”

Watching them for signs of...something...other than just uncomprehending stares, Severus laid his hands flat on the table and pushed himself to his feet.

“With my position with the Royal Household we will be making our home wherever the King is in residence. We leave for Skye Palace in Avalon this afternoon. I have directed our elves to meet each of you in your rooms and assist with your packing.”

Before he could stride from the room, he was stopped in his tracks by the sound of his son’s question.

“What’s he like?” Tavi asked, lifting his head from his hands to stare at his father with a mirror image of his own eyes only in slate-grey, a halfway point between Severus’s black and Astrid’s ice-blue. “Hadrian?”

Severus paused for several long moments.

“Like a King.” He finally answered. “The Hadrian I met was very like a King.”

…

Across the globe in The Empire of the Rising Sun, Emperor Hiro Ryuunosuke, sixty-seventh Emperor of the Empire of the Rising Sun, on the morning after the Claiming, felt the Wards protecting his Palace rise and strengthen in a matter of seconds.

Calling out for his manservant, he sent for the ambassador from the British and his favorite falcon letter-bearer and scribe.

The Wards of Avalon had done nothing but weaken since the last of their Royal Lines was Lost. That they would suddenly tremble and shake with fresh power meant only one thing. His most powerful ally had once again awoken.

And with them came new hope for magic everywhere, for like the now defunct mundane British Empire, that of Avalon was one that spanned the world over.

To them, the sun never did truly set nor was Lady Magic ever forgotten.

It was time to send a letter.

…

At that same moment in Egypt, a hawk winged its way from the Royal Seat in Thebes to the Summer Palace in Alexandria bearing with it great tidings of strange happenings.

…

While Severus was struggling his domestic issues and Avalon’s allies were scrambling for answers from their current ambassadors – beyond those found in the press – another father was having a difficult conversation with his own children.
Gawain Wallace was finally going to have a conversation he’d been putting off for two years. Hadrian had grown tired of his waffling and had given him an ultimatum: tell them or Hadrian would.

“Boys,” he began with a sigh. “There’s something I’ve been keeping from you…”

…

Gawain and David stared after Rhys as he stormed from the room, thunder-clouds crashing across his face.

The father turned to his older son and asked:

“Do you think he actually heard anything I just said?”

David stared after his brother for several long moments. Rhys had distanced himself more and more from him since David had left for Hogwarts. Then he’d nearly cut their father out of his life altogether after he sent their mother away. Rhys had always been closer to her.

Hearing that one of them was to be bound in a marriage not of their choosing…

No. He wouldn’t be surprised if Rhys had tuned everything out after that initial revelation and he told his father as such. Adding:

“He wouldn’t be so enraged if he knew Hadrian was the groom. He’s still hurt that his best-friend kept his status from us all our lives, and he’s bloody furious with you over it, but Rhys would realize that being a King’s Consort is the best he ever could’ve done for himself. Besides being possibly bonded to his best-friend…at least we’d all know either me or Rhys wouldn’t be abused.”

“No.” David sighed. “And if anything it was the bit about how it could be broken.”

“What?”

“Yep.”

Heir Wallace hesitated, not sure if now would be the best time but if he didn’t ask soon there might never be a time if Hadrian decided too soon.

“Dad?” His voice was cautious. “I need to ask you something…”

…

In a reversal of events from a week before, Hadrian found himself slipping quietly through the halls of Skye Palace, on his way to the East Wing where he’d assigned the Windsors and Mycroft apartments for use during their visit(s).

Though he wasn’t alone and it wasn’t a clandestine act, Hadrian was enjoying just being able to stroll through his new home without running into one of the Privy Council who desperately needed him to sign or approve something or one of the ruddy politicians or reporters his days had been filled with.

For the most part the territories of Avalon – including their new “sister” country in the U.S. of A. – were now aware and assenting of the new chain of command. Only Russia continued to be problematic and that had more to do with their mundane counterpart than it did the Russian Premier
of Magic. The various heads-of-state had the plans and reforms for their countries that he and his guardians had worked tirelessly on for years and the two camps – he and his Privy Council and the heads-of-state – had decided on timelines for implementation for various reforms and laws to be fully in place.

Britain was going to require a heavier hand but both they – his Privy Council – and he had known that. The education reforms were going to be the worst. As things stood mundane-born witches and wizards weren’t contacted soon enough and enrolled in a wizarding institution of learning young enough to prevent unnecessary breaching to the International Statute of Secrecy. In fact, according to the numbers Sherrinford had used his contacts at the ICW to obtain, Britain itself was the biggest perpetrator of breaches to the SoS. A massive problem with a simple solution:

Contact early, at the first sign of accidental magic and then educate, educate, educate.

The more practiced a witch or wizard becomes the rarer the acts of accidental magic. Period. There was no excuse for eleven and twelve year olds to be running around blowing up their schoolmates and changing the color of their teacher’s hair when the public wizarding primary schools begin enrollment for gifted students as early as five. The public wizarding education system had mainly been created after the fall of Grindelwald to educate mundane-borns and the poorest of wizarding children. There was even a school-supply grant funded by a portion of the exorbitant tuition of Hogwarts to provide the necessary books and supplies to those who can’t afford it.

There was zero reason why any mundane-born who had been identified through magic usage should remain uneducated until eleven. There just wasn’t.

Even if they couldn’t afford Hedwig Institute at eleven there were public and subsidized schools that provided alternatives, the same for Hogwarts and secondary education up to OWLS or NEWTS. If a student doesn’t meet the qualifications for a scholarship or grant to attend the two best centers of learning in Britain: H.I. followed by Hogwarts, there were other options. Options that weren’t being effectively utilized by the percentage of the population they were there to help.

Education at Hedwig was expensive, approximately one hundred fifty-three thousand pounds per year for an Heir-level education, ninety-one thousand for a Noble-born’s education, and sixty-one thousand for a commoner’s or mundane-born’s education. Hogwarts was better as it catered to a wider pool, costing over seventy-five thousand pounds Sterling per year up to OWLS, just over one-hundred thousand pounds per year from OWLS to NEWTS, and between one hundred and thirty thousand to over two hundred thousand pounds from NEWTS on while undergoing an Apprenticeship.

Originally he’d wanted to just lower the price-tag on tuition but he was quickly convinced otherwise. Noble parents, such as his own deceased father and mother, wouldn’t enroll their children in H.I. and Hogwarts from birth including paying a nearly million-pound price in advance for anything less than a million-pound education. Lowering the tuition or creating a sliding scale based on income wouldn’t do anything but drive more parents to have their children educated outside the country. Instead they all were able to agree to adding more public – and therefor free – schools as well as adding at least one more subsidized school. It would create the ability to take on more students without diminishing the gleam on H.I. and Hogwarts – whose hefty tuitions helped pay for the free and reduced tuitions of the public and subsidized schools while those same snotty Nobles who wouldn’t send their kids to H.I. and Hogwarts if they weren’t ridiculously expensive price gave donations to fund the school-supply, grant, and scholarship funds at all three educational tiers.

He got his way – and didn’t – during the education debates.

Hogwarts was going to be forced to add more classes and undergo reviews of its current staff as well
as comply with the new teaching-regulations over just who is allowed to teach what.

The old laws – before they’d been gutted – had stipulated teachers and professors must have a Mastery in their subjects. When public schooling became viable, that was lowered. Originally a teacher would need to be at least undergoing an Apprenticeship with a Master in their Subject to teach. Then it became needing a NEWT. As things stood, in some cases a teacher would only need a passing OWL.

That didn’t come even close to being acceptable.

Under the new law there would have to be a Master as the Head of Department with all of their subordinates being Apprentices – up to OWLS. To teach NEWT-level subjects and beyond they’d have to be Masters in their own right. There were many similar reforms coming. All of them dealt with important subjects like class sizes, teaching wages, and curriculum.

Personally he couldn’t wait for the old goat to find out he was on probation – and was quite happy he’d won the coin-toss over who was going to tell him. The Privy Council would be making a visit to Hogwarts this week – along with the Board – to discuss the new education reforms with the Headmaster and Staff. Hadrian couldn’t decide which would be better – telling the Headmaster he was on probation, though he’d wanted to just sack him. Sherrinford and Siger had advised patience. Sacking a still moderately-popular man like Dumbledore was a different thing entirely than executing a despised Minister. They wanted to give him enough rope to hang himself – in public – before lopping off his proverbial head.

Probation or the new course subjects….and the teachers who’d been retained to help teach current subjects as well as new ones…he wasn’t sure which would have the old man keeling over but Hadrian rather hoped it was one of the new subjects.

Dumbledore had imposed his own beliefs on the British magical populace for far too long. By the time Thursday and their meeting rolled around, the first wave of reforms including some on restricted magic and the education reforms, would already be in place. And there was nothing Dumbles could do about it.

Hadrian shook his head, clearing his thoughts as the approached the Windsor’s section of the East Wing, stepping into the main sitting room that opened up into the halls leading to the four apartments they’d been given: Queen and Prince Philip, William’s parents, Wills himself, and Prince Harry, he smiled as he heard Harry’s piping young voice asking his older brother why they had to wake up so early.

“Well,” Hadrian answered for his Bonded, drawing all eyes towards where he stood framed by the cream-and-lavender plasterwork that hid the stone-and-gem walls in this part of the Palace. “I thought you might like to see what it was Wills inherited. In Avalon anyway,” he corrected himself with a smile. “Wills told me you’ve already been to the Nimue holdings in Aquitaine.”

“That is most considerate of you, your Grace.” Charles said with a polite nod. “I assume by how you’re dressed and how we were requested to dress that we’ll be riding to our destination.”

Hadrian glanced down at his simple cream leather riding breeches tucked into his highly-polished black dragonhide boots. His cream tunic blended seamlessly with his pants, a black leather long-sleeved jacket tossed lightly on top to protect him from the wind. The others were all dressed similarly, though the ladies were wearing old-fashioned carriage dresses with light cloaks. Altogether, they looked like they’d stepped out of a Regency novel.

“Not quite.” He smiled offering his arm to his Bonded and leading the way to the stables. “You’ll
have to forgive the secrecy…but it’s a surprise.”

…

And what a surprise it was.

The party – save Hadrian – gasped at the sight of the lovely ivory carriage with royal-purple trim. It had a hard top which was vanished with a wave of Hadrian’s hand for the day was lovely and bright, and was harnessed to a gorgeous pair of matched white Abraxans. Smiling he asked permission before keying them into the enchantments on the carriage and steeds.

“The carriage and Abraxans are a gift.” He cast a look at his bonded from under his lashes. “When you all leave here you wouldn’t be able to return without some difficulty save for Wills. With the carriage and steeds, you can visit any time you please. Or if you tire of being in the Palace Wills can open up the Nimue estate so you can travel to and from Skye Palace as you please.” He held up a hand when it seemed like they would voice objections. “I insist. Both carriage and steeds have been Charmed so that unless you know about them you can’t see or feel them. Your magical guards will be able to summon them for you at any time or Wills can. Consider it my way of lessening the inevitable distance between my Bonded and his family.”

“Thank you, Hadrian.” Elizabeth said, reaching over and giving his hand a squeeze. “This was very thoughtful of you.”

After the carriage and Abraxans had thoroughly been exclaimed over, everyone but Wills and Charles decided to ride in it, preferring to join Hadrian on horseback.

Though they had a moment of indecision as the horses they were led to didn’t look like any they’d ridden before.

Hadrian grabbed Wills’s hand and led him over to a pair of stunning Pegasi, one black and one white. Lifting their joined hands, Hadrian encouraged his Bonded to pet the white before ushering Charles over to a palomino Pegasus mare, introducing her as Celeste to the Prince and getting him situated in the saddle and casting the necessary spells to keep him locked in place no matter how much turbulence there might be after leaving the ground. Returning to the white, Hadrian stood back and watched the picture his sandy-haired and blue-eyed Bonded made, petting and exclaiming over the pure white winged horse.

“Do you like him?” Hadrian asked, drawing Wills’s attention.

“He’s beautiful.” Wills responded immediately. “I’ve never seen anything like him, not even Grandmum’s new Abraxans. What’s his name?”

“You tell me.” The ebony-haired boy said as he hopped up onto his Pegasus’ – Asterion’s – back. “He’s yours.”

“Mine?” Wills asked in awe, turning to stare the magnificent creature in the face. “Mine.” He breathed. “Thank you, Hadrian. This is too much.”

“Nothing is too much for my bonded and future Consort.” Hadrian gave a half-grin when Wills rolled his eyes over his response. “What are you going to name him?”

“Apollo,” he decided as he gained his own seat. “His color is like a ray of pure sunlight. So Apollo.”

“Wonderful.” Hadrian smiled and gave the order to move out to the troop of guards that were
accompanying them on their tour of Avalon and picnic at the Nimue Estate.

Avalon was a massive undertaking. Consisting of dozens of floating islands of various size – the largest being Avalon City at exactly four miles in circumference with the second largest being the one-mile oblong that contained Skye Palace – all of which were artificial. Constructed from solid stone on surface lands of both the Emrys and Pendragon territories, they were designed, built, and completely functional before they were raised to their home in the sky.

It was the single largest magical act – ever.

Raising Avalon took the combined efforts of LeFey’s Arithmancy and Spell Weaving, Pendragon’s Blood Magicks, and Emrys’s Enchanting and sheer, raw power.

Altogether the dozens of islands still serve the same purposes as when they were fashioned thousands of years ago. There were the main islands of Avalon City – containing homes, schools, warehouses, and embassies all sitting empty – and Skye Palace in addition to the thirteen islands of the absent Royal and Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses who all had private estates save for House Emrys as whether they were sitting on the Throne or not, Skye Palace was always the home of the House of Emrys. Avalon was self-sustaining which meant farms and ranches and greenhouses all currently being maintained by house elves.

And then there were the parks and preserves.

Species thought long-extinct – such as the Snidget on whom the snitch was modelled after in Quidditch – were easily spotted at any one of the dozen wildlife parks or wildflower fields or forests that made their way seamlessly through the air.

As for preserves…

Well.

If it had wings…it had a home in Avalon.

Including the inhabitants of Avalon’s six dragon rookeries.

Opaleyes, Vipertooths, Short-Snouts, and Horntails all made their homes on Avalon’s islands as well as many, many more.

Thestrals too, with Avalon’s herd easily outpacing the one kept by the half-giant Hagrid at Hogwarts.

All in all, his future Consort – and his future in-laws, were suitably impressed with the Seat of the Avalonian Empire.

Even more so when they finally laid eyes on the beautiful and elegant Nimue estate, which was shining and oh-so-welcoming in the bright August sun.

“..."This was a wonderful idea, Rian.” Wills whispered to his betrothed, their heads tilted together as they ambled through the green and lush grape vines of the Nimue vineyard. “None of us have had much time to relax lately.” He confided, shooting a furtive glance at his parents who were happily walking together just up the hill from them, talking to a fascinating little elf named Muscat about the
vineyard and its history.

For once, Diana and Charles had left their increasingly tense relationship in private, acting like the loving parents Wills had always had. Elizabeth and Philip had stayed behind at the picnic sight atop one of the estate’s hills that looked over most of the Avalonian Islands. The Nimue Estate was one of the outermost of the floating chain with only the dragon preserves farther afield from the central islands containing Avalon City and Skye Palace – though the Palace made up the highest point of the chain and looked over all the rest.

Once they were out of earshot of their minders – both parental and guards – and Harry had wandered off to try his hand at picking some of the just-ripening grape harvest, Hadrian had whispered to Wills that due to Skye containing the Ward Chamber deep within the Palace as well as having the most complex of the runic arrays of all the islands it had to be highest. Many thought or would think that it was a statement of power and it was that, Skye being a formidable and stunning sight no matter whether seen from within or without, but mostly it was to make the most efficient use of the power it took to keep Avalon flying. Since the Royal Families of Avalon were the ones charged with both protecting the main Ward Stones as well as charging them it made sense to keep them within Skye. And since they were already expending massive amounts of power to keep the Wards running, putting Skye in the center and above the rest of the islands made for the easiest distribution of power from the main Ward stones to the lesser Ward stones that powered both Avalon and their security systems around the world.

All sensitive information.

But if Hadrian couldn’t trust his bonded – who by the very nature of their bond was literally bound to keep his trust and secrets – with the reason of why Skye was in the center of the island array there would be no one he ever could trust that way.

And Hadrian wasn’t willing to turn into that king, who kept his secrets and his confidence to himself alone, never letting anyone in and eventually turning into a paranoid old miser.

He’d pass.

And pass on his trust to Wills – who swore he would keep it safe.

They were quickly turning into each other’s closest confidants and bedrocks of support – and Hadrian wouldn’t have it any other way.

…

The day before Hadrian’s “visit” to Hogwarts saw him making his way from a strategy meeting with his closest Councilmembers – namely his former guardians and his honorary uncles – to the East Wing.

Queen Elizabeth as well as Prince Philip and Prince Charles had departed back to Buckingham Palace to see to their obligations to their country – and keep an eye on how well Mr. Major was bumping along after his introduction to Hadrian and the new policies regarding magical children born to their mundane citizens.

Diana and the young Princes however had stayed on.

Wills and Hadrian were both excited, having previously been told that the visit would only last a week to ten days. With Diana’s permission – mainly due to the Princess having a way to return to England to keep up her duties without leaving her sons alone in a strange Palace, thanks to Hadrian’s
gift – the original timeline had been extended, taking them all the way up to the weekend before school commenced. Harry was over the moon, reveling in being able to learn all about the magical world and being able to play with magical creatures of the benign sort. Though the younger Prince was put-out when he was told that no gift of a flying horse was in the offing for him.

Hadrian had a solid hour before he was needed anywhere for anything and was hoping to spend it playing games or just getting to know Wills better. He thought it was safe to say that they were friends at this point but they still had miles and miles to go before they were anywhere near ready to progress their relationship in less than two years. Normally if Wills wasn’t there he’d spend the free time practicing music or Krav Maga or drawing. He didn’t paint much but he did like to sketch sometimes to take his mind off of more engrossing things like music and his studies.

His meeting had been in the West Wing which had the “State” rooms which meant he had to hike all the way across the Palace to get to Wills’s apartment in the East Wing. For now. When they were married Wills would be moved to one of the consort rooms in or attached to the Kings Tower… whatever he preferred. They might even share Hadrian’s quarters. It really depended on what Wills was comfortable with especially with Hadrian having to take multiple consorts.

As Hadrian was cutting across the intersection that met the corridor to the South Wing and Tower in a T, he heard his name called out. Or one of his “names” anyway.

“Your Grace!”

Hadrian had never heard that voice before though it sounded very similar to one he’d spent some time around recently. He just couldn’t place the resemblance.

That lasted until he turned around.

“Your Grace.” The voice said again much more reservedly as he lifted his head to look at the face that matched the smooth voice and slender body clad in all-black dueling robes much like the ones Hadrian had made popular overnight in his photos in the wizarding press.

It was a handsome face with very patrician features coupled with dark slate-grey eyes and a long fall of straight black hair that rivalled his own for length.

“Allow me to introduce myself, your Grace.” Something between a smile and a smirk tugged at thin lips. “My name is Octavian Prince, and I’m your betrothed.”

…

Edited for minor errors 3 February 2016
Chapter Ten: The Dark Arts and Their Defense

Chapter Notes

A/N: To answer a question several people have asked, Hadrian is very tall for 11. He's in the 95th percentile for his age group among males. However he isn't the tallest 11 y.o. boy to ever live. Also he won't keep growing at that rate. He won't grow at all actually until he turns 13 and his magic and body catch up to each other. Hope that answers some questions. Also kids start an intermediate school at 11 and Hogwarts at 13 that gets explained more as the story advances.

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Minor Edits completed 2/3/16

Chapter Ten: The Dark Arts and Their Defense

Hadrian looked up from studying the newcomer, startled.

“Betrothed?” He questioned a moment before switching gears completely from work to personal. “Prince.” He took a breath. “Octavian Prince, you’re Lord Prince’s son.”

Tavi’s half-smile became a full-on smirk.

“Contracted-betrothed.” Tavi corrected himself. Though he was starting to think it wouldn’t be the life-ending incident he’d originally assumed. An assumption his father’s description hadn’t helped. Like a King didn’t exactly inspire the best thoughts in a fourteen year old about their new future spouse. But Tavi was unashamedly-bent and Hadrian while still young for him, was adorable with his big jewel-toned eyes and startled expression. Like a fawn who’d caught sight of the big-bad-wolf. “My father told me last week, your Grace.”

“Lord Prince and I discussed the betrothal.” Hadrian rocked back on his heels, tucking his hands into his pants pocket. Octavian made him…nervous. Wills had never made him so…skittish. Not once they actually met. Octavian and William were turning out to be total opposites – including in looks.

The idea of William – both as a person and a Prince and Lord in his own right and as the person he’s supposed to marry first – turned out to be far more nerve-wracking than Wills actually was. In person William-the-idea became Wills-the-boy, a much easier to deal with person and friend than some murky idea of a future consort.

Octavian on the other hand…

He was bold and confident, striding up and demanding Hadrian’s attention both as a King and as his future-spouse. There would be no waiting for his father to arrange a properly-planned and
orchestrated introduction with Octavian. Just him charging ahead and taking his life in his own hands.

Hadrian appreciated that, even as the smirk on that chiseled face and the look in Octavian’s slate-grey eyes made him highly aware that this was someone not only older and more mature than him but also someone who had clear ideas over how their betrothal was going to go.

Ideas Hadrian was quite certain he wasn’t ready to hear yet.

“I hope you don’t mind terribly that I’ve ignored protocol, your Grace.” Tavi could see that he was making the younger boy nervous and with his nature he couldn’t help but tease him at least a little, using the Voice he inherited – along with a lot of other things – from his father to purr over the honorific, making a light blush dust ivory cheeks. “But I wanted to meet you and give you a small token to show my compliance with the betrothal. Without everyone and my father watching us like a potions experiment about to explode.”

The King of Avalon laughed at how accurately Octavian Prince had pegged his and William’s first official introduction. Of course theirs occurred during their betrothal rites so that added several layers of tension for all involved. He and Octavian would’ve been introduced sometime before the other boy left for Hogwarts in September, if that is, his new Potions Master had requested it or told him he’d informed his son of the contract.

The rest of what Octavian said breeched Hadrian’s mind.

“A token?” He furrowed his brow confused. “According to the contract I’m supposed to court you.” He paused for a moment, eyeing the other boy before deciding on blunt honesty. Octavian Prince seemed like the type to appreciate it. “Something I did tell your father I wasn’t ready for yet. I’m currently courting my bonded-betrothed and trying to get my Kingdom in order. To be blunt I don’t have time to Court you properly Octavian. Besides we’ve years yet before we have to be bonded.”

Octavian waved a long-fingered hand in a dismissive but elegant motion.

“I’ll be at school most of the time anyway.” He shrugged leanly-muscled shoulders. “And I’m not some proper lady who needs a gentle-Knight to come and sweep me off my feet. I want to get a dual Mastery in Alchemy and Potions. I don’t have a lot of time either but I thought if we started slow now and got to know each other when possible it would make things easier later. To that end,” he presented a crystal phial with a flourish.

Hadrian took it hesitantly, not sure about being Courted versus doing the Courting. “Perhaps we both could take turns being ‘in charge’ of the Courtship.” He mused more to himself than his companion as he studied the shimmery liquid he could just see through the crystal. That didn’t stop Tavi from hearing and giving a hidden grin.

The new King of Avalon was just too fecking cute.

And he was Octavian’s.

Well, the budding Alchemist and Potioneer corrected himself with a light scowl he hid from the King. His and his bonded-betrothed’s at the moment. Octavian didn’t like to share, often not even with his twin. That he was going to have to share his husband with at least a dozen others chafed.

Hence his plan.

Toss aside protocol and make certain Hadrian if not loved him at least valued him. That desire to be
valued in his future marriage was the main reason he chose the initial courting gift he did. Even if
Hadrian had no interest himself in potions or alchemy, Octavian could provide things with them that
other spouses or betrotheds couldn’t unless they were alchemists or had Severus Snape for a father.

“It’s a sight-perfecting potion.” Octavian offered when Hadrian’s emerald gaze looked up at him in
question. “I’d heard stories from my father about his friend Lily and her ‘glasses-wearing-git’ of a
husband both from when they were just starting Hogwarts and through school. So I decided to
invent this.” He flicked an elegant finger at the phial. “Seven drops in each eye will correct even the
worst vision. I know you don’t wear glasses but with my potion you’ll still gain perfect vision. It
helps with vision issued caused by injury or aging as well.”

Hadrian looked at the tiny bottle in his hand with awe.

“And you created this?” He asked, nearly unable to believe it. “Why haven’t you patented it or
published your work?”

Octavian shrugged and explained.

“I’m not a Potions Master or even an Apprentice. Even with Severus Snape as a father I’m still
ineligible for my Mastery until I pass my NEWTS. Anything I patent or publish before that doesn’t
count. I’d get credit, yes and if I patent it I’d get paid either for the recipe or to make it but it
wouldn’t be worth as much as it would be once I’ve either entered an apprenticeship or challenged
the test for my Mastery. By waiting any potions I make will count as credit towards my Mastery
credentialing and will be worth more. It’s an irritating reality but it is what it is.”

His betrothed frowned fiercely, hand wrapping protectively around the phial.

“That’s ageist.” He hissed eyes narrowed, looking much to Tavi’s amused gaze like an irritated
kitten. “I should fix it.” Hadrian nodded firmly. “You shouldn’t have to wait just because some
arbitrary rule says you’re too young to do something amazing.”

Pleased with the defense, though it was unneeded, Tavi nonetheless held up a hand, stopping his
King before he could go off on a rant or rush off to make a Royal Decree.

“The rule is there for a reason no matter how annoying it is right now.” Octavian told him firmly.
“It keeps shoddy hacks from selling hodge-podge messes of potions to the unsuspecting populace.
By having the NEWTS requirement restricting the price of potions produced by non-Masters of the
craft, it helps protect the average witch and wizard. Besides it’s only three more years until I’m
eligible to start an apprenticeship or challenge for my Mastery.”

Hadrian studied him carefully, judging the words and finding them true, at least from Octavian’s
perspective. He still was going to talk to Lord Prince about this. There should be a way for young,
skilled Potioneers like Octavian to get credit towards their Mastery for potions they invent before
taking their NEWTS. He’d have to see what if anything could be done about it.

“Thank you for this, Heir Prince.” Hadrian settled on saying, leaving out his plans regarding his
contracted-betrothed’s father. “It is an amazing gift.”

“You’re welcome, your Grace.” Tavi gave a small smile. “And please, call me Octavian or Tavi.
Anything but ‘Heir Prince’” He asked genuinely.

“Octavian.” Hadrian returned his smiled. “Please call me Hadrian, unless it’s a formal event. Then
unfortunately it has to be one of my honorifics.”

“Hadrian.” Tavi all-but-purred smirking in amusement over the bright-red blush that crashed into
downy cheeks.

…

Hadrian *did* eventually make it to see William though it was more of a quick snack with tea than the leisurely game of Snap and talking he’d planned.

He’d spent more time talking with Octavian than he’d realized.

After his meetings for the day were over, most revolving around the coming visit to Hogwarts and education reform with a half-hour music practice thrown in where he barely got to play a set of scales and one piece on his violin and cello. His piano – well Lady Maggie’s piano – had been moved from Ravenscroft Hill to the estate the Holmes had been given to use while both Holmes Lords were on the Privy Council. He’d turned over the Ravenclaw Royal estate/retreat of Raven’s Roost to his former guardians, moving in both Sherrinford and Siger and their wives and Sherrinford’s children to the floating island. As members of the Privy Council, as long as they were within Avalon’s wards they could apparate (Sherrinford) or take a port-key (Siger) to the main entry courtyard of Skye Palace. Having them at one of the many empty estates gave Hadrian a bit more independence and the former guardians more privacy without having to worry about seeing random dignitaries or ambassadors or just Hadrian and William gadding about the palace – a sight fit to give Sherrinford’s wife Lady Holmes heart palpitations over the impropriety of it.

Besides which Hadrian never really took to Sherrinford’s wife and children, a feeling that was very much returned.

They were too…staid, for the independent-minded monarch.

Having them somewhere *other* than his home just made sense.

Hadrian made sure to talk to Lord Prince about the potion Octavian gave him. It wasn’t that he thought his future-spouse would *intentionally* harm him – at least he hoped not – but felt it was better not to blindly trust him regardless. With Lord Prince’s approval of the potion and Severus’s help dropping the required amount in each eye, Hadrian’s okay vision was perfect by the time he woke the next morning.

Thanks to improved nutrition and being under a Healer’s care after being rescued by John and Sherlock, Hadrian’s vision hadn’t continued to degrade after age four but *some* damage had been done. Not enough to really justify glasses or other measures but enough to be irritating at times when he was forced to take breaks earlier than others when reading a text or music. Thankfully the potion didn’t fully activate until Hadrian went to sleep or the sudden improvement would’ve been greatly disorienting.

Wills had been interested in Octavian’s gift and suitably interested that the older boy had taken the initiative to meet his contracted-betrothed.

It reminded him a great deal of Hadrian’s own personal “mutiny” over their own formal introduction and betrothal, though much bolder in its planning and execution.

The Nimue Lord was left feeling very…ambiguous about the whole thing.

On one hand there was someone who was attempting to take away from Wills’ *own* time with his betrothed.

But on the other, Octavian *did* have a right to get to know Hadrian just as he did.
He wasn’t sure how to feel about the whole thing or even *what* he was supposed to think about it but he *did* know that until he made a decision regarding this thoughts and feelings one way or the other he’d stay neutral about it, rather than give into his jealousy over Hadrian spending time with someone *else* besides Wills and his Councilors or his approval or even joining Hadrian in getting to know Octavian.

As the morning of the Hogwarts visit dawned bright and clear, Hadrian had marveled over seeing things so sharply for several minutes before physically shaking himself out of his wonder and beginning his preparations.

A quick breakfast then bathing and dressing in his formal “King” attire that he’d made all the rage: dragonhide pants in black, black tunic, and today an emerald-green dueling robe with his chain of office and rings in place, his Cuff never leaving his wrist now that he’d been betrothed to William.

He was rather vindictively hoping that Dumbledore would just do something beyond the pale so Hadrian could sack him right then and there.

However another part of him, what Siri had dubbed the “Slytherin mark” from his inheritance-via-conquest, cautioned that keeping Dumbledore installed at Hogwarts also kept him busy and in plain sight. A secretive Dumbledore in the public’s eye was infinity preferable to a hidden Dumbledore with no one watching him and all the time in the world to come up with plans to once again return to the limelight and bask in the public’s adoration. And with installing a new co-Head of the school to keep an eye on the old manipulator, the worst of his machinations would be curtailed at least inside of the school.

Meeting his Council in the main courtyard, the only part of Skye Palace that someone could use to enter or exit the Palace under magical means even via house elf…unless you were him, he gave them all a radiant smile.

It was time to go dethrone an old goat.

…”

Albus Dumbledore was *not* having a good day.

Indeed, he’d go so far as to say he hadn’t *had* a good day since the night of July Thirty-First.

On that night, Harry Potter’s eleventh birthday, he hadn’t expected to feel anything at all. Harry was still safely tucked away at the Dursleys being modeled into an appropriately blank and malleable canvass according to the squib he’d stationed there to watch him. The child would be appropriately *clueless* about his heritage even after entering the wizarding world for Hogwarts at thirteen.

He’d be at least two years behind his schoolmates but all the better.

With the stock he came from, neither James nor Lily were anything but intelligent, it wouldn’t do to have the boy be too successful. The Greater Good required an appropriate sacrifice at the right time to defeat Voldemort. Not another prodigy like Tom Riddle who’d had to be *dealt* with.

Dealing with Tom was easy enough and gave him the villain he needed to catapult himself back into the limelight after his popularity started to wane in the fifties.

Increasing the anti-muggleborn hostilities in Slytherin was ridiculous in its ease. A mental suggestion here, a minor veiled compulsion spell there, and a possible rival to the then-deputy Headmaster’s clear superiority was sidelined as a Dark Lord. Granted, he never thought Tom would prove himself quite so hard to rid himself of once his usefulness had waned. From what he could tell, the wizard’s
Shade was *still* drifting about an Albanian forest and possessing low creatures to stay if not *alive* in the strictest sense of the words then at least existent.

Harry Potter was proving himself to be a much larger nuisance than Tom ever was or seems possible for a child who was supposed to have been beaten and broken, ready for saving and molding into the perfect disposable Savior. He’d even had Molly Weasley, social climber that she is, filling her daughter’s head with dreams of being Lady Potter from the cradle. Once Tom was banished for good and all, and Ginevra was carrying Potter’s child and heir, the blasted boy’s usefulness would be at an end and he could be permanently dealt with. Together the grieving Widow and Potter’s beloved Mentor would have been able to take control of Harry’s Seats on the Wizengamot and the Lords Council, at last gaining Dumbledore, a commoner with an Azkaban convict for a father, a foothold among the Nobles.

The rumored Potter fortune would have simply been icing on the cake.

But Royalty?

Who could expect the blasted brat was *Royalty*?

There’d never been even a hint that the Potters or Evanses descended from the illustrious Avalon Seven.

If there had been Harry would never had darkened the Durlseys’ doorway. Instead he would have been kept safe and more importantly *stupid* while Dumbledore positioned himself as the real Power in Avalon. Much like those damned Wallace and Holmes bastards had done.

How they’d found him – the Headmaster had been sure to block Wallace’s abilities to track the squalling brat – let alone when were questions for which Albus, for once, had no answer.

Logic would dictate that it was around the time of Sirius Black’s release from Azkaban that the child was located.

Dumbledore had done what he could to block that fiasco but he’d learned of it too late. In the end he had lost a large part of his reputation and clout – not to mention money once all the fines were filed with Gringotts – in the aftermath of the debacle.

That Wallace hadn’t even batted an eye over the trial or himself attempted to prevent it was telling.

The only way he could have known of Black’s innocence was if he had heard Pettigrew confess, highly unlikely as the rat was still safely protected and living as a pet at the Burrow, or the Wallace Lord had unsealed James and Lily’s Wills.

Wills that Albus had sealed himself so they would *never* open without the child being within Gringotts to do so.

An event that had in all probability preceded or been preceded by the Wallace Lord and *those Holmes menaces* discovering Harry’s heritage.

A full blood heritage testing would be the only way to confirm Wallace’s claim as the boy’s guardian without going through any type of procedure or filing with the Ministry of Magic. A happenstance of paperwork that even Albus would have wanted to avoid at all costs in their position. Having technically kidnapped Potter from his relatives – not that anyone could prove that *now*.

Too late anyway, proof of wrongdoing aside. Not now that his perfect disposable weapon and source of future wealth was King of Avalon and most likely distrusting of the Headmaster. A state
of affairs Albus could fix with judicious usage of memory charms and Legilimency suggestions. Loyalty potions perhaps if all else fails.

He straightened abruptly. A serious disturbance in the wards surrounding the school grounds had pinged at his mental shields. And a large group of people had entered through the Hogwarts gates.

Hurrying with a speed that belied his age, he met his Deputy Headmistress Minerva McGonagall in all her tartan-clad glory in the entrance hall. Her connection to the wards wasn’t as total as his own but anyone with even the slightest magical sensitivity would have sensed the group who just came through the wards without Hogwarts hindering them in any way. Opening the Great Hall doors with a flick of his wand, they both saw why.

Striding up the path from Hogsmeade was the full-complement of the Hogwarts Board of Governors. With them was elderly Griselda Marshbanks, Head of Educational Testing for the Ministry of Magic along with many of her subordinates as well as her own boss: Galen Patil the Head of the MoM’s Education Department who in theory oversaw the greater scope of education in the magical United Kingdom while the Board of Governors oversaw Hogwarts. The relationship between the two parties: Galen and the Board, wasn’t nearly so clean or cut-and-dried as that. Also present was Eddard Ollivander, Lord Garrick Ollivander’s Heir, who was currently serving as Headmaster of the Hedwig Institute of Magic while he took a decade-long sabbatical from the Family vocation of wandmaking and chronicling wand lore.

Then the greater group parted, showing just whom they’d been clustered around either protectively or attentively.

The King of Avalon and his Privy Council had come to Hogwarts.

…

Unbeknownst to Hadrian, Lucius and Sherrinford had put their collective heads together on how best to announce the Educational Changes and Law Reforms to the public without making it seem like Hadrian was slipping into a dictatorial regime. Hadrian was an absolute ruler but for the most part he stayed far, far away from dictating to others. Except for Severus. Severus he’d had to dictate to or he’d still be fighting him over removing his Mark and joining his Staff.

It wasn’t long before the pairing of political mastermind and professional manipulator hit on a solution.

With public approval for Hadrian and the Avalonian Kingship at an all-time high as Lucius slowly stoked the public adoration of their young handsome King to a fever pitch and Dumbledore’s having never recovered from the scandal of Sirius Black’s trial, they knew the old man would jump at any chance to publicly align his name to Hadrian’s no matter how temporarily.

Their plan was simple: tour the castle so Hadrian could “inspect” his property while simultaneously repairing the damage done to the wards and enchantments by generation after generation of neglect. Then once Dumbledore is reeling after learning about his probation they will lead him to the press conference on the steps of the castle where Hadrian, the Head of the Department of Education, Lucius as the Head of the Board of Governors, Amelia, and the two Headmasters of the foremost British Schools will publicly announce the changes coming into effect over the next two years. Including new subject matter and staffing additions and reforms.

It was being staged as a sort of roundtable event where the press got to hear first both from the brains behind the new law but also the Headmasters and the Education Department who would be ultimately held responsible for implementing the new reforms and changes to current policy.
Amelia was in large part there to show support for the changes both as the interim Minister for Magic but also as a Master Auror and Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement as part of their announcement deals with several pieces of the new Law Reformations.

The Fall Session of the Wizengamot opened the day after Hadrian’s Lordship Ball giving him plenty of time to push things like the Law Reformations through and have them in place and functioning without needing to worry about their reactions.

Well…

“Plenty of time” might be a slight exaggeration.

“Enough time” might be a better statement. It was close but with the work they’d put in before Hadrian had even Claimed his Lordship they should be able to get what they needed taken care of without a fight through. Should. Maybe. With hope and prayer to Lady Magic.

Not that there was anything the Wizengamot members could do anyway but with Britain as unstable as it was Hadrian and his Council would rather continue with the farce of being a democracy instead of shoving his Kingship down their throats. Especially with the large mundane-born population the territory possessed. He didn’t want some idiot trying to challenge his right to rule when he still had Dumbledore and Voldemort to deal with. And to be honest he really couldn’t afford it at the dawn of his rule.

They wouldn’t get anywhere with staging some sort of protest or even outright rebellion but they, the public didn’t know that.

Only Masters of History of Magic and the Noble Families that still taught the Olde ways knew how absolute a Magical King’s control over their territory was in reality. Magic Herself Blessed Hadrian and the other monarchs as King or Emperor or Pharaoh during the Confirmation and Claiming Ceremonies. If She didn’t approve of both them and their plans they would have been killed or rendered a squib. That was the risk he and they all took and the bet they make by stepping into a Ritual Site upon their birthdays following their eligibility to rule.

For Hadrian that was at age eleven.

For other monarchs that were the next successor in a long line of kings, pharaohs, and emperors it could be eleven or a hundred and eleven.

The common witch or wizard no doubt believed, at least in Britain, that being a King was a matter of bloodline and it partially was. You had to be of the right lineage to take control of the Avalon Ward stones and grid or they’d swat you aside or fry you like a gnat. But there were hundreds or even thousands of people out there who carried the blood of at least one Royal Line in their veins yet never touched the Throne.

Magic chooses who would Serve Her best, who had the Power She needs.

That’s how one became King of Avalon or Egypt or Japan.

Blood, Power, and Service.

…

Having met Lord Ollivander several times, both on official State business as well as seeking his opinion as to whether Hadrian should attempt to bond with a wand – Ollivander deciding unequivocally against it unless the King wished to conceal the depth and control of his Magic –
Hadrian found himself pleasantly surprised by his son and Heir, Hadrian’s soon-to-be Headmaster Eddard Ollivander. The two spent most of the walk up to the castle proper with their heads – one ebony, one salt-and-pepper sandy brown – bent together discussing what Hadrian’s goals regarding education were, both the King’s own personal education as well as for the greater education of magical Avalon as a whole. By the time they’d shocked Dumbledore with Hadrian’s inclusion in the group, the King had found himself with a stout supporter of both his new magical reforms and his desire to seek out multiple Masteries in order to be both the best King and Mage as he could possibly be. Though Eddard did caution him to try and narrow his focus down to perhaps two “Kingly” Masteries and two “Hadrian” Masteries.

Four Masteries were more than all but the most ardent scholars and professors ever pursued and would set an excellent example for the rest of his people in academic success without making him seem like an eternal student.

Food for thought as Hadrian was about to begin his formal education at Eddard’s school on the first of September.

And as Ollivander the Younger was an Heir and to one of Hadrian’s fellow Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses, Eddard was an extremely good supporter to have, politically and personally. Eddard sat as his father’s proxy for both the Wizengamot and the Lords Council when proxies were allowed. His Pater Garrick much preferred wands to wizards and wand lore to dry political debates.

“Headmaster Dumbledore,” Galen Patil, the Head of the Department of Education, stepped forward in greeting as previously discussed. “As voted on and discussed by the Hogwarts Board of Governors at their last meeting,” yesterday. “The Department of Magical Education in conjunction with the Board and other vested parties are here to perform a surprise inspection of the state of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

“I see,” Dumbledore stroked one hand down his mighty beard. And indeed he did. “And to what do I owe the presence of young Harry?”

Nearly everyone present bristled as Minerva stared at her old friend in affronted shock. That was all but a slap in the face both to common courtesy and the Throne.

Dumbledore simply looked around with his “genial grandfather” mask as if perplexed why all of a sudden he was subject to glares that would make a lesser man wet himself.

Hadrian was one of the only people present not glaring at him, internally rolling his eyes at the old manipulator’s opening salvo. The other was Eddard Ollivander who like Hadrian, knew Albus well enough and was wary enough, to see past the obvious ploy to knock the group off their game. If they weren’t under scrutiny as the others watched for a signal on how to handle the slight, the two of them would trade commiserating looks.

“Correct Us if We are wrong.” The Royal Treatment it was, Hadrian decided. No one could take him being completely formal and make a national incident out of it. Lady Maggie had drummed it into his head over the years, probably attempting to counteract Sirius’s bad influence on his manners: when in doubt be polite. No one ever made the front page of the Prophet for being proper and civil. “However We do not believe We have ever been introduced to you Headmaster.”

“Nonsense, Harry.” Dumbledore waved off the genial correction with his affected bonhomie. “I’ve known you since you were a baby.”

A look flicked towards Sherrinford was all it took.
“Headmaster,” the Lord High Chancellor corrected him sternly. “Matters of your unbecoming familiarity with His Grace aside, you have never been introduced to the King of Avalon. Protocol dictates that you wait for an introduction and refer to His Grace as His Grace the King of Avalon until instructed otherwise.” The: I should not have to tell you this hung in the air like a noxious cloud, poisoning even Dumbledore’s sickeningly-sweet manner.

“Now now, Sherrinford.” The old man continued relentlessly, ignoring the desperate attempts by his Deputy to derail him before he got them both sacked. “You know I pride myself on being on good terms with all my students. Even ones who have yet to cross the threshold of Hogwarts. Surely His Grace doesn’t insist on special treatment?”

Before someone anyone could correct him both for his assumption and for failing to greet an Most Ancient and Noble Lord properly, the membership of the Privy Council being kept mostly a secret still at this point, Hadrian stepped in once again and put a halt to the whole debate.

“Not special, Headmaster.” Hadrian gave a regal nod then arched a sardonic brow. “But the same simple courtesy that should be accorded to anyone in a structured, modern, society. We insist on nothing but what is availed everyone in Avalon: social courtesy. After all,” Hadrian’s eyes were cold as ice. “We have not brought up the many offenses you have perpetrated against Our Person by committing the most heinous crimes of kidnapping and attempted Line Theft by leaving Us with abusive and improper guardians for an Heir to a Most Ancient and Noble House. However, if you Headmaster would prefer to dispense with courtesy, We would be most amenable to discussing them now.”

With every witch and wizard there as witnesses.

Albus nearly wheezed in shock. Whoever had informed Harry of the events following his parents’ deaths had done an excellent job. He must have some sort of relationship with Sirius and Remus after all. There had been no rumors regarding what Sirius Black was up to other than maintaining the Black Estate and Remus had been out of communication with the old crowd since taking up a private tutoring position just before Sirius’s release from Azkaban. As far as anyone knew the two hadn’t even reconnected following the events of Halloween Nineteen Eighty-One.

“There will be no need for that, Your Grace.” The Headmaster caved at once, ashen-faced at having his misdeeds flaunted before some of the biggest gossips in Britain (Griselda Marshbanks, Lucius Malfoy, etc.) “Now I believe Head of Education Patil mentioned an inspection?”

…

As the elder wizard led part of the contingent up to the Astronomy Tower in a blatant attempt to distract them from their purpose, a splinter group broke off and made for the seventh floor.

“Are you sure it really exists, lad?” McG had decided to accompany his charge down to Hogwarts, Remus staying behind to run the guards left in Avalon through a few training exercises with help from his Master-Auror mate. Plus it let him see his mum without having to request time off.

“All the texts recovered in the Vaults were clear,” Hadrian answered absently as he led McG along with one of the other guards and his shadow Russell towards a very familiar gargoyle. “There were even copies of the blueprints in both the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw Vaults. The Hogwarts Ward Room in right under what is now the Headmaster's office.”

In theory all he should have to do was put a drop of blood on the gargoyle’s tongue to activate the hidden door that led to the chamber. Before it was turned into an office it was the private chambers of Godric Gryffindor. And as the ruined Gryffindor castle stones were used to build Hogwarts on
Gryffindor land, he was elected best to keep the wards up and running.

Reaching the gargoyle he took out a simple dagger Siri had given him when he expressed an interest learning to fight like the animagus.

One of the things that made Sirius Black so deadly and effective when he was an Auror was that he didn’t rely solely on magic like many do. Lily had convinced both Sirius and her husband James that knowing how to fight without their wands or magic would both make them more effective with them and allow them not to have to flee if they were caught without them or were unable to use magic for some reason. James according to Siri and Remy’s stories preferred brawling to edged weapons. He didn’t have Hadrian’s discipline making swordwork and fencing a chore instead of a treat. Siri on the other hand for all that he had a bad reputation for being reckless and undisciplined took extremely well to blades of all sorts, though his favorite was either a dagger in his off-hand while wielding a wand or fighting with daggers in both hands.

Hadrian had seen Siri’s effectiveness when he finally gave in a faced Hadrian’s fencing and sword instructor Gawain one-on-one sword versus daggers.

As long as Gawain could keep him from getting too close he did very well.

But as soon as Sirius saw an opening he had Gawain on the ground with daggers at throat and belly.

The young wizard wasn’t anywhere near as effective as Siri and so far preferred having a one-handed or a bastard sword in his main hand with a dagger for his off-hand. That wasn’t always possible anymore as Ancuru was almost a broadsword or greatsword. For someone who wasn’t fully grown yet he needed both hands to handle the length. So he stuck to Siri’s style of double-daggers at the moment when working with short blades.

Nicking his finger on the blade, he squeezed several drops of blood out and onto the gargoyle’s tongue, healing the small wound with a bit of his wandless, wordless magic.

Hadrian had barely put the dagger safely away when the gargoyle’s eyes flashed red and gold – Gryffindor colors – and the very stones beneath his feet sank into the floor. McG grabbed onto him, shielding and stabilizing them as the other guard did the same. They’d been lowered a full ten feet down and then the stone moved horizontally into an opening in the castle wall. The archaic elevator stopped before an ornately carved grey wall that had the sigils of the four Founders arrayed in mosaic tile around a larger Hogwarts crest.

The King simply looked up at McG and arched a brow in a clear “I told you so,” look.

McG rolled his eyes and scoffed, not impressed with the wordless gloating.

“Now what?” The Scotsman asked.

Hadrian pointed to the one piece of the wall section that didn’t quite fit: an inlaid dragon done in gleaming grey hematite.

He grinned. “The motto is part pseudo-sage advice and part instruction. Never tickle a sleeping dragon.” Reaching over he did just that at a smooth spot on the ridged bas-relief scales.

The little dragon gave a yawn and a silent roar then the entire wall rotated around the Hogwarts crest before melting into the surrounded stonework revealing the Hogwarts ward room exactly where Hadrian had insisted it was: directly under the Headmaster’s office.

Hogwarts’ new Lord took one look at the seven ward stones and grimaced. They’d truly suffered
for lack of being cleansed and renewed on schedule. He didn’t know when the secret had been lost, which Headmaster failed to inform their successor, but the wards and therefor the castle and school had paid dearly for it. What should be seven sparkling stones filled with life and power were seven dingy-grey and barely functioning rocks.

How students weren’t being endangered right-and-left by the lacking wards and the professors weren’t being constantly drained to support them he’d never know.

Pure will on the part of the castle most likely.

He’d felt her since stepping on the grounds. She was weak and growing weaker but his very presence was already helping to replenish her. Many had asserted Hogwarts was alive. And they were partly right. It was more along the lines of gaining sentience from all the magic seeping into the stones before and after they were used for the castle as well as the enchantments placed on the castle at its Founding.

Hadrian sighed and cracked his neck. “Time to get to work.”

Moving first to the main stone in the center of the six-point star configuration the Founders had used, lines of inlaid gemstones and marble making up the actual lines of the star, Hadrian took his dagger out and once more laid open his hand. At least the Hogwarts wards wouldn’t leave him with a scar as Avalon’s did to Mark their King. Placing his palm down on the flat top of the cylindrical stone he felt the wards latch onto the power in his blood and…well…feast for lack of another word.

As the ward stone “fed” off of his blood and power he and his guards watched as pulses of raw power coursed from the center stone and along the lines of the star to the secondary ward stones.

It certainly was a lot more efficient than going from stone-to-stone like he did to charge the Avalon wards but not as powerful. With Avalon they needed the extra power from direct contact with his blood. Hogwarts was a ward structure on a much smaller scale and could sacrifice power for efficiency.

Worked for him, the less amount of times he has to slice into his own veins the better.

The longer the stone was in contact with his blood and drew on his power the cleaner all the stones became, Hadrian both feeling and *seeing* the wards strengthen around him. Before long, he and the others could discern the types of stones the founders had used to anchor the ward structure. The stone under his hand was a raw diamond, as many central stones were for their ability to supplement and boost the power of other stones. A ruby cut into a pyramid stood over a foot tall from tip to base and was at least four inches wide at the bottom, Gryffindor made the ruby their House Stone for it being arguably the most powerful of gems with the ability to engender contentment and peace as well as cleansing impurities. In a ward structure it cleansed the warded area from wards, spells, enchantments, and curses not original or wound into the ward structure by whoever had control of the grid.

One surprise was the turquoise bearing the Ravenclaw crest. A square tower as large as the ruby pyramid beside it but around six inches wide, it replaced what would have been a blue diamond in the configuration. A wise move from what Hadrian knew of gem lore as another diamond would have merely provided more power instead of the divine help and protection in battle turquoise was valued for. Hufflepuff’s onyx orb at a mere four inches in circumference was petite and restrained among the larger stones but made up for its small size in its ability to guard against negative thoughts and added protection to the wards. That stone along with several of the spells and enchantments laid into the very foundation of the castle helped create the welcoming sensation many students felt at the school.
Alongside its fellows sat a humble carnelian that was perhaps the most vital of all the stones with its sensitivity to and natural protection against evil and misfortune while its neighbors of peridot warned of impending danger and dark tourmaline purified strange wards and spells from the castle.

It was as carefully selected a set of ward stones as the ones which made up and anchored Avalon’s wards.

Though on smaller scale.

Hadrian sucked in a breath as the diamond grew uncomfortably hot then made a draining pull on his magic before releasing him. Gasping he cradled his hand to his chest though managed to stay on his feet. Taking several deep in-and-out breaths he slipped into a meditative trace for several moments, regaining his equilibrium as his magic rushed to replenish itself.

Looking around he noted that the chamber was sparkling and crackling with life as it cycled his magic through the wards, finally able once again to self-repair and recover from the effects of being neglected for far too long.

Reaching out he felt the magic of the wards with his own innate magic. Mere minutes after the central stone had finished siphoning his power from him and already the difference was night-and-day. Several enchantments that had the sticky-sweet magical residue of the Headmaster had been washed away. Probing with a delicate touch he discovered that they were mainly purposed to causing discord between the Houses, especially Slytherin and Gryffindor while engendering loyalty and confidence in the Headmaster.

Hadrian smirked to himself.

If the old man was counting on those to help him with the still on-going inspection he was in for a rude awakening.

There were several others he made note of strictly due to their nature more than who cast them – though the curse on the Defense Against the Dark Arts position was rather interesting in an insidious way. It had the same “flavor” as the Dark Marks he’d removed from Lucius and Severus, letting him know just who had come up with that particular curse. He found another with Riddle’s aura keeping people away from and blinded to something he hid in the Room of Requirement which was of particular concern.

Something to investigate after he’d returned to the larger party.

Lucius and Sherrinford couldn’t keep Dumbledore and the Board spinning in circles forever – though it would be entertaining to watch them try.

There were dozens and dozens of spells and enchantments all meant to cause harm in one way or another – including the one responsible for the moving staircases. Which if he was reading the cast right was meant to make the unwary fall either to injury or death. Hardly the benign “quirk of the castle” the Headmaster and others before him had passed it off as.

Summoning a piece of parchment and a never-out quill, Hadrian quickly wrote a note detailing an even more familiar magical signature – that of Remus and Sirius with what had to be his father’s touch. It was the tie into the castle wards that allowed their “Marauders Map” to function. He had to allow the wards to do their job and remove it but now that he knew how the tie worked he could ask about how they made the map itself before retracing their steps.

After all, why would he let someone else benefit from their work when he had no idea of who had
the Map?

Yes, it could still be sitting on a dusty shelf filled with other contraband in Filch’s office but it could just as easily be in the hands of Death Eaters.

The risk when he could disable the missing Map or even Maps and make his own when he came back for schooling wasn’t worth the risk of the wrong people finding the Map.

Vanishing the parchment and quill to his private study in the King’s Tower he nodded to McG and led them from the ward room. Hogwarts would be able to take care of herself and her charges without interference now until he returned for school and charged the ward stones once more. Though he would have to come back and meet with the witch he’d selected for co-Head Teacher and share control of the wards with her. Over his dead body he’d entrust them to Dumbledore.

Slipping back in among the Privy Council, Hadrian gave Lucius a discrete signal of his return, slightly warming his Mark over the wizard’s heart.

Smoothly the talented manipulator and political force interjected into the discussion about new brooms for the flying classes and Quidditch teams.

“Fascinating Headmaster,” the icy-blonde drawled. “However discussing the state of the school brooms, something which there should be plenty of funding for without asking for an increased budget or donations, is not the reason why we’ve come. Nor is the riveting talk regarding Filch’s upkeep of the castle, lacking as it is, or that of Groundskeeper Hagrid’s pumpkins health. We have come to see the deplorable state which the castle has fallen under your Headmastership and decide our next move regarding the new education reforms accordingly.”

“Castles take funds to maintain, gentlemen and ladies.” Dumbledore gently chided the Board like they were arrant schoolchildren. “Funds which the Hogwarts budget does not have to spare.”

“Indeed?” Gawain asked mildly. “How so? As I or anyone who is paying tuition for their children to attend this fine establishment can attest, the Hogwarts budget should be a beacon of good health.”

There were grumblings from several other parents of school-aged children who were attending Hogwarts, not least among them McG who had put through two daughters in Gryffindor and a son in Hufflepuff from his two failed marriages. Hit Wizards do not make good husbands. Though he did try to be a good father to his children, albeit from a distance.

After his own disasters in matrimony he understood completely why the most traditional families which included the King insisted on bonding rather than simple marriage.

Marriages could be broken, bondings were for life.

Sometimes beyond.

“Teacher salaries, staff salaries, food budget, scholarships and grants,” Dumbledore waved a hand. “And many other drains on the school accounts.”

“Really?” Gawain drawled, snapping his fingers and summoning a thick, thick file and flipping it open. “According to the audit Gringotts initially began in June of Nineteen Eighty-Five at the request of the then Confirmed Lord Gryffindor-Ravenclaw-Slytherin-Hufflepuff, King-Apparent of Avalon,” or Hadrian depending on how hoity-toity one was being. “No expenditures other than staff salaries and minor withdrawals from the scholarship fund have been made for the last six years. And the withdrawals from the scholarship fund were only of the most minor nature required to keep the fund active instead of defunct and returning the funds contained therein to the donating parties.”
Gawain looked up from the file before snapping it shut.

“Don’t take us for fools, Headmaster.” Sherrinford warned. “We’ve audited the funds of the school extensively and have undertaken a report regarding the OWL and NEWT scores for the last century.”

“Hogwarts is flush, Headmaster.” Lucius drawled bluntly. “Something I as the Head of the Board of Governors found fascinating when Lord Wallace turned over the results of both the audit and the scores report to me earlier in the summer.”

“Especially,” Amelia was also a member of the Board as the Lady of House Bones. “As lack of funding has been the main reasoning behind falling scores, inability to retain teachers, and cutting classes on offer for as long as I can remember.”

“Or I can remember.” The venerable – and scary – Dowager Longbottom added spitefully.

She still blamed that goat-loving bastard for the condition of her son and his wife. Had they not joined up with his merry band of sycophants, they might still be capable of leading House Longbottom and raising their Heir. She was old, tired, and heartbroken. Not the best person to entrust Neville to, though since befriending the now-King he’d seemed to blossom.

Galen Patil took the conversation in hand, looking up from the reports Gawain Wallace had handed him once he’d finished consulting them to confront Dumbledore.

“If funding isn’t the problem Dumbledore,” Patil’s tone was dangerous, his dark eyes glinting. “What is? Why does Hogwarts have deplorable OWL and NEWT scores compared to other schools of its stature, hells.” He cursed thinking of the other school in Britain. “To that of the public and subsidized schools in our own country.”

Albus was stymied. The audit had hit him out of nowhere and the truth wasn’t an option. Telling the Board, King, and Minister of Magic interim or not that you were planning on emptying the accounts right before retiring when there would be no one to question his sudden upgrade in lifestyle wasn’t a sound plan for retaining his job.

His silence was damning but not as much as speaking would have been.

“Then there is no choice.” Lucius held back his smirk, going with his stoic Slytherin mask instead. “But to implement a period of probation on you Headmaster. A co-Head Teacher has already been retained and will be here within a week. They will oversee the proper utilization of the Hogwarts funds and accounts and ensure that the new educational reforms are carried out. This is your only warning Headmaster.” Lucius gave him a fierce look. “If you attempt to hinder the new co-Head Teacher in any way you will be turned off without hesitation.”

“Under whose authority are you making this decision?” Dumbledore blustered. “Educational Reforms? What madness is this?”

“Our Authority.” Hadrian said softly. “And Our Reforms. As to the madness…the only one acting in a rash or mad manner here is yourself, Headmaster.”

Dumbledore fumed silently.

Seeing that her boss…er…co-boss wasn’t going to further engage the Board and their guests, Minerva took the reins.

“What Reforms should I be concerned with?”
“Changes in staffing and subjects taught, Deputy Headmistress McGonagall.” Galen accepted a file from an aide and passed it to the stern witch. “With the deregulation of many magics once outlawed in Britain to bring the country once more in-line with the laws of Avalon, those same magics can once again be taught at this venerable school and staff have been retained to teach the new or in some cases restored subjects. In addition several staff members are to be let go and replaced. There have also been junior professors hired or heads of departments whose job it will be to either oversee the various subject departments as well as administer Apprenticeships as should be already occurring or to teach the younger years to lighten the loads on the department heads.”

Minerva flipped through the file.

“I’ve been replaced?” She looked white-faced and panicked. “Have I erred in some way?”

“It’s not a punishment Professor.” Hadrian smiled at her warmly. “It’s a promotion. From now on as Deputy Headmistress you will serve as a counselor and bridge between the students and staff in addition to your regular duties. We believe and Our advisors concur that asking one person to teach seven years’ worth of Transfiguration students, be an effective Head of House, and Deputy Headmistress was asking too much. Should you still desire to teach, you will be allowed to have up to three apprenticeships active at a time. Granted that is half the number of apprentices as the Department Heads but a good number for a busy witch such as yourself.”

The stern professor nearly beamed once the staffing change was explained to her. Hadrian continued as she returned to perusing the file.

“OWL students will be taught by qualified apprentices or junior professors while NEWTS are taught by junior professors or department heads. Only department heads will be allowed to take on sixth and seventh year apprenticeships. Defense Against the Dark Arts or the Dark Arts and their Defense has been removed entirely.”

Minerva gasped as she realized what she was looking at.

“Dark Arts?!” She whipped her head to the still-silent Dumbledore. “Albus they want us to teach the Dark Arts!”

“Not just the Dark Arts,” Hadrian shrugged nonchalantly at some of the expressions he was receiving. “Magic has largely been deregulated in magical Britain following many of the new Law Reforms. So-called “Dark Magic” is no longer illegal and as a result Hogwarts is required to teach it. Whether you like it or not. The Hogwarts Curriculum will include the following subjects by September First, staff have already been retained: Charms, Potions, Transfiguration, Herbology, Astronomy, Defense replacing DADA, History of Magic, and Wizarding Culture. OWLs students will have the following electives: Dueling, Arithmancy, Care of Magical Creatures, Ancient Runes, Magical Law, Mundane Studies replacing Muggle Studies, and Dark Arts.”

Hadrian almost smiled as Dumbledore turned puce.

“NEWT level students can choose from Dueling, Arithmancy, Finance, Ancient Runes, Magical Law, Ritual Magic, Warding, the Dark Arts, Healing, Care of Magical Creatures, Alchemy, and Spell Weaving. Professors will also each be required to host or captain a club or activity.”

“With that many new subjects it’s no wonder an audit was ordered.” Minerva commented dazedly.

Lucius leaned forward and whispered in Hadrian’s ear for several moments. A wicked grin flashed across his face for a split second before he turned and moved towards the Great Hall doors. The press had arrived.
“You enjoyed that entirely too much.” Wills laughed after Hadrian finished his retelling of his adventure to Hogwarts.

“Not as much as when the old man had to choke on his bile and pretend to support the new reforms for the press.” Hadrian studied the wizarding chess board before ordering his Queen’s knight to take Wills’ King’s bishop. “Or when he realized he no longer was connected to the Hogwarts wards.”

“Sometimes I think you just like messing with peoples’ heads.” Wills shook his own head in mock sadness, laughing when Hadrian gave him a little shove.

“Not people,” Hadrian corrected. “Mainly just Dumbledore. He tried to control my life from the moment I was orphaned, maybe even since before I was born. I’m merely returning the favor.”

“As long as you never sink to his level, I’m okay with it.” Wills shrugged, giving his betrothed a smile then wrinkled his nose as he thought of something. “Or somehow contract the man’s atrocious fashion sense. Has age blinded him or is he just senile?”

The two bonded-betrotheds laughed, whiling away the evening with a roaring fire and another game of chess as Hadrian’s Queen viciously beheaded Wills’ King.

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The Avalon Seven

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…

Hadrian was…well…moping.

There really wasn’t another word for it.
Remus had yet to return from his trip to the States and other territories, inspecting them as Lord Protector and making contacts in case reinforcements were ever called upon for whatever reason. A trip which meant Siri was sulking without his mate and Hadrian had been forced to wait to create both his version of the Marauders Map as well as continue working on their summer project together. Remus and Hadrian always worked on a summer project together. Usually it took the form of a multi-subject project like the miniature-model of Ravenscroft Hill with animated figures that used Charms and Transfiguration.

This summer he’d promised they could work on creating a new version of the linked mirror he and Siri used to keep in touch with each other when one of them was gone.

It was often Siri away with the late Lord Black, especially in his Grandpapa’s last year, but now Remus was gone just as much. Hadrian started H.I. in less than two weeks and once that happened Remus’s job as a tutor would be mostly replaced with his Lord Protector duties. He would still need him, H.I. was only three days a week first year and four second with a limited selection of electives so there was still plenty for him to learn outside of the classroom. And Remus had started taking over more and more of his mundane classes from Lady Maggie as Hadrian got older and harder for her to handle in a classroom setting.

His brain simply worked in ways that were hard for her to understand at times, despite raising both Mycroft and Sherlock she wasn’t a genius or prodigy herself so trying to teach one was nothing short of a trial.

It was well-established that Hadrian like his foster-brothers, was in fact a prodigy.

Being a prodigy was as different from being a genius as the sun was from the moon. Both shed light on the Earth and were celestial bodies but that was where the similarity ended and the differences began.

Yes, both required intelligence.

But there were hundreds of thousands of people on the planet that were smart, super-smart, or plain geniuses that were not prodigies.

Prodigies had something to set them apart.

They had drive.

Without personal drive and determination to succeed at all costs, prodigies were no different than anyone else who had talent and/or intelligence.

It was drive that had spurred Tom Riddle into learning everything there was to know about the Dark Arts and into becoming one of the youngest Dark Lords ever.

And drive was responsible for Hadrian’s many, many abilities.

Where Tom Riddle had pigeon-holed himself, using his drive to settle into becoming a Dark Lord at exclusion to everything else, Hadrian’s drive had him seeking to conquer…well…everything in his drive to be the King of Avalon that Lady Magic had determined he could be.

For an orphaned boy who’d been abused and beaten, originally he’d focused on pleasing his new guardians, throwing all of his drive and his prodigious brain into that goal. It was the reason he’d picked up music and the piano so well before he’d truly fallen in love with either and then learned the violin and cello of his own accord. Music – and teaching it to him – had made Lady Maggie happy and in his small experience of families through the Dursleys he knew that if Lady Maggie was
happy he was less likely to get hurt or sent away.

That same original goal had him learning everything Mycroft and Sherlock had to offer about logic, strategy, and deduction like a little sponge and saw him sitting rapty at Sherrinford’s knee when learning Latin and French. It had him picking up governments and political science from Siger and learning to read at an accelerated rate from Lady Maggie along with his maths. Even his first lessons in fencing and horseback riding were subject to the same intensity.

Then the news came.

He was to be King. That was the reason behind all the other lessons. He was chosen by Magic and would be a King someday…if he was worthy.

And a whole new goal and drive were born.

In a different prodigy with a different childhood, this news would have made a Dark Lord into an incomparable tyrant who would attempt – and ultimately succeed – in having the whole of the world under his unyielding fist.

In Hadrian who by that time had had extensive counseling and mind healing, taken in and protected and loved by his new guardians and his foster brothers and honorary uncles, it created a different King altogether.

Hadrian was a prodigy who would be King.

One who’s been carefully taught and groomed for the position from the time he was a young child. But one that still had the scars – some physical if barely visible and many more mental and emotional – from abuse and neglect. And while in another boy those scars would create a desire to protect himself above all others, in Hadrian it made a King who had a drive to protect his people and his family before all else.

To keep there from being another Tom Riddle or Harry Potter, lost, alone, and abused within the borders of Avalon.

And he would do it with the same intelligence and drive that drove Lady Maggie up the wall and had his guardians throwing up their hands in despair half the time as he learned things and did magic well beyond his years in prayer that Remus – who handled him better than anyone else when it came to lessons – would return soon.

Before their charge’s boredom destroyed Avalon itself before they’d even been able to explore it.

…

The whole of Skye Palace – including the house elves – gave a sign of relief when Remus returned from America two days after the Windsor’s went back to Buckingham Palace.

As yet they hadn’t reached an agreement over how much time William was allowed to spend with his betrothed in Avalon proper. Diana, who was the most supportive of William being magical after his Grandmother Elizabeth, had done an abrupt about-face when presented with a marriage contract and then a flesh-and-blood future son-in-law. There was nothing she could do to change any of it but it had not failed to reach just about everyone’s attention that she was being purposeful in her obstruction regarding William and Hadrian spending time together.

What her precise problem was with the arrangement was no one quite knew though Mycroft who was the most familiar with the dynamics of the British Royal Family posited that learning her son
was to marry and very early had upset her world view of “how things should be done” something no one in any position of power agrees well with.

Hadrian barely allowed him to get settled back in and welcomed enthusiastically by Sirius before dragging him off to the warded room in his Tower that had been designated as his “experiment” room. Warded to the brim and empty but for a worktable it was where Hadrian either practiced his spellwork under supervision or worked on crafting enchanted or magical objects with Remus and/or Sirius. In Ravenscroft Hill he’d had a converted closet that had been expanded with magic. Hadrian much preferred his new space.

If there was one thing Avalon had in spades at the moment it was space.

So much so that he’d given thought to moving his work room out of Skye Palace entirely and into one of the empty buildings on the grounds.

It would be safer than using a warded room in the very heart of the Palace after all.

Thankfully unlike Sherlock, most of his experiments didn’t go boom. He wasn’t quite to that level of experimentation yet. The explosions mostly happened in potions and alchemy – the first of which wasn’t his favorite subject though he’d proven to have skill after spending years under Sherlock’s chemistry tutelage and the latter was still years away from him even making an attempt at.

“Allright, cub.” Remus said with blatant amusement as the hyper pre-teen bounced around his warded room setting things up for whatever project had been driving him crazy with wanting to work on it…and everyone else crazy around him. “What’s the hurry?”

His mirror-calls with his mate had been filled with an unusual amount of pleading for him to hurry home and take Hadrian off his hands.

Sirius was a skilled teacher of Transfiguration and was a Master Auror which required Masteries in Defense and Magical Law. However when it came to pure Charms work…he tended to fall flat. His mate’s only interest in Charms was for pranking or practical applications for Defense, not the experimental usage needed for Hadrian’s projects.

Hadrian whipped around a pierced him with a narrow-eyed glare from under lowered ebony brows.

“I met Octavian.”

“I’d heard as much.” Remus answered blandly, reining in his laughter. Apparently Severus’s son had made quite the impact on the pre-teen.

Thankfully he hadn’t hit puberty yet or this might be a whole ‘nother conversation. He really, really wasn’t ready to revisit “The Talk” with his cub just yet. Remus and John were hoping to put off that conversation Take: Two until he was thirteen and married.

There was a world of difference between the basic biology/relationship mechanics conversation they had with him at nine and the one they’d be having with him sometime hopefully after he became a teenager.

His cub made a low growling sound in his throat.

“Octavian initiated our courtship.” Hadrian waved his hands above his head in a frantic motion. “I wasn’t prepared for that. I don’t even have any gifts for him or anything. Or any real ideas. And the only people I could ask are either his twin sister or his father and…”
Remus held up a hand. “Say no more. I wouldn’t want to have to ask Severus how to court his son
either.”
Hadrian sighed falling into a slump against his work table.
“I’ve only talked to him that once…I…Wills…I.” He ran a hand through his wild mane of hair that
he’d tugged out of its neat tail in his aggravation. “I’m only eleven.” He shrugged. “And I know
more about running a country than I do about how to handle courting and apparently being courted.
Wills is easier. For one he’s the same age as me and in much the same position. I get him things I
know he’d like or things I’d like in his place. Octavian…I don’t know anything about him. Except
that he goes to Hogwarts and I won’t be able to see him for the better part of a year. I don’t want
him to leave without me at least giving him a reciprocal gift. I don’t want him to think I don’t…want
to be courted by him or something.”
“What’s the plan, cub?” Remus was much more sympathetic after hearing his cub’s explanation of
why he was being so manic.
“Wills and I already talked about making a way for us to correspond easier and I thought of the
mirror you and Siri use when one of you has to leave. So I want to make several sets of those.
But…” He looked away, blushing lightly. “I’m not sure about giving something like that to
Octavian…at least until I know him better.”
Besides something about Octavian and his voice made him feel weird. He wasn’t going to set
himself up for more of the same until he figures out why. And whether it was restricted to just his
voice or Octavian in general.
“Understandable.”
“That’s when I thought of making paired journals instead of paired mirrors.” Hadrian smiled
brightly, animated once more. “I still want to do the mirrors, especially since I don’t know when the
next time Wills’s mum is going to let him visit. I know I’ll see him at school but this way we can talk
to each other without any kind of audience. And the paired journals can be used for more than just
talking to Octavian or other later betrotheds. They could be used to keep in contact with the Privy
Council when I go to Hogwarts instead of relying on owls or making Russell ferry letters back and
forth.”
“It’s a good idea, cub.” Remus smiled at his cub’s excited face. “Let’s see what we can do…”
…
It took until the day before the twins left for Hogwarts but Remus and Hadrian eventually discovered
the right configuration to layer the needed spells for the paired journals.
Once they’d done that they’d batted around the idea of making just one Master journal for Hadrian
with all the others linked to it but quickly discarded it for general usage. If there ever came a time
where he needed to complete Council meetings via journal they could revisit it then but for what
Hadrian wanted them for, strictly ease of communication between two parties, there was no point.
And it would quickly getting confusing trying to keep who was writing straight until he memorized
everyone’s hand writing.
So it was that Octavian left for Hogwarts with an emerald-green leather journal in his possession,
password protected and enchanted by his contracted-betrothed.
…


Hadrian had just finished his enchanting work with the journals and mirrors and was walking from his new work-room on the Palace grounds when he passed the Skye Palace mews.

As he did so, he sensed something he’d never felt before and looked up as a gorgeous pure-white Snowy owl flew down and alighted on his shoulder, extending a leg for him to remove her letter.

“Hello, beautiful.” Hadrian breathed, gently untying the missive. He was surprised when she stayed with him, especially as close to the mews and owlery as they were. He would’ve thought she’d want a snack and some water but apparently she had other orders. Orders that became clear when he read the message.

Rian, meet Hedwig.

I know you’re supposed to give Courting gifts in public but I couldn’t wait and chance Mother stopping me (and Hedwig wasn’t having it, let me tell you!).

She found me in Diagon Alley when I was shopping for supplies with Kingsley and all but screamed Rian Needs Me! So here she is. She’s yours and my Courting gift to you. I know you have a whole fleet of owls but this one will be just yours for private correspondence, I know you use your other owl mostly to talk to John and Sherlock.

Since there’s been no success on the making-cellular-phones-work-with-magic front I decided this was the next best thing!

See you soon.

Yours,

Wills

Looking up at the beautiful owl, he grinned as her intelligent amber eyes stared down at him with patience.

“Hello, Hedwig. I’m Hadrian, lovely to meet you.”

…

Hedwig’s first mission was delivering the newly-enchanted paired mirror to Wills and the journal to Octavian.

She returned feathers fluffed up with pride over her success and promptly accepted an offering of bacon and water from her familiar before making herself comfortable on the perch he’d sent an elf for and had set up in his room, tucking her feathered head under one wing and falling asleep.

Hadrian had chuckled at his new friend and given her a quick scratch before leaving her be and preparing everything he would need the next day in his extension and feather-light charmed leather backpack courtesy of John, Sherlock, and his honorary-uncles. John and Sherlock providing the bag and his uncles the spell work.

School started tomorrow.

Hadrian tapped his mirror later that night before his bedtime and said: “Emrys Consort” the password to connect it to Wills’s. Unlike what they’d decided to do with the journals, his mirror had been enchanted as a “Master” mirror, able to connect to any that were linked to it. At the moment that was William’s, Remy’s, and Siri’s though that would change as different people needed use of them for
different things.

The mirror turned foggy and light purple before clearing into a view of William’s sleepy blue eyes and mussed blonde hair.

“Rian?” He blinked then rubbed his eyes partially clearing them.

“Hi, Wills,” Hadrian smiled softly then asked. “Did I wake you up?”

“No, I was just getting ready to lay down.” Wills yawned. “Long day today. Lots of talking between Kings and my parents over how I was going to get to-and-from H.I., what stops were allowed after classes, that sort of thing.” He shrugged.

Kings had won the argument over them wanting him to go by car, pointing out that that would simply make him stick out more than necessary at the school, the same with the new magical carriage. In the end, trusting him with a two-way port-key won as long as he promised to inform Kingsley before going to a friend’s home or staying late at school for activities.

Though there was still no sign of yielding on the visiting-Hadrian front.

As far as William’s mother was concerned seeing him three days a week at school was more than enough time together.

“What stops are you allowed after classes?” Mondays, Wednesday, and Fridays were H.I. days that year with Tuesday being added the next. On Mondays only there was a two hour “study” time following classes where the kids from both years and the three groups in each year could mingle, socialize, and if they needed get help with their studies.

In many ways it was an extension of the social-play-study groups wizarding children often joined before age eleven in an attempt to prevent creating children who had zero grasp of how to behave with their peers instead of only knowing the “proper” way to socialize with adults.

And at H.I. at least, it gave pureblood Heirs and Noble children the chance to be around mundane-born and common-born wizards and witches in a controlled environment. For some it eased the all-too-common discomfort the “elite” of wizarding society had around mundane-born children while for others it taught them to hold their tongues. Rarely did a child educated at Hedwig go on to insult and disparage others for their perceived social status – at least in public.

The punishment for such behavior was simply too strict for most to try it a second time.

Wills grinned at Hadrian’s question.

“Yes,” he answered the unspoken question rather than the verbal one. “I’m allowed to stay for the social activities at the school on Monday and those on the other days with at least a week’s notice. Still not able to go to Avalon though or go with you to your “outside” lessons.”

Unfortunate on the lessons but understandable.

The Princess of Wales didn’t seem like the type of mother that would approve of her son learning to fight…especially since Hadrian’s chosen martial art was better suited to take-downs than simple sparring or even self-defense. Krav Maga is very much a study in offense rather than defense. At Hadrian’s level even sparring isn’t done without thick protective padding.

Still…he would come up for a reason for his bonded-betrothed to spend time with him outside of school and official events.
He just needed more time and exploration first.

“What electives did you sign up for, Rian?”

A-Week for “Heir Studies” students at H.I. were able to choose four electives compared to the two electives the B-Week or “Noble Studies” students and the one for the C-Week or “Wizarding Studies” students. B and C-Week students and their parents could choose to pay additional tuition for extra electives but even then there were some that were only offered to the A-Week students. While it was often seen askance by the mundane-born students as a class divide it had more to do with prior education.

Heirs of Noble Families were held to a higher standard than any other child in the Wizarding education system for the simple fact that unless their families were blood-traitors, they start their private education at age four or five. By the time they reach eleven and Hedwig Institute they already are skilled in the basics and most requirements for any of the classes offered. Noble children who weren’t heirs or “spares” were also held to a higher standard though not as stringent as their older siblings, cousins, or relatives. In fact the term “blood-traitor” rather than referring to purity of blood or blood supremacy beliefs as most assume, actually has to do with the education provided to the children of the blood-line. A family or parent(s) or guardian(s) who don’t educate their heirs, spares, or other children properly are considered to have “betrayed their blood” making them blood-traitors, a stigma that only attaches to the person responsible and any that agree with it.

An excellent example Hadrian had been told of recently when learning about his future classmates from Remus and Eddard Ollivander was the Weasleys.

Lord Septimus Weasley was the Lord of the Aged and Noble House of Weasley, the same status as House Malfoy only with less money. His oldest son and former Heir Charles Septimus died during Voldemort’s reign of terror as did his spare-heir Percival William. That left his youngest son Arthur Bilius as the heir-presumptive of House Weasley as both his elder brothers had passed without legitimate issue. However, Arthur was…well…lazy. And soft. And frustratingly obsessed with “muggles.”

Not an appropriate Heir for an Aged and Noble House.

Nor was he educated and trained as one, having done the bare-minimum all through school though he had the intelligence to reach much higher success.

His father therefore had decided to make Arthur’s oldest cousin Richard Llewelyn Weasley the Heir-Presumptive until Arthur provided him with a suitable son to become his Heir.

A challenge his wife Molly Weasley nee Prewett was more than capable of handling having six sons in less than ten years.

Septimus Weasley in the meantime was appointed the Regent of House Prewett until one of Molly’s sons was deemed by the Weasley Lord to be an adequate Heir for his allied House.

In the end the old lion of House Weasley settled upon the two eldest grandsons: William Arthur and Charles Tristan to become the Weasley and Prewett Heirs. Knowing his son and his son’s deplorable abilities with finances, Septimus himself paid for “Bill” and “Charlie” to be tutored appropriately and then for their tuition into the A-Week program at H.I. when they were of the right age.

That was where what was “right” and “appropriate” as far as the nobles and the children of the Aged and Noble House of Weasley ended and the scandal began.
Young Percival or Percy was three years younger than Charlie and two older than the next sons the twins. It was entirely the intention of Septimus Weasley to pay for Percy’s tuition to H.I. as well, seeing him as an appropriate “spare” for either of his elder brothers. However before it came time for him to attend H.I., Septimus, Lord Weasley, died of his advanced age though some credited it to a simple broken heart having lost his two favored sons as well as his beloved Cedrella Black-Weasley within a year of their passing.

Percy however, wasn’t the type to allow that to stop him. He sat for the scholarship exam on offer at H.I. and received a full-scholarship including funds for his supplies to the A-Week program. His mother had never been prouder and it seemed like despite the absence of the Lord and the Heir being still in school that the star of House Weasley was once again rising.

A supposition that came crashing down two years later.

It was no secret to anyone who knew her that Molly Weasley could be a shrew of the first order.

Nor had anyone who knew her had cause to doubt her pride and aspirations for her oldest children and adoration of her “baby boy” and her “darling daughter.”

When it came to her twins was where the appearance of a happy family fell apart.

Anyone who had been around the twins Frederick Gideon and George Fabian simply knew two things about them: they were ridiculously clever and extremely mischievous.

Everyone that is except their own mother.

Molly Weasley was unbearably overbearing when it came to the twin boys and incredibly vocal about her disappointment – and embarrassment – over their rambunctious behavior.

With the Weasley Lord gone, Bill and Charlies not yet Claiming the Lordships, and the family’s finances, Molly and Arthur couldn’t afford to simply send their twins to Hedwig Institute. And rather than risk the embarrassment of having her sons try for a scholarship and utterly fail – as she was completely blind to their intelligence – Molly refused to allow them to take the test.

Now when a noble family hadn’t the funds to send their children off for education the only proper recourse was to home-educate them until Hogwarts.

Their relationship with their mother in ashes, the twins refused that course. And Molly being well…Molly…she did something which scandalized the nobles.

She sent them to the “free” primary school, even going so far as to accept money from the school-supply fund to outfit them.

No noble child had ever, ever in ninety years attended the public school. It had been built solely for the usage of bridging the gap between the education offered at Hogwarts and the complete ignorance of the wizarding world mundane-born witches and wizards had before entering school. Only the absolute poorest of the wizarding world used it themselves, the first year being considered a waste of time for any child born and raised in the wizarding world.

The nobles were scandalized, the elder Weasley children ashamed of their mother for not even being willing to pay for their twin brothers to attend the subsidized school like normal wizarding children, and the term blood-traitor was attached to a noble family for the first time in generations.

And since the younger two children simply went along with their mother, Ronald and Ginevra were tarred with her same brush, her ineffectual husband along with her.
Honestly, the more Remus told him about the younger two Weasley children he spent time with when visiting his friends from the War, the more he was glad the Holmeses and Lord Wallace were his guardians.

Goodness only knows what would have happened to him if Dumbledore had been allowed to oversee his education…

Focusing back on the patiently-listening Wills who he’d been telling the story of the Weasley-scandal to, Hadrian finally answered the question.

“Arithmancy, Ancient Runes, Care of Magical Creatures, and Dueling. You?”

Wills gave him bright grin around his yawn. “Same, someone might have mentioned what you were planning to take when he visited Grandmother.”

Hadrian smirked. Mycroft to the rescue…again.

“Get some sleep, Wills.” Hadrian ordered softly as he watched lids droop over bright blue eyes. “I’ll see you first thing in the morning.”

“Night, Rian.” Wills blinked slowly then reached out to tap the mirror “off.”

“Night, Wills.”

…

Hedwig Institute of Magic. Hedwig. H.I.

In 1883, the Lords Council had noticed a concerning trend. More and more muggleborns were coming into the Wizarding World every year. A trend noticed around the globe save for the United States where magic was often as lawless as their western territories. In the end, the Lords Council decreed that the current education system was no longer effective for modern society.

More and more muggleborns were arriving each and every year, often completely unprepared for life in the Wizarding World or to be thrown head-first into Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Concerned and worried – both about the muggleborns and that simply lowering the education standards would create weaker wizards and witches – a decree was made and then ratified into Law by the Wizengamot as the Lords Council did not have the same ability to simply create Law that the King of Avalon did.

A portion of Hogwarts tuition every year for the next ten years would be earmarked for several new schools along with undertaking fundraisers and donations.

Altogether over a million galleons was raised – at least half of which went directly to constructing the newly designated Hedwig Institute of Magic. Also built were primary schools for muggleborns and less affluent half-bloods merely dubbed the British Magic School and their sister school in Cornwall the Tintagel School of Magic that allowed those who either couldn’t afford Hogwarts nor could qualify for one of their competitive scholarships to still gain an education another way besides through home-study.

H.I. opened its doors on September the First, 1900. Offering the best of education to the children of noble houses – and those who could otherwise afford it – with the British School and Tintagel opening two years previous to all students. Tintagel offered classes up to OWLs, its success at bridging the ever-growing gap between home-study and Hogwarts leading to the creation of the
Magical Scholarship Academy which was subsidized by the Nobles and offered reduced tuition for students from a young age up through NEWTs beginning in 1923.

Staring up at the gleaming white edifice in the late summer sun, Hadrian could well believe that H.I. took ten years to fundraise for and another seven to design, build, ward, and staff.

With a clear Greco-Roman influence, H.I. towered overhead in several stories of restrained Doric columns and pure white plasterwork.

“Rian!”

The shout came from behind him as the young King was still cataloging the elegant building. Turning he smiled at the waving sandy-blonde-haired boy who was dashing through the arrivals at the one of the port-key points just outside the school wards. Kings was keeping up with Hadrian’s bonded-betrothed at a steady clip, Hadrian’s own guard waiting patiently at the doors.

While wards could be fallible especially around public areas like government buildings, hospitals, and schools, the one protecting H.I. were some of the most impressive on a single building outside of one of Hadrian’s own properties. The remaining Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses had come together to protect their most vulnerable children, as the younger little ones were always safe behind family wards or with their parents and the older were more than capable of holding off most threats until help could arrive. House Potter and House Ollivander were known for being particularly vigilant, having been culled down to a single member at least once in living memory when the school was warded.

Which was why Eddard Ollivander had the Headmastership. The Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses traded the position between them either every ten years as was the case with Eddard or longer if there was a Headmaster who desired to stay longer. At the present time only House Ollivander and House Longbottom had members capable of taking up the task. Dowager Longbottom would be relieving Eddard or one of his siblings or children would if the fierce Lady wasn’t up to the challenge with her other duties.

However first the Headmaster had to make it through this one last incoming class.

And what a class it would be.

The Names on the Rolls so illustrious that the Headmaster himself would be overseeing their educations while the Lord Protector or other members of the Privy Council sat in or gave classes on certain subjects.

Eddard had finally gotten Remus back into the school…though it wasn’t the way he’d hoped for.

But better to have him as a part-time lecturer and bodyguard than not at all. Eddard was one of the few that knew the full membership of the Privy Council due to his father’s position as well as his friendship with the werewolf and his budding mentorship with the young King. Though he wasn’t sure if even Hadrian would be able to convince one of the du Lac’s to take up their traditional position as Lord Marshal.

“She’ll call out to his bonded-betrothed, stopping just outside the wide double doors of the school that were carved from a deep rich mahogany with interlinking Celtic Knot-work hiding the runes set into the grain of the wood. His guard – one of McG’s relations and another Hit Wizard – paused in step with his charge, trading nods with Kingsley as their charges quickly linked arms.

“How did you sleep?” Hadrian asked his bonded, seeing hints of tiredness lurking around his eyes.
“Okay.” Wills shrugged and linked their hands together, locking the two from fingers to elbow, shoulders brushing.

“Nervous, excited?” His bonded probed leadingly, arching a brow as they followed Kingsley into the school, Hadrian’s guard taking the rear.

Whispers followed the two boys, one a good four inches taller than his companion. Hadrian’s Claiming had left him a very tall boy for his age, hopefully his former guardians were right and his body would stop growing for a couple years before starting back up again. Wills had gained some height with his own Claiming the previous January, making him just under five feet tall.

Between their height – some of the tallest in the school if not the tallest in Hadrian’s case – their guards, and their dress – sleeveless battle robes with tunic and trousers such as Hadrian favored though in cotton and linen rather than the leather and silk he wore when being “King” or for everyday in the case of his dragonhide trousers, Hadrian and William stood out even among the wealthier students or the children of wizarding nobles. Neither of them wanted to flaunt their status though some show of it was unavoidable. Wearing more “normal” wizarding materials even if their attire wasn’t quite the fashion – yet – among their own age group was one way to blend in better. The battle robes were the same dove gray cotton as the standard robes the rest of the students’ uniforms, H.I. not requiring a full uniform like Hogwarts but only the dove grey outer robe for everyday and a specially charmed black potions’ robe and dragonhide gloves.

Hadrian could almost swear that he felt the hairs on the back of his neck lift from the sheer number of eyes that tracked him and his bonded through the first floor of H.I. which housed the student lounge/reception area, staff offices, cafeteria, and one large room that doubled as a conference room/lecture hall.

According to his Uncle Sirius who attended H.I. – Remus was home tutored by his mother and father to hide his “furry little problem” – the second floor of H.I. held the potions labs, gymnasium, and library which both years of students shared while the first years had their three classrooms or “homerooms” on the third floor and the second years on the fourth. A planetarium was at the tallest section/floor of the building and was half-indoors and half-outdoors to train the students in astronomy both the “old-fashioned” way as well as using modern methods. Though thankfully there was only one monthly star-viewing lesson per month per class, not one or more a week that takes place after dark.

“Both.” Wills said, looking at the gawking clusters of students out of the corner of his eye, never losing his royal polish. “I hope no one takes a picture of me and sells it to that awful Skeeter woman.” He commented as they reached the conference room/lecture hall that already had several first years present.

The whole year of students had morning gatherings once a month where the Headmaster covered important topics or informed them about upcoming events. In this case since it was the first day of classes for the new students they were meeting everyone in their year and “breaking the ice” before being separated into their classes and shown to their homerooms as well as being given a general tour of the school.

“No one would be able to, Mr. Nimue-Windsor.” Headmaster Ollivander stated, instantly easing both royals’ minds having overheard the comment. “Hedwig Institute is charmed and warded against releasing any information about the students who attend classes here. Someone sneaking in and taking pictures of either you or your bonded would be a direct violation of that safeguard.”

“Thank goodness.” Wills smiled over at Hadrian as his bonded pulled out a chair for him before sitting himself at the Headmaster’s right hand, placing himself between Eddard on his right and Wills
on his left with their two bodyguards either standing at their backs or taking the empty seat at Wills’ left.

“I know you’re not ready to be ‘outed’ to the entire Wizarding World, Wills.” Hadrian leaned in close to whisper to keep the curiously-watching students and staff from overhearing. “I promised you would be introduced at your leisure not mine or anyone else’s.”

“Not even your Lord of the Privy Seal?” Wills teased him lightly, Hadrian’s gift to the Lord Malfoy of usage one of his personal royal residences in Avalon because the Lord had done such a good job of controlling the media having become a running joke between the two. Wills wasn’t quite sure how the older man managed to bend Hadrian to his will when it came to press appearances but he definitely wanted to learn for later in his relationship with the King.

“Not even Lucius.” Hadrian said with a smile then spotting a familiar head of hair out of the corner of his eye, he rose to his feet regally. Lord Malfoy had yet to introduce him to his son and Heir feeling that too much change would overwhelm Draco with the sudden move to Avalon, his father’s new position, and the announcement of his betrothal imminent all happening in a very short time. No need to tax him further by making him meet the King even if Hadrian was hoping to make another friend.

Eddard stepped forward and introduced them formally then made an announcement to the room at large.

“His Grace Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon, King of Avalon, may I introduce you to the Noble Draco Malfoy, Heir of the Aged and Noble House of Malfoy. Heir Malfoy this is His Grace, King Hadrian.” He waited a few moments for the two boys to make their formal bow/nod combination then addressed the room. “At Hedwig Institute as at most bastions of knowledge and learning, the only titles that are used are those of academia. To that end, while I will introduce you all formally to His Grace, after that introduction within these walls he will merely be Mr. Emrys-Pendragon or Hadrian if you are given leave to address him informally. That goes as well for his Bonded-Betrothed Lord Nimue, who will be addressed as Mr. Windsor-Nimue or William rather than His Grace, Consort Emrys, or Lord Nimue. However you shall address myself as either Professor or Headmaster Ollivander or even Wand Master Ollivander rather than Heir Ollivander.”

A few of the students appeared confused though most simply looked excited over seeing the young King and his mysterious Betrothed. However one or two of the more gossip-mad of the students seemed extremely put-out that the spells and wards of H.I. wouldn’t allow them to run to the nearest paper and spill the news all about the finally-revealed Consort Emrys.

“Draco,” The platinum blonde held out his hand with much less formality after the Headmaster’s announcement. “Draco Malfoy.”

Hadrian grinned, pleased at the slightly-lowered public mask.

“Hadrian.” He echoed, shaking the boy’s hand firmly. “Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon, but you can call me Hadrian.”

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3 February 2016 minor edits completed
Chapter Twelve: The Dragon Stair

Chapter Notes

Not as long as I was shooting for but I hope it doesn't disappoint!

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Edited 2/3/16 Minor Errors

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Twelve: The Dragon Stair

“Welcome to the Hedwig Institute of Magic.” Eddard stood at the podium in the front of the room after all the new students had settled down after being introduced to Hadrian. “As you have already heard, I am the Headmaster, Professor and Master Wand Maker Eddard Ollivander. I am also the main Professor of the “A” Week group of students. All of the students in this room, no matter what group you are a part of, will attend the five main lecture classes together in this very room: History of Magic, Magical Theory, and the Three Magics: Dark, Light, and Grey. Every student will also meet with their main Professor and assigned Mentor following their individual placement testing, either myself, Professor Elaine Diggory for “B” Week students, or Professor Dugal Smythe-Smith for “C” Weeks students.”

Hadrian leaned over and whispered to Wills: “That’s Conan’s mum, he’ll be in our week.”

Each of the named Professors, who outside of H.I. were a Lady of an Aged and Noble House and a mundane-born wizard respectively, stood from their seats in the row behind the Headmaster.

“We have individual placement testing here at Hedwig Institute for a simple reason: at Hedwig only the bindings you place on yourself determine what you can achieve. To that end while many of the classes will have a standard-lecture format, there will also be room for individual talents and interests to blossom. Or on the other hand if there is a form of study you struggle with, you will receive the help you need from your professors to be prepared for Hogwarts in two years’ time. Your meetings with your main group Professors serve a simple purpose: to discover what you might have in mind for a career or vocation following your basic education.”

Here Eddard smirked sardonically down at the first row of students where the King of Avalon was flanked by his betrothed and his friend Heir Longbottom.

“If what you desire is to be a great King, we will do what we can to prepare you for that path.” Now he looked around at the other students who were drinking in the welcome speech with wide-eyes. “If you want to do nothing more than live off your inheritance, I will remind you that letting your parents tutor you until you’re ready to skim through the OWLs is much less a drain on your future gold than this Institute. However if you yearn to make your money work for you, we will prepare you for a Mastery in Finance. If Spell Weaving is your secret goal, we shall give you the foundation you will need. Be honest with your Professors, that they might help you farther along your chosen
He clapped his hands together twice and the comfortable stadium seating transfigured into student desks. “Let the testing begin!”

Lunch found twenty-seven new H.I. students slumped over their bowls of rich beef or vegetarian stew in the finely-appointed dining room. Unlike Hogwarts, H.I. served a strict lunch and tea of nutritious and *balanced* meals rather than simply allowing the food to be served family-style, each chose a place at a table and then selected something from each category. On this first day of school they could choose between a beef or vegetarian stew, various vegetable sticks with a dipping sauce or a salad, and a selection of fresh fruits or a mixed fruit cocktail for something sweet.

Unless it was a feast day or celebration, pure sweets were rarely served at H.I. along with the overly-sugary pumpkin juice, with water, milk, or no-sugar-added juices being preferred though tea was an option.

 Hadrian and Wills were the first to rouse, dipping spoons into their hearty stew and picking at the veggie and fruit selections each had ordered.

Neville turned his head and gave the two a mild glare from his still bent-over position.

“How can you recover so quick?” He complained mildly, just short of a whine. “I feel like my brain’s been sucked out and blended then squeezed back in.”

His friend laughed and patted him on the back consolingly.

“I have half-a-dozen tutors, remember?” Hadrian chuckled, even if most of them are more like parents than teachers. “This is not the first time I’ve started my day with a gauntlet of tests.”

“What’s your excuse?” Draco haughtily demanded of William from his position on Neville’s other side. He’d quickly blended into the forming group, which had been joined by one of his own friends who was in the “C” week, Blaise Zabini.

H.I. capped study groups at five students and neither Draco nor Blaise were going to miss out on getting to know the King of Avalon better.

It helped that Hadrian had met Blaise a couple times before at the Wallace Estate, the boy being friends with the older Rhys who started Hogwarts this same day.

Rhys’ brother David was already seventeen and was one of the first students to take advantage of the new apprenticeships offered at Hogwarts with Hadrian’s education reform, being chosen for a duel apprenticeship with the new Defense Head Elizabeth Shacklebolt and the Dark Arts Head Tiberian Nott.

The new Lord Prewett had returned to the school, also undertaking an apprenticeship at Hogwarts as well as Hadrian’s cousin Dora, though Dora was after becoming a Master Auror like Sirius while her friend Charlie was seeking a Mastery in Care of Magical Creatures.

For a school that averages between fifty and a hundred students per year not counting the two apprenticeship years, Hogwarts had previously been massively understaffed. Now with the new appointments and hires, there were around forty staff, making them outnumbered six-to-one instead of forty to a hundred-to-one.

“Andromeda Black-Tonks is my tutor.” Wills said simply, the other boys giving an understanding “ahh.” Except for Hadrian who already knew and felt his pain. Andy was nobody’s idea of a
Draco blinked.

“That’s my aunt.” He said slowly. “I think. I’ve never met either of them…well…”

“We get it.” Hadrian jumped in before his new friend became completely discomfited by the subject. He wasn’t going to make Draco try and explain to Wills that he’d never met Andy because his parents were bigots and that he’d never met Bellatrix because she was crazier than a bedbug and locked away in Azkaban.

That wasn’t what friends did.

“Grandpapa Black reinstated Andy to the Black line before he passed.” Hadrian filled in a couple of the gaps for their rapt audience. “With meeting us maybe you’ll be able to meet your aunt sometime.” He offered, calmly spooning up more stew as the other boys went back to eating.

“Perhaps.” Draco answered noncommittally. The only way that might happen was if his parents had no idea who he was meeting. Though it might not be hard to get away with since they’d both been very busy ever since his father started on the Privy Council and they moved to Avalon City.

“How have you been, Hadrian?” Blaise interjected smoothly to derail the topic. “I haven’t seen you since last summer.”


“And Rhys? He’s been pretty vague since your birthday.” Blaise didn’t know what was going on there but figured Hadrian might since he was one of their friend’s closest companions.

“I don’t know.” Hadrian frowned for a second, studying the piece of pineapple he’d just speared. “The transition to Avalon seemed to go well but Rhys has been doing a fine imitation of a hermit ever since and David wasn’t talking before they both left for Hogwarts.”

“Hmm.” Blaise nodded in understanding, humming around his mouthful of ratatouille. He swallowed before responding. “He does that sometimes. More now since Lady Wallace…” He trailed off, cautious of their surroundings.

Hadrian just shrugged, shooting the confused Wills a wordless glance promising an explanation later.

“So Malfoy.” Neville decided to speak up before the conversation could get any worse. “How are you liking living in Avalon? Hadrian gifted your family with use of the Basilisk’s Den while Lord Malfoy is serving on the Council, right?”

“That’s right.” Hadrian paused in his whispering into Wills’s ear to confirm. They didn’t have long before the meet-and-greet with their professors as well as the counseling sessions with their main professor began and he wanted to fill in Wills on the underlying stories in person. His bonded was a little at-sea since everyone else was in some way connected or acquainted for the most part.

Hadrian knew Neville from his play/social group. Blaise knew Draco from the same sort of group besides his mother “The Black Widow” being great friends with Narcissa Malfoy nee Black. Neville had met Blaise before at Rhys’s home as had Hadrian while Hadrian and Neville knew of Draco though they hadn’t met.

The only person Wills had at the moment was his Rian until he made some new friends.
Thankfully he wasn’t shy.

“Avalon is beautiful.” Draco lit up at the thought of his new home. “And the Basilisk’s Den is just brilliant. It has all kinds of secret passages and hidden alcoves and such. Very, very interesting.”

“Well.” Neville observed cannily. “It is the official Slytherin Residence in Avalon proper and Malfoys are considered the consummate Slytherins as far as Hogwarts Sorting goes. Not surprised the Den’s your kind of place. The Longbottom Estate is grand as well. Much fancier than the Grange, though.” The normally quiet boy cocked his head to one side lightly.

“It is in Avalon.” Wills turned his head and gave the others a smile, caught up on the underlying friendships at play thanks to Hadrian’s coaching. “Most things seem to run grander there.”

“Here here.” Hadrian raised his cup of tea in a mock-toast the others laughing and following suit.

…

Hadrian was the fourth student from his week to have his advisory meeting.

As with many other years, the “A” week or Heir class at Hedwig was quite small. Hadrian’s year especially as it wasn’t until about a year and a half after his birth – with Voldemort safely banished for the moment – that Wizarding Britain felt at ease with having children once more. It was mostly the Nobles who wouldn’t risk their lines dying if they did – like his own father – or mundanes who had children during the height of Riddle’s reign of terror.

The Heir week in his year was smaller than most and would’ve been smaller still if not for Wills. Altogether there was Susan, Heiress Bones presumptive until and unless her Lady Aunt had children; her best friend Hannah, Heiress Abbott; Conan, Heir Diggory; Hadrian as Lord Emrys among others; Neville, Heir Longbottom; Draco, Heir Malfoy; and of course Hadrian’s bonded William, Lord Nimue. Seven Heirs or in Wills’ case Lords, an auspicious number.

It was rare that an Heir would arrive at either H.I. or Hogwarts as a vested and Claimed Lord. In fact it only happened when for whatever reason the Ritual of Blood Inheritance was utilized. Most often, though it varied greatly depending on the rituals and traditions of the Houses, orphan Heirs and Heiresses became Lords and Ladies at the standard Wizarding majority age of seventeen when they’ve come fully into their powers, with a Regent such as the Dowager Longbottom in charge of their estates and political seats until then.

Though generally by age eleven it was known who would be an Heir and they will have been Confirmed as such.

Exceptions are always viable however, such as when the late Lord Septimus Weasley overlooked all of his own children and selected instead one of his grandsons to be his Heir.

“Oh Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.” Eddard smiled at his King, keeping to the proper formality of the occasion rather than call him Hadrian as he had permission from the Lord of Avalon to do so.

“Please sit.”

Headmaster Ollivander waved to the wing-back chair across from him. The interviews were in his private “Professor” office instead of his public “Headmaster” one. It was rare that he took over a group of students as he has with Hadrian’s week however it has happened in the past. Eleven and twelve year olds tended to be much more comfortable in his simple office with a fireplace and comfy chairs than in the somewhat over-the-top spectacle he used for meetings with prospective parents, politicians, and donors.
“Headmaster,” Hadrian nodded regally with a quirk of his lips as he sat with his innate grace in the large cream chair.

“Now to begin.” Eddard snapped his fingers and a rolled up parchment floated over and unrolled at the Headmaster’s side, a Never-Out quill hovering over what looked to Hadrian’s eyes to be a simple blank form. “I don’t believe we need to cover your career goals, do we?”

Hadrian chuckled, shaking his head as the quill filled in his rather long formal name at the top of the form. It quickly added his age, date of birth, and other standard information before moving to the next section and filling in: Career - Ruling King of the Avalonian Empire.

“Moving along,” Eddard glanced at the results from the placement testing that were in a bound ream of parchment on the low table between them. “You placed extremely well. Some of the highest grades I’ve ever seen as far as your theory tests go and you’re very, very high in the practical application percentiles.” Top of his year – so far – though Eddard didn’t think that was anything the King wasn’t already aware of. “Though I would expect nothing less from your previous educators.”

The quill scratched along under Hadrian’s watchful gaze filling in “O” or Outstanding in each of the boxes for the testing results. In several spots there was even an O with an asterisk mark beside it, signifying he’d either gotten the highest grade of his year or he’d broken a record, he wasn’t quite sure. Something to look up later.

“Honestly, Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.” Eddard set the testing results aside, still somewhat boggled over the results from their power-monitoring crystals that helped them discover who would need extra exercises to either expand their core or control the excess power they already have. “If it wasn’t completely out-of-the-question I would send you straight to Hogwarts. However,” they shared a knowing glance. “For other reasons that action is quite unacceptable. Therefore except for the standard lecture classes your studies will be entirely self-paced and you will be allowed to work ahead in the lecture classes as well though you must still attend them with your peers. I’ve no intention of holding a certified prodigy back – or attempting to anyway.” He finished dryly, knowing full-well the futility of such an action.

Despite what some would assume, with H.I.’s reputation for excellence the new King of Avalon was far from the first prodigy Eddard had mentored and he doubted Hadrian would be the last to pass through these halls.

And much to his surprise, Hadrian wasn’t even the only one in his group let alone his year.

From what his deputy had told him of the testing, they’d identified a possible prodigy in Herbology as well as more than one student with genius-level intelligence and knowledge though they were still unsure if they were actual prodigies or not.

One prodigy in a year wasn’t unheard-of though neither was it common. For there to be two for sure with another handful of students with the potential though lacking somewhat in drive…he found his earlier musings quite correct. This would be an auspicious year of students indeed.

“That will suit me well.” Hadrian agreed with a nod. He still had his studies with his former guardians as well as the business of the Empire to cope with as well. There was no reason to waste his time at H.I. if at all possible. Whether Hogwarts would be as accommodating was yet to be seen.

“Now as far as your future education is concerned.” Eddard waved a hand in an encompassing motion. “Have you given any thought to our previous conversation?”

“I have.”
“And what have you decided?”

Hadrian gave a half-smile. “That you were right. While it would be acceptable for a King to have a plethora of Masteries, it isn’t necessarily advisable.”

“Quite so, unfortunately.” Eddard grimaced in empathy. So much potential in this young man. If an average Noble child or even Heir had been given such gifts they would have been able to devote themselves entirely to research and pioneering new magical discoveries. As it was, one of the greatest magical talents he’d ever even heard of was a King. “In other years, more stable and less contentious years, a King of Avalon could have been an eternal student and researcher, leaving matters of State and Security to his Council. You do not have that luxury, Hadrian. As much as it pains me as a guide of greater minds to admit.”

His companion gave a small shrug. “I was raised to this, Eddard.” Hadrian’s face and affect was utterly calm and accepting. “I can always tinker with Spell Weaving and Experimental Charms and other things of that manner when the Empire has settled down. After all,” he smirked. “There’s nothing stopping the Throne from employing Masters – even if only to teach and tutor the King in their vocations.”

Eddard was pleased to see the young man wasn’t bitter over the strictures of his Office the way another might be.

Prodigies have never in his experience taken a restriction on their chosen vocations so well as this eleven year old boy-King.

“Well,” Eddard waved off the depressing subject, getting back to the matter at hand. “Have you made a decision about your education path as far as Hogwarts and your initial Masteries go. I did caution you to pare it down to four, did I not?”

“You did.” Hadrian smiled gratefully. “And I studied the international qualifications and prerequisites for the Masteries I want to pursue both initially and possibly in the future. I know Hogwarts will be stuffed to the gills with classes for me to take everything but I have a plan and I believe I can follow it.”

The quill hovered almost anxiously over the box marked: Ordinary Wizarding Level Goals.

“You’re keeping me rapt with nerves, Hadrian.” Ollivander rolled his eyes. “Out with it, young man.”

“Fifteen OWLs.” Hadrian worried his lip lightly as he peeked up at his current Professor and Headmaster with mild worry. “Ancient Runes, Astronomy, Arithmancy, CoMC, Charms, Dark Arts, Defense, Dueling, Herbology, History of Magic, Mundane Studies, Potions, Transfiguration, Magical Law, and Divination. I know I’ll be able to self-study Astronomy and Divination. That makes thirteen classes I’ll need to take over the three years of OWL study before I have to take the tests.”

“It’s an aggressive plan, Hadrian.” Ollivander frowned as he worked it out. “You’ll have to be disciplined beyond measure and free from most distractions to accomplish it.”

“Most of the early work in stabilizing the Empire will be done by the time I enter Hogwarts.” Hadrian shrugged. “Only emergencies and emergent issues will need my personal attention. I feel I’ve chosen my Council well and they’ll be capable of handling most issues by the time I’ll need to be at Hogwarts nine months of the year.”
“It’s a good thing we’ve already discussed you being self-paced.” Eddard grimaced, frowning. “I wouldn’t like to think of you taking this on without knowing how to self-study and self-regulate yourself when it comes to your education – a weakness tutored students sometimes face.”

“I should be ready.” Hadrian stated confidently. “Besides I’m only going for that many OWLs to silence my detractors.”

Eddard chuckled derisively. “I’d like to see the witch or wizard who tries to play on your age once you’ve broken the record for completed OWLs. The only person who’s come close to fifteen was Nicholas Flamel with two less at thirteen.”

Which was exactly Hadrian’s point.

“NEWTs.” Ollivander stated. “What’s your plan there? Something even more shocking I would assume.”

“Well…”

“Hadrian.”

“Eighteen.”

Ollivander wandlessly summoned his bottle of cognac. He had a feeling he’d need it to get through the rest of this interview.

“And a couple extra classes that I want to take but don’t want or need a NEWT in.”

Eddard paused in pouring his highball, switching it for a tall glass instead then taking deep drink.

“It’s not physically possible Hadrian.” Eddard said slowly once he’d calmed his nerves. “Even if you utilize a time-turner the demand on your body and magic for that many classes will be substantial – even for you. Besides that taking eighteen or twenty or more classes…what are you going to do, bring in private Masters to help you through?”

It was the only way he could see it working – in theory.

Private tutoring would allow the boy-King to take classes where he could with his fellow students and still manage to take that many tests.

Even for a prodigy it was extreme in the extreme.

“Not a time-turner.” Hadrian grinned brightly, devilment in his eyes. “A time-field.”

“Time-fields and the magic to use them have been lost.” Eddard stated in a near-drawl as he studied the play of the firelight on the amber liquid in his glass.

“So was Avalon.”

Well there was that.

“The Founders built a time-field into Hogwarts.” Hadrian grinned, nearly bouncing in his seat at the possibilities. “All I need to do is find and access the entrance from the Royal suite in the Castle and I can take as many subjects as I want.”

Yes, yes he could. Eddard had to concede. Time-fields worked much differently than time-turners. Where a time-turner worked to flit back and forth in time, theoretically giving one the extra they
needed to accomplish important work, a time-field was actually a time-distortion or displacement field. It – according to legend – could either slow down or speed up time inside of it, allowing a person inside the field to do things like study an impossible amount of subjects.

There was a drawback, however.

Inside the field time continued to pass – Hadrian would continue to age.

If he used it too much he could massively shorten his lifespan, a risk Eddard immediately cautioned him of.

Hadrian set to soothing his Headmaster’s worry.

“I’m only going to use it once I reach sixteen and am working on NEWTs,” he admitted. “Unless there’s some kind of dire need before that. If I limit myself to an average of three and a half hours per day for the two NEWT’s years, with an extra cushion of five eight-hour days per month, I’ll lose approximately just shy of four months of my life. Four months versus permanently silencing any detractors regarding my readiness to rule. It seems worth it to me.”

Eddard found that hard to argue with though he was prepared to try until he saw the look in the young man’s eyes. They were firm and as piercing as the emerald-eyed preteen’s ever-present sword. There would be no swaying him from his decision.

The Headmaster cut to the chase, wanting to finish the interview before Hadrian gave him a permanent ulcer with his insane plans.

“What Masteries?”

“Magical Law, Magical-Mundane Finance, Defense, and Warding would be best.” Hadrian shrugged. Warding and Defense were the only ones he truly wanted to Master considering both his temperament and natural affinities. He was tempted to try Spell Weaving and Dark Arts or Ritual Magic but the four he’d picked are most likely to be useful to his future.

Plus he’d become fascinated with warding after seeing the ward schemas that Avalon uses.

“Excellent choices for a King.” Ollivander nodded. “Are you going to continue with your Mundane education?”

Hadrian nodded. “Remus thinks with the Holmes’s help I can get into a specialized distance program Oxford offers for prodigies and other working or employed students like athletes. Probably just a generalized degree in liberal studies will give me the foundation I need for dealing with Mundane politics and politicians.”

“You’re very good at taking advice, Hadrian.” Eddard sighed, worried for the boy and feeling sympathy for his werewolf friend. “I can’t help but wonder how much of this aggressive education plan is Hadrian’s and how much was designed for and geared towards the King of Avalon.” The Headmaster took the completed parchment from its floating position and gestured the young man from the room. “Enjoy the rest of your day, Your Grace.”

…”

Later that night, Hadrian rehashed his meeting with Wills over their mirrors. After leaving school he’d been shuttled straight into his music and languages lessons before going over plans for the Lordship Ball with Lady Maggie and Dowager Lady Longbottom as well as dealing with a few State issues with Sherrinford and Lucius. Now he and Wills were both talking in their beds, lap
desks in place as they dashed off the homework from their sole lecture on Magical Theory they’d been assigned. Twelve inches on accidental versus intentional magic.

Hadrian had already done this sort of essay a couple years ago for Remus while Wills had covered it more recently with Andy so neither had to give it their full attention.

“Wow, he really said that?” Wills asked after Hadrian was finished recounting the conversation with the Headmaster. “I don’t think I’ve ever heard anyone talk to you like that before.”

“Believe me, they do.” Hadrian told him with a roll of his eyes as he studied his work critical of any errors. “They just do it in private. Sirius and Remus especially can be harsh. I think it’s cause they’ve known me all my life. And they knew my parents. Everyone else…not so much. My Papa Siger can be tough, so can the other Holmeses but not quite like that.”

“Mmm.” Wills hummed, nodding his head absently as he proof-read his own work.

“How did your interview go?”

“Better than yours, sounds like.” Wills gave Rian a cheesy grin. “But then I’m going for a much more reasonable two Masteries and a Mundane degree. Not trying to set records in OWLs and NEWTs like some people I know, Rian.”

“Yuck it up.” Hadrian shook his head with a sigh. “I’ll manage it, you wait and see.”

“I know you will, Rian.” Wills gave him a soft look. “I’m just worried about you overextending yourself, we all are.”

“I’m not impossible.” Hadrian assured his bonded. “Nor completely intractable. If it’s too much, it’s too much and I’ll cut back. But that’s a worry for another day, several years off. What Masteries did you decide on?” He got back on topic. “I know you were debating several.”

And William had. With his bonded's new education reforms a whole world of Masteries had opened up to students in Wizarding Britain without them having to study at foreign schools. It made for an intense couple weeks as he went over and over the options both new and old with Andromeda as well as asking his Grandmother and Hadrian for their opinions.

As long as he also obtained his Mundane degree, his parents were appeased – for the moment.

“Healing and Defense I think.” Wills imparted to his Rian. “I guess Healing runs in the Nimue lines and I Inherited the affinity with my Claiming. Andy had me do some exercises and test spells on one of Grandmother’s sick corgis.” His blue eyes glinted with pride. “Worked like…well…a Charm. And Andy has a dab hand with Defense spells.”

“She’s a Black.” Hadrian finished his essay with a flair of his fountain pen and dried it with a spell, rolling it up and sealing it with another and sending it to rest safely in his school bag. It wasn’t due until next week but better to get it over and done with now. “We’ve all an affinity for Defense and some of us for Dark Arts, Astronomy, or Ritual Magic. It’s one of the more diverse lines that still has definite affinities. It’s why Siri was able to become a Master Auror so young and now Dora is following in his boot-prints. Potter has it too, so does Pendragon, Gryffindor, Peverell, Valerius, Wallace, and Shacklebolt. A Defense affinity is one that tends to stay true in a line despite intermarriages with lines that have other affinities.”

“No wonder you wipe the floor with me when we have mock-duels.” Wills gasped as if coming to some great realization instead of just teasing his bonded. “You’ve a massive advantage! Those are almost all your Lines!” Voice turning more serious he smiled. “Guess we’ll have at least one class
“Most likely.” Hadrian gave a happy grin, not put-off at all over Wills’s twitting. “We’ll still have to apply to which Professor we want to proctor our apprenticeships but considering who we are as long as we’re not total dunderheads we’ll probably be able to have the same Master.”

“Good.” Wills nodded firmly as he finished his own homework. “I have to share you enough between your other future consorts and classes. No need to split us up even more by having different proctors for our apprenticeships. What’s your day look like tomorrow?”

“Meetings first thing after breakfast,” Hadrian leaned back against his pillows and lifted the mirror in his hand to face Wills directly. “Then we have to hash out the temporary relocation to Snowdon Castle. Lessons before and through lunch, which I’ll have to take in my study, then going to Snowdon with Lady Bones and the guard to finish sentencing on some of the lesser offenders before the big trials and executions.”

Wills grimaced at that. He didn’t like to think about what his Rian was having to do. They were only eleven. They shouldn’t have to sentence traitors to death but it was what the Law demanded. He just hoped his uncles and foster-brothers would be there to support him when Wills couldn’t. Times like this were when he actually regretted that they wouldn’t be married and living together for another couple years.

Honestly if it wasn’t for the consummation clause in their Contract, Wills was tempted to move up the wedding just to get it over with. Rian had quickly become his best-friend and he wanted to be there to support him all the time – the way Rian somehow managed to support Wills even with the distance between them. The mirrors they were using to talk just being one example.

The carriage to soothe his mum’s temper being another.

“Music lessons after dinner.” Hadrian shrugged. “Not too bad now that Remus is back from his tour of our territories. But Papa Siger is about to be very busy with the influx of dignitaries so it’ll balance out with my Council having to step in a little on my governance lessons with him busy.”

“When’s the move to Snowdon?”

“Next week.” Hadrian grimaced. “We barely settle into the new schedule with H.I. and we have to move residences for a month.”

“At least in Wales it’ll be easier to get to your cello and Krav Maga lessons.” Wills tried to brighten Rian’s outlook. “Maybe you’ll be able to see some of your holdings as well.”

“Maybe.” Hadrian agreed mostly for Wills’s sake. His bonded wasn’t yet in the thick of things and didn’t entirely understand how packed his schedule tended to be. Some weeks he had to mutiny to get any time to himself. “Speaking of holdings…”

“Yes…” Wills drawled copying his bonded around a yawn. It’d been a long day for both boys.

“You’ll never believe what I own ninety percent of…”

The next day passed exactly as Hadrian had described it to William, barring his massive “geek-out” over the grand stair the led to the main ballroom in Snowdon Castle.

Its steps were fashioned entirely of a black and grey flecked emerald green marble but that wasn’t
what Hadrian had a total kid-moment over.

Rather, it was the banister itself and the railing.

Forged by Goblin Masters according to the makers marks he found near the base of the banister on the lower landing in the ballroom, the banister itself was the smooth, sinuous back and tails of several dragons that appeared to race from the top to the bottom of the stair on the left side and from bottom to top on the right. The support rails became the faces, wings, talons, and legs of the dragons in their flight with lighter wisps giving the sensation of clouds and sky. And crouched upon the posts at the top and bottom landings were four dragons in mid-roar, showing off glistening mithril fangs, all various colors of Welsh and Irish dragons.

Hadrian dubbed it the “Dragon Stair” and was heinously hard to convince to move once he’d found it, though the threat of Lady Bones having to come search him out had him advancing according to Siger’s wishes.

If it had just been him, Siri, and Remy they’d still be there taking turns sliding down the banister or examining the workmanship of the artistry.

Even Avalon didn’t have anything quite like it to compare.

Wills was suitably impressed with the pictures Hadrian had taken with his new camera – a gift from Remus’s travels over the summer – and was looking forward to seeing it and the rest of Snowdon Castle when he came for the Lordship Ball.

That night during their now-nightly talks via mirror, William had news of his own, surprising his bonded with his agreement to be officially announced as Hadrian’s bonded and future Consort of House Emrys at the Lordship Ball. Hadrian had been extremely understanding of Wills wanting to protect his privacy, even going so far as to delay the traditional introduction at the Ball for another time until his bonded was more comfortable. That he wouldn’t have to stage another mutiny – this time against almost all of the “adults” in his life – a subjective term since with his Claiming Hadrian was legally an adult in the Wizarding World in his own right, as was William – that he wasn’t entirely sure would succeed in.

Better for everyone involved that William agreed.

He wouldn’t want to completely override his Council and former guardians in such an important matter.

There was no question that he would do it if backed into a corner…but he didn’t want to.

William’s decision had put off that inevitable confrontation for another day.

Snowdon Castle was night-and-day to Avalon.

Built entirely of native Welsh stone, it stood proud and grey against the September sky, standing as a bastion of a by-gone era at the top of Snowdon Mountain. Where Skye Palace was creamy and elegant with gemstone rivers running through it, Snowdon was grey and flecked with the colors of its Royal Family, in the solid square architecture found all over Europe. Towers and murder holes, trebuchets and turrets, Snowdon was built to stand against all challengers.

The interior was worn smooth by both craftsmen and time, the massive great hall leading down into the cavernous ballroom/royal reception area by way of the nearly out-of-place Dragon Stair.

Ancient tapestries lined the walls, softening the grey stone and thick carpets from far-off realms and
allied countries cushioned the bedrooms, suites, and private areas away from the public rooms.

Massive, ancient from a time before Avalon, and welcoming to Hadrian as the last Emrys.

He adored it on sight, though nothing would ever replace Skye Palace in his heart, and assured William that he would like it as well.

Hadrian yawned, bidding William goodnight.

Tomorrow was another packed day, between H.I., his King and Lordship duties, and his private tuition in mundane subjects.

Thankfully he had trusted people to take care of the details of the Royal removal to Snowdon for a month, otherwise he wouldn’t have time to eat let alone talk to his bonded.

Which reminded him.

He needed to make sure and start checking his paired journal that was linked to Octavian’s. The teen had promised to start writing him at the end of the week. Like many other Heirs and children of important Nobles, Octavian was going to be at his Lordship Ball.

Hadrian really, really wanted a better idea about him before he saw him again.

And a better idea about why he made his insides all…tingly.

…

Edited 3 February 2016
Chapter Thirteen: Introducing…

Author’s Note: Time Skips ahoy! Yes, these are going to “skip along” over the next two years. During that time there will be parts where you see a “day in the life” happening which will continue throughout the story even if I skip a month or more at a time. It’s currently planned to take a total of six or seven chapters to get to Wills and Hadrian’s wedding and the coronation ceremony to follow. You will get to see snippets of the education system and how H.I. works during that time as well as some more nitty-gritty political scheming. To answer the questions regarding SLASH yes this is a male-only harem though you will see some flirtation between Hadrian and some female possible consorts. The first actual SLASH scene will happen sometime between the wedding of Wills and Hadrian and Hadrian’s fourteenth birthday but it will be what I call slash-light because of the age factor. Nothing too outlandish will happen until after Hadrian’s fourteenth which is around ten chapters away.

To answer the question regarding length…well…this is going to be like Starlight’s Rise of the Drackens. I love it and adore it so it will have some one-shots that don’t hit in the story as a whole that will be posted on their own as part of the Avalon series. Right now I can see this being over a hundred chapters just to get him through school and part of his planned Masteries. Basically as long as people are still reading and enjoying this I’ll keep writing it.

Wednesday brought another day of lessons and getting to know their peers for Hadrian and William, unsurprisingly to those who knew them well Hadrian was quickly falling into a friendship with the Malfoy Heir whose snarky commentary tended to keep the King in stitches during breaks and mealtimes at H.I.

William was likewise enjoying Draco’s company though he still preferred “His Rian” over the other wizarding children. He had however taken nicely to the shier (and calmer) Longbottom Heir versus the more excitable Draco. A turn of events that pleased both Hadrian and the adults in all four Heirs/Lord’s lives.

Once Thursday and Friday came and went, taking Hadrian’s private lessons and another day at H.I. with them respectively, it was time for more trials at Snowdon – including that of the former Minister and his cabinet.

Lady Amelia’s goal was to clear the Snowdon cells before Hadrian’s Lordship Ball. Having several hundred guests – including those who were avowed Death Eaters who weren’t possible to charge or try at the moment – and dignitaries arriving at the Castle starting the next weekend wasn’t conducive
to keeping the prisoners secure, a problem both Sirius and Remus readily agreed with.

However, there were three prisoners in particular who couldn’t be released – simply because they were still gathering witness statements and evidence as well as letting them sweat.

Vernon, Petunia, and Marge Dursley were promptly moved from the bowels of Snowdon Castle into an undisclosed location – one of Hadrian’s many properties – and placed under a twenty-four/seven guard until they could be moved back to the prison cells of Snowdon.

When it came to prisoners no one wanted to chance escaping, they three were the only ones Hadrian’s wasn’t willing to just judge and sentence.

They would be taken care of before his coronation but for now at least he was content to let them stew.

Siri, Remy, and surprisingly – or maybe not – Lord Prince had all smirked upon hearing of his intransience regarding his abusers and all made comments to the tone of him taking after his mother more than they’d previously thought.

Of all the “Marauders” James’s Lily was the single most vindictive and capable of holding a grudge even better than Padfoot.

Time passed quickly following the trials.

Those who were handed down a prison sentence were moved to Azkaban – ghastly guards or not – and those to be executed were held in abeyance in the Avalon City holding cells until the day after Hadrian’s Lordship Ball and the beginning of the Fall Wizengamot session.

Before he knew it – and with his head spinning from dashing from H.I. to private lessons to King and Lordship duties and back – the eve of the Ball was upon him, bringing with it a sharp jolt to his system and upsetting his equilibrium…

…”Lord Wallace, your Grace.” Russel announced Hadrian’s next appointment. “Accompanied by David, Heir Wallace.”

Hadrian looked up from the order of event for the following day surprised by the formal tone his secretary was using. Once their relationship had been mostly repaired, Hadrian and Gawain had gone back to their accustomed familiarity except on some occasions. Apparently this was one such occasion though for the life of him Hadrian didn’t have the foggiest idea why.

“Lord and Heir Wallace.” Hadrian folded his hands elegantly before him on the leather desk blotter – temporarily cleared for the meeting of its usual piles and piles of parchment, quills and ink, and tomes. The King of Avalon was dressed in his best – Queen Acromantula silk tunic and dress trousers with an over-robe in the dueler’s style he’d made all the rage in the deep royal purple of Avalon with the embroidered Crests of his Houses depicted in a white diamond and mithril thread created solely for the Avalonian Kings.

Other empires and kingdoms had similar combinations for formal robes using mithril, crushed gemstones, and alchemy but white diamond and mithril was Avalon’s alone.

“How can We be of service this evening?”

Both the Lord and Heir were also attired in the formal dueling robes their former ward and friend had
made the fashion among the still-fit (unlike some of the more devout trenchermen such as Lord Parkinson) and fashionable, though the Wallaces were wearing their own colors in fine linen and leather of forest green and sable-brown, the Wallace clan tartan apparent in a sash slashing from shoulder to waist across their chests, held in place by a golden pin with the sword and shield of their House in green garnets.

“The House of Wallace has come to discuss the standing Contract between our two Houses, your Grace.” Gawain answered, no sign of his dismay regarding his son and heir’s plan evident in his voice.

He hoped to Hecate David had thought this through.

It wasn’t the sort of thing that one could back out of or change their mind later. Once it was done, it was done. No matter the fit Rhys would throw.

Hadrian mentally switched over from King of Avalon to Lord of Pevensie as that was the House in question that had an active Contract with House Wallace, a switch that showed in the slightest of easing in his deportment and posture.

“What regarding said Contract does the House of Wallace wish to broach with the House of Pevensie at this very important – and busy – time?” The Lord asked with mild reproof. No matter what, tonight he was only introducing Wills as the Betrothed of House Emrys and his future Consort. It was their night, despite what schemes his Steward had hatched while Hadrian was occupied with school, tutors, and getting Avalon back up and running properly.

He’d barely had time to sleep, eat, and talk with Wills and Tavi via mirror and journal let alone worry over what his Privy Councilors were up to in their own very limited free time.

David traded a look with his father and stepped forward after taking a fortifying breath. He wasn’t absolutely sure this was the best idea he’d ever had – especially with the way things stood with his mother’s scheming. He knew Hadrian hated the thought of someone else making choices for him – his young friend had complained about it enough when he was home from Hogwarts and could give Hadrian his attention and council.

But there wasn’t another acceptable choice.

Left to his own devices – and with the funk he’d been in for more than a year – Rhys would ruin House Wallace and embarrass the Empire of Avalon during a decade they as a people simply couldn’t afford his tantrums and schemes.

Really when it came down to it, it was David’s only option to prevent the looming hurricane of destruction from tainting his proud family and shattering his beloved father – and his long-time friend – all at the same time.

He wasn’t sure what Rhys would do now but he did know what he couldn’t – and that was fuck around on the King-of-ruddy-Avalon.

Rhys had asked him too many pointed question regarding the exact terms of the Contract between House Wallace and the contracted House – though he still wasn’t aware it was with Hadrian – and how to break it.

David wasn’t going to let his little brother break Hadrian’s heart and ruin their family because Rhys was going through a pissy phase that had no sign of ending or clearing any-when soon.

It had left him with a single – though not unpalatable – option.
“I want you to choose me as your Betrothed and future Consort of House Pevensie.”

…

As the door closed behind the two Wallaces, Hadrian collapsed back against his supremely-comfortable leather desk chair and heaved a sigh before turning toward the warded corner.

Wills and Tavi both stepped out, having taken their places through a hidden corridor upon being silently summoned and given directions by Hadrian. He’d sent for his Bonded-Betrothed and his Intended-Betrothed when the two Wallaces had entered his study in Snowdown Castle. The King had surmised at a glance what the topic of discussion would be and wanted the presence – though concealed from Gawain and David – of his two future-Consorts.

They would have to live with either David or Rhys after all, just as much if not more than he himself.

While Hadrian wasn’t going to make decisions like this purely based on his Consorts’ or future-Consorts’ opinions and desires he would take them under consideration, much as he always or at least generally listens to his Privy Council before making a decision that effects Avalon.

He may have the final say but that didn’t necessitate him having the only say.

Tavi was dressed similarly to David as the Heir of House Prince – barring the tartan and pin in preference to having the Prince Crest embroidered on the left breast of his dark blue and oyster outer robe in gold-and-merlinite thread as was appropriate for an Heir of a Most Ancient and Noble House.

On the other hand as Wills was the bonded-betrothed of the King of Avalon as well as being the Lord of Nimue in his own right, his tunic trousers and outer robe were all in Acromantula silk, though the light blue and silver of House Nimue was replaced with a lighter purple than Hadrian’s – it was more of a lavender shade – while the crushed aquamarine and platinum embroidery of a Lord of an Utmost Ancient and Noble House was still in place depicting the proper adornments for a Lord as well as the Crests of both House Nimue and House Emrys.

And Wills had thought the fittings for his betrothal robes were a headache, they were nothing compared to the dickering over the proper colors, materials, devices, etc. for his formal “introduction” robes.

Hadrian summed up the feelings of everyone in the study quite succinctly:

“What in the bloody hell was that?”

His two future consorts lowered themselves with similar grace into the plush armchairs flanking the fireplace as he moved to join them, flopping with much less elegance into the center seat in an outward sign of his tumultuous internal ramblings.

Wills turned to the older Octavian.

“You’re closest in age to David and in the same year as Rhys if I have it right.” His Rian had covered some of the “possibles” with him when they had sat down and discussed Octavian himself. Wills had wanted more information about just whom he might possibly have to share his husband with.

One thing was for certain: after that conversation – which included the tidbit that one of the oldest “possibles” was in his seventies – Wills was much much happier about Octavian.
At least Tavi wasn’t old enough to be their grandfather.

Thankfully that particular candidate was one of several dozen offspring of the Japanese Emperor, the youngest of whom was only seven.

Randy old goat.

Tavi nodded, a light scowl reminiscent of his pater pinching his classical handsomeness.

“What do you make of all that?” Wills posed the question equally to his two companions.

His Rian and Tavi exchanged a look then Tavi nodded for Rian to go first.

“It was out of character.” Hadrian sighed and let his head fall back to stare up at the lofty ceiling that soared above them.

“Very much so.” Tavi concurred. “For all that he’s been heavily pursued – by both genders – there’s never been a whiff of him being interested in settling down. Hogwarts rumors have it that he’s been tossing around the idea of becoming a Curse-Breaker before settling down into his duties as Heir.”

Hadrian nodded absently, knowing the two Wallace brothers better than most. “David has always had a bit of the devil in him. Even convinced Gawain to allow him to sit in on my Dark Arts tutoring since before this coming year formal training in Dark Arts and other ‘Dark’ and obscure magics weren’t offered at Hogwarts. And getting a NEWT in the Dark Arts as well as in Defense and Ritual Magics with a Mastery in Warding are all required for a Curse-Breaker.”

There was a reason Gringotts valued their Curse-Breakers so highly – and it showed in how well they were treated and paid by the notoriously tight-fisted goblins. In the last decade only six Curse-Breakers had achieved the title, one of which was the new Lord Weasley. If David managed it he would be the seventh in twelve years.

“It doesn’t make sense.” Octavian gestured smoothly with one elegant, long-fingered hand. “Rhys would be the obvious choice – and has made his preference or lack of one regarding male or female partners clear. Does David even like males in that way?”

The question was clearly aimed both at Hadrian and the ether.

His intended just shrugged.

“I hope so since he just put himself forward to have a husband rather than a wife.” Wills observed dryly making all three of them chuckle after a moment.

“That wouldn’t stop him.” Hadrian grimaced. “I know David well and Gawain almost better than anyone. If they think it’s a matter of honor or family or valor they wouldn’t care about whether David would rather shag a man, a woman, or a sheep. He would still put himself forward to be my consort with his Lord and father’s whole-hearted approval.”

“Like that are they?” The Slytherin arched a brow. He’d never paid too close attention to the Wallace Heir as he was both two years above him in age as well as a staunch Gryffindor – though not as pompous or prattish as many of that lot can be. “Gryffindors.”

Hadrian stuck out his tongue and gestured to himself with an exaggerated wave of his arm.

“You’re also The Slytherin.” Tavi shot back before shaking his head ruefully. “Whatever am I going to do with you?”

“I’m sure you’ll think of something.” Wills muttered, knowing full-well about the older boy’s habit of discomfiting Hadrian with his overt sensuality. He raised his voice to an audible-level. “I don’t think it matters much about House with Rian being also The Hufflepuff and The Ravenclaw. Moving on.” He rolled his eyes as both the King of Avalon and the Heir of Prince barely refrained from pouting at him for spoiling their barrage of verbal darts at each other before they could begin. “What about Rhys? If like Rian says, David would do this out of a sense of honor or duty to his family, how does Rhys come into play?”

“That.” Tavi rubbed his temples as he closed his eyes wearily. “May be the pertinent question.”

Hadrian slowly rose to sit upright, his face and eyes clearly showing deep thought before his emerald gaze froze over upon reaching a realization.

“Rhys isn’t happy about the Contract.” He explained slowly. “No one has told him who it’s with but he’s complained here and there about it, commiserating and wanting commiseration from me over it…” He trailed off, not wanting to finish his thought.

Octavian had no problem finishing it.

“He’s a slag.” Hadrian’s intended gave a derisive scoff, finally able to tell his future husband what he thought about his friend in a context where it wouldn’t come off as sour grapes over their close relationship growing up or Tavi’s own expectation of being celibate until their bonding. “All of Hogwarts knows it and his older brother definitely does. They’ve had some epic rows over Rhys’s behavior with boys and girls of all Houses and ages. And with Rhys being in Slytherin rather than Gryffindor, they mostly have had those rows in at least semi-public places.”

“I’d say that would give David and his father cause for concern over the Contract.” Wills noted sardonically as the light dawned for all concerned over the driving force behind the meeting. “They’re scared shitless that Rhys is going to break the contract by doing what he does best if chosen – screwing around.”

Hadrian clenched his jaw as he held onto his temper by the skin of his teeth. He wanted to rant and rave over Gawain trying to manage him once again but he knew he couldn’t or at least shouldn’t. This wasn’t so much Gawain trying manage Hadrian after all as it was a Lord trying to protect the honor and reputation of both his House and that of his liege Lord and King.

Said King wasn’t happy about how he’d gone about it but his couldn’t bring himself to fault him for it – especially in light of the “conversation” he’d had with Lord Prince before taking Severus into his service.

Threatening to behead his future father-in-law wasn’t much different than Gawain trying to keep his own son from betraying his King by committing what would be no less than adultery.

“Motives aside.” Hadrian waved one arm as if clearing an invisible board. “What do the two of you think of David’s…well…proposal?”

“I liked him.” Wills shrugged. “Granted I don’t know him, not like you and not even with the simple familiarity Octavian had with him, but he seemed…confident.” Wills settled on a word with a sharp nod. “Knows who he is and what he’s after. And it doesn’t hurt that he’s handsome as all hell.”
“Hell would be appropriate.” Octavian drawled lightly. “He’s darker than I am and nearly a bloody giant with that combination of Italian and Scots blood running through his veins. But.” He had to concede. “He’s alright – for a bloody Gryffindor.”

David Wallace topped most men at six-foot seven-inches in height and a thickly-muscled build he inherited from his swordsman-father that kept him handsome rather than pretty with the fine bone structure and lush black hair he got from his mother.

“But I don’t think you have the ability to add another courtship into the mix right now.” Wills added hastily. “With school and well, us. Either courting or being courted, I’d give him an answer either way you decide and then set a date for when the two of you will start all of that and leave it until then.”

“Seconded.” Tavi gave a sharp nod of his head, making his long hair wave behind him.

“The motion carries.” Hadrian gave them both a quirk of his mouth and rose to his feet. “Now let us meet with our respective parents or in my case mother-hens before the Princess of Wales scalps me bald.”

...

The cavernous Great Hall of Snowdown Castle flowed seamlessly into the Grand Ballroom on the night of Hadrian’s Lordship Ball through a tricky bit of elf magic that turned a blank wall into an ornate archway with a flawless translocation charm. Guests walked smoothly from one to the other and back, catching up, gossiping, seeing and being seen in the elegantly decorated ballroom and the overwhelming grandeur of the Hall. Everyone who was anyone from all over the world was present, soaking in a cross between modern elegance and olde-world traditions that brought to mind the grand balls of the early nineteen and late eighteen hundreds.

Head Chatelaine the Dowager Lady Longbottom alongside the Chatelaine for Wales Lady “Maggie” Holmes with help from the “Sisters Black” Lady Andromeda Tonks nee Black and Lady Narcissa Malfoy nee Black had toiled relentlessly for weeks making sure that every detail from the flowers – heavy on the lilies in honor of the late Lady Potter – to the freshest of enchanted beeswax candles to the final polish on the ancient Emrys throne in the Great Hall were seen to. Nothing – great or small – escaped the gimlet eyes of the Ladies and their House Elf helpers. Snowdon Castle shone – from candle to crystal to gemstones – and everyone who mattered in the greater Wizarding World shone right along with it, bearing witness to the greatness of the revived Avalonian monarchy.

Nothing less would do and the Ladies being who they were, they settled for nothing less.

Ambassadors from all over rubbed elbows with the nobility of every magical country. Lords and Ladies and Heirs of all levels and estates played nice – for once – no matter their political affiliations or personal ideals. Not a single soul was going to take a chance on offending the King of Avalon.

Even if it meant being pleasant, congenial, or simply ignoring the sheer gall of the King to invite the mundane British Royal Family – rumored betrothal or not.

Hadrian and Wills awaited their cue, concealed at the top of the Dragon Stair that led down into the Grand Ballroom.

A fanfare sounded.

Exchanging a quick smile, Hadrian offered his bonded betrothed his arm then as one they descended the Dragon Stair at the far end of the Grand Ballroom while Sherrinford as the Lord High Chancellor
“introduced” them.


A whisper of sound travelled through the crowd as those who recognized the legends surrounding the House of Peverell gasped, choked, or cursed in wonder under their collective breath. Hadrian and Wills paid them no mind, having just made it with stately grace to the archway connecting the Great Hall and Grand Ballroom. Sherrinford wouldn’t have stopped in “his moment” for all the gold in Gringotts.


Another whisper – though this time it was more of a rumble – as those stick-up-their-arse bigots who’d scoffed at having a half-blood as King realized that the late Lady Potter was no more a muggleborn than she was a jackrabbit.

“King of the Empire of Avalon and Lord and Emperor of all Her Territories. Hecate and Loki keep him safe and strong in magic. Long may he Reign.”

“Long may he Reign.” The crowd echoed just as Hadrian and Wills had made it up the steps to the dais that was centered at the front of the Great Hall. Some with more…verve…than others, though none dared remain silent.

The dais was as ancient as the Castle it was located in and held a pair of equally-ancient thrones: one for the Lord and one for a Consort.

Hadrian’s throne was elaborately carved with runes and sigils harkening from long before the Emrys family was Blessed with Magic, they’d been warriors and tribal chieftains long before they were magical royalty. Made of strong and sacred ash wood, it had been polished to a luxurious sheen. It’s match was fashioned from cherry wood and all but gleamed under its own coat of polish, though it was clearly much newer than it’s mate, Wills’ throne still predated those they would use in Avalon.

As the crowd spoke the word “Reign” and Hadrian and Wills turned to face the gathered mass, a wave of magic clapped and crashed as golden and purple as well as green and silver sparks of pure Magic rained down on the two young Lords.

A Blessing indeed from Magic herself as well as the “God and Goddess” of Magic.

All in attendance gasped and either bowed or curtsied at the obvious signal from the ether.

Hadrian withheld the impulse to smirk at the sight of his Uncles Siri and Remy, along with his other mundane – or nearly mundane – former guardians bowing.

Siri had bet him ten galleons that Sherlock if no one else would forbear to bow during his introduction – a bet that cost him with the cue from the powers that be.

“Thank you.” Hadrian gave what was nothing less than a kingly nod and a wave of his hand. In the aftermath of the magical display he had no need of a sonorous to be heard. “Please rise.”
Sherrinford cleared his throat and continued once all and sundry were on their feet once more.


“Long may he live.” The crowd again answered dutifully. After their last refrain none dared to keep silent, lest they face a magical backlash. No matter how they personally felt about the new Lord Nimue, Future-Consort Emrys and his supposedly “dirty” blood.

The two monarchs – or future monarchs in the case of Wills – sat in unison with regal aplomb.

A moment’s pause for the runner to disappear and the crowd to fill-in as magically as the lush carpet had appeared and the group split, and Hadrian stood once more.

With a wave of his hand two sets of chairs appeared, each flanking a side of the dais. Those familiar with the introduction protocols of Avalon nodded in knowing approval while the rest shifted restlessly among themselves. Another wave of his hand and a low table appeared before him. It had a table runner of fine silk in deep emerald and was fashioned of strong oak. In the center of the runner was a scroll, flanked itself by a pair of stands, one holding medallions and the other a series of smaller scrolls.

One last moment to cast a wandless-wordless *Sonorous* and Hadrian began, Wills moving to his side to assist him.

“As is tradition, dating back to the first King of Avalon.” Hadrian’s voice was rich and carried well. “With the introduction of each King come various appointments. Rather than hold my people in further suspense, We shall wait no longer to introduce those appointed.”

Flicking his wrist he had the scroll unroll itself and begin to hover.

“As Lord High Chancellor of Avalon.” Sherrinford moved over to stand before the King, accepting the scroll containing his official certificate of office from Wills and allowing Hadrian to place the Seal of his Office around his neck. “We appoint the Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Holmes, Sherrinford Delancy Holmes.”

“As Lord High Steward,” Gawain mimicked Sherrinford’s movements as the Chancellor found his seat in the grouping of chairs to the left of the dais. “We appoint the Lord of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Wallace, Lord Gawain David Wallace.”

“As Lord High Ambassador.” Siger followed protocol flawlessly, as was expected. “We appoint the Lord of Ravenscroft: Lord Siger Mycroft Holmes.”

Some rumbles came from the crowd as a few of the purists reacted to the new King of Avalon appointing a near-squib and mundane Lord to his Privy Council.

Not that their outrage mattered or was even a concern.

Amelia’s appointment as Lord High Justice was greeted with much less mumbling as she joined her fellow councilors in their seats – an appointment nearly overlooked in the uproar to follow.

“As Lord High Constable.” Hadrian took a deep breath and looked into quicksilver eyes that were
for once solemn. “We appoint our House Member and Godfather, the Honorable and Noble Lord Sirius Orion Black the Third.”

Forget about the squib, the masses were much more up-in-arms over having a former convict – innocent or no – as their High Constable.

A clap of thunder shook the room as Hadrian flexed his power in a wordless reprimand.

Lest all and sundry forget, there was more to being King than an accident of birth.

Eyes wide, the rabble and actual honored guests quieted.

“As Lord High Treasurer.” Hadrian’s smile could draw blood it was so sharp and his bright gaze dared the horde to make further arses of themselves. “The Honorable Goblin Ragnok of the English Goblin Horde.”

Outrage gave way to simple disbelief and stunned silence.

The King of Avalon was trusting the finances of the Empire to a goblin.

Savvy investors actually applauded the appointment. With a goblin overseeing the Empire’s gold, it would do nothing but thrive. It was simple good business any way one looked at it.

“To the Seat of Lord of the Privy Seal.” The crowd waited with baited breath after the last several controversial appointments. Hadrian didn’t disappoint. Arms bared and bare for all to see, Lucius took his place among his new colleagues. “Lord of the Aged and Noble House of Malfoy, Lord Lucius Abraxas Malfoy.”

Sandringham Bones’s – Amelia’s younger brother’s – appointment to Lord Chamberlin was almost a letdown to the gossip mongers. There was nary a thing to object about when it came to the young – relatively – wizard.

The next appointment more than made up for the lull in controversial appointments.

“For the Lord Protector of Avalon.” Hadrian’s voice was soft and steely. “None would do but one who We trust absolutely and without reservation. Therefore We appoint the Honorable Alpha Remus John Lupin.”

Remus ignored the gasps and took his place with stern decorum as Hadrian waited with undisguised impatience for the nobles to silence themselves lest he let off another shot of thunder.

“As Lord Marshal of Avalon, a seat long upheld with honor and valor by the House of du Lac,” Hadrian locked eyes with the du Lac Lord who had refused all his demands to meet with the King. Over his dead body would that old bastard gain a Seat on his Council. Thankfully there was a much more palatable option in the man’s Heir, a dueling master and Master Auror of an age with Siger. “We hereby appoint the Heir of the Ancient and Noble House of du Lac, Heir Armand Gervais du Lac.”

Lord du Lac had to swallow his bile and grit his teeth at the obvious snub – from both that damned infant of a would-be King and from his rebellious Heir.

And the pisser was that even with this latest action from Armand unless he wanted to directly flout the new King – not a wise decision following this snub, Gervais readily understood that he was on thin-ice with the monarchy – there wasn’t a damned thing he could do against either the King or his obstinate Heir.
Gervais couldn’t even curtail Armand’s funds, the younger du Lacs having always come into their financial personal inheritances at seventeen unlike other noble families that made them either work or rely on an allowance until they take up the mantle of Lordship.

Armand du Lac – a much more affable wizard than his stuck-in-the-past father – took his certificate and medallion/seal of Office with the elegantly predatory air of a trained professional fighter that even Sirius Black would envy.

A handsome and muscled wizard in his early fifties, Armand wasn’t yet even approaching middle-age and had not a single fleck of grey in his chestnut hair and only the slightest of wrinkles in the corners of his deep-blue eyes.

“To the Office of High Magister.” Hadrian continued. “We appoint the Lord of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Ollivander: Lord Garrick Alysious Ollivander.”

With his shock of white hair and eerie light blue eyes, Ollivander brought a dash of true eccentricity to the formal group on the Privy dais.

As well as the wisdom that came with true age. Barring Ollivander, none of the other Privy Councilors had seen a century. A sharp change from other Privy Councils that generally are filled with grey-beards, not vital wizards in the prime of their lives.

“We have also created a new Office among the Privy Council.” With that Hadrian shocked a group that at this point considered themselves unshakeable considering the Death Eater, convict, goblin, squib, and werewolf he’d appointed to some of the highest posts in the Wizarding World. “That of Ambassador to the Mundane: the Honorable Mycroft Siger Holmes.”

Mycroft took his place among his father and uncle with due solemnity.

The occupants of Snowdon Castle took a breath as one. There would be no more additions – controversial or otherwise – to the Privy Council. Each and every chair on the Council dais had been filled.

A door to the right of the dais opened and a parade of Ladies came out, crossing the front of the Hall and each taking her seat on the dais to the right of Hadrian.

“Alongside Our Council there are a few other appointments that must be made in accordance with tradition and law.” Hadrian took a breath as he banished the table before him with a wave and held out his left arm, cuff flashing in the candle light. “We give you Our Chatelaines.”

Each Lady stood as her name was called, though some puzzled over the handful of chairs that stood empty at the front of their dais.

Working in order from furthest-flung area to the Head herself, Hadrian introduced them:


More rumbles over the “Death-Eater’s wife” being given such heavy responsibility and honor. Rumbles squashed by the last announcement.
“Head Chatelaine for the Empire of Avalon: The venerable Dowager Lady Augusta Longbottom nee Prewett.”

Hadrian continued once the dragon-lady had retaken her seat.


Applause rang through the Hall – though it was grudging in some places – and the Council, Chatelaines, and Household all rose and took another bow.

“Let Our Lordship Ball Begin!”

At that pre-arranged signal banquet tables appeared all throughout the Hall and everyone was gently prompted towards their seats through use of house-elf magic. Those seated upon the daises were released to mix and mingle according to the prearranged charts and another small table appeared before the two at the center of it all. Wills quickly followed Hadrian’s example and spoke his order to the mithril chargers before tucking into his Beef Wellington, mash, and seasonal vegetables.

After a mostly-pleasant dinner where the guests chose between Beef Wellington, lobster turbot, or duck l’orange, the house-elves made the remains of the dinner and appetizers which included truffle-stuffed prawns, foie gras, oysters, and caviar with full accompaniment, the canny creatures set up long and heavily-laden buffets with a wide range of fruits, cheeses, and sweet desserts including various regional specialties. As the diners rose and the music began, most of the dinner tables vanished leaving only a ring of tables around the edges of the Great Hall as well as a selection of seating for conversation purposes in the same.

The only chairs to be found in the Grand Ballroom were occupied by the Milan Wizarding Orchestra.

As Hadrian and Wills finished their sweets – a strawberry-topped chocolate-ganache tarte for Hadrian and treacle tart for Wills – the sound of a bow gliding along the strings of a violin summoned the newly-introduced King and his Betrothed.

Casting quick cleansing and breath freshening spells, the Royal pair obeyed what was no less than a summons and rose, gliding elegantly to the very center of the Grand Ballroom.

It was time to open the dance.

And what a dance it was.

Gliding elegantly around the floor – Hadrian and Wills with Hadrian leading as both King and taller eleven-year-old – they showed every ounce of both their breeding and training as the Orchestra played the hauntingly lovely waltz from Swan Lake.

Rumors and whispers abounded as they turned, twirled, and glided as they’d practiced, Hadrian using every ounce of his newly-gained strength from the Claiming ritual to maneuver Wills as elegantly as possible and show him off to best advantage.

The new King was proud to have the Lord of House Nimue as his first Consort and he wasn’t scared to show it.
When the music bled into another waltz, this time from the ballet Sleeping Beauty, Hadrian and Wills gave each other a grin as they were joined on the floor. Wills smoothly traded Hadrian off to Octavian for his turn with their betrothed and the young Windsor himself took his Rian’s cousin Dora for a spin – though he guarded his toes. Lovely Dora was, graceful she was not.

Wills kept a sharp ear out and picked up a whisper here and there.

“…lovely couple…”

“…disgraceful, infamous Blacks…”

“Is that the Prince Heir?”

“…damned muggles…”

“…thirteen consorts. Do you suppose…?”

Waltz turned into a lively country dance and Hadrian once again was swept into a dance – this time with David Wallace as Tavi and Wills partnered each other – feeding the growing fire.

Intentionally feeding at that. The three of them had already made the decision that they wouldn’t ignore Tavi and Hadrian’s future – and current – relationships. If the populace reasoned out that Tavi was one of Hadrian’s intendeds, cheers to them. For the moment the Crown and Royal Family/Household wasn’t going to comment one way or the other.

“Have you made a decision?” David asked lowly, leaning down to whisper in Hadrian’s ear when they came together in the fast dance.

“Hmmm.” Was all Hadrian would say before spinning off again.

After taking another turn with Wills, this time a minuet, both of them sat out the following spritely jig though they cheered on Sirius and Gawain who were locked in a battle of footwork, going so far as to summon and lay down a pair of greatswords that they could truly give justice to the tradition.

Deadly implements dismissed, Hadrian whirled Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth away into a gentle waltz with much less fanfare than he’d used with the lady’s grandson. While Rian was occupied, Wills went ‘round with his mum. Bowing and giving the grand dame a kiss to her hand with a roguish wink, Hadrian turned her over to her grandson before whisking Lady Maggie into the next set.

While Hadrian did rounds with all of the important ladies in his life – including his Chatelaines and the wives of his new Councilors and Household members – he also spied both Wills and Tavi being pressed into dances with David. Clever git. His two future consorts also danced with one another several times while their future husband was “doing the pretty” and proving that yes, he could be politic even on the dance floor – a genuine concern of Mycroft’s.

It was directly following Hadrian finishing up with the last of his “required” dances that he was approached.

He’d moved to one of the buffet tables and was mostly concealed in the shadows, sipping thirstily at his sparkling cider and nibbling a petit-four, when the two ambassadors found him almost in sync.

Siger and Sherrinford appeared – as if by magic, which thinking about it, it probably was – just as the dignified gentleman in the stunning montsuki hakama in black with his family Crest over his heart while the silk-draped lady with her golden bangles and black wig waited politely, ceding her
right of precedence to the Japanese Ambassador as he did reach the young King’s side first.

“Princess-High Priestess Hatshepsut, Lord Oshiro,” Sherrinford greeted the two highly-placed (and highly born) dignitaries with all due proprieties. “May I introduce His Grace, Hadrian, King of the Empire of Avalon?”

Siger hissed in Hadrian’s ear in an almost silent aside: “She’s the second-born child of the former Pharaoh and oldest sibling of the sitting Pharaoh and High Priestess of Isis; he’s the first-cousin of Emperor Hiro. Not ordinary ambassadors nor the regular representatives of either throne at all.”

Fantastic. Hadrian thought to himself sarcastically. As if being put on display wasn’t enough and dealing with politicians great and small wasn’t bad enough, now he ran the risk of alienating obviously-valued members of his two closest allies.

What was supposed to be just a ball was turning into a minefield.

And yes, he knew what that was. His mundane history lessons had been very comprehensive.

Unfortunately, he wasn’t prepared for this meeting. Not yet. All indications had signified that he wouldn’t need to actually meet with the royal families of either the Ptolemy or Rising Sun empires for more than a year. And everything the normal ambassadors had mentioned had backed that up.

For Hecate’s sake, he’d only been studying each of their native languages for less than a year, he couldn’t even risk greeting them properly without risking giving offense with his accent or pronunciation.

“Your Grace,” the stately sultry-eyed matron of (Hadrian’s best guess) approximately middle age, stepped forward in an elegant glide, offering a languid hand.

Dressed in draping silks in the green and copper of her Royal House, the powerful and cunning High Priestess was a vision from a bygone time from her horsehair wig to her spider-silk raiment and scarab (the sigil and sacred animal of her House) golden bangles wrapped around her upper arms. Her gold-and-copper collar was stamped with the Ptolemy Crest: the Crook & Flail crossed above a Scarab, and her nails were tinted a venomous green. It all played very well against her black eyes and gold-dusted skin that belied her true age.

After all, Pharaoh Rameses Caesar Ptolemy the Fifteenth was over a hundred years old and was a mere eleven months older than his Priestess sister, one of only two siblings: the High Priestess and the “spare heir” and High Priest of Ra Ahmose who shared the same set of parents, their joint mother having been rendered barren by Ahmose’s strenuous birth though they have over two dozen half-siblings from their father’s various concubines.

Pharaoh Rameses himself has had four wives, two of which have died while the other two an Italian noblewoman in her seventies and a Japanese niece of the Rising Sun Emperor who had only turned thirty this year – quite the scandalous match considering their eldest child was fifteen and precipitated his parents’ hasty wedding.

Things were still…tense to say the least between the Ptolemy and Rising Sun patriarchs.

Which made having the Pharaoh’s High Priestess sister and the Emperor’s Lord of a first cousin standing next to each other a potential crisis.

Thank Loki for Sherrinford and Siger.

“High Priestess Ptolemy,” Hadrian smiled genially and gave her a bow only slightly less formal than
that he would give her ruler brother. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

“The pleasure is mine I assure you, young King.” Hatshepsut’s silken voice was nearly sibilant it was such a rich alto. “All the Priests and Priestesses of Egypt have offered sacrifices and offerings in celebration and thanksgiving over your ascension. After all,” she glanced towards the patiently waiting Lord Oshiro. “When one ally rises we all rise.”

The Japanese Lord quirked a brow at the play on his Royal House’s name and motto.

Hadrian thanked the powerful lady then turned politely towards the nearly-as-powerful Lord.

“Your Grace.” Oshiro’s voice was rich with his native language. “Much as Egypt has given thanks and celebration, as has the magical people of the Rising Sun. All of Japan and our territories look forward to a return to the fast friendship and alliance we have enjoyed in the past with Avalon.”

“Avalon also looks forward to that day,” Hadrian bowed a faction less formally still. “With all our allies and past friendships.” He added, lightly warning the two that he had no intention of playing favorites between the two squabbling empires. “Priestess, Lord Oshiro, are you both familiar with the newly appointed Lord High Ambassador of Avalon, my former mentor and guardian Lord Siger Holmes?”

…

Hadrian, as was quickly becoming habit, collapsed face down into the thick comforter in his personal quarters in Skye Palace.

He and other important members of the Council, Household, and Wills’s family, had all returned to the Palace immediately after he closed the Ball with a final waltz between himself and his bonded.

McG had warned, and all had agreed, that remaining in Snowdon any longer was an unnecessary risk when Hadrian could easily create port-keys between the two places if any dignitaries stayed on in the ancient Emrys seat – which several including the Lady Hatshepsut and Lord Oshiro had.

Wills chuckled from the doorway as he watched his bonded attempt to kick off his basilisk-hide boots without turning over, getting up, or unlacing them.

“You know you’re going to have to beard both of those dragons tomorrow right?” Wills arched a brow as Hadrian gave a knowing groan.

The two royal ambassadors had already put Hadrian and by extension Siger, Sherrinford, and Mycroft, through the wringer – and that was with a carefully watching audience.

There was no telling how bad the meeting Tristan had set for the next morning would be with each of them.

“Are you trying to smother yourself with the pillow?!?”

…

Edited 2/3/16
Chapter Fourteen: Ritual Magic

Chapter Notes

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The Avalon Seven

Author’s Note: Plot Bunnies are evil and multiplying like...well...rabid rabbits. I also ran through the previous chapters and did some editing and fixing of various errors. That is all.

Chapter Fourteen: Ritual Magic

The meetings with the High Priestess and Lord Oshiro were just as fraught with pitfalls as Hadrian had feared they would be. Never had he been so glad to have been raised on politics and diplomacy at the knees of Mycroft and Siger. Their training combined with that of his formal tutors in Wizarding Culture gave him a strong basis to treat with the two highborn dignitaries.

Concessions were made on both ends for informal visits – Hadrian’s preference – between either Emperor or Pharaoh and Hadrian himself over the coming Winter break from school. They also both agreed on having the informal visits be limited to just Hadrian’s closest advisors and family with the other monarchs bringing the same instead of full retinues and having the visits hosted by Hadrian at either Slytherin Palace in India for the Egyptian visit or at the LeFey Palace for the Japanese – as those were the traditional allies of each empire.

Choosing those two locations made it more of a neutral ground as neither was Hadrian’s normal residence for all that he nominally controlled them.

And it saved the monarchs in question the headache of having a state visit occur at their own palaces, the reciprocal informal visits being put off until the summer for Egypt and the following winter for Japan.

All were agreed that the “formal” state visits between allies could be postponed until Hadrian’s wedding to Wills on the Summer Solstice two years hence with the second taking place at the time of his coronation on his thirteenth birthday a month and ten days thereafter.

Each party walked away from the table pleased with the plan and Hadrian was happy that he’d gained a little breathing room in his timetable.

Trying to fit in formal state events around his school and tutoring schedule was murder.

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After meeting with the highborn ambassadors and dealing rubbing elbows with the wizarding elite during the weekend celebrations that punctuated his Lordship Ball, Hadrian fell easily back into his new-normal of school, tutoring, extra lessons, homework, “King-duties”, and spending what time he could either talking to Wills via mirror or Tavi via linked-journal. Thankfully both of his current
courtships were also busy with their own educations and demands on their times so neither felt slighted by how busy his own was. So far at least.

He’d yet to answer David one way or another but the older wizard was showing marked patience with his younger friend and King, popping in for a visit here and there when he had time away from his apprenticeship training and duties at Hogwarts.

A new headache was the start of the Fall Session of the Wizengamot.

The stuffy and stubborn members of that august body had been less-than-pleased to find their powers so severely curtailed when they commenced.

They had forgotten – just like the Ministry they ruled over and the people they served – that they only existed at the leisure of the King – and the King was pissed.

A mood that was confirmed by the swift sentencing before them of several of their former members including Former-Minister Fudge, his former-undersecretary Madam Umbridge, Former-Head of the DMLE and International Cooperation Crouch, and others to be executed for crimes including but not limited to murder and high-treason.

Both the Wizengamot, Ministry, and Wizarding Britain were shook up at that blatant reminder of the change in circumstances the status-quo had undergone.

The executions were set for Samhain.

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Hadrian stared for long minutes into the mirror at his reflection.

It was the afternoon of Samhain and he was dressed to preside over the executions of the traitors to the realm at nightfall.

Clad in black from head to toe, with only Ancuru and his chains and rings of office to relieve the stark color along with his Cuff, he felt like an executioner in colorless leather trousers and basilisk hide boots along with pure black silk tunic and over robe.

He supposed that an executioner is exactly what he was, as it was his heading of the Ritual that would take the magic from the traitors followed by their lives when their systems shut down from shock.

It was the secret of the Emrys Line – the ability to strip another’s magic away and return it to the Mother.

No other of her Blessed had the ability – not one of his own Houses nor his allies could manage it.

Only the Head of the Emrys Line could accomplish it.

No one would be present for the Ritual save the condemned, himself, and a guard who had taken a Vow of secrecy about the manner of execution. In that way Hadrian himself was protected. It was the reason why the Ritual was such a thoroughly-buried secret: no magical person would suffer someone to live who could rob their magic from them. Whether deserving or not, it was a sentence that would have cost him his life – if he’d not taken step to prevent another from ever discovering it.

It was a secret he would never even be able to share with Wills or Tavi or another of his eventual consorts.
No one could know.

And so once the Ritual was complete he would have to force it from his mind and put on a serene countenance before heading to the Samhain bonfires that had been erected on the ground of Skye Palace, joining the others of his Council and Household as well as the two Windsor Princes and their Grandfather who was accompanying them for the Rites.

Hadrian rested his forehead against the glass and squeezed his eyes tight, gritting his teeth.

He just had to get through to the night.

…

There were over a dozen wizards and witches bound, gagged, and kneeling inside the black-stone Ritual space in Snowdon Castle that had been designed and created for a singular purpose: carrying out the Draíochta Creach or magic plundering ritual.

They were arrayed at specific places encircling the Ritual Alter where Hadrian would stand and perform the ceremony that would strip them of their magical cores and return it to the Earth.

McG had been chosen by Hadrian specifically to witness the Ritual as of his guard the Captain was the most trusted beyond the bounds of the Vow that gagged him from speaking of what happened during the “execution” of the condemned. They would die. However, the details of how that was accomplished would be forever concealed from history.

The condemned, which included names such as Cornelius Fudge, Bartemious Crouch, Augustus Rookwood, Dolores Umbridge, and Walden McNair, were all attired in simple, plain, undyed cotton shifts and were otherwise unadorned.

Hadrian made a stark contrast in his black attire and mithril adorments of office and station.

Taking a steadying breath, he picked up the ancient Emrys atheme, getting a familiar sensation of immensity similar to that of his Claiming ceremony from the plain blade.

Another moment had come that would set a tone for his rule: though in this case no other would ever hear of it.

It would mark him nonetheless.

Purging another magical being of their magic was no small matter and one that took a certain amount of ruthless calculation. An ability that made the Emrys Line so very deadly without ever having to wage wars like those of the Pendragon and Gryffindor Lines were renowned for. Ruthless calculation and raw power: those were the hallmarks and calling cards of the House of Emrys.

The wizarding world should give thanks that in Hadrian they were levied by the innate grace and kindness inherited from some of his other Lines.

With having the condemned ready and at hand, the Ritual was much simpler than it would have been otherwise. Hadrian didn’t have to send the magic out and seeking for those he’d sentenced to this fate: merely enact it.

That in mind, he sliced upon his left arm just below his elbow, opening the brachial artery and allowing his blood to flow down upon the already prepared Ritual stone.

Speaking in a combination of Olde Welsh and a lost dialect of Gaelic he gave the Ritual Words:
Magic gives: but can also take.

Those found guilty of the most heinous of crimes:

Now have proven thyselfs unworthy of Her Most Sacred Gift.

By my blood: my will be done.

Let thy sentence be carried out that the Mother can give once more:

And may the blessing thou hast squandered bloom anew in a new life.

As I will: So Mote It Be.

…

The screams would haunt his dreams forever, Hadrian decided as McG healed the cut in his arm and forced a blood replenisher down him.

Something about the Ritual Magic he kept partaking in seemed to lend itself to the taking of blood replenishers.

Lord Prince was going to think him an anemic or something at this rate.

Madam Umbridge had started screaming first, the Ritual working fastest on the weakest-magically that was condemned.

Fudge had begun not moments later, soon giving rise to a chorus of screaming and whimpering voices both male and female. Hardened witches and wizards who had committed heinous crimes all brought low as Mother Magic took back what she once gave freely.

Hadrian was resolved to never use that Ritual again.

He’d learned the lesson of why it had been buried so deeply: once was more than enough.

His mind couldn’t fathom the wizard or witch it would take or the circumstances that would have to occur for one to set such a thing in motion multiple times.

Worse yet: he’d seen evidence that such witches and wizards and such circumstances had occurred throughout the history of the Line of Emrys.

He closed his eyes and sent out a prayer to Mother Magic that such things never came to pass in his lifetime.

Hadrian neither wanted to become such a wizard nor live to see such times that would force the use of that Ritual more than once.

…

Luckily for Hadrian’s state of mind, the Samhain Rites were much more benign.

Even enjoyable in those moments where he was able to forget for seconds or minutes at a time what he’d been forced to do earlier that evening.

Hadrian returned with McG in tow in time to welcome his guests and Household members to the Samhain Rites at Skye Palace. Standing tall and strong on the steps of the Western Courtyard where
the tables and bonfires were set up for the festivities with the greenhouses gaily lit beyond the Western gate, he welcomed one and all with true warmth in his voice, pushing down any lingering distress to be dealt with at another time. With Wills on his arm he joined the gathered company, taking in the scents of roasting suckling pig and caramel apples as well as the sight of the wheat sheaves and corn dollies adorning the palace’s exterior walls.

The Ladies of the Household and their house elf helpers had outdone themselves.

They could smell roasting chestnuts and it made many a mouth water. Hadrian led Wills down the pathway towards the light of the bonfire corridor. There were tables set out with barrels of beer and jugs of cider as well as apple juice and sparkling grape juice for those who didn't want to drink too much or were too young. Smaller iron braziers were heating cauldrons of hot mulled wine from Wills’ own vineyard and the smell of cinnamon and spice added to the perfume in the air.

Coming to a stop before the corridor of flame, Hadrian and Wills turned and faced the gathered crowd, Hadrian casting a wandless Sonorus before addressing the happy group.

“We are here tonight to celebrate Samhain! The night of the thinning Veil, where those we have gone before us into the long night may once more take comfort and joy with the living. It marks the beginning of the time of the warrior and the wizard, where we protect those who are in our care.”

He took a breath, linking hands with Wills thankful for his silent strength as he knew some of those gathered wouldn’t be pleased by his returning to the ancient words of the Festival of the Dead.

“Today marks the end of the Mother's reign during the year and the beginning of the power of the Stranger! Tonight we burn the sacred flames and we shall pass through them, cleansing ourselves of the deeds and losses of the year. As you pass through the flames of Samhain cast out the Darkness of your mind and allow it to be burned clean: preparing you for the coming Winter and the Season of the Stranger.”

There were mutterings from some of the witches and wizards over the controversial exhortation but what could they do? Complain about the return to tradition that Hadrian had already cemented as part of the foundations of his rule? Most, detractors aside, were glad of the resurgence of interest in the Olde ways that Hadrian was creating with every Ritual he directed and every law he and his Council repealed.

Each of the gathered took a piece of parchment and wrote down either a regret for the seasons passed or a hope for the season coming.

Hadrian waited until all were finished before giving Wills a soft smile and tossing his parchment into the cleansing fire, his betrothed following his example. Turning, they relinked their hands and strode with stately grace and reverence through the short corridor of flames, each thinking of the year gone and the future yet before him. Hadrian in particular felt lightened by the cleansing flames and ritual of Samhain, with the blood he’d felt coating him washed away by the fires.

The Ritual had worked its Magic.

…”

After midnight when the festival had ended and the guests had all returned to either their own homes or their quarters within Avalon, Wills found himself once more sneaking through the halls of the palace.

There was something wrong.
He felt it in his bones, in his magic.

Ever since he laid eyes on his ‘Rian earlier that night, he’d known it, he could see it behind that bland public smile and the false gleam in his eyes.

It reminded him of the times after fighting with his father that him Mum would come and hug him or his brother Harry with a brittle smile and shining eyes: wrong. Just wrong.

That smile ‘Rian had worn all night was no truer than his Mum’s easily shattered happy mask.

He knew he wasn’t the only one who saw through it either, for all that he’d stayed at ‘Rian’s side throughout the whole festival he’d seen the concerned looks some of the young King’s honorary family had shared. And above all he knew that look McG had had when he arrived with ‘Rian right before rushing to the side of his new “boss” Lord Protector Lupin. Something had happened, something that had McG not just concerned but worried to his bones.

Like the time he’d almost lost Wills in Mayfair because he accidentally Apparated to get closer to a cute puppy when he was eight and before he’d gotten control of his magic.

Wills snuck up the stairs of the King’s Tower, making his careful way to the bedroom, cautious blue eyes scanning each of the private rooms he passed for any sign of his ‘Rian or what had put that troubling look hiding behind his beautiful eyes.

What he found…it wasn’t what he’d expected to say the least.

‘Rian was huddled in the corner of his massive shower, hot streams of steaming water pounding down upon him and the wizard who held him close as he cried. Both were still dressed, their expensive clothes ruined from the heat of the nearly-boiling water and the steam it made when it hit the chilled tiles of the shower stall. Neither had even shucked their boots – almost as much of a shock as the position he’d found them in, in the first place.

Wills knew how much ‘Rian loved those basilisk hide boots.

They’d been a gift from his friend Rhys before the latter turned into a prat.

And the other wizard was just as bad about his attire as ‘Rian could be about those boots.

Moving closer he caught what ‘Rian was managing to say between sobs:

“It was horrible, Siri.” Hadrian clutched as his godfather’s tunic, head buried in the older wizard’s chest.

Sirius had come to find him after the festival, worried over what his mate had relayed from McG. The HitWizard wasn’t able to tell Remus what had occurred, only that Hadrian had been deeply effected by it and someone should talk to him about it after the rites were finished. He’d found his beloved pup curled up in the corner of the far-too-hot shower, trying to rub the skin of his hands raw as he washed them over and over again, the water continuing to batter down upon their ebony heads.

He’d caught Harry’s hands, pulling them into his chest to curl up in his shirt, letting the boy burrow into him and sob his heart out while Sirius held him safe in his strong arms, the water continuing to batter down upon their ebony heads.

“Horrible.” Hadrian repeated in a harsh whispering sob. “How many horrible, monstrous things can I do before I become a horrible monstrous thing, Siri?” He gasped out a cry, tears falling.

“Where’s the line? One? Ten? A hundred? How many lives do I have to take and how many
gallons of blood has to stain my hands before I become the same as those I just condemned?” Teary green eyes looked up into stormy grey. “How much, Siri?”

“Shh, pup. Shh.” Sirius soothed, rubbing strong hands up and down over the soaked silk robe and shirt. “It’ll be okay, pup. I know you, Harry. You can come back from this. And come back stronger. Don’t let them break you. Don’t let them win.”

Wills ignored the pounding water and lowered himself down beside the pair, one hand reaching out tentatively to brush sopping-wet strands of hair out of Hadrian’s water-flecked face.

He remembered what else had happened that day now.

The executions.

His ‘Rian had had to oversee the executions of the condemned prisoners with McG.

“You’re not a monster, ‘Rian.” Wills said firmly, staring deeply into sorrow-dulled emerald eyes. “And you never will be. That you even question it says that much for sure. No matter how many death sentences you’re forced to hand down due to the action or inaction of other men, you will never break like that.”

“He’s right cub.” Sirius said when Harry’s gaze turned hopefully back onto him. “You were born to be a great wizard and King. Clean hands and an untroubled conscience are the provinces of lesser men. Luxuries of those who don’t have to make the hard choices. You do. And we’ll be right here beside you for the next hard choice and the hard choice after that telling you the exact same things. Yes, it’s hard. No, it’s not fair to ask of you. But it is what it is, and you can handle it.”

“I’m glad this is hard on you, ‘Rian.” Wills admitted, nibbling lightly at his lip. “If for no other reason than taking human life should always be a hard choice to make. Sometimes it’s not as simple as what is easy and what is right. It’s about what is just and what is merely expedient. You have what it takes to make the just choice. And all of Avalon is better for it.”

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Once Hadrian had been calmed down and coaxed from his punishing shower, a salve applied to his red and raw hands, Sirius ushered both boys into clean, dry pajamas and had them burrow together into Hadrian’s wide silk-covered bed. Telling them that he set an alarm to get Wills back to his rooms before his grandfather noticed his absence, Sirius transformed into Padfoot and curled up on the other side of Hadrian opposite his betrothed, keeping a watchful eye on his pup for the rest of the night. He knew there would be nightmares before it was over.

And he was right.

Together Padfoot and Wills comforted Hadrian when he cried out and thrashed in his sleep, gently waking him from his dreams as needed.

After the last and final set of whimpers and cries woke Wills, he gave Hadrian a sleepy hug and trudged back to his own rooms with the newly-awakened Remus at his side.

Wills, Harry, and their grandfather returned to Buckingham Palace that morning, Wills barely able to keep his eyes open to eat his porridge and bacon, and life settled back into the new routine for the denizens of both Buckingham and Skye Palace.

If Wills was a little more somber and Hadrian was spending more time with Sirius as Padfoot keeping him company, no one said a word of it in the wake of the executions announcement in the
Wizarding news.

Of all rags, *The Daily Prophet* had suddenly turned extremely circumspect in the wake of a visit from Hadrian’s new steward.

He owned ninety percent of the damned thing after all. They would watch their collective step from now on unless the staff as a whole desired to be unequivocally sacked without notice.

As weeks went by, Hadrian fell back into the routine of classes with his fellow A-weekers at Hedwig on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays with his private studies and tutoring on Tuesday and Thursday. Much of the non-emergent business of both his private Lordship affairs as well as that of Avalon was dealt with on Saturday while Sunday continued to be a “family” day filled with outings and lessons and games with his hodgepodge of a family. The Princess of Wales had yet to relent on Wills spending extra time with Hadrian so they crammed as much time together as they could on their two days at school while filling in mirror-time with each other while doing homework or working on independent studies.

Wills was even privileged to be serenaded by one of his ‘Rian’s newest compositions on the violin via-mirror at one point – a rare honor.

Hadrian and Tavi were also getting to know each other via linked-journal the older of the pair taking time to help his intended with his potions, defense, or dark arts homework when he had time to do so. Tentative plans were made for them to have an outing together on one of Tavi’s Hogsmeade weekends after the winter hols, Hadrian’s holiday being stuffed as much with ‘informal’ state visits with his closest allies.

However, both of Hadrian’s current courtships would have time with him on Yule, the Queen having put her foot down about the Windsors spending part of the winter holiday with the Avalonian Royal and his extended family.

Neville was spending more time than ever with Hadrian as he was both part of the King’s study group at H.I. along with Wills, Draco, and Blaise and living at the Longbottom Estate in Avalon proper. With his Gran well-occupied with seeing to the opening and readying of the Indian Slytherin Palace located in the Madras province and the French LeFey Palace in Provence, the Dowager Lady Longbottom often brought her Grandson to Skye Palace to sit-in on Hadrian’s tutoring lessons or study times.

Time flew by and before Hadrian knew it December Seventh arrived and with it the start of the month-long school holiday, accompanied by the removal from Skye Palace to the Madras Slytherin Palace for the informal state visit with the Ptolemy Emperor Pharaoh Rameses Caesar the Fifteenth.

Wills came with them, despite arguments to the contrary, as was required of his station as the Emrys Consort.

The Windsor-Nimue Prince and Lord was accompanied by his guard Kingsley as well as a rotating member of his immediate family which changed every day or two as their own demands on their time required.

As Lord Prince’s presence was required, so was that of Tavi and Livia, which made for an interesting group has Lucius had also brought with him Narcissa and Draco; Draco and Livia both knowing of their contract but not having spent any time around one another since it’s discovery.

David had stayed behind at Hogwarts to put in an extra two weeks of work on his apprenticeships before joining the Avalon household at Skye Palace on the Twentieth for Yule and later Christmas.
celebrations. Rhys had also declined to come, spending the holiday instead with his mother and her side of the family in her exile in the Italian Alps.

Lady Pari Patil as the chatelaine for Hadrian’s Indian holdings was the only not-close member of his household who was present for the informal visit, the young King having left most of his Council and large Household behind save for his closest advisors and needed Household members.

The Lady’s husband Galen was the head of the department of Education for Britain and with the new laws and policies was too busy to get away for the week of the visit, keeping the couple’s twin girls and older son at home with him as well.

Pharaoh Rameses likewise had pared down his entourage for the visit, bringing only his most necessary staff and advisors along with his two current wives. Among the “necessary” advisors were his two closest siblings and the only ones with whom he shared a mother: the indomitable High Priestess of Isis who Hadrian had already met and their younger brother the High Priest of Ra named Ahmose. The trio of siblings were quite a bit older than the young King, each having already seen a century of life however, as powerful magicals that made them barely more than middle age.

Rameses’s two wives were a study in contrasts with the elder (his second wife following the death of his first in 1926) being an Italian with a lineage that goes back to ancient Roman stock that had ties to both the Prince and Claudian lines in her eighties while his second living wife and fourth over-all was the cause of tense relations between Egypt and Japan with the lovely thirty-year-old Akiko having once been the fifteen-year-old niece of Emperor Ryuunosuke who rather inconveniently became with child before Ramses had been encouraged to marry her.

Hadrian thanked the stars that Rameses and Ryuunosuke would not have to be in the same room together for another year and a half.

From what Wills and Tavi had learned from speaking with Rameses’s wives, tensions were still quite high between the two monarchs even fifteen years after the indiscretion had taken place.

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On the second-to-last day of the Ptolemy visit to the Madras palace, Hadrian found himself sitting down with Rameses and a few of their advisors/aids for the formal-informal meeting that was the backbone behind the whole royal visit.

Hadrian was accompanied by the ever-present Russell his official secretary as well as Lucius, Sherrinford and Siger while Rameses had brought his equivalent of a secretary which wound up being one of his many many descendants, in this case his great-grandson and a secondary heir to the throne Rameses the younger who was learning how to rule by example shadowing his grandfather the ninety-three-year-old Crown Prince Amenhotep who was also present for the meeting. Rameses’s two siblings were there as well, having been the Pharaoh’s closest friends and advisors since he took the throne of Egypt at a relatively-young thirty years old.

Having so many royal and highborn entities in one room tended to create a moment of shuffling and frisking about before everyone was satisfied with the arrangement, though having the meeting in one of the rare Slytherin meeting rooms with a round table helped exponentially.

“Many blessings upon the House of Avalon.” Rameses said formally as the two monarchs clasped arms, kicking off the meeting. “Bright were the sun and moon upon the hour of your Claiming, King Hadrian.”

“Many thanks and blessings from the House of Avalon to the House of Ptolemy.” Hadrian intoned
soberly. “Long may the stars shine upon our alliance.”

The two nodded, each dipping their heads the exact same fraction, then parted retreating to opposite sides of the ten-seater table.

“One must admit.” Rameses said with a gusty sigh. “That the return of the Empire of Avalon to its former strength is a great boon in these contentious times. It has been a beacon of strength and prosperity that has been greatly missed by all, not just its allies, these many long years.”

“It has.” Hadrian dipped his head slightly acknowledging the back-handed compliment. “And We have come here and welcomed Our Ally into one of Our homes for the purpose of sharing that long-missed strength with Our long-time Ally, the House of Ptolemy.”

Amenhotep spoke, black eyes sharp as he studied the much-younger King. The lithe figure was young enough to be one of his own great-grandchildren, let alone the double-great of his father the Pharaoh. The House of Ptolemy doesn’t play around with the Line of Succession, a trait that has kept them going when Avalon had disappeared.

“You speak of the marriage contract between our two great Houses.” The Crown Prince noted blandly.

“I do.” Hadrian nodded. “Many contracts have come to fruition with my Inheritance and Claiming. Chief among them the one long in abeyance of the House of Slytherin and the House of Ptolemy.”

“And yet.” Rameses noted himself with sharp eyes. “You didn’t inherit this contract, you won it by rite of conquest if my advisors are to be believed.”

“He did.” Lucius spoke to that point; one they were all certain would come up eventually. “Hadrian defeated the last of the Line of Slytherin who styled himself as such though was unable to claim the Lordship and all that came with it. Including the long alliance between your two great Houses.”

Rameses gave a vicious grin. “The House of Ptolemy has a long history of appreciating the rite of conquest. We will honor Our Alliance and the marriage contract that has blossomed anew in the blood of Slytherin. During your informal visit to Alexandria in the Summer we will have those of Our Blood who meet the requirements of the Contract present to sup and treat with the King.”

“Do you have any preferences?” The High Priestess asked with faux-idleness. She well remembered the beauty and grace of the three young males who flocked around the young King at his Lordship Ball.

“Under fifty years of age would be best.” Siger ticked off a line on the parchment resting before him. “And of the Pharaoh’s own children, the contract is between direct heirs not an heir’s heir.”

“It will be arranged.” Amenhotep crossed off plans to introduce the young King to his own progeny and their children. A shame. “All will be in readiness for the visit.”

“Excellent.” Sherrinford gave a sharp nod, Hadrian having leaned over to dictate something to his secretary. “Moving on…”

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The next day after the Egyptians had been seen off, the household packed up and moved again, this time to the LeFey Palace in Provence.

Light and airy, it was a study in French styling and as far removed from the sumptuous eastern flavor
of the Slytherin palace as could be.

Wills and Hadrian linked arms, strolling through the brightly-lit main gallery on the top floor of the palace, enjoying the respite from having royal guests for the afternoon. This next state visit would be shorter than the last, the Avalon household needing to be back in Skye Palace on the twentieth for the Yule celebrations and the Rising Sun entourage back in Osaka for the same. It was a relief that they would only have four more days of state visits and minding their royal manners before going back to their normal behavior…at least until the summer.

“So, let’s see if I have this right.” Wills said, furrowing his brow after his ‘Rian was done explaining the visits to him. “You go alone to Alexandria and Osaka for your ‘selection’ visits then we’re free until our wedding and then your coronation the month after which will be fully-formal state visits.”

“That’s right.” Hadrian squeezed Wills’s hand lightly, giving him a small smile.

“Then nothing until we all go to either Alexandria or Osaka for your weddings to whoever you pick this summer or next winter.”

“Uh-huh.”

Wills frowned. “That seems awfully…” He trailed off not knowing what to make of it.

“Formal?” Hadrian suggested with a roll of his eyes. “Or even cold?”

“Yeah.” Wills shrugged, glancing away at the derisive tone ‘Rian was using. He was glad that tone wasn’t directed at him but at the situation. “I thought it would be more like…well…how you are with me or Tavi.”

Hadrian snorted. As if. That would be a wonder. “Nope.” He shook his ebony mane. “Since they’re contracts between pairs of Royal Houses not just between a Royal House and another level of nobility or even two Noble Houses things are a lot more formal. Technically even letting me pick from a selection of heirs is a major concession on Rameses’s part. One that he’s only making because he appreciates that I took Slytherin via conquest and he has so many eligible heirs and heiresses to choose from. The Rising Sun Emperor might not be as accommodating.”

“That…” Wills shook his head. “I don’t even know what to say to that.”

“Believe me.” Hadrian sighed, giving his betrothed a rueful glance. “I know the feeling.”

…

Hadrian’s words ended up being mildly prophetic, the Emperor Ryuunosuke being both less and more accommodating than his Egyptian counterpart.

For one, the Emperor of the Rising Sun was fully half Rameses’s age at a mere fifty-five years of age. Which curtailed the number of eligible offspring by a great deal. The Ptolemy Pharaoh had over two dozen legitimate heirs and heiresses from his marriages alone while the Rising Sun Emperor had only been married once with an additional two concubines to give him legitimate heirs available to fulfill the contract.

Of those heirs, his eldest two sons were both already wed, leaving him with a mere ten children able to fulfill the contract ranging in age from thirty-two to five and of both genders.

And of that number only six would be of age to consent or otherwise marry by the deadline on the contract, the youngest of Ryuunosuke’s children being too young.
Which Hadrian found himself thankful for, having momentarily turned green at the thought of wedding a nine-year-old when he himself would be between fifteen and sixteen years old – the most outlandish possibility before it was made clear that Avalon would only accept as eligible options who would be of age according to Avalon’s laws to fulfill the contract by the deadline.

Once all the winnowing was hashed out, Hadrian was left with two princes and four princesses to choose from…when the time came the following winter.

Honestly after the shock of having to be firm about the possible age range, Hadrian was just happy to have a choice at all.

Ryuunosuke had been much more intransient than Rameses, perhaps because his ally and rival had been so very accommodating.

It was nothing less than the Avalonian entourage had anticipated but it was still a massive headache, Hadrian being even more happy than ever to return to Skye Palace on December the Twentieth.

…

For the first time Hadrian was responsible for leading the Yule Rites, as the King of Avalon he was the “father” of the empire making him the leader of most of the seasonal and holiday rites and rituals.

The Yule log had been prepared, runes carved into the debarked surface of the huge oaken log then soaked in wine and sweet mead and lastly wrapped in a garland of woven fir, holly, yew, and mistletoe before sprinkling it with spices for the offering.

Candles floated gently scenting the air as the gathered – which included the Windsors and the families of Hadrian’s household members and Privy council – came together in a circle around the circular hearth in the public great room of Skye Palace’s west wing.

Each took their marked place on a soft, supportive cushion on the marble floor, a low table with the ceremonial nibbles, juices, and spiced wine shared between every two place.

Once everyone was in place and the sun had begun to set Hadrian with Wills on his right and Tavi on his left, cast a Sonorous and began the Rite. Unlike other more boisterous and festive rites, the Yule ritual was one of quiet and reflection as they held vigil through the longest night until the return of the day.

Hadrian’s Words were likewise reflective and solemn.

“This is the night of the solstice, the longest night of the year. Now darkness triumphs; and yet, gives way and changes into light. The breath of nature is suspended: all waits while within the hands of the Mother Magic. We watch for the coming of dawn, when the Great Mother again gives birth to the Divine Sun, who is bringer of hope and the promise of summer. This is the stillness behind motion, when time itself stops; the center is also the circumference of all. We are awake in the night. We turn the Wheel to bring the light. We call the sun from the womb of night.”

All repeated the refrain as he and his two betrothed sank down onto their pillows: “We call the sun from the womb of night.”

Light conversation passed around the circle as the gathered all reflected quietly on the year that was gone: a year that brought great change but also the promise of future prosperity hand-in-hand with the Claiming of Avalon.

After a time when the conversation had slowly faded away and the magical people had sunk into
their centers with a mien of quiet reflection and reverence, Hadrian too meditated on the year. Before long, he felt deep within the moon reaching its zenith in the sky, harkening for the next stage of the rites.

“To die and be reborn, all is lost to the night.

Fear passes and yet fear remains, all is lost to the night:

The Wheel of Stars turns.”

Wills repeated the last, as each did in turn, symbolizing the turning of the wheel.

When Tavi had at last finished the refrain, Hadrian lifted his goblet and took a deep draught of the ceremonial wine, the rest following before sinking once more into reverence and meditation.

Hours more passed, the celebrants engaging in quiet meditation or conversation amongst one another. The Windsors all found it very strange, having never participated with any of Wills’ Rites that he celebrated with help from his tutors or guards. Though even the eight-year-old Harry found it startlingly easy to sit and either talk or meditate with the heavy aura of magic that hung in the air.

Finally, dawn peaked over the eastern horizon, bringing with it the end of the Rite, Wills and Tavi standing alongside Hadrian as he finished the ritual.

“We are awake in the night!

We turn the Wheel, to bring the light!

We call the sun from the womb of night!”

They chanted together, each brandishing their wand or in Hadrian’s case the ritual atheme, and casting out their magic towards the smoldering Yule log, setting ablaze in a high tower of flame before lowering their hands and the tower extinguished, leaving only a wisp of smoke rising from the ashes of the oaken round.

Cheers rose from the circle and applause for the showy finish of the ritual as the gathered all climbed to their feet, hugging family and close friends, biding the King and his betrothed goodbye before taking their leave to exchange Yule gifts in private.

Hadrian’s main personal elf Whimsy popped his gifts to his family as well as Wills and Tavi onto the cushion where he’d spent most of the night in meditation and heavy thought.

Turning first to Wills, he handed over the large, flat package with a bashful smile, taking smaller but much heavier package his consort gave him in turn.

The Nimue Lord ripped into the bright paper with abandon, cocking his head slightly to one side at what had been hidden under the paper. Narrowing his eyes, he reached out with his magical senses, feeling the painting of his immediate family including his grandparents. Lifting his head, he gave ‘Rian a bright grin and a happy thank-you. ‘Rian had somehow convinced the Windsors to sit for a magical portrait.

Hadrian gave an equally enthused thank you and a peck on the cheek to his consort once he’d unwrapped his own gift to find a sixteenth-century “sword-breaker” type dagger. He was almost giddy with excitement to try it out.

“Kings spotted it in one of my vaults.” Wills leaned over and confided. “I had no idea what it was:
other than shiny. But once he explained I knew it couldn’t be for anyone else. It even has a blackened hilt with an emerald to match your sword.”

“Thanks, Wills.” Hadrian’s eyes were shining as he gave his consort a strong hug before Wills was ushered off by his parents to their quarters to rest. The rest of the Windsors still did their gift-giving on Christmas.

“That just makes my gift even more appropriate, your Grace.” Tavi teased his intended as he purred out the title in his sultry voice, exchanging packages with the younger wizard.

And he was right, Hadrian chuckling a bit over the set of polishing and sharpening potions for Ancuru that would also work on his new dagger. For his part Hadrian had given Tavi a new potions bag that was charmed for expansion, feather-light, and cushioning for the phials Tavi might fill it with.

The rest of the holiday passed in a blur of state business, visits with Wills or Tavi or both, and soon it was back to school.

A month after Yule brought around Wills’ birthday and the Princess of Wales had conceded to her son spending an afternoon – just the one mind – with Hadrian to celebrate. Since they were in the middle of their yearly sojourn to Sandringham House it wasn’t like there were masses of people or retainers around to notice he was gone for a couple of hours anyway. Wills was intrigued by his betrothed’s thoughtful gift of a tome on Healing, a sentiment shared by Octavian when several weeks later on the teen’s birthday Hedwig delivered a copy of Lily Potter nee Evans’s own potion’s journal for his fifteenth birthday gift.

The Ostara break and holiday brought David Wallace back to Skye Palace, the older teen finally getting an answer to his rather unorthodox proposal out of Hadrian.

The two long-time friends – despite the age difference – were playing a game of wizards chess when David finally brought the subject back up, his icy blue eyes nearly pinning Hadrian to the spot with their brilliance against the older teen’s dark honey skin and pitch-black hair and lashes.

Having just turned eighteen in the Fall, the wilder but more responsible Wallace son had all of the beauty of his mother that the woman had predicted he could claim years before, the only thing truly marking him as a Wallace being his ice-blue eyes and massive build.

“Have you decided, Harry?” David asked, carefully concealing his concern over his friend’s answer. He knew the now-King very well. The last thing he wanted to do was seem like he was pushing or hounding him. The only thing that would accomplish was pushing him in the opposite direction of where you were trying to lead him.

Hadrian peeked up at David from under lush ebony lashes, shooting him a teasing glance.

“I decide things every day, Davie.” His grin was nothing short of impish. “Sometimes that’s all I do: make decisions from sunup to sundown. You’ll have to be a tick more specific.”

“Minx.” David shot back in a growl, swiping out with one massive bear-paw hand to cuff his tormentor on the shoulder. Hadrian nimbly dodged the swipe, sticking out his tongue in a taunt. “You know perfectly well what I mean.”
“Do you even like blokes, David?” Hadrian finally asked the question that had plagued him off and on for months whenever he would take time to consider what to do about the Wallace-Pevensie contract. He was honestly perplexed and it showed on his face and in his tone as he posed the question to his friend. “I mean…” He marshalled his thoughts. “I’ve never heard you talk about anyone, boy or girl, in that way.”

“Why would I?” David kept his voice calm and face bland. “I knew Da was going to arrange a match for me and unlike how some others behave I never saw the point in mucking about with whoever lit my fancy when I didn’t know if I or they would end up contracted elsewhere.” He shrugged. “It never seemed worth the potential heartache just to scratch an itch.”

Hadrian blinked, taken mildly aback at that rejoinder. He’d never thought about it that way before. When it came to other people anyway. Since half his own matches were arranged he’d never given how others choose their partners much thought. And he knew since he was nine that he was going to be marrying at least one other boy so he never had to think too much about his personal leanings with that already decided.

It was an area he would have to consider more in the future since there were still another seven Last-of-Line clauses he was subject to. He was going to have to court someone or several someones that he wasn’t already bound to. It was a strange thought since his mind had mostly been focused on the existing contracts up to now.

What was he going to do about the uncontracted Houses?

He shook his head. That was a rabbit-hole to get lost down another day. David was still waiting for his response to his original question, though he noted his friend hadn’t answered his question either.

Seeing that he wasn’t going to pry an answer out of his young friend without supplying one of his own David sighed, leaning back in his chair.

“Yes, Harry.” He said patiently. “I like blokes like that. Not many, mind.” He qualified his answer. “I mostly go for curves but there are blokes that I’ve fancied before.”

“What about me?” Hadrian fiddled with one of David’s captured pawns, peering up at his friend’s swarthy face from under inky lashes. “Could you like me that way?”

David gave an honest-to-goodness guffaw at that leading question then answered:

“Only an idiot or blind man wouldn’t.” He said bluntly, enjoying the dusky blush that lit up Hadrian’s smooth cheeks. “You’re already cute as can be and are only going to get more and more gorgeous as you age. Frankly,” David tossed off a roguish smirk. “I’d be damned lucky for you to pick a mammoth like me considering the two pretty things you already have following you around. Rhys’ is much prettier than me.”

Hadrian snorted at the last, giving his friend a look.

“Rhys might be ‘pretty’,” he rolled expressive green eyes at the moniker. “But his attitude lately is the furthest thing from it.” He gave a smirk of his own. “Frankly, I should be lucky you even asked, considering otherwise I’d have to deal with Rhys’ pissy moods for the rest of forever.”

“An accord then?” David asked mildly.

“Not until after I’m wedded to both William and Octavian.” Hadrian held up a cautioning hand. “I have too much on my plate with getting Avalon sorted to add yet another courtship into the mix.”
David did some quick math in his head. He was familiar with the wording of the contracts due to his father Gawain’s former and current positions in Harry’s service. That would put their courtship starting at…

“Fourteen?”

Hadrian thought a moment for himself and then nodded. “Fourteen.” He echoed turning his attention back to the game. “That gives me two-and-a-half years to keep beating your arse at chess before I have to worry about hurting your delicate feelings.” He parroted one of Lady Maggie’s cautions for dealing with his many courtships.

The six-foot-seven mountain of a wizard roared with laughter, turning his own attention back to the game.

Delicate feelings, indeed.

…

Another major decision made and off his plate, Hadrian exchanged several more token with his two courtships as the school year drew to a close, bringing his twelfth birthday and the informal visit to Alexandria ever closer.

Hadrian and William had been bonded for almost a year before the Princess of Wales conceded on the two of them spending time together other than at Rituals, state events, or school.

They celebrated with another exchange of gifts, this time a series of fencing and dueling lessons with Gawain for Wills from Hadrian and a Krav Maga retreat in Israel for a weekend from William to his ‘Rian.

And so the Wheel turned.
Chapter Fifteen: The Jewel of the Nile

The Avalon Seven

Note: This chapter is a little shorter than the average chapter. I didn’t want to bore everyone with the formal state dinners, etc. etc. from Hadrian’s trip to Alexandria so it came in at around 5400 words which is about 2000 short from my normal chapter on this fic. I hope you enjoy it, regardless.

Chapter Fifteen: The Jewel of the Nile

“I can’t believe you’re still growing.” Wills said in disgust looking up from his own respectable five-foot height at his five-foot-four bonded.

The Nimue Lord had put on several inches himself over the last year, but, despite warnings from Andromeda that Hadrian might not grow at all for up to several years after the magical growth spurt his body was forced into during his Claiming, the younger wizard had grown at a normal rate, putting on an additional two inches since his last birthday.

Hadrian chuckled and ruffled Wills’s sandy-blond hair before reaching around and hugging the smaller pre-teen gently, tucking him into his chest and resting his cheek on Wills’s head.

“Me either.” Hadrian said with a sigh. “I’ve put on more muscle too. I look like I should be starting second year at Hogwarts, not H.I.”

William wrapped his own lean arms around Hadrian’s ever-broadening chest, not even noticing Ancuru’s scabbard anymore after it being a constant presence for going on a year, nor paying attention to the basilisk hide strap that crossed diagonally over Hadrian’s chest, holding the nearly-a-greatsword in place.

“I wish I could go with you to Alexandria.” Wills admitted, looking up into emerald eyes. “But Mother’s been insistent on taking a holiday ‘as a family’ which she still won’t admit includes you.”

“The Princess of Wales has every right to insistent on you accompanying them, Wills.” Hadrian gently reminded his bonded. “She’s just being a good mother. Adult in the wizarding world or not, you’re still only twelve.”

“So are you.” William flicked the taller boy on the nose with a mild glare. “Mr. I’m-King-so-I-make-the-rules.”

“I am King.” Hadrian gave an irritatingly bright grin down at his bonded. “And I do get to make the rules.”

Wills rolled his eyes and tucked his head back against his ‘Rian’s chest. It was going to be a long fortnight with him tucked away at one of the royal retreats and ‘Rian in Alexandria. With the distance they won’t even be able to send letters at all, just having to rely on their mirrors for quick talks now and again.

“I wish you could go with me too.” Hadrian admitted at last with a gusty sigh. “This is one decision that I would love to not have to make all alone.”

William gave Hadrian a comforting squeeze at that.
“You’ll do fine, ‘Rian.” Wills stretched up and gave his bonded a chaste kiss. “I have faith in you. And if all else fails…you can always flip a coin.”

“Thanks, Wills.” Hadrian said sarcastically. “I’ll keep that in mind while picking my future consort. ‘All else fails, flip a coin.’ If Tavi bitches about my selection, I’m totally blaming you.”

…

They arrived in Alexandria on August Third, a mere two days after Hadrian’s twelfth birthday. After a quick formal greeting and introduction to one of the Pharaoh’s several children who had joined the service of the Egyptian gods and goddesses who would be serving as a combination guide and chaperone while Hadrian was in the palace, Rameses and his entourage got back to the business of running the Ptolemy Empire while Hadrian and his few companions settled into their quarters.

The child in question had sauntered in lazily after the rest of Rameses’s train, ignoring the urging of her eldest half-brother and Crown Prince Amenhotep to hurry up.

“High Priestess of Bast Nefertiti,” Amenhotep waved between the dainty priestess and their royal guests. “This is his Grace the King Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon of the Empire of Avalon.” He shot her a firm look. “No playing with him, little cat.”

With that warning, the “important” members of the household took their leave, Nefertiti remaining behind to get to know Hadrian’s group better.

Intrigued by the warning Amenhotep had given, Hadrian moved to her side, offering his arm as they took a stroll through the walled garden the adjoined his suite.

“That was very odd.” Hadrian observed after they’d made casual conversation for several moments. Nefertiti gave a tinkling laugh.

“The place I occupy in the Pharaoh’s affections is odd.” She countered. “As you become more familiar with myself and my father you will learn this.”

“How so?”

She gave a great sigh, one with far too much weight for her twenty-year-odd soul. It was a painful truth, but a truth nonetheless.

“I am all at once,” she waved him over to a pair of lounges that rested beside a sparkling fish-pond, reclining with ease. “Pharaoh Rameses’s most beloved and most despised child. As I said: an odd place in my father’s affections to occupy.”

Hadrian leaned forward, his prodigious mind clicking away and making deductions. This was a mystery to make even Sherlock salivate. “You’re too young to be a high priestess.” He murmured, jewel-eyes tracking relentlessly over her smooth porcelain face. “Far too young. And with your…”

“Beauty?” She finished, arching a lovely brow. “Oh yes. I would have made a fine match for any of the remaining Royal Houses. Perhaps even sealed the breach between my own House and that of the Rising Sun. But the Temple of Bast claimed me upon my birth and I was given over to them to raise once I was weaned from my wet-nurse.”

“Wet-nurse?” Hadrian’s eyes sharpened at the telling phrase. No one used a wet-nurse anymore. Not without good reason.
“Yes,” her smile was bitter. “The reason why I am all at once beloved and despised: my birthing killed my mother. But I am also the image of her. Hence…”

“Beloved and despised.” Hadrian repeated, leaning back against his lounger. “Why then have you be my chaperone and guide if your place in the family is so contentious?”

Nefertiti gave a playful flick of her wrist giving him a mischievous grin.

“Because I wasn’t raised with them, I’m supposedly impartial: not willing to elevate one sibling above the other. And as I am, as you say, far too young to be a high priestess,” she rolled dark amber eyes. “I am the closest child to you in age who is also ineligible.”

Hadrian gave a chuckle at the “supposedly impartial”. Even if Nefertiti had been sequestered from her other siblings she clearly had firm feelings about them. He felt a pang. It was too bad she was a priestess. He had a feeling that of all Rameses’s children she might very well be the best suited to him with her irreverence and sense of humor.

Not to mention she was truly exquisite.

“Tell me about them then,” he prompted, linking his hands and resting them behind his head. “Your eligible siblings. If you had your way, who would I choose for the Slytherin Consort?”

“Well…” Brown eyes warmed with devilment, the priestess leaning on one elbow and whispering. “I quite enjoy spending time with…”

…

Julian Kwalla, known to his father and siblings as Julian Rameses Kwalla Ptolemy, strode through his father’s palace in search of his favorite sister.

He’d been recalled from his home, located in the Olympic region of Western Washington State in the United States of America where he lived with his mother’s people working as an anthropologist, for some reason that had yet to be explained to him.

Yes, he had been raised a Prince of the House of Ptolemy and had a wand that led most of his older brothers to push for him to join his half-brother Aaron among the House’s standing magical army. But in the wake of his mother’s death when he was ten and the banishment of his baby sister to the temple of Bast, and then the sudden collection of another step-mother a mere five years later, Julian had wanted more for himself than to be yet another Ptolemy son serving his father the Pharaoh and begging for scraps from the royal table. His blood siblings had all understood though their older halfies had looked at him askance for the decision.

Their mother, a truly exquisite beauty who’d been studying for her thesis at the Valley of Kings when their father had spotted her, had been the daughter of a tribal shaman and a squib of European extraction. From them both she inherited her magical ancestry but preferred to live and work in the modern mundane academia rather than follow her father’s footsteps as the tribe’s medicine woman. It was a tragedy in the making from the moment Rameses set his mind to having her as his next wife.

Talia Kwalla simply didn’t have the magical core necessary to bear children for the Ptolemy line – or at least not as many as Rameses had wanted. Had the randy old bastard stopped and been pleased with the four children she’d already given him before falling pregnant with her last, his mother would still be alive. And Nefertiti wouldn’t have been sent away.

From that tragedy came Julian’s own dislike of the magical half of his heritage.
But dislike, indifference, or outright disdain, when the Pharaoh called and commanded, his children came.

To do otherwise was unthinkable, even for his most rebellious child and the one who carried his name: Julian Rameses.

Sweeping into his sister’s suite of rooms, cursing the robes that flowed out behind him and wishing for his normal jeans, Julian called out for her:

“Where is she?” His rich voice rang through the alabaster halls. “Where is my little jewel of the Nile?”

“Julian!” Nefertiti squealed, tiny feet making sharp pitter-patter sounds as she darted into her eldest brother’s open arms. “You came! I wasn’t sure you would, oh I’m so glad to see you! It’s been forever since you’ve been home.”

“Even I’m not stubborn enough to ignore Father when he sends out an official summons.” Julian chuckled drily. “You only have to have the Imperial Guard show up on your front porch once to cure you of that habit.”

Swatting him on the arm, Nefertiti scolded him for his blasé attitude.

“Pax, kitten.” Julian held up one elegant but work-roughened hand, halting the priestess before she could unleash one of her truly spectacular tirades. “Now, you tend to know Father’s plans before even he does. What is this all about? Why’ve I been called to the palace?”

Their father had promised to stop with the royal summons after the time he’d had to send the Guard after his most distant of children. Rameses had been forced to concede that Julian did, in fact, have a life outside of the House of Ptolemy and as an adult wizard, did not have to jump at his Father’s whims.

The beauties of dual citizenship.

“It’s not just you.” Nefertiti informed her beloved brother. “All of the Pharaoh’s eligible children between the ages of fifty and twelve have been recalled.”

“Oh Anubis, give me strength.” Julian cursed, closing his eyes wearily. “He’s meddling again isn’t he? Who is it this time? An Italian Doge, a Bulgarian Count, maybe a British Lord perhaps?”

“Right – and wrong – in three.” Nefertiti gave a humorless laugh.

“A British Lord?” Julian arched a brow. “Father can’t contract me or any of the of-age heirs to a British Lord if we’re over seventeen. Their laws don’t allow for it once we come of age. And I’m happy as a bachelor, thank-you-very-much.”

“Father can’t.” She stressed. “But in the case of a Marriage Contract that had previously been held in abeyance…”

Julian groaned, scrubbing one hand over his eyes. “A contract in abeyance could force any of Father’s unwed heirs to marry – even if we’re already of age. The old bastard must be positively giddy.”

It was the bane of Rameses’s life and the backlash of having so many children: there were only so many suitable matches to go around.
Otherwise having six high priests or priestesses in the same family line would be ludicrous, let alone all of the regular priests and priestesses they had in the family. Rameses had scholars and soldiers and socialites for children in addition to the others who served the gods or had taken positions outside of his immediate control. It was a sprawling morass of children that he’d fallen short in the marriage-contracts business.

And then this one just fell into his lap.

“Our sweet step-mothers must be frothing at the mouth at the chance to snag a Contract for their children.” Julian noted with a roll of his eyes. “Who are they putting forward?”

“Marchesa isn’t too concerned actually.” Nefertiti replied. “The Contract is with the new King of Avalon and he’d very young. Expecting him to choose from one of her brood is a little far-fetched. Valerian is the only real option and he’s five years your senior, dear brother.”

“And what of our ambitious Akiko, hmm?” Julian’s disdain of the woman was well-known, seeing as how she’d fallen pregnant, snatching up one of the most powerful men in the magical world for her own at a nubile fifteen-years-old.

For a mere cousin to the Rising Sun Emperor it was quite the coup.

And utterly sickening to Rameses’s older children.

“Who is she attempting to push onto unsuspecting Avalon?”


Sweet like cyanide anyway.

Fourteen-year-old Sakura had all the ambition of her mother and the same alley-cat morality of their father. It was an atrocious combination for anyone who had to spend time with her. But she was cunning with it. Possibly cunning enough to hornswoggle the new King until she was wedded and bedded, especially considering how little contact Hadrian will have with his chosen betrothed before the wedding.

“Any chance of directing Avalon towards either one of our siblings or Valerian?”

The High Priestess tilted her hand back and forth in a so-so motion.

“Perhaps.” She nibbled at her bottom lip. “I’ve been ‘tasked’ with being his guide and chaperone while he’s visiting. That gives me two weeks to gently nudge him in the preferred direction.”

Julian smirked wickedly, dark eyes gleaming.

“And I’m sure the preferred direction changes with each person who approaches you.”

“Quite.” She rolled her eyes flicking a wrist. “Akiko knew better than to come herself, she convinced our socialite second eldest sister to do her dirty work – I don’t even want to think about what Hatshepsut,” named for their High Priestess Aunt – “made her forfeit in exchange.”

They shared a blood-thirsty grin. Their eldest unmarried sister was just reaching middle age and could make a grown man wet themselves with a single glare. The reigning queen of the Egyptian social court, she was the second daughter born of Rameses’s first marriage to a proper Egyptian witch. And getting a favor from her was like trying to get blood from a stone.
Whatever Akiko had given or promised for her to intervene with Nefertiti on Sakura’s behalf it would have hurt.

“Amenhotep is pushing for Lidia,” Marchesa’s eldest unmarried daughter. “Uncle Ahmose for Ryu, and so on.” Nefertiti waved a hand. “The favorite seems to change with the wind.”

“And you my darling sister?” Julian studied her carefully. One didn’t get to be a High Priestess at twenty without having plenty of cunning and guile of one’s own. “Who would you prefer wed and bed Avalon?”

“Avalon?” Nefertiti scoffed. “Adriana,” the only other daughter of Rameses and Talia. “She’s poised, gentle, and biddable. Perfect for a fourth consort.”

Julian cocked his head. No. He thought. That didn’t quite fit.

Then she continued.

“But for Hadrian?” She stressed the name. “A young King who I found to my shock actually likable? Why, dear brother.” She gave him a teasing look. “Nothing but the best would do: yourself of course.”

...

Forget the Basilisk’s Den or Slytherin Palace, Hadrian decided after the first week of his visit to Alexandria, Rameses’s home is the real viper pit.

It was no wonder their closest friend and ally had been Slytherin.

And now he no longer had to wonder why a flesh-eating-beetle was their House Sigil.

Mystery: explained.

Any one of the royals he’s met since stepping foot in the palace at Alexandria would strip the flesh from his bones to advance themselves in their Pharaoh-Father’s eyes; the only exception being perhaps Nefertiti and the Crown Prince. One because she was safely removed from the competition by being a High Priestess in her own right and the other because there was no higher he could rise in his father’s esteem. Every other scholar, socialite, and soldier he was introduced to watched him with a calculating gleam in their eye – even the twelve-year-old Aiko who was the youngest of his potential consorts.

That wasn’t quite fair, he decided after a moment.

All of Queen Marchesa’s children were lovely.

They were all also old enough to be his father or mother.

Or even older than that.

Even the youngest Valerian, a Cursebreaker who oversaw Gringotts’ operations in the Valley of Kings, was at thirty-five several years older than Hadrian’s own deceased father would be had he lived.

It was very…uncomfortable for him to say the least, that the most suitable for Hadrian’s peace of mind was rather older than he’d wanted to consider for all that his Uncle Sherrinford had told Rameses to cap the age at fifty.
Then there was the *perfect* bride for him in Nefertiti…except for her being the High Priestess of Bast and completely ineligible.

Her brothers and sister weren’t *too* bad, except for the two brothers being straight as a pair of arrows and her sister being an air head.

But better an air head than the vicious bint Sakura had turned out to be.

Nefertiti had thankfully warned him about her young step-mother’s children. He’d taken the warning with a grain of salt as Nefertiti had been open about having her own agenda with his consort selection, but he didn’t dismiss it out-of-hand. There was something he’d found distasteful about the sly-boot Akiko that he’d also sensed in her children.

No.

He’d rather go with someone old enough to be his father before he’d pick someone sure to cause trouble with his other consorts.

Especially since any of Akiko’s children would be first-cousins once-removed to whoever he chose of Emperor Ryuunosuke’s children.

It was all a muddle with no clear solution in sight.

Though apparently there was still a possibility he hadn’t met yet.

Nefertiti had mentioned in passing that her eldest brother was visiting the Great Library, taking a break from his work as an anthropologist in the States’ Pacific Northwest.

He’d seen through the ‘casual’ remark to Nefertiti’s objective: making him interested in her eldest brother.

At this point though he was willing to take the bait, the High Priestess having not been wrong in her appraisals of her eligible siblings thus far.

He could only hope she had as clear a view of her self-proclaimed favorite brother as she had been over the rest of her large family.

…

The tinkling sound of his sister’s laughter drew Julian from his search in one of the dusty backrooms of the Great Library and out into the main section of the massive ancient building. He’d resolutely stayed away from all of the dinners both formal and informal or other events meant to throw him and his siblings both full and halfies, together with the Avalonian King. It had gotten to the point of him taking off first thing in the morning and staying away, usually at the Great Library, until late into the night.

Coming around the end of a stuffed bookcase, he saw the cause of her laughter, a young teen throwing wads of balled up parchment at her as she bothered the ebon-haired younger man who had his head buried in an ancient tome.

A smile quirked at Julian’s mouth.

Nefertiti was being her nuisance-self then.

Walking over he introduced himself, planning on taking his problematic youngest sister off of the
poor teenager’s hands.

“Sorry about her.” Julian called in his smooth baritone. “I’ll take the pesky kitten off of your hands. I’m Julian, Nefertiti’s oldest brother.”

Holding out his hand he found himself ensnared by jewel-green eyes as the black haired younger wizard turned to face the newcomer.

“Hadrian,” He offered, a half-smile tugged at blush-red lips. “Nefertiti’s told me all about you.”

Well, fuck. Was all Julian could think, sending a glare over an ebony head at his wildly grinning sister.

This was going to mess with his five-year-plan.

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Hadrian soundlessly opened the door, slipping easily through into the potions lab. He hadn’t grown so much – yet – that being unobtrusive was a true problem. Not like David with his huge Highlander’s heritage.

The Heir of Wallace managed moving with a predatory swagger that stayed just shy of being lumbering or bear-like. His former silent grace had been a victim of puberty and the once-lithe boy’s growth spurts had put paid to David being a masculine double of his elegant mother. Hadrian was crossing his fingers that when he finished growing he kept his ability to slip about gracefully else Lady Maggie might hold true to putting him back in dance lessons.

And it would make it much harder to sneak up on people unawares or about the palace undetected, of which he was practicing both at the moment.

“I see you.” A silky voice called that had somehow gotten a hair deeper in the two weeks he’d been gone from Avalon.

Or not. Not sneaking works too.

As long as he was undetected by his Council who were trying to put him straight to work after returning from Alexandria he could spend a couple of trouble-free hours…

“Lord Wallace sent a message for you, it’s on the worktable beside the doorway.”

Fuck.

Hadrian straightened up a blinked owlishly at the blatantly-amused slate-blue eyes of Octavian.

*Merlin he’s adorable.* Tavi thought wistfully. *But still so young.* He told himself, pushing his libido down. No matter how old Hadrian looked Octavian was always very very vigilant to remind himself that his King was only twelve. While in time the three years that separated him from his intended wouldn’t matter at all, any more than the six that separated Heir Wallace from their intended, right now it was a considerable gap and would remain so for a couple more years.

The King in question gave him a crooked grin then reached over and picked up the message from his Lord Steward, moving gracefully around the sterile lab that he’d gifted his intended use of, making his way over to Octavian’s side as he simultaneously scanned the parchment.

“What does your Lord Steward need of your Grace?” Tavi purred the title that he’d turned into a pet
name months prior.

Hadrian tucked the missive away in his robes, being already dressed for the Council meeting later that the note was reminding him of in addition to asking for his presence to review some of the business of the realm in the hour prior to the meeting.

“Just a reminder.” He brushed it off, reaching up on his toes and pressing a kiss to Tavi’s cheek, a rare show of boldness from the normally – around Octavian anyway – shy pre-teen. “Missed you,” he glanced up bashfully at the nearly six-foot-tall Heir of Prince.

Tavi hid a pleased smile at the proof of their deepening relationship. For the last several months he’d found himself increasingly covetous – a most unbecoming trait in a future consort of the King – of Hadrian’s easy affection for William. Between the distance separating them and their varying degrees of maturation, Octavian often struggled with desires that were still anathema to his younger bridegroom.

A situation that David Wallace was also finding a challenge, according to a few things Tavi had picked up from idle conversations he’d enjoyed with the older Heir during Hadrian’s absence from the palace.

However, David had never felt the same well – jealousy – as Octavian himself due to the mature wizard having an already well-established relationship with his future intended.

The Wallace Heir could and did sink into the easy familiarity of years’ worth of friendship when around the progressively eye-catching young King, an option Tavi himself did not possess.

Octavian Prince has only ever known Hadrian as his King and future husband.

He knew no other way to approach the object of his growing desire than as his intended. They had no other relationship outside of that, despite the months of foundation building they had done via the linked journals Hadrian had made. It was a situation Octavian found himself at a loss to remedy.

His Prince pride wouldn’t allow him to simply be Hadrian’s consort – not when there would be a dozen others to compete with for attention in that manner. He needed to discover another way for him to have a relationship with Hadrian outside of their Contract.

And he thought he might have found one.

Though only time would tell if he was right or not.

“Did you?” Tavi murmured, leaning down and following Hadrian’s lead brushing a breath of a kiss against one blushing cheekbone. “Even with all those Princes and Princesses fluttering around you?”

Hadrian made a disgruntled face at the reminder.

“Especially then.” He grumbled. “They were all so much older than me.” He complained. “And if they weren’t twenty years my senior they were almost to a person beyond intolerable.” Hadrian crossed his arms, leaning into Octavian’s embrace as the older teen wrapped a lean arm around his shoulders with a comforting squeeze. “I never want our kids to behave like that. Ever.”

Kids? Octavian’s face paled drastically, showcasing his shock, though with Hadrian tucked against his shoulder the other wasn’t able to see it. Hadrian was already thinking about kids?

He supposed it made sense…what with him only just having returned from witnessing first-hand the
circus that a royal household with multiple spouses and children can create.

But still…

Kids?

Tavi rushed to divert the subject, nowhere near ready to discuss that topic as of yet.

“Surely there was one among the Pharaoh’s children you found neither a graybeard or beyond intolerable?” He asked archly, the real question buried in his tone. Was he going to have to deal with a co-spouse old enough to be his grandfather or a true spoiled and pampered brat?

“Mmm.” Hadrian hummed under his breath. “There were one or two members of the Ptolemy House who didn’t make me want to Avada myself after ten minutes in their presence.”

“Just one or two?”

Hadrian shrugged, “I will say that after meeting the Rising Sun Emperor’s niece and her offspring that I’m rather concerned over the coming visit to Osaka in December. If Emperor Ryuunosuke’s heirs are anything like Lady Akiko it might be worth it to revisit the idea of sending a spouse into seclusion once the Contract is satisfied.” He finished drily, rolling his expressive eyes.

“That bad?” Octavian winced. He remembered Hadrian’s opinion on Lord Wallace’s handling of his wife to not be very favorable. The King was of the opinion that if a person’s spouse was truly intolerable that they should seek a divorce or an annulment under the laws of Avalon and deal with the subsequent loss of face rather than stay trapped in an untenable situation such as with Giovanna Bianchessi-Wallace’s exile.

Regrettably, neither divorce or annulment was possible when dealing with a Marriage Contract between two Royal houses.

“I believe the phrase my guide and chaperone used was: syrupy-sweet-sly-boots.” Hadrian chuckled, resting his chin on Octavian’s shoulder and looking up into calm slate-blue/grey eyes. “It was unnervingly accurate.”

Tavi shook his head and gave a small sigh. “That sounds quite disagreeable.” He humored his intended.

“Oh, it was.” Hadrian nodded his head with verve, chuckling along with Tavi as the older teen nudged him over to a stool and bade him to sit and stay out of his hair while he continued to work on the potion he had under stasis.

The two intendeds spending an agreeable hour or so discussing Octavian’s work on experimenting with one potion or another, the older occasionally lecturing for a few minutes on one point of theory or another that was beyond the younger’s current level, whiling away the time until Hadrian had to take his leave.

Bidding his betrothed a good afternoon, Hadrian took himself off for Gawain’s ‘Lord High Steward’ offices, resigned to spending the rest of his day mired in the affairs of State rather than those of his personal interest and affection.

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“You’re back, you’re back, you’re back!” William’s voice caroled through the King’s Tower as the sandy-blonde missile barreled into the braced and waiting Hadrian’s chest.
Wills had returned from his holiday with his family at one of the Windsor family retreats over a week prior, however Hadrian himself was absent from Britain at that time. As had been previously agreed, he was now free to spend several days with Hadrian at Skye Palace. Prince Harry had also come, along with Kingsley and his new “guard” that he’d received when his ‘Rian had poached McG from him.

Hadrian had been absent from the Isles as he’d taken advantage of the Courting gift William had gotten him: the Krav Maga retreat in Israel.

The young King had only been back from the state visit to Alexandria a few days before leaving again for the retreat, making for a very impatient fiancé waiting on him when he at last was back in residence at Skye Palace for the coming school term.

Classes at Hedwig Institute didn’t start back up for another week, allowing Wills, Hadrian, and the rest of the household to settle back in after the state visits and summer session of the Wizengamot as well as Wills’ own holiday with family before getting back into the grind of school which this year would include a fourth day of classes at H.I. every Tuesday.

By slowly introducing the eleven and twelve-year-old students of Hedwig to attending classes three and then four days a week, it allowed the mostly home-tutored highborn children to the study-intensive atmosphere of Hogwarts, bridging the gap between self-paced study with one-on-one instruction and the classroom environment.

The second year at H.I. was also when they were allowed to take extra elective classes and join clubs such as Introductory Runes and Dueling, giving them a serious advantage over their peers when they would begin serious study in those disciplines. However, with who Hadrian and William had had for tutors, either of them were going to have an advantage over even other H.I. students once they hit Hogwarts. Neither Andromeda nor Remus was a pushover when it came to their charges’ educations.

If anything because of the close rapport they’d built with the two boys, they were even harder on them than they would be teaching a stranger’s child of the same age and education level.

Hadrian held Wills close for several long moments, content at being together once more, as the other boy chattered along, filling his bonded in on all that he had seen and done while on holiday away from Avalon.

“…and, and!” Wills was nearly gushing in his excitement to reveal the best of his news to his ‘Rian. “Grandmother said that this year I get to join the Dueling club after school with you and that we can start having sleep-overs during the school term and not just during the holidays when the rest of the family can come! Isn’t it amazing, ‘Rian!” William sighed, squeezing his arms in a deep hug once more before stepping back with a contended sigh. This was going to be a brilliant year. He just knew it.

“That is amazing news, Wills.” Hadrian gave him a kiss on the corner of his brightly-grinning mouth. “It will be wonderful having you around more and not having to use the mirrors so much.”

They were nice, don’t get him wrong, and definitely better than nothing. But it didn’t compare to having the physical presence of their bonded.

“What else happened while I was gone that you haven’t shared with me yet?” Hadrian asked as he led Wills over to the piano, the two of them making themselves comfortable on the bench, William filling in his bonded on the little things they hadn’t had time to share with Hadrian being so busy with state visits and martial arts retreats, Hadrian beginning a few scales on the keys as he listened to
his bonded chatter with half an ear.

A warm smile lighting up his face as the sandy-blonde snuggled into his side.

It was good to be home.

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Chapter Summary

Fluff, fluffy, fluffery.

The Avalon Seven

Author’s Note: It was hinted at but never fully stated, but both Hadrian and William entered puberty at eleven with the growth spurts caused by their Claimings. At this point in the story, both boys have experienced most if not all of the markers of sexual maturity, and are growing and putting on muscle. A couple of those physical markers are mentioned in this chapter (acne, voice changes, etc.) and we’ll start to see the mental/emotional changes occurring to as they get closer to their wedding and they transition from friends to spouses, as well as having to deal with having older consorts joining their growing family.

Chapter Sixteen: Flowers and Candlelight

School started once more and with it came the minute-by-minute and hour-by-hour scheduling Hadrian had rebelled against years earlier but now could no longer escape with the weight of his throne and his people hanging about his shoulders as well as his own personal constraints upon his time.

Hadrian was no more willing to give up his lessons with his cello master than Gawain was to unchain him from his desk when there was work yet to be done.

Many things were sorted and handled by his Council before they ever crossed his desk but still others existed that did require his personal signature if not out-right attention.

With the second year at Hedwig Institute, Hadrian had one less day a week to devote to his personal improvement or matters of state as his schooling kicked into high gear with the addition of electives and clubs – and thanks to Her Majesty’s intervention, Wills was spending more time than ever with Hadrian at Skye or wherever the King of Avalon happened to be located any given week. Between the state visit to Alexandria and Hadrian’s Krav Maga retreat, the normal ‘summer progress’ the King was supposed to make visiting each and every one of his holdings had been delayed – making for an uncomfortable amount of traveling during the Fall term of school. Thankfully the Wizengamot only met four times a year during auspicious holidays now that the King and his council were back in control of the Empire – otherwise Hadrian would’ve had no choice but to be entirely homeschooled, cutting him off from his one avenue of socialization with others his age since he no longer had time to spend with the social/play/study group other his age continued to attend until they left for Hogwarts.

The Wizengamot Session schedule followed the Olde Calendar that marked Samhain as the New Year, making the Summer Session that began on Midsummer or Litha and ran through Lammas or Lughnasadh in August both the last and the longest session of the year where most of the actual work was done. The opening session of the Wizengamot began in December starting on the day after Yule or 22nd (usually) of December and running two weeks. Imbolc was marked by a three-day session for immediate concerns that couldn’t wait, and then Beltane was honored with a
weeklong session – which was also the last chance for any members to submit new business to be debated during the Litha session.

Fortunately for Hadrian, with the Session schedule following the major holidays he never had to be concerned about Wizengamot business hindering his school schedule once he begins Hogwarts the next year – except for the rare emergency session that is. However, as things stand with him retaking control of the Empire into the hands of himself and his Council, the only people who could summon an emergency session were himself and his Councilors – and none would do so without damn good reason. A very good thing indeed, as while the majority of the public loved and adored their new King, there were many who found themselves suddenly in a much less powerful position due to the centralizing force a sitting King created. Wizards and witches who were once very powerful indeed had found themselves mostly neutralized or marginalized – if they managed to escape Azkaban or the headsman with Hadrian’s clean-out of the Ministry.

But even he wasn’t able to completely clean out the Wizengamot as that ancient body had many seats that were strictly governed through family bloodlines. Even if a sitting member had been displaced by being swept up in the clean-outs, there often was a family member with similar ideals waiting in the wings to take up their seat in the Wizengamot. And someone pissed over a father or mother in prison – or even dead – would be more than willing to get their own back – even if it was through such petty means as trying to disrupt their new King’s education.

Such a thing would’ve been untenable to Hadrian.

No matter how many years came and went, part of him was still that little four-year-old huddled on a hospital bed that John brought Sherlock to solve the mystery of, bound and determined to do whatever it took to stay with the people who helped him, healed him, and comforted him through months of nightmares and therapy sessions.

If one didn’t know, they would never think that Hadrian was anything but *born* to be the King of Avalon – and that was how Hadrian wanted it to stay.

There was still that part of him deep inside that was determined to prove himself *worthy* of the time and energy and gold spend by his guardians in building up a broken foundling into the Heir of the Throne of Avalon.

Claiming his Throne and Houses had taken a large portion of that all-too-common drive to prove himself off of his shoulders – but it had replaced it with the full magnitude of what his birthright entailed.

His education was as vital to him as his personal endeavors to have things separate from “Hadrian King of Avalon” that belonged to “Just Harry.”

Which was why he had insisted on being part of the Dueling Club and on taking every elective possible in his second and final year at Hedwig Institute before moving on to Hogwarts.

His next birthday was also bringing other issues to the fore, namely his wedding to Wills, his and Wills’ coronation, and the entre to Hogwarts’ boarding school atmosphere where he will be kept somewhat apart from the woes of ruling the realm – something that he was very much looking forward to after the last year-plus of getting his Empire in order. Hovering in the background was the plethora of nameless worries and issues that could derail his transition from King Hadrian to Hadrian-the-Hogwarts-student – chief among them the not-quite-dead Dork Lord and his band of merry sycophants.

Still, Hadrian studied and worried and ruled, occasionally making time for other pursuits.
Such as spending time with his betrotheds, a pastime that was rapidly becoming one of his favorite ways to spend his precious and all-too-limited down time from being King.

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Wills laughed as he allowed his Rian to tug him through one of the many halls in Skye Palace. With only spending limited time at Hadrian’s official residence before the wedding, he hadn’t had a chance to explore it as thoroughly as Rian had, often leading to excursions to explore Hadrian’s latest discovery in some of their precious mostly-alone time with only one of their guards tagging along after them instead of a whole phalanx of chaperones. Wills thought that they might be nearing the top of one of the Towers, but couldn’t be certain with as many twists and turns they’d taken.

Coming to a landing at the top of a stair, Hadrian whirled on his betrothed, and best-friend, taking both Wills’ hands in his own as he faced him.

“Trust me?” He asked, eyes wide and bright with excitement.

Giving his Rian a soft smile, blue eyes gentle, Wills nodded, flexing his hands against Rian’s own in a slight squeeze of encouragement.

“Close your eyes.” Hadrian commanded him delicately, with none of the regal tone and steel he used with the general populace…or his Privy Council when called for to settle a squabble between the Lords and Lady closest to him and charged with carrying out the business of the Realm.

“Please.”

Confused but willing to play along, William did just that, head cocked slightly to one side as he heard the sound of a door opening and felt the soft early-Fall breeze ruffle his hair, before Rian returned and laced their hands together once more, leading him with a benevolent tugging motion to his hands as Wills kept his eyes closed, rendering himself temporarily blind.

Hadrian swept his own verdant gaze around the scene, making sure that everything was in place as he’d instructed Mipsy, one of his main house elves. To his relief, not a single candle or pillow was out of place, the hidden tower balcony transformed from a simple watch-tower into a vision from Arabian Nights. Candles soared in mid-air and rested in sumptuous sconces and pedestals, scenting the warm breeze with beeswax and sandalwood. Silks in a wide array of jewel tones draped from pillars and the ceiling, pooling in lush waterfalls of gleaming color in the golden light and shadows of the tower. Pillows for reclining were strewn across the Persian-carpet-cushioned floor, also made of silk, and a low table fashioned of gleaming alabaster was laden with bowls and platters in hammered copper and gold.

Everything was perfect for the presentation of his next betrothal gift, one of the formal requirements of their contract, but also a gesture that Hadrian had come to relish, vastly enjoying the delight that would cross either Wills’ or Tavi’s faces when presented with just the right gift.

Sometimes that gift was a simple sketch or a rare composition. Other times it was an ancient tome worth more than Potter Manor. But whatever it was, he loved to watch as his betrotheds opened them, even if he and Tavi weren’t in the “official/formal” portion of their betrothal and wouldn’t be until after his wedding to Wills on the Summer Solstice.

This time it was one of his original compositions that he would be presenting to Wills, this time entitled “Nimue’s Lullaby”. It would be the second composition that Wills received, following the welcome reception “William’s Waltz” was given on their first meeting. These gifts, more than the others, were nerve-wracking for Hadrian. They were personal in a way that others weren’t, his music being an intensely personal and private portion of his life, even in the fishbowl he sometimes
feels he lives in after his Claiming of Avalon.

Betrothals were usually highly scripted and tightly-contracted. His looming ultra-formal betrothals to Julian and whoever he ended up choosing from the handful of candidates in Osaka’s Sakura Palace were good representations of that. All-in-all, Hadrian would meet with his future consorts only a handful of times and exchange a minimum of traditional betrothal gifts with each of those intendeds before they were bonded.

And, at first, that was what he’d expected for himself and Wills, especially with their ages taken into account.

Hadrian had never thought that Wills would turn into his closest and most trusted friend, displacing Rhys in the wake of the older boy’s troubling personality shift after his mother’s removal to the Italian Alps.

His own “mutiny” had set the stage for it, softening the rigid formality between them and allowing them to get to know each other as something else besides contracted betrotheds.

And while they were definitely still too young to be deeply “in-love” with each other, there was definitely a deep well of affection and even intimacy between them, leading them into exploring their bond with an eye towards moving things along in a romantic way instead of maintaining a strictly-friendly bond, especially after their coming marriage.

Hence, Hadrian’s departure from their normal round of games or homework in favor of an actual date…one without watching and censuring eyes from their elders, as McG wasn’t one to worry about a pair of twelve-year-olds being “inappropriate” which had been the main sticking point preventing the Princess of Wales from allowing Wills extra time with his future husband.

One last look around to check and then he stepped back, releasing Wills’ hands.

“Ok,” he said, almost bouncing in place. “Open your eyes.”

William felt his eyes shoot wide as he gasped staring around him in awe at the setting Rian had provided. Even the stars were twinkling and bright, not daring to mar the King of Avalon’s dip into the lushly romantic. From the candles to the silks to the stars, it was perfect, touching something inside William that he had never felt before and soothing a hurt he hadn’t consciously been aware of holding inside.

His Rian had spent so much time this last summer, seeking out Tavi or David, selecting his consort from Egypt, even going to Israel for the Krav Maga camp that William had gotten him. All that time, away from him, and he had started to be hurt by it, even with the resurgence of time together that had come with the school year. He knew it wasn’t fair, especially when he’d arranged the camp after all, but it had been there nonetheless, poking and prodding at him when he was alone.

There was even a part of him, a very small part but a part nonetheless, that had told him his Rian never did things like this because he didn’t actually think of Wills this way…the way Wills thought about Rian.

Oh, they spent time together, were the best of friends, and exchanged gifts both formal, traditional, and appropriate as well as smaller, simpler informal gifts.

But there was none of the dating that went on with his older cousins, no candlelight dinners like he saw on the telly, or lavish declarations of love and devotion.

They were friends, and partners, bolstering each other up when needed, being a rock each other can
count on.

And William, if he would own up to it, hadn’t been sure that was enough for him.

Not anymore.

Then Hadrian, often wonderful but occasionally oblivious Hadrian, goes and does something like this proving that simple friendship wasn’t enough for him either.

Not that Hadrian had issues with intentional blindness that made him sometimes oblivious to others around him, no.

It was just that he was so damned busy that he wasn’t always around to pick up on others’ feelings.

“This is amazing, Rian.” Wills said, voice squeaking just a bit on the ‘z’, making him blush a bit at the audible sound of his changing body – and mind. Puberty hasn’t been bad, for the most part, but he could definitely pass on the up-and-down voice issue, one which Rian had skipped altogether – or seemed to – since he came back from Israel with a bright, smooth tenor, no squeaks, rasps, or hiccups to be had.

Though there had been a smattering of pimples on his chin and forehead from sweating in the hot Israeli summer sun…so there was some justice in the puberty world at least.

And thanks to magic, any wet dreams either boy might have stayed strictly private, no maids or house elves involved in getting rid of the evidence before their parents/guards/godfathers found out.

That was one level of embarrassment both boys were more than happy to forego.

Wills turned after doing a full circle of the room, beaming with pleasure at his anxiously-waiting bonded.

“I love it, Rian.” His voice was warm and soft with his pleasure. “Really.”

“I’m glad.” Hadrian smiled brightly, taking Wills’ hand and linking their fingers together then leading him over to the cushions situated at the low table. A tap of his main hand on one corner had the warming charms and cooling charms over the dishes fading away as they lowered themselves to share one of the large pillows, folding their legs under the table gracefully. “I wasn’t sure if you’d like it, or think it was girly or something, but I wanted to spoil you a bit after having to be away so much, and the visit to Osaka taking up most of the winter holidays.”

The meal Hadrian had selected was a mix of various Indian and Middle-Eastern dishes, all made to be eaten with flatbread rather than traditional silverware, except for the sweet rice pudding that was waiting off to the side decorated with fresh strawberries – William’s favorite.

Both of them enjoyed the change from formal meals and formal manners, digging into the dishes that went from mild raita and hummus to spicy curries and aloo gobi, dueling with pieces of naan and pita for their favorites, and inevitably ending up with tikka masala sauce or a bit of falafel on their robes.

It was great fun that also led to blushes as Rian fed Wills a bit of his favorite, the tikka, necessitating close bodies and laser-like focus, before Wills returned the favor with the rice pudding, albeit with a spoon rather than a piece of naan as the vehicle.

They were boys, but they were soon to be men, and their blushes and sweats and stutters, as well as other reactions, reminded them of it as they made that awkward transition from friends to more.
Once the food had been cleared away, and both of their pit-like stomachs were satisfied for the moment, Hadrian grabbed the parcel off of a cushion, passing it over to Wills with fanfare.

Eyes lowered bashfully, William carefully untied the silk ribbon and wrapping, revealing a familiar sight: sheet music with hand-written notes scattered throughout the several pages, in a well-known hand.

“You wrote something for me?” He nibbled at his lip, touched far more than he was with the first gift of similar kind, as he now knew how rare of a gesture it was, an original composition from Hadrian.

Hadrian gave a small nod, a gentle smile on his face as Wills used the playback spell he’d taught him over a year ago to have the notes dancing around the tower balcony.

Sweet, gentle, and soothing, violin, cello, and flute whispered on the night air as William closed his eyes and blocked out everything but Hadrian’s music. He knew Rian composed when he had the time, and played three instruments: piano, violin, and cello; but he hadn’t known that he’d started seriously branching out into orchestration beyond the first waltz he wrote for William. His music was intensely personal to Rian, and something he tended to only discuss with his cello master or his big-brother Sherlock.

“It’s beautiful, Rian.” William opened sparkling blue eyes. “A lullaby?”

“Nimue’s Lullaby.” Hadrian gave a rueful grin. “I guess I’m not very creative at naming.”

“No, no.” Wills shook his head, waving that off immediately. “It fits. And I love it, just as much as the waltz you wrote me last year.”

“I’m glad.” Hadrian said simply, before leaning over and wrapping one elegant-but-callused hand around to cup the back of Wills’ head and neck, pressing a soft-but-deep kiss to pink-petal lips, eyes fluttering closed.

Blushing red, Wills buried his hands in Rian’s unbound hair, returning the kiss with all his might, even when the gentle, seeking brush of Hadrian’s tongue startled him into snapping his eyes open. Lashes lowering once more, he allowed his bonded entry, for a moment tasting sweet milk and strawberries before pulling back slowly, hands giving up their grip. Rian took the retreat like a gentleman, eyes opening and his cupping hand moving to stroke feather-soft blond hair out of dazed blue eyes.

“That was new.” Wills whispered, licking his lips to sweep the lingering taste of their dessert from them.

“Did you like it?” Hadrian asked, half-anxious as he tucked Wills back into his side, arm wrapping around the older-but-smaller youth.

“I think so…” The blond boy, looked away from intense green eyes. “It was…new.” He repeated himself.

“You’re my first.” Hadrian repeated a thought that had been bouncing around his brain quite a bit lately. “Every first of mine belongs to you…if you want them.”

“I do.” Wills said, voice firming. “I want them, every one. I’ll be your first, and you’ll be mine, no matter what, or who, comes after.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way.” Hadrian reassured him, then set off the playback spell again,
letting the music he created for his first everything echo throughout the balcony and out into the Avalon night.

Between that first “real date” in early October and the end of the Fall school terms in Britain, Hadrian and Wills managed to sneak off for almost a dozen more dates of varying length from a short half-hour lunch and kisses, to an entire day devoted to squiring Wills around on a rare empty Sunday.

Kisses and hugs and other shows of affection became much more common between them, mostly in private, though they had taken to hand-holding at school and around family, or sitting closer than is strictly protocol. Snogging hadn’t yet been broached, nor had any touching beyond simple touches to either’s face, arms, hands, or the rare chest or back. They were learning together, which made moving at a pace both were comfortable with easier than it might’ve been otherwise, had one of them more experience in physical romantic affection than the other.

As such, their experimentation had yet to turn sexual in nature, though they were getting there, as their nightly dreams sometimes showed with the proof dampening their pajamas and sheets.

The subtle shift from just-friends was visible for those who knew what to look for, mostly Hadrian’s godfathers and brothers, summoning a resurgence of “The Talk” for both young men, with John and Remus tackling them on separate occasions, Wills might have bypassed the dreaded “Talk” part deux, but with all of his male family being mundane, Remus wasn’t willing to chance it…and better him than Andromeda though Kingsley might’ve sufficed.

That episode heralded a period of about a week, just before the holidays began, where neither young man was really able to even glance at the other without blushing bright red, especially after Sirius had interrupted both talks to add in some of his more ribald commentary to the already embarrassing endeavor.

An act that had his less-than-amused godson and mate tempted to banish the mutt to Castle Black until the trip to Osaka and Sakura Palace, though they never followed through on the threat, much to his relief.

The Osaka trip was set for just after Christmas, allowing both royal contingents to celebrate Yule without worrying over travel, with the Avalon group of Hadrian and his retinue set to arrive in Sakura Palace via portkey on the 27th and remain for anywhere from a few days right up until Hedwig reconvened depending on how long the selection took.

Emperor Hiro was disinclined to be shown up by Pharaoh Rameses after all with the tensions between the two allies, and so the trip had to last at least four days for all the required feasts and single ball to take place.

Which gave Hadrian just eleven days from the end of term to spend with all his betrotheds/intendeds at Skye Palace, David and Tavi rejoining their fathers in Avalon while the Windsors actually opened the Nimue estate and vineyards for the season. Outside of State affairs in London, the English royals would be based out of Avalon until the New Year, only returning landside to prepare for the yearly sojourn to Sandringham House. With no school, and the Wizengamot released until the Imbolc session, Hadrian for once had time – outside of his normal ruling business and tutoring – to spend and lavish on William and his two intendeds, neither of whom were yet entered into an “official” bonded-betrothal with him.

David had only been selected, with no gifts or formal movements as such made, while with Octavian
gifts had been informally exchanged and acknowledged but they hadn’t gone through the bonding and official rites, not yet.

In fact, the week after Hadrian and William’s wedding would be a busy one for rituals, as he had to go through with the formal bonding of both Julian and the Japanese consort, as well as Octavian, making the most of the state visits and gathering.

Honestly, Hadrian was so very thankful that David and by extension Gawain were patient and willing to wait until the year after for the official bonding and formal betrothal to begin.

He wouldn’t have much, if any, contact with his two royal intendeds until after their marriages, but it was still a lot of pressure on one person, and that was before he took the other contract to House duLac into considerations as well as the lingering issue of what to do with the six other Houses he was bound to take a spouse for and continue.

This was where the changes to the bonding ceremony would come in handy, allowing for others to join equally into his bond with William. His spouses would be able to have relationships with each other, something the more rigid of his guardians had opposed. But Hadrian had never thought that was fair of them. With only so many hours in a day, and so very many of them devoted to either Avalon or his education, he simply wouldn’t have time for every spouse, every day. He could only image the neglect and infighting that could occur in such a scenario.

With them able to have rich and fulfilling lives and careers, and yes even romantic attachments to each other, he hoped that none of them would ever resent him for choosing them or find him selfish for wanting them for his own.

And while at the moment this was an issue far away, it was still an issue, and one he was glad John had thought of before he ended up using the rigid traditional wording for his and William’s bonding.

Hadrian would never be able to love any one of his spouses and them alone.

But he would honor and cherish them each and every one, and loving them as best he could.

All he could do was hope that together with any bonds they form amongst each other, that that would be enough.

…

“Why do they do that?” Hadrian asked his companions, this time Russell and Tristan with McG trailing a few steps behind as the secretary and guard walked over to join him at the study window overlooking the grounds, where he spied Sirius and Remus exchanging flowers in the Western courtyard.

It wasn’t the first time Hadrian had seen them behave this way, often around either their birthdays and anniversary or when one of them would leave or return from a trip. They’d been doing it as long as he could remember, and it had always mystified him. Not that they gave each other flowers, he’d been raised mostly with Wizarding traditions and didn’t have the mundane belief that men only gave them to women. But there seemed to be a sense of ceremony to the entire thing, one that he’d never encountered in his lessons, though the Charm they used to conjure the flower or flowers looked simple enough.

“What?” Russell, asked, then enlightenment crossed his face as he saw the tableau playing out several stories below.

“What is it?” Tristan asked the secretary without leaving his desk where he was doing the accounts
for the Peverell holdings.

“The High Constable and Protector are exchanging Ardor Bouquets and Answering Blossoms.” Russell told him with a faint sigh. He’d never found someone to court and wed as of yet, so outside of a few youthful dating experiences he’d never really used the tradition himself.

Tristan, as Lord Bolyn, had when courting his wife Marie who was a distant cousin of House Clearwater, though they hadn’t done so in some time.

“Well?” Hadrian demanded an answer, though his voice was still genial. “What are Ardor Bouquets and Answering Blossoms, and why does Lady Maggie always sigh and go swoony when Sirius and Remus exchange them?”

“You’ve seen this before?” Tristan asked surprised. Most people raised with the tradition only used it during the courting period, and then only if they weren’t in an arranged or contracted match.

“Always.” Hadrian told them with a nod, unaware of how much he was revealing about the relationship between his godfathers. “Ever since Sirius was freed. The first one I saw Remus brought back from the hospital when he went to see him after the trial. And they’ve been doing, that,” he waved out at the mushy scene below him. “Ever since.”

“It’s a thoroughly English tradition, going back a few hundred years to the Middle Ages and the ideals of Courtly Love, laddie.” McG explained, his education courtesy of his Professor mother Minerva shining. “One that Wizarding Britain took to better than most things muggle or mundane. You would’ve learned about it in Charms your first year at Hogwarts since that’s when they teach the spells used to conjure the Ardor Bouquets and Answering Blossoms.”

“It’s a courtship ritual?” Hadrian asked, intrigued. “Then why do they still do it?”

“It’s considered extremely romantic, and those two have been stupid in love with each other since they were striplings no matter how long it took them to do something about it.” McG said with a laugh. “Which is likely why they’ve kept at it even though they left the courtship period behind years ago. One of the pair, usually the initiating or interested party, conjures an Ardor Bouquet which contains three types of flowers and is wrapped in an herb or greenery which together creates a statement of their “ardor” or what has caught their interest about the other person.”

“It draws on your thoughts and emotions.” Tristan warned, with a cautioning look. “So if you’re thinking about using it, I would suggest giving it a test first.”

Russell grimaced, nodding in agreement. He hadn’t done so with one of his former flings and ended up with a stinging hex right to the bits when she didn’t appreciate the message his bouquet sent. And her answering blossom was a stern No! in the form of a yellow carnation.

“Right he is laddie.” McG nodded as well, then continued to explain. “Then the receiving or pursed party conjures an Answering Blossom which is a single stem or sprig that answers the message sent by the Ardor Bouquet. It’s used mostly by Wizarding Britain nobility or upper-class commoners as they’re all still schooled in the language of flowers, where others are not, though the spell is taught to everyone.”

“There’s also a book in each Common Room at Hogwarts that explains most of the meanings.” Russell supplied. “So if a mundane-born or someone unschooled in the language participates in the exchange but doesn’t understand the message sent or answered, they can look it up. Doesn’t happen very often as it’s mostly nobility that does it, but it does occur, like with our High Constable wooing the Lord Protector in their seventh year.”
“So,” Hadrian said thoughtfully as he classified the flowers Sirius and Remus had just exchanged. “Sirius’s Bouquet was double-red Pinks: Pure and Ardent Love; purple violets: faithfulness; clematis: mental beauty; and…” he trailed off getting a better look at the wrapping. “White dittany?” He frowned, not remembering that one off the top of his head.

“Passion.” McG supplied. “Which is also represented by orange roses.”

“Then the entire message is: I love you purely, ardently, and faithfully; your mental beauty inflames my passion.” Harry deciphered. “And Remus answered with a forget-me-not so that would be: You are my true love, never forget me?” He turned away with a wince as the mushiness took a turn into the aforementioned passion, gentle kisses turning into full-on snogging between the two men.

“That’s a good analysis,” Mycroft drawled as he strode into the study. “Your godfathers being their notoriously sappy selves again this evening?”

“Sirius just came back from a weekend dealing with the DMLE.” Hadrian enlightened him. “You know how they are.”

“Yes.” Mycroft gave a restrained grimace, having come across the pair locked together more than once. “One would hope that being raised to the Privy Council would curb their more…inappropriate public displays of affection.”

“They’re Marauders.” Hadrian rolled his eyes as he moved to set up the chess board, his steward and secretary moving back into business-mode while McG propped himself up beside the fireplace in order to keep watch over the entire area and the dual entrances. “Behaving themselves at all times is rather asking too much of them, even if they are grown wizards now and not the notorious pranksters of Hogwarts.”

“Childish.” Mycroft muttered as he ordered a pawn into position. “Now, other than the rather unseemly behavior of your dogfathers, what else is on your mind, Little King?”

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“Hold it right there, young man!”

Hadrian restrained the need to groan as he let his head fall forward against the doorframe of his non-formal office in the King’s Tower with a loud “thunk.”

He’d almost made it to freedom, his plans for surprising one or both or all three of his intendeds/bonded flying out the window with the sound of his Papa Siger’s voice, one of the few people in his life who still treated him like the twelve-year-old he was at heart instead of the emancipated King he was in practice. That actually went for the majority of his early guardians. All the Holmeses save for Sherrinford’s wife and children, and sometimes Sherrinford himself, all ignored his titles in private, the same as Sirius and Remus did, as did Andy and Ted…though the last two tended to drift into formality a bit more than anyone else.

So while Hadrian had no problem waving off his secretary, steward, and the majority of his Council, when it came to his Papa (and Lord High Ambassador) he was stuck, not willing to ruin his relationship with the other man in order to flex his royal muscles and order Siger away.

“Yes, Papa Siger?” He asked, holding in a sigh as he turned and faced the man who had come in through the portal-door that led straight to his formal office in the State rooms of the West Wing of Skye Palace.

The portal was heavily warded, and only a few members of the Council were able to use it outside of
Hadrian himself and his guards, Siger naturally being one of them.

Which was how he was able to spring a trap on his former-ward before the young man was able to vanish off for parts only known to himself and McG, though if the elder statesman had to bet on it he would’ve put his money either on some hidden room with either young William or David or alternately the potions lab with Octavian. Barring those locales, next would be with either of his friends Heir Malfoy or Heir Longbottom as both now lived in Avalon full-time. Still. Better to catch him before he had to send a runner searching all over the palace for the errant king.

“May I ask, why, when you knew that myself and the rest of the contingent from the ICW would be returning from the Winter session, that you were hying off to parts unknown rather than meet with myself and Sherrinford?” Siger arched a haughty – and knowing – brow. “Especially as I am well-aware that Lord Protector Lupin returned earlier today and informed yourself of mine and my brother’s return his evening after finalizing details with Lady Bones?”

“Couldn’t it wait for once?” Hadrian nearly begged in an-almost-whine. “We leave for Osaka in two days, I would like to spend as much time as I can with my friends before being gone for the rest of the break.”

“Sorry to burden you, Your Grace.” Sherrinford’s voice was dry enough to cause a drought in the rainforest as he joined his younger brother in Hadrian’s office. “However, I can assure you that this bit of business is of interest to yourself and requires your personal oversight, not merely that of the Privy Council.”

Refusing to show the internal wince he gave at that hardly-veiled reprimand, Hadrian squared his shoulders and straightened up as the elder brothers Holmes sat gracefully in the twin chairs facing his desk.

“Apologies.” Hadrian said graciously. “Please, you have my full and utmost attention.”

“Thank you.” The amount of sarcasm Siger fit into those two words would make even Lord Prince proud. “As you know, the International Confederation of Wizards has been watching events unfold with the reclamation of the Avalonian Throne with heavy interest. And now, more than a year later, they are ready to tentatively celebrate the successful revival of the Avalon Seven.”

Hadrian thought for a moment, his eyes narrowed, then said: “I’m not sure I like that sound of that. I sense a trap…of some kind.”

“And so you should or I’d be worried for your education all these years.” Sherrinford gave a harrumph. “By celebrate they really mean: honor us with the privilege of our hosting a series of events.”

This time the King didn’t even bother holding in the groan. The smelled of expense and security nightmares. And that was before he found out which events they were.

“Seven years’ worth of Quidditch World Cups, and another singular event.” Siger told him reluctantly when asked.

“Which countries and years?” He queried with a frown. Much like the mundane Olympics he’s attended several times with his guardians when he was younger, the locations of the Quidditch World Cup are decided at least several years’ in advance to give countries time to prepare for the influx of visitors as well as either build or repair a stadium capable of hosting the event. It was an expensive endeavor, but most of the time the taxes and revenue raised by the annual event either defrayed the cost entirely or even left the host country making a profit. But deciding for a singular
entity like Avalon to host seven in a row…that was an extreme cost to output, especially with the first of them likely being only a few years off.

“England, Russia, Scotland, India, France, Ireland…and Avalon Proper.” Sherrinford, hesitating on the last. All four of the Privy Council who were present for the discussion with the ICW knew what the King’s response was going to be, and it wasn’t going to be an agreement. He knew that it was going to be up to himself and Siger to negotiate with the ICW body for a plan that wouldn’t completely drain Avalon’s coffers as well as not be a security risk. “1996, 97, 99, 2001, 2002, and 2003. The millennial QWC had been decided over a decade ago and will be in Japan.”

“No.” Hadrian said immediately with zero hesitation. “Absolutely not. Avalon is not their new piggy-bank. I’m not going to bankroll seven QWC’s under the guise of it being an “honor” any more than I’m prepared to compromise the safety of Avalon Proper for the same.”

“We told them that would be your reaction…though we put it a little more diplomatically.” Siger assured him. “But they insisted on having us present it to you.”

Hadrian thought for several long moments, one finger tapping idly on the desk blotter.

Ludo Bagman had retained the position of Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports for Britain, after a warning about his gambling habit, while Bartemious Crouch had been one of the executed ministry officials, being replaced with a pureblood named Kiernan Davis who teetered on the edge of not-quite noble and not-quite genteel, along with having a mundane-born grandmother. Between the two of them they should be able to manage the Britain side of hosting a QWC with help from the Privy Council. But some of the other countries are a little dicier, as they’re currently dealing with civil and political unrest on the mundane-side of things.

“England in 1996, India in 1999, and Russia in 2003.” He decided after tossing it around. “We’ll use magical-only areas and counties to limit exposure, if absolutely necessary I’ll concede to a fourth QWC in 2001, we’ll host it in Wales and wrap it into celebrate,” he drawled the word sardonically. “My 21st birthday and the 10th Anniversary of my Rule, the same as we’ll do with the 1996 QWC in England and my 16th birthday/5th Anniversary celebrations that if I’m not mistaken.” He quirked his lips. “Lady Maggie, Lady Augusta and the sisters Black are already working on.” He sighed, shaking his head. Part of him rued the day he put those four in charge of his Lordship Ball, he’d created a quartet of manic social-sharks who thrived on planning grand royal events, including his upcoming wedding.

If one more time they tried to involve him in discussions of oyster versus ecru, he would make it a royal edict to bother someone else with the minutia of royal events.

“What was the singular event?” He asked, trying to wager a guess. “The magical Olympics?”

“No, your grace.” Sherrinford grimaced. “Those are scheduled out a dozen years in advance. None of your territories are due to host one until 2000, when we have the millennial celebrations arranged for London and then Moscow in 2004.”

“Okay…” He arched a brow. “So, what is this event?”

“It was the brainchild of the late Bartemious Crouch and co-Headmaster Dumbledore…an attempt to regain some status after both men were so highly publicly embarrassed with our dear High Constable’s release from Azkaban.” Siger explained, shifting a bit in his chair. “Plans had already been approved to resurrect the TriWizard Tournament, Hadrian, and host it at Hogwarts. At this point all we were able to manage was a delay, pushing it back to 1996 instead of 1994 in the wake of the new education reforms that were set into place last year.”
“Merlin.” Hadrian cursed, slumping back in his seat. “That excuse for grandstanding has a death toll that is ridiculous! What on Earth possessed the ICW to approve this?”

“I believe the co-Headmaster waved the flag of unity and new advancements in safety measures.” Sherrinford reported dully. “With the backing of the Department of Magical Games and Sports as well as International Cooperation, as well as schmoozing the heads of Beauxbatons and Drumstrang into agreeing. Presenting it as a unified front only needing the stamp of approval to proceed.”

“So, to make sure I have this right.” Hadrian reviewed. “We’re going to be footing the bill for several QWC’s in the next decade, as well as having to deal with visiting schools and a deadly tournament on Hogwarts ground…do I have that right?”

“In essence…yes.”

“Fan-bloody-tastic.”

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After a quick spar with McG to clear his head, Hadrian changed into nicer clothes than the simple cotton shirt and trousers he’d been wearing, throwing a warm winter-weight cloak over his dragonhide trousers and Merino wool tunic before heading out to find Wills before he was shoehorned back into his office to help plan the coming events once they were given the official approval by the ICW.

Making the trek across the palace to Wills’ apartment, where he hoped he would find his betrothed but wasn’t counting on it with the Nimue estate being opened for the Yule holidays, Hadrian was thrilled to find a sandy-blond head tucked into an overstuffed easy chair by the fireplace in the common area of the Windsor “wing” of the palace.

“Rian,” Wills greeted him with a warm smile as Hadrian bent down and placed a soft kiss on one fire-flushed cheek. “I was hoping I’d see you before I had to head back.”

“Kings brought you over?” Hadrian ventured a guess, as he didn’t see hide nor hair of either William’s parents or grandparents who sometimes used the open-invitation they possessed to explore the palace and its rich history (and massively-stocked library).

“He’s in the other room.” Wills waved a hand vaguely towards the den – and its stocked bar. “Since we’re safe as houses in Avalon, he’s more for mother’s peace of mind than anything.”

“You can’t ever be too safe, Wills.” Hadrian said with a knowing sigh. “I have guards on me all the time, with our wedding approaching Kings will insist on being ever-more careful as the day gets closer to you being officially the Emrys Consort.”

“I know.” Wills shrugged, one finger tracing invisible designs on the cover of his book as Rian knelt on the carpeted floor to talk to him rather than move away and into a chair or the settee. “It’s just taking getting some used to. I’ve had guards and all, my life, but never this…intense.”

Changing the subject, since it was one that would never be resolved the way they’d like it to be, Hadrian mentioned his new skill.

“I learned a new spell today.” He told his future-consort half-bashfully from under inky lashes. “Want to see?”

“Of course, Rian.” Wills smiled brightly. “I love when you share your lessons with me, you know that.”
“It’s one we’re supposed to learn in first-year Charms at Hogwarts, but I asked so…” He bit his lower lip lightly. “Remus taught me. Here…” Cupping his hands lightly between them Hadrian gave the incantation and flexed his magic, conjuring a bouquet of purple lilac, sweet alyssum, and honeysuckle wrapped in gooseberry leaves.

“It’s lovely, Rian.” Wills blushed becomingly, both at the gesture and aware of the message sent by the flowers. “What’s the spell?”

“It’s called an Ardor Bouquet and the spell is French: “Ardeur être en fleurs” using a wand with a slash sinister and swirl widdershins.” Hadrian explained, having gotten the full lesson from Remus. “To respond the spell is: “Ardeur s'épanouir” swirl widdershins with a finishing strong flick. It’s an English courting/wooing tradition from the Middle Ages among the Wizarding Nobility that’s still in use when there’s not an arranged or formal betrothal between a dating or courting pair.”

Wills nodded, deciphering the French easily as “ardor be in flowers” and “ardor come into blossom.”

“That’s rather wonderful.” He admitted, liking the idea of it. Taking out his wand he followed Hadrian’s directions for the response, intoning “Ardeur s'épanouir,” with a perfect accent. Wills found himself holding a double aster blossom, with another light blush he handed it over to his Rian.

Altogether the two of them had said: “You are worthy beyond beauty, I give you generous and devoted affection with the first emotions of love. I anticipate our bonds of love.” As Hadrian’s bouquet to Wills, then Wills’ response being: “I share your sentiments.”

Leaving two blushing – and lightly kissing – young men to enjoy the scents of their flowers until Kings came to gently interrupt and whisked William back to the Nimue estate for dinner with his family, both of them casting perseverance charms on their flowers and setting them in places of prominence in their bedrooms to enjoy them for a long time to come.

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“Hello my beloved King.” Octavian purred into ebony hair as he pounced on the lithe form of his intended, Hadrian having sought him out the next day after finishing his work. He was trying to be as fair as possible with his future consorts, though with the demands on his time… He shook that off. He was here now, and if the lean arms wrapping around him from behind were any indication, Tavi was more than happy to have his presence. “I’ve heard that you’ve made inroads to the traditional field of “Flower Flirtation.” How have you found it?”

“Flower Flirtation?” Hadrian asked, looking up into slate-blue eyes over his shoulder as Tavi made no move to let him loose in his lab – well his and his father’s anyway – any time soon.

“That’s what we call it at Hogwarts.” Tavi enlightened him as he hugged the still-smaller young man to his chest. With the way Hadrian was growing, it wouldn’t be long before he outstripped him, though Tavi rather doubted that he’d ever be bigger than his Wallace highlander. “Since it’s a way to make your intentions known without being seen as any form of easy, overbearing, or blunt.”

“Huh.” Was Hadrian’s oh-so-elegant response to that. “I wouldn’t have guessed that’s how it’s seen since the times I’ve either seen it done or used it myself the messages have always been pretty straightforward.”

Letting go, Tavi escorted Hadrian over to his customary stool where he watched him work explaining:

“That’s because you’ve only used it with your bonded and seen it used likely with already
established couples, am I right?”

“Yes,” Hadrian gave a nod as he leaned forward, propping his chin on his hand to watch Tavi work on his latest experiment. “I gave a bouquet to Wills and he responded, then I’ve seen Remus and Sirius conjure them as long as they’ve been in my life.”

“That would be why you have that impression of flower flirting.” Tavi nodded, he’d thought it was something like that. “You and the future Emrys Consort have a solid foundation for your upcoming marriage and the other pair have been together longer than you’ve been alive. There’s no room for anything ambiguous with either scenario.” He waved a hand absently as he stirred his cauldron.

“But if you were, say, talking about a pureblood son from an Honorable House approaching a higher-born son or daughter of an Ancient and Noble House, flower flirting would give you a buffer that would prevent embarrassment to both of you. Especially if you’re in the first throws of infatuation or an idle crush. But the opposite it also true.” Tavi expounded. “Wanting to prove the depths of your ardor before approaching your beloved’s parents for a contract or formal betrothal – and have the confidence that comes from knowing your beloved feels the same.”

“I could see that.” Hadrian admitted after mulling that over for several long moments while Tavi wrote his observations of his latest endeavor in one of his potions journals. “The flowers that Remus and Sirius conjure vary but there’s always an underlying theme of either true love or passion depending on the giver and the scenario.”

“They’re also used for apologies.” Tavi shrugged, not that he’d know from personal experience, having had to turn several Ardor Bouquets away in the last year and some months now that his father had told him about his contract to Hadrian. “Every once in a while, when someone stuffs up you’ll see a spectacle in the Great Hall of someone giving their partner a bouquet that’s all apologies and love tokens. Or to let someone down easy when they’re in danger of embarrassing themselves.”

So focused was Tavi, that when he turned and saw a freshly conjured bouquet resting in a clear crystal vase transfigured from one of the many potions vials in the lab, he found himself shocked silent as he deciphered the code in the flowers.

There were white Pinks, for ingeniousness and talent, a nod to what Hadrian thought of him. But at the other members of the bouquet, the always-in-control Octavian found himself speechless. Lavender roses for enchantment. Ranunculus, meaning dazzled by your charms. And all three types wrapped in spearmint for wealth of sentiment.

Blinking back tears as his eyes pricked, the patient Octavian whispered the response Charm, conjuring a jonquil: “I desire a return of affection.”

It was what he’d wanted from the moment he’d found out about Hadrian: for the other young man to value him and give him the affection that he so easily lavished on William.

He knew he wasn’t as easy for others to be taken with as the even-tempered and admittedly-lovely Prince of England and Lord of House Nimue.

But he desired Hadrian’s affection all the same, and had done what he could to wait and be patient, knowing that once the two royals were wed he would have his chance to secure affection for himself.

Only to see in white and lavender and pale green that he already possessed it, just by being himself and not being afraid to tease and ruffle the other young man.

“You have my affection.” Hadrian reassured the beautiful Heir of House Prince, taking the jonquil
with a steady hand and tucking it into his breast pocket after casting a preservation charm on it. “As I have yours?”

In silent answer, Tavi conjured an Ardor Bouquet of his own, handing the red peony for devotion, white rose for Hadrian’s innocence and purity, double aster for shared sentiment, all wrapped in flowering almond for hope over to his intended, reaching out and feathering one hand through Hadrian’s hair as he gave his intended a crooked smile.

“You have mine.” Tavi admitted, as he turned to stroke one elegant finger over the velvety petal of a lavender rose, the bouquet joined by one last addition: a lesser celandine for joys to come.
Seventeen: Visiting Sakura

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Seventeen: Visiting Sakura

Nestled on a high hill outside of Osaka, Japan, the Sakura Palace was the main home and base of the Hiro Family, the ruling House of the Empire of the Rising Sun.

Having been educated on all of his closest allies – and potential enemies – Hadrian had seen many pictures from books and tomes and even paintings and tapestries in his many holdings of the ancient palace, which was a gracious, elegant vision wrapped inside a nearly-unassailable fortress wall.

Cream and gold and pink silk wallpaper offset the dark cherry wood of the palace proper, while rice paper dividers and tatami mats, traditional lanterns and calligraphic paintings and watercolors gave one the feeling that they’d stepped into another era altogether, one vastly removed from the hustle-and-bustle of busy electronic mecca Tokyo.

It was a disconnect from the modern world that Hadrian was used to – just in a vastly different way.

Skye Palace or any of his other holdings were all either very European or in the case of Slytherin Fen, Indian, in feel; much like the Summer Palace of Alexandria brought up the aura of Ancient Egypt.

The restrained elegance of Sakura was as different from them as night from day.

Though when you peeled back the layers and looked underneath, there was a similar – if politer – version of the social-climbing and political-scheming that made up any other royal court. Hadrian was only really spared the same in Avalon due to how new the resurrection of his empire was, and with him still being in school there was no point to trying to maintain an active “court” setting since he would hardly ever be around. He knew, however, that it was merely a reprieve. Once he finished with his Masteries, it would be expected that as a ruling monarch for Hadrian to maintain a court – albeit for the most part the highest positions would already be filled by then, leaving only more outer-lying positions up for grabs.

For his winter visit to the Hiro seat, Hadrian was accompanied by Siger as his Lord Ambassador, as well as Lady Maggie. Naturally his secretary Russell had to be wherever Hadrian was, along with the royal guard, but other than that the rest of the family and his Privy Council were all back in Avalon conducting the business of the realm or taking a much-deserved holiday. William and the Windsors will have returned to England by the time he himself returned, though if he made it back before Hogwarts reconvenes then he would at least get to spend more time with Tavi and David, even if it was just as friends.

Hadrian and his entourage were all dressed in their finest attire, having been shown to the royal guest suites upon their arrival and given time to change and freshen up after their international portkey and were now in the atrium of Sakura’s throne room awaiting their official formal announcement by the majordomo.

He was wearing his winter-robes of black basilisk hide with long sleeves, over a purple Merino-wool and silk blend tunic, and matching black basilisk hide trousers and boots. Ancuru was in place on his back, and the chain of office in mithril with its varied-metaled medallions was set in place around his shoulders while his lordship rings were in show on his hands, Cuff hidden by the long sleeves,
though if it wasn’t one would see the mithril with the aquamarine cabochon had been joined by a mithril crest of the House of Ptolemy, as well as the crests of the House of Prince and House of Wallace in gold replacing their corresponding Houses that Hadrian is Lord of. Once he wed William and entered into official betrothals with the others, they would change to cabochons in their House gems, while the cabochon aquamarine would be replaced with a faceted gem of the same. As it was, his Cuff would change once more – likely by the new year – once he made a formal selection of one of Emperor Hiro’s heirs for his future consort, changing the LeFey crest to that of the House of the Rising Sun.

While some would think that the magic wouldn’t change the crests around until the initial gifts were exchanged – as was traditional – the extensive magic imbued in Hadrian’s cuff, forged by the Lord of the Horde himself, was intelligent enough to recognize the selection of a future consort as a statement of intent without any gifts or other formalizing statements needing exchanged.

The twin doors opened, the cue for Hadrian and his entourage to come forward and proceed down the long runway aisle that led to the dais where Emperor Hiro and wife and two concubines were seated, with two smaller daises flanking it but a step lower containing either the Emperor’s legitimate children and heirs or his closest relatives who were present for the visit, including Lord Oshiro and the High General the Emperor’s eldest brother Isamu. To the Emperor’s left was his wife and concubines, while on his right was the Crown Prince Katsuou, who was forty years old according to Hadrian’s lessons, as well as the Crown Prince’s wife who was the daughter of the Chinese Dynasty’s current Emperor, a lovely woman in her late twenties by the name of Princess Bao, their sons and daughter arrayed behind them.

Fortunately, as with the contract between Slytherin and Ptolemy, Hadrian only had to consider the legitimate children of the Emperor himself, not any of his siblings, grandchildren, or so on.

Several more of the legitimate options were automatically disqualified by being too young to wed legally in Avalon by the time limit on the contract to be fulfilled, in fact to Hadrian’s eyes, rather than the dozens he’d had to weed through in Alexandria, there only seemed to be two princes and four princesses for him to consider – a blessing or a curse depending on how you looked at it. After all, it had taken meeting every single eligible option in Egypt to find one that was palatable to him – the unavailable High Priestess aside. So in all likelihood, while less options made a choice easier, it also increased the chances of being stuck in an unhappy union.


Hadrian gave a very proper nod to Emperor Hiro, as was polite, the gathered court all having bowed at his entrance and the reading of his titles.

The majordomo moved on to introduce his entourage as they followed in his wake.

“Accompanying His Grace: Siger Holmes, Lord of Ravenscroft and Lord Ambassador of Avalon, with his wife the Lady Margeux Holmes, Royal Chatelaine of Wales. Accompanying His Grace: The Honorable Russell Davies, son of Lord of the Honorable House of Davies, Personal Secretary
of the King of Avalon.”

There was no need to introduce the guard, while Russell was a murky area by being a servant to a royal but also being noble-born and therefore a visiting dignitary in his own right.

Emperor Hiro Ryuunosuke rose to his feet, Siger, Lady Maggie, and Russell all bowing, and bid his people as well as the visiting dignitaries to rise before welcoming Hadrian to Japan and specifically Sakura Palace.

“We look forward to the strengthening of the bonds between Our two great empires, Hadrian Denka.” Ryuunosuke finished with, before dismissing the court in favor of the prepared banquet and formal dinner that had been prepared. “Now, come and we shall talk and break bread together, yes?”

“That would be most excellent, Ryuunosuke Denka.” Hadrian nodded politely and waited for his host to lead the way followed by his wife and concubines before falling into place flanking the Crown Prince.

Hadrian found himself neatly cut off from his entourage, as the seating was strictly formal with himself as the visiting royalty seated to Ryuunosuke-denka’s right with Katsurou-denka to his direct left, the Emperor’s wife Empress Akemi-denka across from him and the Emperor’s concubines seated to her right, making him boxed in neatly by the Rising Sun royal family, his Papa Siger and Lady Maggie seated with Lord Oshiro and several of Ryuunosuke-denka’s other siblings with Russell further away.

Were Hadrian from the Rising Sun Empire, he would of course refer to Ryuunosuke-denka as Ryuunosuke-heika, the proper honorific for a sovereign monarch. But since Hadrian was his own sovereign monarch, and they were meeting on Japanese soil, there was no one Hadrian would refer to as such, using the honorific of denka which denoted a foreign royal instead, the same as the other royals referred to him. The only exception to the denka honorific actually being Katsurou-denka’s wife who as a consort to a prince was Bao-hidenka.

Honorifics gave him a headache at times, but when in Japan…

“How are you enjoying your visit to Japan so far, Hadrian-denka?” Akemi asked politely over their opener of miso soup and tea.

“It is very beautiful, Akemi-denka.” Hadrian told her honestly with a small smile. “And Sakura Palace very much gives me the feel of stepping back a thousand years or more in time.”

“The same could be said for many of the ancient palaces of the world.” Ryuunosuke observed. “Though Our own visit to the legendary Skye Palace has not yet taken place, my brother tells me it feels as if Merlin or Arthur themselves might step around the corner any moment.”

Hadrian had to concede that this was true, having had much the same thoughts about the ancient magical strongholds. Though he couldn’t help but add:

“At least we do not have ghosts in Avalon, lest you step around the corner and literally run into Merlin or Arthur like you could Helena Ravenclaw at Hogwarts.”

“I have never understood that.” Bao chimed in from her place beside her husband. “Why the Founders of the school did not use warding to prevent ghosts from haunting the castle. Is there a story behind it, Hadrian-denka?”

“Not especially, no, I am afraid, Bao-hidenka.” Hadrian shook his head. “There is warding to prevent all but harmless or benign spirits, though whether the local poltergeist could be considered
either of those things is I believe a cause for much discussion among both students and staff at the castle.”

Other polite subjects were discussed, all conversation pertaining to his purpose in Osaka carefully avoided while the eligible heirs in question shot him looks every now and then from further down the table as he conversed with their parents and older brother and sister-in-law. If he wasn’t used to being under scrutiny, Hadrian rather imagined that he would’ve ended up fumbling with his chopsticks and sushi, making quite the fool of himself in the process. Thankfully, he was raised for moments like this, and blithely carried on as if there wasn’t half-a-dozen pairs of eyes focused almost solely on him, not to mention all the others of the court that were politely pretending they weren’t utterly riveted by the by-play between the two allied Emperors.

(Note: The dialogue in this section is in Japanese, though Hadrian will be speaking English.)

“I don’t know why we have to pretend to be interested in this child of a gaijin!” Twenty-seven-year-old Keiko complained to her next-elder sibling, thirty-two-year-old Katashi.

Together they represented Ryuunosuke’s third and fourth children and were from his second concubine. They also weren’t being very discrete, as Hadrian was seated within the same room as them along with their mother and the mother of the Emperor’s youngest child, five-year-old Kumiko. The rest of his children were either from his wife (including his first two sons who were both married, and the sixteen-year-old fraternal twins) or his first concubine who gave him another two sons and three daughters, the Emperor giving each of his “Official” mothers of his children a nearly identical split as far as the amount of eligible offspring goes, Hadrian being aware of several more who had already married into various Japanese noble families or other Royal houses such as the reciprocal marriage contract that led to the crown prince taking a foreign princess to wife.

However, at the moment Hadrian was taking tea with the Emperor’s second concubine Ai and her two eligible children. Children who apparently weren’t aware that he spoke fluent Japanese. A mistake likely caused by his only ever having spoken English around the Japanese ambassadors and even Ryuunosuke himself, relying on either Siger or Sherrinford to “translate” for him.

His accent might leave something to be desired and his calligraphy was still coming along, but he read and listened to Japanese quite well.

And, as he’d previously thought, they weren’t trying all that hard – or at least Keiko wasn’t – to be discrete.

“Tsk.” Ai wordlessly scolded her eldest daughter. “This child of a gaijin is still an Emperor, and one of our proud countries oldest allies. You shouldn’t have to pretend to do anything, Keiko, for an unmarried daughter of a concubine, wedding an Emperor is more than you could ever hope for if it wasn’t for this contract!”

Ai gave Hadrian a benevolent smile the entire time as she ripped into her daughter, much to his amusement, following the conversation with ease while pretending to be deaf, dumb, and blind to the tension around him, gracefully complimenting his hostess on the tea and surroundings while acting all the while as if a conversation in Japanese wasn’t going on around him.

“Besides which, sister.” Katashi gracefully offered the handsome gaijin a plate of elegantly sculpted melon. “Word from our dear cousin Sakura says that rather than choose one of the offerings in Alexandria his own age, he spurned her and our other cousins in preference for the half-American mutt Julian, who if you remember our lessons, is thirty-years-old in his own right.”
Hadrian bit his tongue to keep himself from lashing out at the description of his chosen future consort as a half-American mutt.

Mentally crossing off a pair of names as he made small talk about nothing at all with Ai and her two eldest, Hadrian silently counted the minutes as he nibbled at a melon slice until he could take his leave.

One day down, and a formal dinner out of the way.

Three more to go, hopefully with better results.

Though as he listened with half an ear to the gossip tripping off of poisonous tongues in a language he wasn’t supposed to understand, he rather thought that might be a bit much to ask for…

…

There seemed to be a method to the Emperor’s madness, or perhaps the Empress’s, Hadrian decided the next afternoon as he wandered through the winter gardens with the Emperor’s first concubine and her two eligible daughters Makoto at twenty-four and Noriko at twenty.

Both young women were pleasant, with none of the spitefulness in sight or earshot that Ai’s two had had.

But much like Rameses’s daughter Adriana, they gave off an aura of being purely decorative.

Don’t get him wrong, they were beautiful women, as was their mother. Hadrian could see the appeal both to his ally for taking Kanon-san as a concubine and having several children with her. All three women were beautiful, polite, with voices like tinkling bells.

That was where it ended.

Even if he was inclined to pursue one of them, his other current intendeds would skin him alive for subjecting them to the lovely – but so very, very boring – Makoto or Noriko.

Akemi-denka was canny indeed, if his theory turned out to be correct, showing off the possibilities in an order that thus far seemed to go from worst to best, with her own children shining that much brighter for him meeting and talking – or being talked over – the others first.

Smart, smart woman.

Whether her children inherited her intelligence and ability to plan, remained to be seen.

…

“So, how goes the consort-hunt?” Wills asked innocently, but was still unable to hold in a laugh when on the other end his Rian gave a groan and buried his head in the buckwheat-filled pillow, flipping him the finger while he was at it. “That great, huh? Look on the bright side: you’re two-thirds done and only have one more formal dinner to sit through! Plus you said yourself the fresh sushi there is amazing, Rian? Rian?” Wills sighed, wondering if they were going to have to go through this every time Hadrian had to choose another consort.

If so they were in for an interesting decade as the King of Avalon tried to smother himself with his bed linen at least once a year.

“Don’t make me write Tavi or David…I’ll do it…and you know either one of them will tell their
“I’m up, I’m up!” Hadrian popped up back out of the bed, hair in wild disarray. “No need to sic either of them on me, I’m up!”

“Good.” Wills nodded, glancing around his room at Sandringham House, listening carefully for anyone moving in his direction. The mirrors were still a mostly-classified item, with only his grandmother and his magical guards in the know about them. His mum had calmed down enough at this point that he didn’t want to risk setting her back off…or sparking another round of fights with his father. “Now, you said there were two more to go, what are they like from what you can tell from the formal meals you’ve seen them at?”

“Fraternal twins and children of the Emperor and his Empress.” Hadrian rattled off the basic statistics of the pair quickly. “Sixteen, with Natsu, the son, being the elder by seven minutes, ironically in a situation similar to mine and Neville’s though closer together: Natsu was born two minutes before midnight on Midsummer while his sister Megumi was born five minutes after on the 22nd of June.”

“That’s interesting.” Wills mused, thinking about some of the theories they’d covered in Magical Theory regarding wizards and witches either conceived or born on “power days.” Hadrian was one such example, conceived on Samhain and having later come into a powerful magical core and Inheritance. This Natsu could very well be another, though if he gained anything “extra” only time would tell. “What else?”

“Well, for one thing.” Hadrian quirked a half-smile. “I’ve gotten a look at two very different styles of managing an informal state visit. Rameses was content to give me a guide and throw a couple parties. It was all very…”

“Informal?” Wills suggested wryly.

“Exactly.” Hadrian nodded. “Here while things appear informal, there’s clearly massive orchestration going on behind the scenes – though I’m still not sure whether it’s by the Emperor or his Empress, with my galleons being on the latter.”

“Different Houses, different families, different dynamics.” Wills provided thoughtfully. “When you went to Egypt the two “Queen Bees” so to speak – the elder wife and socialite daughter – didn’t have a real stake in who you married with the daughter’s full-blooded siblings all being too old for real consideration and the same with all but one of the wife’s children. In Japan all three of the mothers are still living and trying to gain the most attractive spouse for their offspring – especially the Empress who with her children being double-royals have a much smaller selection pool to choose from unlike that of the two concubines who while noble aren’t royal themselves from what we’ve been taught by your brothers and Papa.”

“That is very true.” Hadrian sighed, having thought the same. “And I considered that as one of the possibilities behind the orchestration but I also think the Emperors themselves play into it as well: they’re two very different men of very different generations. Ryuunosuke could very well be one of Rameses’s own grandchildren the age gap is large enough. While Rameses has almost always been nearly mellow but with an underlying fierceness and fire, Ryuunosuke is stern and nearly severe.” He nibbled a bit on his plush lower lip. “But that might just be his public persona at work.”

“Back to the twins.” Wills brought them around after a moment of letting them both ponder thinks a bit. “What’s your impression of them – just from the bit you’ve seen, no gossip or secondhand information thrown in. Go.”
“Natsu moves like a fighter.” Hadrian immediately. “I’ve seen them all stand, sit, move around, and several of them have to be trained in some form of martial arts, Natsu among them. And he watches everything, including me and my people.”

“Good.” Wills nodded. “The girl, Megumi?”

“Quiet.” Was the answer he got. “And engaging. She’s spoken to Russell and Lady Maggie several times at least and Papa Siger once, all of which had nothing but good to say about her social skills. But it reads flat to me, like the engaging, charming Princess is a mask she puts on and takes off at will while the quiet almost brooding teenager is closer to the real thing – but still not all there. There’s something going on there, I just don’t know what it is.”

“Well…” Wills said around a yawn. “You’re meeting them tomorrow with the Empress. Maybe you’ll be able to find out what’s under the watchful fighter and engaging princess masks the twins wear. ’Night, Rian.”

“Goodnight.” Hadrian replied with a soft voice and smile. “My William.”

…

Early the next morning, itching to do something active after days spent making nice with the other royals and pretending to be interested in either deadly dull small talk or avoiding getting caught in a political trap, Hadrian went in search of the dojo he’d been shown on the tour of the palace. There were several, all with different uses for various disciplines. Hadrian was looking for the one for sword practice, since Ancuru was his constant companion he’d steadily put on muscle in his arms, shoulders, chest, and upper back, and had taken his swordplay and fencing lessons in a more serious manner instead of seeing it as one of the simply “fun” lessons he had throughout the week.

The dojo was as elegant and restrained in style as the rest of the palace, with several ancient swords on display inside protective spells and cases while a few watercolors and calligraphy banners hung from the walls.

Hadrian was rather anxious to spar with McG who followed quietly in his footsteps.

However, it was an activity that would have to wait, for on entering the dojo, Hadrian found it already occupied – though by whom he couldn’t say as the swordsman had his back to them in the midst of his kata.

Wearing the traditional very-wide-legged swing trousers in jade green with white markings, the man was barefoot, and had a pure-white wrap shirt on his torso, the ties just visible at his hip opposite from the empty sword sheath. He had his hair up in a top knot, leaving his elegant neck bare, and his lean hands were relaxed and controlled around the hilt of the katana. It was like a dance, Hadrian decided, as the man moved swiftly and gracefully around the dojo, his body an extension of his gleaming sword as it flashed with either slow/smooth or quick, darting movements.

“Beautiful.” He whispered, eyes wide, as the other man came to an elegant finish, bowing towards one of the paintings on the far wall.

Hadrian hadn’t gotten a clear look at the other’s face during his kata, a situation that was remedied as McG gave a little laughing cough at Hadrian’s nearly-reverent outburst, showing an elegantly handsome face, lightly tinged with a faint blush, having either not been aware of his audience or having heard Hadrian’s assessment.

“Thank you, Hadrian-denka.” Natsu’s English had only a faint hint of an accent, having been
tutored in other languages from the cradle as was common among both the royal and noble houses.

Knowing as many languages as Hadrian, however, was not nearly as common, allowing him to take advantages of other’s assumptions, as with his first audience with Ryuunosuke’s oldest eligible children.

“You are welcome, Natsu-san.” Hadrian said with genuine warmth before giving a somewhat sheepish half-grin. “And I apologize for the intrusion. When I sought out the dojo for a morning spar I didn’t think it would already be occupied.”

Natsu gave a slight bow of his head in acceptance. Normally the foreign ruler’s idea would have been right, few used the dojos this early. However, with the disruption to routine caused by the king’s visit, Natsu had had no choice but to wake early these last days as his normal practice times were consumed with banquets and teas and state dinners all requiring the presence of his father’s children, especially those from his wife where his half-siblings from his father’s concubines were often excused from those events that weren’t directly affecting them.

When you were the son of a king and a potential heir to the throne within five degrees: his brother, his brother’s two sons, then his second brother who as yet had only had daughters, then Natsu himself, there were never any excuses for missing events or potential learning opportunities, even if it was highly unlikely Natsu would ever live to sit on the throne of the Rising Sun.

At least outside of matters of state, being the third son of his father by his wife allowed him much more freedom than his elder two brothers or his two nephews who were heirs.

Natsu had been allowed to choose his own hobbies, his own interests and subjects at Mahoutokoro and had been allowed to board there rather than only being a day student like his elder brothers who had classes followed by private tutoring in other areas not covered by the admittedly impressive and rigorous academic temple such as warfare and governance.

“Thank you, Hadrian-denka.” Natsu accepted the apology gracefully, knowing full-well that many other monarchs would not have deigned to do so. Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon was the first monarch Natsu had met in his life that would apologize for anything, let alone something as simple as interrupting Natsu’s weapons practice. “I shall leave you to your spar.” He bowed correctly and made to leave, only to be stopped by a gesture from the monarch.

“No need.” Hadrian smiled crookedly. “There is more than enough room for us to spar in part of the dojo while you continue your practice. I’m sure my presence in Osaka has already taken enough of a toll on your schedule without depriving you of your own dojo. Please,” he waved a hand, “pay us no mind.”

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“Very well, Hadrian-denka.” Natsu acquiesced gracefully. He really didn’t have another option, now that the King of Avalon had suggested a solution. If Natsu had announced that he was finished, that would be another thing. But the other young man was well-aware that Natsu had made no such allusions and was being…surprisingly thoughtful.

Again, this monarch was most assuredly not what Natsu had expected from not only a “boy-king” but also a Westerner at that...even if he came from an empire with such strong ties to Natsu’s home.

The Ptolemy emperor had had strong ties to the Rising Sun as well but that hadn’t stopped him from disgracing himself with Natsu’s cousin…and worse his cousin from disgracing their entire family with her social-climbing whorish antics, now fourth-wife of an Emperor or not neither she nor her children were welcome in Osaka, and Rameses was only allowed under forbearance and the chilliest of kingly civility between allies that stretched back hundreds of years.
Alliances had been sundered in the past for smaller transgressions, it was only that the Lolita herself had admitted her scheming afterwards that prevented their alliance from fracturing and the two empires entering into a state of cold war if not full-on aggression.

However, with the resurgence of Avalon, the tensions between Japan and Egypt might be finally smoothed over with Avalon taking a spouse from each, shackling them together much firmer than the “shot-gun” marriage had.

Neither of their great empires were willing to be the test subjects for Hadrian’s wrath nor wanted him to side with one of them over the other.

Indeed, the contracts binding Hadrian had become a boon to Avalon’s allies, as a match to a renewed and surprisingly strong Avalon was as high as any royal heir could hope to reach.

Except for times of needing political support for one reason or another, Avalon had had a reputation for marrying among their own and consolidating their power among their seven Royal houses and barring that their seven Utmost Ancient and Noble or even their Most Ancient and Noble strata of nobility.

A situation that had created the young king who was sparring with his Captain while Natsu worked his way through several series of practice katas or routines. Natsu didn’t know what he thought of the idea of being a possible match for Hadrian, he was only sixteen and while that was old for a royal child to lack a betrothal, for a third-son it was expected that he make his mark in his chosen field before marrying. A freedom his brothers hadn’t had. Still, he knew it would be quite some time before whoever Hadrian chose would have to wed him and move to Avalon – two or three years from what Natsu thought his father had said.

Natsu couldn’t deny that the part of him he got from his parents’ political savvy as screaming at him to take a chance and push himself forward before his twin. As a princess, Megumi’s options were much broader than Natsu’s own. Any wizard among the Rising Sun or their allies would be honored by such a match.

For himself, unless he wanted a dry political marriage, Natsu had to walk a delicate line between duty to his family and duty to himself, proving that his worth came more from his work than his ability to provide additional heirs to the throne.

But, he eyed the laughing and joking form of Hadrian as he whirled lightly on his feet, that monstrous sword of his – honestly too large for a young man of his size but Hadrian seemed to have no problems wielding it – gleaming black and deadly under the soft lights of the dojo. His Captain laughed back, the two of them well-matched though it was clear to see that the elder wizard was instructing his charge and as a result holding back both in skill and strength. But not in speed. No. If there was one place Hadrian was a match for the older, stronger, and more experienced man it was in speed.

Natsu smiled slightly, wishing absently that either he knew the western-style sword or that Hadrian knew the art of the Japanese sword, as he was highly intrigued by the idea of which of them would come out ahead in a match.

Granted, Natsu had probably several years of experience over Hadrian, and was therefore stronger and more skilled…but Hadrian was fast and likely stronger than Natsu thought considering the sword he used with such ease.

He was tempted to spar him anyway, matching Hadrian’s western style versus Natsu’s Japanese.
Another day, perhaps, as it would have to be sanctioned by his father.

Crossing swords with a king was a dangerous concept – especially politically.

If either of them were injured, no matter how innocently, it would create an international incident which would be disastrous considering the purpose behind Hadrian’s visit to Osaka.

Still…Natsu mused. It seemed that there was more to Hadrian than first met the eye. As before this morning he’d seen nothing to contradict the idea that Hadrian was a political animal, more talk than action.

Natsu had no idea just how wrong that original assumption was, but he would come to learn…in time.

…

Princess Megumi was everything poised and proper – or as poised as a sixteen-year-old witch could be – and…a bigot.

No. Hadrian shook his head. That wasn’t quite fair.

She was interesting…in her own way, very intelligent at that. But also very ethnocentric, which he expected from any Royal no matter their nationality. But Megumi was ethnocentric to the point of near bigotry, droning on and on about how the empire of the Rising Sun was the best and brightest of all the wizarding world, and with such a rich history, and let me tell you about...

He didn’t know if this was how she really though or felt or if it was just nerves and trying to impress him, either way, he’d almost prefer the twittering of the airheaded socialites over the condescending air of Megumi.

“What are your plans for after school, Princess?” He asked politely, continuing to play the game under the watch eyes of the Empress and the – if he was right – amused gaze of Natsu.

Rather than the simple warrior-wear of earlier, Natsu was dressed his time in a formal men’s kimono in all black save for the jade green crest on his shoulder.

“I will take up the post of Apprentice under our royal Historian and aunt Mistress Masuyo.”

Megumi said, her nose raised just a tad. “Preserving the great history of my House.”

“I see.” Hadrian said blandly, casting a gaze over at the silent Natsu. “And you, Prince Natsu?” He asked archly. “You’ve barely spoken all afternoon. How do you see your life?”

“I have been accepted into an apprenticeship as a Spell-Weaver, Hadrian-denka.” Natsu told him, his English much less heavily accented than his twins. “Though I am not sure what I will use my Mastery towards – perhaps research or as a magical archaeologist? I am told that the Gringotts curse-breakers often employ spell-weavers to counter-act some of the traps on ancient tombs.”

“That’s true.” Hadrian said, being very familiar with the route and education required to become a Curse Breaker thanks to David. “Curse Breaking is a very demanding field, and in order to know every part of it you would have to hold a dozen Masteries. As it is, most have at least two, usually in Warding or Spell-Weaving in addition to either Dark Arts, Ritual Magic, or Defense. At least,” he smiled genially. “That’s the requirements for any Curse Breakers to hold the title and work within Avalon’s borders, I’m sure it differs elsewhere.”

“Is it true that your British Ministry of Magic has a Department dedicated solely to research?” Natsu
asked, head cocked to one side. “Especially that of more obscure magics?”

“Yes it does.” Hadrian nodded. The Department of Mysteries was probably the worst-kept secret in Britain, even if no one actually knew what they studied there. “Love, time, thought, death, the Unspeakables research it all. However, they’re not happy with the new restrictions and oaths they’ve been made to take once I claimed the throne. It seems the Ministers have all had a rather “hands-off” policy, simply allowing them to research under the discretion of the Department Head and threatened with fines for releasing any information. Now there are actual oaths that prevent them from sharing the secrets of their research and limits to what they’re allowed to delve into – and what they aren’t.”

“Why would you do such a thing?” Megumi asked viperously, her academic’s heart offended by his curtailing of the pursuit of knowledge. “Surely all knowledge should be explored and eventually shared?”

“I appreciate your belief, Princess.” Hadrian smiled wryly. “Even though it is one I cannot share. I’m afraid that what it means to rule is that one has to put aside personal beliefs and desires – such as the one for limitless and boundless knowledge – and face the reality that while some things are created with the best of intentions, that doesn’t mean that it will be used in the way it was meant. The Unforgivables are an excellent example of a good idea gone horribly wrong. I won’t see my own Unspeakables create the next torture curse so long as I am King of Avalon.”

“What do you mean?” Natsu cocked his head curiously. “About the Unforgivables?”

“You would be told that they hold no purpose outside of causing harm – and that’s mostly correct in their modern incarnations.” Hadrian said, taking a sip of tea to soothe his throat. “However, originally they were created for much different purposes: the Killing Curse as a humane way to slaughter livestock, the Cruciatious to restart a failing heart, and the Imperius to prevent suicides and help alleviate depression and other mental disorders. As you can see,” he waved an elegant hand. “They’ve all been perverted from their original forms – though certain farmers retain rights to use the Killing Curse on livestock only, subject to periodic checks.”

“That’s an interesting idea.” Natsu murmured to himself. “A spell that can restart a heart or help with mental disorders. Too bad, that as you’ve said, they’ve been twisted so thoroughly. I wonder if there is a way to rework them…make them safe to use for their original design…”

“If there is Prince Natsu.” Hadrian smiled softly. “You have my blessings – and my archives to access – in your search to find it.”

“But that would mean my brother would have to go to Avalon.” Megumi gave an unbecoming sniff, ignoring the scolding glance she was getting from her mother. The Princess knew what she was doing. And it was securing the life she wanted for herself – one not stuck as a foreign bride in a strange culture, even to so handsome a groom as King Hadrian was sure to be. No. Natsu was a much better fit than she. And she had no problems playing up to make sure he was chosen. “Why on earth would he do such a thing?”

“Well.” Hadrian said dryly, eyeing her with veiled distaste. “Since if your father agrees Natsu will be my consort, he’ll have all the time his wishes with my archives, including that of the Department of Mysteries should he so desire.”

Natsu blushed, looking away.

He wasn’t sure how he felt about being chosen, especially over five of his siblings no less, but now that the choice was made there wasn’t much he could do about it.
And the funny thing was he never really tried to catch Hadrian’s attention, his siblings making fools of themselves had done all the work for him.

No, he wasn’t sure about this at all.

But at least he had several years to figure it out and comes to terms with the twist his life had just taken…and Hadrian seemed at least partially supportive of his goals, which was much more than most monarchs would be.

Yes, he mused. Maybe this could work after all.

In time, anyway.

And thankfully, with Hadrian’s other commitments, they had quite a bit of time before them to sort things out.
Eighteen: Finding Normal

The Avalon Seven

Author’s Note: This chapter is basically a “week-in-the-life” chapter that takes place in April 1993, between the winter holidays where Hadrian chose Natsu and the summer holidays which is when he’s scheduled to marry William, be crowned officially, and become officially betrothed to Tavi, Julian, and Natsu.

Also, if you haven’t checked out my Facebook page, I have reference pics and graphics up for most of my stories, including what I imagine Hadrian’s consorts to look like which also includes an as-yet-unnamed consort who I may or may not go with for the lucky number 13.

Chapter Eighteen: Finding Normal

Monday

Hadrian worked very hard each and every day to find a slice of “normal” in his life.

Even if it’s something as little and seemingly simple as holding hands with Wills or something as occasionally complex as insisting on keeping his cello lessons in mundane London, Hadrian really worked at injecting that small amount of “life-before-the-throne” into his life after the throne.

Most days he was successful.

Others he was not.

This Monday was, rather unfortunately, one of the latter.

April was a “transition” month, falling between the holidays of Imbolc and Beltane, and after the Spring Equinox in March, leaving it open for political scrabbling as wizards and witches tried to get their acts (and bills, and proposals, and, and, and…) together before the submission deadline of May First or Beltane for the major Wizengamot and social season that ran from Litha through the beginning of the school year.

Unfortunately, as Hadrian has had cause to learn over the last year and a half since his Claiming, transition month was just a polite way of saying: “The kids aren’t out of school yet, the social season hasn’t started, and we’re fecking bored so we’re going to deluge the Privy Council with utter bullshite to try and get some excitement going.” Or at least that was how it seemed to Hadrian, having dealt with several transition periods since taking the Throne of Avalon, and it seemed that whenever there wasn’t a Wizengamot session active, a ritual or social date or season, or students home from boarding school that the nobility and government-workers of Wizarding Great Britain lost their damned minds.

Last year, with the new laws and policies still new, had been much quieter.

This year parents had expected the proper breaks at the proper times, with large holidays in the summer and winter and two of varying length in the late winter/beginning of February for Imbolc and late spring/first of May for Beltane. Something which was very appreciated by the families who still celebrated wizarding rites. Families who did not, such as those that were home to mundane-born students or from a blended household, still had the option of having their children come home for Easter for a three-day weekend instead of during Imbolc.
Double-dipping was frowned upon when it came to students’ absences from the magical boarding schools in Avalon, though if the family genuinely celebrated both ways and the student kept up on the work, it was left to the discretion of the school staff to decide whether the student was allowed to leave or not.

Which made many students who attended Hogwarts happy, as while Dumbledore was inclined to deny the absences, his new “co” and overseer Flamel was not, and Headmistress Perenelle gladly allowed them the trips home.

It also pleased the increased number of staff-members many of whom followed the Olde Ways and needed to return home for at least a night to observe rites with their own families or Houses if they were nobility.

Hogwarts now employed over forty staff members, not including the two groundskeepers and seven custodial staff who now called Hogwarts home year-round. Not all of the staff lived and worked at the school, in fact only fifteen plus the maintenance staff members and their families chose to do so, the others flooing in to the newly re-opened floo-center that had become vastly overgrown in the last century and was just outside the castle gates off the road to Hogsmeade. A few others lived in or around the wizarding village, making their daily commute even easier.

Naturally, it was those professors with children at home or main careers outside of teaching who lived off-campus, while those who were single or married without young children mainly lived at the school.

But having the holidays revolve around the Olde ways and the seasonal rites made life much easier for all of the staff, with most genially switching between watching over the students who didn’t go home depending on what rites and holidays they personally practiced.

It was a nightmare to schedule apparently, but that was what Hadrian had a Board of Education for with mere oversight provided by the King and Council.

There were other dates besides the four main holidays where parents were welcome to pull their students for family rites or rituals according to the traditions they followed, but as with anything else it was subject to approval, though more often than not most students whose families wanted them home knew to keep their schoolwork and behavior inline lest they have to deal with a family that was doubly upset.

On this particular Monday, Hadrian hadn’t even been able to stay for the afterschool study group with Wills, Nev, Draco, and Blaise, having to go straight back to Skye for meetings with his Council.

And over what?

The gods-damned Quidditch World Cups, Triwizard Tournament, and magical Olympic games that the Empire is scheduled to hold.

The International Confederation of Wizards had been handled most deftly by Siger and Sherrinford, with Avalon agreeing to host three QWC’s as well as the Tournament, siting that every other magical country or sovereignty was given a break between events, and with having to host two in the same year, as well as the two Magical Olympics they were already scheduled for, that they risked setting a dangerous precedent that could be used to financially “punish” a country by the ICW for infractions under the guise of showering them with “honors”.

Which had made just about every representative exceedingly paranoid that Avalon would do just that
in retaliation due to their holding seven unified votes already without even adding in their allies.

Hadrian and his ministries and Council now only had three QWC’s to deal with: 1996 in England, 1999 in India, and 2003 in Russia. Which wasn’t as good of a break in between as it seemed when you added in the millennial Olympics in London in 2000, and the next four years later in Moscow plus the Tournament which was in the same year, 1996, as the first QWC they were planning.

The subject currently under heavy debate was which homes and holdings would be opened up to guests and important dignitaries during the various events over the next decade.

It was an important subject, especially as some guests could be quartered in Avalon proper with Hadrian such as his close allies once the marriage contracts are sealed, but others would still expect royal lodgings even if their royal host wasn’t in residence.

“We have to open up Camelot Castle at Tintagel.” Lucius Malfoy, Lord of the Privy Seal and the wizard responsible for Hadrian’s overwhelmingly high approval rating among the public, stated emphatically. “It’s one of the royal seats and the only place appropriate to house royal guests outside of Snowdon Castle or Avalon itself for the Quidditch World Cup in England and the Magical Olympics in London.”

“Agreed.” Hadrian said with a sigh. “Lady Narcissa is the chatelaine over Our English holdings. Perhaps we should find assistants for her? A minor lady perhaps to take some of the burden from her? Five of the holdings we’re opening for the two English events – not including the birthday celebration and Fifth Anniversary – are under her purview.”

Five, at least with Camelot added for the royal guests. Potter Manor and the Black Townhouse were going to be opened for the two teams of the QWC and the participants in the Magical Olympics, while Peverell Keep and the Valerius Chateau were going to be opened for important guests who couldn’t be expected to stay in a hotel but also weren’t so important that they expected royal or personal treatment. It was a minefield of who to put where, and until they have firm “attending” announcements from other governments, it was all very vague and headache inducing.

Thankfully, most of it was going to be handled by his Council with Hadrian giving the final approval, aside from gaining his agreement on which of his holdings they would use.

“England’s not the problem.” Mycroft said with a put-upon sigh. “Not that I am in any way diminishing the work Lady Malfoy has ahead of her for the 1996 year. But we also have the problem of an international event taking place in Scotland where the royal holding was torn down and made into a boarding school.”

“I’m not hosting guests at Hogwarts other than the visiting schools.” Hadrian said with a mulish set to his jaw. “The school year is supposed to be my break from the majority of political maneuvering where possible. I’m not going to have dignitaries wandering around and watching me while I’m in Potions class or what have you.”

“That’s not what we’re suggesting, pup.” Sirius, the Lord High Constable reassured him. “But there is an alternative no matter how much you don’t want to allow it nor the lack of excitement from myself and the other members of our House to have foreigners cluttering up Castle Black. It’s more than grand enough to be a royal seat and won’t cause offense as everyone knows the Gryffindor seat became Hogwarts.”

“Lady McLaggen is the Chatelaine for Scotland.” Gawain mused. “Between Castle Black and the bordering estates of the McLaggen’s and Wallace Grange, we should have more than enough space for everyone who comes to view the events.”
“It will keep you from having to scatter the dignitaries between the other holdings as well.” Siger offered, knowing that Hadrian wanted to consolidate the drain on his holdings as much as possible.

“Where else?” Hadrian sighed, shifting to rest more fully against the back of his chair.

“In Russia we were hoping for Briar Rose…”

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**Tuesday**

Everyone at Hedwig Institute knew by now that any time Hadrian had to skip out on his study group on Monday that during the elective period at the end of the day on Tuesday – which happened to be Dueling – that they did not want to be partnered with him.

And it wasn’t even entirely because he was usually anywhere from stressed out to down-right pissy.

It was because while dueling someone like Hadrian, who had training in martial disciplines other than magical offense and defense was always more difficult than someone without it, it was vastly more irritating to square off against someone who didn’t use a wand to cast magic.

At all, really.

There were no wand movements to give away the spellwork, no hand to watch more than the other, none of the usual “tells” beyond the occasional verbal spell and the usual coloration of most offensive spells.

Except, not all spells had a signature color like two out of the three Unforgivables do.

You could see the Killing Curse or a Crucio coming, there was no way to anticipate an Imperio.

There was a part of Hadrian that was similar, hidden until it was upon you, that had a ruthless edge of viciousness to it that only came out when he needed it.

Lord Prince, Hadrian’s royal potions master and future father-in-law, knew that better than anyone, having been served an ultimatum of “switch loyalties or die”, dished up with a regal chill that was startling from a young wizard but which would become only more frightening and effective as Hadrian aged.

That part of Hadrian, the ruthless, vicious, cold part of him was one that was rarely seen but that everyone instinctively knew was there and could – if pushed – come out during a duel.

Which made pretty much everyone take care not to rouse the vicious fighter’s edge that lurked during the more vigorous duels during their instruction and practice.

So, on the days where Hadrian was already riled up, most of his classmates tended to duck when Professor Ollivander was looking for someone to partner Hadrian.

Blaise Zabini wasn’t most people.

At already thirteen, he was one of the oldest students in the H.I. class of 1991-1993. He was wealthy, well-bred, and already showing signs of the handsome face and lithe figure that he would have as an adult. Wealthy, yes. But not nobility, his mother being a half-Veela from the Italian conclave who was an extended relative of Gawain Wallace’s estranged wife and his late father her third husband, a half-African wizard who died – despite rumors – of natural causes being quite a bit
her senior upon their marriage.

And he had given the most unusual bright violet-indigo eyes to Blaise that were striking against his light brown skin and deep chocolate hair.

Moreover, Blaise had a Veela’s fiery temper, one of the few who could hold his own against Hadrian when the King was in a mood.

More importantly, due to his Veela heritage, Blaise was more than capable of flinging a fire-ball in Hadrian’s face with little warning, evening the playing field – at least a bit – against the King’s wandless magic.

Taking one look at his students, Eddard Ollivander gave a barely-audible sigh before ordering Mr. Emrys-Pendragon and Mr. Zabini into the dueling ring, making sure to triply-ward the space as he’d learned to do the hard way the first (but not the last) time the two had faced off against each other when Hadrian had had a bad start to his week.

The Headmaster and main Professor of the “A” week students of the King’s class knew from speaking with his father what the main topic of conversation was among the Council these days, so he knew to expect a stroppy young King in his class – a warning that he was always glad to receive from the Ollivander Lord. Not that Eddard could blame the lad for being a bit heated. He couldn’t say that he would want diplomats and dignitaries from all over the world trying to drain Avalon’s coffers under the veil of “bestowing honors” nor having to then agree to host those same dignitaries – or the high-powered individuals that they represented – in any of his homes, let alone one that was as important and personal to Hadrian as Castle Black.

Eddard remembered the late Lord Arcturus Black, and had enjoyed the old codger’s stories immensely when he was doing his thesis on the early Pict and Druid effect on wizarding traditions for his History of Magic Mastery.

There hadn’t been a wizard alive more knowledgeable on the subject than Lord Black, whose family had distinct roots in the Picts and Celts and Bretons long before the Saxons, Vikings, or Romans cast eyes to England’s shores.

He had mourned the man greatly for his knowledge even if he hadn’t known him well or found him particularly warm.

Eddard could only imagine what the loss had been like for young – at the time, very young – Hadrian as well as the other members of the House of Black.

To have to open up Arcturus’s long-time home – and stronghold – to foreigners?

No, Eddard didn’t blame Hadrian one little bit for his snit.

And thankfully, Mr. Zabini was more than competent enough to fight fire with fire.

Though Professor Ollivander would still make sure to put a flea in McG’s ear over making sure the young King had a physical outlet for his temper – hopefully that night and not later so the anger would fester. There was nothing like a little healthy exercise and aggression to blow off steam. Swordplay or Hadrian’s strange Middle-Eastern style of unarmed combat would do nicely…if it could be managed.

If not, Eddard was sure that he would have an increasingly-irritated and hair-trigger-tempered King on his hands for days if not weeks before it all blew over.
An opinion that wasn’t helped in the least when he saw Mr. Emrys-Pendragon’s eyes nearly glow when he barely ducked one of Zabini’s trademark fireballs before firing back with a vicious Stunner that slammed the lad into the barrier before he fell unconscious to the ground.

...

It was a much sweeter – and calmer – Hadrian who returned to his suite in Skye Palace that evening. Wills was coming to spend the night with Henry the next day, which was amazing as since there was no H.I. on Thursdays, they might actually get to spend time together with just Henry (and their security details) as their chaperones. Wills wouldn’t have to return to Windsor until Sunday evening, with Andromeda giving Henry some lessons on wizarding culture and history while he was on break from his primary school and visiting them along with Wills. Apparently, there was some to-do at Windsor during this year’s Easter holiday visit to the edifice but it wasn’t a children-invited event (formal dinner or something) and so the Princess of Wales had agreed to let them stay over.

Needless to say, all the boys were excited about it, even if Hadrian and Wills were much more enthused than Henry...though the younger prince was always happy to go horseback riding or get another lesson in flying with the pterrippi.

Though it seemed the Windsors weren’t the only ones who had been given an unexpected break – or rather, weren’t the only ones hauled into the Council’s and his former-guardians’ plotting.

Hadrian was well-aware that both his unscheduled stop at his Krav Maga instruction studio and having Wills come to stay was part of their plan to derail his temper and take his mind off of having to open up Castle Black.

And he was sure that having a seventeen-year-old and six-foot-seven inch Wallace Highlander sprawled out on his bed when he came out of his shower clad in only some soft cotton pajama bottoms and toweling dry his hair was another part of it.

Ancuru was anchored – a bit of spellwork that both Remus and Sirius and a not-entirely-willing to play nice Lord Prince helped him with – on the enchanted stand directly to the left of his massive bed.

Hadrian still had to carry it around strapped to his back – and someday when he was fully grown perhaps at his hip – but within his quarters in Skye they’d devised a way to keep it stationary so he could shower or sleep or what have you without having to worry about carrying it or having it drag along behind him like a lost puppy.

“Is this how hard-working apprentice curse breakers spend their limited free time?” Hadrian asked jokingly as he chucked his damp towel at David Wallace’s – his longtime friend and now-intended – dark head. “Lounging around royal bedchambers...how did you get up here anyway?”

“I am a curse breaker in training, Harry.” David rolled his eyes as he tossed the towel into the laundry bin with a flick of his wand, sitting up to lean against the headboard as he watched his younger friend unselfconsciously shrug into the shirt that he’d laid out on the end of the bed, knowing that unless he was expecting company the younger wizard usually ran around in just his bottoms – which considering the state of affairs between the two of them would be quite the scandal if the wrong member of Harry’s household were to see it with David in the room with him. “That part of it wasn’t hard since I only had to work around your alarm spell. As a future-consort I’m already keyed into the spells on the tower.”

“What about McG or whoever is on guard?”
“Again.” David snorted. “Friend, son of your Lord High Steward, intended.” The older wizard ticked off his fingers as he made his points one-by-one. “They weren’t going to stop me, especially since word has it – namely, my da’s word – that you’ve been in a strop since yesterday.”

“Not so much anymore.” Hadrian shrugged, then climbed onto the bed with a sigh to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with his friend. “Got to work off some energy – and anger – and Wills and Henry will be staying a bit starting tomorrow. I feel like the Council – or maybe my Household – is trying to bribe me into a better mood.” He admitted with a laughing snort. “Which since they’re using extra spars and visits with Wills – and now apparently yourself – as offerings I’m tempted to throw a wobbly more often – at least in private chambers with them.”

David joined in with his snickering laughter at the idea, knowing that while it was tempting, Harry would never stoop to that sort of thing.

And with the upcoming wedding and coronation in a couple months, the bribing-with-visits was almost a moot point as far as Wills’s presence was concerned.

“How’s your apprenticeship going?” Hadrian asked, genuinely interested to hear from one of the first selections for the new program at Hogwarts as to how it was working. Professors had always been able to take on apprentices at the school, but due to the sheer limited number of professors with masteries, it was only ever one or two per year. Which had made it appear to be an elite education, due to the rarity. In reality, while the apprentices certainly learned, it was always hectic and they found themselves needing additional training or tutoring to actually work in their desired fields after they completed their mastery or masteries.

Apprenticeships were more common now that they were in the second year of the increased Hogwarts staff, with the apprentices serving as Junior Professors under their Masters. But there were still only about a dozen between the first-and-second year apprentices in their sixth and seventh years at the school. David himself would serve an additional year strictly as an apprentice and Junior Professor next year, his eighth at the school, as he’d taken on multiple mastery-level subjects to be a curse breaker. Hadrian’s distant cousin Nymphadora was in the same situation, needing at least two masteries (defense and magical law) to eventually gain the rank of Master Auror, following in the footsteps of her “wickedly brilliant” cousin Sirius, Hadrian’s godfather and Lord High Constable of Avalon.

Though whether Tonks would rise as high as Siri had remained to be seen.

“It’s going.” David told him with an exhausted sigh. “I really don’t know how the professors deal with grading papers and tests and teaching and everything all the time. I really don’t. Sitting behind a desk all day like that drive me barmy when Professor Nott or Shacklebolt have me help them or loan me out to Professor Bolyn.”

Professor Nott was Tiberian Nott, the younger brother of the current Lord, who held masteries in Dark Arts and Ritual Magic, formerly a professor at Drumstrang who Hadrian had helped the Headmistress poach from Headmaster Karkaroff. Shacklebolt was actually Kings’ mum, the Lady Elizabeth, a Master Auror with degrees in Defense and Magical Law who had retired and been enticed into taking over the Magical Defense program at Hogwarts once she was assured the curses on the department had been removed. And Professor Bolyn was a cousin of Hadrian’s steward who had strong ties to the Gringotts cursebreakers, with masteries in Warding and Ritual Magic.

All-in-all, the three best sources David had as far as his education and apprenticeship went if he wanted to survive long enough as a cursebreaker to marry Hadrian.

“That’s why you want to be a cursebreaker, remember?” Hadrian prodded him. “Lack of desks,
though if you stuff up you’ll have a mountain of paperwork to fill out for whoever employs you. And we all know how excited I and your father would be if for some reason you died and Rhys had to step up. So pay attention to what they tell you and don’t die.”

“I won’t.” David slung an arm around Hadrian’s shoulders in a squeezey half-hug. “ Wouldn’t want you to lock my baby brother in a tower in remote Russia or something for being a brat and annoying you.”

“What is going on with him anyway?” Hadrian had to ask. Neither Wallace had been forthcoming with a straight answer on the subject, though Hadrian, Wills, and Tavi all had ideas which had been more-or-less confirmed by Hadrian’s spy…er…foster-brother Mycroft.

David shrugged it off, the way he always did, not wanting to discuss the subject.

How do you tell someone whose been friends with both you and your brother for years that you don’t trust your brother to behave himself – not as a son of House Wallace, an Heir to a Lordship, and not in the least as a betrothed and bonded-spouse to a King?

You didn’t.

“Anyway.” David said, not even pretending to hide the change of subject. “I did get introduced to an interesting curse breaker the other day, one Lord William Weasley.”

“Really?” Hadrian arched a brow, intrigued. It was Lord William’s insistence on following a non-traditional career for a Lord that had helped David win that particular fight with his father over his future.

At least, David had rightfully pointed out, he was only planning on being a curse breaker until he had to take up his Lordship, unlike Lord William and now his brother Lord Charles Prewitt, who were each taking on less-traditional forms of employment for Lords who weren’t actively sitting on the Wizengamot.

But Hadrian supposed, lacking anyone who could force them to do otherwise, there was nothing really stopping the pair of non-conformist Lords.

Except Molly Weasley’s infamous temper and glass-breaking screech…but if it hasn’t worked yet, Hadrian didn’t think it was going to ever.

“Really.” David nodded, shifting a bit to look down into Harry’s face. “He’s a junior cursebreaker now, finished with his apprenticeship and shipping out to Gringotts’ digs in Egypt.” A smirk quivered on the edge of David’s well-formed mouth. “Apparently Germany wasn’t far enough away from his mother, he’s going all the way to Egypt to escape her Howlers.”

“Is that what he said?” Hadrian asked incredulously. “Or is that just the general assumption?”

“Both, actually.” David admitted. “He said it to his supervisor but was overheard by one of his fellow junior cursebreakers. Gossip being gossip, he’ll be fleeing for his life and sanity from an overbearing harpy – which, granted isn’t far from the truth – by breakfast.”

Hadrian knew that Molly Weasley nee Prewitt deserved a great deal of the talk about her, especially the label of blood-traitor. However, for a moment he couldn’t help but feel sorry for her. That was the sort of rumor that someone – especially someone who had already taken quite the fall from grace – just didn’t recover from in society.

“Charlie was especially glad to see him.” David finished. “Between their apprenticeships, they
hadn’t had much cause for joint classes in the last couple years.”

That was very true, Hadrian agreed silently. While one had devoted himself utterly to cursebreaking, the other had planned a bit better for his inevitable future and taken a Finance mastery alongside Care of Magical Creatures. Cursebreaking didn’t automatically lend itself to making an educated Lord, anymore than CoMC did. Though working for Gringotts, Lord Weasley couldn’t be completely without savvy when it came to the Law and Finance. And what he didn’t know, the goblins would be sure to teach him…though in a manner that would make him yearn that he had taken at least one of the two “Lordly” subjects for advanced education.

“It’s nice to hear about them being able to do what they want with their lives.” Hadrian sighed, able to hear for himself the slight tinge of bitterness in his voice. “I’m sorry.” He apologized as David turned worried dark brown eyes on him. “I’m trying to be good company but I’m just not feeling that way. I’m a bit…jealous of their options I suppose. No one’s forcing them into marriages or making them open personal, private homes to grasping, greedy diplomats and politicians.”

“Hey,” David murmured, tugging Harry a bit firmer into his side. “I’m your friend first, remember? I’m not going to judge you for being upset over Castle Black being used as a glorified hotel or not being thrilled over having to pick a pair of consorts on a few days or less of acquaintance. At least I had a choice in the matter, you never did.”

“Some choice.” Hadrian snorted, finally saying what he’d been thinking for over a year. “Either marry me or risk your brother who – as much as I care about him it’s true – has turned into a slaggy prat, cheating on me to break his betrothal or worse not cheating on me and creating some kind of international scandal once we were married. No Heir or Lord with a brain in their heads would’ve allowed that kind of taint to fall on their House. If you were anyone else, you would have been able to marry – mostly – as you pleased and not had to worry about how a thirteen-year-old King is handling his Council meetings.”

“I suppose I should have said something earlier, and I would have if I knew that this was how you’d taken it.” David said after a long moment of silence, taking out his wand and silently casting a now-familiar spell to Hadrian’s eyes.

Conjured on the bed on Hadrian’s lap was an Ardor Bouquet, one filled with wildflowers like alstroemeria, sweet alyssum, baby’s breath, and wrapped in acacia leaves.

“I’m not marrying you because I have to Harry.” David told him quietly as the King reached out a gently stroked one delicate white-and-pink petal on the alstroemeria – or Peruvian lily – which was nicely complimented by the white sweet alyssum and dainty baby’s breath. “I care about you, I entered into this arrangement because I saw a friend who needed someone on their side, above and beyond just another consort.”

It was a message echoed by his bouquet which – depending on the interpretation – sent a message of devotion and loyalty with a pure heart for one who had worth beyond beauty. The Acacia was the simplest message of all, wrapping it all – devotion, loyalty, heart, and worth – in friendship.

A flicker of Hadrian’s fingers and he offered David his answering blossom, a single deep pink long-stemmed rose meaning “Thank you for being in my life.”

“You’re welcome, Harry.” David said, leaning over after clipping the stem of his rose short and preserving it then sticking it to his robe’s lapel with a charm. “I’ll always be here as a friend, even when we’re more. I promise.”
Wednesday

The next day didn’t carry a release like dueling or an outside lesson in Krav Maga, instead it made his brain feel over-stuffed as he had lessons in four core and one elective subjects, including a double-dose of Potions and a round of Ancient Runes.

Hadrian was ahead of most of his peers across the board, but there were a few who match or surpassed him in a subject or two.

Neville, Heir Longbottom and Hadrian’s friend of a few years, had grown in leaps and bounds after being introduced to the play/study group that had gathered under the watchful eyes of Remus and Andromeda prior to Hadrian’s Claiming and their first year of Hedwig Institute. Fencing and dueling had melted away a bit of his excess baby fat, and having confident friends who believed in him had done worlds for his confidence in turn. He was the top student in Herbology in their entire year of students, including those who were in the B or C groups.

Draco was another, constantly trading places with Hadrian over who took top scores on Potions exams, while a know-it-all in the C group beat both of them in Arithmancy…and would throw the occasional fit over not being the top student anywhere else.

Still and all, none came even close to Hadrian’s abilities in magical Defense and Dueling but Wills was second to none in Charms and kept pace with Hadrian in Astronomy due to being under Andromeda’s tutelage for several years.

It was with excitement that Hadrian bid Wills a temporary goodbye as Kings collected his charge and McG did the same, the two going their separate ways for the scant few hours needed to pack and collect Henry from Windsor Castle.

While they hadn’t yet arrived, Hadrian rushed through his meetings with his steward and secretary, trying to clear a few hours to devote strictly to spending time with the two Windsors that weekend without other obligations cutting in.

“Family” dinners with his household and foster-family members and godfathers were all well and good, but with so many adult-adults around instead of emancipated minors like Hadrian and Wills – at least in the magical world – conversation tended to be more mundane and less about things like Quidditch maneuvers and prank ideas for when they get to Hogwarts or Henry’s cajoling for a Pegasus of his own.

The younger Windsor brother had already learned that while his parents and even grandparents weren’t keen on him getting such an obviously magical pet as a flying horse or a crup, that his brother’s intended husband might be an easier mark, especially when bribed with extra time with Wills without a little brother dogging their heels.

No promises had been made yet – mainly because neither twelve-year-old really wanted to anger either the Queen of England or the Princess of Wales – but Henry was well-aware that he was growing closer to a Pegasus of his own with every little thing he did that made the life of his brother and brother’s fiancé easier.

Like disappearing to the sitting room of his suite in the King’s Tower – both princes were staying in the Tower with Hadrian, though in other rooms – and leaving Wills and Hadrian alone to do their homework or – icky enough for the nine-year-old – cuddle.

“I see you gained a new bouquet and shelf.” Wills commented, pointing towards David’s bouquet and answering blossom that now resided under a stay-fresh charm in crystal holders in Rian’s sitting
Each of his fiancés – formally betrothed or otherwise – who had taken up the tradition had their own shelves, each in a different room of the Tower. Tavi’s was in the bathroom, Wills’s the bedroom, and now David’s in the sitting room, though since he saw Wills most often, his was filled with more holders and flowers than the other two. Hadrian knew that Remus did the same with the bouquets Sirius gave him – and vice versa.

It was ridiculously sappy…but sweet none the less.

“David.” Hadrian told him needlessly, Wills having already figured that out unless Rian was being courted by someone in secret – which wasn’t likely since the King was determined that his consorts would at the least have a cordial relationship with each other if nothing else. “He came by on a flying visit yesterday. It was nice to see him without an audience for once.” Hadrian said honestly. “Especially his father.”

“I know that feeling.” Wills laughed, twining their fingers together as he stood, pulling his Rian up from the worktable and over towards the alcove where the King stored his instruments. Firmly but gently, Wills sat Rian down on the piano bench before joining him, flipping up the cover over the keys and resting his fingers expectantly, Rian watching him with indulgent eyes before sighing and taking out a sheaf of music and setting it up.

A duet, naturally.

They spent the rest of the promised Henry-free hour in much that same manner, snuggled up hip-to-hip on the piano and playing – or just fiddling about – sneaking in soft kisses and whispers between songs.

It was an excellent start to a several-day-long visit, and a pleasant respite from the tangled web of international politics that Hadrian was currently navigating in the wake of the events thrust upon Avalon by the ICW.

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**Thursday**

The pleasant feeling of the previous night did not follow Hadrian long into the next morning, as moments after breakfast saw him all-but-running between his formal office to the Council rooms to his personal office and back again, with lunch being scoffed over a proposed bill that had been flagged as troubling by Mycroft and tea skipped altogether to Andromeda’s – and Lady Maggie’s, and Mipsy’s – ire.

Much of it was going over two of the new laws that Hadrian was set to pass in the upcoming Wizengamot session. Technically, as King, Hadrian could announce and create new laws as he pleased – as he had done the first weeks of his reign following his Claiming. As a general rule, however, he preferred to twine his laws in among those passed by the Wizengamot which made it a great deal harder for the detractors of his laws to determine which were strictly his and which were introduced by the Lords and Wizengamot for his approval.

A bit of slight-of-hand that many – if they wished – could easily see through with a bit of research…if they knew where to look for the original filings of the laws in the various Ministry and Royal archives.

These two laws in particular have the potential to be some of the most controversial he’ll ever
introduce or pass, including his reformations of the education and penitentiary systems.

They had already laid groundwork for both – even if no one knew that’s what it was – with the publication during the fourth-quarter edition of Magical Theory Today, which carried as it’s headline an investigative, empirical study of the dual phenomenon of so-called muggleborns and squibs.

The article – titled “Facts and Myths of Wizarding Genetics” with a multiple-researcher byline including Lord Severus Snape-Prince, Dr. John Watson, Alchemist-Master Nicholas Flamel, Master of History Madam Perenelle Flamel, and one Sherlock Holmes – covered ideal-destroying and tradition-flouting information gained from research going back to the year 1400…when both Nicholas and Perenelle first investigated the issue for their first masteries. Included was a chart which covered the lessening and eventual break-down of the magical core depending in the degree of relation between “breeding” pairs of magicals, as well as the number of generations – which varied somewhat depending on the level of degradation of the magical gene – it took for the gene to repair enough to produce a functioning magical core capable of producing a witch or wizard rather than a squib or hedgewitch or hedgewizard. What had been found was that while, yes, traditional thought was right in that magic did and could eliminate the dangers of inbreeding that mundane society had discovered and subsequently outlawed marriages depending on the degree of consanguinity, it couldn’t continue to do so for multiple generations that were too closely related as eventually the amount of magic it took to correct the other genetic defects essentially “broke” the magical core and over-stressed the magical genetics.

To put it simply, marriages too closely related for too long of a period in the same line would breed the magic right out of it.

Several more “modern” wizarding families had been sited, including the Gaunts, Blacks, and Princes, who were prime examples of magical degrade from inbreeding that was corrected by a “cleansing” influx of fresh genetic material, in the cases of the Gaunts and Princes via a mundane parent and in the Blacks by so-called “muggle” borns who were – as Sherlock had deduced years before – the products of generations of squibs and hedge-magicals who with enough time and fresh genetic material saw a resurgence of active magic, in the case of the Blacks via one Ted Tonks who was a muggleborn and one Lily Potter nee Evans who while thought a muggleborn for most of her life by English society was actually a pureblood – but one whose families had relocated to America two hundred years before, intermarrying with magicals from all over the world and adding fresh genes to their Houses.

Charlus and Dorea Potter nee Black had infamously spoiled the ever-living-shit out of their son James, which was explained by his friends Remus and Sirius as a direct result of them struggling for years to be able to have children at all, let alone one who was a rather powerful wizard. Everyone expected James to be moderately powerful at best, or even a hedgewizard or – shame of shames – a squib. Blacks, however, even those of the blood and not the name, tended to show their broken genetics in other ways, such as the infamous “Black Madness” made so very public by Sirius and James’ cousin Bellatrix LeStrange.

It was a similar situation with Draco, who had also been considered very spoiled before his family moved to Avalon after the appointments of his parents to either the Privy Council or Royal Household.

Having a King for a friend, while it didn’t do much for his high sense of self-worth – had helped to curb his more arrogant leanings while all talk of blood-supremacy had been quickly stricken from his head by a father who would have been less-than-pleased to have his son insult – even indirectly – the new King who had a notoriously-muggleborn mother despite her being revealed as a pureblood, a fact that often slips many magical minds.
The studies backed up what had already been held as some as pure common-sense – especially those like the Holmes family who had strong ties to mundane society.

But as many would tell you, common-sense and logic weren’t necessarily strongpoints of magical society.

The first of the new laws covered the legality of marriages within a certain degree. It passed a blanket-ban on any marriage where the relationship therein contained the words “parent” or “child” with the exception of honorary positions like godparents. It included adoption whether strictly legal or by blood ritual, mainly because the idea of someone raising and grooming a child to be their spouse was held with contempt by both Hadrian and his Council and was frankly considered abuse under part of the reformed penal code. Basically what the law broke down was the number of generations that were allowed to pass without adding in fresh blood depending on the degree of consanguinity between partners and how distantly related that fresh blood must be depending on that same degree.

For example, if Hadrian were to marry someone within the fourth degree – such as Neville Longbottom or one of the Weasley-Prewitt children – then any offspring of theirs could marry as they pleased. However, if those same offspring again married within that same degree – or even closer – then their children would need to seek partners outside of the fifth degree. And as the degrees became closer or farther then the legality of marriage for their offspring changed degree as well.

It could be considered a bit cumbersome and convoluted, but as marriages were expected to be announced in advance, it gave the Department of Marriage and Births a chance to check the degree of relation between the potential spouses and cross-reference it against the charts provided by the study and the law.

And if someone married against the law, such as by using a private ritual or one that only needed a witness or two, then anyone involved could be levied with heavy fines or even jail-time if it is discovered that one of the parties has been coerced – such as parents forcing a marriage to keep the lines “pure” as in the infamously case of Orion and Walburga Black – with the marriage being held as legally invalid and annulled if possible.

Which as Hadrian was an absolute monarch was very possible, except in the case of magically-and-soul bound spouses.

An exception which was rare in the extreme, and one that was included in the law as to become soul-bound you had to be soul-mates and were thus excluded from any laws, contracts, or other impediments blocking such a union.

If the first law was sure to rouse the indignation of the magical populace, the second was doomed to gain their ire, as it governed the treatment and employment of squibs and hedgewizards and witches in magical society.

With muggleborns being the proven children of magical society’s traditional cast-offs, it made no sense to Hadrian that either muggleborns, squibs, or hedgemagicals were forced to live in mundane society when they could still be productive and valuable members of said society…and to that end, the new law prevented them from leaving magical society for the mundane world.

It was packaged as under the cloak of maintaining the Statute of Secrecy, but anyone who was aware of the trend of Hadrian’s laws which were all tooled towards restoring the might and glory of Avalon, knew that underneath that was the desire to see a great deal less of a magical exodus into the mundane world.
A big part of that was making the magical world more inclusive and accessible to those it typically shunned: muggleborns, squibs, and hedgemagicals, as well as magical creatures and beings.

Under the new law, muggleborns and their families were all placed under a gaes to prevent them speaking about the magical world. Moreover, muggleborns who chose to live and work outside of the magical world would have to do so without magic of any kind, having a ward similar to the Trace placed upon them that would alert the authorities if they used magic or spoke of it in any way, shape, or form. It was harsh, but necessary as with every year mundane technology became more and more advanced, increasing the risk of the magical world being exposed. They would also be monitored for magical offspring.

That was the “stick” of the law, the “carrot” coming in the form of stipends after completing schooling to help bridge the gap between being students and productive members of society, and tax benefits going to any employer that hires a set percentage of muggleborns, squibs, hedgemagicals, or beasts/creatures.

Avalon itself was set to be one of the biggest supporters of the new movement which would hopefully lead to a resurgence of magicals being born to magical families and curtail the number of muggleborns who were born each year, with the city set to reopen within the next ten years and being steadily repopulated in that time starting with a small influx of support staff following the coronation.

The Ministry clean-out had certainly helped, as more muggleborns were hired that year to fill positions than ever before as well as a record number of squibs and hedgemagicals who were able to utilize pre-enchanted objects to complete tasks requiring magic – which many entry level positions did not, in fact, require.

It was sure to be several months of scathing political op-ed pieces and outrage, not to mention the starting bang of the Wizengamot reaction.

Still and all, it was necessary for the growth of their Empire and the health of its citizens so Hadrian and his Council were bound and determined to see it through.

…

Wills laughed, Remus joining him in his mirth, that night as they watched Rian chase Henry around the pterrippi stables, the pair chased in turn by Hedwig, “Padfoot”, and Rian’s cat Fievel.

Hadrian had been clearly frazzled and his brain overworked from hours and hours closeted with his Council as they went over and over some new laws that were set to go into effect after their wedding and coronation.

It had been Henry’s idea that they have a picnic on the grounds before going for a fly, one that Hadrian had thankfully jumped on, arranging it all in a matter of minutes between the House Elves and McG.

He wasn’t yet married to his Rian or formally his consort, so Wills couldn’t actually help with the burdens of the crown, burdens that he was all-too-familiar with from his own birthright.

Wills had never wanted to be King of England, even going back as far as he could remember to the first time he understood what it meant to be born into the family he had.

In that way, he had Rian were all-too-alike.

Neither had asked for what life had put on their shoulders, but that didn’t change the fact that the
burden was still there, whether they wanted it or not.

So, Wills did what he could to clear up the tension in his Rian’s eyes and the creases furrowing his brow, knowing all the while that every bit of attention Wills lavished on his intended would be returned ten-fold one day when – gods willing many years from now – both his father and grandmother have passed and it’s Wills’s turn to be a King in full instead of a King-Consort.

Even if it meant playing tag with his squirt of a little brother, who, spying that Wills had somehow stayed out of things, darted over and tagged him into the game with a rather-muddy smack of his hand, sending Wills darting over him with a yell, a laughing Rian and yipping Padfoot dodging out of his way.

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Friday

“Now, can anyone remind the class of the basics of marriage and betrothal contracts as we discussed last week?” Headmaster Eddard Ollivander asked the joined second-year class from his seat on the auditorium’s stage.

The Headmaster liked to change things up every so often with the students’ class schedules so they don’t become bored or stuck in a routine-rut. This week that had meant switching the Magical Theory combined class on Tuesday with the morning elective period on Friday. It also gave the students those extra few days to finish their assigned essays on comparing and contrasting both magical and mundane marriage and betrothal customs in the Empire of Avalon and how they have evolved, including legislation and the recent revelations in Magical Theory Today.

Hands shot into the air in the wake of Professor Ollivander’s question, the wizard calling on one of his normally more reticent students Ms. Hannah Abbott, the current Heiress of the Ancient and Noble House of Abbott, though that was likely to change as it was well-known that after having three daughters in the last twelve years, Lord and Lady Abbott were expecting a son who due to the mostly-presiding inheritance traditions of primogeniture would be elevated ahead of his sisters in the line of inheritance. Most considered it a good thing, as while young Hannah was a bright and kind witch, she didn’t really have the, well, bite most expected a Lord or Lady of a House to have when called for it. She would however make a fine Healer as she had stated as her career goal in her beginning interview her first year.

“Marriage contracts are always binding without exception.” Ms. Abbott reported softly. “They cannot be altered in anyway, though they can be held in abeyance with cause, such as an appropriate spouse not being available from one of the contracting Houses. Some can be broken but usually the reasons are extreme such as a party being found guilty of high treason.”

“Very good, Ms. Abbott.” Eddard nodded, smiling, then asked the group. “And betrothal contracts? Yes, Ms. Granger.”

“Betrothal contracts are almost the same as marriage contracts but with key differences.” Hermione Granger answered, the words rushed as was her unfortunate habit. They’d worked with her quite a bit on toning down her know-it-all and attention-seeking habits in classes, but hadn’t yet been entirely successful. Hopefully, once she was surely sorted Ravenclaw among others of similar intelligence, she would calm down at Hogwarts. “The major of which is most having clauses that allow for the paired individuals to end their betrothal without marriage.”

“Excellent. Can anyone give me an example of a severing clause that a betrothal contract may have that a marriage contract would not?” He prompted, wanting to test them fully before moving on to
the related topic of the day which dovetailed nicely with the discussion, being one of the last before moving on from this segment of magical theory into the next which was, suitably, regarding pregnancy and birth and the effect of a parent’s magic on an unborn child’s and vice versa.

Less hands went up this time, understandably enough as most families in modern times only practiced betrothal contracts and not the more severe and binding marriage contracts…unless you were very high nobility or royalty.

Thus, the Headmaster wasn’t surprised that most of the children who knew the answer were from among that group, or were voracious knowledge-fiends like Ms. Granger.

With a quiet chuckle, Eddard called upon who he supposed would be the authority on the subject given his experiences with magical contracts, the King.

“Yes, Mr. Emrys-Pendragon?”

“Incompatibility is the main clause that differs between the two types, though there are cases where a marriage contract will contain said clause and a betrothal contract will not.” Hadrian said factually, ignoring the eyes that over time he had gotten used to watching him, whether he sought their gazes or not. “Usually it is magical or sexual incompatibility, such as one of the selected pairing being strictly homo-, a-, or hetero-sexual but not being paired with a compatible partner. In rare cases, there will be allowances for compatibility in the areas of ideals or personality, but that is taken into account far less often. In the case of magical compatibility it would be a case of their magic failing to bond during the betrothal or marriage ceremony which – generally speaking – will negate or void an existing contract between two parties, though not necessarily between their Houses.”

“Very thorough, Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.” Eddard said approvingly. “Moving on, our next topic has to do with a specific realm that is generally but not always covered in these contracts: courtship and gift-giving between intendeds.” Waving his hand, Headmaster Ollivander revealed the writing on the board behind him which the students quickly set to recording for themselves.

“There are several kinds of gifts given between intendeds which are strictly governed by contracts while others can be a case of family or regional traditions or personal preference. Contractual gifts include but are not limited to: dowries and bride-prices, and in some cases but not all morning-gifts… yes, Ms. Granger?” He asked with a held-in sigh as the brunette’s hand shot into the air.

“What is a morning-gift?” She asked with a furrowed brow. “I don’t believe it’s something I’ve heard of.”

“With good reason.” The Headmaster told her. “Almost always they are only given to a bride or consort of royal or high noble birth who is matched in an arranged marriage. The last public record or a morning-gift being given – as it is a private matter between spouses despite being governed via contract – was the gift of Ancuru by Merlin Emrys to his bonded-consort Arthur Pendragon. To answer your question however, a morning-gift simply put, is the gift traditionally given to a bride or consort following the consummation of a marriage the morning after said consummation, hence the moniker, morning-gift.”

Eddard watched as blushes lit up nearly every pair of cheeks in the room, save for that of a few students who were either more pragmatic, or who were well-aware of what a morning-gift was as well as what it implied, such as Mr. Zabini whose mother was the infamous Black Widow, and the betrothed pair of Hadrian and William, who were almost certainly familiar with morning-gifts – in theory – considering the age of the contract which bound them together.

Though if any of his students made that same connection, at least none of them were so ill-mannered
“Traditional gifts in the Empire of Avalon include betrothal cuffs, wedding raiment, and in some cases a ceremonial weapon or piece of jewelry. An English tradition still in use during courtship is the giving and receiving of Ardor Bouquets and Answering Blossoms which you will cover in more depth during your first year of secondary wizarding education in Charms. And as I previously stated, various families and Houses have their own traditions, and what traditions are followed if not under contract can be left largely to personal preference.”

Eddard waited for the scratching of quills to catch up before continuing on.

“Dowries and bride-price gifts are always included as part of a contract. In some cases, they may be merely symbolic, however most of the time they are intended to provide for the bride or consort of the match following the death of their spouse and are placed in trust for them or their children. Usually it is a set amount of gold and/or silver, but land or property can also be used. For those of you who missed it during your History of Magic lesson…” He arched a knowing brow at young Mysters Crabbe and Goyle. “Part of the Empire was acquired this way, with several of the royal retreats as well as more significant landholdings passing into Avalonian control by way of a bride-price or dowry for a royal bride or consort…”

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Saturday

Tomorrow, Sunday, was “family day” at Skye Palace, no matter what else was going on at any given time, and had grown to include more and more people as the “family” grew. This week they were to be joined by the Prince and Princess of Wales, for dinner if nothing else, leaving Saturday afternoon for Hadrian and Wills to get in some time together while Remus and Kings took charge of Henry for a couple of hours, going over – under vow of secrecy knowing it wouldn’t be a popular lesson with the Princess – basics of fencing, as well as some of the martial arts that they’ve picked up over the years. Both twelve-year-olds were thrilled to have a bit of one-on-one time (ignoring McG as their guard) that they didn’t have to chivvy out of their guard, guardians, or Council.

Hadrian still had to spend the morning in and out of meetings with people, but it was much more relaxed.

Morning tea and meditation with Ted, as the mind healer had clearly seen how stressed Hadrian had become over the coming legislative season, not to mention his wedding and coronation.

It was more of a check-in than an actual mind healing session, but still helped take the pressure of being the “perfect King and husband” off the young wizard’s shoulders.

Ted Tonks was well aware that if left unchecked, Hadrian’s prodigious mind will worry a problem into the ground and heap expectations onto himself that no one else would ever even consider being his to deal with.

But that was Hadrian, and everyone close to him was aware of the habit, which stemmed from issues reaching back to before he was found abused and nearly dead in an alleyway by a London policeman and taken to John Watson’s clinic for care.

Today they were spending their time after Hadrian finished with his meetings wandering around the Nimue vineyard via a ride on their pegasi, McG following along as always.

It was a break that Hadrian was as always very thankful to have after a morning of running through
the week’s headlines and hidden stories with Lord Malfoy or meditating with Ted Tonks, or going over things that needed immediate attention with Sherrinford and Siger.

But despite Hadrian being the main instigator of their outing to Wills’s Avalon estate, where they were greeted as enthusiastically as ever by his House Elves who took care of the manor house and grounds or ran the vineyards and orchards and winery, it was Wills who had planned their lunch in the gorgeous crystal conservatory.

Which was when his Rian lifted the dome off of their desert, he was honestly surprised to find a wrapped gift in place of a sweet confection, which appeared in place of the gift after Hadrian picked it up.

“What’s this?” Hadrian asked Wills with a small amount of confusion.

As far as he was aware, they weren’t supposed to exchange anymore gifts until the pre-wedding/wedding formal exchanges in June. They were getting married exactly forty days before Hadrian’s combined birthday/coronation, which meant that for at least part of that time they would be hosting dignitaries at Hadrian’s various royal residences. However, what Wills didn’t know was that for the week immediately after their wedding they were going away for a “honeymoon” though they had no plans to actually consummate their wedding until they felt ready, which for the peace of mind of their guardians was likely to fall much closer to their first anniversary than their wedding day.

“What’s this?” Wills told him with a soft half-smile. “You’re not the only one who’s allowed to spring presents on his fiancé, are you?”

“No,” Hadrian smiled back, genuinely surprised and a bit touched that Wills went through the trouble to get him an extra gift, especially during a week where he’s been rather more stressed than normal. “I’m not.”

With that, Rian gently undid the silver bow and pulled back the golden-striped cream paper from what he could already tell was a book of some kind.

Well, he was right and wrong, he supposed as he blinked back moisture in his eyes as he understood what it was he was holding.

An album.

More to the point, an album of photographs, both wizarding and mundane, filled to the brim with photos of Hadrian and all the important people in his life, he saw as he flipped slowly through the pages.

More touching, and nearly heartbreaking, were the photos that Wills clearly hadn’t taken or been a party to himself, those that contained Hadrian’s parents and their friends going back as far as a copy of James’s post-birth portrait painted when he was in infancy and being held by Hadrian’s paternal grandparents.

“What?” Hadrian closed his eyes and cleared his throat as his voice threatened to give his high emotions away. “Where did you get all these?”

“Here and there.” Wills told him a bit vaguely, before moving to sit at his Rian’s side and point out specific origins to some of the pictures. “A lot of the school-years were from your dogfathers or Lord Prince, and they also suggested who might have more like a few of the Professors – past and present – at Hogwarts, or Dowager Lady Longbottom as her son and daughter-in-law were such good friends with your parents. Here,” Wills flipped to a pair of pages towards the end with an
excited smile. “That’s you and Neville after you were born, and there’s your mums when they were about to pop.”

On facing pages were a pair of couples, clearly Harry’s and Neville’s parents, the wizards standing behind their wives with a hand on their shoulders while Lily and Alice beamed at the camera, their bellies almost touching as they were angled towards each other. On the opposite facing page was the same picture – almost. Only instead of touching bellies, each mother was cradling their son so that they were angled towards each other, the camera managing to catch bright emerald and warm brown eyes on the two babies, who quite interestingly were almost mirrors of their parents – Harry looking like a mini-James with Lily’s eyes while Neville was quite similar to Alice in looks including his tuft of blonde hair, but with the brown eyes inherited from his father.

Another turn of the page showed a “My First Christmas” portrait complete with a fake-Santa at a mundane mall, with Lily and the Marauders looking on, absent one Peter Pettigrew.

More and more pictures were revealed as they went through the gift together, Wills pointing out several that were photos of portraits that Hadrian recognized from Potter Manor or Castle Black of his parents and grandparents and so on.

Though he was very curious as to how Wills found the photo of his mother’s family from when she was a small child and clearly still very close with her sister, before things like jealousy destroyed their bond.

So, he asked, getting a surprising answer.

“They’re still alive, aren’t they?” Wills shrugged, not particularly proud of how he’d used his position to circumvent normal rules and laws, but since it put such a glowing look on his Rian’s face, not ashamed of it either. “You bound their bloodline to mundane-status to prevent any further abuses of magical children and locked up the adults, but your cousin – little blighter that he might have been – inherited all of his parents’ and aunt’s possessions, what was left after their legal fees and fines, even if they were put in storage until he was either adopted or came of age to leave the foster system. His guardian was more than obliging when asked about joint possessions, and willingly handed over anything that looked like it might have belonged to your mother or been a joint possession.”

“How…” Hadrian was speechless, eyes wide. He’d thought that Mycroft and Sherlock and everyone had taken care of that part of things. Not his Wills.

“Your Lord Prince helped.” Wills gave another shrug, blushing a bit. “And so did your godfathers…and everyone really. They were just waiting for you to ask I think because they didn’t want to reopen old wounds. If you go to one of them I’m certain they’ll show you what they found…especially Lord Prince, he seemed to have a better idea than most about a lot of it. It’s not much mind.” Wills tacked on. “But there are a couple of things I think you might want to see…”

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**Sunday**

The next day, Hadrian did just that.

While Severus would never have anything less than a contentious relationship with Sirius Black and Remus Lupin, they all were adults, even if they chose to forget that during the occasional Council meeting and devolved into brawling…usually between Siri and Sev, though Remus if pushed hard enough had taken a swing or two at Severus’s rather prominent nose.
Remus was the most helpful for Lily’s things post-schooling that had been recovered from Petunia, while Severus had a good idea of the origins of many of her heirlooms that hadn’t been recovered from Godric’s Cottage or been in storage at Gringotts.

Heirlooms which included a lovely feminine jewel set complete with necklace, bracelets, earrings, and a coronet all set with the Evans watermelon tourmaline in the delicate rose-gold of an Aged and Noble House.

A set that Hadrian could never remember seeing his aunt wearing in the scant few years he lived with them, and for a good reason once Severus had run a diagnostic on the pieces.

“They’re charmed.” Severus reported with a smirk tugging at one side of his handsome mouth. “By a signature I recognize as your grandmother’s, your Grace. By the time of their deaths, your grandmother Dahlia and grandfather Harold had realized that Petunia’s jealousy was never going to fade into acceptance of her squib-hood. The charms prevent anyone not born or married into the Evans line from wearing the pieces, which as your aunt was a squib from a lower-born American family, disqualified her from their usage…which apparently didn’t stop her from failing to give them to their rightful owner in Lily after their parents’ deaths a year before Lily’s own.” His smirk turned into a full-blown sneer over Petunia’s greedy, grasping spite. “Frightful creature that she is.”

They also found an enchanted pocketwatch that worked as a schedule reminder, whistling when the person attuned to it was due somewhere within a set time period. It was likewise made from rose gold and had the Evans crossed laurel sprig and wand engraved on the back while the front was set with twelve small watermelon tourmaline round faceted stones, the same that held the hour places on the watch face. It had place markers – so far without being attuned to Hadrian – for Ministry of Magic, Home, Work, Conference, Dinner Out, and Special Occasion, while the hands which marked the meetings were engraved with “Early, On-Schedule, Late, and Your Wife Will Dance On Your Corpse” the last of which got a much-needed laugh from all of them who were gathered to go through the items, while Sherlock lost himself in a deduction frenzy over how many times the late Lord Evans had been “Late” before his enchanted watch added the final time-keeper which announced his imminent demise.

And things were good, for the moment, with many of Hadrian’s important people gathered and laughing while the missing few were off at school, and ostensibly safe.

…”

End author’s note: David and Harry do another “flower flirting” exchange off-screen between this chapter and the next with Harry instigating. Here’s the flowers if anyone is interested and their accompanying messages:

Harry to David: Crown of Deep Pink Roses with sprigs of Volkamenia and Gilly-Flower, wrapped with spearmint. Reward of virtue, thank you for being in my life, may you be happy, lasting beauty, bonds of affection, warmth of sentiment.

David’s answering blossom: sprig of Frankincense – faithful heart.

A/N2: I went back and fixed a couple of errors 1/5/17, notably David Wallace’s height of 6’7” instead of the mistake of 6’5” I originally wrote in this chapter.
Nineteen: To Have and To Hold

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Nineteen: To Have and To Hold


Lord Charles Prewett, known to many as Charlie Weasley, tapped his wand on the wrought iron gates of that guarded the way into the wards and up the drive of the Weasley manor known as the Warren. His own ancestral seat of Rosemont Island in the Irish Sea was generally occupied by several of his distant – and elderly – relations including the dreaded Great-Aunts Muriel and Tessie, making it more…congenial for the two noble brothers to meet at Bill’s seat in Wiltshire instead. Bill was the architect of their current meeting, flooing him in his apprentice quarters at Hogwarts and asking him to pop over the first chance he got.

And it didn’t take long for Charlie to realize why once he’d exchanged welcoming hugs with his older brother who was due to gallivant off to Egypt any day now, as Bill led him into his study and to a sight Charlie wasn’t expecting in the least: that of their second-cousin Arnold Prewett, a squib who became a mundane accountant who had a young girl with him. Both occupants of the Warren’s family drawing room had the dark red hair of the Prewetts with the large but well-formed nose that came along with it. His cousin was a modestly handsome man, while his – who Charlie thought was at least – daughter had the early young girl’s prettiness that would turn beautiful or stunning with age. But while the father had warm-brown eyes that he shared with his grandmother Tessie, the daughter’s were a rich hazel more green than brown.

“Arnold.” Charlie welcomed the member of his House, the man never being officially stricken from the rolls or disowned, though Charlie’s mother Molly openly discouraged any talk about him to her children. “Good to see you.”

“And you, Charlie.” Arnold stood with a ready smile, just tinged a bit with sadness, as he clasped hands with his family’s Lord. “Or it is milord now?”

Charlie and Bill gave a nearly-in-unison eye-roll at that and waved him back down. Arnold was only a handful of years older than Bill’s twenty-three and a few more than that over Charlie’s twenty-one at twenty-eight. Both of them clearly remembered a time when – before Arnold’s invitation to a wizarding school failed to arrive – he was a fun and playful older cousin who showed them the wonders of hunting frogs and tadpoles in the pond at the Burrow.

“Just Charlie you prat.” He buffeted his cousin on the shoulder. “And who is the little miss, then?”

“The reason why we’ve come, actually.” Arnold said with a bit of anxiousness. “This is my daughter Mafalda. Mal, say hello to my cousins Bill, Lord Weasley and Charlie, Lord Prewett.”

“Hello.” The dubbed-Mal said shyly, ducking her head after dipping a hasty curtsy and retaking her seat.

“Anyway.” Arnold sighed, running one hand over his short-cut red hair. “I don’t know if you remember, but I had Mal a bit young, only seventeen at the time, and her mum’s parents were none too keen on it.”

“We remember.” Charlie told him with a faint grimace that was shared by Bill. Molly had gone on a
tear over it whole endeavor and their grandfather Septimus was fit to be tied, as young Mal’s mother had been a hedgewitch from a genteel line – not the best match for either party – and her parents had refused to allow her to wed “that no-good Prewett squib.” The capping tragedy being the young lady’s death in childbirth from her parents refusing her any medical care before shoving the newly born-and-named Mafalda Prewett off at St. Mungo’s with instructions to notify Lord Weasley.

“Aye.” Bill nodded at his brother’s words.

“Well,” Arnold was a bit at a loss of how to explain it, honestly. “Turns out, Mal’s been invited to attend a wizarding school. She’s a full-blown witch with the combination of mine and Eugenie’s blood apparently. And since one of the invites that have come in was from Hedwig, quite a powerful one at that.”

“I’d say so.” Charlie said, an expression of dawning understanding lighting up his face. Mafalda was in a murky position in wizarding law, as strictly-speaking her mother had been underage to marry – sixteen – when they eloped, which resulted in her nominal house-arrest when her parents caught up with the pair. Mal was a pureblood, a daughter of House Prewett, and for all intents and purposes a noble-born even if some sticklers would try and protest the legality of her parents’ union. With being sponsored by Charlie as her Head of House, those protesters would be best served to keep quiet instead of belittling and picking at her. “Well, there’s only one thing to be done.” Crouching down in front of Mal, Charlie asked her: “Well, Ms. Mal? Do you want to go to magical school?”

“She’ll need a tutor between now and then, Charlie.” Bill reminded him. “She’ll be a bit behind for B Week.”

Their younger brother Percival was both of their heir presumptive at the moment, though if both of them died without issue then House Prewett would revert to either Fred or now Mafalda depending on which was determined to have the stronger claim.

Nonetheless, she’d need the education of a noble-born young witch to succeed as her station demands.

Charlie hummed under his breath, having an idea. He’d make sure Mal had an actual tutor to cover the educational gaps Mal might have but for the part of being a noble-born young lady…the answer was clear to him.

“Arnold, I think it’s time you reconciled with your grandmother and aunts…don’t you?”

…

June 20th 1993, Skye Palace, Avalon

“The Windsors have arrived, your Grace.” Hadrian’s personal secretary reported. “And Prince Charles is waiting, as you requested.”

“Excellent.” Hadrian said, as he continued to examine the documents spread out on the desk before him. “Show him in, if you please, then shut the door and activate the privacy wards, Russell.”

“Yes, your Grace.”

Charles Windsor, the Prince of Wales and Crown Prince of England, looked in turns to be frustrated and baffled by his summons to his soon-to-be son-in-law’s official King’s study. Nothing about the situation regarding this boy and Charles’s son had ever pleased the royal man, not the least among
them the realization that William – and indeed many, many others – had power that Charles could scarcely dream of. That the child Hadrian seems to get along so well with Charles’s mother the Queen did little to recommend him to the Prince of Wales.

“Please sit.” Hadrian commanded the Prince of Wales, without ever looking up as he set his signature to another document, only setting his pen aside and raising his bent head when he heard the Prince follow his directive. “I’m sure you’re quite at sea over your summons here today.”

“Yes, your grace.” Charles answered, restraining the need to grimace at the title preferred by the – unfortunately – much senior royal despite his young age. “I am rather. With the ceremony tomorrow I thought that we were to settle in and then run through everything before dinner. This meeting has caught me rather off-guard.”

“I know.” Hadrian responded, sitting back as he studied the man carefully. He’d never known what to make of Wills’s father. He was possibly the next English monarch, and by all accounts a warm and good father despite his personal failings as a son and husband. He lived an extravagant lifestyle, but was vocal about important humanitarian affairs. A conundrum, was Charles Windsor to Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon. And according to the investigation by Hadrian’s household, council, and guard, an exceedingly indiscrete one at that – in more than one area of his life. “That was the point.”

“What?”

“Tell me, Prince Charles.” Hadrian folded his hands on the desk blotter, pinning the man with his suddenly cold and cutting gaze though his tone never wavered beyond pleasant. “When you were informed of Wills’s magical abilities and heritage, were any of the involved parties in any way unclear regarding the International Statute of Secrecy.”

Charles felt himself pale and his mouth run dry, instantly having a very good idea about what this entire display was regarding.

“No.” He admitted with dignity in the face of his own wrong-doing now that the chickens of his loose-lipped and often frustrated ramblings have come home to roost. “They were not.”

“And yet, despite being well aware of the binding international laws governing the knowledge of the magical world in regards to those of non-magical ability and heritage, you took it upon yourself to engineer the single largest breach in the ISS since November 1st, 1981. We know, Prince Charles.” Hadrian bit out, eyes flashing. “And needless to say, We are not best Pleased that the father of Our own fiancé has broken Our laws and those of the international magical community willy-nilly.” Hadrian raised one hand and slammed it down on the desk. “What are We to do with you, Prince Charles?” He demanded to know. “Dozens of Aurors, Hit Wizards, and magical personnel have spent months, months! Tracking down each and every non-magical person informed of the wizarding world and Obliviating them, which can have severe consequences on a non-magical person’s mental health.” Hadrian’s frown turned into a full-out glare. “One of the most troubling and vocal in spreading the information was your own mistress – another subject We must discuss with you.”

Before Charles could protest that gem, Hadrian continued, sounding rather more tired than enraged.

“Were you anyone else, a breach of this magnitude would constitute a massive fine and a sentence of at least a year in Azkaban prison. However,” Hadrian held up a hand to silence whatever Charles was about to say or whatever protest he might have lodged. “As your crime has been handled mostly in-house, We are not faced with the dilemma of imprisoning Our own father-in-law. But.” He bit out the word. “There will be consequences for this, Prince Charles. Not the least of which is the discussion We must now have with Our sister-monarch Queen Elizabeth.”
“I have broken international law, that I acknowledge.” Prince Charles agreed hastily. “But surely this can be settled without involving the Crown? Man-to-man?”

“Unless you’ve twelve million pounds in your back pocket.” Hadrian observed dryly, watching as Charles’s eyes shot wide with shock. “No, we can’t. That is the total of the fine that the Privy Council has agreed to levy upon you in addition to a term of house-arrest in lieu of a prison sentence at Azkaban.” Hadrian let that settle in a moment then continued. “When I said massive, I meant the fine was massive. Especially as it includes the cost of the investigation and all personnel, the sanctions and fines Avalon was charged in turn by the ICW, and the cost of housing a royal personage for the course of your house arrest term which We have yet to discuss with the English Crown.”

“House arrest?” Charles repeated, his voice wavering. “I cannot be out of the public eye so long, people will talk.”

“Let them.” Hadrian shrugged. “It’s none of Our affair. What is Our affair is making sure that such a breach is never caused again by a member of the Windsor royal family. We and the Queen will come to terms and inform you, the guards are already aware of your imminent house arrest so any thoughts you might have of warning anyone and perhaps finding a way around your visitor restrictions might as well be dashed now. As it is, by being so lenient with my father-in-law I run the risk of having issues with the wizarding public if they’re ever made aware of it.” Hadrian arched a brow before delving into a brief vulgarity. “Shit rolls downhill, Prince Charles. It’s just unfortunate for you that We know exactly where this stink rightfully belongs.”

“Twelve million and a year’s house arrest, Hadrian?” Elizabeth Regina asked him in concern as they walked sedately through the western portrait gallery, Hadrian having collected her for their talk along with a few of her corgis, allowing all of them some exercise before the rehearsal and accompanying dinner. “Isn’t that a tad extreme?”

“Someone, someday, will eventually discover my covering for my father-in-law.” He told her honestly. “At that point I need to have levied a severe enough alternative punishment to stymie most of the naysayers over my apparent “playing favorites.” The scope of the breach and the investigation were simply too large to contain forever.” He sighed, shaking his head. “And we three: myself, you, and Charles, as well as the guards and Princess Diana, will be the only ones aware of the imprisonment being a case of house arrest in one of my properties. On the books it will be a sentence carried out in the dungeons of one of my castles. He can have no visitors, nothing except for you, his wife, and official trips for unavoidable State Business. That’s all. I’m well-over the edge of preference as it is.”

“Well.” Elizabeth gave a little sniff of satisfaction. “At least that wicked woman won’t have access to him for a year. That’s something good out of all of this. Maybe with a year’s separation from her and the company of his wife, things might finally straighten themselves out in my son’s household.”

“One can only hope,” Hadrian shared a knowing look with the elder stateswoman. “On which subject I must draw your further attention for a moment longer. I mentioned it to Charles – but I don’t know if it stuck. Oaths and vows are taken very seriously in Avalon – indeed the entire wizarding world. That’s why we were so careful to allow room for additional consorts in my bonding vows to William.”

“Yes, I remember that explanation.” Elizabeth said dryly. It hadn’t gone over well at all. Not with any of them save the boys to be honest.
“Well.” Hadrian cleared his throat. “As my attention via the investigation and Mycroft’s network has been drawn to Charles’s…friend, I must warn you that should his marriage to the Princess of Wales end, as far as the magical world is concerned, he may not remarry. Indeed, do to that woman’s loose tongue regarding said magical world, she is not allowed within a hundred yards of anything or anyone magical according to the terms of her gaes which was the solution agreed upon in lieu of a prison sentence for her as well.”

“You mean…” A cold, satisfied smirk flashed across the aging monarch’s face. “That woman can never be around Wills – or Harry if he ends up magic – or their properties and eventual children.”

“No.” He told her with a smirk of his own. “She cannot.”

“Excellent, young man.” Elizabeth told him, waving her corgis forward as they rounded the corner towards the Windsors’ apartments in Skye Palace. “I don’t believe I shall have a problem freeing the amount of my son’s fine after all.”

…

*Witch Weekly Headline Week of June 21st, 1993*

*Run-Up to the Royal Wedding!*

*The Flowers!*

*The Gifts!*

*And so MUCH MORE!*

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*Witch Weekly Sits Down with the Royal Chatelaines!*

*Who Share on Event Planning*

*And*

*The Days on Everyone’s Minds:*

*The Royal Wedding*

*And*

*Royal Coronation*

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*Babies Booming?!

*What’s in Avalon’s Water?*

*Ladies Black-Malfoy, Black-Tonks, and the Honorable Mrs. Anthea Holmes*

*ALL Expecting Bundles of Joy!*
Everyone gathered in Skye Palace’s Grand Ballroom which was in the process of being transformed into a scene from A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream with glittering fairy lights and swags of garland and towers of gilded trees with hanging crystals and candles.

It was only one of the transformations that the room would go through the following day, the House Elves busily practicing and practicing the change-outs until they had them down to a science over the last month when the six Ladies in charge of the event finalized the order of events and the décor and atmosphere for each.

The Shakespearesque gilded forest scene was for the seated dinner that broke the wedding ball into two segments and was preceded by the actual wedding scene, the wedding breakfast, and the first half of the ball and was followed by the second half of the ball, each with its own theme and décor, etc.

All of which was bracketed by the twin rites of the Solstice at dawn and dusk, which Lady Augusta was beginning to talk them through once everyone was gathered and seated at a few of the tables laid for the dinner the following evening.

“Excellent, all are here.” The Dowager said crisply, her lieutenants: Ladies Margeaux Holmes, Narcissa Malfoy, Andromeda Black-Tonks, Anthea Holmes, and Princess Diana all flanking her, each having helped plan the monster of an event in some capacity. “We can begin. Tomorrow sharply at dawn is the opening Solstice ceremony on the East Lawn which will be heavily attended by many of the wedding guests. Attendance is optional. The rites will last approximately thirty minutes, after which we shall adjourn and prepare for the wedding which will commence at precisely seven in the morning. Everyone will be ready and either seated or in place for their procession no later than six forty-five.” She cast a gimlet eye over Sirius Black and Sherlock Holmes in particular, much to Prince Harry’s visible amusement. “The wedding will conclude no later than seven thirty and the receiving line will commence for our newlyweds while guests are shepherded into the holding area, chairs and passed drinks and small appetizers will be available during this time as people wait..”

“How many guests are you anticipating?” The Queen Mother asked in honest curiosity, having no notion of the scope a magical royal event could contain.

“For the wedding alone?” Lady Anthea Holmes answered, having finally given in and married Mycroft very, very quietly the previous year. “Over five hundred from the worldwide gathered royalty, nobility, and gentry in addition to other guests such as the members of the Wizengamot and their families and those privately employed by His Grace, which includes a portion of the staff at Hogwarts School,” she cracked a bemused smile. “I believe they drew straws to determine who would remain to man the school as it has only just let out for the year.” And it was an early release at that to accommodate the royal wedding.

“Oh my.” The Queen Mother blinked, shoulders squaring. That was much larger – and therefore a grander affair – than she’d anticipated.

“Some of the royals – in fact most – have only sent representatives.” Hadrian assured her, and really, all of the Windsors who weren’t expecting to rub shoulders with magical royalty outside of Hadrian himself. “With having the wedding on the Solstice most Heads of State are tied up with hosting their country’s seasonal rites.”
Which included both of his intendeds’ families, thank Magic.

Natsu and Julian would be attending, and in fact were already ensconced in royal visitor suites in the palace, but accompanied by the official ambassadors and their sisters Megumi for Natsu and Nefertiti for Julian.

It was a bullet Hadrian was glad to dodge for another forty days until his coronation and the State visits that it entailed.

“Carrying on.” Lady Augusta held back a harrumph over the interruption considering who was doing the interrupting. “Depending on the length of the receiving line there may be a break where the two families can adjourn with the newlyweds for a small rest while the guests mingle and the presented gifts are set up in the breakfast rooms. The wedding breakfast will begin promptly at ten – barring an overly long receiving line – and last one hour, afterwards while the newlyweds open gifts until just before noon the other family members are free to mingle or take a respite as needed and change into appropriate clothes for the ball. At noon precisely the Milan Wizarding Orchestra will strike the first waltz led by our newlyweds and the first section of the ball will last until five with music provided by the Milan Orchestra, the London Magical Philharmonic, the Vienna Magical Symphony, and the Paris Magical Ballet Orchestra, while throughout the evening banquet tables will be laid with a variety of food and drink for the gathered to enjoy in lieu of a sit-down luncheon. From five to six will be the formal wedding dinner, which is set to be quite magical indeed as we can all see around us, then from six until dusk will be the secondary ball with music from Celestina Warbeck, the Hobgoblins, the Weird Sisters, Spellbound and closing the night Lorcan d’Eath.”

“Who?” Prince Charles leaned over and asked his son quietly, gaining himself a dual answer from both Harry and Wills.

“Wizarding bands, father.”

“Magic music, father.”

“At dusk,” at this point Augusta simply carried on with it, knowing that the last part likely doesn’t matter in the least to the Prince of Wales. “Will be the final Solstice rite, in the Western courtyard. Again, attendance is optional and really, after Ms. Warbeck, most of the guests over middle-age or those with children will begin to trickle out, except for those among the Privy Council and Royal Household. After the rites, the newlyweds will take their leave and the remaining guests will either disperse to their rooms in the palace or be gently reminded to use their portkeys home by the guard, though many may choose – so long as they are of age - to use the group portkey down to the Solstice revel taking place throughout the night on the grounds of Camelot Castle at Tintagel.”

Princess Diana stepped forward. “Everyone should have appropriately marked garment bags in their wardrobes for each stage of the event. If there is an issue with fit, simply call for one of the elves – by name if you have a preference or simply Elf if not – and they will assist you.”

“Thank you, Princess Diana.” Andromeda nodded, one hand resting lightly on the barely-visible bump that was a bit larger than her sister’s but smaller still than Anthea’s burgeoning belly. As they were respectively two months along for the Black sisters, and four months along for Anthea, that wasn’t much of a surprise. “Now, let’s run through the processions a few times as well as the steps during the ceremony and the break to the receiving line before dinner.” She clapped once after everyone had stood and the ballroom within moments took on the appearance of a blank stage with simple plain-wooden props for the seats, alter, and so forth.
“This is quite strange, my dear.” Elizabeth commented to her husband as they tried on their provided wedding attire for the following day. With the number of events involved, and the differing traditions, it was extremely thoughtful of Hadrian – or his chatelaines – to make sure they were all well turned out. “Never before have I been to a wedding where the guests wore white or black and the newlyweds colors! Though,” she must admit. “It will keep attention firmly on them out of the massive crowd quite easy, even with everyone wearing their most glittering jewels.”

Though after seeing some of the other color combinations that her grandson Harry will be wearing as well as the small changes to her own attire as the day progressed, she couldn’t help but wonder if there was an underlying ceremony or code to it all she was missing.

As she would discover later, indeed there was, a noble code hidden in the robes and gowns and sashes, one that her William’s new husband will help her decipher – at least a bit.

“That it will.” Philip agreed as he raised his arms to test the cut of the dinner jacket. Formal wear was formal wear after all, the only real difference he noted was that the cuts tended to favor an older style that favored an active physique, though that of the older set tended to be a bit more forgiving than that worn by his grandson or the – even Philip could admit – rather dashing Lord Malfoy.

“Which set did you bring to wear? The Grand Duchess Vladimir?” Either with pearls or emeralds, he knew it was one of his wife’s favorite state pieces.

“No.” Elizabeth told him as she gently did up the collar that he’d left unbuttoned to make sure that the wonderful silk shirt really did fit as well as he thought. “Considering that aquamarine is the gem of William’s House Nimue, I brought the Brazilian Aquamarine Parure while Mother will wear the Five-Aquamarine tiara. Diana will also be wearing an aquamarine set which William found in his vault and according to his records is traditionally worn by the Lady of the House for formal occasions.” A half-smile quirked at her mouth as she enjoyed the irony for a moment. “One that neatly outshines my own, I must admit.”

“Impossible.” Philip declared, a hint of his younger dashing self shining through – the Prince who stole her heart before she even realized it as a young girl. “Ancient wizarding gems or no, not even Diana can outshine my Queen.”

…

Hadrian shoved down his nerves as he woke and dressed the morning of the Summer Solstice and his wedding to Wills. With the formal wedding breakfast in a few hours and needing to lead a ritual, he only had water to tide him over until he could take a few small nibbles with tea before the ceremony. As the leader of the Dawn ritual he found himself shrugging into his undyed raw silk overrobe, tunic, and trousers with his feet bare as tradition – and the more devout followers of the Olde Ways – demanded. Other than Ancuru, his cuff, and his Lordship rings, he wore no ornamentation at all, even his long black hair was left to swing free in the pre-dawn dew as he made his way, followed by his guards and joined by his household and many of his guests as he made his way to the Eastern lawn where more guests of the day were already gathered around the yet-to-be-lit torch that would burn all day before being used to light the Midsummer bonfires at dusk.

At his approach, the gathered celebrants dipped short curtsies, and Hadrian was pleasantly surprised to see the Princess of Wales in attendance along with her sons though the rest of the family was absent.

High Priestess Nefertiti gave him a cheeky wink from her place standing almost opposite him as he stood at the most eastern side of the torch and the others gathered around in a massive circle, her arm linked with her much-taller brother’s.
As the first fingers of light began to touch the horizon, lifting the oppressive pre-dawn darkness save for the lights from the Palace, Hadrian began.

“As Samhain is the time of the Warrior and Wizard and Beltane that of the Maiden and Witch, so Midsummer is the season of both Lord and Lady.” He spoke in a soft but carrying voice as he moved back to the circle and with a kiss of breath lit Wills’s candle, then Wills passed on the light to Harry on his right, then Harry to Diana, and on and on the light passed as Hadrian spoke. “We are here today to celebrate the power and energy of the sun and the season of growing things, of life and health and new birth. The Sun is the source of warmth and light around the world, as a Father should be to his children while the Earth cradles them as her own, bringing them forth from her womb as all Bearers do. Today, at Litha, the summer solstice, we mark the longest day of the year. From Yule until this day, the sun has been moving ever closer to the earth. Flowers are blooming, crops are growing, and life has returned once more. Today we honor the Lord and the Lady for their gifts and blessings of Life and Magic that we all may be rejuvenated in the light and warmth of the sun.”

“May we be blessed and renewed in the light of the sun.” The company gave the traditional refrain as Hadrian lit the torch with a flick of his hand to clapping and cheers as the celestial body in question crested the horizon fully, bathing them all in the mid-summer light.

Short ceremony over, Hadrian linked arms with Wills and led the way back to the palace as his party blew out their candles and the others all either left for the palace or apparated or took port-keys to wherever they were staying before the wedding to prepare for the ceremony. Most of the nobility had been jockeying for weeks for a spot if not in the palace then in one of the many Avalonian estates. More and more Houses had come forward in the last two years to claim their empty homes or businesses in Avalon Proper, the formerly-dormant capitol city. And those who didn’t have a claim to one were in the process of campaigning heavily for the right to rent or out-right purchase one – for the acclaim if nothing else, as the Council had made the process both rigorous and expensive for anyone who didn’t have a place in the household or employ of either Crown or Council.

And with good reason.

The last thing they wanted was to let a viper slip in and nestle at the very heart of the Empire.

Other guests had been given portkeys into the arrivals courtyard of the Palace that were only good between Dawn and Midnight on Litha or Midsummer, with warnings that anyone found attempting to wander outside of the open areas for guests or attempting to stay beyond the limits of the portkeys would find themselves either facing a prohibitive fine – a thousand galleons or more was the last number Hadrian heard, depending on the station of the offender – or jail time in either the Palace’s dungeons or even Azkaban…which should fend off all but the most determined of breaches.

Thankfully, the wards on the “non-public” areas of the Palace – which for this day had been extended to include just about everywhere that wasn’t one of the bathrooms, retiring rooms, dining rooms, or the grand ball room – were as stringent as possible, making some members of the Council like Sirius and Remus be specially keyed-in due to being an Animagus or Werewolf.

The morning Solstice rites were generally very short, with the real celebrations coming in the night with bonfires and drummers and frolicking through the forests and over the grassy hills of the wizarding-only areas of Avalon and many other magical countries. Some wizarding folk even enjoyed mingling with the mundane pagans who had begun to celebrate more and more openly following a resurgence of interest in the nineteen-sixties and seventies. All in all, it was set to be a fine rout with the wedding ball and the dual celebrations – both of the holiday and the first royal
wizarding wedding in Avalon in more than two hundred years.

Technically, they were already bonded together, as their vows at their betrothal were binding.

A wedding was a more modern idea, marriage being a civil union in Avalon – and not even practiced in all parts of the Empire – while a bonding such as their betrothal was a magical union.

You can get divorced in Avalon, or have a marriage annulled…but you can’t break a willing bond.

Some ceremonies blended the two forms together: marriage and bonding, and it was the most common form of wedding ceremony extent, while the younger British generation that came into maturity after the rise of Voldemort seems to simply prefer marriage…likely due to the many years Dumbledore had had to gut magical education in England. Their marriage ceremony was one of the oldest forms of a blended ceremony that had been adapted from a simple handfast-bonding into a fully public wedding. They didn’t need to use it, they could have gone with a simple civil ceremony…but it made a statement if the King and his first consort were willing to undergo a bonding not once but twice.

Bondings were preferred once for good reason: there wasn’t an out making couples – or triads or larger groupings – forced to work on their problems. Bondings also bound partners, what made one happy made both happy, what was good for ones magic was good for the others, and so on. And the main reason Hadrian was pushing for bondings and blended ceremony to once more take precedence? Bondings created the most plentiful and powerful offspring.

Magical Great Britain was suffering still from a lack of children born during two wars too close together, not to mention those that had chosen to fight and die in the mundane World Wars.

They were once the largest and most prosperous of the Seven kingdoms of Avalon and Her Territories, now they lagged far behind both Russia and most definitely India for number of citizens and new innovations.

Only France was worse off, being hit much harder during the two mundane wars and suffering for so long under Grindelwald.

Hadrian was determined that Avalon would rise and flourish once again.

Even if that meant being forced to play example for all his twenty-four million magical human subjects from newborn babe to oldest crone.

Pressing a quick kiss to Wills’s cheek as Kings swept him away along with his brother and mother, Hadrian and his guards quickly made their way to the King’s tower and his wedding raiment, though, studying his dirty feet and wind tossed hair in the mirror of his bathroom, he conceded that a shower was most definitely needed before starting to pile into the several layers of finest Queen acromantula silk and mithril adornments.

Holding back a sigh, Hadrian set the water to steaming with a flick of his hand, pulling out all the little pots and potions that were traditional to use as a bridegroom before his wedding.

Sometimes – oftentimes – tradition was more than a little tedious.

…

At seven o’clock on the Summer Solstice of 1993, the great hall of Skye Palace was filled, noble men and women standing shoulder to shoulder as they stood, waiting with bated breath for the doors on the eastern and western ends of the dais at the northern point of the room to open. The balconies
were filled with the elderly, the important, and those with young children who couldn’t easily stand for the long wait between the announcement of the ceremony’s start and the king and his consort to meet in the center of the massive hall.

Flowers and ribbons filled the room, shining and glistening as if they were freshly picked or woven in the early midsummer sun that poured in from massive windows that soared from the marble floor with its gemstone rivers up high overhead. Lilacs, honeysuckle, orange blossom, white roses and lilies all led their scent to the bright morning air and the smell of fresh beeswax candles that would stay lit throughout out the Solstice. Sweet alyssum, lesser celandine, and other sweet flowers lent a hint of charm to the traditional – and meaningful flowers, twined with the silk ribbons in pink, white, dark blue, two shades of purple, green, silver, and gold which all had meanings of their own. Love and romance and caring and tenderness; purity, peace, and marriage; integrity, knowledge, power, and seriousness; royal and magic, fertility, good luck, and generosity, calm and above all prosperity; those were wished upon the soon-to-be-newlyweds alongside other things, good things.

For as it was with most absolute monarchies, when the monarchy prospered and loved and grew, so to did the kingdom and empire it ruled.

The guests set off the lovely setting perfectly in their pure or mixed depending on their status and station robes of white or black or undyed silk and cotton.

Jewels flashed and precious metals gleamed, not the least of which upon the simple alter made of Applewood for fertility, peace, plenty, and joy. It was laid differently to that of a traditional bonding for the blended ceremony, with the silken runner from House Emrys making another appearance in emerald green and white. Upon it was a mithril chalice engraved with the Emrys sigil and adorned with faceted emerald gems on the base and rim with a matching flagon beside it filled with a sweet honey wine from the Nimue vineyards. On the very front of the alter the braided silk ribbons for the handfasting rested, many nobles straining to try and make it out, as the colors chosen often gave a hint as to the possible relationship between the spouses, as one color was chosen by each spouse to represent the other and the two were then braided with a third that was a “neutral” symbolic color. In this case, Hadrian had picked yellow, the color of happiness, joy, optimism, idealism, imagination and hope for his groom while Wills had gone with red for all things intense and passionate for Hadrian, as well as it being a color of power and happiness in eastern cultures. They were braided together with an ivory silk ribbon for calm, peace, and unification.

Though the audience would never know who chose which color, they were nonetheless auspicious choices, and ones that along with the décor, gave many of those waiting anxiously hope for their homelands and relief, knowing that they had a strong, unified monarchy to lead them once more.

Lord Ollivander, who was serving as the officiant, stepped forward in his plain undyed natural silk robes and the doors to the east and west opened, the “families” of the bridegrooms coming forward all wearing white or black, though a few such as Gawain Wallace and his son David who were more devout were wearing undyed ritual clothing as well. The Privy Councilors came first from the eastern door, filing out singly as their families watched from gallery boxes above their heads, then stood in place in the empty first row among the audience as they were followed by the “family” – either adopted, blood, or otherwise – of the bridegrooms who came to stand just at the base of the dais. As promised, chairs appeared behind the more elderly ladies, as they weren’t expected to stand through the whole ceremony the way the other family members were.

Wizarding wedding or bonding rites didn’t have “attendants” as such.

Just family members and close friends usually as witnesses with one or a pair or more depending on the rite of “neutral” witnesses to play officiant if required by the chose rite.
At last the doors opened once more and the bridegrooms stepped forward, the crowd letting out a chorus of appreciative murmurs or wondering gasps or sighs at the sight of two young, strong wizards adorned in the finest of wedding raiment, each provided, as was traditional by the other groom – the clothes at least, the jewels and other embellishments were generally, and in this case definitely, belonging to themselves. It was a tradition that served a singular purpose, the idea being that even if a bride price or dowry or morning gift or any of the other traditional “Proofs” that a groom could support their bride or consort were absent in a match, that the wedding raiment they purchased for their bride or consort would tell the tale of both how highly they valued them and the manner in which they would be provided for. Given that each wizard was decked out in the finest of rare Queen acromantula silk, with embroidery in crushed gemstones and precious metals and basilisk hide boots on their feet, it was safe to say that each groom was able to keep the other lavishly and valued them just as highly.

Hadrian smiled a little, a gesture returned by his Wills, at the sight of his soon-to-be husband.

William’s heavy silk overrobe was in a rich platinum color, as appropriate for a Lord of his station, which came to the wrist, just barely allowing sight of the light silver tunic with its platinum and aquamarine cufflinks to be seen. Will’s trousers were silk again, in light blue, and the whole outfit was embroidered in platinum and aquamarine embroidery, with runes around the hem and cuffs for longevity, happiness, and other well-wishes. A silver and light blue sash embroidered with the Nimue crest was at Wills’s hip, a crest that was over Wills’s breast on the overrobe as well. His boots were dyed light blue to match his trousers, and his heavy platinum and aquamarine Nimue pendant and Lordship ring gleamed under the light, as did any hint of his betrothal cuff that peeked from under his shirt and robe cuffs.

Hadrian was dressed almost identically except in the colors of House Emrys with a white shirt and emerald green trousers and boots, the embroidery being emerald and mithril due to his station as king. His overrobe was the deep purple of royalty as well, with the glittering diamond and mithril embroidery shining brightly as the Avalon crest spanned his back, while his personal crest was over his right pectoral and the Emrys crest his left over his heart. Ancuru was sheathed in a white basilisk hide sheath on a mithril belt, both studded with diamonds and emeralds while his Lord’s mantle – a massive men’s necklace that spanned from shoulder to shoulder – that showed the crests and metals and gems of each of his Houses gleamed along with his two joined royalty or lordship rings and his own betrothal cuff.

They were the epitome of youth, wealth, and power, and not a soul staring at them could ever doubt it.

Nor could they doubt the wealth and power of their families, many a canny eye picking out the gorgeous platinum and aquamarine Lady’s jewels shining on the head and neck and wrists of the Nimue Lord’s mother, or the Pevensie set that was worn by Lady Margeaux Holmes as she presided as his “mother” for this and many other formal events.

Hadrian and Wills met before the alter, clasping hands without prompting and turning to face Lord Ollivander.

“Please be seated.” Lord Ollivander commanded the crowd and was swiftly obeyed with the quiet rustling of cotton or silk trousers and skirts and robes. “Today, on the morning of Midsummer, we come together to share in the foundation of a new era: that of the reborn Avalon Dynasty.” Garrick intoned richly, his voice resonating through the great hall of Skye Palace with the help of a handy wandless *Sonorous*. “A Dynasty that founded a great Empire and which has blossomed under the guidance of our new King. Today that King takes the first of his consorts as husband and King-Consort of the House of Emrys. As they have already been bound together in vows and oaths of
betrothal, so too shall they be bound together as spouses and husbands and Kings.” Lifting the
braided cord for all to see with the showmanship of a true salesman, Garrick handed it with steady
hands and a solemn aspect to the King, who took it in his left hand and rested it gently to hand
equally down from either side of Wills’s left wrist, as with how they were positioned Wills’s left
hand was clasped in Hadrian’s right.

Knowing his part, Hadrian spoke as he used his magic to wandlessly direct the braid to wrap around
Wills’s wrist and their interlocked hands and fingers until it reached the halfway point where they
were joined.

“I bind thy hands, to clasp in mine own.

I match thy heartbeat, and mark it in time.

I cover thy tender skin, to shelter and shield.

I place upon thee my wedding claim, William, Lord of House Nimue.

Thou art mine to have, mine to hold, mine to protect, and mine to love.

My beloved bonded, thou art mine own.”

Taking a deep, steadying breath as Hadrian’s words crashed over him. They were really doing this.
They were really marrying in front of hundreds of people – including their loved ones. And now
Hadrian was watching him – his own nerves showing in his eyes for Wills to clearly see even if it
didn’t show in his face or voice – waiting for Wills to cast the spell to finish the handfasting and
speak his own part. Shoving down his nerves, Wills concentrated hard, wandless magic not as easy
for him as it was for his bonded, and set the braid to finishing the complex knotwork pattern around
their hands and his Rian’s own wrist, giving his own half of the vows as he did so.

“I bind thy weapon hand, that thee will protect me.

I bind thy heartbeat, to which mine own beats in time.

I encircle they strength, that it will not fail.

I protect thy heart, which is mine own truest treasure.

I accept thy claim on me, and lay mine own on thee.

As I am yours, so you are mine, Hadrian, Lord of House Emrys and Emperor of Avalon.

My beloved bonded, thou art mine own.”

It was old, very old, wording, something which had been a matter of no little amount of contention
during the wedding planning.

But Hadrian had been firm.

They would use the ancient Emrys words or none at all.

And judging but the shocked gasps from the “newer” magical kind as well as the younger wizarding
set and the approving glances from the “Older” nobility, Hadrian’s instincts, as ever, had been spot
on.

“With the giving of vows and the binding of your hands, you are enjoined together in marriage.”
Ollivander proclaimed, pouring the sweet wine and offering the chalice to Wills, giving the traditional seven blessings. “May Hecate and Loki watch over and guard you, may your lips only know sweetness, may you drink deeply and long of the warmth and blessings of coming together, may your union prove prosperous and fertile, and your joyful cup never empty. So mote it be.”

“So mote it be.” The husbands echoed along with the crowd, Wills offering the cup to Hadrian who took a symbolic drink of the sweet wine before taking the chalice and reversing the process, then returning the chalice to the alter and taking Wills’s ruby-wine-tinged lips in a warm kiss that lasted a mite longer than propriety dictated.

“Lords, Ladies, royalty, nobility and all those gathered.” Ollivander proclaimed. “It is my great honor and fortune as Lord High Magister to present to you King Hadrian and King-Consort William of the Royal House of Emrys! And with their kiss I announce this union sealed! What magic has bound together, none shall ever tear asunder, so mote it be!”

The receiving line – where Hadrian and Wills greeted each and every guest and the guests in turn presented wedding gifts that were whisked away to be checked over for security purposes before being moved to the drawing room where the shiny packages were put on display until they were opened later in the day – was just as long and tedious as Lady Augusta’s order of events the evening before had foreshadowed.

However, Hadrian had to admit that he had enjoyed introducing Wills to the two intendeds his new husband had yet to meet: Julian and Natsu, and their sisters Nefertiti and Megumi who were serving alongside the two intendeds as the official representatives of their royal fathers.

Both pairs would actually be returning to Skye Palace during the next forty days between the wedding and the coronation for their own bonding ceremonies, with the royal weddings for each taking place in a couple of years at one of the royal residences of their houses, word from the ambassadors currently speaking of the Summer Palace at Alexandria and Sakura Palace in Osaka, as Hadrian had already visited them once before which would make it easier on the foreign bridegroom.

“I can see why you were so taken with her.” Wills whispered in his ear after Nefertiti was escorted away by her brother after they presented Emperor Rameses’s gift – or at least told them of it, as a Granian, the fastest and most elegant of the pterrippi, wasn’t exactly the sort of thing you trotted through a palace for presentation. Instead, they presented a box that was likely filled with the ceremonial tack for a royal mount, as well as whatever gift had been selected for William. “She’s rather enchanting isn’t she?”

“Very.” His Rian whispered back as the Japanese delegation moved forward. “And I noticed you were more than a little impressed with him.”

“Who wouldn’t be?” Wills shot back with a soft snort. “He looks like a native warrior from some penny dreadful and treats his sister like a Princess…which she is but is beside the point.”

“Best brace yourself then, love.” Rian advised him. “Because here comes my other intended and his sister Megumi…and she’s not nearly as nice though he’s just as handsome…”

As Hadrian and William were greeting all those who had come to see them and gracefully accepting their gifts from lavishly wrapped packages to simple tokens in brown paper, their two rather different families mingled both with each other and with the other guests over glasses of sparkling juice or
champagne while nibbling on yogurt or fruit or rare cheeses on freshly baked crackers, even caviar or pate on toast.

Much of it was congenial, though there were spots of discontent among the large crowd, one of the most notable being the father of the “bride” Charles Windsor, owing most likely to the confrontation with his son-in-law, followed by a much chillier audience with his mother, yestereen.

“What on Earth is all this fuss about?” Charles groused, ostensibly to himself but easily overheard by the trio of wizards chatting – uneasily – among themselves who had taken on the job of wrangling the Prince while Mycroft and most of the other members of the Privy Council were busy keeping the dignitaries from slitting each other’s throats – or helping Queen Elizabeth with the wizarding royalty and nobility she was being introduced to, many for the first time formally. “He’s just another boy-king, a figurehead, no more.”

Fed up, Sirius Black with help from Lucius Malfoy and Severus Prince – an unlikely trio if there ever was one, all united through their loyalty to Hadrian whether vow induced or otherwise – snapped at the petulant Prince.

“You just don’t get it, do you?” Sirius snapped, voice low and deadly as he glared at the whining man who’d been steadily tossing back glasses of the excellent French champagne from his own son’s vineyards.

“Get what?” Charles sneered at the silvery-eyed wizard.

“Hadrian is more than some figurehead or politician, Prince Charles.” Silver-grey eyes darkened and flashed, resembling a storm more than the star their owner was named for. “He’s a King, an absolute monarch. By his will and word, Avalon prospers and the rest of the magical world with it.”

Charles scoffed with a derisive arch of a brow. “I rather doubt it.”

“Do you know how many students enrolled at Hogwarts this last year, Prince Charles?” Lucius asked, taking his turn at the lists. “Less than fifty. A number that has been steady for the last ten years due to low birth rates from a war. We had a brief period of peace where the number of students rose between 1945 and 1970, but they never rose as high as those during the reign of the last Avalonian King. Avalon was dying, and then Hadrian was born, Voldemort was defeated, and Avalon has a King once more. The expected first-year enrollment for 1994 is projected to be over a hundred souls and increases with every following year. It’ll be generations before enrollment is back to the cap of five-hundred.” He explained, waving an elegant hand. “And Hogwarts only serves one-percent of the best and brightest magical students for secondary education.”

“He’s more than a King, Prince Charles.” Severus said in his softly cutting way. “And whatever your issue with your son-in-law, I suggest you keep it behind your teeth. For you’ll find no allies for your gripes here, and even less of a chance in the magical world as a whole once your oath-breaking makes the Prophet.”

“What do you mean?”

“Our words are our bonds,” Sirius told him with a shrug. “To be an oath-breaker is the most serious of breeches of decency in the magical world as it means you’ve had to corrupt your magic to do so. We’ve even a name for it: démoniste, and it’s the greatest shame and insult one can lie at another’s feet.”

“We sit on the Privy Council, sir.” Lucius reminded him. “Or are a member of his Grace’s household. We know of your crimes. Believe me. As far as you are concerned, the magical world
is the last place you want to gain anymore enemies for behaving like a buffoon to your son-in-law. At this juncture, their Graces are your only allies here. And the only things standing between yourself and a prison cell for your crimes. It wouldn’t do to alienate them further…now would it?”

With that, Lucius turned and made his way back into the great hall to check on the professional photographer, leaving the two former enemies to keep an eye on the petulant Prince.

…

It was a hasty push through to the end, with no breaks for the wedded couple, but precisely on the hour as directed by the indomitable Dowager Longbottom, Hadrian and William led the procession into the formal breakfast room in Skye Palace’s public wing.

There were two wings usually open to the public depending on the type of event going on – the official State Wing which held the Council Chambers, the Throne Room, Great Hall, State Dining Room, and Grand Ballroom as well as the King’s State Offices and those of the Council as well as a few other rooms: bathrooms, portrait galleries, and so on. The public wing was a bit different, a tad less formal, and mostly filled with items and furnishings of great historical significance, not unlike a great house that has been converted into a museum or open for visitors during part of the year. This was where the retiring and freshening rooms for the coming ball were located, as well as the formal breakfast room and other rooms that were going to be used throughout the day, the reception halls where the guests had gathered and mingled between events, and so on. Part of it was also serving as a holding and arrival area and “green room” for the various musicians that would be preforming during the two parts of the ball.

Shining in gleaming white marble with rivers of pale lavender amethyst running through it and glittering white diamond, the formal breakfast room had been decorated in a more restrained and elegant fashion than the abundance of ribbons and flowers that had festooned the great hall.

Rich royal purple ribbons and cloths in silk draped the tables and twined elegantly along the pillars, while garland of orange blossom and sweet lavender tulips and violets with deep green magnolia leaves scented the air from swags and centerpieces. Runners in snowy white silk were specially embroidered in emerald and aquamarine silk thread, and each place was set with real gold flatware. Place settings of the finest bone porcelain with a delicate edging of gold sat on golden chargers, and all the glassware was the finest of crystal.

It was a room to celebrate the joining of the highest of Houses – and it looked it from the finest of silk down to the last dewy forget-me-not.

Hadrian and Wills sat at the head table, flanked by their families in order of precedence – though one that made sense in the magical world and not the mundane, as on Wills’s left sat his brother followed by his mother and then the Queen of England with her mother next to her, then the royal menfolk, while on Hadrian’s right was first Siger then Maggie, Sherrinford and his lackluster wife, and so on.

Everyone else sat at round tables seating twelve and enjoyed the three course meal after nibbling on appetizers for over an hour, more than one needing to pass on the still-plentiful champagne and switching to coffee or tea if they wanted to make it through the ball without making the worst sort of faux pas.

Wills talked softly to his Rian, the two of them sharing their impressions of the guests quietly among themselves, and taking turns speaking to Prince Henry/Harry so he didn’t get bored, the younger prince already displeased that he had to wait to change into less formal clothing until just before the ball – and even then it would still have to be in all white to show that he was underage as it was still a formal “society” event.
The newlywed couple both enjoyed the starter of a light yogurt and fruit parfait very much, eating at a steady pace and keeping one eye on the pace of those around them, knowing that once they finished the elves would immediately clear the top layer of dishes with their magic and serve the main, a perfectly prepared eggs benedict with either salmon or ham or a vegetarian option of a vegetable compote. None of their RSVP’s had indicated someone who didn’t eat things like eggs or milk products, so that was one less worry for their wedding planners and Bitsy, the head kitchen elf for Skye Palace. Conversation flowed easily and lightly, no real pockets of trouble as everyone was aware that they were under heavy scrutiny by nearly everyone around them, the normal “society-set” and the royals more than anyone else, as they were well-used to being in the public eye more than most.

Even Charles, as the warning he’d been given by the trio of wizards had been well-heeded at least for the moment when he was so heavily outnumbered.

Wills let out a happy little sound of surprise when once his plate had been cleared of his salmon eggs benedict, the final plate appeared with a perfectly turned-out crepe filled with strawberries and cream for the final “dessert” course of the meal.

“Crepes weren’t on the menu for today!” He told Hadrian excitedly, eyes bright. “I ordered the custard!”

“Crepes weren’t on your menu today.” His Rian corrected him with a soft smile. “I know they’re your favorite so Whimsy,” Hadrian’s personal elf/valet, “underwent a bit of espionage with help from the other elves and Lady Augusta. See.” He gestured towards the other tables where many others were already digging into – politely but digging in nonetheless – to crepes with a variety of sweet fillings while others enjoyed the aforementioned custard or the third option of fruit tartlets. “A little surprise to make you smile on your wedding day, love.”

“Thank you, my Rian.” Wills smiled, voice gentle as he leaned over and gave him a peck on the cheek as soft as his smile. “Thank you.”

Hadrian just gave him another smile before cutting off a bite of his own crepe with blueberry-peach filling and popped it into his mouth with a showy flourish, making Wills and the closely-watching Prince Henry laugh at his minor theatrics, as he’d intended.

All the while, both groups on either side of the couple were keeping sharp eyes and ears out, taking in the whispers and murmurs that floated up to the head table to relay to the newlyweds later – though no one quite missed how every so often Hadrian’s eyes would sharpen for just a moment or his nose would flare a tad when someone said something that hinged on impolitic at a royal wedding breakfast. “Lovely” “keeping with tradition” and even “scandalous” – the latter usually in conjunction with either the vows or having William and Hadrian’s mundane family sitting at the head table or even present at all – being some of the more common whispers. Others spoke of the richness of the wedding raiment, or the beauty of the new King-Consort’s mother’s traditional Nimue jewels, or the elegance of the décor. Over all, nothing to be too worried about, though there was a person or two who Siger or Sherrinford or even Lucius made mental notes to keep tabs on through the rest of the celebrations – and in some cases pass on that directive to the royal guards.

Before long, the plates were cleared, and the time for the traditional toasts began. In some places, the toasts took place during dinner, but with hours and hours left of dancing and flowing champagne and wines, everyone with a functioning brain cell knew that making them at the end of breakfast when there was a better chance of said toasts being remembered instead of lost in a fermented-grape haze was best all around.

Taking her cue gracefully from the Longbottom Dowager, the Queen of England stood and her
husband at her side rapped lightly on the side of his crystal champagne flute with his real-gold table knife, drawing all eyes to the head table and the coming speeches, most listening raptly as Hadrian without a moment’s pause cast a quiet Sonorous on his newly acquired grandmother.

“Ladies and gentlemen.” Elizabeth Windsor began with an ease – if not comfort – gained from decades upon decades of giving public speeches. “I believe I speak for the family of both grooms when I thank all of you for coming today and bearing witness to the joining of our two great Houses. Not just of Emrys and Nimue, but also of magical and mundane. Today marks the beginning of a new era, one in which, someday, the King of England shall also be the King-Consort of Avalon – an event which has never in all both of our illustrious histories has never occurred before. Some might fear such a monumental event, but as a Queen and as a woman and a mother and grandmother who has seen things both great and terrible through her lifetime, I can say without reservation that I truly believe that this union both of houses and of two young wizards, has all the makings of the former and none of the latter. I look forward to watching with eager eyes all of the great things you two accomplish together – both as spouses and as Kings.” Raising her glass she toasted them. “To King Hadrian and King-Consort William!”

“To King and Consort!” Rang out the cry from the massive crowd as they all touched glasses and sipped, Elizabeth retaking her seat as Sirius Black rose.

“Normally,” Sirius began, having to stop and close his eyes a moment before continuing. “Normally, this should be where Hadrian’s father would speak. James was a good man, and a great father, and I know that he would be proud of the wizard and king that his son has become though it was the last thing he would have expected which has left me rather at sea when it came time to trying to put together the right words to say..” Reaching into his pocket, he set his glass aside as he took out a parchment – a letter – and opened it to the interest and confusion of all those present. “Fortunately for everyone, not the least myself, I don’t have to guess at what James would say. The Master Marauder was already way ahead of me – or should I say Lily was, and left me with his words to say, written by his own hand.” Taking a steadying breath and leaning a bit into his mate at his side, Sirius took a deep breath and began to read.

“Padfoot, old boy, I don’t know if Lilyflower has quite lost her mind, but she’s been insisting we make up these letters just in case Dumbledore is mistaken and things go, well, wrong.

And if you’re reading this, then I suppose they have after all.”

Sirius looked over at Hadrian, skimming the crowd a moment with his gaze and said in an aside: “I’ll skip to the pertinent part.”

“…and tell Harry, when the time comes.” Sirius shuddered out a breath. “That if he is considering marriage that he should ask himself one question: will I still enjoy talking with them when I am old? If the answer’s yes, then let him know that his happiness is all I ever wanted for him, and give them this blessing upon their wedding day or bonding day or however they choose to go about it:

May you have enough happiness to keep you sweet;

Enough trials to keep you strong;

Enough sorrow to keep you human;

Enough hope to keep you happy;

Enough failure to keep you humble;
Enough success to keep you eager;
Enough friends to give you comfort;
Enough faith and courage in yourself, to do what must be done;
Enough wealth to meet your needs;
Enough determination to make each day a better day than yesterday;
And enough compassion and understanding to never turn cold towards one another.

That Lily and I weren’t there to give him our blessings ourselves will always be our greatest regret, but know that wherever we end up after, we’ll always be watching over our Prongslet.

Signed, James, Lord of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Potter.”

Sirius took a moment as they all blinked back tears – for those who got teary eyed over Prongs’s message, not the least among them was the King himself – sniffing back a few himself before raising his glass once more.

“And I’ll add a word of my own to that of my lost friend, a father and wizard beyond compare: always remember pup – what is life without a little risk? To Hadrian and William!”

“To King and Consort!”

…

While the guests mingled, or retired to the various refreshing or retiring rooms to change before the ball, their families with them, Hadrian and William spent more than an hour reviewing the gifts that had been scanned for spells or enchantments, then opened and put on display by the house elves while Hadrian’s secretary Russel Davies logged each and every gift, the sender, and any messages that had been sent along with the gift – which could include little things like the paper used for the card or tag or wrapping, the colors of the wrap, and many other little social cues. Being able to tell the difference between sunshine yellow and lemon yellow meant knowing if a sender was wishing the couple well or wishing them ill. It was what made the position of being Hadrian’s personal secretary a job almost always filled in the past – as well as the present – by a member of the nobility, usually a son or daughter of a House who wasn’t the heir or spare. Though in time as Hadrian’s family and Court grew and he aged, he would need at least two more secretaries, one to serve as an undersecretary to Russel and help him with his work, and another strictly to manage his social calendar and tag along with him when he left the palace or was attending meetings within the palace grounds.

But currently that was just a vague problem for another day, and Hadrian was able to brush it off and giggle along with William at the spectacularly ugly – but very expensive – baroque vase which was a gift from one of their Russian noble families.

Not all the gifts were ugly or ill-chosen – or rather chosen with the galleons they cost in mind instead of whether it was an appropriate or lovely gift – such as the Granian and tack for Hadrian and the equally thoughtful present of a full bolt of rare – and exquisite – Egyptian basilisk hide that had been treated and dyed a shimmering aquamarine with silver edgings around each scale in honor of William’s Lordship. Not many places still had the knowledge required to breed and control basilisks, or how to dye and treat the resulting hide from when the deadly serpents shed, and the best quality hide came from the Egyptian viper handlers at Karnack and the ancient textile houses of Alexandria. A gift that had stunned them both came from the French Minister of Magic, who was also a Lord
among the French magical nobility, Monsieur Delacour, who had gifted them with a gorgeous Faberge egg in the emerald and gold of House Emrys that when opened revealed a scale-model of the exterior of Skye Palace in perfect miniature, down to the last stone.

A more personal gift – and one that brought both smiles and tears to William’s face – came from his grandmother in a private audience before she adjourned with the rest of his family to rest and change before the ball began at noon – an hour drawing steadily closer leaving the wedded couple little time to change into their ball clothes.

“Just a little something.” Elizabeth told them both as Kingsley brought the box over, the top rather conspicuously punctured with holes throughout. “I’m told that you’ll both be able to take your familiars with you – and I know you both have pets – but I’m sure Hadrian as the owner of the school won’t mind bending the rules a tick so that you can bring him along with your owl, William.”

“Him?” He asked with a tad bit of apprehension. As much as he liked dogs and animals in general, he was a little afraid she’d gotten him a corgi or dorgi…and as much as his grandmother loved them, they were never his favorites for the sheer amount of noise they all made around the palace if nothing else.

“And now your friend and familiar.” Elizabeth added. “Our Mister Shacklebolt assured us that as a magical bred dog, your new friend will live much longer than a normal Great Dane, and will deter anyone with thoughts of ill-intent through sheer size before even taking his training into account.”

“Protection.” Elizabeth said firmly. “He’s trained to protect William and anyone friendly with him. We were assured that he completed his training with flying colors and is more than ready to go to work once he finishes bonding with our grandson.”

“Well then, Wills thought to himself, they would certainly be the experts in training magical dog breeds to specific jobs – and breeds of all kinds of canines, not sticking with the Crups that most kennels prefer in modern times.

“Hector, your name is Hector.”

And for the rest of the afternoon and evening, his new friend Hector trotted along at William’s side.
faithfully keeping in step and casting alert eyes over the massive of people when he was told to stay on the dais instead of following his person and his person’s mate onto the dance floor.

... Finally able to strip out of the heavy silk formal wedding raiment and into slightly-less-formal clothes for the ball, Hadrian and Wills slipped off to the King’s Tower for one of the quickest changes they could manage, taking advantage of the elfin ability to pop between rooms to shave time off and give them a bit of an extended break over what had been promised.

Silk was still the order of the day, but this time it was paired with slim-cut basilisk hide trousers and a short dueling-style robe like those Hadrian preferred while the silk was a sleeveless formal shirt with a lace-up neck, and a sash in the case of Wills since Hadrian was once again wearing Ancuru on his hip in the white basilisk hide sheath. Both of their robes cut in at the hip and fell in panels to the ankle from there, allowing freedom of movement, and were also sleeveless, showing off their burgeoning muscles – though there was nothing burgeoning or juvenile about Hadrian’s form, his most recent growth spurt putting him at five-foot-eight while William was slowly coming on at five-foot-four. Both robes were in royal purple with the Avalon crest over their hearts, while Hadrian wore the Emrys colors in the white shirt and emerald green trousers and soft boots for dancing, Wills dressed identically except for being in silver and light blue under the robe, and with a silver-and-blue sash at his hip that was embellished with the Nimue crest. Their robes were once more embroidered, though this time in elegant patterns instead of runes, in the mithril and diamond thread of Avalon, mithril lord’s mantle and Nimue pendant gleaming in the light around their necks.

They were King-and-Consort in full, instead of groom-and-bridegroom.

At noon precisely, with the newly-named Hector on Wills’s left Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon and William Emrys-Nimue took the center of the grand ballroom’s dance floor as the Milan Wizarding Orchestra drew their bows and launched into Hadrian’s first-ever gift to his intended: William’s Waltz.

“Wills?” Hadrian asked as he guided Wills through the steps of the waltz, music from his own heart and mind filling the ballroom as they were watched with varying degrees of adoration, love, and interest. Even those who didn’t approve of them, or had issues with the monarchy, or simply issues with either Hadrian or William themselves, couldn’t deny that they were as interested in the dynamic between the two as those who gushed over them in the society pages or loved them as members of their own family. Their interest was simply less…wholesome than that of others who were otherwise motivated.

“Mmm?” His consort hummed back, a hint of a smile on his pink lips as he gracefully followed his Rian’s lead on the dancefloor.

“Are you happy?”

“More than I can say.” William reassured him, eyes shining up into his Rian’s slightly-anxious gaze. Wills couldn’t really fault Rian for being worried. The whole day had been nothing less than a three-ring-circus – and Rian knew better than anyone just how much William hated that part of his birthright. “You?”

“Not really about being in a fishbowl for the rest of the night, no.” Hadrian quirked a little smile. “But about finally being married? More than I can say.”

“Then focus on that, on me.” Wills told him simply, batit his eyes humorously. “And not on the nosy old biddies who are already sharpening their claws for tomorrow’s gossip sessions. Did you
see that muggle woman wearing the Nimue matriarch’s parure?!” His whisper turned into a near cackle as he mocked some of the harsh words they both had overheard more than once that day.

With a bright smile hiding his chuckles, Hadrian added a barb of his own that had “just happened” to have been said loud enough in his presence to be overheard.

“Just who does that Margeux Hawkins think she is? Uppity, that’s what with her near-squib Holmes husband and wealthy ward. Wearing the Pevensie jewels, for shame!”

“Why are the cats so high-hackled over that anyway?” Wills asked now that they had a moment “alone” even if it was in the middle of an empty dancefloor as his Rian spun him around with five hundred people watching. “Lady Maggie’s a noblewoman, and the next thing you have to a mother, and as a Holmes her House is only one degree below House Pevensie…”

“Her marriage House, not her birth House.” Hadrian reminded him as he turned in step with the waltz. “And yes, it matters, even if Pevensie is only one step up from Holmes, let alone Hawkins, to the real snobs in the nobility – or even the gentry and wealthier commoners – it matters. Especially since Lady Maggie – for all that she’s a wonderful woman and has been a wonderful guardian – isn’t very magically powerful, married a man who’s from the ‘near-squib’ side of the Holmeses, and had a pair of ‘near-squib’ sons. If she were powerful – magically, or her husband or sons were, no one would say a thing – the way there hasn’t even been a hint of gossip about Andromeda or her family despite it still being a bit of a scandal.”

“Twenty years later and they’re still on about it?”

“When you can expect to live over two hundred years, hashing over the same ‘major’ scandals for twenty or thirty or fifty years isn’t that hard, especially when it’s bored aristocrats who prefer to live on their family – or married family – money instead of doing something productive with themselves.” Hadrian said with a grimace that he hid behind another smile.

Knowing that the song was coming to an end – and with it his uninterrupted time with his Rian for a good while – Wills asked: “We dance together every seven dances, right?” Just to make sure. As it was, there really wasn’t a chance for many breaks besides the dinner hour, unless the person they were supposed to partner agreed to end the dance early for a drink or nibble, allowing them to do the same or duck out to a bathroom if they’re quick. Honestly, depending on who they had to partner, half the time that was likely what they were going to be doing with each other instead of actually dancing.

“Right.” Hadrian bowed low and pressed a kiss to the back of Wills’s hand as the orchestra finished the waltz with a flourish. “I’m off to Lady Augusta now, you?”

“My mother.” Wills told him. “Then my grandmother and great-grandmother, then I’m doing the tour of the Utmost High ladies and your family while you dance with mine.”

With silent looks of commiseration, they gave each other one last smile as they split off to collect their next partners, this time for a contrasting dance in triple time known as a historical saltarello or “hopping dance” which despite being rather phased out by modern standards of dance, was still alive and well in the magical world, as were many other “old” styles of dancing.

Lady Augusta was still quite spry, at seventy not even having reached a true middle-age, though grief and hardship had lined her face and aged her before her time.

“Things are going well, your grace.” She reported as they came together in the measures of the dance, just barely out of breath from the fast hopping steps. “Not so much as a blemish, despite
whatever the society cats say in the morning. And things are well in hand for your departure.”

“Thank you, milady.” Hadrian replied with a slight nod, not surprised in the least that she was already aware of his surprise gift to William – some time to themselves.

“Your grace.” She dipped a curtsey as the dance ended, Hadrian giving another nod and escorting her back to her seat before heading off to claim the next lady on his list – this time the even older Lady Ollivander who was a hundred if she was a day, having had her son and husband’s heir Eddard late in life. He danced the more sedate pavane with her, keeping the conversation light and pleasant – like the gentleman he was – before escorting her back to her husband before swooping up Princess Diana who was serving as the Dowager Lady Nimue this evening.

“Hadrian.” Diana greeted him softly with a half-smile as he accepted her hand from Sirius who was making his own rounds of the social set. Indeed, everyone was in an intricate pattern determined by births and marriages and power and wealth that to an outsider would appear some mad form of silently organized chaos.

“Princess.” He nodded slightly with a quirk of his mouth. “Or is it Mum now?” He asked cheekily.

“Diana will do, I think.” She told him with a soft laugh as the dance – this time a Scottish Reel – began.

“Diana.” Hadrian smiled brightly at her in acceptance.

“You seem to have got my husband in quite a tizzy.” She commented, carrying on the conversation as they separated and came together in the dance.

“He got himself into a tizzy.” Hadrian retorted not unkindly. “All I did was keep him out of Azkaban.”

“It’s that serious?” She asked with alarm, though not one iota of it showed through her pleasant mask.

“Very much so.” He told her. “I don’t expect him to have told you the lot of it – but only his being Wills’s father saved his hide. Rather than in a tizzy, he would much better be served by showing a bit of that grace under pressure that those of us born to high station are supposed to cultivate.”

“I see.” Diana said. And she rather thought she did, if her new son-in-law – normally not one to shy away from matters – was being this reticent.

“I certainly hope not.” He said, much to her surprise, thinking on just who was at the center of the entire sordid affair. “For your sake…if nothing else.”

A quadrille with Sherrinford’s awful wife, then a pair of pleasant dances – minuet and a Viennese waltz respectively – with the sisters Black, and Hadrian found himself with William snugged back into his arms for another waltz (or slow waltz or English waltz depending on who you asked) this time to Strauss’s ‘Roses from the South’, the two of them holding each other a bit closer than was proper…but they were newlyweds so even the cattiest of society biddies wasn’t likely to comment on it lest they look like overly-prudish old prunes.

“How much longer?” Wills sighed, despite knowing that they were only at the very start of the ball – they hadn’t even changed orchestra’s yet!

“Too long.” His Rian replied, casting a mental eye over his list of dance partners. “I’ve my betrotheds next – all four of them – then your gran and great-gran, the first break for the next
orchestra to begin, back to you, then the foreign Princesses, Dora, Sherrinford’s bland daughter, Lady Bones, Livia Prince, and then…”

“Back to me.” Wills finished with a smile. “At least I don’t have my dance card quite as packed to the gills and regimented as yours, Rian love.”

“It’s nearly as bad.”

“Nearly.” Wills stuck his tongue out briefly, the childish gesture missed by their audience as Rian whirled him faster in response. “Is still better than the same – at least in this case.”

“Prat.”

“Wanker.”

…

By the time the dinner hour rolled around, William was very grateful for that “nearly” as Hadrian looked half-ready to commit murder after having to squire dignitaries and socialites and old biddies around the dance floor for hours on end. At least, he did if you knew what you were looking for. Which as Lady Maggie made a quick seating plan change that put William sitting on Hadrian’s immediate right with her sister-in-law presiding over the foot of the massive head table, William wasn’t the only one capable of deciphering Hadrian’s too-bright eyes and brittle public smile.

“What is it, Rian?” Wills leaned over during the soup course and asked in a murmur too low to be overheard. And with good reason. Hadrian had been raised to be a consummate statesman and monarch, it took a lot to get under his skin to the point of needed total separation from the aggravating party. Hells, he dealt with the Wizengamot, the Council of Lords, and his own Privy Council on a daily or weekly basis! A little sniping and gossip mongering was hardly the sort of thing to get his blood up.

“They’re saying nasty things about your Mum and Lady Maggie.” His Rian whispered back just shy of a hiss. “And our friends!”

Well, Wills had to concede, that last would be the straw that broke the hippogriff’s back for Rian.

They expected, all of them, to come under at least some public censure for Hadrian’s rather public honoring of both Wills’s mundane mother and his foster mother, not that it had ever bothered Hadrian before – at least not enough to rouse his formidable temper in public.

But their friends?

Oh, now that’s a different matter altogether.

Hadrian is much more protective over them than he is the adults in their lives and for a simple reason – none of their friends could really be expected to hold their own in the public eye the way adults like the Princess of Wales or the regal Lady of Ravenscroft could and had done for years.

Even Draco, perhaps their most canny and cunning friend and the Heir of House Malfoy, couldn’t be expected to stand toe-to-toe with the old cats of society without getting his feelings hurt or having his ego take a sharp – and possibly crippling – blow.

All of their year mates had been invited – along with parents or guardians of course – and most of them had accepted whether pureblood or mundane-born. Of course, for the mundane-born, that had meant getting permission to accompany one of the magical families to Avalon for the day, but most
of their families had been eager for their children to be included in the exclusive event. Many had no
doubt been given orders to tell their families all about it. After all, most of Britain enjoys a good
royal spectacle and they didn’t get much bigger than weddings and coronations.

“Who was it over that set you off?” Wills asked, knowing as well as his Rian did which of their
friends were the most vulnerable to gossip – usually because of their family histories. “Draco?
Nev?”

With one having an infamous former-Death-Eater for a father than the other being for all intents-and-
purposes an orphan, out of their year group from Hedwig Institute they were two of the most likely
to be whispered about – but in whispers only given the high status of their parents and Nev’s
grandmother.

Nev’s own parents, after all, for all their infirmity were still highly-regarded as Aurors and war-
heroes who had received Orders of Merlin – First Class for their actions during the Voldemort war.

“Them too.” Rian sighed, giving Wills a sad look. “But mostly it’s over Blaise.”

Wills let out a little hiss of his own.

Yes, he had to suppose. As far as being vulnerable in the public eye, especially with having high-
profile friends like Draco Malfoy and the tow of them, Blaise was right up there with Draco and
Neville – only without the protection of his family to keep the malicious murmurs to mere whispers
instead of all-out snide commentary.

Blaise’s situation was one that spurred on some of the roll backs in the new code of law governing
marriages – or rather, his mother’s – once Hadrian learned the full of it from Blaise himself instead of
in whispering dribs and drabs from the nastier young people in their schooling life. It was common
knowledge that Blaise was a quarter-Veela. What wasn’t common knowledge was that his
grandmother who passed down her creature blood had been extremely vain to the point of searching
out the richest and handsomest mate she could find – regardless of his nature. Amorette Delphine of
the French Veela society lasted barely a year married to Jerome Tertius Bianchessi, a distant cousin
of both David and Rhys Wallace through their mother. Just long enough to bear him a daughter,
Blaise’s mother Giselle Amorette, who as soon as she started her menses was raffled off to the
highest bidder through a binding marriage contract.

Only, it didn’t stop there.

Jerome wasn’t content with selling her a mere once. After all as a half-Veela Giselle was a highly
valuable commodity to the immoral man. Her first husband died under “mysterious” circumstances,
leaving the still-a-minor Giselle free to be sold on again. And then again. And again.

Giselle came of legal age according to the laws of the Italian city-state of Venice and its Doge during
her third marriage. However, by then it was too late. Giselle had given her third husband a son,
Blaise, and via her marriage contract retained full custody of him, giving her wicked father another
way to leverage her into doing his wishes. It was only by mere happenstance that her most recent
husband – number six – was a minor member of House Nott and as a bureaucrat with the Ministry of
Magic, very image conscious. Tidus Nott was one of the MoM employees sentenced to death for
treason, likely committed in order to pay for his “bride” in the first place, and killed a year-and-a-half
previously.

Blaise’s mother mourned, keeping up appearances, and as soon as the official mourning period was
over, remarried for the last time – and to a powerful witch having had more than enough to do with
wizards save for her darling son.
Lalita Collins, older sister of Galen Patil who was the Head of the Board of Education for Magical Great Britain, and widow of a younger son of the late Lord Collins, was too well-connected for Giselle’s father to risk an assassin’s blade…if one even made it into the territory of Avalon in the first place with the highly-secure warding scheme it enjoyed when a King was enthroned at Skye Palace.

Needless to say, there was plenty of fodder for the vicious society bitches to feed their gossiping tongues with when it came to the horrible history of Giselle Patil nee Bianchessi…and likely all of it was being spilled right where Blaise – an acknowledged friend of both the King and King-Consort – could hear it.

The old cats had no idea how lucky they were that Hadrian’s control had improved over the years, or else they could very well have found themselves without tongues at all so vile was their bile.

“He’s tough, Rian, he’s had to be.” Was all Wills could really say to comfort his new husband. “If I know anything about him, anyone who has been dumb enough to say something within his earshot – or even out of it but it’s gotten back to him – will find themselves having a sudden attack of hives or something similarly harmless but irritating.”

Hadrian chuckled a little, willing to give Wills that one, and settled back into their dinner, knowing he – they both – had another round of dancing with biddies and socialites ahead of them during the second half of the ball.

…”

Prince Harry Windsor watched with increasing worry as his parents carried out a hissed conversation both literally and figuratively over his head at the table.

His brother and his new husband – which he would find even weirder than he already did if it weren’t for years of instruction about the wizarding world from Lady Andy – were halfway up the table seated at the head while the rest of the Windsor family were arranged on opposites sides of the middle, bookended by people who they were at least somewhat familiar with already like the Holmeses and the Tonkses.

Which was a good thing to Harry’s mind, if his parents were going to insist on having a semi-domestic over the cheese course.

One thing Harry did understand about the hissed barbs being traded by the Prince and Princess of Wales, was that whatever had happened it involved his father and several of his friends, most notably one that was only spoken of rarely around himself and his brother and known to them only – at this point – as that woman.

The venom and viterol that was always used by Harry’s female relatives regarding that woman made it clear that whoever she was, not one single Royal Lady from his great-grandmother Elizabeth to his grandmother the Queen, on down cared for her or his father’s friendship with her.

Whoever she, in fact, was.

Anger and irritation flooded his nine-year-old body, the red-headed young boy trying unsuccessfully to shove it down until he could return to his rooms in Skye Palace later and scream it out into his pillow. Wills was gone more and more now, leaving Harry regretfully alone in the battleground that had become his parents’ marriage, which was just one of a dozen or more subjects that cropped up sometimes daily and led to a row either with high emotion and flying crystal or icy stares and icier words. For a time, it had almost seemed as if Wills’s change of being and station from a regular boy albeit a prince into a fantastical wizard who would be a Lord in his own right was the glue that held
an ever-crumbling marriage together.

But with this latest round of ice and venom playing out in front of the wizarding world over canapés, it seemed as if even uniting for their children and the people simply wasn’t enough anymore.

The upswell of anger – at his parents for falling apart, at whoever that woman is who seems to constantly be an issue, even at his brother for leaving him alone with embittered caregivers far too often – threatened to choke him as it rose and his hand began to shake, Harry quickly hiding the tell with a clenchet fist under the table.

But it didn’t choke him.

It exploded instead, shattering the crystal up and down the lengthy supper table for several place settings in either direction.

Several people gasped or cried out, especially those who had been holding a flute or glass at the time of his outburst, though it appeared as if no one had gained a severe injury from the display.

Just as Harry was ready to burst into overwrought tears – which would only mean a lecture from both his father and grandfather at the display – over causing so much trouble, what it meant flying right under the radar of his upset, a voice rang out over the kerfluffle.

“Reparo suprema.” Harry’s new brother-in-law called out as he stood with the casual elegance and command that his grandfather had spoken approvingly of more than once, walking with Harry’s older brother at his side down the long table, his magic flowing out from him as he made his way to the epicenter of the magical shockwave – and his young brother-in-law who sat in near-tears as his mother fussed over him and his father just fussed.

…

Crouching down, Hadrian leaned in to Harry’s personal space in a half-conspiring manner.

“Was that you, Harry?” He asked in a carrying whisper.

There was no real need for secrecy, a child’s first magic was an event for joy not shame. But the cause was clearly still upsetting the younger wizard, and acts of accidental magic were often seen as embarrassing events by the children who made them. Especially when they’re as large and impressive as Harry’s had been, bringing sharply to mind Hadrian’s own issue with destroying crystal at a similar age.

Though in Hadrian’s case it had been an act of anger and stifled independence than what appeared to be anger tinged sorrow.

“I didn’t mean to…” Harry whispered back. “But I couldn’t hold it back…”

“You didn’t need to, Harry.” Wills leaned over and gave him a congratulatory hug. “Don’t you realize? You’re a wizard, Harry! You’ll be able to go to Hedwig the same as I did, and join us at Hogwarts in due time!”

The brother of the new King-Consor (uncrowned) blinked rapidly.

No, that hadn’t quite pierced his self-recrimination and embarrassment yet.

Looking around, he noted that most everyone was looking upon him in approval, while several of the older women and not a few of the men were studying his mother with what looked like appraisal
and he would later learn had everything to do with the Princess birthing not one but two magical heirs.

More than one magical family that night were already appraising the likelihood of the implosion of the lady’s marriage to her muggle husband, that she might remarry into magical society and “bless” one of the waning families with her obviously strong genes though she didn’t have active magic herself.

Any woman who could birth and bear two powerful and noble magical heirs with a muggle for a husband was a high prize indeed to some.

After all, it had not slipped passed notice that the royal couple seemed more embattled than enamored.

“No harm done, Harry.” Hadrian assured him, waving a hand over the table before reaching out and summoning his and Wills’s own flutes, passing Harry his newly restored glass of sparkling grape juice. “All easily fixed with a spell or two.”

And it had been, Hadrian’s spell taking care of the inanimate damage while Andromeda and a few others with the ability to heal taking care of the handful of minor injuries as gossip over the new Nimue Heir buzzed around the table.

Raising his glass, Hadrian called a toast:

“To Lord Henry Windsor-Nimue, the Heir-Apparent of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Nimue!”

“To Lord Henry!” Rang out from the gathering, some cries more joyous than others, Prince Charles’s in particular being more rote and lackadaisical as he quickly knocked back his flute of champagne.

“I’m Wills’s Heir?” Harry asked after he’d gotten over his blush at being so honored by not only his family but also his new brother-in-law…who happened to be the King of Avalon.

“Yes, Harry.” Wills answered as Hadrian gave the younger wizard a hair-ruffle and returned to his seat at the head of the table, leaving Wills to chat and ease his brother for a moment or two more. The feast was nearly over anyway. “Until I have a son to pass the title along to, you’re my Heir.”

“You know what that means, don’t you?” His mother leaned over and teased him a bit after fiddling with his dress robes.

Harry sighed with a nod, saying glumly: “More lessons with Andy.”

His mother and brother only laughed at his despondency, as he’d spent more than one afternoon decrying how it was “unfair” that Wills had magic, or a wand, or his own Pegasus, all of which were now available to him, or at least would be in time, the young wizard noticeably brightening up when such was pointed out – if a bit dryly – by his brother.

…

*Witch Weekly Special Edition: The Wedding Royale!*

*June 22, 1993*

*Pictures of the Royal Couple*
A Rare Glimpse of High Priestess Nefertiti, the Incomparable Jewel of the Nile!

And More!

…

Wills followed his Rian indulgently as the impatient monarch tugged him through the halls of Skye Palace by the hand following the second round of dancing and the nightfall Solstice ritual that came after.

Thankfully the most scandalous moment of the two last segments of the evening was limited to Rian once again using Olde verbiage for the Solstice Rites and deciding to dance a tad too close to Tavi.

All-in-all, much less potential for huffy biddies than the inclusion of “dirty” – and with Wills’s former limited exposure to the greater wizarding world, that had come more of a shock to him than Rian, and was likely the reason that his parents and now-husband had been to adamant to keep him out of the public’s greedy hands and judging eyes – blood like his relatives and their friend Blaise. And that was before you considered that Wills’s parents spent much of the evening – once the champagne started flowing – arguing in an undertone of hisses whenever they were near each other, as his brother’s emergence of accidental magic can attest.

At the moment however, Wills found himself a bit boggled, as he’d assumed – and no one had said otherwise – that they would head straight for the King’s Tower once they left the Rites.

Instead, Hadrian was leading him towards what the now recognized as the Port-Key and Apparation arrival and departure point that was warded against everyone but Rian’s nearest and dearest – usually just the Holmes’s and his dogfathers, the rest of his Council and even his personal household having to use the more “public” arrival point in the main courtyard outside the castle proper.

“Um, love, what are you doing?” Wills asked with some concern as Hadrian pulled out a polished shell.

“What are we doing, rather.” Hadrian gave him a bright – and bit mischievious – smile. “We are going away – just for a little while. Just you and me…” And a minimum of guards along with the stray house-elf or two.

“Okay…” Wills arched a brow. “Like a honeymoon?” His tone turned towards anxiety.

“But not.” Hadrian shrugged, well aware that neither of them were ready for a real honeymoon. “More a get-away from court and royal pressures before the never-ending parade leading up to the coronation. I managed to argue us into a week of sand, sea, and quiet.”

Blue eyes beamed out of William’s young and handsome face, eyeing the shell – port-key – with anticipation.

“Where?” He asked eagerly.

“You’ll see…” Hadrian teased him a bit, holding out the shell. “In about thirty seconds.”

…

Daily Prophet June 29, 1993

Back from Vacation and Stunning as Ever!
King Hadrian and King-Consort William Out And About!

A Royal Visit to the One-Year Anniversary Charity Gala for the Lily Evans Home for Magical Children

By Rita Skeeter, Full Story Page 2

...
The Avalon Seven

So, a question that comes up almost more than any other for Avalon Seven is about the Houses, and what families are included and at what rank. I could’ve thought I included a list at some point, but given how many questions that I’ve gotten on it obviously not. So here it is.

*Note: This is listed from lowest ranking group to highest ranking but until we get to the three highest tiers isn’t put into any particular order within the ranked groupings.

Honorable Houses:

Davies, O’Connor, Shaunessey, Lovegood, Clearwater, Collins, Pucey

Aged and Honorable Houses:

Stuart, Bolyn, Hawkins, Parkinson, Brown, Flint, Sprout

Aged and Noble Houses:

Weasley, Malfoy, LeStrange, Diggory, Marshbanks, Prewett, Evans.

*From here on, these houses either served or were royal houses or allied with another major house of the nobility. They are grouped together based on what house they served or were allied with and their own precedence among the other great houses that had a major alliance with a royal house. Both the nobility and the Royal Houses themselves are listed in order of least powerful or last to join the Avalonian alliance to oldest/most powerful/founding member.

Ancient and Noble Houses:

Abbott and Smith - served Hufflepuff

McLaggen and McGonagall - served Gryffindor

Shacklebolt - served Ravenclaw.

Pericale - served Slytherin

DuLac - served LeFey

Most Ancient and Noble Houses:

Elliot - allied Peverell

Wallace - allied Potter.

Nott and Prince - served Ravenclaw.

Bones - served Hufflepuff

Holmes - allied Peverell

Black - served Slytherin
Utmost Ancient and Noble Houses:

Valerius and Nimue - served LeFey

Potter, Longbottom, and Pevensie - served Pendragon

Peverell and Ollivander - served Emrys.

The Seven Royal Houses of Avalon

*The Royal Houses fall into two groups based on when their Royal status was founded. The first
group or “founders group” came to power between 500-1000 CE while the second group that took
their names from Arthurian legend when Avalon was formed came to power pre-500 CE and in the
case of House Emrys and House LeFey were BCE powers.

7. Hufflepuff
8. Gryffindor
9. Slytherin
10. Ravenclaw.
11. LeFey
12. Pendragon
13. Emrys

…

I’m hoping to stay in Avalon Seven for at least two or three updates before moving on to my short
prologue challenge stories but as proven time and again, I have almost no control over where my
muse takes me so I’m not going to promise anything this year as far as update schedules or
completing works.

That said, enjoy!

Chapter Twenty: Of King and Country

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The King and Privy Council Attend Iceni Prison Inauguration

By Martin Mimblewimble, Pages 4-5

…

Hadrian and William found their honeymoon entirely too short, though both recognized that any
period of relaxation and privacy away from the rigors of managing Avalon and the scrutiny of the
public – let alone their families – was a boon that would be all too rare.

A week, Hadrian had stolen for them, spent in near-total isolation together on one of Hadrian’s
“royal retreats” – this one off the coast of Spain – that had only a few simple upgrades from the
original cottage that the island came with when it was acquired through marriage between a former
Avalonian prince to a princess from the Iberian Empire, the magical equivalent of modern-day Spain
and Portugal that has a history nearly as long and storied as its closest neighbor (and occasional
enemy) the LeFey kingdom of France.

The upgraded cottage had all the modern magical conveniences a pair of newlywed young men
could wish for, and a pair of house elves to cover everything else, the pair spending most of their
days either lazing around on the beach, swimming, or simply enjoying the time away with each other’s full attention.

Kisses – and a bit more – abounded, and it was with a pair of golden tans that they attended the gala for Hadrian’s pet-project (and an important step for there being options for muggleborn children) the Lily Evans Home for Magical Children.

No rest for the royal, the gala was the night after their return from their honeymoon, and it was one of the events Hadrian absolutely could not miss, though it wasn’t nearly as teeth-grittingly frustrating as far as gossipy nags as their own wedding reception had been – mainly due to the gala catering to anyone who could afford the exorbitant price-tag on a ticket, which managed to cull quite a few of the nastier society cats due to them being long in name and short in gold.

The gala was to take place every year during the Summer Season at the Black Townhouse, and was just as rabid a success during its sophomore season as it had been during its inaugural year, many considering it one of the highlights of the social season after Hadrian’s wedding and the to-come coronation that was a bare month away and the people of Avalon were waiting for with baited breath.

Every night it seemed – especially on the weekends – Wizarding Great Britain’s glittering social set put on ball after rout after gala, all during the run-up to the coronation. Not a single hostess wanted to be found lacking in this special season, and not a single matchmaking mama would disdain to chew glass or walk over hot coals if it meant an introduction to one of the visiting royals or foreign nobles or even Hadrian himself. It was a whirlwind of contracts and betrothals, trysts and conquests.

And the couple it was all – ostensibly – surrounding couldn’t give a farthing for it.

They attended events, but unless they were sponsored by Hadrian’s interests or one of the ladies of his household such as Lady Malfoy or Dowager Lady Longbottom, they weren’t to be found, lest accusations of favoritism abound amongst the social harridans.

Most of the events they attended, didn’t have a damn thing to do with the social season at all – but rather the Wizengamot Session that the season coincided with as the ladies of the nobility and gentry worked their political wiles in games just as serious and twice as vicious as that played out in the legislative halls.

Another important date that required their honeymoon to be truncated to a week, beyond the children’s home gala, was the opening of Iceni Prison.

To no one’s real surprise, one of the main issues on Hadrian’s list of things to fix in WGB was the prison system.

He’d been only four years old when he’d been rescued from a prison of a sort, and led to an investigation of his godfather’s incarceration in the process, but he still remembered the tears Sirius had shed when he’d hugged him the first time after being deemed safe to visit by Ted, who had taken on Sirius as one of his mind healing patients after the trial.

More, he remembered the nightmares Sirius had often in those early years, and that still haunted him every now and again almost nine years after his clearing and release.

Something had to be done.

It was getting the public to swallow it that was the problem, a problem that Hadrian’s spin-doctor of a Lord of the Privy Seal Lucius Malfoy had taken on with just as much relish as he had ensuring that
all of the territories of Avalon were nothing less than in deep and abiding love with their young monarch and the resurgence of the Avalonian royal lines. Lucius had spent more than a day or two sweating a possible conviction to the horrid prison with its nightmare-inducing guards during his days as a Death Eater, and to this day still had former-friends rotting there. Not the least among which were his unlamented-sister-in-law and Bellatrix’s husband and his brother.

Bella was nothing less than batty, but Rodolphus and Rabastan had been fierce, cunning, and above all loyal to the Dark Cause…a cause that no longer existed thanks to Hadrian’s repeal of many magic and tradition stifling laws passed over the centuries between the last king of Avalon and his reign.

Lucius couldn’t do anything about their sentences, their crimes were too many for any court to void, but he could help Hadrian in his crusade against the deplorable and inhumane conditions of WGB’s only prison.

And he did.

It came in the form of a series of articles, some small and discrete, others screaming headlines, all revolving around the horrific history of Azkaban and its guards.

To Hadrian’s everlasting frustration, the Wizengamot rarely did anything he wanted without one hell of a fight…unless he managed to convince them it was their own idea anyway…and were he another monarch he’d simply disband it and get on with ruling.

But he wasn’t another monarch, and he enjoyed the illusion of democracy that kept WGB’s magical public content if not truly happy with their government.

He’d expected nothing less than a war of words to wrangle the Wizengamot into line when it came time to fund a new prison, his meager handful of inmate care and condition mandates that passed during the ministry clean-out no longer enough so long as the Dementors remained chained to Azkaban. Words, it turned out, were required. Just not his, but the public’s.

Iceni Prison, built on a remote, cold, northern island, wasn’t a paradise.

For the new inmates, all moved from Azkaban, it might as well be.

The complex was massive, and warded to the gills then made unplottable before the Fidelius finished off the protections.

Guards were stationed there for monthly rotations, but no matter who tried – and many did, as Avalon was far from a utopia – none ever seemed to recall what the secret was or even who the secret keeper might be.

Bad news for a possible prison-break.

Excellent news for the Wizengamot, as after the debacle of the ministry clean-out, their popularity had never been higher than after the article of their King cutting the ribbon to dedicate the new prison.

The article on the lock-down of Azkaban and the entombment of the Dementors, however, barely received a first-glance, buried as it was in the back pages among the lonely heart ads and the bone-dry doings of the wildlife of Antarctica.

…

The Wizengamot Hall, and the accompanying myriad offices, had been one of the first places built at
the Ministry of Magic, an offshoot of the Lords Council chambers that existed on the London site long before there was such an institution as the MoM.

Grand in design, and made to fit an assembly of forty nine lords and forty eight elected or appointed members, as well as a dais for the royal family (though many had assumed, wrongly, for the British royals in case they ever decided to sit-in on the governance of their magical subjects) and the Chief Warlock’s podium, rather than being buried below ground, they were located a floor up from the MoM atrium rather than a floor down like the Minster’s offices.

Hadrian had sat-in on the Wizengamot before, spending large amounts of time there during the summers in particular when a watchful eye over what laws were passing by the Wizengamot to make it onto his desk for ratification needed his presence – a reminder of the new status quo – rather than that of various members of his Privy Council. However, it would be Wills’s first meeting, though not the first meeting where Hadrian had been accompanied by a family member. Though, usually, it was his Papa Siger or his foster-brother Mycroft who volunteered for the duty.

The Wizengamot chambers had been designed along the same lines as many similar parliamentary chambers, only with a large dais at one end for the king and his council, with the Wizengamot seats coming out in an arch with aisles separating the dais and an open area in the center for the scribe tables and any witnesses called to give statements or testimony before the assembly.

Nor had Hadrian ever sat in full state with his secretary at his side, his Privy Council before him, and a consort at his right hand, so it was safe to say that when the Chief Warlock – one Thracius Ogden, an MW (Member of the Wizengamot) who had been elected without so much as a whimper from an opposing party for the last thirty or so years for his district…mainly due to him being the head of the Ogden distilling family – called the session back to order after the previous night’s recess that there were more than one taken-aback MW or Lord/Lady at the sight of the entire Privy Council filing in, with only his secretary Russell pausing to announce:

“All rise for his grace, William Emrys-Nimue, consort of House Nimue; and King Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon, King of the Empire of Avalon!”

Thracius, venerable old wolf of business that he was, didn’t so much as flicker an eyelash in surprise at the unannounced visit from his ruler.

The rest of the Wizengamot, however, wasn’t nearly to sanguine.

More than one of them – even after the clean-out – owed their positions as much to connections as they did to merit on the side of the elected and appointed MW’s.

Not the most comfortable of situations given Hadrian’s record of stringent requirements for holding a ministry position. With their jobs – and in some cases livelihoods – hanging on the line and their King’s ability to dismiss them in an instant, more than one felt themselves shrink in their seats rather than draw his ire. Something Hadrian himself viewed with heavily concealed amusement.

Nowhere else in his empire, including Dumbledore’s continued plotting at Hogwarts and the remaining blood-purists, did the phrase “while the cat’s away the mice will play” fit than in these chambers.

It was as if they somehow believed that his Councilors had been chosen for reasons other than their loyalty to him and the throne.

Yes, many of them were British, and had even sat as members of the Wizengamot before being selected for his Council – which came with an automatic seat and vote in the Wizengamot, allowing
them to appoint a proxy to their Wizengamot seat, usually a spouse, sibling or heir – but that in no way meant that the unspoken *ways of things* prevailed over their duty to the crown.

Even Lucius wouldn’t dare to attempt such a thing.

Or, if he would, which wasn’t quite possible given his vows to Hadrian, there was never a Wizengamot session – open, closed, or emergency – where his Lord High Chancellor (and foster-uncle and former guardian) Lord Sherrinford Holmes wasn’t present and keeping a sharp eye on all the WM’s, including Hadrian’s own Council.

Familiar with the routine, Hadrian and Wills sat in unison, then Hadrian nodded to the body, with first his Council and then the WMs sitting in a wave, with only the Chief Warlock remaining on his feet – as he would for the entire day excepting only recesses or when another WM was called to speak and would take his podium to present before the Wizengamot.

This was different than the heavy – and often vicious – debates where the Lords would argue back and forth from their seats.

“*The Wizengamot session of Summer 1993 is once more called to order.*” Ogden’s voice rang out with the solid tones of a man who had no need of a *Sonorous* to be heard – a persuasive tool for both a businessman and a politician, which the seventy-four-year-old wizard was both. “Scribe Gillyflower, please read the closing statements from yesterday’s adjournment.”

As the scribe, one Thurston Gillyflower – an up-and-coming son from a family that rode the border between genteel and common – read out the minutes and closing statements, Hadrian cast his eyes over this session’s crop of both WM’s, scribes, and the volunteer runners, leaning over to point out a few to Wills in a quiet whisper, though the dais was cloaked in impenetrable anti-eavesdropping charms it wouldn’t do to be rude to Scribe Gillyflower.

“Scribes are selected from a pool of candidates that work in the Ministry.” Hadrian whispered, his breath on Wills’s neck causing a bit of a blush to dust his neck but not all the way up to his cheeks. “Our best and brightest who aspire to the Wizengamot elected or appointed positions. Mr. Gillyflower works in the Department of International Cooperation and is apprenticing with Our Councilor Sandringham Bones for his Mastery in International Magical Law. There,” his Rian gestured minutely to the other scribes, pointing out one after another as they would rotate in and out as needed for breaks. “Athena Meadows. Her late aunt Dorcas was a member of the Order of the Phoenix along with my godfathers and parents, but in the wake of Dorcas’s murder by Death Eaters her parents cut ties with Dumbledore.”

“Many did.” Remus leaned over to murmur in an aside to both boys. They both knew all the stories, though Wills was still fitting names to faces – the reason for Hadrian’s reminders as William had already been thoroughly briefed and schooled in the Wizengamot and the ever-changing players – and most importantly their loyalties. “Almost as many families were lost – or pared down – from their involvement with Albus as they were targeted by Voldemort.”

Wills nodded in understanding, and his Rian continued.

“Ms. Meadows is apprenticing in business with her great-uncle.” Hadrian nodded to the Chief Warlock, Wills arching a brow. Nepotism at its finest and still alive and well. Not that either he or Rian could really judge too much given the make-up of Rian’s Council. “I understand Chief Warlock Ogden has high hopes for her. Rufus Smythe, no relation to our former Professor from H.I., is the lone half-blood among the scribes.”

*Now that* was interesting.
For all that, from what Wills understood, Rian worked at trying to balance the Ministry and Wizengamot to reflect the population they both served, there was still a minority of half-blood and squib-lineage witches and wizards in favored positions. That one had risen to be selected to Wizengamot Scribe was either a sign of that change, likely *encouraged* by Hadrian or that Mr. Smythe was something impressive. Probably both, if Wills knew anything at all about his husband.

“Highest OWL and NEWT scores since Tom Riddle.” Rian smirked a quicksilver smile at Wills’ knowing glance. “He was headhunted by more than one Ministry department.”

“Who’s his mother?” Wills asked knowingly.

A half-blood with the last name of Smythe meant that it was his mother that was the pureblood.

Smythe-Smiths were purebloods, Smiths were pureblood nobility, but *Smythe* was a mundane name that hadn’t been a WGB name in hundreds of years after the last Smythe daughter married a Smith wizard and insisted on the merge.

“A witch from a cadet branch of the Stuart family.” Hadrian teased a little. “One of your very-far-removed relatives if you trace things back long enough.”

Wills snorted. Long enough his arse. You’d probably have to go back six centuries or more to find the relation.

He was probably – undoubtedly – closer related to his husband than this random Mr. Smythe.

If there was one thing he had quickly learned from Andromeda, it was that WGB was overbred to the point that it made mundane royalty look positively bursting with new blood.

Honestly, if it wasn’t for magic, mundanes, and squib-lineage witches and wizards, they would’ve bred themselves into extinction long ago.

“And the last scribe?”

“Allis Grey.” Hadrian said. “Pureblood, common-born, family has a long history of service that usually produces either teachers, aurors, or healers. Mr. Grey is an anomaly as he chose to enter a position as a junior undersecretary to the Assistant Minister of Games and Sports straight out of Hogwarts. But.” Hadrian shrugged. “It happens, usually when someone has been a runner for the WM’s and caught the eye of a department head.”

Wills wasn’t surprised, as being a runner – an unpaid errand-boy or girl – was the route many young witches and wizards took if they were considering a career in either the Ministry, Courts, or Wizengamot. It was the same in many legislatures or courts around the world, magical or mundane. Exhausting, thankless work most of the time, but often illuminating and a prime opportunity for young men and women to learn and network.

Hadrian didn’t need to point out the runners, Wills had spotted most of them for himself as they stood against the walls behind the WM’s waiting to be summoned.

And more than one of them he recognized either from description – the bright carrot-red hair of Percy Weasley was hard to miss after all – as no detail too small was missed by the Privy Council when prepping them for their visit today, or in the case of the junior runners from H.I.

Senior Runners this session were the aforementioned Percy Weasley with his caroty hair, Adrian Pucey who was on friendly enough terms with Hadrian from their pre-H.I. social group, and Alexander Cornfoot, whose younger brother had been in their year at H.I. Both Weasley and Pucey
were noble-sons, and Pucey was even an Heir, while Weasley was an heir-presumptive until his
brothers settled down. Cornfoot was also a pureblood, but his family was in publishing, partnered
with the Goldsteins as the owners of Wiz-hard Books and Publishing which also published
periodicals such as Witch-Weekly and Which Broomstick.

The Junior Runners both kings knew at least a little from H.I., being either from their group like
Heiress Susan Bones or one of the others like Anthony Goldstein and Tracey Davis.

Interesting to Wills – thought it made sense – was that each of the parties had a senior and a junior
runner that they’d selected…but those runners actually served a different party with Percy Weasley
for example running and fetching for the Moderates while Susan Bones did likewise for the
Traditionalists and Alexander Cornfoot for the Progressives – or as they were sometimes known for
their connection to former-Chief Warlock Dumbledore’s organization the “Phoenix” party as they
often tended to vote in lock-step with Dumbledore’s agenda…though Hadrian knew that had
changed somewhat since the co-Headmaster’s disgrace.

“Thank you, Scribe Gillyflower.” Chief Warlock Ogden nodded to the scribe who retook his seat,
taking a long drink from his water glass as Scribe Meadows readied herself to take dictation and Mr.
Smythe minutes. Between the two jobs of the scribes they were able to capture the full account of
the meetings and still rotate as needed. “Returning to the still-open issue before the Wizengamot:
The Equal Opportunity bill.”

A rumble started through the Wizengamot.

Hadrian knew that they’d already passed the limiting improved security bill that would further
withdraw the magical world from the mundane, however, as expected they weren’t enthused with
the idea of having to pull their heads out of the twelfth century and end the stigma against the same
people who’d they’d just forced to remain in the Wizarding World rather than seek opportunity – and
fair treatment – in the mundane sector.

Not that it mattered.

They’d do what he wanted in the end.

And given that the authors of the bill were none other than Lord Ogden, Minster for Magic Lady
Bones, Mr. Arthur Weasley, Lord Sandringham Bones, and head of the department for International
Cooperation Kiernan Davis, with sponsorship from both the Head of the Department of Magical
Education Galin Patil, and the heads of the magical education institutions in Wizarding Great Britain
including Headmistress Flamel from Hogwarts and the new Headmaster of H.I. Algernon
Longbottom who had taken up the post this summer after Eddard Ollivander completed his ten-year
contract; Hadrian doubted it would take much at all for all but the staunchest old sticks to come
around.

Neville’s Great-Uncle Algie, Algernon Longbottom was his grandfather’s younger brother who had
pursued and gained a Mastery in Finance and had helped keep House Longbottom solvent after the
tragedy of his nephew Frank and his wife’s incapacitation had landed Augusta Longbottom nee
Prewett as the Regent of House Longbottom and a seat on both the Hogwarts Board of Governors,
the Wizengamot, and the rearing and care of a toddler Heir.

With Augusta serving the King as his Head Chatelaine, and Neville heading off to Hogwarts in the
Fall, Algie had found himself with a bit of time on his hands, time that he decided could be best spent
overseeing H.I. rather than put yet another duty on Augusta’s strong shoulders or turn it over to one
of the other Utmost families, as there were few enough of them that weren’t currently held by
Regents or a thirteen year old King.
It wouldn’t pass uncontested, let alone unanimously.

But it would pass all the same.

Hadrian was right, it did, and all without him ever having to say a word.

There was, apparently, something about simply having him present after his show of resolve following his Claiming that tended to serve as a reminder to the ostrich-like mentality of the most devout of stubbornly prejudiced goats that this wasn’t their world anymore.

It was his.

In the end, they were all just players in his game.

And while none of them would ever concede as such, not even to themselves, that didn’t mean that the WMs weren’t aware of it, and wary of it.

It took more power and a hell of a lot more backbone than most possessed to stand against the sheer power that the King of Avalon represented than all but the oldest families – or amusingly enough the newest – let alone try and step up and play the game against him.

And of those who did, ninety percent of them were – amusingly enough for those aware enough to see – all members of his Privy Council.

Funny how that had worked out…

…

Witch Weekly Special Edition

The Coronation Issue!

The Crowns!

The Jewels!

The Royals!

And Above All The Betrothals Revealed!

Who Are the Lucky Wizards?

Profiles and Pictures of King Hadrian’s Confirmed Betrotheds and Intendeds!

All Inside Beginning on Page 2

…

Traditional gifts were often a pain in Hadrian’s considered opinion.

Whether the traditional gifts for a rigid, formal courtship or betrothal, or the traditional gifts to other royals upon birthdays and weddings or coronations, the rules were so varying and complex that they had to have several tomes to cross-reference before Russell sent them out after having Hadrian select one of usually a trio of options vetted by Lady Holmes (Maggie, not the other one) and Hadrian signing the card sent off with his choice.
An exception that Hadrian was very much excited for, was the traditional gift from an Avalonian monarch to his people upon his coronation.

The value varied depending on the times, but it was always the same thing: a custom-minted coin with the personal crest of the new monarch on one side and the crest of Avalon on the other.

In Hadrian’s case due to the wealth of his coffers and the number of his population (both wizarding and sentient creature/being) it was a silver sickle.

Now, that didn’t seem like much to Wills when he’d been helping Rian sort through the designs.

Then Rian explained just how much that added up to considering the breadth of his territories: over one point five million galleons.

Some of Hadrian’s creature or being citizens had no idea or want of a sickle, so for them another item of like value and meaning was crafted, but for the most part the Gringotts mints had been hard at work churning out the silver coins night and day for months.

And it was with deep satisfaction that Hadrian watched from his personal balcony in the King’s Tower as the last of the carrier owls took wing from Skye Palace, and the other Avalonian islands, much as they were doing from all of his estates all over the world.

He knew that not all of his citizens would keep them – a boon of a silver sickle for every person of a large family could be a blessing even if true poverty didn’t really exist as such in the magical world. His people didn’t have to worry about shelter, or going cold for the most part, or having access to clean water. But they did have to worry over fourth-hand clothes, medical care, and the ones that worried him the most – fresh food and decent employment.

Witches and wizards, he should say, didn’t have poverty issues.

Squibs, creatures, and beings often did.

It was unfathomable to him.

It would not do, and whether by legislation such as just passed (though with the coronation was waiting to sign into law, keeping it out of the public eye for the moment) or from emptying his own vaults, he would do something about it.

Though, like anyone, he’d rather the former worked instead of resorting to the latter.

…

Hadrian swore to magic that it seemed like the unending stream of important dignitaries arriving would never fucking end.

It made the procession from his wedding to Wills look like a walk in the park, and his Lordship Ball a day at the spa.

This was an area where of the two soon-to-be crowned kings, (since King and King-Consort was the sort of pretentious bullshit Hadrian had to deal with at formal events but not in his own damn head), Wills was the better equipped to handle it.

For all that they’d had similar – to a point – educations regarding being a sitting monarch, though from different perspectives given absolute-versus-constitutional monarchy, Hadrian hadn’t had to sit through formal state events growing up the way Wills did. Hadrian didn’t even know he was going
to be a king until much later in his childhood than William Windsor let alone having to act like a future monarch. He was raised to a certain standard of knowledge regarding how to behave, but very little practice when it came right down to it. His Lordship Ball was very much an audition for how well he’d learned how to behave and act as a diplomatic representative of his country and crown, with his visits to Egypt and Japan being his first real tests, and his wedding a much more intimate affair – comparatively – than his coronation.

Representatives and ambassadors from magical countries or independent tribes or city-states spanning the globe – some even he’d barely heard of – had begun arriving in the week before his birthday and coronation, filling Skye Palace and the other Avalonian estates to brimming and bringing massive commerce to the newly reopened (but yet to be officially inaugurated) Avalon City as well as the magical villages and districts spanning Wizarding Great Britain as nobility and everyday witches and wizards, creatures and beings, flooded the region. The lucky visitors had received invitations to one of the estates or homes of the populace, including Hadrian and his Council and household’s ground-side estates. The unlucky ones either had to “pass” as mundane and fill the hotels in London and Cardiff and Edinburgh – among others – or the few Wizarding hotels and guest houses on offer.

It was a crush and nothing less than a headache for the MoM’s Department of Transportation and the Department of International Cooperation.

However, it was a crush that brought with it a significant financial and economic boom to WGB and even mundane Britain, one the like of which had Hadrian’s Lord High Treasurer Ragnok rubbing his hands together in glee.

Thankfully, with Hadrian’s wedding another appointment to his household had been made after he’d arrived back in Skye Palace and seen the mountain of invitations the wedded pair had received in just that short week. It seemed that with his bonding to his first consort, the match-hungry parents of both Avalon’s greater social sets and that of London had begun circling. Lalita Collins, the older sister of Galen Patil, who was also – purely incidentally of course – Blaise Zabini’s new stepmother after the unfortunate death of his last stepfather and the heir of the incarcerated Lord Tiberius Nott, making Blaise's friend and step-brother Theo the heir an orphan in the care of his uncle and Regent Tiberian, was more than capable of handling the post of Social Secretary to the King.

In time Wills – not to mention any other consorts – would need their own social secretaries and Lalita, let alone Russell his main secretary were sure to need assistants and undersecretaries but for now simply taking Hadrian’s schedule off of Russell’s plate was enough with him heading to Hogwarts in just over a month.

This also had the “happy coincidence” of moving one of Wills’ and Hadrian’s joint friends from H.I. into Skye Palace with them, which Blaise and Draco were equally ecstatic about as their royal friends, while Neville simply enjoyed that there would need to be less port-keys down to the surface with Blaise up in the skies with the rest of them.

Hadrian wasn’t the only member of the family more than ready to be done with the presentations of guests that occurred three nights before the actual coronation, his brother-in-law Henry was more than “over it” as was his cousin Dora. Eleven years apart or no, neither one was the sort to want to sit still and polite as royal after royal was paraded down the aisle of the throne room and presented formally to Hadrian and Wills. Much like the set-up from his Lordship Ball – only on a larger scale – Hadrian and Wills were flanked by their respective magical family members, household, and the Privy Council.

Thank magic itself that the dignitaries only had to be “presented” to the royal couple or what was
already taking more than an hour would stretch on for *days*.

Under other circumstances, this parade of pageantry would occur the night before the coronation.

Other circumstances however, didn’t take into account that for the next three nights leading up to the morning of the coronation, Hadrian had rituals to perform each night.

Rituals in the form of betrothals to Tavi, Julian, and Natsu.

Hadrian shifted a bit as Wills gave him a short pinch to his underarm, hidden by Wills’s hand resting gently on Hadrian’s wrist.

A reminder to pay attention as the next set of royal visitors were presented, this one more interesting to him – and from the look of it Dora – than some of the others.

“Sovereign Prince of Carpathia, Vladislav Sebastian Ardelean the Fifteenth!”

Sovereign Prince Vladislav, who ruled over a magical region that contained the Carpathians, consisting of a chain of mountain ranges that stretch in an arc from the mundane Czech Republic in the northwest through Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, Serbia, and Romania in the southeast, was the fifteenth prince of his name to rule the magical region that contained some of the wildest magical regions in Europe and at least two dragon sanctuaries. He was dark, both in magic and in looks, powerful, ruled without contest or complaint with both a gentle hold over his people and a fierce wand or sword against his enemies, and most interesting to most of the parents or guardian with eligible children, *single*. The latter of which Hadrian hoped he had a sense of humor about, because he planned to thank Prince Vlad for taking at least some of the matchmaking heat off of himself during the coronation furor.

Though he feared once Vlad, who at thirty was more than twice Hadrian’s age and had kept up a genial correspondence with the younger ruler since his Claiming, would never forgive him his invitation to all the balls and feasts of the coronation weeklong celebrations once he got a taste of the species of rabid matchmaking mothers that had been feared in Britain since before the mundane Regency period.

A glance from Wills had Hadrian holding back a smirk as Hadrian followed his eyes toward something that he’d caught a glimpse of before having to focus on welcoming his quill-friend to Avalon.

Dora, devoted singleton and focused utterly on her career, who had been threatened to within an inch of her life by her mother to get her into the traditional robes for an eligible daughter of House Black and wearing her natural face and long black curly hair, *was blushing* as Vlad caught her silver-grey eyes and *winked*.

Hadrian and Wills faced their eyes front, both terrified of bursting into giggles at the sight after hearing dozens of rants over the last two years from Dora about how men weren’t worth the bother, thankfully in time to avoid a glare from Sherrinford as he announced the next in the long line of royals.

A list that included heads of state as well as royal ambassadors such as the head of the American Department of Advanced Magics Natalia Graves and her family, the Ministers of various Avalonian territories, and the royal family – or at least part of them – from all over Europe, Egypt, and Asia.

Some, like Sovereign Prince Vlad, came themselves, others sent their heirs or siblings or even spouses.
However, one thing was clear by the time all had been presented and Sherrinford was close to losing his voice.

It wasn’t only the British parents who had matchmaking on the mind, as it seemed every set of envoys contained at least one eligible member.

Something that Hadrian and Wills weren’t the only ones to pick up on if the grin that kept tugging at his dogfathers’ lips were any indication as well as the carefully-blank looks on the faces of his Privy Council.

The bastards.

…

That night while Wills was off spending the evening with his family after the double-duty of the presentation parade in the Great Hall at Skye Palace and the official betrothal ceremony between Hadrian as the Lord of Ravenclaw and Octavian as the Heir to House Prince (Wills understandably feeling a bit of a pang at seeing his Rian and Tavi kiss for the first time in front of him) with Hadrian’s cuff gaining a merlinite cabochon to go with the aquamarine faceted gem that signified his bonding to Wills, and Tavi now wearing a cuff of his own in gold with mithril details, set with blue diamond and merlinite cabochons, Hadrian sat down for a bit of peace and quiet in his personal study.

He knew Wills was upset, how couldn’t he be?

Knowing was a world away from seeing after all, and for a long time Wills had been Hadrian’s only official companion. Tavi had come soon after, however unofficially, and Wills had never seemed that jealous…then. But. And it was a big, but. That was before two massive milestones in his and Wills’s relationship.

First, both of them were only eleven when they were betrothed. While that might not seem like that big of a difference from thirteen, those two years encompassed a great deal of maturing physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Second, and maybe even more significant, Wills wasn’t just Hadrian’s betrothed anymore.

He was his best-friend, his bonded, and his first husband/consort.

Those were big shoes to fill, a lot to ask from a single person, and no matter how hard he tried, Hadrian would never be able to devote himself as completely to Wills, no matter how much he loved and appreciated him, as Wills did – or was expected to – himself to Hadrian.

It was an issue that Hadrian had known all along was going to be a problem and a roadblock to happiness for himself and his consorts.

He just hadn’t thought that it would invade Skye Palace so soon.

“Brooding?” A lightly accented voice asked from the doorway, Hadrian looking up from his glass of mildly-alcoholic cider with a scowl for Vlad. “Ah yes.” Vlad tsked, shoving his way into the study and cheerfully ignoring the looming form of Lionel who stepped out of the shadows before Hadrian waved him back with the nonchalance acquired by a life lived with guards. “I see that you are.”

Hadrian groaned good-naturedly, throwing his head back against his chairback as Vlad zoomed in on the crystal decanters arranged on the bar built into one of his bookcases and stocked by his
“Haven’t I dealt with you enough today, Vlad?” Hadrian complained half-heartedly. “If it wasn’t flirting with my cousin – and riling up my godfather in the process by the way, good luck with that – you’re heckling me in my study and raiding,” he cocked a brow at the shimmering gold liquid in Vlad’s glass as he sauntered over and threw himself into the chair on the other side of the fireplace. “My good elf-cognac.”

“This is good?” Vlad sniffed a bit at the glass after a playfully exaggerated grimace. “If you say so… micul rege.”

Hadrian rolled his eyes at the Romanian version of what seems like everyone’s favorite nickname for him.

Coming from Mycroft, little king was one thing.

Coming from the prat raiding his booze it was something else entirely.

“Goat-fucking vampire-layer.” Hadrian shot back with only a hint of heat, Vlad toasting the epithet in approval. At least part of their personal correspondence had covered what – to Vlad – was a very important part of Hadrian’s education: cursing with real _heft_. “What do you want, anyway? You know you’re not supposed to be hanging around my private quarters, least of all mere days before the coronation.” He scowled for real this time. “How did you even get around the Guard?”

“Trade secrets, old son.” Vlad staged-whispered with a smug smirk. “And of all the royal riff-raff floating around this rather magnificently absurd bastion of power-flaunting, I’m the one with the least to gain by offing a boy-king before he takes the throne. Your own people would be the ones to worry about there, let alone the family of your consort or betrotheds-slash-intendeds.”

Hadrian grimaced. “Don’t reminded me.” He pouted a bit, then tapped glasses with Vlad as they both shot back the rest of their glass’s contents. Though his burned a great deal less than Vlad’s. At least he wasn’t the only monarch around with that particular axe hanging over his head, Vlad is all too familiar with it after his father was assassinated when he was only twenty-five – young, indeed to take a magical throne – and had to fight off a palace coup to take the throne.

One led by his father’s former best-friend and closest advisor.

Vlad was just a _ tad_ bit bitter over it, as said best-friend was also his maternal uncle, hence why he was – quietly – bride-shopping away from Carpathia.

“Husband overwhelmed?” Vlad asked with the incisive tactical mind that kept his crown on his head – and more importantly his head on his neck.

A solemn nod and sigh was his answer, Hadrian’s ebony head thunking back hard against his chair.

Vlad ran a canny eye over the five-foot-eight King, who for a thirteen-year-old was likely to hit at least a couple inches over six-foot if not more before he was done. He’d grown – according to Hadrian’s letters – a good six inches since his claiming and it was only recently that his growth had started to slow down a bit. Might not end up as tall as his Highlander – that wizard and his father were both huge men – but still impressive. Vlad himself had topped out at five-eleven and soon enough he was sure he’d have to start looking up at his kingly friend.

“It had to happen sometime, old son.” Vlad shrugged, throwing a leg over the arm of the chair as Hadrian stared up at the ceiling. “Better sooner and done with than lingering and seething and exploding spectacularly in some fashion later.”
“You’re probably right.” Hadrian gave another heavy sigh. “That doesn’t mean that it makes me feel any better about the situation.”

“Fate dealt you a tough hand.” Vlad agreed with that, easily. “Could have been better, could have been much worse, but hey.” He swung out and tapped a bouncing knee with one sword-rough palm. “I’ve seen your current crop of intendeds. That tough fate isn’t without its compensations, yeah?”

Hadrian blushed at that, even as he failed to hold back a pleased, proud smirk.

Vlad nodded and rose back towards the decanters, mission accomplished.

“Now.” He demanded. “Tell me all about your cousin. She’s single, yes?”

Hadrian laughed, realizing with that half-hopeful half-arrogant prince tone that Vlad was actually taken with Dora and not just trying to stir up Siri.

“Forget about it, Vlad.” He snorted. “It doesn’t matter how pretty you are, or how many castles you own. Dora’s a tough, career-minded, Black witch.” He shook his head as he snickered. “Siri cursing you impotent would be the least of your problems if you start chasing her. Better stick with an easier bride…like an asp or a honey badger.”

“Ah my young friend.” Vlad sighed knowingly. “Every once and a while you speak words that remind me of just how much you have left to learn…”

…

Coronation Day.

A day that the Empire of Avalon, its allies, and magical nations all around the world had been waiting on with baited breath since Hadrian’s Claiming two years before.

Staring out over the gathered crowd, Hadrian took a deep breath and held it as Lord Ollivander as Avalon’s High Magister called out, exhorting the crowd to all rise for his grace the King.

Enchanted mirrors hung high in the Throne Room, which had been expanded to fit the massive guest list, not that one would notice amongst all the glittering crystal, candlelight, and shining white marble with rivers of gemstones running through it. The mirrors had been set with a temporary two-way spell, courtesy of the ingenuity of the remaining Marauders, and the password spell to key into them had gone out in every paper – major and minor – in the wizarding world. Hadrian had been told via Lucius that in many pubs and inns and other gathering places that coronation parties were taking place, citizenry of all walks of life able to enjoy and witness the coronation, much as they had for another monarch of Great Britain decades before via television.

He had been preceded by Lord Ollivander with his mage’s staff topped with a gleaming emerald, who was accompanied and flanked by Remus as the Lord Protector who held Ancuru in its enchanted stand on his right and Lady Amelia Bones on his left as both the Lord High Justice and one of his Ministers of Magic, upon whose hands rested a pillow covered in purest silk that held something not seen in generations: the Crown of Avalon.

Where the throne in Skye Palace was relatively new compared to that held in the Great Hall of Snowdon or Camelot, the crown was ancient and heavy with both meaning and spellwork.

Much like a Lordship ring, it would not accept anyone unworthy, no matter what a blood test said or a High Magister declared.
Ancuru was the first test of an heir.

The crown was the last.

It was a simple thing, modest compared to more modern crowns, engraved with runes and older than Ancuru or Skye Palace, of harking from the union of Emrys and Pendragon.

A band of mithril, forged by master-goblin craftsmenship and with an unending “lease” from the goblin nation, with the runes for strength, longevity, power, and wisdom repeating on each side of the band, it was set with a single square cut diamond in the rare deep purple of Avalon chosen by the first joint king of the nascent empire.

Legend said that a king who wore the crown of Avalon had no fear of either an assassin’s poison or a craven’s blade, so significant was its protections.

For Hadrian’s sake, his family hoped it was true, as while Vlad hadn’t been right about who might be plotting his demise…he wasn’t wrong in the supposition that at least someone, somewhere was at any given moment – whether in truth or merely in flight of fancy.

Such were the risks of rule.

Hadrian’s Guard, led by McG in their finest uniforms, came after the trio of symbols and lined the purple carpet that led from the rear of the throne room and the curtained doors to the waiting dais and throne.

Breath steady and sure, Hadrian garbed in plain silk robes and naught else, barefoot as the ancient ceremony demanded, stepped forward.

King of the Empire of Avalon.

…

The coronation protocol was opposite that of the wedding and reception, where everyone else was peacocked and colorful in the colors and sigils of their house or family while Hadrian was plain, coming before Magic to be judged and blessed as King of one of Her Empires without conceit or artifice.

Just himself.

Just Harry, the lost boy who was found and became a king.


Just him, bared to magic, and waiting for Her judgement.

Turning as he made the dais and throne, he stood facing not just magic as he felt a substantial, oppressive weight settled in the air around him, but also his people and his peers, the other magical rulers who had gone through some version of this same thing – if they were like him from one of the Blessed families.
“Sirs.” Lord Ollivander pronounced to the assembly, though only the citizens of Avalon would answer him. “I present to you here your undoubted King. All who come here this day, can you say the same?”

“Magic bless the King!”

Garrick nodded and Hadrian sat, the elderly Lord of House Ollivander bringing forward the mage staff and holding it before the king with his magic alone.

“Sir, are you willing to take the oath?”

“I am willing.” Hadrian said, taking a breath and reaching out with his right hand placing it upon the now-glowing emerald of the staff.

“Will you solemnly promise and swear to govern the magical Citizens of the Empire of Avalon and of your Possessions and other Territories to any of them belonging or pertaining, according to their respective laws and customs?”

“I do so promise.” Hadrian’s voice failed to waver even as the magic pressed down upon him, threatening to send him tumbling to the floor with every word and every vow passing between Ollivander and himself, only his sheer bloody-minded stubbornness keeping him in place and his tone steady at points as even those in the front rows of the assembly began to sway from the force of it all reaching them in heady waves of power.

“Will you to your power cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgements?”

“I will.”

“Then give your vows of kingship before this company and to your people.”

Sucking in a breath, Hadrian fisted his hand in unconscious reaction to the emerald he held as it burned, threatening – or so it seemed – to sear him to the bone as more than one witness in the gathering fainted from the now-crashing waves of power that warned both him – and them – of the severity of his charge.

“I, Hadrian Augustus, Lord and King of Avalon as chosen by Magic Herself, swear upon my magic that I will defend and preserve, with all My power, the independence and territory of the Empire of Avalon; that I will protect the freedom and the rights of all citizens and all residents of the Her Territories; that I will maintain and preserve the absolute monarchy of the Seven Royal Houses of Avalon; discharge the office of the Throne with justice and fairness; and will employ for the maintenance and promotion of the welfare of my people all the means Magic places at my disposal, as a good and true King and Emperor should do.

So Mote It Be.”

In thunderous echo of his Lordship Ball, magic and light crashed and rang through the hall, then were swept away as if they’d never been at all, save for the telling witch or wizard who needed to be revived, having been overcome by the pressure of the gathered power.

The mage staff held by Ollivander whipped itself vertical and slapped firmly into the palm that moments before its stone threatened to scorch, the emerald glowing in proof of power as the company cried out: “So mote it be!” and cheers rang throughout the empire and toasts were made to his grace, Hadrian Augustus, Lord and King of Avalon.

Serious ritual over – for the moment – Hadrian stood and was robed by Lady Maggie, once more
The coronation had been resplendent in the Pevensie jewels, as she would be until he wed David, that lady draping his young, strong from in a dark purple Acromantula silk robe of finest make, the crest of Avalon upon its back with the seven crests of his royal houses embroidered in white diamond and mithril thread upon his left front side and his six noble houses upon his right. Siger stepped forward as she stepped back and with equal ceremony – and no little pride though less tears glittering in his eyes – cinched his robe with his sword belt at his hip, Hadrian finally tall enough that Ancuru didn’t drag behind him when worn thus. Though Hadrian had to say, of it all, perhaps what he would remember most was watching as his foster-uncle and one of his sternest taskmasters Sherrinford stepped forward and knelt after Hadrian had once more taken his seat and shod his feet in basilisk-hide soft-boots lined with softest graphorn wool.

Each step of the “garbing” ceremony had significance: his “mother” wrapping him in his robe of state, his “father” gifting him with a warrior’s belt, and his Lord High Chancellor shoeing him in particular as a symbol of the Privy Council’s service to their king.

But then, what in a coronation wasn’t symbolic or significant in some way, no matter how mad it might seem?

Who, after all, needed sanity when they could have magic?

Ollivander during all this had stepped back, allowing Remus to come forward and facing Hadrian from the step below, holding up Ancuru as Hadrian once more rose, his staff moved to his left side so he could take and sheath Ancuru with his right as Remus proclaimed:

“A staff is the weapon of the mage, the sword of the warrior. Kings of Avalon must be both, for magic without action is dust in the wind, as strength without wisdom is the ruin of nations.”

Taking up Ancuru and holding it high, Hadrian waited long moments as the runes upon the blade pulsed once, twice, thrice and then laid quiet, sheathing it in a practiced, fluid motion as was required lest any fumbling be seen as an ill omen.

As Hadrian sat once more, Amelia stepped up onto the stool behind the throne, the crown of Avalon in her hands and lowered it onto his brow.

“By the power vested in me as Lord High Justice of Avalon and Minister of Magic for Wizarding Great Britain, I, Lady Amelia Bones of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Bones, do hereby crown you in the presence and agreement of this company, Hadrian, Lord and King of Avalon.”

Cheers rang out, “Long live the King! Long live the King!” as Amelia stepped down and back, and the crown settled quiescent onto Hadrian’s smooth brow.

It was one hell of a birthday present.

Lord Ollivander stepped forward first, the others filing off the dais in order, and gave his vow of fealty to his new liege lord and King.

“I, Garrick, Lord of the Utmost Ancient and Noble House of Ollivander, do become your liege man of life and limb, and of earthly worship; and faith and truth I will bear unto you, to live and die, against all manner of being. So mote it be.”

The old wandmaker pressed his kiss of loyalty to Hadrian’s royal signet ring and rose from his kneel,
stepping back and bowing once, then returned to the king’s side to take up his charge of safekeeping
the King’s mage staff – oak, he noted with a core of mingled dragon heartstring and phoenix ashes,
topped with the Emrys emerald – while the other nobles and lords of Avalon came forward and gave
their oaths, beginning with the King’s husband as the Lord of House Nimue, then his head chatelaine
and her grandson as the Regent and Heir of House Longbottom, followed by the Privy Council, and
then the other lords and nobles in order of rank, with the Ministers of Magic for the various territories
after them, with Natalia Graves as the head of ADAM and the newest official member of Avalon
coming last.

Once every oath had been given and accepted, and all the oath-takers had returned to their seats the
company once more rose, having been seated after the crowning and cries of “Long live the King!”

Hadrian rose with them as in smooth concert Wills moved back to kneel before his beloved, his
brother Henry trotting at his side with a pillow in his hands, upon which sat his charge for the day:
William’s consort circlet which Hadrian had commissioned from the finest artisans (though not the
goblins as they preferred to work strictly with mithril) in platinum set with alternating emeralds and
diamonds. It was half an inch thinner in the band than Hadrian’s crown, as was tradition for a male
consort, though the ornamentation was left to his own choice. And as usual, Hadrian had chosen to
flaunt just how much he valued his husband and best-friend, even lining the band with a blend of
pure silk and cotton so it would not rub or chafe Wills’s creamy skin.

“By the power vested in me, as King of the Empire of Avalon and all her Territories, I crown you
William Alexander Emrys-Nimue, King-Consort of Avalon, first-consort of the Crown!”

…

…

Author’s Note: Yes, I used quite a few chunks of ideas from Queen Elizabeth II’s coronation, as well
as what I did for Jon’s coronation in Tomb of the First Men for this chapter. And I’m not sorry…
Vlad took the proffered flute of champagne that night at the Coronation Ball, held in the Skye Palace
Great Hall from the server – who wasn’t a house elf as one would expect in a fortress that hovered
over a backwards place like Wizarding Great Britain but who he thought based on their aura was a
hedgewitch – with a gracious smile as he returned to scoping out the game afoot, both the players
and the prospects.

The game, as it always was at this time of year in WGB and at any affair of this kind, was that of the
most important to the magical nobility: that of succession.

Players, naturally, were those in the hunt whilst prospects were their quarries, and to make it
interesting both parties often changed roles from one moment to the next.

It was a game that Vlad, like any reigning monarch without a spouse or heirs, took deadly serious.

Especially as he didn’t want to end up like his father, marrying into the wrong family and dying for
it.

Though Vlad did take a second from his intent search of the massive ballroom and the linked
chambers that provided all kinds of entertainment from music to food to even gaming, a true Rout in
the English tradition, to cast a genuine smile and a lift of his glass towards his host and friend the
newly-crowned Hadrian as he succeeded (finally, to Vlad’s eyes it had taken some doing) in coaxing
his husband and first-consort back out onto the dance floor after their opening waltz.

Young William it seemed had taken more than a few days to work through the issues that arose with
his husband’s official betrothal to three additional wizards, though if the head-tossed-back laugh that
poured out of the young man’s peachy lips was any indicator, he’d at last come to terms with it.

Good show, old son. Vlad wished him well with his consort, even as he spied who he thought might
make a fine one of his own.

Hadrian had all-but-dared him, after all.

And what sort of Sovereign Prince would he be if he just let that lie…

Wills snorted another laugh as he peeped over his Rian’s shoulder at the drama playing out across the
heaving ballroom.

“He’s going to get his bits hexed off.” Wills laughed, burying his head in Rian’s neck as Prince
Vlad barely dodged a stomp of a blushing Dora’s slipper as she rolled her eyes at whatever line the
suave prince had led with, the daughter of House Black being “saved” whether she wanted to be or
not, by her ever-hovering elder cousin. “Siri looks at his wits end with all the attention Dora’s
getting.”
“I know.” Rian laughed into Wills’s ear, fighting off an unkingly bout of the giggles as a turn of the dance showed a pouting Vlad, a heatedly gesturing Siri, and a sneaking-off Dora. “She likes him though.” He added. “Or else she would’ve done that *I’m a Black and you’re dirt* thing that she learned from her mum and Lady Narcissa.” He wagered, having seen Nymphadora Black-Tonks do just that to suitor after suitor at both his Lordship ball and their wedding reception.

Wills nodded in agreement, knowing of what his husband spoke.

“Come on.” He prodded Rian as the music wound down. “Let’s go save your friend before he really *does* get his bits hexed off. Remus isn’t having any luck calming down your dogfather.”

His Rian groaned under his breath and grumbled, much preferring to keep dancing rather than save Vlad from himself, but agreed nonetheless, allowing Wills to tow him over to his godfathers and friend and distract Siri with “how grown my pup is getting!” as the Animagus had been having *issues* ever since they’d gotten married…though whether it was over Hadrian growing up or Sirius feeling old as a result, no one was quite sure…

…

Hadrian ended up whirling around the dance floor with all of his betrotheds/intended as well as Wills, though thankfully Wills had come to some sort of peace with the situation after it slapped him in the face at his Rian’s and Tavi’s betrothal ritual.

He’d been prepared – or at least so he’d thought – but no amount of preparation could ready a person for watching as their spouse locked-lips with another person.

And unlike their own betrothal kiss, Rian’s and Tavi’s was a lot less tame, though not vulgar or inappropriate. Just…passionate. Sensual, like everything else Octavian Prince.

The brief lips-touch of Rian and Julian and Rian and Natsu had been much easier to deal with.

Both of those men – no matter how attractive – were virtual strangers.

For a long moment Wills had understood down to his bones the insecurity Tavi had been struggling with for the last couple years – and needless to say he didn’t like it.

He didn’t like feeling it, but more importantly, he didn’t like what it said about *him* and his own confidence in his bonded and Rian’s love.

So, he’d gone to the one person he thought could really help: his Mum.

…

Wills knew that his Mum had loved his Father very much at one point, and now that he was older and they were going through troubles he understood what his family meant about *that woman*.

Divorce.

It was an ugly word.

An uglier thing to be dealing with, even with Wills spending much of his time anymore in Avalon or otherwise with Rian than with his birth family in the center of the media firestorm.

The divorce rumblings were quiet, which he thought Rian might have a hand in, but the scandal was an inferno with his father’s former mistress barely waiting for him to leave for a trip to “repair his
relationship with the Princess of Wales” before selling her story to the gossip rags.

With the dirty laundry aired, and his parents existing thus far for the last month in an icy stalemate, he hoped that his mum might have advice or comfort to give him, though his own situation is worlds away from her own.

And she did.

“There were three of us, in my marriage.” Diana had sat him down on her bed at Skye Palace, running her elegant fingers through his blond hair. “For the longest time, before it began even. It was a bit crowded.” She sighed, closed her eyes, and continued. “But that wasn’t what broke us.”

“What did?” William asked, frowning over at her.

She pursed her lips, debating for a long moment, then said it.

“He wanted a daughter, and I gave him a son.” The tone, even years later, was nothing less than bitter. “That was it. He didn’t want much to do with Harry, or with me, and the shutters just…came down. With the love gone, only the duty was left.” Diana tilted her head. “As it turns out, duty wasn’t enough anymore for me.”

“There will be more than three of us in my marriage.” William noted.

“Yes, there will be.” Diana nodded. “However, Hadrian is no Charles. I believe that he’s the sort that will manage to multiply his love, not divide it. More,” she smiled genuinely at the thought, even though she was much too young to be a grandmum. “I doubt he would ever do anything in the world that would kill your love for him.”

…

Feeling rough hands clasp his own, William jerked out of his reverie and back into the present, letting himself lose his worries in the laughter and smiles and pure joy that had taken the day as David pulled him into a circle dance with the others that now made up his closest family: Rian and Tavi, Julian and Natsu, David and himself. They were to be a family, the six of them plus more. And one thing he’d learned the hard way with his birth family, was that they would be what they made of it.

And he wasn’t about to lose this time of being Hadrian’s sole husband, to cement their relationship and grow their love to scars left behind by the family that made him.

…”

“What is it, Wills?” Rian asked him that night, as they snuggled together trading sleepy kisses, his mum’s words still haunting his mind.

“I…”

“Whatever it is, you can tell me.”

“I think my parents are getting a divorce.”

…”

After an early morning exploring a new first, brought on by the renewed sense of closeness between the royal couple though no clothing was removed on their lower regions, it was a blushing pair that
sat down to breakfast in Hadrian’s suite in the King’s Tower.

A sight which greeted a far-too-awake for the hour Lucius as he entered after a perfunctory knock.

“Whatever it is the answer is no.” Hadrian said at once, all-too-familiar with that particular look in
his Lord of the Privy Seal’s eyes.

“Sorry, can’t.” Lucius nearly chirped if it wouldn’t have been undignified of him. “Part of the royal
package your grace.”

“Russell?” Hadrian craned his head around the svelte figure of Malfoy towards the nondescript form
of his private secretary.

“He’s right, I’m afraid.” Russell informed him. “A photo shoot this morning has been on your
calendar for months to go with the joint-interview tomorrow with Lord Holmes.”

“The papers have been baying for new blood and the coronation and glittering assemblage will only
sate the likes of Witch Weekly.” Lucius informed the royal couple, hands resting elegantly on his
walking stick before him. “Either we give the harder-hitting papers something to run with or they’ll
start finding it for themselves, which no one wants as you’re due to sign the new bills into law
tomorrow.”

Hadrian grumbled, William chuckling at his predicament until Lucius reminded him with glee:

“That means you as well, your Grace.” Lucius smirked at the now-scowling King-Consort. “And
thanks to the timing of his other Grace, the rest of the future Consorts as well.”

Hadrian swore, William snarled, and Lucius laughed at their frustration as Russell pretended to be
deaf and blind as he started in on reading off the schedule for the day.

…

Daily Prophet August 3, 1993

Upheaval in Magical Great Britain as Wizengamot Unveils New Laws!

Muggleborns, Squibs, Hedgemagicals, even Creatures Oh My!

All Under Scrutiny!

Progressive Thinking or Aggressive Actions by Ruling Bodies?

You Decide

Page 6

By Rita Skeeter

…

Exclusive Interview with King Hadrian and Lord High Chancellor Holmes!

All About New The New Legislative Actions, Entering Hogwarts, and More!

Pages 2-5
Julian and Natsu were only staying a week after the coronation as their families departed two days later, which gave Lucius his desired photo-ops of Hadrian posing with each of his intendeds before they returned to their homes.

It also gave Hadrian a bit of time to show off Avalon City to both them and Vlad, who had extended his visit after starting a two-steps-forward one-step-back chase with Dora...who by the information-pumping tea-time ambush she’d sprung on her royal cousin, wasn’t exactly upset by the attention from the rogue Sovereign Prince.

Though whether it would become something more than an idle fancy for both of them remained to be seen, nevertheless Andromeda and Sirius were both keeping an eye on the pair.

Andy because she knew her daughter, and Sirius because as a former rogue he recognized the type...and wanted Vlad to keep far, far away from his “baby cousin.”

At this point Hadrian and Remus had a bet on whether Dora would have a flaming affair with the prince just to spite them.

That avenue for entertainment aside, and the drama going on in the press, Hadrian, Wills, Tavi, and David all had shopping to do for their return to Hogwarts, as this was the last year of David’s apprenticeships before venturing out into a field-internship as a Junior Cursebreaker...likely with Gringotts.

Draco, Neville, and Blaise, naturally, accompanied them, making for a large-but-happy group that port-keyed over to the main shopping district in Avalon City from Skye Palace five days after the coronation and two days after the press announced this year’s spate of law changes, something Wizarding Great Britain had grown to expect at this time of year following the new-legislation block of the Wizengamot’s summer session.

Supply lists had gone out, albeit delayed a day as 31 July had been blocked out by the coronation.

For the thirteen-year-olds the list was quite hefty depending on how many classes they planned to sign up for:

First-year students will require:

- **Uniform**
  - Three Sets of Plain Work Robes (Black)
  - One Pair of Protective Gloves (dragon hide or similar)
  - One Winter Cloak (Black, silver fastenings)
  - Please note that all student's clothes should carry name-tags at all times.

- **Books**
  - The Standard Book of Spells, Grade 3 by Miranda Goshawk *Charms*
  - A History of Magic by Bathilda Bagshot *History of Magic*
  - Medieval Sorcery by Icarus Stuart *History of Magic*
  - The Decline of Pagan Magic by Bathilda Bagshot *History of Magic*
  - Intermediate Transfiguration by Emeric Switch *Transfiguration*
  - Goshawks’ Guide to Herbology by Miranda Goshawk *Herbology*
  - Magical Drafts and Potions by Arsenius Jigger *Potions*
  - Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them by Newt Scamander *CoMC*
Tavi and David’s lists were quite a bit smaller, with David entering his final year of Hogwarts and Tavi his fourth.

At the least, none of them were taking either OWLs or NEWTs, but David would have to take a battery of exams to qualify for a field-internship and become a certified Cursebreaker at the end of it, still even that paled in comparison to the stress that NEWTs tended to cause as there was no stigma if an apprentice or intern had to take qualification exams more than once.

The same could not be said for the standardized testing required by the ICW’s education division for an accredited school of magic.

As Avalon had only been found two years before, Avalon City was still in the progress of being settled by Avalonian citizens from all countries and territories, though some of the first to take up residence had been the Embassies located in the international quarter, which brought with them shopkeeps and merchants eager to supply them from the surface.

A major project had begun within hours of Hadrian Claiming Avalon, sorting through all the applications and deeds submitted by citizens highborn and common, tradesmen and nobility, to the empty properties maintained by the Avalon house elves for hundreds of years.

The main estates had been the simplest to manage, as those families were all still in extent today, if only through a single person like Hadrian.

It was the others that were the headache, often with more than one claimant, and kept Gringotts branches all over the world hopping for months as they sorted through the morass and then forwarded any disputes on to be adjudicated.

Still, a good portion of the claimants, even upon their cases being recognized and titles and deeds being ceded over were reluctant to pull up stakes and move hearth and home to the reclaimed city, as such while some used Avalon as a summer or vacation home, others still either set up secondary shops or cadet branches of their family, and those not taking advantage of either option and not wanting to move were then able to sell their claim back to the Empire, which maintained a waiting list for those anxious and eager to move to the floating city.
Hadrian insisted on the claims being sold to the Empire and then resold for two simple reasons: one, it kept the prices from ballooning out of control, and two, it allowed them to vet who was settling in as his next-door neighbors – and who were not.

Needless to say, those “undesirables” that Hadrian was leery of allowing close found themselves among the group *eager* to sell their claim to the fabled city.

He knew he wouldn’t be able to prevent crime or bigotry in Avalon…but he could certainly keep known problems from camping on his doorstep.

…

The group waiting in the courtyard to go shopping shifted a bit restlessly as they were delayed by a missing member.

Julian, with Nefertiti on his heels, simply gestured towards his baby sister with a put-upon sigh in explanation as the others smirked at him, all but Tavi who flinched at the glare his twin sister Livia cast at his head when it appeared that he might join the ranks of unsympathetic males.

Kings and McG were their Guards, but the group by necessity also included more than one lady besides the High Priestess of Bast and the sixteen-year-old Livia Prince, with Lady Maggie in attendance as chaperone given the mixed nature of the group, with Giselle Collins, Blaise’s mother, accompanying them as well.

It was an outing that would normally contain Lady Narcissa and Lady Andromeda, however as both ladies were expecting, neither one desired to squire around a group of teenaged boys, even with the inclusion of Princess Nefertiti and Prince Julian, the former leaving it up to her husband to keep an eye on their son, especially as he was yet to have an unchaperoned visit with his betrothed Livia.

And if Lucius had to suffer the shopping trip, so to by magic did Severus.

A wise precaution on Lady Malfoy’s part, as it wasn’t only Hadrian who suffered a moment of distraction when at the clothiers where the group were being fit for their Hogwarts uniforms – if needed for the older students – when the High Priestess who usually wore concealing robes tried on a Hogwarts’ girls uniform…complete with short mini-skirt. The discrete – if painful – stinging hexes from the wands of the older gentlemen were the only thing that saved more than one young man from an icy rest of the trip. Wills, who had both been distracted and noticed Rian’s own, just found it vastly entertaining when his husband gave a muffled yelp that was echoed by Draco.

With their robes on order, they found themselves shepherded towards a magical luggage shop that Lucius preferred, the first years debating various features while the visitors wandered around the store, Julian and Nefertiti comparing the styles to the ones he preferred for his work, and Natsu investigating a few cases that were specialized for duelists to carry their edged weapons in for competitions.

“And how would the Heirs and their Graces prefer their trunks?” The proprietor asked once they’d all decided on their individual models.

“Black and silver with the Malfoy crest.” Draco spoke first with a glance at his father who nodded in approval.

“Brown and cream, Longbottom crest.” Neville stepped up next, with a softer tone than his flamboyant friend.

“All black, with the initials B.E.Z. in silver.” Blaise shrugged it off, not minding in the least over the
lack of crest, though his step-mother offered to get permission from her brother for him to use their family crest he didn’t see the point. He wasn’t nobility. And given the expectations that followed his friends around, thank Loki for that.

“Black and light blue.” Wills decided. “With the Emrys crest on one side of the lock and the Nimue crest on the other.”

“Black and green.” Hadrian went last. “With my personal crest only.”

“Yes, your Grace.” The luggage maker nodded. “Delivery guaranteed for tomorrow at the latest.”

“Thank you, sir.” Hadrian nodded back regally, signing off on the slip for himself and Wills with a flourish, the others either presenting their Gringotts cards or their father in Draco’s case taking care of it the same as they’d done at the tailor.

Wills had protested, as he had more than enough wealth between his mundane inheritance and his Nimue accounts to buy his own things, only to find that in this case at least, his Rian was intractable.

People would be able to say many things about him over the course of his reign, but never would they say that he took anything less than the utmost care of his husbands, a fact proven out as with a discrete signal to the shopkeep, Hadrian had the weapons case Natsu had eyed but set aside after several long moments added to his bill and arranged for it to arrive with the rest, thankfully before his betrothed was due to return to Japan.

A scene that played itself out again and again, with the peacock feather quill Nefertiti eyed at the stationary store, the first-edition at the bookstore for Julian, the decorative crystal potions phial at the apothecary for Tavi, and dragonhide carry-all that attached to a broom at the Quidditch shop once all the “required” items had been ordered and paid for that David had picked up and played with for a solid five minutes before putting it back with a sigh that he didn’t need it until next year.

“I’m surprised.” The High Priestess commented as they all sat – thankfully – between the apothecary and the Quidditch shop for a spot of ice cream at Florean Fortescue’s second location in the up-and-coming shopping distract that both Lady Maggie and Lord Malfoy favored.

There were several shopping districts in the several-square-mile Avalon City, including the “High” district they were now browsing through as the goal of the day had been completed and the international district near the embassies. Some shopping areas were geared more towards families, other towards food, and so on. But the High district and the Main district tended to have a little bit of everything, as seen by their ability to stay in a single square and find all the supplies for Hogwarts plus a few spots of recreational shopping.

Florean’s son Flavian was in charge of the second shop, with his father still manning the original location in Diagon Alley, and the younger Fortescue wheeled out the large group order with the flick of his wand as the Princess finished her thought.

“I would have thought we would be swarmed by press long before now.”

It was a common thought now that it had occurred to several members of the group – at least, if they didn’t already know the secret to their privacy.

“It’s a privacy ward, little cat.” Her brother clued her in, nodding to the pendants Hadrian was wearing and its twins around the necks of his betrotheds, tapping his own. “Keeps the press or anyone with a camera spell on their mind away.” Julian arched a brow at his intended. “Which I gather is the secret to there being no truly scandalous or just silly pictures of you floating around in
the news like some of my siblings.”

Nefertiti stuck her tongue out at her brother, uncaring of the childishness of the gesture, knowing that the last bit was at last partially directed at her.

She may be stuck as a High Priestess, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t able to have fun…just not marry or leave the service of the Goddess.

“Aw, Harry.” David teased. “Now we have a little cat and a little king.”

Hadrian narrowed his eyes at his friend, hissing: “I will kill you one of these days.”

“Not until after the wedding, one would hope.” Tavi drawled with the acid tongue he inherited from his father. “I have no intention of being stuck with his brother as a co-spouse, thank-you-very-much.”

Those familiar with Rhys Wallace snorted out, or covered their laughs with a cough as David gave an exaggerated roll of his eyes, their foreign guests just shrugging as the joke was lost on them, none of them having been introduced to Lord Wallace’s younger son as of yet.

“Trust me.” Blaise whispered in a mock-aside, his voice carrying around the grouped tables but no further thanks to the wards. “You don’t want to be stuck with Rhys for life either.” He told the pair of princes and the lovely princess. “He’s my friend…but he’s been stricken with more than a little of the stupidity virus lately.”

“Ah, I see.” Natsu nodded obligingly. “Like my cousin Sakura.”

“Yes.” Hadrian and the Egyptian pair all agreed heartily, only to send the rest of the group back into laughter once again.

…

Roaming the halls of Skye Palace the next morning, in search of a gym or dojo or salle, Prince Natsu took the suggestion of his guard provided by his betrothed – a title that if he forgot himself the Avalon-style cuff on his wrist in mithril with blue sapphire and jade cabochons was there to remind him – and found himself walking in on a tableau that curiously echoed that which brought him to Hadrian-denka’s attention in the first place…but very different at the same time.

For one, Hadrian-denka was not alone practicing but locked in a spar.

For two, neither Hadrian-denka nor his opponent who Natsu recognized as his friend/intended David-san were fully dressed but stripped to the waist showing off the impressive musculature of whom Natsu had heard Octavian-san refer as “Hadrian’s Highlander.”

Hadrian-denka himself wasn’t weak or lacking in strength by any means, as shown by his ability to hold ground against the much-larger David-san, however there was no denying that David-san was a grown man while Hadrian-denka was still developing. Beyond the obvious differences in sheer strength, Natsu noticed that both fighters had a similar style, though of the two Hadrian-denka was much faster than his opponent, a necessity given David-san’s much longer reach. They would likely be equals one day, when Hadrian-denka was older, but for now in hand-to-hand at least, he found himself falling in the end to his friend, as Natsu thought would be the outcome after studying them for a few moments.

Natsu applauded nonetheless, walking in on quiet feet as the pair of now-joking and wrestling fighters stopped and turned to watch him glide into the room in his regular sparring outfit with his
bamboo practice staff in hand.

It wasn’t a real weapon, and wouldn’t do much good in a fight, but he rather doubted either his guard or those that shadowed Hadrian-denka would allow him such in close proximity to their charge anyway, as even the guards at the Sakura Palace likewise protected his father, even from his own family in case of an attempted coup.

“Are you familiar with the staff, Hadrian-denka?” Natsu asked, head tilted a bit as he took in the view with nary a blush and steady eyes as the pair climbed to their feet, sweat-slicked skin on display and revealing the crest-shaped scar over Hadrian-denka’s heart.

A remnant of his Claiming if Natsu knew anything about such things.

His father had one similar in the same place, though a different design.

Natsu was unfortunately too far away, and the detail too fine, to make out which crest it was that magic marked her Avalon King with upon his Claiming.

Well.

A mission for another day.

For today, he was after a spar that he’d been thinking on for over a year and a half, that he had no intention of returning to Japan without.

His father was content with the strengthening of their alliance that his bonding to Hadrian-denka posed.

His mother happy with her plotting and that another of her children made a fine and strong match.

Natsu wouldn’t be content with it until he tested Hadrian-denka himself, and in his own way, some of his worries had been assuaged by his short visits for the wedding of Hadrian-denka to William-denka, and the fresh view he’d gotten of the pair and the other anticipated consorts during the coronation celebrations and shopping trip the day before, but not all of them.

No, not all.

If he was to marry a King, he wanted it to be a King that he could respect at the least.

He didn’t expect love, not from a political match.

But he would have respect, both for his spouse and from him, or he would find a way to escape the trap his sister set for him even if it means being banished in disgrace back to his father’s house.

…

“So,” Vlad smirked feeling the warmth of sweet, sweet revenge. “How’d it go?”

A limping Hadrian just glared at the Carpathian twat lurking in his study and – once again – drinking his booze.

Only this time somehow he’d located his best cognac instead of merely the good cognac.

The arsehole.

“I’m going to tell Siri to hex you bald.” Hadrian whispered, holding in a pained whimper with the
last of his pride. Then he frowned. “How’d you know, anyway?”

“No one else would kick your little kingly arse other than your instructors in London.” Vlad said knowingly.

“House Elf information tree.” Hadrian corrected after he’d settled in his favorite chair and put up his leg, which thanks to a rap of Natsu’s staff was still throbbing like a bitch in heat.

“House Elf information tree.” Vlad agreed. “Your elf gets a pain potion, another replenishes, and so on and so forth. It’s a very complex yet accurate system.”

“Natsu has a level of mastery that wiped the floor with me.” Hadrian admitted, reaching into his robe and taking out another dose of pain relieving potion. There wasn’t anything to really heal… it just hurt. “But he seemed…”

“As stoic as ever?” Vlad suggested, familiar with the ways of the Japanese court. There weren’t that many royals running around after all.

“Pretty much but I thought he smiled – just a bit – when I countered his first few strikes.” Hadrian shrugged than gave an immediate wince. “Still, I’m younger than him so I’m hoping that counts for something.”

“Younger son.” Vlad commented. “Means he was trained as a secondary guard for his father and the crown prince. He’ll use that mastery that kicked your arse on your behalf once you bond. And since you lasted longer than ten seconds against him, or so the gossip goes and your rather pathetic face says, he probably won’t take off back to Japan as soon as the consummation sheets cool off.”

“Have I told you how much I hate you yet today, Vlad?” Hadrian commented, slowly and carefully leaning his head back as his friend passed him his glass half-filled with his best cognac.

“Not yet.” The other sovereign laughed, saluting him with one of the hand-rolled cigars that Hadrian kept – hidden of course – for visits from Siri. “But the day is young my pathetic friend.”

Vlad ended up leaving for his main residence in Romania without an official courtship in place with one Nymphadora Black-Tonks.

That didn’t mean that he left without hope, as she had accepted an (informal-non-binding) courtship gift of a Hit-Wizard grade custom-made wand holster and agreed to exchanging letters to see if they might suit with the caveat that she would not be entering into any contracts, betrothal, or otherwise until she completed Auror academy and was finished with her probation with the DMLE, which was two years away.

But, an official courtship was still on the table, and Vlad wasn’t the sort of wizard to be scared off by a strong woman.

Rather, he found her frankness and tenacity intoxicating after the parades of perfumed debutantes he’d been subjected to from the cradle.

Sirius watched this all with more than a little betrayal in his puppy dog eyes, especially when both Andromeda and Narcissa’s pregnancy tempers made it very clear that despite whatever instructions he was given by his godson, unless he wanted to spend some quality time locked in his Animagus form and sent to the pound he would not bite the visiting royal in the arse.
The Carpathian prince’s leave-taking was apparently some sort of silent signal to the other – if few – lingering guests from the coronation and the accompanying celebrations, as day by day Hadrian’s properties emptied, including – unfortunately as all involved were enjoying at least being able to *speak* to one another – Natsu and Julian.

Julian was needed back home at his job in America, while Natsu had to prepare for beginning his own apprenticeship in Spell Weaving at Mahoutokoro.

Neither left empty-handed, as in addition to their betrothal cuffs and the presents Hadrian had gotten them on the sly during the group visit to Avalon City, they had also exchanged their formal courtship gifts.

Being between royal houses, there was little room for individual choice as there were – as usual – traditions to follow with Hadrian receiving a Kinjal dagger engraved with the Ptolemy crest from Julian in reciprocity to the bow and quiver with the Slytherin crest he’d initiated with; while Natsu answered the set of fine tessen with the LeFey crest with a trio of traditional Japanese swords with the Rising Sun of House Hiro. Their official, royal, betrothed wasn’t the only one to gift them to both men’s surprise. True to form, none of Hadrian’s other spouses – future or current – were about to be left out.

Both princes were taken aback to find themselves receiving more than the formal gifts, even the tokens Hadrian had purchased for them while shopping were a surprise, but each thought – if only to themselves – that it was…*warm* of them to do, even such small tokens as some feathers from Wills’s pure-white Pegasus for Julian (hard to come by in the Pacific Northwest) or an invitation to correspond with David to Natsu.

Taking their leave with their sisters once more in tow, the royal matches found themselves with a bit more hope for their futures than they had before their arrival.

Which was rather the point of the gestures, after all.

…

“They’re waiting, your Grace.” Lucius reminded the King, who was staring off into space, likely grounding his Occlumency shields.

It was time for the last press conference – and one of only a handful Hadrian had given in the last two years – before he headed to Hogwarts and was effectively out of the public eye for the next few months until the Winter break.

True to Lucius’s prediction – and don’t think that Hadrian didn’t think that there was more than a little Divination involved with how well his Lord of the Privy Seal can anticipate the whims of the press – the pictures provided by the photographer hired on to cover the coronation and the photo shoot with Hadrian and his spouses, current and future, had satisfied the papers and gossip rags for several weeks as they hashed out everything from the circle dance (all six of them smiling and laughing as they whirled around, crowns glittering and shining on Hadrian and Wills and the coronets for princes on Julian and Natsu) to the finest details of the five-sets of “couples” poses he’d sat for with each of his confirmed husband/intendeds.

Wills, Tavi, and David in that way were all *old news* as far as the press was concerned, though they did like to gossip here and there over David’s dark good looks and dangerous career choice or Wills’ mundane relations, or Tavi’s former-Death Eater father.
But Julian and Natsu were new to the press, as no pictures had been released from the wedding of any of the royal envoys, as only the official portraits were allowed. The guest list had been disseminated, and raked over, but no pictures. So the sight of the two princes from Avalon’s closest allies laughing and dancing with the King and his consorts, then the official press release regarding their betrothals…well.

Wizarding Great Britain was in a tizzy, as of all Avalon’s territories, it was WGB that was the most possessive of the King.

Granted, not without reason.

Hadrian was born in Cornwall, raised there until being kidnapped to Surrey, and then spent his formative years between London and the Lake District.

His education had been distinctly British in design, and while he was fluent in many languages and had blended well into other cultures on his visits out of England or Avalon, there wasn’t much – if any – press coverage of those events.

And much of his Council were also from WGB, though Lucius was French in extraction, as was his Lord Marshall DuLac.

That three of his five consorts – at this point – were two Englishmen and a Scot…well.

It wasn’t only his accent that had WGB puffing out their chests over being able to “claim” him as their own.

A state of affairs he would need to alleviate at some point, the beginning of which he hoped to plant seeds for today with this press conference.

Hadrian was the King of Avalon, not the British King of Avalon, and his other territories needed some form of acknowledgement and attention.

That Britain was the most fucked up of his territories – and needed the sternest eye – only made the problem worse as he still to actually give it most of his focus until they settled the hells down and started behaving with some form of logic and sanity.

At least then, he might have a bit of breathing room to spend a summer in Russia or winter in France instead of having to be on-hand in case of the next MoM cock-up.

Lucius and Hadrian didn’t have what one would call a comfortable relationship, despite the close friendship that had developed between Draco and his father’s liege lord over the last two years studying together – and competing in Potions and their Dark Arts classes – however most would term it a companionable alliance.

Hadrian knew what he wanted from Lucius, and Lucius – utter Slytherin that he was – devised ways to fulfill or exceed his liege’s expectations.

But of all Hadrian’s royal household or Privy Council, he was also most at odds with his Lord of the Privy Seal for a very simple reason: while there was little Lucius would not do, Hadrian had a very well-developed sense of both justice and morality.

So while Lucius thought nothing at all of manipulating the public through the press – or any other method his tricky mind devised – Hadrian preferred a method of instead of controlling the press directly, simply controlling their access.
They could say what they pleased, so long as it was properly sourced and referenced.

*That* stuck in Lucius’s craw like nothing else.

Hadrian also didn’t play favorites with the press – for the most part allowing any of them the chance to pose a question during interviews or land a scoop about this or that.

What he *did* do was very carefully vet anyone allowed into Skye Palace, wore privacy wards whenever in public not on an official visit, and keep a distinct barrier between the press and his private life – including his consorts and family whenever possible.

Which was the cause of the current sticking point between Hadrian and Lucius, as despite Wills – and the others – being now the acknowledged chosen husband or suitors of the King, not one was present for the most recent press conference.

Hadrian at last nodded in wordless readiness, then preceded Lucius out to the ballroom of the Black Townhouse in London, which had become a sort of land-based headquarters for Lucius and any press events rather than clutter up the Ministry atrium or open Malfoy manor every time the Lord of the Privy Seal needed to meet with Martin Mimblewimble or another of the preferred writers for the various Avalonian and international papers.

Russell and Lalita following on their heels, Hadrian took the podium with the trio curving around behind him and the guards – most of the full force today, as any day where Hadrian has this sort of scheduled semi-public event – keeping a barrier between the stage and the press as the flashes of cameras went off like mad and the press corps shouted greetings as their sovereign.

“As Our Lord of the Privy Seal stated,” Hadrian began much more comfortable with these events than he had been a bundle of nerves at the first. “We will give a statement and then open the floor for questions.”

Lucius had already warned/reminded the press that their king was taking time out of one of the busiest times of year in any household let alone a royal one to speak to them.

Between the close of the Wizengamot, the end of the Summer Season, and the opening of the school year in just a week, people highborn and low tended to scramble at the end of August…and that was before you added in all the additional responsibilities of running an empire to the mix.

“This Season has brought many changes to Avalon.” Hadrian told them, quills scratching frantically under the direction of dictation spells to catch his every word. It had only taken one reporter misquoting them for the rest to learn of the cost. If he wasn’t mistaken, that idiot was currently stationed at the South Pole reporting on the migratory patterns of emperor penguins. “All of which We believe will lead to a stronger, more prosperous nation and Empire. As We move forward, the eyes of every magical nation – enemies, neutral, and allies alike – turn to Avalon to watch, to wait, and to wonder. They wait to see if We will stumble and fall under the weight of Our coronation vows. They watch Us as a leader in the magical world. And above all they wonder if the renewal of the Throne will succeed in once more uniting a scattering of peoples and citizens from all corners of the Mother into a strong, indivisible Empire. To them We say: No.”

Hadrian watched himself, emerald eyes gleaming with untainted power and resolve as the reporters shifted in confusion and Lucius cursed – quietly so as not to be picked up by the quills and ears before them – as his King and head-pain-in-the-arse once more went off-script.

“No.” Hadrian repeated, voice turning from steady to thundering. “There is no need to wait: for I will not stumble, I will not fall. No. They should not watch *me* as a leader in the magical world
from which to emulate but stand up and lead themselves if they find their nations not equal to the
Vows of Office which I have sworn. No. Do not wonder if I will unite my people and my
citizens.” Hadrian spread his arms wide, gesturing to the press corps themselves. “For here you are
and there you were upon my coronation: strong, proud, and undivided in your love and loyalty to the
Empire which was born from the life and magic and blood of seven great families. Look to
yourselves, I say, to answer those who doubt us and doubt our Empire. For Our People aren’t
merely seven nations and dozens of scattered territories but One People, with One Voice, and One
Desire: a prosperous Empire to call Home.”

Applause thundered through the ballroom and resounded across Avalon as the Wizarding Wireless
played his speech – and the following question-and-answer portion – for all his people to hear.

In Skye Palace, Wills, David, and Tavi exchanged amused glances, all well-familiar with how much
Hadrian hated doing these meet the press “dog-and-pony shows.”

For a young wizard who swore up and down and spent more than one morning incinerating
newspapers (usually Witch Weekly) with unholy glee, he certainly knew how to work them.

Though all who knew him had to agree that it was much more an issue of practicality on Hadrian’s
part than any real desire to be good at it.

But if the press were going to dance, Hadrian wanted them to dance to his tune and not any other,
lest he end up dancing to theirs.

Hadrian took a sip of the water handed to him by Lucius, then nodded to the reporters for the frenzy
of questions to begin – but a silent frenzy of waving hands, as they’d learned the hard way after his
second press conference that he would ignore anyone who was ill-mannered enough to shout.

“Martin?” He called on one of his favorites.

Martin Mimblewimble wasn’t a very auspicious name – or an auspicious man for that matter – to rise
up to the heights of being one of a king’s set of favored reporters. However, it was that exact
unassuming, quiet nature that made him a favorite. Martin didn’t shout. He didn’t shove others
down to raise himself up. And he most certainly never misquoted or misrepresented the King,
making him a rare creature indeed in an age where nothing sold so well as headlines featuring
scandal, sex, and King Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon.

Hopefully all three, though given his age, there wasn’t much of the first two to be found…yet.

Hope, however, sprang eternal in the hearts of the more vulturistic of the international press, one of
which watched Hadrian with a rapacious gaze through acid-green cat-eye glasses at every
appearance.

If it wasn’t for the precedent it would set, Hadrian would have Rita Skeeter behind bars.

Alas, he’d had to settle for wards preventing an Animagus from transforming in the government
buildings of Avalon and his territories, as well as hospitals without being specially keyed in like
Padfoot.

It wasn’t much, as she had a grasping and seeming infinite reach, but it was just enough to keep her
from her most offensive method of gathering her “interesting tidbits” as she’d put it when confronted
by Amelia for her illegal activities.

Needless to say, Rita was having a field-day with the scandal of the new King-Consort’s parents’
brewing divorce.
The viperous bitch.

“Your betrothal to Princes Julian and Natsu, your Grace.” Martin focused on the political, as that was his section of the Daily Prophet. “How have they affected the strained relationship between Avalon’s two most powerful allies?”

“Both my fellow sovereigns are pleased to renew their alliances with Avalon through a match between our great nations.” Hadrian replied with the standard answer for that question, one that he and Lucius had worked and reworked since before his Lordship ball. “And anticipate much good for all our peoples with the reunifications of our ancient lines.”

Giving a mental sigh, Hadrian called on the reporter from Witch Weekly – the official reporter versus the scattered freelancers such as Skeeter – knowing that her question would help round out the issue of his courtships/marriage and allow him to move onto more serious – or at least less personal – questions.

“Elspeth?”

Elspeth Smythe-Smith, as usual, was nearly bouncing in her boots. One of the few reporters that had never seemed to settle into these events the way her compatriots had. Not much of a surprise, as she was given more to fluffy, bouncy writing to go with her perky personality which belied a vicious temper if one of her more junior writers at her magazine even thought about trying to snag a royal piece away from her, with even the notorious Rita Skeeter not safe from her tongue if she thought her place was being in anyway usurped.

“Your grace.” The pretty-but-plain dishwater blonde witch in her late twenties dimpled up at the royal. “Thus far you’ve selected five of your expected thirteen future spouses, and with the matter of your grace’s contracts public record, is it safe for one to assume that leaves only one last contract to be fulfilled?”

It was the question every witch and wizard with eyes on a prince’s (or King- Consort’s) or Queen’s coronet wanted to ask, as it was assumed with Hadrian’s upcoming marriages to his closest allies, that he may choose less…politically for his other spouses, though he’d never made it a matter of record which of his contracts corresponded to what houses or even ever confirmed that his betrothal and marriage to Wills fulfilled one.

His contracts were open knowledge, and speculation ran rampant regarding them, but given his age it was assumed that none of his choices in this matter until he was older would be anything but politically motivated and/or a matter of contract.

And even Hadrian could see why the public thought as such.

Wills was the Lord of an Utmost House, Natsu and Julian were Princes, and both Tavi and David were Heirs to Most Ancient and Nobles Houses; all sound political matches even if he wasn’t under contract to wed them.

That he actually enjoyed the men he was to marry – or was already married to – didn’t seem to occur to anyone unless they’d seen him with Wills and noted the distinct warmth between the Couple Royal.

He wished he could tell everyone to mind their own buggering business, and as if reading his mind, Lucius gave a soft clearing of his throat.

“As ever, Elspeth, until all contracts are fulfilled, the Throne will not make public any details
regarding them.” He chided softly, then threw her a bone, no matter how meagre. “However, as it is now a matter of record, We will confirm that Our marriage to William Windsor-Nimue was a result of a contract between the House of Emrys and the House of Nimue.”

Which still wasn’t revealing any details or anything the public didn’t already know, but it would give her a soundbite for whatever fluff piece on his choices she was writing up for the next issue.

Narrowing his eyes – just a bit that wouldn’t show on camera – Hadrian noted the acid-green tipped nails that slyly crept into the air and the near-smirk on blood-tinged rouged lips.

Biting his tongue as a reminder to hold his temper – and better to face her head on now where he could deflect her than later where she’ll intentionally set out to goad him for ignoring her, he faced the spider in her web.

“Rita?” He arched a brow at the reporter, the others almost leaning out the way as their near-adversarial relationship was well known.

Though it should be noted, that at least they seemed to enjoy it more than their audience, who every now and then could see literal sparks fly as their King’s temper lit or Rita’s hair began to vent her excess magic.

“This Season has been an incredible one, filled with events due to the excitement surrounding both the royal wedding and the coronation.” Rita began with a statement before swooping in for the kill. “What do you have to say to the lack of courtships that have arisen in the wake of one of the most active social seasons in decades? Or the detractors that point towards your grace’s own well-known need for more spouses as the reason so many of our homegrown witches and wizards for refusing to settle down?”

You could hear a pin drop in the Black ballroom as the other reporters in unison sucked in a shocked breath at her bare-faced gall of that question after the King had deftly avoided a more politely worded pry into his personal relationships, and the weaker – or simply those with the strongest survival instincts – took a step away from the witch with the poison pen.

Behind him, Hadrian could almost hear Lucius close his eyes in defeat at the expectation of a shocking headline the next morning – or perhaps a Special Edition depending on how scathing his grace’s rebuttal became.

None of them were anticipating the response he gave, not even Rita if the gape-jawed shock on the venomous beetle’s face was any sign at all, let alone her rapidly blinking eyes.

Not that her shock kept her magic from guiding her Quick-Notes quill, as even on her deathbed Rita Skeeter would be ready for the next big scoop.

He laughed.

Genuine, head-tossed-back, full-belly laughter peeled from between well-formed lips and a becoming flush lit his golden-tan cheeks, emerald eyes sparkling.

A long moment passed as he regained his composure, knuckleing away a tear of mirth and catching his breath.

“Thank you, Rita.” He sighed. “I needed that. In answer to your question: I would tell my detractors to grow up. The Empire of Avalon has a current population of over twenty-four million witches and wizards spread over seven major countries and a dozen other territories. Our last census put the current population of magical England alone – not counting the rest of magical Great Britain
rounded out at three-hundred-thousand souls. It’s impossible, when looking at the hard facts of the
sheer numbers that all of the eligible witches and wizards in Britain and throughout Avalon are
waiting for one man – no matter who he might be – to swoop in and carry them away to Skye
Palace.” Hadrian shook his head with another chuckle. “I’ll marry who I marry – and in my own
good time. The rest of the world has better things to do than sit around waiting for me to toss a
crown at their feet, and that wouldn’t be the sort of spouse I would want anyway. Next question.”

Derringer Sweeps of Potions Quarterly stepped neatly into the stunned avoid left behind by his
proclamation, bringing a shift to the topic as he could be counted on to do whenever Rita or another
reporter began leading things astray.

Given what Hadrian knew of the uses of the “discretionary” galleons his Lord of the Privy Seal had
access to, Hadrian rather thought he knew why.

“What subjects are you looking forward to the most at Hogwarts, your Grace?” Sweeps asked, quill
poised. “The published graduation announcements from Hedwig Institute of Magic noted that your
Grace finished his pre-Hogwarts education magna cum laude.”

“I’ll be testing out of some subjects.” Hadrian replied candidly. “Or up into advanced placement on
Headmistress Flamel’s recommendation. I am excited to explore new subjects at Hogwarts, as
following the education reforms of two years ago, classes such as Healing, Warding, and Spell-
Weaving have returned to my bloodline’s venerated school of magic.”

“And your sorting, your Grace?” The expected follow-up came from Georgiana Willowby of
Emerging Trends in Magic, a half-scholarly and half-political periodical that had a following in the
movers-and-shakers of the magical world. At first glance, it wouldn’t be a topic of interest to such a
publication. However, when one considered the…potentials that each Hogwarts House had touted
for decades, it was one with the potential for far-reaching consequences for how Hadrian was
viewed post-Sorting both by WGB and the wider magical world at large.

“As King of Avalon, by Our very position as Head of each House of Hogwarts, cannot be Sorted.”
He answered, taking more than a little pleasure in killing that way of pigeonholing him dead before it
ever fully drew breath. “By Our blood we are every inch the Gryffindor as we are the Hufflepuff as
we are the Ravenclaw or the Slytherin.” He told them, smirking inside, though if the gentle – and
hidden – nudge from Lalita was any sign it was coming through a bit in his tone or body language,
forcing him to rein it in. “Our uniform shall bear the Hogwarts crest, and each week We will
represent a different House so as to not unduly influence the House Cup.”

He took another drink of water, in lieu of an eye-roll at the disappointment that was all-but-dripping
off of the press.

“Next question.”
The Unified Code of Avalon was the work of over a decade of preparation and study when it debuted on August 31, 1993 throughout the Empire of Avalon.

Begun as a flight of fancy between a pair of too-smart-for-their-own-good brothers and their werewolf friend, it was first presented as a rough-draft to the foster-brother of Sherlock and Mycroft Holmes in 1989, when his education reached the topic of the mess Wizarding Great Britain had become without steady leadership under the Ministry of Magic.

Hadrian saw its value instantly, and joined the task-force of Sherlock, Mycroft, and Remus, adding his own unique perspective and bringing along with it the knowledge of Master Auror Sirius Black, and the pragmatism of his Scottish steward Gawain Wallace.

In the end, over a dozen minds gave input to the Code before it was finalized, ready to be put into place when the sovereign of Avalon felt it time.

That time came a bare thirty days after his coronation and the day before he hied himself off to Hogwarts…leaving his Privy Council to deal with the fallout of the ultimatum that the Unified Code brought along with it:

The countries and territories of Avalon were given five years to come into compliance with the Code, or be faced with a reorganization the likes of which would make his clean-out of the British ministry look like a pleasant day on the beach.

Not in that language, of course.

Still, his Ministers understood him nonetheless.

Though given his coronation vows, anyone with a bit of logic to bring to bear would have been able to see that particular writing on the wall.

Two sections in particular were considered of the most importance – and therefore subject to the most stringent inspection – crime and education.

A disparate pair at first glance, however when one considered the moves Hadrian had already made in said areas in Britain alone, it was easy to see that they were close to his heart, and ever-present on his mind.

…”

Witch Weekly Headline: Week of 30 August 1993

Hearts-They-Are-A-Breaking!

King Hadrian Rejects Fairy-Tale Ideals!

No Being Swept Off Your Feet With This
Hadrian leaned against the balcony off the King’s Tower, enjoying the quiet of the night as he watched the lights of the floating islands and the brief spurts of flames that made a chorus of color each evening, casting reds and golds and oranges over the stonework of the isles nearest the dragon rookeries.

He would miss this over the next months.

The late-evening solitude after his duties were done but before any last-minute fires needed putting out before he truly retired for the night.

Wills was spending a few days with his family at Buckingham Palace before a big to-do of his leave taking for “a highly private boarding school”, a bit of playacting for the British public who were currently ravenous for anything and everything Windsor as the “War of the Waleses” set fire to the gossip rags.

“I know that look.” An amused voice spoke from behind him. “That’s the look James would get every year as he looked back at your grandparents standing at Kings Cross Station as the Express pulled away.” Remus came to stand beside him, nudging his shoulder playfully. “Saying goodbye before you even leave, cub?”

“Just…making a memory.” Hadrian answered several long, quiet moments later.

It was something he deeply appreciated about his relationship with Moony.

He knew how to just be.

Ironic, given that said werewolf’s mate couldn’t stand to be still for more than a few seconds unless he was dead asleep.

Amber eyes glinted in the light of the starts and the waning moon as Remus nodded, understanding that desire deep in his bones.

“Good night for it.” Was all he said in answer.

And the two stood, side by side and not saying another word, until the arrival of late-summer clouds began to blot out the moonlight, hurrying them inside lest they be drenched in the coming squall.

Neither was all that prone to simple illnesses like colds, but with Hogwarts a few days away it was better to be safe than sorry.

Tossing an arm around his cub, mourning a moment when he had to stretch less than the last time he’d done so, the boy was growing again, Remus joined the younger wizard at the hot chocolate service Whimsy had set out with a warming charm after “Lord Protector Moony” arrived in his cub’s rooms.

“What else is on your mind, cub?”
Remus knew better than to think that it was only the beauty of the night that had drawn Harry away from his finalizing plans and ensuring everything was set for him to be absent his seat of power for the coming months. Vanishing boxes between his study at Hogwarts and Tristan’s desk at Skye would help matters – and keep any chance of interception at bay – and Russell plus most of the guard would be with him as well. But with the Code finally being launched and the preparations for the international events in the coming years continually needing attention, there was always something more that needed his approval or his keen eye or, or, or.

“Have I done enough?” Hadrian finally asked after taking a long sip of his chocolate. “To neutralize Dumbledore, I mean.” He added when Remus cocked a brow.

“The Headmistress’s reports have been promising.” Remus reminded him. “And your other plants in the school seem to agree that you’ve kept him too busy with teaching and rubber-stamping to meddle – too much anyway.”

“Mmm.” Hadrian hummed. “But for all that – the teaching and the reduction of duties, the limiting him to a very small pool of students who should be beyond the age of being overly impressionable – Hogwarts is still very much his turf. I still believe that keeping him busy and visible is the best thing until we manage to either find proof of true crime under the Code or he hangs himself on the rope we’ve given him.”

“But you’re not eager to walk into a game that he’s no doubt been planning and setting up for the last two years either.” Remus noted.

“Would you be?” Hadrian arched a brow with a sigh. “He’s charismatic – you should know that better than anyone. Even with keeping his classes to sixteen and seventeen year olds, he still has opportunities to spread his poison. That he has to be ever-more subtle than in the past is a reason for caution not celebration.”

“He’s an old coot.” Remus smirked. “But he’s a canny one. I don’t think you’re going to get the confrontation you’re hoping for out of him. He won’t make it that easy.”

“Yeah.” Hadrian sighed once more, knocking back the rest of his chocolate like it was fire whiskey. “That’s what I’m worried about…”

…

Headmistress Perenelle Flamel carried on with her work as her liege lord scribbled away at the student’s desk she had conjured for the last two days.

Between conferences with the now-former Headmaster Eddard Ollivander and King Hadrian’s longtime tutor Professor (now Lord Protector) Remus Lupin, it was decided that encouraging the King to sit for placement tests on his most advanced subjects would only help him in the long run. He’d been open about the fact that he intended to seek four masteries – not the most she’d ever heard of by any means – but was facing somewhat of a clock given his contractual obligations to continue to marry and eventually produce heirs. Perenelle was without doubt that he would place up at least in several classes.

And there was no question regarding him having the maturity – mental, emotional, or power-wise – to keep up with older students.

Granted, with the new system that had been launched between the educational overhaul Hogwarts had undergone and her tenure here, there was nothing stopping Hadrian anymore from studying as many subjects as he liked.
With alternating weeks of classes, much as some mundane schools practiced, there was no longer a need for time-turners to allow students to fulfill their educational aspirations.

The only question was whether the student in question could handle the homework and self-study load that came with alternating, say, potions one week and transfiguration the next – both historically work-heavy classes.

Though given Hadrian’s educational aspirations, she was glad that Eddard had filled her in on the time-field that could be activated in the newly refurbished Royal Tower – specifically the personal study rooms that had everything provided from a potion area to a dueling strip.

She believed, without even glancing at his placement tests, that her liege could be placed out of the incoming class altogether as Eddard had forwarded the educational records of all his students at the end of the year as per normal procedure. It was only those students who had been strict homeschooled-only pupils that did not yet have an academic record to follow them to Hogwarts – which often led to some confusion and dissonance the first month or so as they adjust to the competitive and aggressive academic atmosphere in one of the (once again) top magical schools in the world. Hogwarts wasn’t yet the top school, but they had reclaimed a spot in the top-ten, which as they had fallen quite low under Dumbledore’s leadership was a feat that had the Board of Governors gifting Perenelle and her administrator Caitlyn Dumfries, a muggleborn witch with an MBA, generous annual bonuses the past two years.

That Hogwarts even possessed a Royal Tower had been somewhat of a shock to many, as it wasn’t until Hadrian had come by earlier in the week to charge the wards and set up his testing with her – along with his guard, of course – that the camouflaging disillusionment charms had been dropped by the semi-sentient castle.

Perenelle smiled to herself, more than a little amused by the grand old girl.

A sentiment that seemed to be returned by “Lady Hogwarts” as Perenelle and her husband had been greeted just over two years ago now with the shocking sight of Nick’s former student Albus shouting at a gargoyle statue with all his worldly goods in the castle surrounding him in a shambles.

Hadrian and Hogwarts had colluded, and with Albus’s probation/demotion to co-Headmaster and once-more teaching Professor, he’d been unceremoniously tossed out of the Headmaster/Headmistress’s tower, a designation due to the ward-stone present (if hidden for over a century from Hadrian’s information) in what had formerly been Albus’s office and was now her own. She and Nick shared the well-appointed quarters, and the castle had obligingly provided her husband with a small study of his own to meet with his apprentices and do his paperwork as the Head of the Alchemy department. The main provision of said position being the administering of the rare Alchemy apprenticeship and keeping a stern eye on his wayward former student as Albus taught the fourth and fifth year Alchemy and fifth year Transfiguration students.

Jasmine Patil, the cousin of the current Department of Education head for the British Ministry, was Albus’s counterpart in the Transfiguration department, teaching third and fourth years as well as the occasional apprentice herself, with Aramintia Davies – a daughter of House Abbott – serving as the main apprenticeship overseer and Head of the Transfiguration department.

Honestly, if it weren’t for Albus having taught or been headmaster over both Transfiguration mistresses, Nick wouldn’t have to keep an eye on both areas of Albus’s classes, though the old scoundrel seemed to enjoy the job after many years between his last apprentice and the offer from the young king currently working away at his Dark Arts placement exam.

The King, his Privy Council, and all the others that had overhauled Hogwarts had certainly done a
thorough job, and this year was the first with a full-crop of apprentices seeking their beginning pre- 
mastery education within the Hogwarts walls.

A good thing, that, as it would free up time for the fully-fledged professors with their second and 
third year apprentices able to take on teaching the first and second year students.

An apprenticeship, after all, varied greatly in the amount of time they took to complete – with only 
part of that denoted by the amount of effort put in on the part of the apprentice.

Some, like that of a cursebreaker such as young Heir Wallace, completed two years at an educational 
institution before completing the rest of their pre-mastery training during a field internship.

Others, like she had no doubt was the young Heir Prince’s plan, would use time while completing 
another apprenticeship at a school to also study up to challenge a Mastery exam.

With Severus Prince as a father, and seeing the young wizard’s OWLs, she had very little concern 
over releasing Octavian Prince into the wilds of a potions mastery without a formal apprenticeship as 
he would need under her husband for Alchemy.

Eddard was sending her an interesting crop of students this year however, with two confirmed 
prodigies and several other students that had prodigy-level intelligence without the all-consuming 
drive.

And that was only from one of the schools Hogwarts accepted students from, not to mention those 
that were educated at home.

It wasn’t a full incoming class, not by a long shot as the incoming class of 1993-94 was the last in a 
line of limited birth rates due to that madman Voldemort.

Only fifty-three students in the entire class, less than a fourth of what Hogwarts could handle per 
class and not be bursting at the seams…it was a very large castle after all.

At full capacity, the grand old girl could house and educate an average of three-hundred eighty 
students per year through their NEWTs and another fifty or so apprentices depending on how many 
staff lived off-campus, or if any apprentices did so.

Now, it only held three hundred and eighty students from all of the years including the apprentices.

It was no wonder the wards needed more attention, with that much of a difference in ambient magic 
to feed them.

“I’m finished, Headmistress.” Hadrian said with his normal polite manner, setting aside his fountain 
pen and hitting his parchment with a quick-dry spell so it wouldn’t smudge. Rolling it back up into a 
scroll, he carried it over and set it down with the others to be graded by the various department 
Heads, as was the routine when a student challenged a course.

He cracked his neck and shook out his arms, glad to be finished.

“Excellent, your grace.” The Headmistress stood with an elegance that made a fool of her actual 
age, though as she looked to be thirty at most if one didn’t know they would never think that she was 
old enough to remember a time before the Ministries of Magic came to be, before the last King of 
Avalon passed without issue or heir. “We will have your results – and your personal schedule – 
completed before the first day of term.”

“Thank you, Headmistress.” Hadrian nodded, then went over to the ward stone to examine the
wards through it.

Keeping his amusement to himself, he nicked his thumb on the sword-breaker dagger he’d gotten ages ago, powering the wards with his blood.

Plotting something was right.

Dumbledore had managed to wind himself a very small loophole in the wards.

Undoing it would be simple enough…but he wanted Dumbledore occupied not desperate, and now that Hadrian knew of the loophole, he could warn his guard of what to look out for from the goat-fucking bastard.

He knew it would be too much to hope that Dumbledore would strike at him soon.

The old man had far too much patience for that, as his near-perfect behavior thus far during his probation had proved.

Hadrian doubted it would even be during his first year.

His second – or worse his third – were far more likely, as the patient spider would want his hovering “fly” to grow complacent before entangling it in his web.

Unfortunately for Dumbledork, Hadrian wasn’t a fly to be ensnared, but rather a decoy that he would choke on when going in for the kill.

…

Business was booming at Hogwarts – and not just their test scores.

Where before the educational reforms of the last two years, the castle relied heavily on imported foodstuffs and maintained a skeleton staff, under the direction of the new Headship of Professor Flamel and Administrator Dumfries, the castle now only imported specialty foods such as chocolate that were too time-consuming for the house elves to manufacture, and they boasted a robust staff of over eighty souls including apprentices.

Once a bastion of purebloods and the occasional half-blooded staff, between the assistants to each department head (nearly all to a one mundane-born with degrees or training vital to each position) and the new crop of grounds crew and facilities maintenance staff and field workers and even an official security staff, there was now a much more equitable working environment.

If the new hiring practices had amused the bigoted British magical populace, those hired for the security staff had shocked and/or outraged them.

Why settle for mere witches and wizards, when there were magical creatures that were much more effective a deterrent against an attack on the school (especially once the King was very visibly enrolled)?

Potions were more than capable of curbing the worrisome attributes of say a werewolf’s lunar madness, and a vampire’s bloodlust was easily satiated with donor blood acquired from mundane blood-banks.

With these provided by their contracts, a force of a dozen werewolves and a handful of vampires had signed on with Hogwarts, along with binding contracts that would in addition to the provisions made for them prevent them from attacking a student or employee of the school except in self-defense.
Wandering the school corridors at night had drop into non-existence the first year the new security measures had been put into place, and the teaching staff found to be much less irritable with the patrols officially off their plates.

Hogwarts was owned by the King after all.

And if there was one thing he’d made clear it was that he wasn’t merely content to pass laws regarding keeping their magical population prosperous, he was going to set the example for his people to follow.

…

Monday, August 30, 1993.

It was a typical scene at Platform 9 ¾ of Kings Cross Station – at least typical for the last two school years at any rate.

Changes on top of changes, while the bulk of the student body wouldn’t arrive until the traditional September 1st beginning of the school year via Hogwarts Express, the apprentices and the incoming class of first years arrived several days before.

And with good reason.

The apprentices needed that time (three days this year) to meet with their apprenticeship Masters after their brief two week summer break and ready themselves in the case of the second and third year apprentices for teaching classes themselves including preparing their classrooms.

Second and third year apprentices (depending on the number of apprenticeships the apprentice both was qualified and selected for from the Hogwarts Masters) were responsible for teaching the first and second year subjects, as well as other duties for their masters such as running subject study groups and assisting with clubs.

First year apprentices had a year of being errand runners, unpaid interns, and heavy study loads as their masters put them through the wringer to test their dedication to their crafts, though always by the end of it they had a solid foundation in the upper echelons of their chosen fields and were able to see the light at the end of a very long, dark, exhausting tunnel.

The incoming first year crop of students arrived earlier for a different but just as important reason: to make their course selections (and give the school time to organize what the first-year schedule would look like based on availability and course overlaps) and, perhaps more vital yet, to meet their classmates for the next five to seven or more years without the bias of House in place.

With the House Cup weighted more towards academics than a simple points system, and the Quidditch Cup not contributing to said points system but a strictly-athletic trophy, some of the traditional tension between Houses had been alleviated, and it wasn’t uncommon to find inter-House self-formed study groups or teams playing pick-up games of Quidditch or other sport on the weekends.

Allowing the students to meet (those that hadn’t already from social groups and pre-Hogwarts education anyway) without the blinders of House already in place was a simple measure that helped inter-House unity along and was one of the first suggestions of Headmistress Flamel upon taking up the post.

Dumbledore may have retained the title of co-Headmaster, but that was the extent of his power
within the school aside from his position as Alchemy – and depending on the year and the need – Transfiguration professor.

On the platform, parents and guardians shed more than a few tears as they kissed and hugged their children goodbye, while significant others did the same to the apprentices who would likely be too busy for the next month to spend much time away from the castle on the weekends.

Notably, this year a privacy spell had been cast over the platform, so there were no cameras in evidence anywhere to snap footage of the Lords Protector and High Constable all-but-smothering their “Prongslet” as King Hadrian big adieu to his longtime guardians, godfathers, and household members until the first break home for the weekend of Samhain.

His husband William was likewise being petted and fussed over by his parents, Charles with the assurance of privacy being open with his love of his son as much as his estranged wife was famous for.

Charles, for all that he was often pilloried for being cold, was a doting and loving Papa, who regretted his behavior with his former mistress for the pain it had long caused his sons if nothing else.

The War of the Waleses might be still hot and heavy in the mundane papers, but before their children they were nothing less than cordial if cold to one another.

Diana gave William one last kiss goodbye, the royal couple’s things having been taken straight to the King’s Tower at Hogwarts by the Skye Palace elves along with their owls and pets and Hadrian’s personal secretary and his things, and Hadrian’s brothers John and Sherlock got in one last ruffle of his free-hanging long black hair, then they were loaded into the middle car of the Express, and the bright red train pulled away from the station to many waving hankies and a cheerful blast of its horn.

…

Hadrian gave a gusty sigh of relief as the Express chugged out of view of the Platform and he threw himself down onto one of the plush compartment benches, his husband laughing at his dramatics.

“Relieved much?” Wills joked.

“You have no idea.” His Rian smiled bright and wide, emerald eyes shining. “Two full months of no Council meetings, no Wizengamot, no Crown duties.” He gave a heartfelt groan of reprieve at the very thought. “Hogwarts might as well be heaven.”

“I know the feeling.” Wills laughed, as he did indeed. Hogwarts was a chance for them to be – if not normal – at least something close to it. Seven years of education before the full burden of their stations once more crashed down on them year-round instead of merely on breaks.

Heaven was in no way an overstatement of how much both of them were looking forward to it, even with the education-intensive atmosphere of the school waiting upon their arrival.

They could just be students for once, instead of having to attend to princely or state affairs after returning home as they’d done at H.I. with nothing else to devote themselves to…except each other anyway.

Well, for Wills.

Hadrian would still have to deal with crises as they popped up, and Russell had already blocked out Saturday and Sunday between breakfast and lunch for “Affairs of State” on Hadrian’s personal schedule.
But a mere eight hours a week – less depending on how much work there actually was for Hadrian to review and sign off on – was a blessing after two years of near round-the-clock pressure and work when not studying or at school.

The compartment door slid open, ushering in a dark head of hair and a white grin as David, returning to Hogwarts for his last year of apprenticeship, located his longtime friend and betrothed.

“Feeling good, Harry?” David laughed a bit at the loose-boned sprawl of the younger teen who was taking up almost a full bench in his languor.

“Mmm.” Hadrian didn’t bother so much as lifting his head, not letting anything break his current weightless euphoria.

Wills smiled over at who had been dubbed “Harry’s Highlander” by Tavi, a title that had somehow found its way into the press, and offered a seat next to him as Hadrian was unlikely to be moved from his indolent sprawl anywhen soon – or however long it took the rest of their friends on the train to find them.

Remus and Sirius – let alone the contingent of royal guardsmen including McG who were accompanying them to Hogwarts on a rotating basis – had insisted on them being in a car one from the middle of the train as a safety precaution.

A sound notion, as if some lunatic decided to attack the train on the assumption that Hadrian was riding it to Hogwarts with the rest of the incoming first-years – which had been soundly scoffed at in the papers – the first and last cars were the most obvious targets.

As a result, it might take Draco, Blaise, and Neville sometime to locate them in a random compartment in a random car, but given the tenacity of their friends, it was only a matter of time before Hadrian would have to give up on his basking in freedom and behave like a functioning human being instead of a coma patient.

David and Wills talked quietly, mostly about David’s apprenticeship and where he hoped to be assigned next year by Gringotts for his cursebreaking field internship – the Wallace Heir having already been accepted to their program contingent upon his passing the final apprenticeship exams at the end of the year – while they allowed Hadrian to just bask – and eventually doze – in the warm late-August sunshine.

Noticing that his betrothed had fallen asleep, David gave a little snicker.

“He’s such a damn cat when left to his own devices.” The king’s longtime friend commented quietly to Wills, who nodded with a smirk.

“The palace has a bet that when he eventually manages his Animagus transformation that he’ll be a feline.” The Nimue lord grinned at David’s raised brow.

David’s father might be Hadrian’s Lord High Steward, but Gawain Wallace wasn’t one for carrying tales due to the restrictive vows he’d had to give Hadrian years before to keep his place in the King’s confidence.

As a result, the Wallace sons were often the last to know of the palace happenings between David being busy with his apprenticeship and Rhys spending most if not all of his vacations from school in Italy with their mother, Gawain having relented on her having visitors after six-months of isolation save for the house elves and the nearby mundane village.

Something that David was currently happy about, as it’d saved him from the fit Rhys had surely
thrown when David’s betrothal to Harry had been officially announced in the papers – and Rhys no doubt put the pieces together between the contract House Wallace had with House Pevensie, Harry’s revealed titles, and David’s celibate behavior at Hogwarts.

Rhys had been a snarky shit to David that first month back at school for both of them two years ago October after Hadrian’s lordship ball where he’d danced with David in the same line up as his other future spouses, but eventually he’d mellowed.

Whether that was a sign of maturity or trouble to come in the future David still wasn’t certain, but he wasn’t going to worry over it unless or until Rhys caused trouble for either their House or their monarch.

“Wasn’t his pater James a stag?” David asked with a soft frown of thought.

Unregistered of course, but the entire story of the Marauders had been excellent newspaper fodder after Sirius Black’s trial.

“Yes, but from what Sirius says forms are individual.” Wills shrugged. “And Rian is a very different person than his father had been. A cat or even a wolf or snake given their meanings is more likely, unless he ends up as a winged creature with as much as he loves to fly.”

“I could see that.” David nodded, eyes narrowed. “A falcon or owl maybe. A predator not a songbird.”

“If you want to bet,” Wills told him. “Russell holds the book as he doesn’t partake in any of the bets in the palace household or Council.”

“And as Harry’s secretary, he’s most likely to know the outcome before anyone else.” David added knowingly, giving it some thought. “I might bet, it’s harmless fun after all.”

And it was, nothing malicious or harmful, plus with the privacy clauses in everyone’s contracts and vows, no word of the palace betting book ever made it into the press or public knowledge.

Just a bit of fun to help alleviate the pressures of palace life was all, and if David knew Harry, something the King was well-aware of and let continue unchecked as he understood the need for a pressure release.

Not everyone let off steam by pummeling others in duels or hand-to-hand with a mundane martial art after all, though David would be willing to bet that Hadrian signed up for all of the more physical clubs on offer at Hogwarts with the staffing increase.

All students had to participate in at least one of them after all, whether mundane sports or unarmed combat, dueling, fencing, archery, or any of the others, with the lack of a physical education class at Hogwarts students were required to participate in at least one physical club and one non-physical club…mainly to keep them from running wild on the non-open campus weekends.

Busy students were tired students, and tired students were docile students as David’s Defense Mistress (and the head of the Hogwarts Defense Department) had told him on the first day of his apprenticeship.

A code that if the education reforms the Department of Education and the Hogwarts Board of Governors were any indication, was a common one in Wizarding Great Britain if not educators worldwide.

Hadrian had only been napping for about twenty minutes when the door to the compartment opened
once again, this time ushering in a pair of students who were snickering all the way inside, even as Neville nudged Hadrian awake and to share his bench, Blaise taking the open seat beside David.

“Wha’?” Hadrian asked drowsily then frowned as he did a quick audit of the compartment. “Where’s Draco?”

“That’s the funny part.” Blaise supplied as Neville was still snickering. “We were looking for you when we found a compartment filled with what looked like the full complement of future she-snakes. Draco was sacrificed so we could escape with our virtues intact.”

“Let me guess?” Hadrian said around a chuckle, rubbing away the sleep from his eyes as David and Wills laughed at the pair throwing the blond-haired Heir Malfoy under the bus. “Parkinson and Greengrass?”

Neville nodded, brown eyes gleaming bright with laughter. “Plus Bulstrode and Morag MacDougal.”

Hadrian frowned a bit at the last, not familiar with the name.

“Homeschooled.” Blaise supplied, guessing at the reason for Hadrian’s confusion, enlightening David and William at the same time. “Pureblood gentry family that tends towards isolationist policies with their main landholding in the Marches.”

Ah.

That explained that.

Not high enough on the noble register to warrant invitations to royal events, but as isolationists they weren’t going to get involved in radical politics like that of Voldemort or Dumbledore either.

“How do you always know?” William groused, good-naturedly.

“I’m a commoner who’s fallen in – thanks to my mother’s connections – with the King of Avalon.” Blaise rolled his eyes. “I have to know who to watch out for lest they poison my pumpkin juice to step over my convulsing corpse to take my place in Hadrian’s circle of close friends.”

“Fair enough.” David decided. It wasn’t as if Blaise was wrong after all. And having someone around that excelled at knowing things the rest of them weren’t privy to due to their station of birth wasn’t a bad thing by any measure.

“Draco really should save himself the trouble of Parkinson’s clinging and attempts at social-climbing and just announce his betrothal to Livia.” Hadrian said, exasperated on the play-acting the two had been making a show of for years. “It’s not like those glamours on their cuffs are hard to notice.”

“Maybe for you, Rian love.” William arched a brow at his husband. “But for the rest of us mere mortals unless we know they’re there we wouldn’t notice them at all.”

“I do.” David shrugged. “But I’ve been trained in that sort of thing. King Hadrian here is just special.”

At that Hadrian scowled at the teasing over his eternal confusion between what is natural for him and natural for everyone else.

Some of it is pure education.
The rest comes hand-in-hand with his natural grasp on all things magical, a sign of his prodigious talents.

And his friends – let alone his family – never fail to correct and tease him whenever he still got mixed up, though it happened with greater rarity now than it did during his early years.

“It’s Livia that’s insistent on it, from what Dray’s told me.” Blaise brought the subject back around before Hadrian could get too peeved at his Highlander. “Doesn’t want the attention that the match will bring, especially with Draco being younger than her. But that shouldn’t last long, since I know they’re planning on being in a few clubs and partnering each other, which should probably get at least the less aggressive Draco-poachers like Greengrass to back off. Pansy though…” He snickered at Draco’s misfortune, as did they all.

It wasn’t malicious, but still…better him than them.

Only Hadrian’s clear disinterest at H.I. of socializing outside of his chosen group had kept Parkinson and a few others from launching themselves at his head like a mass of be-ribboned ballistic missiles, a respite that he doubted would last whilst at Hogwarts and he joined up with study groups and social clubs.

Witch Weekly’s most recent spate of articles on his still un-contracted consort openings hasn’t helped, as he still received proposals from witches and wizards of all ages and walks of life daily, which Russell replied with firm but polite refusals which amounted to: the King will choose his consorts in his own good time, thank you very much.

Draco eventually won his way free of his admirers – or the admirers of his face and family fortune anyway – and joined them, only to be teased within an inch of his life before Hadrian called a halt to it before the teen’s infamous temper blew.

The Malfoy Heir had taken more than his silver eyes from his mother’s family after all, and a Black’s temper was never to be taken for granted.

“Ha-ha-fucking-ha.” Draco snarled, silver eyes flashing. “They’re not girls I tell you they’re bloody harpies! And you arseholes,” he flipped off Neville and Blaise. “Abandoned me to them like some fucking sacrifice!”

“Every man for himself when it comes to vipers hunting for a match, my friend.” Blaise countered unrepentantly. “If either of us had been the closest to that door you would’ve left us behind so fast all we would’ve seen was a vapor trail behind you.”

“Anything from the trolley, dears?”

The timely arrival of the snack trolley interrupted what could have been a vicious rejoinder, as the teens all fell upon the offerings – sugary and otherwise – like ravening wolves.

Hadrian himself didn’t have any real need to clear out the Honeyduke’s finest, since between his guard and Russell, let alone the secure mail-boxes that worked as linked vanishing boxes between his study in Hogwarts and his office at Skye Palace, he had ready access to any treats he might desire.

But, as the proceeds benefited the scholarship fund, he helped himself to whatever caught his fancy, including gallantly paying for the rest of his friends and husband before sending off a cheery Mrs. Furst to resupply before the next compartment.

Sweet tooths abated and fizzy bottles of either pumpkin juice or butterbeer all-around, the rest of the
train ride passed smoothly in idle conversation, much of which consisted of the others picking
David’s brain regarding everything from Hogsmeade visits to which staff members were a soft-touch
or a hardarse to which electives had the heaviest homework or self-study requirements.

Then an announcement came over the overhead:

*Fifteen minutes to Hogsmeade Station. Please stow all luggage and pets or familiars for transport
to Hogwarts. Fifteen minutes to Hogsmeade Station.*

Beaming with excitement, they tidied up, then the train crested an uphill curve and there it was: the
sleepy village of Hogsmeade, Scotland.

They had arrived.

…

With the audit into the Hogwarts accounts, several items that had been languishing in disrepair had
been renovated – including the crumbling path to the Black Lake and the rickety little boats for the
arrival boat ride that gave incoming students a nothing-less-than spectacular view of Lady Hogwarts
at her finest, illuminated with candles and light from every window against the Highland mountains
and rich forest land that surrounded her.

After a squeezy hug from David, Hadrian and the rest were escorted over to the path by McG and
another guardsmen, the rest who had traveled on the train and kept watch over their compartment
taking the carriages to the castle.

Wands alight, the group of quietly chattering first years followed the head groundskeeper Mr.
Plantanus down the gravel path to the tidy boats waiting on the shore.

The former groundskeeper one Rubeus Hagrid had been a beneficiary of the judicial review of cases
after the ignoble spectacle Sirius Black’s miscarriage of justice had been for the Ministry and
Wizengamot. Going back to the very beginning of the century, anyone, living or deceased, with a
criminal record was invited to lodge an appeal. Hagrid had been found innocent of all charges and
had his wand-rights restored, a significant fine provided for the trumped-up mishandling of his case,
and offered a place in continuing education classes offered by the London Magic School. Another
black-mark had been placed against Voldemort, and Tom Riddle’s award for services to the school
stripped.

“Four to a boat, now.” Mr. Plantanus’s soft burr instructed.

Having to split up with McG and Lionel arching a brow and waiting beside the furthest-flung boat,
Hadrian and Wills waved to Draco, Blaise, and Neville as they clambered into the next boat, Theo
Nott darting over like a shot rather than being stuck with Pansy or another annoying contemporary.

Like a loud-mouthed red-head who could be none other than Ronald Weasley, his spot purchased by
one of his brothers without doubt, despite Siri – or anyone else who met him – not having good
things to say about the boy’s work ethic or intelligence besides playing a good game of chess.

“Ooh…”

“Oh my.”

“Wow.” The last came from Wills, wide-eyed like all the rest at catching sight of the lit-up Hogwarts
as the smooth glide of the boats – disturbed only by a few playful passes of the giant squid’s tentacles
– brought them around the curve of the headland and the castle into view.
“Beautiful, isn’t she?” Hadrian asked, smiling over at Wills and looking away from the sight that was awe-inspiring even in a teen that had visited the castle a handful of times over the years since his Claiming.

“Very.” Wills nodded firmly. “Reminds me of Balmoral, a bit.”

“I could see that.” Hadrian agreed after a moment. “Same type of stone, I think.”

“Watch your heads!” McG called out, and the couple ducked the same as the other students, and then boats came in to dock at the side of the castle after clearing the wall that led to the small cove and sheltered it from harsh highland winds.

The teens climbed from the boats – with varying degrees of ease – and were led up to the massive doors, Mr. Plantanus using his walking stick to give a resounding knock.

Moments later, they opened, revealing a tall witch in tartan with a stern countenance.

“The first years, Professor McGonagall.” Mr. Plantanus doffed his hat and then strode off out of sight around the bend of the castle for his cozy cottage near the forest where his wife likely had a hot cuppa waiting on him.

“Thank you, Plantanus.” Minerva nodded her head. “I will take them from here.”

Minerva cast her stern gaze over the newest crop of young minds to enter Hogwarts, her mouth twitching as she suppressed a smile at the face her son was pulling to rile her up before her new charges.

Honestly.

One would think Durstram was a new first-year himself the way he carried on at times, rather than a father in his own right and the Captain of the Guard for His Grace.

“Welcome to Hogwarts.” Minerva greeted the young ones, including the tall form of the king himself who stood a few inches taller than most of his contemporaries, making him easy to spot beside her son and his blond husband. “As Groundskeeper Plantanus said, I am Professor McGonagall, Assistant Headmistress of this school. Come along.”

Turning after a head-dip in recognition to the king, Minerva strode through the doors, which closed behind her after the last first-year scurried through.

“Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is one of the finest bastions of wizarding educations in the world – and each and every one of you is now responsible for helping maintain that reputation of excellence.” Stopping at the doors to the Great Hall, she cast another gimlet eye over the group. It was a healthy enough number, given the…issues of the time they were born in. Still, she was eager for the days where enrollment returned to the heights she’d enjoyed in her own youth. “We have a strict code of conduct for our charges here at Hogwarts, which is applied equally no matter the birth, station, or aptitude of an individual student. Within these halls only your personal education is our concern. Hard-work, studiousness, and discipline will behoove you. Malicious troublemaking, bullying, and bigotry of any kind will see you dismissed.”

More than one first year shifted under her stern face and starchy manner, particularly those who before the reforms could have counted on their family names to sway things in their favor.
Hadrian however, as well as William, could have beamed at her.

Much like at Hedwig Institute, here they could be students and not kings or lords or consorts.

Just teenage young men out to better their minds and play a round of gobstones with friends.

Most excellent, indeed.

“Tonight, you will enjoy a repast in the great hall, and spend the next few days getting to know one another and bunking in dorms by gender. On the First during the Welcoming Feast, you will then be Sorted into your Houses. Your House will be your family for however many years you study with us at Hogwarts – whether merely to OWLS or all the way through an apprenticeship, granted you are accepted by one of our resident masters and apprentice proctors. The Houses are Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw, and Slytherin; named for the founders who were sons and daughters of four of the royal houses of Avalon.”

More than one sideways glance was darted at a calm-faced Hadrian then, the King not so much as cracking a smile from his public persona.

“Your achievements will bolster your House in the annual Cup competition. Your transgressions, however, will be only your own to bear in the form of detentions, letters home, and even possible suspension or expulsion. A copy of the academic code awaits each of you in the dorms, and you are expected to review it and sign your agreement no later than the morning of the first, lest you be sent home.”

Taking a moment to ensure that the threat sank in, Minerva clapped her hands once, the doors to the candle-lit Great Hall swinging open to reveal the Heads of House and Departments waiting for them, the apprentices and other staff eating in a separate dining hall.

“Now,” she broke character and beamed at them all. “Welcome to Hogwarts. We look forward to your stay here with us. Tonight, we are all here to answer any questions you might have regarding your academic choices that you will make tomorrow.”

Waving them in towards the laden small round tables that each had a Head stationed and waiting, Minerva took her place at the Head table which this evening held only herself, the Headmistress, her husband Nicholas the Head of the Alchemy department, and the Administrator.

“Where do you want to sit, lads?” McG prompted his charges.

Hadrian gave a quick scan of the room, then took off for one of the tables, Wills at his side as they’d linked arms after climbing from the boats.

Each table sat a handful of students, and some had more than one Head present, as all total between departments and houses there were a total of seventeen heads, some of which pulled double-duty like the Assistant Headmistress who was both the Assistant and the Head of Gryffindor, or the diminutive part-goblin Head of Charms who was also Head of Ravenclaw and so on.

“There,” he said, heading straight for a table towards the center. “The Head of the History department: Heir Stuart. Seeress LaMont,” the head of the Divination Department which only took students upon recognition of their having a legitimate gift. “And her scribe are all seated together.”

Heir Stuart was both the heir of one of the Avalon noble houses – an Aged and Honorable House – but he was also a distant relative of Wills’s, if you went back far enough in the genealogy and his father Lord Hamish was Wills's Steward and lordship tutor.
More important, he was a moderate politically, and held several masteries.

Hadrian might not have to acknowledge him within the halls of Hogwarts, but not to do so could be seen as a slight.

Not that it was an onerous task, as Heir Stuart knew how to spin a tale not unlike the late Lord Arcturus Black, and was a stellar conversationalist who had swung the Wizengamot more than once to his point of view during his four decades within that body.

As first years, they wouldn’t have Heir Izar as a professor for years yet, unless a more junior professor was ill or otherwise absent, and even then only if they continued with post-NEWT studies in History of Magic.

Seeress LaMont on the other hand neither teen would ever have as a professor, though she did tend to supervise more than one club given her light work load as an actual professor, only having a handful of students at any given time with so much as a kernel of true talent that needed mentoring.

Her scribe – a position that required training and certification lest a prophecy be missed or mangled – Diane was her constant companion, and wife though neither witch had taken the other’s name.

All in all, an interesting company with which to break bread, and one that gave both boys as well as their friends who had joined them plenty to think over as far as their career goals and elective selection was concerned.

…

After the introductory dinner, all the first-years were led to the Gryffindor dorms to sleep, as they were the only one protected by a portrait that could be reset and not a secret as some of the other dorm entrances were.

All save two, who had separate quarters in the King’s Tower.

“Where’s Hadrian and Wills?” Conan Diggory, Heir Diggory and the cousin of Cedric one of the Hufflepuff prefects asked.

“King’s Tower.” Neville told him as he nabbed the bed between Conan and Draco. “Hadrian won’t be Sorted, and as his consort Wills won’t have to live in the dorms but can come and visit with his housemates whenever.”

“Lucky.” Seamus Finnegan moaned, flopping onto a bed across the room. “Not having to listen to other lads snore and fart and wank? That’ll be heaven for them right there.”

“Stuff it, Shay.” Blaise slapped the notoriously flirty – and firebug – of an Irishman on the arse. “Haze has to sit in on meetings that would bore us to tears, is locked into a bunch of marriage contracts, and deal with a Queen as a grandmother-in-law. If that’s the trade off, I’ll take the dorms.”

Some of the other teens watched all this by-play, trying to work it out.

Mundane borns mainly, who hadn’t gone to Hedwig with them, or homeschooled like the newest Weasley, and didn’t already have friendships in place save the shallow ones created on the long train ride.

“Please.” Ron Weasley snorted. “As rich as those two are? I’d take that trade.”

“Lucky for the kingdom then that Harry has never expressed a preference for skinny, freckled,
gingers.” Neville joked ribaldly. “Nor Wills for that matter.”

Ron blushed to his ears, fuming mad at the joke at his expense, the other boys all joining in.

“That’s true enough.” Seamus jumped back in, rolling over and fanning himself dramatically. “Us dark-haired beauties have a better shot at the King’s pants then you do, Ron. Have you seen David Wallace let alone the rest of them?” The shameless teen let out a wolf-whistle. “Fine, fine, fine pieces of ebony-haired man-meat, those. With a single blond-haired beauty for spice.”

“Come off it.” Miles Flint, the younger brother of Marcus Flint and the “spare heir” of House Flint said, exasperated at the talk of Hadrian’s growing harem while he was trying to study the code of conduct and the electives to choose from. At least as the spare heir he had choices, not like his brother who was constantly in trouble with their uncle who held the regency of House Flint with their father in Azkaban and Marcus not yet ready to take it up. “Don’t you have anything better to do than talk about Hadrian and his consorts – current or otherwise?”

Marcus was many things, but a good student was not one of them.

Thankfully, as the spare heir no one really gave a flying fuck what he did as long as Marcus was alive and kicking, a sentiment he shared with many of his fellow “spares.”

“No.” Seamus said after a long moment of thought. “Not really.”

Pillows came flying at him from all corners of the room, battering him back and forth at the command of his classmates, devolving into an all-out pillow war once Draco broke one of the fluffy bed pillows over Weasley’s head.

…

The top conversation the next morning was split between two subjects: electives and pumping Hadrian and William for information on what their Tower looked like from those in the know.

Their friends, of course, led the charge, with the nosier of their year-mates listening in as the close group of friends pestered the King and consort for a tour, which was promised with good humor after the student interviews were finished, a necessity as Blaise was up last and hell would freeze over before he would allow the others to go without him…not without some wicked form of reprisal in store anyway, as Blaise was still the only one willing to go head-to-head against Hadrian in a snit with his veela powers helping him stand against the powerful magical prodigy.

Or as Headmaster Ollivander had put it over the last two years, being both willing and able to fight metaphorical fire with literal fire.

Invitation to rummage through the royal rooms obtained for the wider group of friends outside the core five, including for Susan, Hannah, and a special inclusion of Hadrian’s own: one Sally-Anne Perks whose name he had never forgotten after his brother Sherlock showed him her file.

Her talent and intelligence had won her a scholarship to Hogwarts after her fight to merely survive had gained her the attention of Hadrian’s Child Welfare department at the overhauled Ministry of Magic.

Sally-Anne in fact became on of the very first occupants of the Lily Evans Home for Magical Children, where she found herself safe, and her powers space to grow.

Adoption wasn’t an option the young girl had been interested in – then or now – but a foothold in her new magical world was something she sought and eagerly worked towards when she learned of
the facts of life for a no-name mundane-born girl from the dregs of London, a former runaway living on the largess of the King and dependent on hand-outs to fund her education. She wanted more than a life as a shop clerk or being stuck in an entry-level ministry position. But if she wanted up and out of that cycle, she had to work hard and prove herself.

Which she had done in spectacular fashion, with test scores that rivaled most of her incoming classmates.

Sally-Anne may not have wealth or a name to back her, but she had drive and that was something Hadrian could respect.

He had more than a healthy helping of it himself after all.

Still, he knew her inclusion, passed off as a polite attempt to include a new student in a foreign environment, soured more than one refined palate, as proved by the spiteful words of one Ms. Parkinson towards the royal couple after breakfast was over and the first-years began to discuss elective options with serious intent.

All knew that they may not be able to take up all they wished, depending on how many electives everyone wanted to take and how that fit against the scheduling for the standard classes, but there were certain sets of classes that tended to be taken by the same students and therefore rarely ended up in conflict such as Ancient Runes and Arithmancy, while it wasn’t unheard-of for say, Dark Arts to be scheduled during the same block as Care of Magical Creatures.

And given what OWLs were required for placement in classes not offered until NEWTs, it was an important selection to make as you couldn’t get into Warding without both Runes and Arithmancy; Ritual Magic also required both as well as an OWL in Dark Arts; Finance needed Mundane Studies (as in science, math, and so on, not the class formerly called Muggle Studies) Magical Law, and Arithmancy; while Healing, Alchemy, and Spell Weaving each required a different set of five OWLs to take.

On the bright side they were informed of such before setting their electives in first year, but it was also one of the most important choices they would make to set up their future goals – and that carried a heavy sense of pressure for most of the new students.

Hadrian alone it seemed was the only student not stressing out over the selection parchments, as the great hall – which was basically their common room until their Sorting – filled with the sound of chatter and strain.

William had even been sucked into the drama, muttering under his breath at one of the round tables that had reappeared after breakfast at a single long table with Headmistress Flamel presiding at one end along with her husband, and the heads of Ravenclaw Professor Flitwick and Hufflepuff Professor Sprout at the other. The other two heads of house were still present, moving from group to group and giving advice or calming nerves as required. Though in some cases such as the frazzled visage of one Ms. Granger who Hadrian’s group as all too familiar with from H.I., who seemed intent on taking every single possible course.

Not that such a thing was possible or even advised, with the A and B weeks not beginning until NEWT level when students were considered mature enough to handle the self-study requirement involved and another five electives were added to those on offer.

Some students in the first two years of the new scheduling had taken advantage of the A-B system to fit in courses that they hadn’t had room for or that had been in conflict with another, allowing them to sit a NEWT in a subject before graduation – or an OWL at the least.
For himself Hadrian wasn’t too concerned as he could always hire another tutor for the summers or continue his education post-Hogwarts.

But for the stress-lines appearing on his William’s brow, he finally spoke his piece when William seemed to become stymied over dropping Dark Arts and Runes.

“Wills, love.” Hadrian told him gently, ignoring the eavesdroppers. “Lets pare this down a bit, yeah?”

“Yeah.” William blew out a breath, shaking his head. “I know you’re taking as many courses as they’ll schedule for – and more in self-study beside – but, I don’t know if I want to do the same or not.”

“We’ll have plenty of time together without needing to twin-up our schedules.” Hadrian gave a wry smile. “And I’ll probably be in an upper class for Dark Arts. You know that you’ve never been all that…”

“Good?” Wills suggested when his husband struggled for a way to phrase it that wouldn’t damage his feelings. “Believe me, Lady Andromeda has despaired of my lack of aptitude in that area for years. I know it’s not my best subject.”

“Well then, there you are.” Hadrian smiled. “One down. What did you want to take for NEWT electives?”

“Finance, Healing.” Wills listed absently, studying the example syllabus in the student handbook provided that contained their copies of the code of conduct, class listings, and club offerings. “I don’t know that I’ll want to add more than that.”

“Then no need for Runes either.” Neville pointed out, having scratched off Dark Arts himself at Wills’s self-effacing statement. It was an area where he struggled as well, but at least in that he was in good company. “But…”

“I know.” Wills pouted at bit at the form. “I’ll need Arithmancy.”

“I don’t know why you’re even bothering.” A snooty voice spoke up from the next table. “It isn’t as if you’ll ever do anything with your education.”

Those within earshot sucked in shocked breaths at the speakers – Pansy Parkinson, of course, who had her nose out of joint over both the inclusion of Sally-Anne to the upcoming tour of the royal rooms and Draco’s preference of his friends to her company – daring at saying such a thing to a royal consort.

Wills flushed beet-red, but before he could snark back at the bint, Hadrian laid a calming hand on his own that had fisted at the disparagement.

“I don’t quite know what you mean by that, Ms. Parkinson.” Hadrian replied, arching a frosty brow that matched his too-polite tone that had his friends ducking for cover and avoiding eye contact at all cost.

“It’s simple.” Pansy retorted with sneering condescension. “All he’ll ever be is your consort. I don’t know why you even bothered educating the mudblood.”

Unfortunately for Pansy, that bit had been overheard by Professor Sprout, who was marching over puffed up like a sail in full wind – but not before Hadrian had his shot at puncturing her shallow sense of self-importance.
“Oh, I see.” Hadrian chuckled humorlessly. “You’re one of those noble daughters. The kind that believes that all you need to land a rich – and noble, and pureblood of course – husband is a name and what’s between your legs. Let me tell you something.” Hadrian smiled a shark’s grin that he learned at the knees of a consulting detective and the British government. “And enlighten you to a bit of reality. A noble consort is much more than a pretty ornament and a way to secure a noble’s line. They’re a precious, and essential member of a household. While their lord – or lady – is off with the Wizengamot for twenty hours straight, they’re managing the finances of their family and ensuring its prosperity. While their spouse is required to dance attendance on their monarch, they’re the ones that know why. And while their spouse may give them a name, it is only through their presence that it lives on. William, is much more than a consort. And what I give him in return is paltry enough: no privacy, a life that is distinctly abnormal, and snooty nosy parkers commenting on everything from his blood-status to his haircut. Supporting him in his educational and career goals is little enough I can do in return for all he – and my other future consorts – do for me and my houses. Think on that, Ms. Parkinson, the next time you call the Consort of House Emrys something so foul as a mudblood, won’t you?”

…

One thing led to another, and in the end it was a good portion of their year that ended up tromping up to the King’s Tower.

Access to the Tower was restricted and only available on the second floor to prevent an invading force (signs of Gryffindor’s war-like temper marrying up to Slytherin’s cunning) from being able to march directly to the Tower.

In fact, the entrance wasn’t far from the mostly-abandoned girl’s loo that Hadrian knew from both Hagrid’s trial and royal records concealed the entrance to the Chamber of Secrets…something he’d have to worry about at some point given that the last Slytherin to enter the school had used the ancient protector as a way to “cleanse” it of so-called dirty blood.

Theo Nott wasn’t about to be left alone with a fuming Pansy, or get drawn into the heated intellectual debate over various class options with the bulk of whom most were betting would make up their year’s set of Ravenclaws including Granger, Mandy Brocklehurst, and Stephen Cornfoot. Seamus in the meantime simply was his shameless self and invited himself along, bringing the group up to ten, a full third of their year. For fear of more tagalongs, Hadrian and Wills headed out before anyone else jumped in, Hadrian not wanted to spurn any of their classmates – before they deserved it anyway – and Wills too amused at the near-frazzle Seamus’s self-invite had Rian in to be much help.

The group was asked to wait as Hadrian went into the Tower with only McG to make sure that wards and locking spells were set over anywhere – or anything – that the others shouldn’t be accessing, as even though it had only been one night there were secrets both of the Tower and of the King that were “eyes-only” to say the least.

Such as the doors that led everywhere from the Headmaster’s office to outside the castle, to say nothing of the time-field controls in the Tower’s main office, which also had his mail box and sensitive documents making it another off-limits area.

And as other doors were being warded for the visit, the guards’ level on the entrance floor, Russell’s rooms, and the royal bedchamber were locked as well, leaving only the more “common” or public areas open for the curious teens to explore.

“Well, then.” Wills ushered them inside once the door popped back open. “Here we are: the King’s Tower.”
The group of ten crowded into the entrance chamber, though found themselves underwhelmed with the simple stone room with a single richly-colored tapestry hanging from the spiral stairwell in the crest of Avalon. The circular stair circled the entire tower, however with the wards in place it only showed the balconies leading to the public areas rather than the full complement of floors. Their friends simply assumed that as it spiraled over their heads as they started at the top to work their way down that it had a roof-access…which it did but there were several floors between the common area/library/study room and the rooftop.

It was one of the flat-topped towers, which led to an outside living space that Hadrian already had plans to furnish once the hurry-up-and-wait frenetic pace of the start of school calmed.

“Nice digs.” Seamus commented, strolling around the massive room that was one room, with the only division coming from the furniture: a seating arrangement by the fireplace, some grouped tables for study, an overstuffed reading chair with a lamp behind and a side table, and so on. The Irishman frowned. “Bigger than our common room – for now – I think.”

“He’s right.” Draco’s canny eye and mind did a quick comparison. “Not by much but for only two people its on the grand side.”

He didn’t mention it, but Draco was already plotting on arranging things so that study groups were hosted here rather than in the library or the great hall…especially as he spied more than one tome that he doubted would be found in the library or in the Restricted Section if so.

“What else is there?” Blaise asked, after their second stop which was a small-scale version of the dining hall at Skye Palace.

“Lots of things.” Hadrian shrugged from where he’d propped a shoulder against the wall by a painting of whom the engraved nameplate dubbed Rakesh Slytherin, one of the earlier Slytherin kings if Hadrian had his lineage correct. “Private rooms, guard quarters, Russell’s rooms, and a state secret or two.”

“Aw man.” Conan teased. “And here I was looking forward to winning the betting on boxers or briefs.”

Hadrian – very maturely – stuck out his tongue at his classmate/friend. Conan had been one of the kids that Hadrian had finally been allowed to socialize with before attending H.I., along with Neville, Susan, and Hannah plus Hannah’s younger sister. He wasn’t as close to Hadrian as Neville, due to him splitting time between the social group closer to his home and the one at the Wallace estate, but he was good company – and a good friend – for all that he couldn’t be considered one of Hadrian’s closest friends.

Conan was much more light-hearted than many Heirs tended to be, a trait he shared with his cousin Cedric from the stories the other teen told, and made a good foil for Hadrian’s group of closest friends that tended to be on the more serious side though they still knew how to have fun.

If Neville reminded Hadrian – more than a little – of Remus, then Conan would definitely be a Padfoot, minus the occasional dog-like barking laugh from the older – and odder – wizard’s Animagus form.

“You all lose.” Wills told Conan with a taunting smirk shot at his Rian whose glare at his beloved was hot enough to melt stone.

“Oh really?” Seamus’s grin as he sidled over to the luscious – if he did say so himself – consort was nothing less than salacious, matching the leer he cast at the blushing and glaring King from across the
“Do tell, gorgeous.” He purred, thickening his brogue for effect.

“Down boy.” Sally-Anne walked up at smacked the brunet on the back of the head with a solid wallop. “I for one would rather not know about what my King wears under his trousers.” Her tone turned teasing as she grinned at Hadrian who had given her a high-five as she passed him in her circuit of the room. “He’s the one supposed to picture us naked when he gets stage-fright not the other way ‘round.”

“Sonuvabitch, not you too.” Hadrian cursed under his breath, netting him a disapproving look from Hannah and a laugh from Susan – both due to his language in front of “ladies” which Hannah made no bones about scolding him for as Seamus continued to badger Wills to reveal what sort of knickers his husband – or himself, Seamus really wouldn’t be fussed either way - wore.

“You’re not a lady, not in here.” Hadrian rolled his eyes and crossed his arms. Wills had gotten him into this – along with his own tongue – and the traitor had abandoned him to Hannah’s not-so-tender mercies while the others started talking to some of the portraits.

High treason, that’s what it was.

Especially, Draco, Blaise, and Theo who were trying to convince Rakesh to talk to them between shooting him smug smirks.

“You’re just a friend, and I don’t have to watch my language in private around my friends.” He arched a knowing brow at the narrow-eyed blonde. “Do I?”

“You’re not nearly as smart as you think you are, Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon.” Hannah settled on for a rebuttal – though she notably didn’t argue with his point.

“Really?” He arched a musing brow. “I shall have to inform the Headmistress at once. Imagine, torturing myself with all those tests just to be dismissed before the Sorting…”

Huffing out a breath with an exaggerated pout she gave him a playful scowl.

“You’re not as funny or charming, either.” She informed him.

“I beg to differ.” He retorted with a snicker. “I find myself hilarious.”

“Way to prove her point, love.”

“Hush, you.” He wrinkled his nose at Wills. “You’re still in the dog house for trying to shop my choices in unmentionables to an incorrigible flirt.”

“I’d reform in a heartbeat if it meant a shot at either of you.” Seamus admitted without so much as a blush. “Separately or together.”

Hadrian cocked his head to one side, trailing his eyes up Seamus’s lanky early-teens body in a look that might as well be one long stroke of his tongue, then strolled away whistling a jaunty tune.

“Was that a yes?” Seamus shouted at his back, nearly stuttering in response to that look.

“That.” Neville patted the finally-flushed flirt on his back. “Was him fucking with you, mate.”

“Damn.” Seamus deflated, sulking more than a little bit as the future-Slytherins – there was no way those three were going anywhere else – all but fell into each other’s arms in raucous laughter at his expense.
“You really shouldn’t bait him.” Susan explained kindly to the boy that hadn’t had as much exposure to Hadrian as the others save Sally-Anne. “Sometimes I swear he doesn’t know how to turn down a dare.”

Groups formed and reformed or expanded in the brief span of time left before the Welcome Feast and the inevitable Sorting of all the first years but Hadrian.

For simplicity’s sake, he would be rotating between Houses alphabetically which should hopefully allow him time to socialize with all of his classmates – both in his year and the two above, as the Headmistress had confided that while some self-study would be necessary, he would be able to join both the second and third years in those classes which he’d tested into.

He hadn’t taken tests for all of the classes, for the simple reason that he wanted to be with others his age.

He just didn’t want to be bored out of his mind in the process.

Besides which, Hogwarts was really a golden opportunity to help form the opinions of his contemporaries (age-wise) in Wizarding Great Britain as to both the renewed monarchy in general and their new King in particular…something that would be accomplished with much more ease if he was also taking classes with a wider pool of students than those his own physical age.

Then, the sound of the Hogwarts Express whistling cheerfully into the station sounded – amplified no doubt as a warning for the teachers, staff, and apprentices – throughout Hogwarts and the brief idyll before Sorting broke, and nerves once more took center stage as they gathered in an antechamber off the Great Hall as it filled with the noise of hundreds of hungry students happy to be out of the drizzly September Scottish weather.

“Now then.” Head of Gryffindor McGonagall bustled into the antechamber where she’d left the first-years to “tidy-up” with a pointed look at smudge-nosed Ronald and the misbuttoned cloak on Alicia (Ally) Infeles. “Form up, straight line please, and here we go.”

Following behind like ducklings after their mother, the first-years walked out into the Hall, the radiance of which put their own welcoming dinner to shame as the ceiling danced and wheeled with stars and the candlelight flickered and glowed from crystal sconces and silverplate.

McGonagall led them over to stand at the side of the hall, just adjacent to the ancient Sorting Hat, and then returned to stand beside it, with Hadrian at her side who would manage the Hat – lest it end up on the floor, or in the soup as in one memorable Sorting – as he wasn’t to be Sorted himself.

Then the brim opened, and the enchanted headwear sang:

“In times of old, when I was new,
And Hogwarts barely started,
The founders of our noble school
Thought never to be parted.

United by a common goal,
They had the selfsame yearning
To make the world’s best magic school
And pass along their learning.
"Together we will build and teach"
The four good friends decided.
And never did they dream that they
Might someday fade away.

For were there such friends anywhere
As Slytherin and Gryffindor?
Unless it was the second pair
Of Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw,

So how could it have gone so wrong?
How could such bloodlines fail?
Why, I was there, so I can tell
The whole sad, sorry tale.

Said Slytherin, "We'll enjoin just those
Whose ancestry's purest."
Said Ravenclaw, "We'll follow those whose
Intelligence is surest."

Said Gryffindor, "We'll enthrone only those
With brave deeds to their name."
Said Hufflepuff, "I'll honor the lot
And treat them just the same."

These differences caused little strife
When first they came to light.
For each of the four founders had
A house in which they might

Ally only those they wanted, so,
For instance, Slytherin
Took only pure-blood wizards
Of great cunning just like him.

And only those of sharpest mind
Were raised up by Ravenclaw
While the bravest and the boldest
Went to daring Gryffindor.

Good Hufflepuff, she took the rest
and taught them all she knew,
Thus, the houses and their founders
Maintained friendships firm and true.

So Hogwarts worked in harmony
for several happy years,
but then discord crept among us
feeding on our faults and fears.

The Houses that, like pillars four
had once held up our school
now turned upon each other and
divided, sought to rule.

And for a while it seemed the school and her founders
must meet an early end.
what with duelling and with fighting
and the clash of friend on friend.

And at last there came a morning
when old Slytherin departed
and though the fighting then died out
he left us quite downhearted.

And never since the founders royal houses four
were whittled down to three
have the Houses been united
as they once were meant to be.

*Then a day came,*

*And I was glad to hear.*

*That Avalon had risen once more,*

*To bring an end to the tear.*

And now the Sorting Hat is here
and you all know the score:
I sort you into Houses
because that is what I'm for.

But this year I'll go further,
listen closely to my song:
though condemned I am to split you
still I worry that it's wrong,

Though I must fulfil my duty
and must quarter every year
still I wonder whether sorting
may not bring the end I fear.

As we must unite as one
or we'll crumble from within
I have told you, I have warned you...
let the Sorting now begin.”

Hadrian eyed the Hat with a mix of wonder and caution at the tale, though it helped fill in a few gaps regarding the original end of the Avalon Seven.

He wondered, also, just what else it knew…but as Professor McGonagall had gathered herself and was reading off the first name, it was a thing to ponder for another day.
“Abbott, Hannah!”

Hadrian smiled at his friend as she took her place on the stool and he set the Hat down gently on her head, his hands barely leaving the brim before:

“Hufflepuff!”

And the table filled with students clad in robes either edged in yellow or wearing yellow and black striped ties burst into applause.

Amanda Avery-Jones, Susan Bones, and Alice Bonifice, were all welcomed into the House of Loyalty with increasingly raucous cheers as it appeared the Badgers might end up with a majority that year.

The Hat, after all, might be charged with quartering the year, but it also wouldn’t put a student in a House that was truly unfit for them, making it so that at times there was a bit of a gap between the house numbers but never a very large one, usually less than five or six between the fullest house and the leanest in number for the year.

However, the next four broke the trend of the previous quartet with:

“Boot, Terry!”

“Ravenclaw!”

The Ravens cheering just as earnestly but with a bit more decorum than the ‘Puffs.

“Brocklehurst, Mandy!”

“Ravenclaw!”

Before another trend could begin came:

“Brown, Lavender!”

This sorting took a bit more time than the others, but only by twenty or so seconds, nothing close to a hat-stall.

“Gryffindor!”

Blushing Ms. Brown was met with cheers that made the ‘puffs look time by the House of Lions, and the Hat continued with:

“Bulstrode, Millicent!”

“Slytherin!”

Taking almost no time at all.

Another six students were Sorted, with names and faces flying by save for Conan who got a smile and a shoulder bump in congratulations for landing Gryffindor along with Lavender, only the second student and first male sorted there for the year, with it looking like ’93 would be a lean year for the Lions.

Fay Dunbar’s sorting to Ravenclaw put them even with Hufflepuff with five each, the Lions and Snakes only having a pair as Tracey Davis had joined Millicent in green-and-silver.
Then came the Sorting that was of most interest to Hadrian – and indeed most of the Hall.

“William Emrys-Nimue!”

Hadrian smiled brightly at his husband, as the blond strode confidently across the Hall, ignoring the staring student body with panache.

He had a pretty damn good idea of where his Wills was going to end up, but there was always the chance that the Hat could find certain traits stronger than others.

“Gryffindor!”

Laughing as he tugged the Hat off Wills’s blond curls, the handsome youth had only been under the Hat for less than a minute, Hadrian gave him a smacking kiss to the cheek and a wink before turning once more to his duty as Wills made his way to the roaring Lions and sat easily between David and Conan, the two plotting to make sure there was room enough for a pair of slim bodies to join them at the end of the ceremony.

Wills could hardly wait for classes to begin now that the nerves of Sorting were vanquished.

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Author’s Note: For the full Sorting results, I have posted a Note on my Facebook page with the full list of students – canon and OC’s – and their placement.

Also, while I think it goes without saying, the Sorting Hat's song isn't original, only parts of it were tinkered with to fit the story.
Due to requests, I’ve copied the complete Sorting from the last chapter at the beginning of this one, which includes the Sortings for both my OC’s and the canon characters.

*Note: Contains Spoilers for Chapter Twenty-Two of the Avalon Seven, specifically the Sorting Scene...I’ve also included students who in canon were in other years/houses mainly because at the time I came up with this list my naming ability was running on empty.

Sorted by House and includes original characters:

Gryffindor:

Brown, Lavender; Diggory, Conan; Emrys-Nimue, William; Finnegan, Seamus; Infeles, Alicia; Longbottom, Neville; Patil, Parvati; Perks, Sally-Anne; Roper, Sophie; Thomas, Dean; Vane, Emma.

Hufflepuff:

Abbott, Hannah; Avery-Jones, Amanda; Bones, Susan; Boniface, Alice; Crabbe, Vincent; Finch-Fletchley, Justin; Goyle, Gregory; Hopkins, Wayne; Jones, Megan; Jonston, Edgar; MacMillian, Ernest; Rivers, Oliver; Smith, Zacharias; and Weasley, Ronald.

Ravenclaw:

Boot, Terry; Brocklehurst, Amanda (Mandy); Corner, Michael; Cornfoot, Stephen; Davies, Roger; Dunbar, Fay; Entwhistle, Kevin; Granger, Hermione; Goldstein, Anthony; Li, Sue; MacDougal, Morag; Malone, Robert; Moon, Lily; Patil, Padma; Smith-Brown, Sarah; Turpin, Lisa.

Slytherin:

Bulstrode, Millicent; Davis, Tracey; Flint, Miles; Greengrass, Daphne; Hawkins, Reginald; Marshbanks, Leanne; Malfoy, Draco; Nettle, Mauricius; Nott, Theodore; Parkinson, Pansy; Runcorn, Alistair; Zabini, Blaise.

Not Sorted: Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon.

All total: 11 Gryffindors, 14 Hufflepuffs, 16 Ravenclaws, and 12 Slytherins; 25 witches and 31 wizards.

Top of Form

Chapter Twenty-Three: Old Friends and New Faces

Diana entered the gorgeous morning room at Skye Palace with trepidation hidden behind the confidence learned from years at the side of a Prince.

At the insistence of her son and son-in-law, Diana and Henry had taken up residence at the Nimue vineyards of Avalon in the wake of the disaster her marriage had turned out to be on both her and her husband’s parts. They were accompanied by Wills’s guard from the royal protection force, on the Queen’s insistence. At the moment however, while her divorce was in motion, no clear resolution
regarding custody of her children had been reached – a situation that didn’t have any end in sight and was complicated by both herself and her sons being subject to magical law as well as mundane law.

Under magical law – as Diana understood it – Wills was the Lord of House Nimue, making him ostensibly not only Henry’s guardian but also Diana’s if her marriage to Charles was broken or dissolved.

It was nothing less than odd to the former Lady and current Princess, to be considered under another’s guardianship in her thirties let alone that of her thirteen-year-old son.

However, that was the way of the magical world, and as Diana had been proven a squib rather than a non-magical by not only giving birth to two strong magical sons but also through testing over the last few years undertaken by her own curiosity and carried out by Lady Andromeda, Diana was subject to the laws of the magical world.

Her confirmation as magical, removal to the Nimue holdings, and her station as mother to two magical boys had garnered Diana an invitation that brought her to Skye Palace this morning – for a ladies tea.

While still a princess in the mundane world, in the magical she was considered the Dowager Lady of House Nimue, and would until her William’s heir took a spouse.

And wasn’t that a mental switch to flip – from an automatic assumption of wife or husband to spouse.

While originally feeling more than a bit out of place among the magical ladies that formed membership of the royal household of Skye Palace – for one reason or another – over the last two years as she acclimated to the strangeness of magical society and assisted in planning Wills’s wedding, she had formed at least a tentative friendship with both Lady Anthea Holmes and Lady Narcissa Black-Malfoy, already having formed a working-friendship of sorts with Lady Andromeda Black-Tonks while that strong witch tutored her sons in the magical world and helped prepare first Wills and now Harry for the trials that faced them as a magical lord or heir.

If this tea was with only those three ladies, Diana would have no reason for even an iota of trepidation – though her now very-public marital troubles had her on the back foot.

Diana knew full-well what the magical world thought of divorce, let alone infidelity.

However, this was a full Ladies Tea, with most if not all Ladies involved in the royal household set to be present – and the first of such social events that Diana had been invited to as the Dowager Lady Nimue.

At the least the formidable Lady Augusta should be present, along with the indomitable Lady Margeux, and more than likely her sister-in-law (as Diana had heard Hadrian put it more than once the other Lady Holmes) the stiffly-formal Lady Philippa Holmes nee Smith along with her shy daughter Helga who had married the Ollivander heir and son of former Headmaster Eddard, Gareth, the previous year, and her flighty daughter-in-law Euphemia Holmes nee Brown who was newly pregnant as well, and possibly the other royal chatelains in service to Diana’s son-in-law or the wives of his Privy Lords…save Lady Amelia who was both the Minister of Magic for Great Britain as well as Hadrian’s Lord High Justice.

Diana need no royal training to realize that for Lady Philippa at least, her presence would be worthy of at least a scornful nose-wrinkle, if not an entire politely-hidden-by-a-teacup sneer.
The Smiths, she had had reason to learn over the past several formal events and balls she had attended, were as displeased with her high-station due to her son – now sons with Henry’s magic being revealed in spectacular fashion – as the most stiff-necked blood purists such as the Notts.

In that – warning her so to be wary of and who not and most importantly why – her burgeoning friendship with Andromeda and Narcissa had been invaluable.

Hadrian had also given her family as a whole a warning or two, but tended more towards allowing others to make their own determinations as to the motives and attitudes of others.

A wise thing, as the way one treats a King – or a Queen in the case of her mother-in-law – was vastly different from how one treats a fellow noble or the common man on the street.

Diana had never been overly approved of by her fellow highborn – a fact that failed to bother her – especially as she used her marital station to make waves in the process of drawing attention to what many condescendingly dubbed her “causes” such as homelessness, poverty, and children’s welfare at home and abroad.

But the people loved her for the same reasons the nobles scorned her – and that was a trade worth making as far as she was concerned.

A notion that her son-in-law didn’t fear to embrace himself, though as a King and absolute monarch his power over his nobility and ability to fend off censure was a much stronger shield to his name than her own as a married-in (and now to be scandalously divorced) Princess.

Still, with Wills off at Hogwarts full-time, Henry busy with his lessons much of the time, and her marriage in ruins, Diana had no real reason to refuse an invitation from Lady Margeux who had retained – and likely would for as long as she wished if Diana was any good at all at reading a situation – her position as the main “Lady” of Hadrian’s household.

A fact that worked in Diana’s favor, as while Diana was considered a squib, Lady Maggie’s powers were not much greater than her own simple ability to use pre-purposed magical objects and birth magical sons – or daughters if the time ever came where she might remarry.

Diana held in a snort, even as her heart broke a little at the thought.

After all – who would dare even attempt to handle the ex-wife of a Prince?

…

The tea had come to an end, and Diana stared out of the morning room’s vast picture window over Avalon as some of the other ladies were ushered out or otherwise took their leave.

Diana should be as well, but for some reason the view transfixed her.

To think, while mainland Europe was still in the thrall of the Dark Ages, her family was participating in such a great work of magic.

It was enough to still the mind and bestow awe upon even the greatest of snobs – which Diana, as her trips with her boys to McDonalds and theme parks alike very much was not.

“Is there something on your mind, Lady Nimue?”

The soft, ladylike tones belonged to none other than Lady Narcissa, who for all that most considered less approachable than her healer sister, was more of an age with Diana.
“Just wondering over Avalon.” Diana gave the lovely blue-eyed lady a half-smile. “Every once and a while I forget…and then my breath catches in my chest.”

“Yes, it does have that effect.” Narcissa agreed with a small smile of her own, one hand rubbing lightly over her softly mounded stomach.

She and Andromeda had conceived – amusingly enough – both on Beltane, which wasn’t all that uncommon if a magical of bearing years...frolicked after the bonfires.

For that same reason, children were also conceived in greater numbers on the Summer Solstice and Lughnasadh, as those festivals took place during the fertile growing season with the last ‘baby boom’ of the year generally coming on Samhain.

That wasn’t to say that magicals didn’t quicken with child during other times of year, not at all.

It was simply easier to do so during the growing season and with the boost provided by the rituals and festivals.

“How are you feeling?” Diana asked with genuine interest.

Narcissa’s laugh was bright.

“Miserable.” She beamed at the golden-haired dowager of House Nimue. “And happier than I’ve been in a decade.”

At eighteen weeks, she was in the down-swing of mother’s sickness, and starting to show thanks to her very slender form.

Andromeda, being not at lithe, likely wouldn’t show as much for weeks yet – the lucky witch.

“Oh?” Diana gave a short frown in confusion.

From what she had seen, Narcissa was much in love with her silver-haired husband, and adored her son, where in that mixture there was room for unhappiness, she wasn’t certain.

Narcissa cast a glance over her shoulder, then motioned for Diana to sit with her on the wide window seat, casting a privacy spell over their nook once the princess had done so.

“I know my sister has meant to mention it.” Narcissa began, feeling her way through the conversation. “However, it is a delicate thing to approach, given your current…difficulties.”

Diana turned a bit cold, knowing at once what the other lady meant.

“Oh, no.” Narcissa waved the mask off. “It’s nothing bad. Simply, that we felt – Andromeda and I – that you should be aware of the consequences of the inevitable outcome of your removal to the Nimue vineyards.”

“Very well.” Diana gave an agreeing – if regal – dip of her chin.

“As you may know from your sons’s lessons, magical nobility – particularly those which are staunch blood purists,” Narcissa began with care. “Have trouble with bearing and delivering babes.”

Diana sucked in a breath, one hand covering her mouth as the blue eyes watching her glinted with long-held grief.

“Yes.” Narcissa said no more than that. “My sister and I both only have one child for more reasons
than both Dora and Draco being more than a bit of a handful.” Then she smiled. “Your son-in-law has changed more than the law regarding marriage and babes. His leadership and lending of his power to the ancient rites is helping us overcome what has long been a personal struggle in many Houses and pureblood families.”

“You and Andromeda?” Diana put the pieces together with an understanding smile. She wouldn’t know what she would do without either of her beloved boys.

“Both were told that we either would not – or should not – conceive again.” Narcissa supplied, her hand once more brushing over her bump. “And our sister Bellatrix – mad, and cast off as she is – never conceived as far as I am aware with her husband Lord LeStrange.”

“Miracle babies.” Diana laughed a bit, shaking her head. “And should I prepare myself for one as well, should I take a lover?”

“Oh, you’ll be sought after for more than a lover, I’d bet my husband’s manor on it.” Narcissa told her with a knowing arch of a brow. “You’ve had two strong magical sons with a mundane husband. There’s more than one House or pureblood family that would give half their holdings for an influx of such power. And with the new laws regarding intermarriage and breeding.” Narcissa gave a dainty shrug. “You’ll be quite sought after.”

“I’m thirty-two years old.” Diana blinked in shock. Though the idea of more children did appeal. “More than that.” She continued. “I can’t marry again according to magical law.”

“Why would you think so?”

“I’ll be divorced.” She bit her lip then admitted. “And I was unfaithful to my husband.”

“Oh, I see.” Narcissa waved that off airily. “You are stuck on a particular point of magical law that does not apply. You see,” Narcissa enlightened her. “Once an oath is broken – of any kind – per magical law it is broken. The first offense is what matters to magic, not any that came after. As for your divorce.” Narcissa smirked. “Marriages are dissolved under Avalonian law. It is bondings that cannot be. You will be marriageable. And your age of all things is no matter. Thirty-three is not even middle age for a mundane, let alone a squib or a magical. With the latent power of your heritage and living in the magical realm, you will live longer than you would in the mundane world. Not as long as a full magical.” Narcissa warned her. “But still more than long enough to bear more children if you please and see your great-great-grandchildren at the least.”

With that, Narcissa gave the shocked Dowager Lady Nimue a comforting pat on her hand and rose, breaking the privacy spell as she did so, to report back to her elder sister that the lady in question had been informed of what may – and knowing some Houses – will come once she is once more eligible.

For Diana’s part, she simply sat and stared out over Avalon once more, her brain tumbling all around far too fast for her to catch hold.

…

The morning after the Welcome Feast – this year the first morning of the school year – was the only breakfast of the year with the “House” tables present rather than a choose-your-seating set-up similar to the plentiful round tables at the Incoming dinner for new students. This was for a simple reason: for ease of casting the spell that would add schedules to each individual student’s planner. The majority of the years were easy enough, as other than a few shifts the students would have the same classes as the year before. However, for the first and fourth years, a complex process involving graphs, spells, arithmancy, and more than a little cursing on the part of the department heads was
involved in crafting their schedules.

Each department head thanked Magic every year for two reasons – one, that they *had* magic to help with the process; and two, that they didn’t have to accommodate the students clubs and study groups.

That was the students’ problem, though all of the clubs took place before or after school hours or on the weekends.

It was the study groups – and the students that wanted to participate in clubs running at the same hours – that led to whinging every year without fail.

Mundane Studies was another clear area, as the massive study hall allotted – the largest for any one area of study – was staffed completely during the school day with professors to assist any of the students with their correspondence work.

This set-up meant that this morning, much like the prior evening, found Hadrian sandwiched between Wills and Neville, with Conan across from them bracketed by Seamus and Dean who were new to hanging around the royal pair, particularly Dean who hadn’t attended H.I. with the other teens but had passed the entrance exam for Hogwarts and netted a partial scholarship to help defray the expense of the prestigious school.

That didn’t stop the pair of Gryffindors, as the other options were much scarier to a couple thirteen-year-olds: older students or worse, *teenaged girls*.

Lavender and Parvati giggling every time they looked down the table at Hadrian didn’t help their bravery in the face of the female sex either.

Once seated, the first-years noticed notes placed on their plates, which instructed them to insert the note into the first page of the back half of their school planners – the actual “planner” portion as the front half was filled with class descriptions, club and teacher-led study group hours, and the dreaded rules – then to tap it with their wands which would activate the spellwork and fill-in their schedules.

By requiring the students to separate by House, it allowed the spell to only have to search through one House-roster instead of four, quartering the amount of power it required on the part of the staff and school to manage.

Still and all – it was much more time-efficient than forcing the House Heads and their deputies to find and pass out each and every student’s schedule for the year.

“Okay.” Wills allowed with a grin at Hadrian, being one of the few first-years along with his husband to bring his filled bookbag with him to breakfast. He didn’t fancy a jaunt back up to the King’s Tower this early in the morning, breakfast only ran from seven to seven forty-five after all. “That’s brilliant.”

“Mhmm.” His Rian hummed, resting his chin on Wills’s shoulder as he studied his schedule then compared it with his own. “We’ll be able to have several classes together this year, plus clubs and study times.”

Conan across the way rolled his eyes at the mush.

“As if you two aren’t joined at the hip already.” And between school and being one of their mutual friends he’d know.

“Oh, I’m sorry.” Hadrian arched a brow at his friend. “Does that mean you don’t intend on being right there with us for Flying Club and Pick-Up Quidditch?”
The Diggory Heir quickly back-tracked.

“No one said anything about bailing on Quidditch.” He shot back. “Only the level of mush we might have to clear from the field in order to play.”

“Better you than me.” Neville interjected before the two could get going – though which two was the question, as Wills looked just as perturbed if not more than Hadrian. “I’ll stay on the ground with the sensible folk, thank-you-very-much.”

Hadrian conceded that with a nod and a sigh.

No matter how many times he and Wills – not to mention Quidditch-mad Draco – had tried, Neville remained firmly attached to terra firma.

“Horseback Riding?” He offered, already knowing that he had a snowcone’s change in hell of getting Nev to join the Pterrippi club.

“Sure.” That was different. Regular horses that stayed on the ground were just fine with Neville. So long as they didn’t sprout wings mid-gallop. “I’m doing Herbology Club too.” Neville tapped his wand to the two-hour slot for that on Sundays, watching with a smile as it filled in.

The planner potion for student use worked like a drag-and-drop with pre-loaded options ranging everywhere from the offered clubs and proctored study groups to self-arranged scheduling for personal study groups with select friends or blocking off individual study and homework times.

Junior Professors roamed the Great Hall as chatter mixed with quiet contemplation filled it, extra time allowed – though fifteen minutes only – this morning as having learned from the previous two years the professors knew that ushering the students to class when they were focused on nabbing their preferred clubs and study groups before they filled up was like trying to herd cats. At least the apprentices managed to field whatever questions couldn’t be handled by the information in the planners. And that was mostly for the first-years after all, the older students knowing the drill.

Wills took a peek at Rian’s schedule and snorted.

He would sign up for all of the active clubs except dance.

“I’m not getting up for all of those.” He told his husband, eyes narrowed on the sudden look of innocence on Rian’s face.

Damn him and his puppy-dog eyes.

“Four out of five.” Hadrian started in on the bargaining when the puppy-eyes failed. It had been a long-shot anyway, even for puppy-eyes on his scale. Wills was not a fan of early mornings. And as the activities Hadrian preferred started at six am, getting him to join any of them was going to be a win.

“Two.”

“Three.”

“Not Unarmed Combat.”

“Done.”

Ignoring the snickers surrounding them – from their year-mates and the older students as well –
Hadrian focused on his next victim – er – target.

“Don’t even start with me.” Conan swore, warning him off with a vaguely threatening fork. “There’s no way I’m doing any more than I have to.”

Which in his case was only the Fencing Club, per his father’s insistence.

“Nev?” Puppy-dog eyes locked on their next target, who promptly ducked his head and avoided eye contact – too late.

He’d already been hit with the big-green-gaze-of-pitiful-doom.

Neville muttered under his breath, then conceded. Like Conan, he had to take at least Fencing anyway, and Merlin knew he could use the Dueling practice outside of class. It was the Archery and Unarmed Combat he wasn’t looking forward to. At least he knew he could count on Hadrian to keep him going, and the extra exercise would help build more muscle for the more physical herbology projects.

Dean just laughed him off when the green gaze turned to him, he’d be taking dance in the evenings like any sane teenager…or those with betrotheds or girlfriends who drug them into it; while Seamus rolled his eyes and signed up for Fencing and Dueling as he’d been told by his House lord.

His Da may be a mundane, but him Mam was a daughter of House Shaunessey in the direct line…and Lord Shaunessey kept a stern eye on all of his Heirs whether immediate or secondary for the poor sap he’d leave the title to…if the ancient codger ever did shuck his earthly coil anyway.

“Success.” Hadrian beamed, rubbing his hands together in a mock-evil fashion, complete with cackle.

“Are you off to badger Draco or Blaise first?” Wills asked with a smirk.

“Why one or the other?” Rian stood with a bounce in his step, bag and planner in hand, pressing a kiss to Wills’s cheek, having already sorted that he’d meet him at the Mundane Study hall on his way to their first class together: Charms. Hadrian had a double-period of Defense with the Third Years while Wills was going to get a head-start on his mundane school work. “See you later, love.”

“See you.” Wills waved him off, focusing on his planner and then adding a Defense club and a Charms club slot during Rian’s Music Clubs, and finishing out with a Potions Club on Saturday mornings that Russell had already blocked off the previous night for “Affairs of State” for Hadrian. Wills knew that even with more clubs than his Rian, he still had a lot more free time between the heavy work-load his husband had insisted on and his duties as King.

But at least neither of them were bothered – yet – as they’d been warned could happen over different interests and differing social groups.

Jealousy was sure to pop up again at some point, Wills had already struggled with it thanks to Rian’s betrothals, but thus far they’d cleared the first hurdle and while he might be being too optimistic, at the moment everything looked nothing less than perfect.

Early morning active clubs aside.

…

After negotiating Draco into the same agreement as Wills, and talking Blaise into adding Unarmed Combat to go with his already selected Dueling club, Hadrian made a round of his other
acquaintances – even if just a fly-by – at the various House tables before heading off to his first Hogwarts class.

There would be plenty of time to sucker – talk – his other friends into joining some of his pursuits later.

One of the good things of having a staff capable of teaching the current student load wasn’t only improved grades and less injuries from accidents due to lack of supervision, but also having lots of staff to take on study groups or clubs, not just manage detentions and a sparse couple of extracurriculars.

Making his way into the Defense corridor, Hadrian took his place with the Third Years – and the whispers instantly started.

Of all the years, Third Year had the most students – if only by a couple – at seventy strong, making teaching all the year at once unmanageable.

Where before the reforms would have been simply split by House, now there were mixed groups of students from every House that usually were on similar education paths, though not always depending on what electives they took and if they’d had to repeat any core subjects, and so on.

As luck would have it, that meant that Hadrian’s class had landed both of the Weasley twins, Conan’s older cousin Cedric, and Adrian Pucey who Hadrian knew being David and Rhys’s cousin but wasn’t overly close to for the last couple years; with the rest of the thirty-odd students being a mixture of House, social status, and gender.

“Well, well, well, Gred.” One of the redheads leaned forward from where he was talking to the rest of the class’s Gryffindors.

“What have we here, Forge?” The other echoed him, the pair continuing on in their alternating speech as their classmates groaned, rolled their eyes, or simply ignored it.

“It looks like a lost firstie, Gred.” The first eyed him.

“Can’t be, Forge.” His twin scoffed.

“Perhaps his nips is in search…”

“…Of some double-trouble…”

“Do you suppose?”

“Oi.” Hadrian had enough of that line of discussion, well-warned by Tavi and David alike of the Weasley Twins and their pranking habits.

It was far too early in the year to start a prank war.

Though it was something to keep in the back of his mind for just before winter break…

“Shut it.” Cedric shook his head. “Or did you miss the shadow?” He jerked a thumb towards Lionel who was on Hadrian-duty for the day, Evan Durand, another guard, following Wills when they were separated.

“Aww…”

“But…”
“He wouldn’t…”

“Hex, little….”

“Old us….”

“Now would he?” They finished together.

“If you annoy me to the point that I convince him you’re a threat to my sanity he might.” Hadrian said drily, just as the door to the class opened and the group was ushered inside by the Professor for this half of the year.

A Professor who happened to be none other than Master Auror Alistair Moody, father of the infamous "Mad Eye" Moody, with Auror Cassius Grimble taking on the other half of the year down the hall.

“Alright you lot.” Moody grumbled, nodding once to Hadrian – then to his amusement giving Evan an even deeper nod of respect for the wand that was held in a loose, steady grip in his hand and ready to cast. “Constant vigilance.” He said with approval. “That’ll keep you and your charge alive and kicking, boy, mark my words.”

Hadrian was pretty sure that holding in his eye-roll was almost physically painful for Evan who had more than a decade of experience as a HitWizard in France before being plucked by Hadrian and McG for the Guard, a decade that included more than a little time guarding the French Minister for Magic.

“As I’ve already seen.” Moody continued as the students shuffled into seats. “You’ve noted our younger guest. Mr. Emrys-Pendragon took several placement tests before the start of the year and is now inflicted with you lot for this year’s Defense Class.” Moody grunted as the students traded surprised looks amongst themselves as Hadrian took his seat at the back far-corner of the room with Evan between him and the door. A placement that had him nearest the Slytherins to Moody’s dislike.

Though the old Auror couldn’t fault it for strategic value save for that one caveat.

“CONTANT VIGILANCE!” He barked at the group, making more than one sixteen-year-old jump – Hadrian and his guard notably not among them, a phrase that any Auror trainee that was assigned to either father or son would recognize. “I didn’t survive the reign of terror of two Dark Lords without it.” The slap of his wand on the blackboard had the words – also in all caps – appearing on the board. “Now.” He continued. “You no doubt expect some folderol about your O.W.L.s. I’ll leave that to the other professors. You’re here to learn Defense and Constant Vigilance!”

This time his bark had only half the class jumping, the old scared Auror giving a pleased nod at that.

“Carrying on…”

…

“How was your first class?” Wills asked as he linked arms with his Rian, their shadows falling in behind them as they walked towards their Charms class.

“Interesting.” Hadrian decided. “I’ve got the Weasley twins, Adrian, and Cedric all in there with me.”

“Which Professor?”
“Moody.”

Hadrian rolled his eyes at Wills’s laughing snort.

“Yes, yes. It’s very funny.” He muttered. “The Twins are already working on testing the limits of his patience. But they knuckled down well enough when the demonstration started.”

“What’d he do?” Granted, it was two years off for Wills, but he was interested nonetheless. It had to be more entertaining than the physics paper he’d been working on.

“One of the first-year apprentices were hidden under Disillusionment charms.” Hadrian supplied as they met up with their classmates for Charms, which included Neville, Blaise, and Draco. “He demonstrated six different levels of Revealing charms. We have to practice them and write six-inches each on how they worked for us and why.”

Neville whistled. “Three feet of essay on the first class?” He winced. “Better you than me.”

Hadrian narrowed his eyes on his quiet friend, noting the not-as-tidy hair.

“You went back to the Tower and napped didn’t you?” He asked with no-little amount of betrayal as Draco snickered and high-fived Nev.

That made two of them.

“Maybe.” Neville gave him a cheery grin. “Some of us don’t have to take classes with upper-years or mundane studies, remember?”

“Prats.” Wills muttered, tugging Rian away before he recovered from his shock, towing him over to where Susan and Hannah were chatting with some of their Housemates and a few Ravenclaws.

The Charms classroom was open, students filtering in at-will before the bell and arranging themselves near their friends if possible.

A benefit of shared classes with both Hadrian and Wills in one place had them able to sit somewhere other than a well-protected corner of the room, the pair ending up one-row back from the front and surrounded by a mixed group of Houses that included their friends in this class: Nev, Draco, Blaise, Susan, and Hannah.

Unfortunately, there were a couple other students in this class that they’d rather were in the other block with the rest of their yearmates.

Like that prat who’d been nothing but a pain at H.I.: Zach Smith.

According to Draco – who always seemed to know the pureblood gossip – the Smiths were a mixed bag. Most of them were as polite and well-mannered as one would expect from a noble family that tended to sort Hufflepuff with the stray Ravenclaw or Gryffindor.

Then there was the main line males.

As the story went, upon the death of the Smith matriarch, the Dowager Lady Hepzibah Smith, the then Lord Smith could not locate a pair of invaluable heirlooms – one of which he intended to use to press his claim to the empty Hufflepuff throne.

The Smiths, having been loyal Hufflepuff retainers, had intermarried with the royal House more than once in their history.
Losing the Cup was nothing less than a horrible blow atop a senseless tragedy.

Left with no other option than to attempt an inheritance test through Gringotts, Lord Smith was refused the Hufflepuff title by the magic of the Bloodline Ritual, leaving him and his heirs with nothing less than a chip on their collective shoulders – especially when it came to Hadrian who had successfully and *accidentally* done what Lord Smith had failed.

Zacharias therefore, made sure to be the biggest arsehole he could to both Hadrian and anyone else to associated with him…without tiptoeing over the line into an arrest-able offense.

No matter how tempting, Hadrian couldn’t justify locking up Zach Smith for being a donkey’s cock-pimple.

He *could* however, hex the ever-loving-shite out of him if the prat ever found anything resembling a backbone and stepped up to the dueling strip.

Not that Hadrian was counting on such a turn of events.

Still.

One could hope.

…

Ms. Arless Wimbleton was their Junior Professor for Charms, and started them off after a brief introduction and explanation on their topic for the next month: Housekeeping and Grooming Charms.

Simple enough, one would think, but when one had the potential to burn down a house and the other to burn *you*, both were subjects that were best left for secondary Charms education and not the beginning courses taught at pre-secondary institutions.

A pair of spells were taught in conjunction that class: *Scourgify*, for general cleaning and a simple waxing charm for use on hardwood.

The object was simple: try to create a uniform, thin layer of wax on their desks per the example piece of wood passed out to each student, then clean it away with *Scourgify*, and repeat.

“Excellent, Mr. Emrys-Nimue.” The eighteen-year-old Junior Professor congratulated Wills on being the first to complete the *Scourgify* correctly. “Five points for Gryffindor.”

Wills cocked a brow at his Rian, asking a non-verbal “ready to play?”

Smirking in answer, before Ms. Wimbleton could move on to helping Crabbe from Hufflepuff with the spell Hadrian tapped the desk just once without saying a word, and it glistened and gleamed under the fresh coat of polish.

Laughing in delight, Arless added: “Five points to Gryffindor for completing *Ceratura*, Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.”

“Show-offs.” Draco snorted. “Now show the rest of us mere mortals how you two did that…”

…

Double-Charms led into lunch, the group of friends already making plans to section off a bit of their free evenings into a study group – likely in the library since until things settled down Hadrian didn’t
see McG being enthused about having anymore brats tromping through the King’s Tower than necessary – then onto Care of Magical Creatures for most of them.

Blaise had no interest in the subject, already dead-set on becoming either a barrister or solicitor, both of which had heavy education requirements.

He’d rather devote that two hours a week (one period each on Monday and Thursday), to Mundane Studies thereby giving him two more mornings a week to sleep in, than tromp around the animal and creature paddocks learning about the care and feeding of bowtruckles or crups.

Care was over before they knew it – the first single-period class any of them had had thus far – but the walk at least helped burn off some energy before Arithmancy, and let them snatch up snacks from the Great Hall on the way, as they knew there wasn’t a chance for them to fill their ever-empty teenage bellies between Arithmancy and double Potions.

Generations of potions students gave thanks the day Hadrian hired on the “dungeon bat” of Hogwarts as his Royal Potions Master and Researcher.

As did the Ladies Black-Tonks, Malfoy, and Holmes given that Severus was personally monitoring their health and supplying them with nutrition and anti-nausea potions – not to mention said ladies’ husbands.

Draco was filled with glee as he paid the royal pair back in points gained for their performance in Charms, Potions being his top subject thanks to Severus’s tutoring as his godfather and a genuine interest in the subject despite his goals of following his father into politics and the Privy Council.

At least their Junior Professor Argentum Jigger wasn’t as biased in point-taking as Severus was still notorious for being, which saved Gryffindor from going into the hole instead of breaking even with Slytherin.

Burdened with homework for Potions and Arithmancy, the group of first-years trudged into the Great Hall and found an empty table, a too-amused looking Tavi and Livia coming over to join them, Neville budging up from his spot collapsed next to Hadrian for Tavi while Livia took an empty seat between Draco and Conan.

“You six have the same schedule?” Tavi asked, tossing an arm across the back of Hadrian’s chair as the group found a second-wind and gave their order from the menu – another Perenelle change – to their plates from the pre-selected nutritional-but-tasty options.

Lunch was served family-style, and snacks were out between classes, but breakfast and dinner were both planned by the staff nutritionist and completed by the elves in large batches with any leftovers transported to a wizard-staffed half-way house in London for those who were on parole – which made a nice treat as any former-prisoner would tell you, the funds for reintegration never seemed to stretch to extras like bone-in ham and bread pudding.

David and Rhys Wallace rounded out the schedule – the latter to most of their surprise.

“For the most part.” Blaise explained. “Smarty-pants over there has some subjects with second or third year.”

“And you’d rather be caught dead than tromping through mud.” Rhys added with a knowing grin, leaning back to eye his long-time friend’s custom dragonhide boots.

“That too.” Blaise shrugged off the good-natured chuckles from the rest of the table, even as he caught Hadrian’s calculating glance at the Wallace “Spare.”
That was one doxy nest he was going to stay well-away from.

Getting in the middle – as any Slytherin would tell you – only led to getting hexed on both sides.

And this was one toxic concoction that had been brewing for months if not years, if his read of the situation was right.

…

Rhys laughed along with the playful taunting carried on around the table, not an iota of his inner rage showing on the surface.

It wasn’t being overlooked for his brother that infuriated him – though there was that too.

No one spurns a Bianchessi and walks away unscathed.

It was the blatant disrespect of it that chafed.

Allowing him to read about David and Hadrian’s confirmed intentions like a common nobody in his mother’s Witch Weekly, both of them and his damned father hiding the truth of the contract from him for years.

No, he wouldn’t let this lie.

But he wasn’t a Slytherin for nothing.

He knew Hadrian, the younger wizard was just waiting for Rhys to retaliate.

So Rhys would wait.

And he would watch.

And eventually, the day would come where that uppity foundling would reap what he’d sowed.

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Chapter Twenty-Four: A Wolf’s Wisdom

Two weeks into term and Headmistress Flamel called her first staff meeting with the apprentices overseeing the first years – plus the two apprentices and two professors over Mr. Emrys-Pendragon’s advanced placement classes – and the standard inclusion of the Heads of House and their deputies.

The two professors grumbled, as they had to stay for a double-meeting for their other years depending on the subject and the demand, but Alistair and the O.W.L. level Dueling Professor Thierry Armstrong both understood their summons.

“How are our newest crop of students acclimating?” Perenelle started off the meeting with the standard question, the Hufflepuff Head of House Pomona Sprout taking the lead as usual.

With fifty or more incoming students per year – especially now that the school was once more regaining its international credibility – they had a set system for these start of the year meetings. First, as Pomona was currently doing, they would cover any issues of homesickness, students that might need a bit of help adjusting, and so on. Then things got interesting.

The apprentices watched, and then blinked – as they always did – when Perenelle asked:

“And trouble spots?”

Pomona sighed, exchanging a knowing glance with her fellow heads of House: Minerva, Filius, and Septima Vector who had replaced Severus upon his leave-taking from teaching.

Trouble spots referred in this case to exactly what it said on the tin.

Two years before the main concern had been the Weasley Twins.

The year before that it was Rhys Wallace who had apparently decided to become an unrepentant rogue and was...precocious with it.

Given the looks between her Heads, Perenelle would be willing to wager that this crop of students had more than one student to keep a firm eye on – though the whys of such situations were always their goal, as the discovery of such usually led to an intervention on the part of the staff before a situation grew out of hand.

In the case of the Twins, a clear-cut explanation between what was a prank and what would be considered bullying under the student code had been in order.

For Rhys...well.

Implementation of school-wide contraceptive potions had already been in the works.
His behavior simply bumped up the time-frame.

Neither Perenelle nor Septima planned to be the unlucky witch who had to explain to Lord Wallace that his younger son had either been impregnated or impregnated someone else under their watch.

“Two of my ‘Puffs, this year I’m afraid.” Pomona reported with genuine regret. It always saddened her when a young person failed to acclimate properly to Hufflepuff. They may have a poor reputation, which was hogwash, as duffers, but a more loyal group was hard-pressed to be found. “Mr. Smith it seems is carrying on his father’s and grandfather’s ill-placed grudge against Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.”

Several of the apprentices nodded, including one of Pomona’s apprentices for Herbology Sophocles Brown, who was from a cadet branch of House Brown.

“It’s been limited to snarking – for the moment.” Sophocles supplied, the other apprentices who had taught one of the few classes that the two shared, which was thankfully this year limited to Charms, Herbology, and Arithmancy. “But come a time where they face each other across a dueling strip and it won’t stay that way.”

David Wallace, present as the second-year Dark Arts apprentice – which as Hadrian’s tests and papers were to be marked by David’s Dark Arts Master Professor Nott wasn’t a conflict of interest – snorted.

“Smith’s been a pain in Harry’s backside for the last two years.” He enlightened them. “And has been given the opportunity to sort the issue like wizards. He hasn’t the backbone for it.” The Wallace heir smirked. “If it wasn’t for his lack of cunning, he’s a better fit for Slytherin than Hufflepuff.”

“We shall have to see if we can’t redirect his soured ambitions then.” Perenelle commented, Pomona nodding her agreement at the charge put to her. “And the other?”

This time Pomona’s regret was more grimace than sorrow.

“Young Mr. Weasley.”

As one, the apprentices groaned, scowled, or rolled their eyes in exasperation.

“Honestly.” Tanessa Gillyflower, the Care apprentice, asked in utter exasperation. “How did a boy that lazy make Hufflepuff?”

“Too hot-headed for Slytherin.” Minerva rattled off, more than familiar with the quirks of House Weasley. “Not book-smart enough for Ravenclaw, not enough back-bone for Gryffindor.”

“Yes,” Pomona agreed, shaking her head. “He’s one of the “rest” I’m afraid. Misters Crabbe and Goyle at least have a sense of loyalty for all that they seem easily led, and aren’t afraid to ask for help in their classes. Mr. Weasley I fear will need an assigned study hall if there’s hope of him scraping more than the bare minimum of O.W.L.s.”

“Minerva?”

“Ms. Perks is adjusting well.” The Head of Gryffindor answered the unspoken question. “And my lions seem to have split into several groups of preference but aren’t shy about mingling with each other and other Houses.”

“Filius?”
“There’s a good mix this year.” The diminutive Ravenclaw reported. “Good heads, every one. Ms. Li’s translation charms are holding, and some of her yearmates are helping with her English.”

Ms. Li was Sue Li, and the daughter of the Ambassador to Avalon for Imperial China.

“I have one book-bound student this year.” He continued. “But Eddard has made a start at least in broadening Ms. Granger’s horizons, and I’ve hope that she won’t continue her problematic behavior from Hedwig.”

Perenelle knew full-well what he meant, as Ms. Granger’s record had more than one note regarding her false-accusations of cheating against other students, which had tapered off towards the end of her second year at H.I. – but not before isolating her from her peers there.

“Has she made any friends?”

“Ms. Brocklehurst is amenable to studying with her.” Filius allowed, though it didn’t go any further than that. “And she’s chosen Unarmed Combat for her physical activity…and has held her own against the other handful of young ladies there which seems to have gone a long way in repairing a bit of the relationship between herself and some of the others.”

“Clubs?”

“Arithmancy and Runes, no non-educational additions I’m afraid.”

“Hmm.” Perenelle tapped a finger on the long staff table. “Keep an eye on her Filius. It’s early in the year yet.”

Flitwick nodded, and the reporting continued with Septima.

“My little snakes are themselves.” The Slytherin head rolled her eyes. “All jockeying for position save for Mr. Malfoy who easily scooped the head position for his year with his station and friendship to Mr. Emrys-Pendragon. Mr. Runcorn has a sly temper on him, and I don’t want to be in the vicinity when Ms. Parkinson realizes that Mr. Malfoy is contracted.”

As a matter of safety – and to keep untoward rumors to a minimum – the school was always appraised of contracts, be they for marriage, betrothal, or courtship; this also allows them to turn a blind-eye to any activities that would normally be prohibited, such as a first-year Slytherin visiting in private with a fourth-year Ravenclaw.

The other teachers winced in sympathy.

Over the last weeks all had had occasion to become acquainted with Pansy Parkinson’s shrill shriek when something – from an assignment grade to dessert offerings – didn’t go her way.

Spoilt beyond ruin, that one.

And with no more ambition than to be a rich lord’s wife.

“Is Mr. Emrys-Pendragon’s wand-blank doing the job?”

Hadrian had made no secret of his wandless abilities – at Hedwig where there were school-wide privacy wards. At Hogwarts, while other students per the academic code couldn’t take his picture without permission, they could gossip all they pleased. His “wand” was no more than a shaped and polished piece of white oak, provided by his High Magister Lord Ollivander to help him keep his abilities a secret for a while longer.
“ Seems to be.” Moody allowed. “He’s gotten better at faking it than he was the first week. I’d still feel better if he’d at least pretend to be using verbal spells, though he could easily be placed up higher than third year in Defense.”

“No need for the verbal spells.” David waved that off. “His wordless magic is well-known and publicized. That he’s never needed a wand is not and it’s our duty to keep it that way until Harry says otherwise.”

“And as for the placement.” Perenelle gave David a look for talking out of turn. “It is his wish to remain among those his own age – or near. This is a scant seven years for our King to be a student first and King of Avalon second. Let him enjoy it.”

…

Between clubs and activities, classes and study, Hadrian found himself just as busy as predicted.

Even with being able to “cheat” with the Time-Field in his study in the King’s Tower, which made plowing through a week’s worth of work in two four-hour blocks on the weekends possible, not to mention his self-study and homework, he still was pressed for time.

Free time was precious and limited as his loose collection of friends and acquaintances consolidated into several groups that interchanged at will.

The Twins seemed to have adopted him following that first Defense class, popping up out of nowhere to irritate him with their double-speak and attempt to sneak a prank around both Hadrian and his guard – or guards if he was with Wills.

They took his shadows as much of a challenge as Moody’s constant vigilance if he was any judge of their character at all.

With them came the rest of the Gryffindor quidditch team, as well as their friend and dorm-mate Lee Jordan who had netted the job of Quidditch Announcer for the school games, and a randomly-popping-up-in-disapproval Prefect Percy.

There were enough staff that Head Boy and Head Girl were officially retired student positions, but Prefects beginning in third year were still in place to help keep an eye on the students in the dorms.

The new prefects that year boasted Angelina Johnson and Kenneth Towler from Gryffindor’s third year – much to the Twin’s dismay with their “Angie” who played Chaser for their team – Conan’s cousin Cedric and a young lady named Diana Ainsworth from Hufflepuff, Professor Sprout’s niece Pandora and the Elliot Heir Kai for Ravenclaw and rounding out with Hadrian’s friendly-acquaintance Adrian for Slytherin, joined by a rare Slytherin halfblood Iona whose mundane-born mother had married into the pureblooded Sheridan family who mainly dealt in weaving magical cloth such as Acromantula silk.

First-years weren’t allowed to try out for Quidditch teams – much to the dismay of Wills, Conan, and Draco – but that didn’t stop them from playing games of pick-up Quidditch on Saturday afternoons, usually ending up with mixed teams of varying Houses, ages, and genders of the most Quidditch-mad members of the school rotating in and out.

Hadrian took whatever position needed, but despite the entreaties of the Weasley Twins and their Captain Oliver Wood, staunchly refused to go out for any team next year on the grounds that it wouldn’t be fair to the other three teams.

That it was also a massive safety risk for a King without an heir didn’t need to be said especially
once David put a bug in Wood’s year over nagging him on the subject.

The second week of school was drawing to a close when Hadrian sent notes to his husband and two betrothed in the castle, wanting to arrange an hour “study group” that was more a time to be social and spend time together.

If the two weeks of mayhem had taught him anything, it was that if he didn’t block out the time, it would never happen between his own interests and friends and that of his nearest and dearest.

Whether it was Neville towing him out to the greenhouses to enthuse over the latest advanced project he’d been set by Professor Sprout who’d taken special interest in the herbology prodigy, it was Livia corralling Tavi to work on a joint alchemy or advanced potions project, or one of David’s apprenticeship masters assigning him another load of first or second year tests to grade – barring those of Hadrian and Wills, naturally.

Heads of Department, House, or the Headmistress and Administrator alike all had access to public copies of each student’s schedule after all, in case a one-on-one needed scheduled or a student needed fetched in the case of a family emergency. It was only time-slots blocked out as “private” that weren’t privy to disclosure – and even then they would know where the student planned to be even if not what they were doing. They also were able to alter a student’s schedule in the case of failing grades disqualifying them from certain clubs or activities, or detentions being assigned.

Wills and Hadrian were already cuddled up on the couch in front of the fire in their private living quarters when David swooped in and scooped first one then the other up into a bear-hug, Tavi following him with rolling eyes and a shaking head muttering a scathing: Gryffindors under his breath.

“Thank you for saving me from Nott.” David told them after he’d set them back down – wobbling a bit form the sudden head-rush – on their feet and let them retake their seats, ceding the spot next to Harry to prickly Tavi and sprawling in the empty, but so-very-comfy side chair facing them. “Even the old corker couldn’t deny me visiting the King.” He teased.

Tavi snickered, knowing from rare occasions where the Dark Arts Head had to cover classes for a professor or apprentice that Tiberian Nott could give his own father Severus a run for the title of exacting with his pupils.

Hadrian had keyed both of his intendeds into the Tower, allowing them to come and go mostly at will so long as Hadrian was present, without him they had to be escorted in by the guard to wait or see Wills.

“I see how it is.” Hadrian pouted with a mock-gasp. “Using me to get out of your apprenticeship chores…I am ill-used I tell you! Ill-used!”

Wills melted into Rian’s shoulder as he giggled, Tavi barely hanging onto his dignity to keep from doing the same as David guffawed.

“Weekly meetings then?” Tavi arched a brow.

“Well,” Hadrian drawled. “If I want to see any of you outside of a classroom or a club, it seemed the best course.”

“It’s a good plan.” Tavi told him with a half-smile. “Since I can’t convince you to take me dancing…”

Hadrian wrinkled his nose as the Prince heir struggled to keep a straight face, finally losing the battle
with a shit-eating grin.

“I still can’t believe your sister is forcing Draco into that.” Wills shook his head with a laugh. “Or that Blaise is going willingly. You’d think we’d had enough at all the balls we have to attend and all the lessons we were forced into over the years.”

“Livia is Livia.” Tavi shrugged. “She always wanted more than to be a gracious Lady of a noble House. Better my god-brother learn now than have to deal with a frustrated harpy later. I may be the Slytherin twin but my wand has nothing on my sister for pure inventive viciousness.”

“Your father taught you both everything he knows, didn’t he?” David asked shrewdly, more than familiar with the tales of Severus Prince-Snape’s ability to devastate with his wand as equally as his tongue could cut.

And having been taught by Potions Master Snape before he openly held the Prince title, David knew just how cutting said tongue could be to a dunderheaded student.

“Now.” Tavi’s grin was more a baring of teeth than a smile. “That would be telling.”

“Considering that his mother is Lady Narcissa Black.” Hadrian noted with a grin of his own. “I believe Draco is well-prepared for a strong lady wife with her own power and opinions.”

“You would know.” Wills elbowed him lightly. “Lord Black. How does go the courtship between Dora and your friend Vlad, anyway?”

“Sirius waffled between threatening castration curses and caving to her look,” which Hadrian was certain Dora inherited from her mother Andy. “And running away with his tail between his legs. Since she’d laugh his antics off if she wasn’t at least a little interested, I’d say Vlad’s making headway, though she’s determined to finish Auror training before committing to even an informal courtship.”

“I don’t know who to feel more sorry for.” David said with a rueful quirk of his mouth. “Vlad or Sirius.”

“Vlad.” Hadrian snickered. “Definitely Vlad. She’s going to lead him on a merry chase that’ll make Livia’s skipping around an open courtship look like child’s play.”

…

October brought the Grooming and Household spells section to a close in Charms, and moved on to a spell that both Hadrian and Wills were more than familiar with: Flower Flirting.

It was a part of the next block of Charms, and a subsection of conjuration that went hand-in-hand with their lessons in Transfiguration where they were discovering transforming base ingredients into complete objects such as silica into glass or rough wood into finished sculptures or furniture.

Not as fun as turning a porcupine into a pin cushion, but vastly more useful as their next step was inanimate to animate transformations where they would learn to take items created from base materials and make such things as animated toys or figures, or to command a chair or desk to move without use of a levitation charm.

Basics, it might seem, but foundations for later work in human transfiguration, as the next step from transfiguring a stuffed lion toy is transfiguring it into an actual lion cub – which required much more power to be an actual lion with functioning organs and not just a lion skin with stuffing that roared.
Conjuration was a field that existed halfway between Charms and Transfiguration, and was one of the most useful branches of magic besides Healing for the everyday.

Beginning with flowers – and giving the first years a reason to learn the spell well and how to focus their will and power into creating what they truly wanted to happen – was one of the easiest ways to gain their full attention and bend their abilities to the task.

“Now.” Professor Wimbleton called for attention after demonstrating the spells needed and going through the theory behind basic conjuration of living things – which flowers qualified. “Who is ready to try it?”

One timid hand rose towards the back of the room.

“Yes, Mr. Hopkins?”

Wayne Hopkins was a mundane-born student.

He was also a Charms prodigy, giving both Wills and Hadrian a run for their galleons in the class, which both teens enjoyed since he was modest about it instead of nagging like Ms. Granger, though even Draco had to admit she had finally gotten better.

At least a little.

“What if we don’t have someone we want to give them to?” He asked, blushing and keeping his eyes well-away from his classmates.

“Oh, that’s just fine.” She assured him with a smile. “Simply think of someone you care for. Just because the spell is used traditionally for courtship or romantic gifts doesn’t mean it has to be. You could think of your mother, or a friend, or your pet for that matter.”

Several of the students unwound at that reassurance, not just blushing Wayne.

“All that matters is the emotion and intention behind the spell, and focusing your will and magic on completing it.”

“Yes’m.” Mr. Hopkins nodded, then closed his eyes and thought.

“Ready?”

“Ardeur être en fleurs” the mundane born wizard encanted, with a slash sinister and swirl widdershins of his wand.

Opening his eyes he laughed at the bouquet of cinquefoil, wood sorrel, and white roses wrapped in moss, all but the roses having meanings of varying maternal love.

He’d clearly taken the Junior Professor’s advice and thought of his mother or other maternal figure.

“Very good, Mr. Hopkins!” Arless beamed. “Five points to Hufflepuff. Who’s next?”

“I’ll give it a go.” Seamus offered as Wills and Hadrian smiled at each other.

The class may be a repeat for them but the extra information on conjuration wasn’t a loss by any measure.

Though even Hadrian couldn’t have anticipated what happened next as Seamus proved just how much of a bold Gryffindor he truly was at heart.
“Ardeur être en fleurs.”

Only, instead of pointing his wand at his desk, he’d come up a bit onto his knees in his seat and aimed over Hadrian’s shoulder, the bouquet of blue periwinkle for early friendship, butterfly orchid for gaiety, and orange rose for passion wrapped in a smile curtesy of sweet William foliage landing dead-center in the royal personage’s open text book to gasps all around.

“Fi-five points to Gryffindor.” Arless stuttered after a long moment as Hadrian simply picked up the bouquet and tilted it this way and that, studying the blooms and the message for long moments as the class was held in suspense.

After a seemingly endless moment, Hadrian turned a bit in his seat and tapped his fake wand to Seamus’s desk, a simple single aster appearing in answer.

The message as simple as the flower: I will think on it.

“Five points to Hufflepuff.” She murmured then hurried to usher the other students into practicing amongst each other, more than a little frazzled by the turn the class had taken even as Hadrian conjured a full bouquet for his husband of sweet alyssum, deep pink roses, milk vetch, all wrapped in hemp for fated love which eased the scowl off of the royal brow better than any magic could.

Seamus might have made a spectacle – he’d known the flirty Irishman was more serious than Hadrian had given him credit for, he wasn’t exactly subtle – but when it came to heartfelt gestures, no one did it better than his Rian.

…

The end of October brought the first break from classes and the hectic pace – for the more involved students – of Hogwarts.

Samhain.

This year the festival and celebration of the thinning veil was on a Sunday, allowing students who weren’t required to stay at the castle for academic reasons or personal preference to return home and participate in their family rituals.

Or in the case of Hadrian and Wills, lead the Samhain ritual and feast at Skye Palace.

Wills in particular was happy to see his mother and Harry…but he also intended to put a flea in the ears of Siri and Remus.

Hadrian was a stubborn arse when he wanted to be.

And at the moment, he was devoting every ounce of stubbornness contained in his five-nine self to ignoring Seamus’s overtures for reasons Wills didn’t think even Hadrian fully understood.

If he had to take a guess – which was the best he could do as Rian was being obstinately silent even with David and Nev on the subject of the flirty Irishman – Rian was either trying to avoid jealousy from either him or his other intendeds, or was being stubborn for stubbornness’s sake.

The latter of which was entirely possible as frazzled as Rian got whenever the words: “betrothal” “wedding” “marriage” or “heirs” were brought up – usually by his Privy Council as they tried to urge him into at least pretending to consider candidates for his “open” consort positions.

Sirius and Remus left the subject alone, and Severus while not an official Councilmember but whose
opinion was valued could honestly not give less of a fuck.

Lucius, Sherrinford, and Rian’s Lord Chamberlin, Lady Amelia’s younger brother Sandringham Bones however didn’t stint in dropping hints, veiled criticism, or outright demands over the mere one consort Hadrian had bonded, and the four intendeds waiting in the wings, not in the least regarding the DuLac contract that had a deadline that at the moment Hadrian was content to ignore.

His most stringent Councilors were not equally content with the situation, as Hadrian’s childhood had proven over and over again just how fast five years can disappear.

Sneaking out of their shared bedchamber at Skye Palace was quite the feat, as it ever was, given Rian’s ingrained habit of rising early to fit in practice of one sort or another before Russell bustled in during breakfast and got the King started on his day on the weekends at school and most everyday at Skye.

School wasn’t just a break for Hadrian after all, but for his household as well, and while the work of the King’s secretary never ended, at least during school hours Russell had more quiet time to himself than was the norm at the seat of an empire.

Plus, if one ignored Hadrian’s early-rising habits, one couldn’t get around the fact that he was an inveterate cuddler – and had been even since he was a child according to stories that never failed to make Rian blush in mortification whenever Remus or John got into a reminiscing mood. His cat Fievel used to be his nightly companion, the young boy gentle with him even in sleep, but had found himself displaced to the end of the bed with the wedding. Still, the adult cat found himself mollified by his place on the bed instead of in a bed on the floor like Wills’s Great Dane Hector.

The slobber machine was far too large to sleep with people…mainly due to his habit of stretching out his legs in his sleep and pushing said people off of their own bed.

Just once was all Hector needed in sharp claws to never attempt as such again with Fievel.

Wills and Hadrian being much softer touches to puppy-dog-eyes had compromised with a massive donut pillow that was almost fluffy enough to the point of swallowing Hector whole.

The canine loved the thing, and had a habit of hiding bones and Fievel’s cat toys in the nooks and crannies made by the soft fabric and fluff.

Altogether, between his cuddle-monster husband, said husband’s persnickety-when-woken cat, and always-alert Hector, sneaking out of the tower was more than a bit of work, even with magic involved.

Hector wouldn’t allow himself to be left behind – his whole purpose was to guard his boy after all – and much like he was a quiet but solid presence at school, the gunmetal blue Dane followed his boy on paws that had been silenced from nails clicking on the stair tiles before they left the bedroom.

Fievel – proving once again that he was smarter than the average cat, much like Hedwig was smarter than the average owl – opened on baleful eye and stood with a stretch, padding over to his boy and curling up beside his head to help him stay asleep like he used to before recent months.

There was a rigid set of duties – a hierarchy – among the castle familiars, and each held up their end knowing that they were loved and petted and feted for it by their people.

At the top of that hierarchy was Fievel, every inch the regal cat – former foundling kitten or no – to match his royal owner. Next came Hedwig, who had a bond with Hadrian unlike the other palace owls, and protected their shared boy with all the ferocity of the winged predator she was in both
breed and disposition. Then came Hector, who guarded both boys, and then all the rest whose people didn’t reside in the high tower.

As such, Fievel would comfort and vouchsafe his boy, while his boy’s mate went off on whatever errand called him away from the warm bed in the high tower.

Humans.

Silly creatures.

...

Remus cocked open the door at ungodly-oh-clock in the morning, propping his shoulder against the jamb and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, half-convinced that he wasn’t seeing what he was seeing.

He blinked for a long moment, noting teen, dog, and guard, then reared back a bit before an amused half-grin revealed a too-sharp white canine.

The Lord Protector of Avalon leaned back, craning his neck around the door and barked out:

“Oi! Mr. Padfoot!”

“Wha?” Came the grunted grumble from deeper in the suite.

“Wake up you randy dog!”

“Why?” The sound of feet fitting the floor and shuffling towards them accompanied the nearly-canine whine which had Hector cocking his head in confusion for a moment before placing the sound as coming from the dog-man instead of the wolf-man.

“Because.” Remus tried to snap, only for a laugh to tumble out and his amber eyes to gleam in amusement. “If our cub looks anything like his husband, you need to hop-to and go teach him that glamour to cover love-bites before his mother-in-law castrates him with a rusty spoon.”

“What?” Sirius asked, then leaned around the door, taking in the sight that amused his mate so.

Though he would’ve bet a month’s dishes duty with the house elves that two seconds before the blue-eyed blond hadn’t been blushing crimson and slapping a hand to cover the side of his neck.

“Oh side too, lad.” Sirius told him with a coughing chuckle, shaking his head and disappearing back into the suite to locate slippers and a robe before hightailing it from the suite, leaving Remus to impart the sure-to-be-lifesaving glamour on their godpup-in-law. “Damn, pup.” Sirius whistled under his breath as he wandered away, sharing a last laughing glance with Remus and Lionel. “What, did claiming Slytherin turn you part vampire or something…?”

“Oh god.” Wills buried his head in his hands. “Just kill me now.”

“No need for that.” Remus manfully held in the rest of his amusement – though he intended on having a good laugh over it later with his mate when he returned – and ushering the teen inside with a strong hand cupping a growing shoulder. “It happens to the best of us. All part of growing up and learning, yeah?”

Wills just nodded, refusing to lift his head and stop hiding but trusting the gentle – if mischievous – werewolf to guide him to a seat, which Remus did, gentle pressure urging him to sit, Hector flopping at his feet as the amber-eyed wizard bustled around a bit collecting tea and locating a shirt to cover
his scarred chest.

No need to put the lad off his tea this early in the morning.

“Now.” Remus began once William had semi-recovered and was alternating between sips of tea and rubbing at the horse-pretending-to-be-a-dog’s ears. “I’m assuming that you didn’t come looking for that glamour I’ll be teaching you before you leave – though you really do need it lad if you like being married to a functioning wizard.”

Wills muttered into his cup, his flush renewed by the reminder.

Remus rubbed his jaw to hide another smile, eyes shining with suppressed humor.

Teenagers.

It was hard to believe that he was ever this young.

“Nothing to be embarrassed about – though gods know Siri is going to have a field day with this for months.” He reassured the young man. “All part of growing up and learning. You’re certainly not the first boy in the history of creation to land himself some impressive hickies. And you won’t be the last either. Just use the glamour until you and that cub of mine learn a bit of control and you’ll be set.”

Rubbing his hands against an in-heaven Hector’s head and ears, the Dane’s whip-like tail thumping against the carpet in joy, Wills made himself focus even though all he wanted to do was sink to a puddle of goo.

“There’s a boy in our class at Hogwarts.” Wills began to explain. “Who’s made it clear that he’s interested in Rian, but even though he gave Seamus an answering blossom that meant he’d think about it, all he’s really done the last couple weeks was avoid the situation. Which really is only making Shay more persistent and flirty. But Hadrian doesn’t want to talk about it with me or any of our friends so…”

“You were hoping myself or Pads could bring it up.” Remus nodded, following.

It wasn’t as if he was ignorant of the situation after all.

Gossip may take a bit of time to travel from Hogwarts to the Prophet or Witch Weekly headquarters, but it does eventually get there.

Everything from Harry’s placement in advanced classes, what clubs and activities he was involved with, who his friends were, and the situation Wills had brought to him with young Mr. Finnegan had all had their moment in the spotlight whether headlining or in the social gossip sections.

“Yes.” Wills blew out a gusty breath. “Would you? It’s not just that Shay has become one of my friends – a friend to both of us – and I don’t want either of their feelings hurt. It’s also what could be said about Rian if he leaves it be too long.”

“You’re thinking of the papers.”

“How could I not?” He gave a wry smile that didn’t meet his eyes. “Ever since I was born I’ve been in the public eye. From my first day of school to McDonalds trips, state dinners to becoming Lord Nimue, I’ve been under the microscope the same as the rest of my family. Rian hasn’t had to worry about that with the wizarding world as enchanted with him as they are. But if someone with an axe to grind wanted to, they could take something innocuous like Rian hesitating over a courtship
overture no matter how casual, and build a massive scandal out of it.”

“Point well taken.” Remus murmured his quick mind already turning the problem over and over, seeking the best solution. “I’ll talk to him, William, but…”

“I know.” This time his chuckle was genuine. “He’s a stubborn arse.”

“Language.” Remus’s eyes gleamed. “And yes, that he is.”

At least he came by it honestly, Remus thought. Both James and Lily had been stubborn enough to move mountains for sheer will. To say nothing of their tempers or ability to hold a grudge.

Thank Merlin that Harry rarely had reason to tap into that part of his inheritance, as the thought of the two combined was more than enough to send a shudder down a werewolf’s spine in dread.

…

By necessity, whenever Hadrian was in Skye Palace during the Hogwarts school year, whether for a day or a month, a Council meeting was called.

This put a distinct kink in Remus’s plan to corner him, though it had the advantage of herding all needed parties in one location.

The problem was clearing out the rest of the people cluttering up Hadrian’s office at midnight on the thirtieth, from the secretaries to Siger and Remus’s own not-needed-but-present-because-he-could mate.

Sirius picked up on Remus’s tension, and through an entertaining – to both Remus and Harry who quickly caught on – mixture of guile, irritation, and pranking managed to clear the office save for his mate and pup within minutes, winking at his lover on the way out. A slight thump on the other side let them know that Padfoot had taken up guard on the door, keeping them from being interrupted.

Merlin, did Remus love that man – shedding problem or no.

“Alright, Moony.” Harry gave him a crooked little smile that nearly sent Remus’s mind tumbling back twenty years to Hogwarts and another black-haired boy who was too smart for his own good. “You’re not going to give me the Talk again are you?”

“No, cub.” Moony chuckled, spinning one of the spindle-backed chairs that the house elves popped in whenever there were more than one or two people cluttering up the royal study and straddling it, wrists crossed in front of him as his forearms rested on the chair back. “Though you’re going to want to either take it easier on your husband’s neck or remember the glamour charm Pads taught you this morning if you ever want children.”

Hadrian winced at that, giving a full-body jerk at the reminder of what his mum-in-law would do to him if faced with any evidence of his activities with one of her baby boys before Wills was… well…ninety.

They hadn’t consummated, not yet, but they were hormonal teenaged boys after all.

Things happened.

“Point taken.”

“Mmm.” Remus’s amber eyes flashed gold with mirth before dimming back down as his mood
sobered. “But there is something we need to discuss on a similar topic.”

“Aw fuck.”

“Language, cub.”

An arched eyebrow and a snort was all Remus got at that attempt at adulting from the Marauder. Especially since Hadrian learned nearly all of his curses – in more than one language – from Messrs. Padfoot and Moony.

“What’s going on, cub?”

Green eyes shifted, staring at the tapestry of the seven royal House crests and animals spiraling around the crest of Avalon that took prominence above the fireplace that could double as a private Floo if needed.

“I don’t know what you mean…” Hadrian hit another wince. Even to himself he sounded stilted. It was a damn good thing the Wizengamot – hells, the press – didn’t have Moony on their side or he’d never be able to get anything passed them.

Moony – along with John – could shred his ability to lie or at least prevaricate like nothing and no one else he’d ever met.

Ted Tonks, the Royal Mind Healer who’d he’d been seeing on a varying basis since early childhood, reasoned that it had a lot to do with who he’d latched onto as “safe” following his rescue from the Dursleys.

Remnants of that broken little boy who didn’t know his own name but remembered playing with a giant shaggy Padfoot and his Uncle “Mooy” before his toddlerhood went to hell with a pair of bright green curses and a meddling old fool.

Sirius could sniff out a full-lie if he wanted to, and Sherlock, Mycroft, and Siger could all use their little bit of extra from their magically-powered brains to read him, but when it came to the inability to deceive, that was the province of Mooney and John alone. Similar to how he felt about Wills or David. Hadrian could lie to them…he just didn’t want to, though he would if the safety of the empire was at stake. Remus and John at least knew when to push him for the truth and when not to, something that came with age and experience that Wills was still learning.

“You’re in danger, Harry.” Remus told him, watching as the young man sighed and allowed his shoulders and posture to slump, leaning forward to lean and prop himself up on the massive desk. “You have to know that. You will never be in more danger than you are now. Until you have either an heir or a number of consorts that makes an heir probable if something were to happen to you, your life, not just your crown or throne, is in more danger than at any point in your reign. You have to know that.” Remus frowned, his stern gaze taking in the minor shifts in his cub’s face as piece by piece the mask of the “King” fell and left only Harry behind.

And Harry was scared out of his mind.

“You do.” He breathed, eyes wide. “Then…what in the hells are you doing cub? Do you know how many assassinations have been stopped by the Guard since your Claiming? Or that the attempts doubled between your return from your honeymoon and leaving for Hogwarts?”

“I know.” Lifting his head, Hadrian pressed the heels of his palms against his eyes, blocking out the shocked visage of his godfather and oldest-running protector. “McG gives me a report every day
before I retire for the night.”

It wasn’t a small number after all, though it only grows when he’s away from either Skye Palace or Hogwarts where he has total control of the wards, though even at Hogwarts there were still attempts at him, ranging from love-potions to the mind-control to poison most of which are caught by the elves before McG even gets involved.

The biggest threats were always when he went out in public, from shopping to a ball to press conferences.

Not everyone was satisfied with having Avalon restored after all, despite what the papers claimed or how good of a spin-doctor Lucius was.

Most powerful people didn’t like to share power, let alone having it ripped away from them entirely.

“Then what are you waiting for?” Remus demanded to know. “At the least you should be considering candidates like Shaunessey’s whatever-generations-removed-great grandson who’s been sniffing around or selecting a DuLac to fulfill the remaining contract. Or stop dawdling and marry one of your already-selected consorts. That’s the only protection you have now that you’ve proven old lines can be re-born in the common era.”

“The Smiths proved otherwise.” Hadrian sighed, dropping his hands and watching his godfather with tired green eyes. “It’s not just blood that matters with magic, isn’t that the whole point of the new Code?”

“You’re right.” Remus nodded, tilting his head to the side. “But the lines are so interbred that that is a chance more than one purist is going to be willing to take. And until you have an heir or at least the likelihood of one being born posthumously, they’re going to keep trying to make it a risk with a hefty payoff.”

“And there’s no bigger prize than Avalon,” Hadrian sat back in his chair with a weary wave of his hand, the Avalon ring of Lordship flashing in the light. “I know.”

“You know, you know.” Remus parroted. “And yet you wait.”

“What makes you so sure I’m not considering my options as you say?” Hadrian asked, the corning of his mouth ticking up in a not-quite smile. “Isn’t that one of the purposes of Hogwarts? Seeing the best and brightest of a generation. Putting them altogether and seeing what comes of it?”

“And Finnegan?”

Hadrian shrugged, shifting a bit uncomfortably with a light blush.

“He’s very... forward.”

“Mmm.”

“And flirtatious.”

“Mmm?”

“And lighthearted.” Hadrian rubbed at the back of his neck, craning it to stare up at the mosaiced ceiling. “And with a sense of fun and mischief a mile wide.”

“You realize you just described your uncle Sirius, don’t you?” Remus told him with a chuckle,
laughing at the scrunched-face Harry made at *that* statement hidden as a question.

“I also just described Rhys Wallace before things went to shit.”

Oh. Remus sat up, shoulders straightening. And there it was.

*That’s* what was holding him back.

Remus was one of the few that knew Harry used to have a bit of a *crush* on the playful, handsome younger Wallace. Likely his first-ever after the nearly-obligatory one on Anthea. The breakdown of the relationship between Harry and Gawain had had far-reaching consequences that didn’t end with the separation between Gawain and his wife.

Or even the changes it wrought in young Rhys when he began acting out in response.

It was no secret that for several years, young Rhys had blamed Harry for the estrangement of his parents, a resentment that was trebled by Gawain spending most of his focus on repairing his relationship with his liege lord and not his sons. David had weathered the storm well for the most part, being older and more self-sufficient than his younger brother at the time. Rhys, who was and still is a mummy’s boy, had been set adrift with a busy father and a brother away at Hogwarts.

His…*precocious* sexuality and sorting to Slytherin had been a cry for help…one that had been ignored by his father and left for his aunt Regina Pucey nee Wallace to handle with help from his cousin Adrian.

He’d settled down, and eventually Gawain had caved to the entreaties of wife, son, and sister to allow Giovanna visitation with their boys, though David being older spent only a few scattered days with his mother every year around the holidays.

Rhys had seemed to grow out of the troubled, angsty stage…but a bit of darkness lingered and his once-strong friendship with Harry had become more that of a distant but friendly acquaintance.

The *friendliness* of which had been strained further upon the revelation that the Wallace family’s contract was with *Harry*…and that as a result of Rhys’s misbehavior he’d chosen his brother over his former close-friend.

Reports from the guard stationed at Hogwarts had the two teens making overtures to once again find common ground – but it was slow going.

Nevertheless, the whole situation had left scars on everyone involved – and more than it had seemed after the first gale of that storm had blown over if Harry was still struggling over it years later.

“Cub.” Remus sighed, eyes closing and shaking his head before rising and coming to kneel at Harry’s side, spinning him in his desk – *throne* – chair to face him, hands placed gently on chin and knee to ground the teen and force him to meet his gaze. “Listen to what I say. People are going to hurt and disappoint you. You know that better than anyone should at your age. You knew it before you knew how to *read*. But you can’t cling to those hurts and use them to judge others. Just because a few traits someone possesses reminds you of someone else doesn’t mean you should tar them with the same brush. Look at me.” He told him. “If I judged all wizards by the actions of a few, I’d be the same as Greyback. For so long, until *you*, everyone in the British Wizarding World judged all werewolves by *him*. And worse, if they’d known he was my sire?” Remus shook his head. “I wouldn’t have survived to watch you be *born*, let alone watch over you and teach you or speak to you now. I know it’s easy to do. Your Uncle Siri is guilty of it more often than not. It’s just human nature to say: well this person hurt me so I’m going to fear and loath everyone like that so
I won’t be hurt again. Everyone in the world has the capacity to do harm. Living in fear of it is no way to live at all.”

…”

“It’s not good Quidditch you know.” Hadrian whispered that night into one pink-tipped ear as he snuggled into the massive bed he now shared with both Fievel and Wills, Hedwig out hunting and Hector watching with bright blue eyes from his fluffy nest, waiting as always for their breath to deepen with sleep to slumber himself.

The cat had no such manners – or patience – and was rumbling a soft purr as he chased rats in his sleep.

“Hmm?” Wills hummed, a soft smile curving his mouth as he curled into his Rian’s side, listening to his husband’s heartbeat as one callused swordsman’s hand combed soothingly through his blond hair.

Hadrian tilted his head down, a knowing half-smile just kissing his mouth as he watched that pretty face with eyelids closed in repose, just one breath away from sleep.

They’d need it.

The Samhain rites and festival was tomorrow.

And with Hadrian being officially crowned, that meant a grand masquerade ball.

Though while the Rites would be taking place at Skye Palace and at holdings all over the Empire, the ball itself would be at the Potter Manor this year in Wiltshire, a much easier location for most to travel to than either Skye Palace or Snowdon in Wales.

Narcissa, even in her delicate state, could hardly wait as it was her first ball as the Chatelaine of his English holdings, making her the ostensible hostess for the evening.

“Siccing a werewolf on your king.” He tsked in mock-dismay. “That could be considered treason you know.” He teased.

A blue eye cracked open, unrepentant humor making it sparkle even with the droopy eyelid threatening to hide it.

“Not treason.” His first husband teased right back, his words recalling an easier time then all they had to worry about was manners and hiding from their guardians. “Merely mutiny.”
As he had for the past two years, Hadrian led the Samhain Rites at Skye Palace at dusk.

The air redolent with the rich scents of spiced mead and cider, sky laden with the clean smoke of the oak and apple and cheery wood fires perfumed with offerings of sage and corn husks and cinnamon that filled the nostrils, and the magic rising with each wisp of smoke and the ever-darkening night.

Thoughts and worries were burned in the cleansing flames, and wizard and witch alike were refreshed by passing through the ceremonial cleansing corridor by ones and twos, with young children propped on hips and the older ones traversing it with the courage buoyed by the example of their elders and the support of peer-pressure.

With Hadrian’s crowning, came another set of yearly requirements: the social season.

While affairs of state could – and would, often – be used as a handy excuse for many events, there were some that as the King he was obligated to either host or attend on the main Festival days or nights of the Great Rites.

One such was the Hunt Ball of Samhain.

A traditional masquerade, it was the final social even of the Fall and harvest season, with only the Yule ball coming between it and the opening Ball of the season on Beltane, followed in much closer succession by the Solstice or Midsummer Ball in June and the Harvest Ball in August of Lughnasadh.

Those five alone were unavoidable save for in dire circumstance or joyful ones just as the birth of a child, though at least the Harvest Ball could be folded into the celebration of his birth and coronation and the Midsummer with that of his wedding to Wills.

Though he was sure with as many spouses as he needed, that in the end all five of the great balls will end up doubling as a celebration for a wedding and later anniversary.

It suited his socially-economical soul.

And his fiscally-economical training he’d gained under his late Grandpére Arcturus.

The invitations had gone out that morning as was tradition.

His grin as he looked out over the bonfire and caught the wink Siri tossed him was nothing less than mischievous.

And it was nearly time to see who among them were willing to play.

…

The morning of Halloween found mostly only the mundane-born and those half-bloods or pure-bloods who held to the more…progressive ideals espoused by the likes of Dumbledore present in the Great Hall for the morning meal.
One such group were clustered around the table and feeling strangely bereft without the presence of Hadrian and his friends – particularly a pair of redheaded twins who without the approval of their parents were unable to attend the Rites like their older brother Percy who went to celebrate with the Prewetts every year as since he was the Heir Presumptive of their older brothers, either Bill or Charlie could act as his head-of-house and sign off on the required permission slip.

The company of little Ronniekins was hardly a comfort in comparison to time with their other friends at any of the Samhain parties that would start at nightfall while they were stuck at Hogwarts and the All Hallows Eve feast that was a halfway point between a traditional harvest feast and a Halloween party.

Hogwarts students could choose to participate in the Rites with the Headmistress and her husband Nicholas along with many of the teachers – those that didn’t have rites of their own to attend – but were not required to do so.

Even Lee was gone, the half-blood attending the rites with his mother’s family.

Needless to say, boredom was not the friend of a peaceful castle so long as the Twins were students, so it was with no little relief that the Headmistress who had been watching for the arrival of the mail owls after the elves had scanned the incoming mail for anything dangerous, and saw two come to rest before the puckish pair, as others – more than a dozen in total – landed all around the hall, each baring a leg-band engraved with the crest of Avalon.

“Blimey.” Ron said with his mouth half-full as the birds came to a stop and offered their legs to his brothers. “What’s that?” He asked, looking around with sudden awareness as more than one gasp sounded around the Hall. “Wha’s goin’ on?”

His answer came not from his shocked brothers – a look that Ron thought both looked out of place and at once perfect on his brothers who always targeted him with their pranks – but from across the Hall where an outraged Zach Smith, another pureblood who turned his nose up at the Olde Rites, towered over one of their fellow ‘Puffs, face red and wand bared.

“The Hunt Ball!?" The prissy prat bellowed, Ron rolling his eyes. As if that was a big deal or any kind of shock. Well. Maybe for the poor bastard Smith was always targeting. Ron may not be the brightest Lumos, but at least he knew better than to pick on a fellow ‘Puff. If it wasn’t their Head of House doling out detentions about house loyalty, it was their own sticking up for the kid. But some wizards were just thick that way.

At least Ron only fought with those that deserved it.

Like that slimy snake Malfoy.

“You, you little son of a muggle got an invitation to the Hunt Ball?"" 

Ron rolled his eyes with a scoff as Professor Sprout beelined for the arse.

Honestly.

It was just a dance.

What was the big deal about it anyway?

…

“What seems to be the problem here gentlemen?” Pomona asked, arms crossed and wand tapping
against her shoulder as she came to a stop behind one of her problem ‘Puffs – and one of her most promising.

“This arrived by owl this morning, Professor Sprout.” Quiet mundane-born Charms prodigy Wayne Hopkins explained, holding out the gold-and-copper shot cream invitation that Pomona had no need to study to know what it said. She had received one herself after all, as many teachers at the school had in advance to allow the Administrator and staff to work out staffing for the night to allow those who wished to go to do so. Pomona wasn’t one for parties, even one as prestigious as the Hunt Ball, but was honored to have been remembered anyway.

As was any witch or wizard worth their salt.

Not that her absence would be noted as she sent a polite thank-you for the invitation.

The Hunt Ball was a game for younger witches and wizards than herself, with less grey in their hair.

Though she wished any of her ‘Puffs – past or present – luck.

“Ah, yes, the Hunt Ball.” Pomona smiled, eyes flickering between the pair of boys as her fellow teachers – and more than one of the older students – explained the significance of the invitation to their more clueless fellows. It may have been years since the last Hunt Ball, let alone one hosted by a royal house, but it hadn’t been forgotten either or the fantastical prizes that awaited the winner of the ever-changing Hunt. “An invitation to one of the premier events of the year.” She dimpled a smile at the young teen as Smith fumed in impotence, still standing behind his yearmate but having moved back and sheathed his wand at her presence. “You must have caught the attention of someone important to receive one, they’re quite coveted among the younger wizarding set.”

“Why?” Wayne asked, baffled for reasons similar to one Ron Weasley, though smart enough to note the royal seal and signature on the thick, fancy parchment. “I’m just a middle-class mundane-born from Avon.”

Pomona tsked at the self-deprecation.

“Clearly you’re more than that.” She told him, narrowing her eyes at Smith when it looked as if he might scoff. “As invitations to the Hunt Ball can only be sent at the leisure of the hosting House… which with the coronation is none other than our own Mr. Emrys-Pendragon.” She smiled softly, already anticipating the next set of objections. “Don’t worry, you won’t offend him if you don’t attend – though I’d encourage you to at least go this once to try. There’s a game played every year you see, the Hunt. And the winner ends the night often with a prize ranging from a purse filled with galleons to any number of rare items.”

“But…” Wayne said, still baffled and a bit dazed. “I haven’t anything to wear.”

His head of house chuckled, then gave him a knowing wink.

“That’s half the fun.” She confided, leaning close. “The invitation acts as a port-key, then on arriving it will turn into a mask. Quite the tidy bit of spellwork and older than the Ministry. Upon arriving, you’ll enter a simple room with two doors…”

…

Wayne held tight to the parchment with a small group of fellow students outside the gates of the school, watched by a handful of teachers and some of the school security staff.

Port-keys couldn’t work within Hogwarts after all, and that required a bit of planning.
Thankfully enough teachers would also be at the Ball that there weren’t issues of safety at said Ball, but to and from required a bit of caution.

“Remember,” the gruff voice of one of the guards reminded them. “Your masks will turn into port-keys at five minutes after midnight and we’ll be right here waiting for you. Five minutes past, no more no less.”

“Yes, sir.” Several students murmured, then said nothing at all as what felt uncomfortably like a fish-hook behind their navels picked them up and whisked them way from a castle in Scotland to an elegant manor in Wiltshire, England.

Gasps of delight sounded from all around Wayne, witches and wizards alike awed by the bonfires burning all along the drive, lanterns swinging from trees and ribbons in all the colors of Fall swaying in the light breeze.

As they’d been told, staff hired for the event in a variety of masks and costumes ushered them – and the many different masks they were now holding as they crossed the entryway into Potter Manor – into a long corridor that stretched right and left before them that couldn’t possibly be the normal main entry but an adjustment to accommodate the needs of the house’s master for the night.

Entering the small room – about the size of a standard fitting room, Wayne noted with an appraising eye – he took a deep breath and put on the simple men’s half-mask in black leather. Closing his eyes, he felt the magic of the mask wash over him as his head-of-house had told him to expect – before docking points from Smith for causing a scene, again – and then opened them with a laugh as he saw his reflection in the changing room mirror.

Dressed all in black with a red sash and a flat-topped hat, complete with a thin black moustache on his upper lip, he could pass as an extra from the set of one of his mum’s favorite old American movies: *The Adventures of Zorro*.

“Wicked.” He breathed, then flinging his dashing cloak back with a swish, stepped through the door opposite from where he entered and out into a dazzling whirl of masked witches and wizards from slyly grinning foxes – that he was pretty sure were actually the Weasley twins – to a pair of icy swans that were the only ones sans-mask: the hostess of the evening Lady Narcissa Malfoy and her lord-husband and escort Lord Lucius.

He changed his mind as he saw all the variety of costumes from the flamboyant princess dancing with a prince charming to the simple like his own Zorro.

It wasn’t wicked, it was magic that was nothing less than brilliant.

Moving into the crowd, having spotted a wide table with a tempting array of glistening cakes and sweets, he also noted something else.

There seemed to be an unusual number of Scottish Lords…all with the exact same costume in black and silver tartan with matching claymores sheathed at their backs.

Odd.

More than odd, actually, as he took in the crowd.

As only that one single costume was repeated.

What was that all about?
“Are you sure about this?” Wills asked his husband from where he was sitting on the bed in the master bedroom of Potter Manor, where they’d port-keyed after the Samhain Rites to get ready for the Hunt Ball.

Wills was going as King Arthur – Excalibur, crown, and all – with a gold half-mask embossed with red lions.

Mainly because he refused to get involved with the latest brand of crazy dreampt up between his husband and his bad-influence uncle Siri.

It wasn’t like he couldn’t see the humor, or even the point.

It was that he didn’t feel like running around all night in a kilt and not much else.

Rian and Siri had put their heads together that morning after Rian had had his “talk” with Remus about his lingering issues with choosing more consorts, and decided to use the traditional Hunt of the Hunt Ball to add an edge of real challenge to a couple of their classmates and others that Rian had been evaluating for the last couple years.

That it had been in the back of his husband’s mind that some of their friends and/or acquaintances might be a good addition or two wasn’t a surprise to him.

Hadrian rarely did anything with just one purpose in mind after all.

And since Wills going to Remus about Shay had apparently soothed whatever lingering worries Rian had over Wills getting hurt by Rian being more proactive about the situation, his husband didn’t see a reason to continue being tortured by his Council over the situation.

That said, Wills was reasonably certain that the morning snogging session had been at least half hormones and half Rian preempting any doubts Wills might have over his place in his Rian’s life.

The clinking of potions vials being clinked together in a toast was Wills’s answer as Hadrian, Neville, Conan, and Draco all downed the aging potion provided by Lord Prince under the Potions Master’s amused gaze.

Severus Prince still wasn’t the most…congenial soul in the world, but he was no where as foul-tempered as he had been in years past between his beloved wife’s death and being all-but-indentured to Dumbledore.

That he didn’t have to worry about a madman reclaiming him into his service and his children’s futures were assured had also lifted a great deal of worry from his slim-but-strong shoulders.

As such, a rare frivolous request from his liege lord while originally met with a sardonically arched brow, had in the end been met with a snort of laughter at the chaos and scrambling from the stiffest-necked blood-purists at the Ball.

If there was one thing sure to entertain Severus Snape-Prince, it was watching the same arseholes that used to snub him and his late wife for his mundane father’s blood falling all over themselves around Lily’s – who many of them had sneered at her marriage to the Potter heir and snubbed as a mudblood – son.

The comeuppance was sweet on his scathing tongue.
Siri, who was already dressed along with Remus, though the latter had yet to apply the needed glamours, whistled at the sight the four young lords and lords-to-be made once their bodies had finished shifting and morphing.

Sirius was the only one of the group that hadn’t needed any adjusting other than an easy spell to cover some of his tattoos to carry off the prank – and the point of the Hunt.

Clad in the black-and-silver tartan of the Black of Clan Black, with a chieftan’s badge holding the traditionally-wrapped kilt together over his heart and a claymore at his back, complete with authentic soft boots and leg wraps, his blackest-ebony hair hung free and his quicksilver eyes gleamed.

Remus was dressed the same, but would be glamoured to match his mate – as would everyone else playing the game – before they left the room and met up with the others playing “The Black of Clan Black” for the Hunt of the Hunt Ball.

Draco was a lithe and lean six-foot with long silver-blond hair to rival his father and eyes the same liquid silver of his cousin, while Neville had turned into a handsome man indeed, standing two inches above the Malfoy heir, with warm hazel eyes and hair that had darkened to golden-brown, a bit of scruff on his jaw. Conan was taller yet, topping Neville by an inch with rich brown hair and gleaming blue eyes in a strongly attractive face, shoulders as broad as his father’s with a more massive form than the cut one of Neville. But it was Hadrian who took the cake, topping all his friends at six-four with shoulders as broad as an axe handle and the strong upper body of a swimmer topping the flat stomach and lean legs of a runner, ebony hair pouring down his back and emerald eyes shining in a face that would have guaranteed his desirability if his name, rank, and fortune hadn’t done so already.

“Damn.” Wills arched his brows with a mock-leer. “I’m one lucky wizard.”

“Amen.” Conan teased, giving Hadrian a leer of his own despite feeling no actual attraction to his friend. If this collection of men wasn’t enough to spark his interest, then he’d have to inform his father that he was one-hundred-percent straight. Between Neville’s rugged attractiveness, Draco’s pure elegance, and Hadrian’s overwhelming *hotness*, there couldn’t exist a person even mildly attracted to males that’d fail to be interested. “Though it looks like it’s birds for me, blokes.”

“Eh.” Hadrian teased, shrugging it off. “I always thought it was sheep for you anyways Diggory.”

Snorting a laugh as said sheep-lover pounced on his bigger friend and the adult males shook their heads, Wills took a glance at the clock and broke up the wrestling match before they could forget why they’d all just aged themselves up a dozen years.

“Better get dressed and your glamours on.” He called out. “Party’s going to start soon.”

Half-masks in place, including Severus who had deigned to join in on the prank for the pure joy of fucking with people’s heads, eyes and hair changed to black and silver as needed, scars covered and tattoos of Celtic knotwork applied – temporarily – the group of “Lord Blacks” and King Arthur met up with the other score and some wizards and a witch or two that were joining them.

Many were wizarding actors, paid to play the part after being vetted by the Guard, but some were also members of the Guard or his Council, as well as two that intended to spend the night flirting with each other and driving everyone else crazed: Dora and Hadrian’s friend Vlad.

The costumes were identical, the only differences being matters of height, build, apparent age, and bone structure as visible around the mask.
An announcement once all the guests arrived and the real fun of the Hunt could begin.

“Attention, attention!” Lucius called out once a hostess’s spell cast over the invitations and guest list informed his lady-wife that all who’d RSVP’d that morning had arrived.

Thanks to the aid of the wizarding orchestra going silent and the help of a Sonorous, the chattering mob of several hundred turned towards the “hosting” couple of the Hunt Ball.

“As Samhain night ushers in the season of the warrior and the wizard, we welcome all on behalf of the His Grace the King to the Hunt Ball!”

Cheers and the ringing of flatware on crystal rang through the massive ballroom that his Narcissa had outdone herself designing for the night. Bright and rich fall flowers mingled with shimmering crystal and delicately-scented beeswax candles. The fireplaces roared but were spelled to prevent the packed crowed from overheating but gifting them with the scents of the season: spices, apple, and woodsmaoke.

“Now.” Lady Narcissa took over from her husband, the wave of her wand conjuring a table behind them on the dais holding a trio of fall-toned pillows, each holding a treasure, as her husband flicked his wand and revealed the rules of the “Hunt” from which the Hunt Ball had long ago gained its name. “As is tradition, the Hunt will reign from our signal until the stroke of midnight your object:”

“Among you.” Lucius carried on, his deeper voice carrying with greater ease over the now-throbbing crowed. “Is a host of the Black of Blacks. Hidden in this host is our Host the King. The lucky witch or wizard who discovers the true Black of Black will be our reigning Hunter or Huntress!”

“What are the rules?” One voice called out.

“Hang the rules.” Another rang out, ripe with laughter. “What’s the prize?”

“The rules are simple.” At her words the crowd quieted once again. “Magic in any way, shape, or form is not permitted. You may not attempt to remove their masks or strip their glamours. You may not bribe any of the Black or use other such measures.” As she spoke the rules she outlined shimmered into being on the banner above the prize table. “Only your mind and your wits are at your demand…and for a true hunter or huntress, they should be all you need.” She smirked.

More than one grumble arose at that, though they were joined by renewed laughter as well.

After all, while the prizes were serious, it was meant to be fun.

“As for the prizes.” Lucius joined his wife in her smirk. “They depend on the Hunter or Huntress who prevails. For an underage witch or wizard, the choice of either galleons or a year’s scholarship to the wizarding school of their choice.” More than one mundane-born perked up at that. Hogwarts wasn’t cheap after all. What they didn’t realize is what underage was in this context, which meant under eleven as any older and they were able to enter a courtship by Avalonian law. “For those who are either married, bonded, or otherwise ineligible – the fabled Hunter’s laurel!”

The Hunter’s Laurel was an old artefact of House Potter, awarded to them by their liege Lords House Pendragon.
As it sounded, it was a laurel coronet with a lioness rampant holding a ruby between the laurel points.

And made of solid gold, it’s worth in history alone was vast, and in galleons ranging over a thousand at least.

“And last, but certainly not least of all.” Lucius built up a bit of tension, reveling as always in the limelight. “For those eligible, your prize is your quarry! An informal courtship of no less than three social engagements with His Grace the King!”

A roar went up at that, as the Blacks all smirked.

It was the traditional prize after all, ranging anywhere from a boon or a favor to a kiss to their hand in marriage.

“A caveat, if you will.” Narcissa told them once the noise had subsided. “Each hunter or huntress may only guess once, and if you are wrong…” She trailed off.

“You will owe a boon to our gracious host.” Lucius finished. “Best choice wisely and well. The Blacks are numbered, and each guest spelled for secrecy. You may come up to this chalice.” He motioned to the golden cup behind them. “And enter your guess upon the slip provided and linked to your magical signature to prevent anyone from winning through sheer process of elimination.”

The slips in question appeared in their hands, and then Narcissa and Lucius counted off, Narcissa raising her wand.

“On your marks!”

“Get set!”

“Go!” Lucius roared and Narcissa slashed her wand down, a cloud of golden and orange sparkles showering the guests in grand display.

…

“Anyone else entertained that people keep picking whichever Black dances with King Arthur no matter how many times they get it wrong?” Dora asked her fellow Blacks, including Vlad who was using it as a free-shot at spending time with her thanks to there being multiple “Blacks” dancing, flirting, or otherwise grouped together.

“The Notice-Me-Not spell on the chalice is helping with that.” Hadrian commented from where he was leaning on the wall between Vlad on Dora’s left and who he was pretty sure was Draco…or maybe Severus. Hard to say with both of them being sarcastic bastards when they wanted and the glamour distorting their voices to be unmemorable. “Or else process of elimination would still be in play as a viable strategy.”

“How many favors are you owed thus far?” Vlad asked, arching a brow and sneaking an arm around Dora’s metamorph-ed waist, who just cocked a brow at him but left it be, a victory for him since she’d yet to acquiesce to any more contact than a kiss or two.

“Enough that the Wizengamot is going to kick themselves for playing come the Summer Session.” Hadrian smirked in satisfaction.

“Plotting prat.” Draco commented, the tone helping Hadrian separate him from his snarky godfather.
“At least pretending to be me is keeping Livia from dragging you out for every dance.” Dora teased her baby cousin…even though age-wise Hadrian was the youngest, Draco was definitely the least mature of the two.

Draco shuddered a bit.

The things he did to keep his betrothed content.

He had no plans to spend any part of his bonded life hanging upside down from the rafters thank-you-very-much, and that was the least of what Livia was capable of if he irritated her.

A little dancing was a fair trade.

And a lot less expensive than what his father goes through every time he gets on the bad side of his Black bride.

Both in pain and in galleons.

If there was anything he learned from his father, it was the time and money saving value of a well-placed “yes dear.”

A few more minutes passed in pleasant – if joking – conversation as they watched the crowd churn around them from the balcony high above the dance floor they’d claimed for a respite, one of several set aside for the “Blacks” when they needed a break.

But, there was a limit to how much time they could linger there, to keep things fair on both ends as Hadrian couldn’t be successfully hunted if he wasn’t within the field of play.

Still, a bird’s eye view was both informative for how various personages were weeding through the options of Blacks, as well as entertaining.

Some Blacks, such as the Marauders and Severus, were having entirely too much fun with the game, and to his surprise, of everyone he’d expected to play him the best, Severus was racking up the most false-identifications.

Hadrian shook his head as another player fell to the Potions Master’s abilities to act.

Maybe it wasn’t as surprising as it should have been on the surface.

The man had been a spy, for months at that, in Voldemort’s inner circle.

Severus Prince was the true Slytherin of Slytherins…and was using all of his wile and cunning to make fools out of his most irritating former-students, fellow lords, and a visiting dignitary or twelve.

Hadrian choked back a snicker as he watched a vapid-headed debutante bat her lashes at snarky-Snape as he left the balcony to return to the floor below him.

He’d have to do something for Sev after this.

Probably get him one or two of the nearly-impossible-to-source potions ingredients on his “wish-list” for his research.

Or a reprieve from attending the next Lord’s Council, though which would please him more was hard to say.

He’d ask Tavi tomorrow.
If anyone would help him figure out the enigma that was Severus Prince, it was his son and near-mirror image.

…

“Oh, there you are.”

Hadrian turned at the airy voice, mouth twitching at the sight he found behind him.

A young lady with long blonde hair and silver-grey-blue eyes that looked not so much at him but more through him had been disguised as the magical cousin to the silver-studded blue butterfly – a quite rare species. Her mask was in the shape of the butterfly itself, with her eyes where spots on another species might be, and her white frock trailing more of the same. What he thought might be actual butterflies were making themselves at home in her trailing hair, all in all creating a vision of some nature nymph.

“Ms. Lovegood.” He gave a proper bow from a Lord Black to an Heiress of a lower-ranked House. As all of the Blacks had been doing when speaking to others. “Harvest greetings.”

“Harvest greetings, m’lord.” She bobbed a curtsy, a fae smile on her cupid’s-bow pink lips. “How are you finding the Hunt, m’lord?”

“Enlightening and entertaining.” He decided on the spot. There was something else about her that tingled at his senses. Something other and it was more than her smile or her gaze that seemed to know or the butterflies in her hair. “Do you intend to claim your prize?” He asked, taking the bull by the horns rather than dance around the subject. He was supposed to be a Gryffindor today, joining Hufflepuff once more at one minute after midnight.

“Oh, not at all.” She answered in that same airy voice. “I didn’t realize myself you see. The flitterbys told me.”

“Flitterbys?” He arched a brow, appraising her once more.

“Yes, yes.” Luna continued, explaining. “They’re drawn to masks you see, they like to peek and spoil others’ fun.”

“I see.” Hadrian answered. And he thought he did.

Unless he’d finally cracked under the pressure of Avalon, the Lovegood Heiress was either a Seer or some other kind of sensitive. A medium, or clairvoyant. It wasn’t unheard of, but just as rare as a true Seer, and often a great deal more useful on the day-to-day.

“Well, then.” Hadrian gave her a wink and a gallant bow. “M’lady if you’ve no wish to claim a prize, perhaps you’d allow me this dance?”

Luna giggled brightly, delicately allowing him to take her hand and lead her onto the dance floor.

“It would be my honor, good sir.”

…

A chime rang through the ballroom of Potter Manor, Lady Malfoy rising from where she’d been seated – at her husband’s overprotective insistence – at the table flanking the dais with her sister and Lady Anthea Holmes, Princess Diana joining them not long after the trio of pregnant ladies had been positioned just so with their hovering – even the implacable Mycroft Holmes – lovers watching over
them.

Not one of them blamed them, nor did any one of the other ladies or guests present.

All of wizarding society knew the troubles both Narcissa and Andromeda had gone through to have just one child each.

That they now were each once more blossoming with life was considered nothing less than a near-miracle by most, especially for Narcissa who had lost more than one babe in the attempt to give her husband an heir.

Two miscarriages after Dora was likewise enough heartache for Andy, and both sisters had thereafter taken precautions against more pain.

Then Beltane came, and the magic of the night and the King they served had overridden their health, precautions, and history to bless them with children once more.

Healthy, strong children who were firm in the womb and ripe with magic.

For that alone, the sisters Black would love their King.

Hadrian being Hadrian, it was simply a bonus to their relationship with him, and he was nearly as excited for their blessings as their own blood-families were.

“One hour left, milords and ladies.” Narcissa warned in her bell-clear voice. “One hour left for the Hunt.”

…

Fred and George Weasley, each equally pleased with his matching fox costumes, roamed the gaming tables located in one of the ballroom antechambers.

The Hunt might be the main event of the Ball, but there were other entertainments for those not wanting to wager an open-ended favor against the offered prizes.

Hadrian’s prizes were tempting, but he was a wily blighter.

Better odds were found elsewhere, as far as they were concerned, with different attractions.

For the Twins, said attraction were the card tables and rich lords and merchants with more gold than sense.

Perfect Percy was busy – easily spotted by his brothers in his plum Wizengamot Member costume and harlequin mask – networking in the ballroom and rubbing elbows with whatever muckety-muck he could nail down for two seconds.

Good for him, and for them, as he’d no doubt out them at least to their absent older brothers if not their Great-Aunt Muriel for gambling if he spotted them.

“All in.” Fred called at the poker table, pushing forward his pile of gold that had slowly grown as he fleeced wizards and witches alike for whatever they were dumb enough to wager while George cleaned up at the blackjack table.

The tables were warded against all magical forms of cheating.

Useless against a pair of brothers that had learned to count cards at their grandfather Septimus’s knee,
as had Bill and Charlie before them, Percy too straight-laced for the skill.

But what pompous pillocks don’t know won’t get them hexed, and purists like this lot who thought
themselves “too good” for the Hunt going on in the ballroom would never have the thought of
muggle cheating even occur to them…so long as the Twins don’t overreach and give the game
away.

“Five minutes!” This time it was Lord Malfoy announcing the time, prompting a flurry of action
from the guests who hadn’t yet attempted a guess. “Five minutes remaining.”

One guest in the guise of a black and silver Great Dane, who had been watching everything from
one of the alcoves overlooking the ballroom, took that as his queue, and reaching his target, leaned
up and whispered in an ear.

“You really are a troublemaking Black at heart, your Grace.”

Then, as the crowd began to chant, loped up the stairs to the dais, eyes locked on glamoured silver,
as the piece of paper he’d written his almost-certain-guess upon lowered into the chalice just before
the strike of midnight and the shout of one! From the crowd, the chalice lighting as his paper hit
bottom with bright gold and purple flames.

Gasps and cheers rang over the ballroom as they all realized, the others lingering in the gaming
rooms or retiring rooms drawn by the frantic rush of the final count, that someone had done it and at
the last moment at that.

As was tradition, Hadrian climbed the dais as the gathering unmasked, the false Lord Blacks
changing back into their normal forms – including dresses of Black clan tartan for the ladies – and
many were teased by their friends over mistaking Severus Prince or Dora Tonks for the graceful
King.

Reaching up, Hadrian removed first his own mask, eyes changing back to green as the aging potion
wore off, his form shrinking as the magic of his costume shifted around him: a sight that wasn’t at all
unpleasant given that he possessed a growing-but-pleasing form well-revealed by the shirtless
costume.

One curiously scarred hand lifted, and the last mask lowered, leaving the crowd staring in shocked
silence as the spell wore off.

There stood in all his glory none other than the missing and presumed dead Regulus Arcturus Black.
Twenty-Six: Never Underestimate a Slytherin

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Twenty-Six: Never Underestimate a Slytherin

“Hello Cousin.”

At that casual greeting from the recently un-assumed dead Regulus Black, younger brother of Sirius Black and still-assumed Death Eater, the crowd turned from shocked silence to outraged cacophony.

A look from Hadrian was all it took, and he had his godfathers and Lucius surrounding him, as others moved in to protect the pregnant ladies who were dear to his heart and his beloved husband, Wills still in clear view but flanked by David and Gawain, Lionel at his side so fast he might’ve apparated.

“The missing Regulus Black.” Hadrian mused, head cocked to one side, his quiet words doing more to silence the mob than a shot would have. “Now found. Tell me, cousin.” He emphasized the relation.

It wasn’t something he dwelled on overmuch, but he had a dozen or so easily-identifiable shirt-tail relatives in the crowd alone, not even taking into account anything of too-extended degree or the wizarding world at large. Sirius and Regulus were both his third cousins, along with Neville, the Weasley children, Barty Crouch Jr. in Azkaban as of two years prior, Leanne and Alex Marshbanks at Hogwarts, and Luna Lovegood’s father Xenophilius.

And they weren’t even his closest living relations, a distinction that belonged to his still living Great-Grand Aunt Lady Marjory Marshbanks nee Potter, who married one of the direct-line Heirs of House Marshbanks in nineteen fifty-eight, and the grandmother of Alex Marshbanks, the youngest living Marshbanks Heir.

Granted, Lady Marjory could have made a case for being his guardian at one point, or petitioned for a place in his household, but why would she want the bother?

Her horses, husband, and grandchildren were more than enough for a Dame in her fifties that had lived through the terror of Grindlewald, lost her brother, nephew, and grand-nephew to Voldemort, and had enough sorrow in her life from said losses without bringing more pain into her life.

She asked for a picture of her great grand-nephew every year, and a visit and tea at Skye Palace, and that was enough contact for her.

A request that Hadrian was more than gracious enough to accept, for all that he might wish for a closer relation to the only living born-Potter.

“How is it that you are here, now, when I don’t remember seeing your name on the guest list?” Hadrian arched a brow, ignoring that Regulus had won the Hunt and was to be crowned the Hunter with everything that implied.

With their relation, it was up to Regulus to declare himself eligible or not, meaning that he very well might have to go on three dates with a probably Death Eater.

Joy.
McG was going to have a coronary, if he wasn’t already.

“Why you did, cousin.” Regulus smiled wickedly. “Perhaps you don’t recognize me…” Trailing off, he gave a cheeky grin, and then his body morphed, leaving the familiar figure of one Asterion Lovegood, Hogwarts Professor of Spell Weaving, and Unspeakable in his place.

“Metamorphmagus.” Hadrian chuckled drily, shaking his head. “One brother an Animagus, the other a Metamorphmagus. Fascinating.”

Regulus shifted back into his normal form with a nod, tilting his head to the side in a familiar tick he shared with his elder brother.

“And, before your guards hang me from the rafters.” Regulus rolled his eyes and bared his lower arms. “Not a Dark Mark in sight.”

“What?” Lucius and Severus chorused, joined by the bark of Sirius, the three of them moving to block the missing man from view and cast a plethora of various revealing charms on the unblemished ivory skin.

“How is that possible?” Severus muttered, then cast a suspicious glance at Hadrian who held up his palms in a wordless “wasn’t me.”

“Unspeakable.” Lady Amelia Bones told them with a sigh, moving to join the fray.

This was a Hunt Ball that was going to be gossip-fodder for years at this rate.

“I always wondered by the Department of Mysteries didn’t take a stronger stance against the Death Eaters, yet the DMLE always seemed to just find antidotes to the more vicious spells and poisons. That they had an inside man helping, a spy of their own, and a metamorphmagus at that makes more sense than any other theory I’ve heard since the War.” She continued.

“Guilty,” Regulus shrugged. “Or not guilty, depending on how one looks at it.”

Hadrian nodded, then eyeing the crowd made a decision, saying quietly: “We’ll continue this later.” Before finishing the performance for the mob.

“What prize will you claim, Our Hunter?”

“While you are a tempting prize.” Regulus said with all the roguish charm of his brother. “I must declare myself ineligible and lay claim to the Hunter’s Laurel.”

Nodding, Hadrian strode to the prize table and banished it after taking up the Laurel, then returned to facing his cousin and reaching out – Regulus was of a size with him, with a lithe slenderness belied by his restrained power thrumming under his skin – and placed the prize upon his brow.

…

The Guard was nothing if not efficient, Hadrian had to admit.

Within minutes, McG had the Council rounded up as well as the living Blacks, and port-keys to take them to the safest and most private place that was held ready at all times in case of emergencies or last-minute meetings.

A place that was, ironically enough, Regulus’s childhood home: the Black Townhouse.

An irony that wasn’t lost on the Unspeakable if the hint of a smile on his high-born face was any
clue at all as the ebony-haired man glanced around the updated foyer and halls, peeking into rooms as Hadrian and Sirius – who kept sneaking peeks of his own back as his long-missing brother – led the way to the office he maintained here.

Lucius, while married to a Black, had been left at Potter Manor to oversee the clearing of their guests – a task made easy enough by port-keys set to go off in intervals after midnight.

He would arrive soon enough to support his wife and son, the former of whom had regained her ladylike public persona after turning milk-white and faint at the sight of her favorite cousin returning from the dead.

Severus was hovering over the ladies Black, there was no other word for it, and lending his silent support to his long-time friend and godson, his children returned to Hogwarts with the other students rather than add to the already-large group that was to seek truth from an Unspeakable and spy.

Another irony for the night.

Hadrian didn’t doubt this was Regulus Black – the drama of choosing to be “reborn” per se on Samhain was all Black, let alone the manner in which he’d chosen – but he had his concerns nonetheless.

Of all the Ministry, the Unspeakables had categorically been the biggest pains in his arse since his Claiming – and the hardest to manage.

It wasn’t hard to understand why that was the case.

Give any department devoted to research carte blanche and limited oversight and they were going to throw a wobbly – or a hundred – when that status quo changed.

Oversight and a reasonable budget were filthy words to the Department of Mysteries, and even losing one of their own Unspeakables during the clean-out hadn’t helped them rationalize the necessity of the changes.

Rookwood had put them on the chopping block.

Their attitudes and obstinacy had kept them there.

The head of the Unspeakables was summoned to the Black Townhouse to corroborate Regulus’s story…which just filled Hadrian with joy.

Before the clean-out, few were the departments of Wizarding Great Britain’s ministry that hired on skill and aptitude alone. In fact, there was just one: the Department of Mysteries. That, along with the work they had done to prevent the worst of atrocities from rampaging through WGB during the reigns of both Grindelwald and Voldemort, was a main reason there still was a Department of Mysteries after all the headaches they caused hand-in-hand with their more useful aspects.

As a result, the Head Unspeakable could give less of a damn for the magical monarchy, being raised by his staunch Scottish Independent maternal grandparents after his mundane-born mother dropped him in their lap, and who had a deep loathing for ignorant pure-bloods that dominated the Wizengamot and other high-ranking Ministry posts – or did.

Highly educated with vast intelligence and a blatant disregard for the rules, Hadrian liked him immensely and enjoyed knocking heads in debates from politics to magical theory to the color of the sky.
That didn’t stop him from cutting his budget or tossing him in a cell to cool his head off whenever he danced too close to out-right subversive behavior.

Mordred Melanthios Rue, a prodigy from all accounts, and a fatherless son with a face that made more than one House *twitch* in discomfort and pray that if the day ever came where his curiosity overcame his resentment that he *wasn’t* one of theirs given that he got his kicks by reading mundane science tomes in the middle of the *Leaky Cauldron* while flaunting his wandless abilities and lived to shove the mere threat of his existence in their pompous faces.

Saying that he had a “chip on his shoulder” was an understatement along the lines of stating that the surface of the sun is a *wee bit hot*.

Sauttering into the office that had been expanded by the house’s magic to accommodate all of the “master’s” guests, Rue arched a brow at the sight of Regulus sitting sprawled in front of Hadrian’s desk with wands out and pointed at him by the Guard, his older brother watching him like an apparition from his darkest nightmares – or fondest dreams – that would disappear the moment his quicksilver eyes shifted away from that familiar face.

“Oh good.” Rue murmured, tone dark and sardonic enough to rival Severus at his best. “A party.”

“Sorry to start without you, boss.” Regulus saluted the head Unspeakable – who was a handful of years younger than the operative. “But I couldn’t help myself.”

Snorts and scoffs in stereo came from around the room at *that*, with Sirius, Rue, Remus, and even Andy all exasperated at his unrepentant falsehood and flamboyant attitude given the gravity of his revelation.

Not the least of which was the pain and grief that his family and friends all experienced with his disappearance and rumors of his demise at Voldemort’s wand or order.

Hadrian whimsically imagined that Rue’s voice – even when irritated with his agent – rivaled the dark chocolate color of his hair, persuasive and tempting as the face that gave credence to the rumors of Rue being the base-born offspring of an aristocrat – though who was the question as none had ever even attempted to lay claim to the powerful creature with dark blue eyes and cheekbones that could cut glass.

Bastard – in both birth and nature – or not, Mordred Rue was a power to be reckoned with.

Stunning though, which only made him that much more lethal to those unsuspecting the razor-edged mind behind the angelic face.

“Unspeakable Raven.” Rue nodded his dark brown head, one of the only Unspeakables that publicly scorned the concealing cloaks of their Department membership. “You have broken cover.”

“Not without cause.” Regulus defended his actions, as King, Council, family and friends stood silent and watched the byplay, gathering what they could from both what was and was *not* said between the two enigmatic wizards.

A tapping black combat boot was Rue’s sole response, Regulus wincing at the sight and then caved to the wordless demand to hurry before his boss’s patience ran out – a trait that had never been all that dominant or well-developed in the dark wizard to begin with.

“The shade is on the move.” Regulus reported, his voice low. “Hopping from creature to creature, ever westward, ever forward without fail.”
Thunder cracked across Rue’s sculpted face, body tensing and his power crackling under his skin sending out tendrils that sparked in the air.

Rage. Hadrian noted to himself, trading a glance with Remus as the werewolf dropped his wand into his hand, a shield ready on his lips. Pure rage all but poured off of the Head Unspeakable, a wizard who prided himself on his stoic persona and unshakable reputation.

The ability to remain calm no matter the disaster was an invaluable trait in an Unspeakable and one of the rumored reasons why Rue was head-hunted by the DoM at a young age, not unlike the Black son who had been brought in by Rue’s predecessor to play spy for the Death Eaters and blood-purists.

There was only one shade Hadrian could think of – or his Councilors and closest advisors for that matter – which would garner such a reaction from Mordred Rue, who had drawn the eye of the DoM after surviving one of the most vicious Death Eater attacks of the Voldemort war, with a body-count that had more than one blood purist baying for Azkaban for the “murdering mudblood.”

“And you revealed yourself rather than report in?”

Regulus shrugged. “I can do more in the open as Regulus Black than I can as the slightly-dotty Professor Lovegood.”

“Slighty dotty is right.” McG drawled, leaning back and folding his arms across his broad chest behind his charge. “We never could pin down whether you were testing the wards on the Tower on purpose or just had your head in the clouds.”

“They’re good wards.” Regulus had to admit. “Same as the ones on the school – very different from when I was a student there. Gave me more than a bit of trouble when I was inserted onto the staff with the rest.”

“How did you manage it?” Hadrian asked, cocking his head to the side, playing along with the diversion – for the moment – as he did need that answer.

Letting Dumbledore’s woven-in loophole remain was one thing as he could dismantle it at any time.

A metamorphmagus hiding in plain sight was a threat to the school, as while WGB liked to think it was an out-bred talent, both Regulus and Nymphadora proved that false.

With the proliferation of Black blood – both in WGB and abroad – it was a risk Hadrian couldn’t ignore.

Not to mention other countries where the talent can be found outside of Britain.

“Shapeshifting combined with Occlumency-induced MPD.” Sirius interrupted before either Unspeakable could open their mouths. His tone was thick with disgust, voice near a growl. “You damn fool.”

“Works on Dark Lords and Wards alike.” Rue supplied. “We’re able to unlock talents present in the wizarding genetic code, depending on the degradation and suppression of the code in question. From the case notes, Raven’s case was as simple a procedure as such things get. The Occlumency, however, wasn’t us.”

Hadrian buried his face in his hands as Severus scowled down at a far-too-cheerful Regulus, the other spy knowing exactly where and how “Raven” had obtained his skill in Occluding.
Though Severus had never been *dunderheaded* enough to suppress his active personality to the point that it wasn’t registered by some of the finest wards ever fashioned – a ploy that he doubted would’ve worked on Avalon given his experience with feeling the near-sentience of the Skye Palace wards.

That Regulus wasn’t a threat to Hadrian – or so Severus assumed given his ease of manner – would have helped a great deal with the school…not so much with Skye Palace.

“That would meet the requirements of the Occlumantic trigger to recover your main identity.” Rue allowed, though he didn’t sound happy about it. “I would imagine that much like our young *King*, your survival of Riddle alerted you to his renewed strength of purpose.”

All eyes shot between Hadrian – and the faint Sowilo scar on his forehead, hidden though it was by his loose hair – and a grim-faced Regulus who held up his hands to the lamp light, dropping the glamour in wordless explanation.

Teeth marks.

More than that, *half-moon* teeth marks that any mother with a toddler could recognize as human dentition.

“A were attack?” Armand duLac asked, leaning forward to get a better look at the scars that weren’t limited to Regulus’s hands but also were scattered from arms to neck – the few that they could see despite the loose shirt and pants in black that Regulus had worn under his costume’s magic.

“Greyback’s pack?”

It was a normal assumption given the amount and shape of the scars – if such attack took place outside of the full moon as Greyback and his pack were known for.

“No.” Lucius whispered, having rejoined the company in the midst of the drama surrounding Rue and Regulus’s reunion. “Worse. Much worse.” Light blue-grey eyes shot over to the Bones siblings in concern. “*Inferi.*”

Breaths were taken all around, as Amelia closed her eyes in a slow blink, Sandringham’s blood rushing from his head in shock as he felt behind him and fell into a chair conjured by a watchful Lucius.

Edgar Bones, their brother, along with his wife had died in an attack on their home during Voldemort’s reign of terror. Worse, Edgar had been killed first and then reanimated to murder his wife as Death Eaters watched and laughed and jeered. It was only the wards set on all Auror homes that had saved their daughter Susan from joining them in death as the DMLE responded to the AK that struck down Edgar – but not in time to spare her the horror of watching her father tear her mother apart.

Toddler or no, some events left their mark, as Hadrian’s nightmares of the Killing Curse bore out, and Susan’s terror of Inferi that was like to show up when Moody had them start on their Dark Creature segment of the syllabus for the year.

“Playing the Dark Lord false isn’t for the faint of heart.” Was all Regulus had to say to Lucius’s observation and the others’ shock.

“Raven’s apparent “death”,” Rue carried on, ignoring the emotions of the rooms as he always did. “Gave us a unique *opportunity* to gather information on a trend spotted by my predecessor. And while the loss of a covert agent isn’t ideal, it will also allow the DoM to move forward in ways that
were blocked while Raven was still inserted in his cover.”

“Protection from the shadows is hardly ideal.” Regulus smiled half-heartedly at his brother, an apology of sorts darkening his eyes. “But – if it will be allowed – I would be willing to return to my post at Hogwarts openly and serve as a liaison between the Department and the Crown.” He then muttered under his breath. “Which might just keep you two,” meaning Hadrian and Mordred. “From hexing the daylights out of each other on a monthly basis.”

“Yeah, good luck with that.” Sirius snickered, amused even in his shock at Reg’s return – and as a good guy – or at least not a Death Eater – at that. “Like tinder and an *Incendio*, these two.”

“I won’t pretend to be pleased.” Hadrian decided upon a tack, one finger tapping on the desk blotter before him. “At the continued withholding of information that the Unspeakables practice. *However.*” He continued with a sharp glare for both Regulus and Mordred when it appeared they would argue the necessity of their secret-mongering and whisper-hoarding. “So long as from now on a policy of not withholding information that could present clear and emergent danger to either the Empire or the Throne is observed, I won’t – *yet* – gut the department and reassign each and every one of you to the Mundane Liaison, Misuse of Mundane Artifacts, or Magical Accidents and Catastrophes offices.”

Regulus winced at the vindictiveness – and creativity – of the threat.

Such a move would be far worse for him and his fellows than a simple sacking would be – and markedly more painful.

Which he gathered was rather the point.

“That said.” Hadrian rose to his feet and gesturing for the group to disband. “I want a full dossier on Riddle – including his current state – in my hand before breakfast tomorrow and another on all of the rituals, potions, spells, or other means used by the Unspeakables to unlock genetic potential in a subject no later than eight in the morning Saturday. Am I clear?”

“Yes, your Grace.” Mordred nodded, though the set of his mouth told of the sourness his agreement presented him.

“Regulus.” Hadrian gave the errant Black a half-smile. “I’ll see you tomorrow at breakfast, while your circumstances are explained to the Headmistress and Administrator when they wake by my secretary Mr. Davies. And now.” He gave Regulus a too-bright smile, waving to the group of Blacks who hadn’t so much as twitched as the office cleared, McG prodding Rue out of the office ahead of them. “I’ll leave you to your just desserts.”

And with that, the door shut softly behind him, locking with a *snick*, as Regulus looked at his brother and cousins, with their spouses and children who had tightened ranks and surrounded him while his attention was on the King.

Swallowing around the sudden lump in his throat, he flinched and held in a yelp as Siri finally broke free of his restraining mate and pounced, expecting nothing less than a walloping followed by a cursing for his ruthlessness in leaving them to grieve over him.

Which came, all in good time.

But it was at the hands of his pregnant cousins, and not his brother.

Sirius was far too busy hugging the life out of him and hiding his damp eyes in Regulus’s coat, as his not-so-little brother did likewise in his wild black hair.
“Merlin, Reg.” Sirius choked out, his strong arms banding like iron around him. “Merlin, it’s really you…”

“I’m here, Siri.” Regulus whispered, returning the embrace and closing his eyes to breath in the wild scent of wind and grass and fur that always followed his brother around. “I’m here.”

…

“Are your ears still ringing?” Severus asked his old friend when he saw him next.

“Oh, shut up, Sev…”

…

Hadrian was less-than-surprised to finally – well after midnight – make it back to his suite at Hogwarts that night only to be met by the rather adorable sight of his husband and two of his future consorts and several friends all cuddled together in a puppy-pile in the main living area by the fireplace.

“Started falling asleep not long after they arrived.” Lionel supplied with an amused smile as his Grace snapped a quick set of photos before moving towards the pile of bodies. “We covered them up as best we could, figured moving them if needed could wait until you returned.”

Since Hadrian doubted any of them would have willingly been ushered from the King’s Tower before an explanation was provided for Regulus, that was a wise decision on the part of the guard.

It had kept them all calm if nothing else.

The only ones missing were the young ladies – as there was no way in hell any of the teachers would’ve allowed them into his quarters without a chaperone – and Draco as the latter was still with his parents interrogating – er – catching up with their wayward Black sheep.

“You going to wake them?” McG asked scratching as his jaw-scruff with a yawn.

“You going to wake them?” Hadrian smiled and changed his costume into covering pajamas, then another spell had the floor under his loves and friends – including Conan, Neville, and Blaise, though Wayne, Cedric, and the Twins were all a pleasant if unexpected surprise – and a last conjured pillows for those without a couch cushion or crumpled blanket on which to rest their heads. Only Hector – observant as always – so much as twitched as he eyed the pile-up and then snuggled down into the barely-there gap between Tavi and Wayne, who’d somehow ended up closest to his consorts and bookended by Cedric. On the other side of the Hufflepuffs were a quartet of Gryffindors, Conan slumped against his cousin Cedric, with Neville against him then the Twins, and guarding the outside was Blaise whose position as a protector was as instinctual to the quarter-Veela as his fireballs and temper. “This is warm and comfortable.” He grinned up at his guard as McG rolled his eyes in an extravagant motion before switching out with the night guards, Lionel and McG officially relieved.

The wordless tone wasn’t really necessary in his opinion.

It wasn’t like he was wrong.

And besides…other than a few times of having the Wallace boys over or Wills and Harry, Hadrian
had never had a sleepover before.

Unplanned or not, he was going to make the most of it, what with tomorrow’s classes only running in the afternoon and evening due to the late-night that always accompanied Samhain.

Sleeping in had never held more promise…unless it was just him and Wills and miles of sandy beaches and suntanned skin to explore before rising for the day.

Still.

This promised to be a most excellent second-best.

…

It was an exhausted group of students who woke to the comforting – and stomach-rousing – smells of bacon, sausage, coffee, tea, and chocolate.

The House Elves – wonderful creatures that they were – had provided brunch at the behest of Russell when it became clear that the teenaged students weren’t going to wake without reason anywhen soon. *Reason* was therefore provided, as they would need to eat, talk, and then the others scatter back to their rooms and dorms to clean-up and change before classes in a couple hours. Besides which, his liege’s spells or no, sleeping on the floor couldn’t be the most restful thing in the world if his own memories of sleepovers were accurate.

If the smells of food started the process of waking, the sound of Russell whistling Hector awake to go for his morning walk certainly did, was the Great Dane let out a yawn and a soft woof that rustled Wills’s hair before trotting out the door towards the courtyard, a spell on his collar working to open and close doors for him.

While one would think that waking up in a pile of male teenage bodies – and every scenario that implies – would be beyond awkward, one would be right.

The absent – and shameless – Seamus was probably the only first-year in the castle that could’ve dealt with the issue without blushing, an equanimity that his year-mates did not yet possess about *things* poking in new and strange places.

That at least several of the boys in question were unequivocally straight did not help – at all.

Over the course of his employment with the King, Russell had had many moments of levity where were he a different wizard the blackmail opportunities were ripe.

Fortunately for the blood-red blush on the face of Conan Diggory and Neville Longbottom when they scrambled from the center of the puppy pile, pulling down their shirts to hide their *pointed* awakening, he found more amusement in the moment than in hoarding proof of humiliation for later opportunities.

Which was why it had become his job to wake the King in the first place, and not another such as McG who could and *would* hold such things over his young charge’s head – probably forever, including passing evidence down to the next unlucky bastard who had to try and keep the young pup safe and often from himself as much as external threats.

The pair weren’t the only ones to blush, but they were the only ones to overreact, the rest simply climbing to their feet and stumbling towards the food, save for the quartet of Hadrian and his consorts who snuggled a bit longer watching their friends out of amused eyes before eventually climbing to their feet after a round of shared good morning nuzzles and kisses – only in part from
their canine companion who trotted back over to them after his morning constitutional.

“So I suppose that, answers that burning question.” Bold Conan commented after recovering from his abrupt awakening spooned into Neville.

“Hmm?” Hadrian hummed in question as he and Tavi – still wrapped up in each other though limited to arms around waists – wandered over to the table, Wills and David murmuring quietly to each other and bringing up the rear with a hopeful-for-handouts Hector at their heels.

“About your consorts.” Fred told them with his normal bluntness.

“An’ whether they’re,”

“Together,”

“Or jus’”

“Together, wi’ you.” The twins finished together.

“There’s a bet on it in Gryffindor.” Neville drawled, recovering as much from the focus being shifted as from the cup of sweet tea in his hands.

The Gryffindors were, of course, referring to the bashful good-morning kiss David had teased from Wills, before the older two shared a tongue-tangler with their younger counterparts whispering and nuzzling between them.

Sweet enough to give their audience cavities – but the first real sign of anything beyond simple affection between the others and not just Hadrian.

Cedric and Blaise both snorted at that.

“There’s probably a bet on it in every House.” Tavi drawled, rolling his eyes at them. “Since even my own house-mates aren’t nearly discrete enough in trying to suss out the answer from me.”

Hadrian, feeling more than a bit of the devil that morning, smirked at his friends.

“Well, I hope you bet right then.”

“I did.” Quiet Wayne – whose golden curls were beyond mussed in the morning and whose eyes were a sleepy blue instead of clear sky – admitted. “I couldn’t see any other way to make it work.”

“Smart lad.” David told him, smiling around his coffee. “Though, I hope you all,” he arched a brow at the Twins. “Will have to wait to collect on your winnings until after Harry is ready to go public with that bit of scandal.”

The others all either nodded or waved him off, well aware of the “what happens in the Tower” rule of silence.

Not to mention the wards Hadrian had put up after the first tour to ensure it.

He liked having his friends over.

He liked not being the centerfold scandal of Witch Weekly more.

“Speaking of scandals.” Cedric took the hint and changed the subject. “Regulus Black?”
“A metamorphmagus.” Hadrian shrugged. “Alive, well, and returning to teach once his cousins finish chewing him up and spitting him back out for making them mourn him I would think. I’ve already adjusted the wards to fill that gap, now any metamorphmagus will have to be written in to shift the same as Professor McGonagall and any other animagi on staff have to be to use their animal forms.”

“Being a shape-changer must have been useful for staying alive when the Dark Lord wanted him dead.” Tavi noted, eyes sharp. “A spy?”

“Mmm.” A nodding hum was the only answer – or explanation – Hadrian gave on that.

“Ballsey.” George grinned.

“He’s a Black, ‘course he is.” Fred nudged his brother’s shoulder with his own. “Just lookit us.”

“How much did you take the pomps for?” Hadrian asked with genuine amusement.

He’d spotted them at their game, but let them have their fun.

It wasn’t as if any of his favorite people had been at the gaming tables to get fleeced.

And if someone like Lucius or Sirius had sat down, they would’ve given as good as they’d gotten, as not one of his advisors or family were mutton-headed fools.

The Twins just beamed brighter than the sun in answer, eyeing Wayne contemplatively when he asked:

“Could you teach me to play?” With a very studied look of innocence that was belied by his sharp eyes.

“Depends.” Fred decided after a look at his other half.

“On your.”

“Purpose.”

Cedric – not to mention the rest – suddenly found themselves having trouble controlling their grins when Wayne gave a growl that were he grown would be fierce but on a thirteen-year-old was nothing less than adorable.

Like a kitten.

“Smith.” He all-but-hissed, eyes flashing. “He’s an unmitigated arse, but he usually is sneakier about it than he was yesterday. And he likes to play cards in the Great Hall with some other pureblood gits on the weekends.”

Wills lost the battle first, snickering into his pancakes as the others coughed to hide their own laughs or just gave into the urge.

“Nice.” Blaise eyed the mundane-born ‘Puff with appreciation. “He’s too proud to believe he could lose at anything – despite the evidence staring me in the face at the moment – to anyone he considers lesser.” Which given that Blaise was a quarter Veela, also included him to a true purist like Smith or Pansy Parkinson. “Can I join in on this little lesson in monetary vengeance?”

The Twins each jerked a shoulder in agreement.
“Sure, why,”

“Not?”

“Should be fun.”

…

“You don’t give up, do you?” Hadrian asked with more than a hint of exasperation eyeing the – this time illustrated – note that landed in the middle of his Astronomy text without looking up to see the author.

There was no need, he already knew who it was from.

With a series of dates being up on offer at the Hunt Ball, it seemed more than one of his classmates at Hogwarts had caught on to him being the true Hunter – for his missing consorts. As had many of the nobles and gentry from around the world. Hadrian – well, Russell – had been bombarded with contracts and proposals and offers that numbered in the hundreds.

And it had only been a week.

Lifting his head, Hadrian gave a reluctant half-smile at the sight he’d come to expect whenever he was in the public areas of the school: one grinning Seamus Finnegan waiting to see his reaction to whatever gambit he’d decided on next.

Thankfully, the Headmistress had made it crystal clear to the school that any attempts at wooing him during classes would carry a swift loss of free-time to bother him outside of classes from racking up detentions.

For which Hadrian could only give thanks.

He couldn’t think of much worse than having Seamus’s attention split between a bubbling cauldron and trying to flirt at the same time given how often his concoctions turned explosive when he was giving them their full and needed focus.

Wills, and their friends, all found it ruddy hilarious.

And to make it worse, the interfering prats refused to move all of their study groups to the Tower, forcing him to wait for them to be out of class in the library where Seamus had hunted him down this time.

The Irishman might have failed at the Ball, but he was more than making up for it in sheer tenacity.

Unfolding the note, he arched a brow at the simple – if clever – message.

Still thinking? It said at the top, with a crown-wearing stick figure below it with a thought bubble that read: I really should go to Hogsmeade with Seamus…

“How?” Hadrian told the other teen, who bounced a little and punched the air at the pronouncement. “I suppose this is a proposition?”

“You dodged me last Hogsmeade weekend.” Seamus tilted his head with a grin. “Hiding away with your slave-driver secretary you were. ‘m not even asking for the full day. Just a friendly butterbeer at the Broomsticks will do me fine. C’mon?” His grin turned wheedling and his brown eyes widened. “Wha’ do ya have ta lose?”
“One butterbeer.” Hadrian held up a warning finger. “Just one.”

“Yes!” …

Regulus sprawled in his absent-minded Black grace in the chair across from Hadrian later that night.

“Should I even ask how you got through the Tower wards?” Hadrian asked, half-heartedly as he focused on his Dark Arts essay.

“Sweet William escorted me up.” He offered, not wanting his little cousin to tighten down the wards anymore than they already were. They already gave him a headache half the time if he wasn’t Occluding. “No need to fuss.”

Hadrian said nothing to that, other than noting that his husband must have gone up to one their chambers after getting out of Defense Club. His Music Club got out earlier than Wills’s club did, allowing him some time to work before bed, unlike the Defense group. Still, it was good for Wills to have his own interests, and with most of their friends as well as David and Tavi all taking part, Hadrian gladly left them all to it and enjoyed his time with his piano and violin and cello.

Magic knew, he needed the break from people, and the music club was one of the lesser-attended activities given the more popular Defense Club took place during the same time-slot.

“What do you want, Regulus?” He asked with a sigh, looking up from his parchment as it seemed his cousin wasn’t interested in offering up the reason behind this rare visit.

Regulus had slotted back into his teaching post at Hogwarts with only the barest of explanations given to the student body regarding his true face and name.

However, familial relation aside, the two hadn’t suddenly become bosom-buddies.

Though they did tend to find each other entertaining when they had cause to be around each other.

A folio hit the table in answer.

“Bossman wanted me to deliver this one in person.” He explained with a put-upon sigh. “Eyes-only and sensitive information and all that rot.”

The Unspeakable Head wasn’t pleased with the new level of oversight his department had been punished with, but he was at least playing along – for the moment.

This newest delivery was the newest in a line of documents and reports or other research that Rue had provided in keeping with their new détente.

“What’s this one on then?” Hadrian arched a brow, sitting back in his chair.

“The Hall of Prophecy.” …

It wasn’t only the other students of Hogwarts or the nobility of Wizarding Great Britain that had taken note of Hadrian’s more active approach to his lingering issue of heirs and consorts.

From foreign royals to common-folk, Avalonian citizens to traditional enemies, all had taken note – and not just of a hunting, eligible King; but of his policies and law changes as well.
Magical races long denied their historical territories and rights, creatures and beings who had faded into myth, all watched and waiting to see how the young King would rule – and if his word was as noble and true as his laws promised.

All waited.

All watched.

And many considered.

Though what, was often the question.

…

Before Seamus got his date, there was another event that required Hadrian’s attention and that of his consorts: David’s birthday on November 8th.

This, his last year at Hogwarts, the Wallace Heir was turning nineteen and while his friends were taking him out the next night – as being an apprentice David could leave the castle at will – the night of his birthday was spent celebrating with everyone at the school.

His father had owled him a gift of an apprentice cursebreaker’s pack – one notably suited for hot, dry weather, making his son smile at the thought that his father had already worked out where his Gringotts field internship was scheduled for (David was hoping for Egypt like Bill Weasley, it was one of the more active field assignments available and Guatemala had too many bugs for his taste) or had gotten Ragnok to put in a word for his heir.

Which, given David’s excellence during his schooling, wasn’t needed in the least.

David was excited for his field internship, but, at least part of that excitement was due to a fringe benefit that he was hoping would come out of it.

Gringotts cursebreaking interns – those assigned to Egypt in particular – spent anywhere from one to three years in the field…without returning home.

For David, it had the potential of being a time of freedom from his duties to his House and line that he’d never had – and a chance to… recalibrate how he thought about Harry.

He didn’t regret stepping up and taking on the contract.

How could he?

But, he did struggle at times with the realization that he was going to marry the same little boy who used to stumble after him at Wallace Grange and liked nothing better than rolling around in the mud with the dogs – often including his godfather’s Padfoot form.

Not the sexiest memories to have of your intended.

Sweet, innocent kisses and cuddles aside David often still struggled with bridging the gap between the near-fraternal feelings he’d had for little Harry with those of the strong man and his future husband.

It was something he imagined Harry’s Egyptian betrothed might have issues reconciling, considering that while he met Harry when he was already “Hadrian, King of Avalon” he’d also been thirty-something (David thought) to Harry’s eleven at the time.
A pretty – and big – eleven-year-old, but just eleven all the same.

It was different watching someone grow from the distance of an older age and only meeting them a handful of times between introduction at a young age and then marriage later.

And while David’s body had no issues with Hadrian – whose would if they were attracted to males? – his mind and heart often did.

A break would be perfect, allowing him to leave behind a near-brother, and return to a lover.

At least…he hoped.

After all the presents had been opened – including a set of warding and cursebreaking tomes from Hadrian and Wills that David would’ve given a kidney for – Hadrian glanced around with a frown as everyone else laughed and joked and enjoyed the massive cake provided by the House Elves.

“Where’s Tavi?” He asked in concern.

The Prince Heir had been around before, including presenting a gift of a potion that will help keep David hydrated in the desert heat, but now no matter where Hadrian looked the other teen was nowhere to be found.

“I think he said something about needing a break from the noise.” Wills offered, hearing the question from where he was playing a round of wizarding chess with David, the pair cheered on by Rhys and Livia.

“Check your roof terrace.” Livia told him after a quick look around. “Barmy git likes the night air,” she shivered just imagining it.

“Ok.” Hadrian frowned, going over to David and giving him a one-armed hug and excusing himself, feeling something off but not sure what.

The others waited for him to wander out of the Tower living room before turning to stare at Livia.

“Really?” Rhys asked. “That’s the best you could do?” He shook his head in dismay. “I can clearly see now how you didn’t make Slytherin.”

“Shut it, tosser.” Livia hissed, eyes narrowed. The may play nice in front of Hadrian, but the two could barely stand each other. “It worked, didn’t it?”

“What’s going on?” David asked, blinking. He’d clearly missed something and he wasn’t alone based on the confused looks around the room save for his brother – who probably knew a bit from observation but not much else – and the pair of Wills and Livia who’d gotten Harry out of the room.

“Tavi up to his old tricks.” Livia smirked, refusing to give anymore information no matter the bribes offered. “Trust me – you’ll see.”

…

“Tavi?” Hadrian called as he walked from the bright stairway out onto the dim rooftop terrace, eyes blinking as his vision adjusted. “Are you alright…” He trailed off, blinking for a whole new reason as what he was seeing took a moment to process. “Woah.”

Hadrian had worked with his house elves from both Skye and Hogwarts to clean up the rooftop and turn it into a terrace, warding it to keep out foul weather, popping furniture and lights and with
Neville’s help potted plants and trees to add some color to the grey stone. A comfortable conversion area surrounded a small brazier with dragon motifs in soft blues and purples, with a wrought iron and glass dining area opposite. Bronze lanterns hung from grey stone, and a woven bamboo mat cushioned feet bare or shod from the castle’s chill.

And above it all soared the Scottish sky, with the Forbidden forest to the right and the Black Lake ahead, heather-strewn hills to the left.

Tonight, however, the shining stars had competition, as Tavi – likely with help from his sister and Wills – had strung fairy lights from the trees and lanterns and plants, a cherry-wood fire pleasing the nose in the brazier, and underfoot was strewn with deepest red rose petals, orange blossoms, and stephanotis, arrangements of the same spilling over the dining table, and standing with the stars overhead and the Lake at his back, one elegant hand holding a simple Ardor Bouquet with the same three flowers all wrapped in ivy, was Tavi.

Tavi was as vibrant as the red-red roses surrounding him, the rich red of his button-down shirt a perfect match for the roses, his hair spilling down around his shoulders rather than pulled back, with a silver tie highlighting the deep blue-black of his eyes as the red shirt warmed his ivory skin. A dragonhide belt in inky black was clasped around his waist with the Prince coat of arms, and his long legs were wrapped in matching black trousers tailored to his tall, lean figure, shapely feet bare on the carpet of petals and blossoms as his shirt sleeves were folded back to reveal strong forearms and shapely wrists.

He glowed.

And then he spoke, in that deep sultry bass voice that had given Hadrian shivers since the first moment they met.

“Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon, will you marry me?”

A delighted laugh burbled out from between well-formed pink lips, and the door to the stairs banged shut behind him as Hadrian ran forward and threw himself into Tavi’s arms, wrapping strong runner’s legs around narrow hips and trusting Tavi to catch and hold him despite them being nearly of a size.

Mouths met once, twice, thrice, as Hadrian’s joy continued to overflow, the younger man feeling the faintest hint of a rose thorn pricking at the skin of his lower back as Tavi held his wordless message that echoed his proposal, loath to cheat his little lover of his due even when said lover ambushed him with joyful kisses rather than a sensible yes.

But then, Tavi mused as he wrapped his other hand in Hadrian’s long braid, a sensible agreement would have been the move of a King.

This creature wrapped in his arms and attempting to steal the very breath from his lungs – or at least the blood from his head – wasn’t that person of regal majesty.

This was just Hadrian, a boy who had to grow up far too soon, and who wanted nothing more in his life than for his family to be happy and safe – unless it was a happy and safe family of his very own, not one patchworked together from fostering and duty and archaic bonds.

And just Hadrian was an impulsive, surprising, delightful creature indeed.

One overrunning with sentiment, who stored each and every blossom and token given to him in their own unique places.
Another young man would have been insulted in Tavi’s place to know that his tokens – those of a floral nature anyway – were displayed along the edge of the master bath in the King’s Tower at Skye Palace.

Another young man wouldn’t have realized that the bath was one of the few places Hadrian could truly unwind, a place of comfort, and that was where Tavi’s bouquets and blossoms made their homes, where Hadrian could see them every day as he prepared to face the world or unwound from the omnipresent stresses of ruling an empire.

Tavi wasn’t just another betrothed to Hadrian, he’d become a friend and a comfort, and had been a subject of flustered desire from the beginning of their courtship.

Marriages had been successful when built on much less.

Tavi had promised himself when he’d learned of his contract, that he would make a place for himself in Hadrian’s life, an equal place to all others.

His Prince and Slytherin pride would have allowed for nothing less, and now that Hadrian was finally ready, Tavi saw no reason to wait another six months or a year or perhaps even more before fully taking his place in his future husband’s life.

He’d been waiting on Hadrian for two and a half years already.

He wasn’t patient enough to wait anymore – Livia had taken most of the patience between the two of them, Tavi’s being limited to mostly Hadrian and his potions.

But Hadrian was ready now.

His Hunt had proven as much.

And Tavi was ready to take what was his.

“Never willing to wait.” Hadrian teased as he pulled back, nearly reading Tavi’s mind. “Couldn’t hang on another couple weeks for me to do the asking, could you my lovely snake?”

“Never.” Tavi told him with a smiling pulling at the edge of his mouth. “I’ll always be one step ahead of you my little fox.”

“Hmm.” Hadrian dropped his legs back down to the ground, but kept his head resting over Tavi’s heart, reaching back and taking possession of his newest set of courting flowers from his Prince.

“When?”

“I was thinking New Year’s Eve.” Tavi offered. “Since you jumped through all the hoops with Wills already, and will have to do so again with Julian and Natsu, I thought a quiet little ceremony with just us and our closest friends and family sounded just right.”

His only answer – other than the snogging of his life – was a single red carnation.

A simple flower, with a simple message:

Yes.

…

Author’s Note:
Red Tulips: Declaration of Love; Stephanotis: Marital Bliss; Orange Blossom: Bridal Festivities; Ivy: Affection, Friendship, Marriage.

Red Carnation: Yes
Twenty-Seven: Payback and Potential

The Avalon Seven

Chapter Twenty-Seven:

Payback and Potential

…

Witch Weekly Headline, December 1, 1993:

Debutantes Prepare!

King Announces New Year’s Eve

Black-and-White Party!

Who Will Make the Cut?

By Ramona Meriweather

Full story pages 2-8

…

“Have all the invitations gone out?” Hadrian checked with Russell as they packed for the winter break.

School had flown by in the weeks between Samhain, David’s birthday, and Tavi’s surprising proposal.

Planning a surprise wedding under the noses of his guard, chatelaines, household, and Council simply added to the speeding-by time. Not even Wills or Livia were in on what Tavi had had planned, the cunning Prince heir posing his asking for help in the guise of a romantic date. But with Russell in collusion and the help of the elves, anything was possible.

Though Hadrian would’ve preferred Witch Weekly not run almost a full issue on his upcoming “party” but you win some, you lose some.

Speaking of dates.

Seamus had turned out to be better – and more intelligent – company than Hadrian had thought.

Who knew there was an actual brain under all that swagger?

Things were progressing there – in a very informal and almost casual manner – but even slow progress seemed to be enough to satisfy the flirty Irishman.

And a handy stinging hex kept him from getting to handsy with either Hadrian or Wills, though once he’d been invited a bit more fully into their circle, he’d had to learn for himself that it was just better not to try with either Tavi or David, both of which had much worse than stingers in their arsenals and weren’t bashful about using them if he stepped over their lines.
He’d only had to be hung upside down from the King’s Tower rafters once to never attempt to flirt with Livia again – innocent or not.

“Yes, your Grace.” Russell checked something off on his ever-present notepad. “And Clover,” Russell’s helper elf who handled most of the errands for the secretary. “Reports that the Head Kitchen elf Bitsy has the menu and cake well in hand, with Whimsy enlisting several others for decorations.”

“Simple.” Hadrian reinforced. “Simple decorations. Simple ceremony. We managed to slip the dress code through tradition with a black and white party excuse, but anything extravagant and our guests will be put out over breaking traditions over gift-giving and wedding breakfasts and, and, and.” He twirled a hand.

“The elves have been instructed.” Russell promised. “Nothing over the top. Simple, winter-themed, with red roses and white stephanotis. It’s taken care of, Hadrian.”

“Good, that’s good.” Hadrian blew out a breath, digging his hands into the top of his hair. “Was last time this stressful?”

“Not for you.” Russell reported drily. “However for everyone else: yes.”

“What do you think the chances are of Maggie not skinning me alive?”

“That depends.” Russell pretended to give it serious thought. “Are you planning on giving her grandchildren anywhen soon?”

The panicked darting of Hadrian’s eyes around the room was answer enough.

“Then, not a chance.” Russell smirked at his boss, taking fiendish delight in his last-minute jitters. “You’re fucked.”

“How did I get into this?” Hadrian thunked his head down onto the table.

“If I have the order of events right.” Russell answered the rhetorical question with relish. “Your clever Prince snogged the daylights out of you then got you to agree to a near-elopement.”

…

New rules led – always – to new forms of discontent and divide, perhaps especially in a group of young people such as attended Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

Sometimes the divide was simple, as was the case where certain classes and clubs tended to draw likeminded students.

Other times it was complex and swirled with issues of status and class or strength versus intelligence.

Few other than true academics attended the Arithmancy club after all, while the Flying, Defense, and Dueling clubs were some of the most popular offerings among the four groups of clubs that had risen from the waves of change two years before. A few of the clubs had already existed before the overhaul, either formally as with the Choir or informally with the groups of students who would play pick-up Quidditch on the weekends. Many of the others were new offerings and led to new friendships as common interests bridged divides that were often otherwise seen as impassable.

Dozens of clubs had sprung up after all, between the new requirements of both staff and students to participate unless one was a Head, or in the cases of Quidditch players who were excused from the
athletic club requirement.

Every student, under the new code, was to participate at least once a week in both an athletic club which included Dueling, Archery, Fencing, Unarmed Combat, Horseback Riding, or Dancing; and an academics club which existed for each core and elective offering of the school though some clubs like their elective counterparts only accepted students of NEWT age or beyond. Two other types of clubs had also come about. Extracurricular clubs covered subjects not on official offer at the school and included the aforementioned Choir, as well as Public Speaking, Art, and Music. Then last but one of the best optionally-attended club types were the games and sports clubs which included Mundane Sports that was a cross between an athletic club and a games club, Flying/Quidditch (not the House teams), Wizarding Chess, Gobstones, board games, and cards clubs.

With hundreds of students, and Hogsmeade weekends limited to once or twice a month depending on the behavior of said students, the professors had found much to their delight that while advising or running a club soaked up a few hours of their time a week in cost, it paid massive dividends in keeping the students out of trouble and had even shown improvements in academic performance and focus in classes.

Students still hung out with friends during free time – but had the option of making friends both outside of their House and their Year through clubs – and had their own study groups.

Pranks were still played, couples were still found on the Astronomy Tower or in empty broom cupboards.

But the underlying…tension that came hand-in-hand with boredom and had led to more than one accident over the years had mostly dissipated.

Though as with anything, tensions still had a way of exploding more excessively than any volatile potion when hormones were added to the mix.

As was the case one morning before the Winter break during the Unarmed Combat club which took place like several of the other athletic clubs in the mornings before breakfast during what some of the students had dubbed “zero hour.”

Unarmed Combat was the second-least attended of the athletic club offerings, with only the Dance activity less well-liked – though eventually it tended to fill up over the year as couples paired off and used the club as a way to be affectionate without risking points-deduction or a detention for being inappropriate…though no amount of begging had gotten the staff to agree to teaching the students more risqué dances such as tango, bachata, or kizomba.

A restriction that didn’t hinder the more amorous-minded teenagers, but was still enforced nonetheless.

Hadrian half-wished that he participated in the dancing club, if only to have been there in person when Pansy Parkinson finally realized that while no announcement had ever been made, her “darling Draco” was very much taken by the very lovely – and vicious – Livia Prince as Draco never partnered anyone else save for a few of Livia’s friends and only after the first several weeks of school.

Unarmed Combat had several things going against it as far as its detractors were concerned.

Being a rougher form of self-defense – especially considering the “hands-on” aspect of it – it was disdained by both the blood-purists as “too mundane or muggle” as well as by the most cerebral students…or those who just didn’t like to get dirty.
That the staff advisor was also the Head of Security and an alpha werewolf scared off more.

In the end, it left a healthy mixture of students of all blood-statues, was one of the few clubs to be weighted in favor of half-bloods or mundane-born students, and those that enjoyed the visceral satisfaction that came from sparring even in controlled conditions.

As with any of the athletic clubs Hadrian took part in, it also had a heavy presence of his Guard to prevent any “accidents” from occurring, though as he was always paired with their the advisor/alpha Thomas for sparring and demonstrations or one of his guards, it at least wasn’t as likely to give McG an aneurysm as Dueling or Fencing was, where he was more often than not paired with older students – in some cases much older – for him to have a challenge.

An interesting member that had raised more than one eyebrow at her inclusion to the Unarmed Combat club had been none other than Ms. Hermione Granger of Ravenclaw.

One of the most intelligent students in their year – as well as an inveterate bookworm – most of the boys had expected her to favor either Mundane Sports like most of the mundane-born students (which from what Wills had told them was similar to how a mundane gym or physical education class was run) who found it familiar and comfortable in the strange surroundings of Hogwarts or either Archery or Dance which both tended to be female-heavy.

Wills was one of the teens that tended to attend the Mundane Sports activity depending on what they were going to be doing on a given weekend, much like Seamus, Dean, and many others who had their favorites and their sports they’d rather miss.

Football and rugby tended to be well-attended for instance, while badminton was subject to groans and eye-rolls when it came up on the schedule posted in the student handbooks.

Most of the staff involved with the many and various clubs were self-aware enough to know that most teens weren’t going to have stellar-attendance records for an extracurricular, even ones that were ostensibly required at least once a week. In accordance, while it wasn’t a rule, many would post in the schedules what topics were planned for a specific meeting, allowing students who needed extra self-study – or just a nap – to skip without missing a topic of interest or one that they needed help with for classes. It worked, for the most part, and rare was the student sent to detention or their Head of House for failing to keep up with the club requirements as outlined in their student code.

While some complained – staff and students alike – over four of the main athletic activities taking place in the mornings before breakfast, others saw the benefit.

Early workouts for fencing or dueling, archery or unarmed combat let students wake up before classes, worked off some of their energy, and saw them able to better focus and last through the sometime long hours of study during the week.

Hadrian found it a bit of his old normal integrating into his new school-normal, as he’d had to wake up early for various lessons or activities for years, as had many other heirs and heiresses.

Fencing and Dueling were almost requirements for any heir, and certainly expected for them to take part in by their parents if not their peers.

Archery – while one of the less-favored activities – was a traditional skill of some families and Houses, especially among the ladies though that hadn’t stopped Hadrian from taking it up when offered the chance.

Wills and Tavi – not to mention his suitors, the most obvious of which was Seamus – had all
certainly enjoyed the definition the required arm-strength had added to Hadrian’s developing
physique to both his arms, pectorals, core, and back.

There was a reason ladies of certain houses had a reputation for their lithe figures and elegance, such
as House Black or House Bolyn with archery providing one and dance the other.

Exceptions always happened, but in a world where reputation was almost as important as breeding
and gold, duty and expectation carried a weight that was almost visible on some shoulders, though
pride ensured that said shoulders rarely bowed under the pressure.

The surprise addition to the Unarmed Combat club of Hermione Granger of Ravenclaw had proven
that expectations could always be defied, and her boldness in standing up to a few of the more
condescending older teen males when they hissed a challenging heckle at the frizzy-haired young
woman showing many the answer of what had taken the Sorting Hat so long to decide her placement
when those who knew her from Hedwig had expected an immediate-sort to Ravenclaw much like
Draco Malfoy’s to Slytherin.

Hermione might be a ‘Claw nearly to the bone, but she had a thick streak of Gryffindor to her that
impressed more than one Lion, and her taking-no-crap from the more lunk-headed members of the
Unarmed Combat club won her more than one ally in the House of Courage and Bravery.

She might still irritate the ever-loving-shit out of them when she got on her soapbox about everything
from Arithmancy to Creature Rights, but she’d proven herself to be smart and bold, something the
Lions could respect and the Snakes made note of, and helped her avoid becoming a target of the
meanner-natured members of both houses that were known for pranks or bullying – when they could
get away with it.

To many purebloods’ disappointment, the Flying clubs either brooms or on Pterrippi, didn’t count as
a physical activity given that it was for leisure and not exercise, leading to more than one of them
who were – to be frank – too lazy for most of the physical clubs such as Mundane Sports, Fencing,
and Dueling which had either a lot of running (Mundane Sports) or the expectation of some prior
experience to the Unarmed Combat club.

With no requirement of prior experience, and no extra tools or needs other than the same activewear
that all students received after being sorted with their House emblem and name, it seemed at first
glance an excellent option for those who weren’t prepared for the more involved physical clubs.

An assumption that was wrong on so many levels that it led to many moments of either hilarity or
frustration from clumsiness, accidents, or whining.

They’d started out slow and easy as Thomas worked on identifying the various skill levels he was
working with before breaking the students into different groups. Hermione ended up in the novice
group, as did many others, while a handful including most of the seventh years and Hadrian were
experts, with the rest in a couple groups in-between. Another novice, and a main cause of whining
and the eventual event that showed just how much tension can still build even with an outlet, was
Ron Weasley.

Ron Weasley could be many things, as his experience thus far at Hogwarts had proven to both his
classmates and his teachers.

He could be loyal, having finally clicked with a few of the Hufflepuffs and Gryffindors in his year
due to his participating in Flying and Wizarding Chess, and made a good if not overly thoughtful
friend.
While lazy with homework, which had led to his Head of House assigning him to a monitored study hall along with his housemates Vince Crabbe and Greg Goyle, he was shockingly intelligent in a few subjects that interested him – mainly Wizarding Chess, but also Defense – but his mouth tended to run away with his sense and his temper left much to be desired.

The latter being a combination that would get him in trouble more than once during his life, starting in childhood against his brothers, though with the student body of Hogwarts had found a few new targets.

Most notably among them being Draco Malfoy of Slytherin – or any Slytherin really, though he went after Malfoy the most, carrying on the near-feud between their fathers that also went back to their Hogwarts years – and Hermione Granger of Ravenclaw, whose sometimes know-it-all attitude ruffled his deeply-ingrained inferiority complex as well as reminded him of his least-liked brother Percy who had become the third Weasley brother in a row to be made Prefect to much acclaim from his mother.

“Alright, brats.” Thomas barked at the group of teenagers. “We’re going to start a new section today for all of you: throws.”

Several of the teens groaned, already knowing that they’d be eating dirt and limping back to their dorm rooms to apply bruise-salve, which was always available in the medicine cabinets of the dorm bathrooms whether communal or private given the demand for it – and that it’s not a potion or treatment that’s easily abused.

Others were bouncing on their toes in excitement or had a vicious light in their eyes as they eyed up a few pains in their arses – hoping, no doubt, that they’d be able to apply a little supervised retribution under the guise of sparring.

Hadrian was just happy to be practicing one of his main unarmed skills, throws and takedowns being his among his favorite skills he’d picked up from years of martial arts and Krav Maga practice.

Especially since they often worked just as well on larger opponents as they did on those his same size.

Physical activity in general was important for young witches and wizards for all that it was often overlooked, as it helped their magic integrate into their bodies and thereby caused less stress during times of magical growth spurts like the one Hadrian had experienced during his Claiming. Magic can channel itself – and its own excess – into and through its host. Something which if the pathways aren’t already in place can cause massive damage to body, mind, and core.

In Hadrian’s case, years of meditation and physical activity had spared him a great deal of damage even if said channeling had also caused a great deal of pain and disorientation in the process.

Another side effect – if the magic channeled is significant enough or the body was unprepared to otherwise deal with it – appeared for both Hadrian and Wills (and if Hadrian’s suspicions were right both Rhys and Seamus) was throwing the body into hormonal or sexual maturity early in an attempt to force the body to “catch up” to the magically-powered growth it had experienced.

Or Rhys and Seamus were just natural in their precocious sexuality, either way, and they were hardly alone, simply the most open about their behavior as the house elves – gossipy creatures that they were amongst themselves for all that they held their bonded witches’ or wizards’ secrets close – could attest to the general precociousness of teenagers who have discovered physical pleasure, having to often clean away the evidence of such things with the laundry or in the bathrooms.
“Up for a demonstration, Mr. Emrys?” Thomas asked in his rough-gravel voice. Like many teachers, the alpha werewolf had taken to simply calling Hadrian either Mr. Emrys or Mr. Pendragon, depending on where their family hailed from with Englishmen and women favoring the Pendragon House – for good reason considering their fame – and the rest for the most part favoring House Emrys.

Thorpe was a Scotsman through and through, like many of the auxiliary staff hired on in the last two years at the castle, and favored House Emrys.

Minerva McGonagall was a rare exception, sticking strictly to protocol and his full shortened last name of Emrys-Pendragon when even the Headmistress had softened over the last months.

Not that Hadrian or McG were surprised.

For many years the venerable Deputy Headmistress and Head of Gryffindor had been a bastion of proper behavior that inspired more than one up-and-coming witch with her no-nonsense attitude.

Hermione Granger was merely the newest case of heroine-worship to set eyes upon the tartan-clad Scottish witch.

“Always, Alpha Thorpe.” Hadrian gave a bright, eager grin that was answered with a smirk as the massive alpha waved him forward.

Thorpe was one of the few people in the castle that had a clear view of Hadrian’s physical capabilities aside from his Guard. Not even Wills, Tavi, or David had ever really seen him in full-action or going all-out against an opponent. Mainly because doing so was dangerous for both parties unless they were more than a normal human or magical person.

Like, say, an alpha werewolf.

Hadrian enjoyed anytime he could let go of his control – whether in a physical, mental, emotional, or magical sense – even a little. Wrestling with Remus, fencing with Gawain or David, dueling against Severus or Sirius, such were the times when he didn’t have to worry – overmuch – about damaging his opponent beyond repair. His hand-to-hand practice with Thorpe had been added to that list, as had a few other names from his dueling and fencing clubs with being exposed to a wider pool of opponents.

Rhys for example was a wily bastard with a wand, even if he did little more than suck wind with a sword despite his early training before his father let him drop it as a losing battle, while Blaise had only gotten more formidable with age and maturity increasing both his strength and reach as well as his control over his natural abilities with wandless fire.

The quarter-veela prat.

Blaise wasn’t the only creature or part-creature in their school, though aside from the security forces he was the most open regarding his heritage.

After all, it was hard to hide something that his mother was infamous for, so why bother making the attempt in the first place?

“We’ll start today with one of the simplest but most useful throws,” Thorpe began pacing a bit as Hadrian came to stand before the group of about forty students. “A full hip throw. The idea is simple: using your hips to get lower than your opponents to break their center of gravity and adding a pivot to send them to the ground. Simple enough: but like anything else takes practice to get right.”
Thorpe motioned to Hadrian, who took up the position, and proceeded to throw the alpha to the
ground at full-speed, the room – a large gymnasium-type location that had been repurposed for the
active clubs to use during the months of foul weather when practicing outside wasn’t desirable –
cushioned to prevent any more injury than minor bruising…so long as the students obeyed the rules
of engagement during spars or other practices.

Hadrian and Thorpe took turns with the throw, going full-speed, then slowing it down and showing
it step by step with each of them taking turns hitting the floor so the students could see the motions
required for when the other person was either taller or shorter than yourself.

Of course, seeing only did so much with physical defense.

The rest was practice, practice, practice.

“Turn into it, lower center of gravity, grab, lift, pivot, throw…” Hermione murmured to herself,
repeating the process out loud over and over again.

“Merlin.” Ron Weasley scoffed, rolling his eyes and crossing his arms over his chest. “It’s just a
throw, not your homework Granger. Give it a rest already.”

Ignoring the glaring girl, Weasley turned to Crabbe and Goyle who had fallen into a routine of
tagging along either after Weasley or one of the other pureblood Hufflepuffs in their House and
year…even if Weasley was a blood-traitor like his sister and parents.

“She’s a nightmare, honestly.” Weasley said with his uncaring spite, ignoring that his voice was one
that carried, allowing the “nightmare” in question to hear every word. “I don’t know how anyone
stands her. It’s not like she has any friends.”

“Mr. Weasley.” Thorpe scowled over at the loud-mouthed carrot-top. “Front and center. You just
volunteered to go first.”

Ron gulped, face washing out at the next words from the alpha werewolf, his freckles standing out in
stark relief.

“Ms. Granger, why don’t you show Mr. Weasley how it’s done, hmm?”

Between the anxious look on Weasley’s face and the smirk on Granger’s, the gathered students let
out more than one snicker in anticipation of watching the prat fall on his arse, with others like
Hadrian looking away from the sure-to-come spectacle to keep their composure.

Though none anticipated just how painful the situation would prove to be for the unfortunate soul of
one Mr. Ronald Bilius Weasley.

Except, perhaps, Ms. Granger’s mother Jean who had taught her to SING at a young age.

And SING she did, barely having turned and Ronald put his hand on her shoulder in the mock-grab
Hadrian and Thorpe had demonstrated before he elbow slammed with all her body weight behind it
into the taller teen’s solar plexus, her sharp heel jamming down on his instep as she turned and broke
away. Too busy gasping for breath and hopping, Weasley never saw the jab to his nose coming
from a pointy-knuckled fist, let alone the wicked knee to his groin as she grabbed his shoulders and
pulled him into the upward thrust. Watching with vicious satisfaction as he gave out a whining
squeak of pain, hands leaving his nose to cradle his family jewels and males of all ages wincing in
helpless sympathy, Hermione simply smirked wider and said: “now that’s a nightmare.”

“Detention, Ms. Granger, for failure to follow directions. We’re practicing throws not basic self-
defense.” Thorpe sighed, gesturing for Crabbe and Goyle to help up Weasley and had them escort him to the nurse. “But good form, nonetheless. Everyone pair up.”

The Winter Break brought with it the first round of term-exam frenzy – though nothing like it would be later in the year for those students facing O.W.L.s, N.E.W.T.s, or Apprentice Exams from May through June.

It also was the time of the mid-year class rankings and review of student class placement into self-study or higher level classes.

Hadrian was the most famous of their advanced placement students, but he was by no means the only one or the only capable of advanced placement, with the Winter Break being the deadline for any student who didn’t feel challenged by their current classes to apply for advancement either through being placed into upper-level classes or self-study.

“I still say Emrys should be bumped up.” Moody groused when the subject arose. “He’s top of his class in every class – even wand to wand with the third years in Dueling and Defense. There’s no reason to hold him back.”

“Except his own wishes.” Minerva corrected with a harrumph. “Merlin forbid that we continue to take those into account. He’s only the King of Avalon after all.”

“Mr. Emrys’s placement is not a matter for debate.” Perenelle told them with an internal sigh. “However, others among our first-years are. Misters Longbottom, Malfoy, and Hopkins are all candidates for either self-study in a subject or advanced placement while Misses Granger, Perks, Padma Patil, and Bones are likewise.”

“Mr. Longbottom could easily test out of Herbology through the OWLs.” Pomona told them all with a happy blush on her cheeks. “I would be glad to take him under my wing for self-study if needed to allow him to do so and move up to NEWT-level Herbology next year after he gets the expected ‘O’ on the Herbology OWL.”

“Mr. Malfoy isn’t as proficient in Potions that moving him two years would be wise.” Arsenius Jigger, the Head of the Potions department reported. “However, a year’s advancement would prevent him from becoming bored and complacent in his work. Having Severus as a godfather has clearly benefitted his brewing. I believe his schedule has enough flexibility for him to join the second years in their classes.”

“And Mr. Hopkins?” The Administrator asked, her secretary taking notes of the needed changes to various student schedules for the next term.

“Charms Prodigy.” She was told without preamble from the first-year’s junior professor. “At least a year up, perhaps two though that would require both aptitude testing and self-study to catch up before he could join upper-level studies.”

“We’ll see about it.” Pomona fretted a bit. “He’s shy, and quiet. I don’t know that he’ll want the attention that being bumped up will bring him.”

“If he’s not the only one he might go for it.” David Wallace told them, having spent more time around the boy in question than anyone due to his budding friendship with Harry. “He’s quiet, yes. But support from other students and his success in several subjects has started to give him a quiet confidence with it.”
“Mr. Emrys does seem to have that effect on others.” Elizabeth Shacklebolt, the Defense Head noted. “I remember a much more timid Longbottom Heir when I first made his acquaintance years ago. Now he’s as bold a Gryffindor – if calmer than a few of his contemporaries – as anyone could ask for.”

“Ms. Granger is an issue.” Flitwick got them back on track. “She’s bright, of that there is no doubt. But I worry over her clinging to the written word and not being willing to experiment or extrapolate. And her power levels, while normal for a witch of her age, might not be mature enough for upper-level course work depending on which classes she might be eligible to self-study or advance in.”


“It is a bit odd for a Mundane-born.” Flitwick allowed. “In the past we’ve seen more than one come here and challenge the “known” simply because to them magic is a thing of wonder not rules and whys. Rather, they often say “why not?” But Ms. Granger’s personality makes it hard for her to see beyond her pages of notes and the written text to seek answers outside of book bindings. The instinct of magic isn’t ripe with her the way it is in other students in her year, such as Mr. Hopkins.”

“All the intelligence of Lily Evans or Severus Snape,” Minerva murmured, regretfully. “And none of the imagination.”

“Arithmancy and History of Magic then.” Perenelle suggested. “Neither of which require imagination but do need a strong work-ethic and a healthy dose of intelligence.”

It was an acceptable compromise, all could agree, though only bumping a year and not two lest her power leave her wanting on her practical OWLs for the former.

“Ms. Perks has an innate potential in Dark Arts.”

And wasn’t that surprising for a Mundane-Born?

“And its sister-subject Defense.”

“That’s…not much of a reach.” Perenelle allowed, aware of the girl’s background and time among the homeless before being brought to the Lily Evans Home founded her first year at the London School to keep her from putting any more magical holes in the city. “Her accidental magic was impressive and dangerous before she began training.”

“She should get on fine in the second year Dark Arts class.” David said, being the professor in question. “Harry’s in there as well and can help her along.”

“Ms. Bones also excels at Defense,” Pomona added, pleased as punch that more than one of her ‘Puffs were being brought forward for advanced placement this year. “They should be able to help one another as well.”

“Not a surprise.” Elizabeth snorted. “Given that Amelia probably started tutoring the girl as soon as she was old enough to hold a wand.”

And after the tragedy of her lost brother and sister-in-law, Susan’s parents, who could or would blame her?

“And Ms. Padma Patil?” Perenelle asked, directing the question towards Filius though he wasn’t the one to answer.

Rather, Minerva was.
“Transfiguration.” The former head of the department answered. “I’ve already marked her for an apprenticeship if she decides on that path after her NEWTs after a conversation with former Headmaster Ollivander.”

Now *that* was interesting as the Deputy Headmistress was one of the toughest professors to gain an apprenticeship under. For her to have been interested in a student at this point said quite a bit about Ms. Patil’s potential. Whether she’d choose to harness it was another thing entirely.

…
The Elopement That Wasn't

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the long wait but I'm focusing a lot more on my original fiction these days.

For more information about my original works, you can find me on Facebook here: https://www.facebook.com/sifabrams/

My first in a modern-with-magic short story series releases on Friday!

The Avalon Seven

Author’s Note: So, due to naming conventions in WGB, Harry has several versions of his name: formal and informal. His “informal” names are the ones used most often in public of Harry James Potter or Hadrian Emrys-Pendragon. His “formal” names are those used in rituals or signing important documents or correspondence but rarely if ever spoken outside of major ceremonies and can include up-to all thirteen of his Houses as well as his formal middle name of Augustus which would look something like this:


Or, a lesser version such as most commonly used like these:

Hadrian Augustus Emrys-Pendragon; Hadrian Augustus LeFey; Hadrian James Augustus LeFey; etc.

Given that he and Tavi have chosen – even to the point of infuriating a lot of people in the process – to have an informal ceremony, when Tavi gives his vows it will be specific to the House that he’s marrying so it will be to Hadrian James Augustus Ravenclaw.

Just thought I’d talk about that a little in case of confusion as depending on what “hat” Harry’s wearing at any given time his used name for official purposes can change...

Chapter Twenty-Eight: The Elopement That Wasn’t

December 31st, 1993; Ravenclaw Keep, the Isle of Man

For once, having a ridiculous number of holdings and properties scattered across the globe was working in Hadrian’s favor.

It was expected, naturally, that over time he would visit each and every holding in due course, especially the main holdings of each of his lines as they were the traditional sites that should be used for his marriages as he brought a spouse into a line, with the only exception being, as always, House Emrys as while Snowdon was, technically, the seat of House Emrys as a sitting King his first consort was traditionally and officially wedded into the House at Skye Palace, a situation which was likely – unless he could somehow avoid it – going to play out a second time if and when he chose and bonded-married a spouse for House Gryffindor as they had used the very bones and stones of
Gryffin’s Keep to create Hogwarts with Skye Palace serving as their “seat” forever after.

All of which meant, that unless he wanted to add scandal onto scandal, he needed to marry Tavi, his Ravenclaw consort at Ravenclaw Keep.

Which as it was one of the holdings he’d yet to visit for any length of time, it wasn’t hard to make an idle suggestion of finishing out the Winter Break there, after, of course, celebrating and performing the Winter Solstice/Yule Rites at Skye Palace.

Throwing a black-and-white party at the Keep also served to hide the set up for the wedding as well, with the biggest hurdle for making a royal elopement happen being ordering the wedding raiment under the noses of his household…which also happened to include his betrothed’s father.

Needless to say, hiding anything from Severus Prince for long was a losing proposition most of the time.

Severus Prince was also, however, an apparently open-handed wizard with his twin children, and as the wedding was going to be as stripped-down and informal as a royal wedding could be without causing a major scandal instead of a minor one, Tavi managed to order Hadrian’s wedding garb without bankrupting his trust account.

He was only an heir after all, not a Lord in his own right or a Prince like Wills.

Mithril embroidery was a bit out of his budget on his own merits without dipping into the Prince funds.

Another point in their favor was Tavi being sixteen – almost seventeen – and therefore of age to consent to a marriage bond in his own right as he’d had his last magical inheritance last February, had completed his NEWTs, and had a little over a month until he was seventeen and considered a full-adult in the wizarding world.

Not that either teen expected Severus to object – if anything they thought he’d be damn happy about their skipping all the pomp that went hand-in-hand with a Wedding Royale – but still…better safe than sorry.

Between Russell and the House Elves, everything was arranged for the wedding, while Lalita and Dowager Lady Longbottom had managed the party arrangements, something that would have normally fallen under Lady Narcissa’s purview but given that she and Lady Andromeda were both in their last month of pregnancy, had been handled by the Head Chatelaine.

Personally, Hadrian could hardly wait for his new nephew to arrive, his sister-in-law Anthea only a week or so behind the sisters Black in her carrying.

All three would be the first babies he’d ever had experience with – human babies anyway – and he was half-excited and half-apprehensive, with the normal, nearly pedestrian, fear of somehow managing to harm such a small and physically-delicate being.

A late – almost last-minute – arrangement had almost completely bollixed up the entire plot…or mutiny against pomp which at this point was basically Hadrian’s raison d’etre outside of fulfilling his duty to magic. It had been Tavi who had pointed out what Hadrian had missed. Or simply overlooked given the eternal conflict that seemed to exist between Tavi’s godfather and his bonded-betrothed.

If they were to be married, Lucius would ruddy fucking kill them for springing it on him and the public at large, leaving the Lord of the Privy Seal to be caught with his pants down in the eyes of the
Wizarding public and the press.

Hadrian rather liked living.

And the threat of having an embarrassed and infuriated Lord Lucius Malfoy – who was also Tavi’s godfather – teaming up with Lady Maggie to skin him alive was not something Hadrian was prepared to face when the issue could be averted.

Loyalty oaths were wonderful things and while Lucius was less-than-thrilled over the skirting of tradition his godson and liege were dabbling in, being forewarned and allowed to smuggle in the palace’s favored photographer to document the “black and white party” alleviated the worst of what would have been his retaliatory tactics.

Honestly, as things stood, it was likely only Severus’s disdain for anything remotely resembling acts of grandstanding that would keep them safe from Tavi’s father when they sprung the elopement trap on everyone.

Well, that and Livia and Draco’s wedding certain to be a spectacle – a painful one for the obscenely private Lord Prince to withstand – and the reality that as bonded-betrotheds Hadrian and Octavian were married in spirit and magic if not strictly by the letter of the law.

Yule passed with all the joy and good-cheer of the season, including the annual Yule Ball that like the Hunt Ball on Samhain had been handled by Hadrian’s chattelaines with the King only required to show up and dance the appropriate dances with whatever of his betrothed/husband/fiancé were present and not go sneaking out into the shrubbery at the unoccupied Potter manse in Avalon Proper with Lady Augusta hosting hand-in-glove with Lady Maggie. Not that he wasn’t tempted. Especially when certain parties pushed their eligible children at him like launching a shot over a frigate’s port-bow.

Still, now that he was older and had more control over his social engagements (and had met more people his own age beyond the rarified atmosphere of Hedwig Institute or the playgroup put together for his sake when he was younger) even the requisite social duties of the crown weren’t as onerous as they could have been.

Besides which, watching what he privately called the “Slytherin Contingent” go to verbal battle against the “Gryffindor Brigade” in Council with his few Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws, and non-Hogwarts educated Councilors and advisors could likely be considered a form of high comedy… unless he had something pressing on the docket, then he helped Sherrinford keep them in hand even if it seemed every meeting he learned new and unique insults and invectives from the minds of Uncle Siri or Lucius.

Though every now and again Remus or Mycroft would sneak one in that was nothing less than solid gold.

Unlike his wedding to Wills, where most of the heavy lifting was completed by his chattelaines, there were certain differences between what he could sneak under their collective radar as part of the black and white party and what would be a dead giveaway to the plotting occurring between Hadrian, Russell, and his closest companions.

He’d not selected for status after all, or not entirely, but brains and ability when it came to filling the positions of his household.

And Augusta Longbottom was one of the sharpest women he’d met in his life, quite the feat considering who had raised him.
Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with Russell who’d more than earned the bonus Hadrian had authorized for his help with all the arrangements, Hadrian ran nervous eyes over the tables set with white silk cloths and plaid napkins with table runners to match in the festive red-green-black pattern they’d chosen, pinecones and poinsettias making winter centerpieces, all of the matching décor in the same winter theme standing out strikingly against the black and white attire of the guests as they arrived or stood beside the towering “Yule tree” made of stacked rings of poinsettia plants that in little more than a handful of minutes would be the site of his wedding to Tavi.

Tavi…who had yet to arrive since one glance at his robes in addition to Hadrian’s own would give away the game.

“Are you ready for this, your grace?” Russell leaned in when a signal from Lucius had the faithful secretary leaning down – just a hair – to whisper to his employer and monarch.

Taking a deep breath, Hadrian nodded to Lucius then moved through the crowd with a simple but unceasing motion to the platform arranged just so before the poinsettia display at a flick of Russell’s wand, another flick from the same casting a Sonorous on his liege and a last hostess spell that all in close service to the King were familiar with had a chiming tone ringing out over the crowd to silence them and draw their attention.

“Ladies and Gentlemen.” Hadrian announced once all realized that it was none other than their host and King calling for their attention and a resounding silence carried over and through the crowd. “I’m afraid I must announce that you have all been deceived.” He began with sepulchral tones, only to give a bright grin, breaking character a split-second later. “Worry not: it was for a good cause.”

So saying, he stripped off his concealing cloak, revealing his wedding robes, sending a shockwave of understanding crashing down on the gathered to a variety of reactions from appalled shock from the highest stickers to amused understanding from Severus Prince as Tavi stepped from the shadows and took the hand offered to him by his fiancé.

“It’s my fault, I’m afraid.” Tavi said with a beaming grin to equal Hadrian’s own as Lord Ollivander, a necessary conspirator to the affair stood with a chuckle and moved into place revealing his own high priest’s robes. “I didn’t want a to-do.”

“That said, welcome and thank you for joining us.” Hadrian told the crowned with a regal nod. “And for standing as witnesses to the wedding of Lord Ravenclaw to the Heir of House Prince.”

Taking his signal, Russell stepped away and Ollivander gestured for their hands, prepared for one of the simplest wedding ceremonies he would likely oversee as Hadrian’s High Magister.

Especially since now Hadrian has pulled a fast one once, his council, retainers, and chatelaines would be quick on the uptake to avoid another if possible.

Not every society and species keeps to the traditions of Avalonian magical society.

If Hadrian wed outside of it he could very well have a ceremony that was even far simpler than this as Ollivander asked for their vows.

“I, Hadrian, in the name of Magic that resides within us all, by the life that courses within my blood and the love that resides within my heart, take thee Octavian Severus Prince to my hand, my heart, and my spirit, to be my chosen consort of House Ravenclaw. To desire thee and be desired by thee, to possess thee, and be possessed by thee, without sin or shame, for naught can exist in the purity of my love for thee. I promise to love thee without restraint or hesitation, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in poverty, in this life and beyond, where we shall meet, remember, and love again. I shall
not seek to change thee in any way. I shall respect thee, thy beliefs, thy people, and thy ways as I respect myself.”

A wave of Ollivander’s hand had Hadrian’s cuff flashing to show the change from engaged/bonded to wed/bonded, the cabochon of House Prince changing to a highly shined gemstone, then he turned and repeated the prompt to the Prince Heir.

“I, Octavian, in the name of Magic that resides within us all, by the life that courses within my blood, and the love that resides within my heart, take thee, Hadrian James Augustus Ravenclaw to my hand, my heart, and my spirit to be my chosen husband. To desire and be desired by thee, to possess thee, and be possessed by thee, without sin or shame, for naught can exist in the purity of my love for thee. I promise to love thee without restraint or hesitation, in sickness and in health, in plenty and in poverty, in this life and beyond, where we shall meet, remember, and love again. I shall not seek to change thee in any way. I shall respect thee, thy beliefs, thy people, and thy ways as I respect myself.”

Tears were blinked away from many an eye at the soft smiles and softer kiss shared by the new husbands before Ollivander could even give the command for it, the flash of Tavi’s cuff changing over nearly hidden by the impromptu embrace.

Chuckling once more, Ollivander announced:

“By the power vested in me by the Throne of Avalon, I present to these gathered witnesses Lord Hadrian James Ravenclaw and his bonded husband and consort Lord Octavian Severus Ravenclaw-Prince. Long may their union last and with the blessing of Lady Magic may it be fruitful. So mote it be.”

“So mote it be!” Rang out from the small crowd and no sooner had the new husbands withdrawn from each other than they were set upon by those closest – which, by necessity as well as order of precedence, were their family members.

A slap to the back of their heads from Severus was then tempered by a hair ruffle and a smirking nod, the Prince Lord giving his approval of their scheme…even as their ears started to ring from the peel Lady Maggie was ringing over their heads as the others watching laughed at their plight.

It was, after all, nothing less than deserved.

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