Execrable Colours - (third year)

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### Execrable Colours - (third year)

by Sean Jacobs

**Summary**

Barely a month into the new school year and there’s already drama, action, and a bit of excitement regarding the newest piece of news in the wizarding world: Peter Pettigrew, Lord Voldemort’s personal servant, has escaped Azkaban with a mission, one that he will fulfil no matter who he was to kill.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban rewrite  
Rewritten: 31/September/2016—revised: Not Applicable

**Notes**

Execrable: Extremely bad or unpleasant.

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All warnings from book 1 apply. I still have no beta...
Harry was somewhat glad when he felt the Hogwarts Express jerk to a stop at the station. He got up straight away, collected his trunk and pets and made towards the platform, hoping to find his parents and get out of there before he died of boredom. He stood with Draco, who was leaning against a wall, discussing what they’d be doing over the holidays and how they’d be celebrating Harry’s birthday, seeing as he’d be a teenager in a month.

He had apologised many times to Draco, stating that it wasn’t his fault that his birthday was missed and that it was a terrible date as it was when exams were on and he needed to study for them. He sighed, ignoring Draco’s tirade about birthdays and watched as the station slowly thinned out, excited students vanishing with their families.

“I’m sure someone will be picking you up, Harry,” said Draco, rather nervously, looking around the station, hoping to see Lily or James. “If no one does, then you can just come home with me and spend the holidays at my manor.”

“It’s not your manor, Draco, it belongs to your entire family.”

“May as well be mine,” sniffed Draco. “You’ll always be welcome there, though, you know that, right?”

“I’m not stupid, Draco,” said Harry, moving out of the barrier and standing near it. He watched as a mother praised their child, who had just stepped off a silver train. “You know it’s sad when a Muggle cares more about their children than a magical family. Honestly, I’ve never really seen a magical child abused, even the spare children.”

“That’s because we’re not brutes, like Muggles,” said Draco. “We treat children with the respect they deserve. We, the children, are the future of the wizarding world and we should have the best childhood that we can, that way we pass that on to our own children.”

“I never really realised that.”

“Mm,” hummed Draco, watching the same Muggles that Harry was. “What I said sums up the speech that I got when I was around eight. I’m sure father would be rather displeased that I butchered his speech.”

Harry laughed. “It’s just lucky that I’m not your child,” he said, grinning. “Look, Draco, if you don’t wanna stand around and wait for me, I’d understand. You can go and find your parents if you want. I’m sure they’re going sparse looking for us. I won’t hold it against you if you leave. I’ll be fine.”

“I’d never forgive myself if I just left you sitting here alone, Harry,” said Draco as he slid down the wall. He pulled Harry down with him and sighed. “Mother and father will agree to wait with us for a while if you wanted. They think of you as their second son.”

Harry let out a breath and stretched out his legs. “Thanks,” he said, nudging his trunk and wheeled it
next to him with his foot. He’d already sent Hedwig off to Malfoy Manor before the train had arrived at the station, not wanting her to be dragged around. Nagini was complaining about the foul smelling humans.

The two boys remain silent for around twenty minutes, watching the Muggles come and go. It was a further five minutes until they were found by a pale looking Lucius, who was panting slightly. He stared at the two boys and let a rather strained sigh as he realised how miserable Harry looked. “Come on you two,” he said, forcing them to stand with one of his glares. “We’ve got to find Narcissa, who is still searching, and then we’ll be able to head back to the manor.”

“Yes, father.”

“We’ll get something into you,” said Lucius, pulling his son up. “And then we’ll make sure that you didn’t catch anything.”

Draco snorted at how his father said the word and cheerfully pulled Harry up, who was still sitting down, clearly lost in his own thoughts. He knew that Harry would be in a bad mood for a majority of the afternoon and maybe even into tomorrow. He couldn’t blame his friend for being sad about being ignored at the end of the school year. It was Harry’s mother that kept him believing. Being kidnapped and taken into the Chamber of Secrets and no one coming to make sure he was alright must’ve put a massive dent into his pride, maybe even his trust. “Come on, Harry,” he said, holding out his hand. “Quicker we get home, the quicker we can start making bets on the next Defence Against the Dark Arts professor.”

Harry made a sound and clenched his friend’s hand, allowing himself to be pulled to his feet. They remained silent as they made their way towards a rather secluded area, which would allow them to Disapparate without the Muggles being any wiser about it. He had a rather large feeling in the pit of his stomach that his parents wouldn’t be there, at Malfoy Manor, waiting for him. He didn’t expect them to jump out as soon as they arrived and claim that it was a joke or a prank. He sent Draco a discreet look, hoping to figure out whether his friend was in on this and he realised that Draco’s nervous look was genuine and he was just as concerned that Lily and James weren’t around.

“Almost there,” said Lucius, tapping his foot behind that slow couple in front of them.

Harry nodded, almost as if on autopilot, and returned back to his rampant thoughts. He was currently questioning whether this was a common feeling and that he shouldn’t even bother to try and raise his spirits, just accepting the outcome, or whether he should attempt to fight the thoughts and claim that his parents did care for him. The last letter he had received from his mother was almost six months ago, claiming that everything was fine and that she just felt a little off. His last letter from his father was such a joke that he had forgotten the date that he received it.

“Steady yourselves.”

Harry already knew the basics and hardly flinched when Lucius’ cool hand touched the back of his neck, pulling him along for side-along Disapparition. Some felt as if they were being squeezed through a tube; others felt as if they were being ripped apart as they travelled, only to be hastily put back together as they appeared. He was the former. He gave a polite nod towards Lucius, who was steadying his son, and made his way towards the luxurious Malfoy Manor, his trunk already in his assigned room. He had a lot of information to process, mainly about this whole ordeal and how distant both his parents had become since he had started Hogwarts.

He knew that he and James wouldn’t ever see eye to eye. It was almost as if they didn’t really connect, always doing different things. He didn’t hate the man, nor was he neglected in any way, but he couldn’t help but feel as if something dire was wrong. It was his mother that had him on edge.
The fact that his mother hadn’t shown, despite what happened, had him concerned, confused, and most of all, hurt. He may not have been the award-winning son that his mother deserved. He had poured all his free time into his studies in hopes of impressing her with his intelligence. He may not have been as friendly and caring as Longbottom, or as welcoming and accepting as the Weasleys, but he was unique and he attempted to be an all-rounded son, who would drop everything to see his mother smile.

“Alright, Harry, what do you wish to do today?” asked Draco, following behind Harry with easy steps. He knew his friend was brooding, but he didn’t want to sit around and watch as Harry moodily did things. “It’s officially the first day of the holidays and I don’t wanna spend it inside, playing chess or reading. Merlin forbid. Soon enough, we’ll be sleeping until around three in the afternoon and then we’ll wake up and make the house-elves cook us a delicious meal—”

Harry allowed Draco to talk to himself, stating all the ‘fun’ things they’d do now that they didn’t have to wake up at six and get ready for lessons. It wasn’t depression or anything odd like that, he just simply felt lethargic about it all and wanted to just curl up on a chair with a book and sleep. He waved off Draco, who was still talking, and muttered about going to the library. He, of course, loved the Malfoy’s library. It wasn’t as big as the library at Hogwarts, but it held more advanced and rarer material. This library had hidden things that many would never see.

The moment that he had opened the library, the torches that lined the expensive looking walls flickered to life, illuminating the room. He much preferred to torches compared to those blinding lights that Muggles had. The warm and soothing glow of a torch was much better and allowed for easier reading. His small fingers gently brushed across the spines of each book, almost lovingly, until he stopped at one particular book, one that he hadn’t seen before. He couldn’t help but think if the book was new, even more as he gently tugged it from its position on the floor-to-ceiling bookshelf.

It was hours later when Harry emerged from the library, never loquacious when in one of his moods. He had placed the book in the exact same position that he had found with it meticulous precision. The knowledge from the rare and obscure book was firmly tucked away in the deepest part of his mind. He mentally prepared to tuck that knowledge away for future use and referencing. He swept from the corridor, the clicking of his shoes as he walked at a brisk pace down the empty corridor seemed to echo along the dark panelled walls.

He was aware that he had missed dinner and a vast amount of the day while he was cooped up inside, reading the book that he couldn’t seem to put down. ‘Yes,’ he mused, glancing at the clock that was perched on the wall, as if appearing on the wall as if he needed it. ‘Draco’ll be very displeased.’ He paused when he heard a noise and wondered if his friend had some kind of sixth sense and was stalking him.

“Little Master,” breathed Mopsy, a wave of relief washing over her. She called the name twice more before her Little Master finally stopped. “Little Master must be eating something! Mopsy wills be making Little Master something right now! Sit, sit!”

Harry wanted to spin around and curse at the motherly house-elf for being able to track him down, despite his almost successful attempts at escaping both the house-elves and the occupants of Malfoy Manor. He didn’t bat an eyelash when a small table, lined with a soft tablecloth, appeared from nowhere, a chair following soon after. He slumped into the seat, eyeing the wooden spoon that Mopsy was waving around in a threatening manner. “I’ll eat,” he said, watching in amusement as his house-elf vanished from sight with a small bow.

Mopsy appeared back within the blink of an eye, a small tray hovering above her hand. She placed it down and clicked her fingers, causing a spoon, knight, and fork to appear on the table, next to the
“Little Master better be eating,” she said, glaring at the boy that she served. “Mopsy will be cleaning the greenhouse now.”

Harry watched in amusement and gently prodded at the silver plate of food. He ignored the large Malfoy crest that sat in the centre of the plate and focused on the actual food. He was acting much like a curious child who had spotted a dead animal and was poking it to just make sure that it was indeed dead. He continued to poke it with the fork, an uneasy expression plastered over his face as he jabbed it. He pursed his lips and stabbed a small piece from the plate and, as he took a deep breath, lifted it towards his slightly parted lips.

He wasn’t sure how to even describe the disgust he felt the moment it touched his lips. He had jerked the fork straight out of his mouth and screwed up his facial expression. “Disgusting!” he muttered, trying not to dry retch as he picked up the glass of water and downed it in one go.

“In my opinion, it looked rather nice,” said a nearby portrait, chuckling. “I would eat it.”

Harry sighed and pushed back on the chair. “You can have it if you want,” he said, not bothering to look at the man in the portrait. Said man was his favourite portrait as the man was rather laid back and didn’t bother with etiquette. “I have no objections and it would get Mopsy off my back about not eating if she thought I had eaten it.”

“So, lad, what’re you going to do?” asked the man, leaning forwards slightly. “Fooling a house-elf isn’t an easy task, especially not one that is that motherly.”

‘Just vanish it,’ suggested Tom, his voice sounding rather mocking. ‘You can do that, can’t you?’

Harry huffed and pulled out his wand, after looking down the corridor, of course, and aimed it at the food. Muttering the spell under his breath, he watched as the food vanished. He breathed a relieved breath as he tucked away his wand and leant back, studying the clear plate. “Hello, Mopsy,” he said, his voice remaining calm and soft. “Thank you for the food, it really was delectable. I had no idea that I was hungry before you gave me that meal.”

“Would Little Master like more?”

“NO!” shouted Harry, his eyes wide. “I mean, I’m no longer hungry, Mopsy, wouldn’t want to eat too much.”

Mopsy leant forwards, a watering can in her left hand, and inspected the pristine plate. She stared at the plate, waiting for something and then she took a small step backwards. “Little Master not be eating the food!” she wailed, looking rather distraught about the ordeal. “Mopsy has failed Little Master!”

“I did, Mopsy!” said Harry, standing straight up, knocking the conjured chair over in the process. “I promise that I ate some of it.”

Mopsy investigated the plate once more and then shook her little head, her ears flung everywhere. “Little Master is lying!” she wailed. “Mopsy has failed Little Master! Mopsy is being a terrible house-elf!”

Harry bit his bottom lip, trying to figure out what he could say to calm the near hysterical house-elf down. Mopsy was a rare house-elf. She wasn’t unhinged like Dobby, the house-elf that would smell socks before he washed them or complain to the other house-elves that he didn’t want to be a servant and wanted to be free. He knew that that was the result of inbreeding amongst house-elves and the house-elf was as crazy as the Black family, except Narcissa, who was the only sane one from that
family. “Mopsy, please calm down,” said Harry, staring at the wailing house-elf. “You’re a good servant, better than any other.”

Mopsy continued to wail, her large, round eyes filling with unshed tears. She vanished the table and chair with a click, the plate vanishing before it smashed to the ground. “Mopsy is being such a failure, Little Master!” she said, rubbing at her eyes. She repeated it three more times before straightening slightly. “Little Master, please be allowing Mopsy to leave and wail alone.”

Harry really was impressed by how Mopsy vanished things. He had realised early that the house-elf was rather showy for him and often did things that would impress him, such as allowing something to fall within a centimetre of the ground before she vanished it. Watching the house-elf make a bed was by far the most thrilling thing he had ever seen. It was like a tornado of sheets and pillows. “No, Mopsy,” he said, his lips slightly pursed. “I refuse to allow you to leave and go wail and sob over something that you had no control over.”

“But Mopsy must!” said Mopsy desperately, her voice slightly cracking as she spoke. Her tears rolled down her face and dropped onto her clothes, which she instantly cleaned. “Mopsy has failed Little Master! Mopsy must punish herself.”

“I told you years ago that I didn’t want you to punish yourself, Mopsy,” said Harry, a defeated expression slowly appearing on his face. “And I mean that even more if the failure isn’t your fault. If I’m not eating, that’s my fault and not yours. You got me the meal and that means that your task was done and completed successfully. It’s my fault, Mopsy, not yours.”

Mopsy nodded her head in supposed understanding, despite not understanding. “Yes, Little Master, but it is being my fault—”

“It isn’t!” said Harry, cutting across Mopsy. Of course, Mopsy stopped speaking the moment he opened his mouth and she just stood there, waiting. “You know that no matter what, I’d never make you punish yourself as I don’t like it when you hurt yourself. Never! Not even if I was in a bad mood. You’re a good house-elf, Mopsy, a very good one that I’ve had for the longest time. It would take something serious for me to make you punish yourself, which I don’t really need to go into, but small issues like this aren’t one of them. I’d also punish you if you turned out like that demented house-elf, Dobby, stay away from him.”

Mopsy laughed and stood up a little straighter.

“I really don’t want you to punish yourself, Mopsy,” said Harry, his tone soft. “If it’ll make you feel better, you can make me a cup of tea and a nice ham and cheese sandwich and put them in my room and I promise that I’ll eat and drink them both.”

Mopsy nodded overenthusiastically and vanished with a loud crack.

Harry sat on the large bed that was in the centre of his bedroom in Malfoy Manor. It had been two days since the holidays had started and he was aware that he would be soon turning thirteen, not that he looked or felt as if he was that old already. He had his legs crossed over each other and his arms placed in an almost comical position. It honestly looked as if he was replicating one of the stupid poses that the Muggles came up with and attached to meditating, which he most certainly wasn’t doing. No, of course not, he was instead sitting in his mindscape, if it could be called that.

He guessed that it was meditation, but that was a completely different act and had different results. A mindscape was something that every human had, whether Muggle or magical. Wizards tended to reach it easier and had a far easier time morphing it into something else. It was a difference branch of
Occlumency, one that was widely accepted.

His mindscape was like a lush forest, filled to the brim with exotic plants and cobblestone pathing. It was small and had a clearing and a small wooden hut, which held all the basic necessities. He walked into the clearing, which was near the small hut, and smiled, knowing that the fallen logs had morphed into perfect sitting spots made him feel giddy. He continued on, leaving the clearing and pushed his way through a dense plant, which had blocked the cobblestone path.

It happened quickly and he had no idea how it happened, but the cobblestone path slowly merged into disturbed dirt, as if someone had walked across it recently. He continued walking deeper and deeper into the forest, noting that it was getting darker and darker as he progressed. He soon came to a fork in the road. He sniffed and took the right path, knowing that he was always right and going right would be the right choice. He chuckled as he walked, ignoring the growing darkness.

The only light came from him and it hardly illuminated the cave-like walls that were slowly surrounding him. Wrapping his arms around himself, he rushed forwards, walking at a speedier pace.

There was a man walking on the path. The man had no distinguishable shape, nor did he actually walk. The man hovered above the ground, the only thing touching the ground was a dark cloak, which brushed across the dirt, leaving faint footsteps. A very small radius around the man flickered blue for a moment, almost replicating ice. The man seemingly made no other noise besides a faint whimpering. He continued to walk peacefully until he noticed a small black-haired boy walk towards the cave. He made a noise that sounded like distress and chased after the boy.

Harry continued to walk through the cave, his arms wrapped around his chest. The only light that illuminated the cave came from him, which didn’t shock him as much as it should have. He did expect a hole in the top or something, allowing some natural light, but he was wrong. He should be afraid and he should’ve been cautious, but why should he? It was his own mind. Taking slow and careful steps, he finally made it to what appeared to be the end of the cave. He ran his hand over the door that had been wedged in the walls and brushed his hand over the rune symbols on it. He bit the inside of his cheek softly in confusion.

The door was rather plain, having no obvious things that made it stand out. It had a few runic symbols and a swirl pattern, but that was it. The door was pure black with a silver lining, which drew around the four runes that were on the door. The door had no handle, nor did it appear to actually open from that side of the cave.

He continued to study the door, unaware of the ghastly thing floating behind him. He had no idea what the door was or what was behind it. Maybe the situation was reversed and he was behind the door for someone else. It was a crazy thought, but that’s why you didn’t spend long in your own mind. You tend to drive yourself insane. He had seen this door before, though, a few times, actually. It was curious.

The man hovered behind the boy, slowly losing distance on the boy as he chased after him. He wouldn’t be able to keep up with the youthful strides of a child, especially not under the current circumstances. He needed to warn the boy to stay away from the door and to never step foot in the cave again! He floated across the dirt path, chasing after the boy, making frantic noises.

Harry pulled his hands away from the door, a gesture that would have appeared comical from another person, and glanced at his hands, wondering if the door had burned him. He felt something latch onto his mind and try and push in. ‘The door was trying to control me,’ he thought, his thoughts louder than usual. ‘How does something in my own mind try and attach itself to me?’

He pondered it for a few minutes before he leant in, wanting to study the runes. He heard something
and spun around, hoping to figure out what was making that awful noise that echoed throughout the cave. What he saw was something that obviously came from a children’s nightmare. The moment his eyes met the ghastly man, he felt such an uncontrollable amount of rage and then he was instantly thrust from his own mind. He blinked and realised he was sprawled out on the floor of Malfoy Manor.

“Say it.”

“Je dois apprendre le français mieux et arrêter l'affaissement. Draco est juste et je suis paresseux,” said Harry, stuttering and pausing at random intervals throughout the speech. “Was that right?”

“The only thing you did right, Harry, was butcher the French language,” said Draco, huffing. “Teaching you another language is the hardest thing I have ever done.”

Harry huffed and glared. “What was I meant to say? It had your name in it so I assume that you’re calling yourself handsome or something.”

“Maybe you should figure it out.”

“Anyway, it’s not my fault that French is an impossible language. You go there every year, so I’m not surprised you can speak it so well,” said Harry. “Y’know, Professor McGonagall said that I, Harry Potter, was the best student that she’s ever had the fortune to teach. She said that I picked up things impossibly fast.”

“Menteur!”

“Hm, yes, I am somewhat of a mentor,” said Harry, grinning.

“That’s ignorant and racist, Harry,” said Draco, his eyes narrowed. “And on Professor McGonagall’s behalf, it’s simply favouritism. She clearly favours you and looks past your atrocious ability to learn things.”

“They say that the issues lies with the teacher and not the student,” said Harry smugly, his smile wide. “So, really, it’s your fault and not mine. The issue lies with you and your dreadful ability to teach me French.”

“Me?” said Draco, sounding offended. “I can speak fluent French and I have spoken to the elitists of the French Ministry! The Delacour sister adore me! D’you hear that, Harry? The Delacour sisters! Perhaps the daughters of the two wealthiest and most influential people in all of France.”

“Yes, Draco, I heard you,” said Harry, his index finger gently tapping against his chin. “Perhaps a spell that could automatically translate words into another language. That would be useful and I wouldn’t need to bother with this.”

Draco ignored Harry as he trailed off with the thought, muttering about a spell that Salazar had been working on at the time. “I’m a great teacher. I’ll have you know that I’ve taught three others French and they’ve picked it up flawlessly,” he said. “I think it’s just you, Harry, you’re bad at learning things clearly beyond your grasp.”

Harry sneered. “It’s not my fault that French is a complicated language. I swear Latin was easier to learn than that language! Honestly!”

“It’s not complicated, Harry. You’re just hopeless,” said Draco, his facial expression blank. “You could explain to me how the most complicated potion worked without issue. Heck, you could even
explain how to later the potion and make it better. Yet you’re stuck with another language? Don’t you know parts of Latin that are said to be complicated and a small amount of Old English as well?”

“Yes. I know Latin and small amounts of Old English,” said Harry, eyeing Draco warily. “Both’ve them have been far easier to learn than French, I’ll have you know that.”

“Right.”

Harry pulled himself up and slumped against the headboard on Draco’s bed. “Y’know, I’d probably have an easier time making and perfecting some sort of translation charm.”

“A spell to translate words into another language would be very difficult. There’s a reason that no one has been able to make one yet,” said Draco, his chin lifted. “We can make things float, summon fire, and do all sorts of stuff, but we cannot instantly learn something. It’s not possible and it breaks the rules of magic.”

“Yes, yes, I know, Draco, magic cannot make us know things instantly, nor can it make us more intelligent,” said Harry, grinning. “For now. I’m only twelve, Draco, but in a few years, when my genius has been shown, I’ll create the spell and break the boundaries of magic. We’re above Muggles, Draco, in every form besides in advancing things.”

“Salazar, you receive two perfect scores in a row and you think you’re Merlin reincarnated,” muttered Draco. “If you keep that up, Harry, people’ll think you’re just a giant mass of ego.”

“I am a genius, Draco!”

“Mm, okay,” muttered Draco, looking uninterested. “We hide from Muggles, Harry, surely we cannot be above them.”

“We can do things they cannot, Draco,” said Harry. “We can control the elements with a flick of our wands; we can appear and disappear with a twist of our arm; we can turn back time and manipulate it to some extend; we can cure diseases with a simple gulp of a potion; we can control them with a spell and a mutter of words... kill them with the same... torture them with the same.”

“You’re crazy.”

“I don’t mean to come off as an ignorant pure-blood elitist,” said Harry, looking at the wall. “We don’t hide from Muggles because we’re above them, we hide from them because they’re the greater threat... at least in numbers.”

Draco lifted an eyebrow. “An ignorant pure-blood elitist, hm?”

“I don’t mean you, Draco, and I don’t mean your family. I’m talking about the obvious witches and wizards that lack intelligence and shamelessly attack Muggles. They claim that they’re better than Muggles and then they run away and hide? COWARDS!”

“Oh, Harry, do calm down.”

“Yes,” said Harry, ignoring Draco. “I could list twenty pure-blooded lines that are more of a disgrace than any Muggle that I’ve come across. There’s close to four billion Muggles on the planet, Draco, compared to our two hundred thousand? We won’t win a war.”

Draco snorted, taking Harry’s ranting with very little concern. He and Harry used to always discuss things like this and Harry would get far too into it and become so passionate that he ended up sounding racist. In that sense, he feared how smart his friend was because if he applied himself, he’d
make valid points and the masses would follow his word. “I know that we can do things they cannot,” he muttered, already expecting Harry’s counterargument. He wondered if Harry would change tactics and go back to targeting pure-blooded elitists.

“And they can do things we cannot! Can we solve math issues in a matter of seconds?” said Harry. “Tell me, Draco, what’s four thousand six hundred and seventy-two times seventeen divided by ten?”

“I have no idea,” muttered Draco. “That’s a ridiculous thing to ask. No one can solve that without writing it down.”

“Muggles can, using a calculator,” said Harry, proud. “That’s not all. They can wipe out cities with a simple button press. Kill masses of people by pulling a trigger. They lack magic, but they’re not powerless. When I say we’re above them, I meant that because we have things that not even their technology can achieve. Regarding the advancement of society? We’re like cavemen to them.”

“Father said that while there’s peace, it would be prudent to not rock the boat.”

“I’m not gonna argue with that,” said Harry. “It’s wise to not disrupt the peace with petty ideals and trying to wage a war against Muggles. We’d lose and that’s that. We won’t stand a chance against Muggles. Our shields cannot withstand a bullet; our wards cannot stop a bomb. Our magic may short-circuit electronics, but that’s two-way. Enough electronics will break a ward.”

“What about Diagon Alley?” asked Draco. “It’s surrounded by a Muggle city.”

“Our constant magic aids in powering it,” said Harry. “I’m also positive it’s built on a ley line, same as Hogwarts.”

“What’s a ley lane?”


“Alright,” said Draco, his tone uneasy.

“I have learned that the ‘Light’ side wasn’t exactly incompetent in the first war, so how come Voldemort lasted so long?” asked Harry, looking at Draco. “Dumbledore mayn’t’ve been the one to defeat the Dark Lord, but he sure did destroy the man politically. I know it was a turning point for your father when the Dark Lord came out as a half-blood chasing after pure-blood ideals.”

“More people were upset that the Slytherin line was ‘disgraced’,,” said Draco, sneering at the word. “I’m sure many would’ve attempted an assassination attempt if he hadn’t died when he did. He was on the verge of losing all his followers regardless.”

Harry snorted. “He’s still alive, Draco, you do know that? He’s spent his life since being ‘defeated’ as a wraith. He possessed Ginny Weasley and made her open the Chamber.”

“At least he cannot do that anymore,” said Draco. “I’m still annoyed that you’re the heir of Slytherin and Gryffindor. You’re lucky you’re a boy, else mother and father would be pushing for marriage.”

Harry snorted. “I’m so lucky.”

“For being a descendant of Slytherin, you sure lack his traits,” muttered Draco. “You’re far too rowdy and rash to be a Slytherin. You cannot sit down and just relax, you must be doing something.”
“You mean you didn’t know?” asked Harry, gasping. “The Sorting Hat wanted me in Gryffindor, Draco, and I said that my undying love for you was more important and that I needed to be in Slytherin with you.”

“Shove off,” muttered Draco, studying the pattern on his quilt. “I wonder if this coming year will be quiet. The last two years have been interesting, to say the least. Possessed teachers and the famous Chamber of Secrets opening.”

“We’ve been over this before, Draco,” said Harry. “While saint Longbottom attends the school, there’ll be all types of odd things occurring. Longbottom’s a magnet for attention. This year will probably be dragons or something like that. They’ll attack the castle and Longbottom’ll charge out and fight them. You know, I think he hires these fanatics to constantly attack him and make up events to paint him in a positive light and keep him relevant.”

“That’s a conspiracy theory I haven’t heard before,” said Draco, holding back his laugh. Most of Slytherin came up with theories on everything that happened. Harry was, and most likely always will be, a contributor. “Speaking of school... D’you know who’s gonna be the new Quidditch Captain? Seeing as you helped Flint graduate, which surprises me, and he’s no longer the captain.”

“Of course he graduated,” said Harry. “I taught him.”

“Be careful, Harry, else your ego will cause you to float into the sky.”

“Anyway, I think it’ll be Bole, Bletchley, or Higgs,” said Harry. “It’ll be one of those three. They’re the only suitable ones for it.”

“Where’s your pet snake?” asked Draco, quickly changing the subject. “I haven’t seen her since you got here.”

“She’s ignoring me and my presence because I was kidnapped and didn’t take her into the Chamber of secrets,” said Harry, looking towards the nearby forest where said snake probably was. “She won’t let me live it down. Every time I see her, she rants about how I left her behind and how I’m neglecting her and that I am a terrible owner. Honestly, she’s such a queen, if snakes had royalty, I swear she’d be one of them.”

“You know they say that pets get their traits from their owners,” said Draco smugly, his eyes flashed in an almost taunting manner.

“Oh, ha-ha, Draco, you’re so funny!” said Harry, slapping his knee, forcing a fake laugh. “I’ve never heard something as funny and witty as that!”
Harry was already bored of the holidays. The Malfoy Manor, while extensive and containing a vast majority of things that you could do, was obviously not doing it for him this time around. His head had a constant dull ache that had been running rampant for the past eight hours, ignoring the time that he had been asleep. He could easily blame it on the fact that he had spent ninety percent of his time reading various rare texts.

Despite his headache, he really wanted to make a potion, despite how much of a bad idea that was. Of course, that idea had been shut down the moment he had made his way towards the potion labs and realised that there was next to nothing that he could use. That was clearly the fault of Severus Snape, who was clearly the last one to use the lab, considering the perfect state the lab was in.

Sighing, and sighing at how dull his life was, he made his way to the last option for entertainment. He made his way, with the help of a house-elf, towards his blond-haired friend, who would be the one to quench his boredom. He found Draco outside, looking rather concerned, standing in the famous gardens of Malfoy Manor. “I see that you’ve been hooked on gardening, Draco.”

“I’ve always helped with the garden, Harry,” said Draco. “Just not why you’re around as I assumed you’d tease me for it.”

Harry watched as Draco wiped the dirt from his trousers. He raised an eyebrow at Draco’s choice of words and just smirked.

“Don’t smirk, Harry, it’s a rational fear that you’d belittle me for it. You can be a giant prat at the best of times.”

“I’m certain that I told you years ago that I personally enjoyed gardening,” said Harry. “It’s a natural relaxant… much like meditating.”

“Yes, I know.”

Harry hummed as he slowly made his way towards Draco. “I’m so upset that you kept this from me. We could’ve been doing gardening together and not doing such mundane things like Quidditch.”

“Quidditch isn’t mundane!” hissed Draco. He was able to ignore the infuriatingly catchy tone that Harry was humming, and the jab at gardening together, but he couldn’t ignore that. “What’re you doing out here anyway? I thought you said that you’d be inside studying all day.”

Harry continued to hum, ignoring Draco’s question for now. He had planned to spend a majority of the day studying, but he gave up and the fact that he still had to complete his homework that had been set for the holidays. He really wanted to beat Granger in the work that had been assigned and there wasn’t an excuse as to why he couldn’t, see as he had access to information she didn’t. He
knew a lot of things that he shouldn’t and he had slipped and broken a few titbits of information to Professor Flitwick, who become almost infuriating near the end of the school year.

*FLASHBACK*

“Now, Mr. Potter, that spell that you just said is most certainly not taught by Hogwarts, nor is it in the library!” squeaked Professor Flitwick. “How did you come across it?”

Harry gave a mock look of sadness, his right foot twisting against the stone beneath him. “I was curious and I saw it in the Malfoy Manor a year back,” he lied easily, not wanting to inform the professor on why he knew questionable material. “During the summer.”

“You should avoid such spells, Mr. Potter,” said Professor Flitwick, jumping onto his chair enthusiastically, that way he was eye level with his student. “While the Dark Arts aren’t evil, nor do we want to fall into such a simple-minded taboo regarding them, they require the caster to be able to feel and channel hate. Not many students have experience events that could cause them to feel such an intense hate and I’m rather concerned that you’re asking about such magic that requires it.”

Harry already knew this and was curious on why the professor was simply repeating information. He wouldn’t complain as that could cause the professor to shut off and once a Ravenclaw got going, they’d be talking about magical theory like they’d lose all the knowledge if they didn’t. Yes, Ravenclaws were the easiest to manipulate. No matter their personal ideals, they’ll keep an open mind for knowledge.

“– the Dark Arts have an allure that cannot be explained,” continued Professor Flitwick. “For some witches and wizards, the allure is non-existent and they’re not affected by the lure of power that the Dark Arts offer. The headmaster is one of those people.”

“What happens when someone that hasn’t got an affinity for the Dark Arts attempts to cast them?”

“They would get a taste similar to one that you would get after eating something disgusting,” said professor Flitwick. “Once again, the headmaster is a testament to this.”

Harry couldn’t help but frown at the ridiculous claim. He tilted his head like an owl and forced himself to not jump up and state how ridiculous the professor’s claim was. “That makes very little sense, professor. There’s no such thing as ‘light’ and ‘dark’ magic. Magic itself cannot be good or evil, seeing as magic is entirely based on intent.”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Mr. Potter,” said professor Flitwick. “Magic hasn’t been documented, nor has it been studied in-depth to what I could be. Plenty of witches and wizards have had theories on where magic comes from and how we access it, but no one has ever figured it out completely.”

Harry regarded the professor with a curious expression. This wasn’t a new topic and most Ravenclaws seemed to allow the history of magic and where it came from to rest. “Some believe that magic originates from points in the human body and we were fortunate enough to have the points line up perfectly, allowing us to push the energy from our bodies. Some, mainly clueless people, think that we have a ‘power level’. Like, maybe, the power is a digit that increases and decreases with each action or spell cast.”

“And what do you believe?”

“We’ve already figured out that magic is based on intent and emotions, which means that magic could also be mental and not in the body,” said Harry, glancing at the professor curiously. “As I said before, magic cannot be good or evil, it’s the choice of the caster. I don’t mean that in the sense
that all magic is like that, as potions, which is magic, doesn’t require any intent, just knowledge, and a steady hand.”

“A system in place where energy is stored and then decreased with each spell cast,” reminded Professor Flitwick. “What do you think about that theory?”

“It’s stupid,” said Harry, his tone blunt. “If that was the case then there’d be no reason to attend a school to improve. Once you learn what your base energy level is, you’dn’t need to bother even attempting to learn spells.”

“A solid theory, Mr. Potter, but we’re not here to debate that,” said Professor Flitwick. “I do believe in parts of your theory, especially the parts about intent and emotions. I don’t believe that magic comes from the mind, though. The magic behind the Dark Arts is based on emotion – hatred. As much as I hate discussing the subject and theory behind the Dark Arts with a student, I believe you’ve got your head on straight and won’t run off and start casting the Dark Arts. There are spells that require you to feel a certain type of emotion for the spell to be successful. The Cruciatrus Curse is one of them. In order for the spell to work, you must want to inflict that pain… you must want the other person to suffer. The emotion must be your own –”

“That means that anyone who pleaded the Imperius Curse when caught by Aurors was lying,” said Harry, interrupting. “As all Death Eaters had to prove their worth to join and that was usually done with using one of the three unforgivable curses.”

“Now you’re catching on!” said Professor Flitwick, not at all bothered by the interruption. “Despite how far we’ve lingered from our original subject, I do enjoy chatting with you, Mr. Potter, it’s oddly refreshing.”

“I try, professor.”

“Now, now, back on topic,” said Professor Flitwick, smiling. “It’s the opposite with healing spells. In order to heal someone, you must want them to get better… for them to heal and be happy. You’ll find most witches and wizards that dabble in the Dark Arts struggle with such spells because they prefer death and destruction. A ‘light’ wizard won’t have that particular issue.”

“Morgan le Fay,” said Harry. “She was, by far, one of the most brilliant healers in her time, surpassing squads of healers or her own. She was sought after by most groups and starting cities for her talent. She was a hospital combined into one person. She was considered to be a dark witch.”

“Morgan le Fay was a dark witch, yes, but she wasn’t a killer,” said Professor Flitwick. “According to any texts and scrolls from that time, no one saw her kill.”

“Those texts and scrolls are all wrong and have been altered by simple tales. Just like all legends and myths. Morgan le Fay killed plenty of people, whether innocent or enemy. She spent more than half of her life in war. She died fighting. Her tale of death has been changed from what it should be to what it is today. The wars back then aren’t what they’re like now, professor, plenty of innocent farmers, merchants, and children were slain just because they were in the way. She’d heal her injured soldiers and then send them back into the battle, uncaring if they were injured again. She was a dark witch, professor, no matter what anyone says, she studied the Dark Arts.”

Professor Flitwick remained silent for a moment before he simply turned around and walked towards his desk. “I’m curious on what your source is.”

*END FLASHBACK*
Harry was aware that what he had said had been passed along the professors and most likely changed slightly. He was aware of the curious and concerned expressions on their faces, especially the looks on the older professors. He had kept his source hidden and he was sure that Professor Flitwick had said that and it made them curious and suspicious. The thing that made most people believe it was the fact that Professor Flitwick was like an encyclopaedia and he knew almost everything about history. It was surprising that it wasn’t Professor Flitwick teaching History of Magic.

He turned to Draco, breaking his reverie and smiled. “I have studied today, Draco. It means very little when your potion stock has been emptied and someone never refilled it!”

“Don’t blame me with your ‘I know it was you’ look! I don’t ever use it to make potions,” said Draco, glaring. “It was either father, you, or Professor Snape.”

“It’s normally you that forgets to tell someone that the stocks are empty they just sit like that for weeks on end until someone needs them.”

“A Malfoy doesn’t forget things,” said Draco, sarcastically, as he waved his hands around. “You’re lucky that I forgot that particular speech as it was so absurd –”

“Ooh, that’s a new word.”

“– and it wasn’t worth learning,” finished Draco, ignoring Harry. “Also, Harry, you’re a git. What about you? You’re the one who constantly says stupid things like: ‘I can make this better if I just add this or use – nope!’ and then an explosion happens.”

Harry just smirked and dodged the pile of leaves that Draco tossed at him. He leant down and caressed the stem of the pink rose that was growing at a rather rapid rate, carefully avoiding the thorns. “D’you know that you’re missing a very rare rose from your garden, Draco? I was searching for it and I cannot find it.”

Draco quickly stood, panic etched onto his face, and looked around the expansive gardens, searching for the missing rose. “And what’s missing, Harry? Mother’ll kill me if I accidently pulled it out.”

Harry let out a soft sigh, feeling bad for making Draco panic so badly. “The black rose, Draco,” he said, searching Draco’s face for some sort of instant recognising of the plant. “You know of it, your facial expression reveals as much so, yet, you don’t seem to be worried that it’s missing.”

Draco tapped his forehead with his index finger. “I – I’m not sure if it’s even a real flower, Harry.”

“Maybe you just don’t wanna talk about it, hm?” said Harry. “But you must, Draco, you must educate me about this flower. I’m just a simple, ignorant half-blood with zero knowledge on flowers and their hidden meanings amongst the pure-blood families.”

Draco sighed. “You know, Harry, that would have been a rather intelligent sentence had you not said ‘wanna’.”

“I know I’m smart,” said Harry. “I don’t need to use big words to make it appear that I am smart, nor do I need to talk like I have a stick up my arse. Now, tell me about this flower.”

Draco frowned and stared at Harry. “I’m sure you were taught about every flower alongside me when we were younger. The black rose isn’t actually black, instead, it’s more of a deep purple that appears black when in the moonlight,” he paused and noticed that Harry was gesturing for him to speed it up. “You know that the red rose is an unmistakable expression of love. Red roses convey deep emotions – be it love, longing or desire. Red roses can also be used to convey respect,
admiration or devotion. A black rose is the complete opposite, but it also represents darkness and death. A flower has many different meanings, some are more known, and others are forgotten.”

Harry’s expression didn’t change, but his mind was internally working at a faster pace to process this new information. “I assume the black rose has no superstitions attached?”

“‘We’re wizards, Harry, superstition isn’t exactly common ground for us as we break most of them daily. We are supernatural, Harry, therefore we are superstition.”

“Get over it, Draco, I used the wrong word,” said Harry. “I meant, clearly, is there anything that makes them avoided, et cetera.”

Draco decided to take pity on his friend. “I know what you mean. Many witches and wizards fear that the black rose means that death is coming to them or it has already been. It’s much like the fact that the black Delilah means massacre.”

Harry watched with morbid fascination as Draco paused and started to hum a song that sounded as if it was straight from a morbid children’s song.

“Stuck in a meadow, with nothing but a small black Delilah… something, something… massacre… what’s been done has been done, what’s to come – I haven’t heard it in years and I’m sure most of it is wrong.”

“That was rather informative if I must say so myself. The part where you sang a song that you have no idea of what the lyrics are touched my heart,” said Harry, grinning. “I don’t care about the black Delilah, Draco, I asked about the black rose. I’m confused on why you don’t have it. A legend in your garden.”

Draco let out a very long and an almost defeated sounding sigh. “You’ll find more about the flow in father’s study. I’m sure if you ask nicely he’ll let you in and you can study it all you wish. As for the black rose? I’m sure many’ve the past Malfoy’s have tried but failed. The black rose has alluded many people. People have reported it, but it seems as if it only appears to those that are worthy.”

“Of course, Harry, you can freely use my personal study anytime you wish,” said Lucius. “The small library within has plenty of rare books, tomes, scrolls, and texts that haven’t been read in centuries. The least expensive book contained within is worth around six hundred Galleons, so you’ll find what you’re looking for.”

Harry fought back the grin that was threatening to onto his face. He had been in Lucius’ study before and he had seen the vast collection of books within. Lucius’ speech wasn’t done for bragging rights, it was simply informing him that the library contained rare things that were worth a fortune and were irreplaceable. The books within were meant to be destroyed and the knowledge was to be kept quiet.

“I’m not sure on why you’re searching for information about the black rose, but you’ve come to the right place,” said Lucius, dragging his finger across the blank wall which hid his personal study. “The book, which was written and compiled during the founding of the legend, is in my personal study and you’ll find it if you search for it. I’m not telling you which shelf the book is on, nor what the book looks like. You’ll simply have to find it yourself.”

Another one of Lucius’ policies. He would give you the location of an item, but not the description or general appearance of it. You didn’t get into influential positions by being open about everything. Harry knew that Lucius held so much sway over the Minister simply because he was made go on wild goose chases and Lucius would always be there in the end to help him. A trap within a trap.
“Thank you, Lucius.”

“None of the books are cursed, so you won’t need to keep your wand handy,” said Lucius. “I counter the wine and alcohol in the cupboard. You may be mature, but you’re twelve, going on thirteen, and you may have a lapse of sanity and intelligence and try and sneak a bottle of my fine wine. One sip of that wine and you’ll be on the floor, slobbering and drooling over it, unable to forget even the simplest of sentences.”

“So, in other words, one sip would get me pissed.”

“Such crude words are beneath you, Harry,” said Lucius, looking rather displeased. “How I dislike when children grow into teenagers and begin using such profanity.”

Harry grinned, knowing full well that Lucius himself probably said worse things.

“Enjoy your reading,” said Lucius, beginning to walk away. “The room will lock itself when you leave.”

Harry wasted no time in admiring the lush room that was decorated with gold trim and a nice dark blue that swirled throughout the walls. He ran his index finger over the spines of the books, hunting for the book that Draco had described to him before he came, already knowing his father’s policy.

‘Purple cover, with a leaf that changes colour based on your mood,’ he thought, making himself angry and then happy. ‘Title is obscured and impossible to read… not because of damage, but because the book wishes it to be.’

He found the book after muttering about stupid books that could change their appearance on will. His muttering changed to aggressive books that flew at his face when he cursed at them. He wanted to blow the dust off the book but realised that it was probably just the design of the book and that he’d look foolish doing it. Something about this book reminded him of Riddle’s diary, but it didn’t have the dark foreboding feeling that Riddle’s diary had.

Ο θρύλος του μαύρο τριαντάφυλλο
(The Legend of the Black Rose)
Written 62 AD – Translated 1796 AD

Το μαύρο τριαντάφυλλο είναι βασισμένη σε μια παλιά – και πιθανότατα ξεχάσει – θρύλος του παλαιού. Η ιστορία ήταν αστράχανη στις περισσότερες πτυχές, αλλά εξαιρετικά περίπλοκη σε κάθε όρο της λέξης και πήρε ως εξής: ένας μοναχικός αγόρι περπάτησε μέσα από μια φανομενικά απελευθερωμένη και ερημική δέσμες, το μνημείο της εξορίας, όπως μερικοί κάλεσαν. Ο μοναχικός αγόρι ήταν βράζει, το μίσος χύνεται πολύ το δέρμα του όπως ο ίδιος πήρε ακληρή βήματα μέσα από το δέρμα, να γλιτώθησαν πάνω από τα άγρια ανάπτυξη. Κοιτάξε προς τα πίσω, το μίσος του συγκόμισες καθώς είδε τα απομεινάρια του πρώην ζωή του πρώην οικογένεια του ήταν το γέλιο, χαμογελαστός, και να πυροβολούσε εξορίζοντας του.

(The Black Rose is based on an old – and most likely forgotten – legend of the old. The tale was simple in most aspects but highly complicated in every term of the word and it went as follows: a lone boy walked through a seemingly endless and deserted forest, the path of exile, as some called it. The lone boy was seething, hatred poured off his very skin as he took harsh steps through the forest, tripping over wild growth. He glanced backwards, his hatred surging as he saw the remnants of his former life—his former family were laughing, smiling, and celebrating his exiling.)

Ήταν ζηλιάρης ότι οι γονείς του είχαν άλλο παιδί, ευλογημένο από τους ουρανούς και τις τύχες τους εαυτούς τους από τη γέννηση άλλο παιδί, κάτι που κανένας δεν έχει γίνει εδώ και πολλά χρόνια. Άρπαξε ένα ραβδί και μεχανιές τον ήρεμη της πόλης, τραυματίζοντας τον και προκαλώντας τον.
(He had been jealous that his parents had another child, blessed by the heavens and the fates themselves to birth another child, something none have done in many years. He grabbed a stick and stabbed the leader of the town, injuring him and causing the man severe pain that almost ended his life. His failures at ending the life of an old man tarnished him and ate away at his core. Not even in double digits yet, he was sent away; a threat; a menace—not accepted, not forgiven. Whether he was sent away due to failures or because he attempted to kill an innocent man, he not knew.)

Υποσχόμενοι να τους τελειώσει ὅλα, βάδισε επί και τον Μάρτιο έκανε.

(Vowing to end them all, he marched on—and march he did.)

... 

Μια εξαιρετική κήπορος το αγόρι ήταν, στην πραγματικότητα, αυτός ο ίδιος, ήταν σε θέση να αναβιώσει τα νεκρά φυτά και τους επιτρέπουν να ανθίσει για μια ακόμη φορά, ένα σεβαστό και σπάνιο ταλέντο που ζητήθηκε έξω. Πολλοί αγρότες ζητήσατε από το αγόρι έξω, μαθαίνοντας την εξορία του. Ποιος νοιάζόταν αν προσπάθησαν να ακότοσεί σε ζήλια: Ζήλια θα κάνει το έργο αγορί σκληρότερα και καλύτερα μόνο, μύσος του αγοριού άρχισε να επηρεάζει το έργο του.

(An excellent gardener the boy was—in fact, he, himself, was able to revive the dead plants and allow them to bloom once more—a revered and rare talent that was sought out. Many farmers sought the boy out, learning his exile. Who cared if he attempted to kill in jealousy? Jealousy would only make the boy work harder and better. The boy’s hatred began influencing his work.)

Μια μέρα, στο σκληρό ήλιο, το αγόρι είχε τείνει σε μια μικρή ομάδα των τριαντάφυλλων. Το κόκκινο του τριαντάφυλλου του θύμισε τα χείλη της μητέρας του και έσπρωξε όλο το μύο του στην ενιαία τριαντάφυλλα, προκαλώντας το τριαντάφυλλο να μαραίνονται και τα πέταλα για να ενεργοποιήσει μαύρη σαν τη νύχτα και το στέλεχος να στριψει σε μια νοσηρή και εφιάλτικο τρίπτυχο. Το στέλεχος μεγάλωσε εύθραυστη, αλλά παρέμεινε ισχυρή, εφ ’όσον το αγόρι έσπρωξε τον θυμό του μέσα στο φυτό. Γύρω από το εργοστάσιο, το έκανε άρχισε να αποσυνθέσεις. Το αγόρι πήρε πίσω σε κατάσταση σε, αντικρύζοντας τη δημιουργία του με κάποιον οποίο μοιάζει με ευτυχία.

(One day, in the harsh sun, the boy was tending to a small group of roses. The red of the rose reminded him of his mother’s lips and he pushed all his hatred into the single rose, causing the rose to wilt and the petals to turn as black as the night and the stem to twist in a morbid and nightmarish way. The stem grew fragile, but remained strong, as long as the boy pushed his anger into the plant. Around the plant, the ground began to decay. The boy jumped back in shock, eyeing his creation with something akin to happiness.)

Το αγόρι δεν ήταν σε θέση να επηρεάσει οποιοσδήποτε άλλο εκτός από τα φυτά. Νόμιζε ότι ήταν μογκ και πού πίσω σε ένα ταξίδι για να δείξει τους γονείς του ότι ήταν μοναδική και καλύτερη από τον αδελφό του.

(The boy was unable to influence anything else besides plants. He thought he was magical and set back on a journey to show his parents that he was unique and better than his brother.)

...
perissōterο από απλά ζωγραφίζει τα πέταλα των λουλουδιών. Τα μοναδικά λουλούδια εξαφανίστηκε απλά όταν σκοτώθηκε από τον πατέρα του επειδή τόλμησε να επιστρέψει. Ένα λουλούδι αυξήθηκε μετά το θάνατό του. Το μερίδιο αυτό αυξήθηκε όταν το αγόρι πέθανε και καμία προσπάθεια για να το αφαιρέσετε λεπτόρυθμη και ο καθένας που τόλμησε να προσπαθήσει συνάντησε ένα οδυνηρό τέλος.

(Many, of course, to this day feel as if the boy was a fraud and he did nothing more than just paint the petals of the flowers. The unique flowers simply vanished when he was killed by his father for daring to return. One flower grew after his death. It grew where the boy died and no attempt to remove it worked and anyone that dared try met a painful end.)

Harry frowned. The translation from Greek into English was helpful and he was sure whoever did it was thorough and knew the language well, but he simply couldn't trust that. There were a few notes regarding the tale in the translated pages saying that much of the story had been lost and that it jumped around often, missing parts of the story and that the tale was originally written by a bystander, one who followed the boy around.

He barely got three paragraphs of information on the Black Rose and it was nothing that he wanted. The brief version was that the boy was exiled due to jealousy of a new sibling and he found he had a talent with plants, allowing for a chance at redemption with his parents. The boy assumed that his parents would forgive him based on the fact he had a rare talent and could mend and create plants with a simple push of emotion.

He knew that the plant existed. It was a feeling in the pit of his stomach that he was correct and it existed. He just knew that it'd be hard to find. He wasn’t like Granger and believed everything written in a book was correct and the truth. Granger believed everything written in a book, even if it was easy to discredit and the theory behind it was busted. The stories regarding Longbottom weren’t true. The lazy moron didn’t ride around the country on a dragon, nor did he gain the respect of a hippogriff at the age of ten to save a woman from harm.

This book, though, was far too convenient and only told the scarcest of facts. It said basic things that got you interested and then said no more. Half the pages in the book were simply translations to other languages or scribbles that were apparently from the child himself. The only thing that made this book of nonsenses valued was the date it was written.

He sat at the desk, his fingers drumming across the rich mahogany wood, debating on what he should do now, seeing as he had no other leads regarding the black rose. He was highly curious about the plant ever since he had seen it mentioned in a Muggle book. He disregarded the fact that it was a Muggle who had a theory on it, seeing as Muggles did a lot of guesswork on magical things and got them right most of the time. Muggles had better technology and better equipment to find this stuff out.

He had also read about the lotus, the purple lotus. Purple was his favourite colour, not that he would say that to anyone.

He stood up and did another search through the room, wishing wizards had a Searching Spell or something like that, and searched for anything regarding the purple lotus. The issue with looking for keywords is the fact that you’d have to read most of the books to find snippets regarding it and he wasn’t exactly sure if the official name was called the purple lotus. He really didn’t want to keep asking Draco about flowers – it was rather awkward.

As he slipped the last book back into the position that he had pulled it from, his eyes caught the clock that was on the wall and he frowned. It was almost eight in the afternoon and he had missed lunch and dinner while he searched for the book. He ran his hand through his hair and left the room, jolting slightly as the wooden door vanished the moment he shut it.
It was far too late to ask Draco the question that had been on his mind for days now. Well, there was always tomorrow.

Chapter End Notes

Ignore the butchered Greek, yeah? :D
Harry sat at the rounded table off to the side in the Leaky Cauldron, his fingers gently scratching the surface of the table as he waited for the inevitable. He listened to the various chatter that seemed to echo around the dingy pub. The rare giggle from a child with an overactive imagination pushing through the chatter, which would then silence, hoping to hear the scolding. Witches and wizards were all the same… all wanting pieces of information and gossip that they could tell their friends, looking better than what they were.

He caught a few conversations that were about none other than Neville Longbottom, the Boy-Who-Lived. It was astonishing that people could come up with unique stories to tell their friends regarding a twelve-year-old boy. Nothing was justified about it either.

“Harry!”

Harry glanced up, instantly knowing who it was. He sent his mother a warm smile, glad to see her in much better health than her last letter let on.

“I’m glad you came,” said Lily, sitting down at the table. “James’ll be here shortly… he’s just finishing something at work and then he’ll be here.”

Harry scowled, knowing too well that it would be James who was going to be late. He’d been here for five minutes and each minute that drew closer and closer to the deadline was more and more encouragement that his father wouldn’t be here on time. That man was only punctual when it came to working.

Lily kept smiling, even as she realised that her son seemed unbothered by the fact that James would be late, as if he had expected that. Maybe she was reading him wrong and it was a lack of concern. Was she misjudging the fact that Harry hadn’t been in contact with James and therefore wouldn’t miss him after such a short period? Had James been in contact with Harry without telling her? They had planned it after all.

“Would you like anything, sir?” said Tom, looking at the boy, waiting for an answer. He already got Lily’s order as she walked in.

Lily watched as her son ordered something different to what he normally got. ‘Do I really not know my son like I used to?’ she thought, staring at Harry. ‘I know that Molly suggested that I allow him space and time by himself, but I cannot help but feel it cost me my son.’

“‘Yes, Tom, I’ll have that,’” said Harry, pointing at the dusty menu. “‘No sauce and I don’t want them cooked with that stupid charm that you do, it overcooks them and it’s like I’m eating charcoal.’

‘This place is absolutely disgusting considering it’s the entrance to Diagon Alley,’ said Tom, his voice laced with disdain. ‘I understand that you wizards lack advancement, but must you really go for the drab and ominous look?’
Harry didn’t bother arguing with Tom. He had been annoyed with the voice for ages, especially considering the voice had been silent for weeks.

‘I can only lower my vast intelligence and speak to you scarcely,’ said Tom. ‘I fear that I’m losing my IQ as we speak.’

“Harry, love, did you hear me?” said Lily, looking confused. She couldn’t follow Molly’s advice any longer. She had to mother Harry, no matter how old he was getting. “I’m afraid I’ve wronged you in some way.”

“No,” said Harry, “I didn’t.”

“Would you like me to repeat it?”

“Nah,” said Harry, unsure of what else he could say. He hated how sad his mother sounded. “I’m glad that you decided to meet me, mother – I was getting worried.”

“Harry, I – I’m sorry,” said Lily, her facial expression betraying everything. “I – we didn’t mean to ignore you or make you worried. Something – something important came up.”

Harry actually felt somewhat bad for making his mother stutter over her words. He realised that the panic that she was showing was by far the most real thing he’d ever seen. He knew that his mother wasn’t a good actor and nine times out of ten, she wore her emotions on her sleeve. “You could’ve sent an owl?”

“We tried!” said Lily. “We tried, Harry, we really did. What I wanted to say couldn’t be said over a letter and I couldn’t floo. I asked Dumbledore if he’d allow you to floo home so that we could talk in person, but he said that it was impossible.”

Harry frowned, his bright green eyes reflecting the flickering torchlight. “When’ve you ever listened to what he has to say?” he said, looking rather displeased. “The very last thing that I heard from you, mother, was that you were sick.”

Lily remained quiet for a moment, internally debating on how she should handle this situation. She watched as Tom, the barman, came and placed Harry’s plate of chips onto the table. She watched as her son gave her a look and then speared a rather long chip. She’d already formed the words in her mind, and all she needed to do was open her mouth and say them. “Harry, I –” she paused when she heard the door to the Leaky Cauldron open. She twisted her head and saw her husband enter, a large grin on his face. “James, what took you so long?”

James had barely a second to sit when he was bombarded with questions by an almost panicked looking Lily. He sent her one of his trademark goofy grins that he never lost from school. “I was stopped by a Muggle woman who had been mugged just outside.”

“She was mugged?” asked Lily, looking rather concerned. “Just outside the Leaky Cauldron?”

“The Muggle was mugged. Mugged Muggle. Heh.”

“James!” said Lily, slapping his arm. “I’m glad that you didn’t take all day to deal with it. How was work, and the recent issues?”

“Ah – that issue… yes, we – err – solved it rather quickly,” said James, not meeting his son’s eyes. “We were rather positive that we’d run out of manpower midway through. We got it in the end, though.”
“What happened?” asked Harry, stabbing a chip with his fork. He watched, curiously, as James began to stutter around the issue. ‘Doesn’t want to tell me as I’m in Slytherin and I’ll most likely go back and tell all my Death Eater friends,’ he thought, staring at his so-called father.

“I cannot tell you about that, Harry,” said James, watching his son eat the chips. He even noticed the smile that appeared on his face, as if he had already predicted the answer that would be given. “You’re a minor and my son, so I cannot give you any information regarding cases that belong in the Ministry.”

Harry, of course, didn’t like the silence that followed James’ words. He decided that he would throw in a quick barb, seeing as he had been polite for the three minutes that James had been here and that was annoying him. “Or, perhaps, you cannot tell me as I’m a Slytherin and the natural enemy of the entire Gryffindor population of Aurors,” he said, staring directly at James. “Maybe I’m wrong and you simply don’t want your future Death Eater son to have any information regarding the Auror department. I mean, according to you, all Slytherin students are evil and joined Voldemort.”

The silence that lingered across the table that the three Potters were sitting at was almost unusual, especially for a ‘chatty’ family. Anyone that was watching, looking for gossip, would have a field day trying to figure out what stunned the entire table into silence.

Lily sent her son one of her famous looks that made most grown men cower (only her husband and Sirius Black). She promptly lifted her cup of tea to cover the smile that threatened to appear on her face. She loved when Harry could throw something that James said back in his face, especially regarding Hogwarts houses.

James, on the other hand, was almost radiating anger as he listened and absorbed his son’s words. “I’ve never said anything like that,” he said, his eyes flickering with betrayal. “I may’ve tread the fine line, but I have never claimed that all Slytherins were Death Eaters. Damn it, Harry, I’m the Head Auror! I cannot be biased.”

Harry snorted. “You shouldn’t be biased, but you are,” he said, stabbing another chip. “You know better than to lie to me, father, I have a great memory. Just before I began attending Hogwarts, you said that all Slytherins were bad and evil. You kept your petty school rivalries to a minimum because I was friends with Draco, who would’ve gone to Slytherin no matter what.”

“You did, James,” said Lily, softly, as she looked at her husband. “You’ve said that a few times, actually. As well as claiming that there’s only three Hogwarts houses. You told Harry constantly that Slytherin was the ‘evil’ house and that’s where all the Death Eaters went. You forgot one person and...”

“Alright, alright!” said James, throwing his hands up. “I may’ve said that, Lily, but I didn’t mean it like that. I just know that most captured Death Eaters were from Slytherin... they were rather loud with their claims that Slytherin was the superior house. I don’t feel that way about you, Harry. I’d never want to see you on your hands and knees, bowing and kissing the robes of some insane wizard. I’m sure that you’ll never do that, especially with how you treat Neville.”

“I don’t care about Longbottom,” said Harry, glaring. “It’s Weasley that started this whole ‘Harry Potter is a Death Eater’ nonsense. People believed it because I was in Slytherin. It wasn’t said to my face, not at all, but it was obvious what people thought because they’re so disgustingly obvious about their petty accusations and headache inducing criticism.”

“Harry –”

“The point is that people look up to what you say, as a Head Auror, and then when you say
something stupid like all Slytherins are bad, in front of Weasley, it’ll catch on.”

Lily sat quietly, drinking her cup of tea slowly. She was glad that Tom had walked around and refilled it, offering a much welcome distraction from the upcoming argument. It wasn’t her argument and she had absolutely no plan to join in on either side of it. She knew that James was more of a doer than a planner and he refused to plan, hence why he was taken off the field as he just charged in, shouting ‘charge’ as he attacked the bad guys. Her son, on the other hand, was the opposite and was only rash when provoked – he would sit and plan out every possible scenario and do it that way, planning a victory from that. It was the stereotypical Gryffindor versus Slytherin mentality. Mindless bravery versus cool cunning.

Her musing was cut short when she blinked and glanced across the table, more so at her husband, who had a rather offended expression plastered over his face. ‘Only Harry can make James so upset,’ she thought as she swivelled her head to her son, instantly seeing the delighted smirk. ‘I missed something important. Damn it!’

“How can you say something like that?” said James, his facial expression still offended. He stared at his son for a few seconds before sighing. “I have always placed my family before work. I haven’t ever pushed you or Lily aside for work.”

“Have you?” said Harry, staring at his father with an amused look. “How many times have you said that you’re gonna do something, something for mother or I, and then forgot about it mere minutes later?”

James stared, unsure of what he could say to counter his son’s argument, which was flawed in almost every aspect. “Harry,” he started, looking at his wife with something akin to trepidation.

“No,” said Harry, cutting off that avenue of approach. He spoke softly and made sure that his point was cemented in before he paused to take a bite of his chips, which were going colder. “You forget about us because of work. I think, sometimes, you pride yourself more on your job than your family.”

“I’ve always placed you and Lily above everything else,” said James, his voice getting slightly firmer, even if he wished to talk in a hushed tone. “When have I ever done otherwise and put my job before either of you?”

Harry made a humming noise as if thinking. “Let me think for a moment, I’m sure I can think of something in less than five seconds. Ah, yes, the moment that I, your son, was sorting into the so-called evil house and that meant that I was evil and clearly not worth your time,” he huffed and rubbed at his temples. “Y’know, it was bad enough knowing that my own father despised me because a piece of fabric decided to place me in a house that is called evil because of short-sighted people. How can an eleven-year-old be evil? How can a twelve, thirteen or even a fourteen-year-old be considered evil? I’m sure that Voldemort himself wasn’t born evil, nor did he just randomly decide that he would start killing people because he was sorted into Slytherin.”

“No one has ever said that eleven-year-old children that are sorted into Slytherin are evil.”

“Believe it or not, but I’m not finished,” said Harry. “Not only that, but you decided that I wasn’t worth the effort to see when I was dragged into the Chamber of Secrets by Weasley, the female one, and left there to perish because she was being possessed by Voldemort. Then, when it was all over and I managed to escape, I get left at Kings Cross station by myself for a majority of the night. God knows if I hadn’t been friends with Draco, I’d’ve probably spent the entire night there.”

James sat silently for a moment, mulling his words over in his head. “It slipped my mind,” he said,
staring at his son. “The year has gone by so fast and I assumed it was still May.”

“Well, May?” repeated Harry. “Don’t try and lie to my face. Still May. Do you think I’m stupid? Do you think that I cannot read between the lines? God, if it was Longbottom that you needed to pick up, you’d be straight there at the correct time and date.”

“No,” said James. He hated that Harry was a lot like Lily and impossibly stubborn and one thing turned into another and all of a sudden things that happened three years ago were suddenly relevant. He expected his son to bring up something else, or go around in a circle. It was an experience that he was familiar with.

“Yes, it must have slipped your mind that your son was going to leave Hogwarts sometime soon and you didn’t even prepare for it,” said Harry. “I would like it if you just listened to what I have to say instead of looking at the crest on my robes and judging me by that. You should know that no matter what, I couldn’t fit into Gryffindor as that house is so loud and annoying that I’d’ve lost it within a day. Loud noise irritates me, you know that! I’m not very Hufflepuff-ish either, I’ll have you know—not that it’s a bad thing. I was either going to Ravenclaw or Slytherin, as mother guessed. The Sorting Hat simply said that I would’ve done well in either and that I fit into both perfectly.”

“I know that,” said James, pausing for a moment. His facial expression was one of pure thought, as if he was debating the existence of all of mankind. He didn’t want to turn to Lily for advice, as he usually did, this time around. His son was so different to him and other children that he knew that it was difficult to bond with Harry. Other children would be outside, scraping their knees, tearing their clothes, getting dirty, just running amuck and his little boy would sit inside and stare out the window, a large book in his hands. If it hadn’t been for the patience of Draco Malfoy, then he was certain his son would have had zero friends. His son was antisocial and hates almost everyone in existence, except for a select few. “Your house at Hogwarts means very little to me…”

“It shouldn’t mean anything at all! The only thing my house represents is the colour of my robes and the type of emblem I’ll receive. Neither of those are a big deal, but you made it into one,” said Harry, his tone snappish. “I’m not the adult here! It’s not up to me to run around after you, nor is it my job to try and be the parent. Y’know, I’m kinda glad that I was sorted into Slytherin as it revealed your true colours regarding the situation.”

“My true colours?”

“Yeah. Your true colours,” said Harry, his tone condescending, as if he was addressing a child. “I’m pretty sure that it was you that said that we shouldn’t hold bias against in particular house in one of your Head Auror speeches, y’know, the ones that are written by someone else and you repeat them as you wrote them? Maybe you didn’t read this one and your words came back to bite you.”

“I write my speeches,” said James. “I can repeat everything that I’ve ever said –”

“And you can’t remember saying that we shouldn’t segregate ourselves from Slytherin students as that’ll solve nothing?”

“Quite right,” said Albus Dumbledore, leaning against the chair next to the Potter’s table. “The war has been over for many years now. I feel that we should start banding together and stop the segregation of the Slytherin house. James, your opinion on such things matters more to most than you think it does.”

“Oh, okay…”

“It will not be done overnight, of course not, but it will take a lot of time and patience,” said
Dumbledore, giving the table a kind smile. “We are on the correct path, for now.”

Harry glowered at the headmaster, ignoring every single one of his words. He had noticed long ago that James got a slight brightness in his eyes whenever the headmaster was mentioned. It was sickening.

‘Albus Dumbledore isn’t evil,’ said Tom, finally breaking his silence. ‘He’s powerful. He’s influential. He’s respected. Your father, James, is going to admire him because of those three things.’

Harry needn’t’ve bothered trying to justify his thought process to a voice in his mind. He watched the headmaster like a hawk watches its prey, or a vulture watches the injured animal heave its way across the desert. He knew that the man may not be ‘evil’ in that sense, but he was deceptive and very manipulative. “I tried that, headmaster, and all I got was complaints because I, of all people, threatened a group of Hufflepuffs to join my study group.”

Dumbledore just smiled and turned back to James and Lily, ignoring Harry for now. He had informed the boy plenty of times to lodge a complaint if he so desired. “It’s good to finally see you out and about, James. I haven’t seen you in a while,” he said, smiling. “Be sure that you don’t turn into another Cornelius Fudge and neglect your family, now. That, of all things, would be such a shame to see.”

Harry rolled his eyes and picked up his fork, his appetite returning tenfold now that the headmaster was here. Eating would give him something to do instead of listening to the headmaster go on about new lemon flavoured treats. While James, the idiot, ignored him and focused intently on the headmaster, his mother kept sending him small smiles that showed how much she cared. He knew, at that moment, that it wasn’t his mother’s fault, it was quite obviously James’ fault.

“– Muggles have come up with some amazing things,” said Dumbledore. “Arthur has been having a field day with all the new cursed items he’s been getting.”

Harry mentally placed his fingers in his ears and began screaming ‘la la la’ to drown out the headmaster and his idiotic talking. He pushed his plate across the table, allowing Tom, the barman, to see that he was finished. It hadn’t taken Tom long to come and collect it, ruining the conversation between Albus Dumbledore and his parents. ‘Good,’ he thought, a smirk threatening to appear on his lips. He lifted his head and almost jolted on the spot when he realised that the headmaster was less than an arm’s length away.

“Are you excited for the upcoming school year?” asked Dumbledore, smiling in his usual way. “I am rather curious about what elective classes you will be taking.”

“I guess,” said Harry, not putting much effort into it. “I’d actually love if I could skip a year or two, like they do at Durmstrang, instead of sitting in classrooms where I’m not learning anything. I don’t think Draco’d like that, though, me leaving him behind.”

“You never know…”

“No, no. No, he’d hate me if I advanced a year and left him behind,” said Harry, thinking. “It’s not that we have the same classes, or anything like that… I think he just wants to graduate together.”

“And what about elective classes?”

“Y’know, I’d love to learn about the creation of spells, and such, like they teach at Durmstrang,” said Harry, his expression softening. “I’ve been thinking up a spell that could change the entire wizarding
world! I mean, not bragging or anything, but it’s a genius idea.”

“Oh?” said Dumbledore, looking moderately surprised. “I had not had any thought that you would be interested in creating your own spells. That is rather advanced, especially for a student in his second year, going into his third year.”

“Age doesn’t determine intelligence,” said Harry. “There’s plenty of things that could only be done by someone with a young mind.”

“Plenty of witches and wizards will debate about that,” said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkling. “What are you working on? That is, of course, if you don’t mind an old man asking.”

Harry stared at the headmaster, curious, debating whether or not he should say something about his spell being a destructive based spell. He decided against it, just before he opened his lips to say that it mimicked a volcano’s eruption and burned the person alive. “I’m not sure if you know that when I was a lot younger I worked with Professor Snape in various things, such as potions and spells, and we came up with an idea. The spell was rather simple and it was hardly a new thing, but how we were going to implement it and make it work was,” he paused, noticing that his mother, James, and the headmaster were all intrigued. “It’s a lot like the Stinging Hex, just slightly different. Instead’ve stinging the opponent, it tickles them. The spell was designed to be something to help younger children learn to duel.

“How interesting,” said Dumbledore, every word that he had said was true. “Severus is rather talented at spell creation. I am glad that he has taken you under his wing and aided you in your learning. I feel foolish for not realising it before, but that explains why you are decent at potions.”

Harry intentionally allowed the conversation to drop, not wanting to divulge more of his spell that he had been working on for many years. He was glad when the headmaster finally took his leave, a few minutes later. He smiled until he met the expression on his mother’s face, which was a rather serious expression that he hadn’t seen before. “You look rather serious, mother, are you alright?”

“It wasn’t an on-the-spot decision, as some have assumed, nor was it planned, but it did happen a lot sooner than we had hoped,” said Lily, a concerned expression replacing the serious expression. “As your father lacks the correct etiquette, despite his upbringing, I’ll be explaining what’s going on. It’s nothing bad, just so you know.”

Harry stared at his mother for the briefest of moments before he nodded. He wanted to laugh at the barb at James, even when said man didn’t bother to defend his pride and etiquette, which was actually decent when warranted, not that he would ever admit that out loud. He decided that it was best if he just sat silent and allowed his mother to explain ‘what’s going on’ as she put it.

“We found the Potter Estate and we thought that it would be best if we attempted to move back into the estate, hoping that it would be a better place for us to live instead of in a cramped house in Hogsmeade. We did debate about going back to the house in Godric’s Hollow, but Voldemort had
hit the building with a powerful curse and half the house had sunk into the ground, completely destroyed.”

Harry nodded along, already knowing these pieces of information. He wondered what the Potter Estate looked like. Thousands of questions flickered through his mind about it.

“Well, the estate needed a lot of restoration,” said Lily. “From what we’ve seen, the Anti-Muggle Charm failed and it was seriously vandalised in almost every aspect. We’re not sure why the charm failed, but we have a feeling it was sometime after Fleamont and Euphemia passed away, maybe even a few years before, as they lived in Godric’s Hollow until James and I got married. Dumbledore thinks it’s because the house felt uncared for, as James was never introduced to it.”

“Tell him about the damage!”

“I’m getting there, James!” said Lily, exasperated. “About ninety percent of the windows were smashed, the pool had been covered in graffiti, looking like it was more paint than pool, the plants and garden had been destroyed and pulled up. A lot of the walls and doors have been destroyed and it was only to the house-elves quick thinking that we were able to save a lot of the furniture, which we’ve sold for quite a bit of money.”

“You sold antique furniture, probably been in the Potter family for generations?” said Harry, blinking. “I mean, we can’t be that hard up for money.”

“We’re not,” said James. “Far from it, actually. We had almost double the money that we had before. Who knew that Muggles would pay so much for sofas from the eighteen hundreds?”

Lily sighed. “I told you, James, Muggles think our everyday furniture as collector items…”

“You said we had, meaning we don’t have anymore,” said Harry, directing the conversation back on track.

“Right,” said Lily, ignoring her husband’s pleading expression. “A lot of the house was rebuilt with magic, therefore able to be rebuilt faster. Dumbledore aided us in the building, as did a fair few professors. The house-elves also help with some parts, their magic being a lot better than what we could do.”

“They wouldn’t have been able to help much, as part of their agreement many centuries ago,” said Harry, remembering the piece of information he had read in the Chamber of Secrets during one of his visits. “They’re bound to cook and clean, not build.”

“I never knew that.”

Harry gave his mother a curious look. “If house-elves could build, then they’d be used as slaves,” he said. “When Helga Hufflepuff first picked them up, she stated that they wouldn’t ever build, only tend to houses.”

“And I assume when she said houses, she meant the four Hogwarts houses, not everyday houses,” said Lily, processing the knowledge. “That makes a fair amount of sense.”

Harry sighed, feeling as if he was explaining something to Crabbe and Goyle. “Helga Hufflepuff first sought the creatures after noticing that they were cleaning dirt. No one knows where house-elves come from, nor their name prior to that. Rowena Ravenclaw had a theory that they were the lower-class elves and banished from another realm, but she dubbed that theory childish. Salazar assumed the same, except a little different. House-elves have more power than us, in every sense of the word. They’re much like goblins in the sense that they have a lot of raw power, just no way to direct it.”
“Let’s get back on topic,” said James, not following the current conversation. He, like many other wizards, took advantage of house-elves and didn’t really mind where they came from, not that he would ever voice that out loud. “With all the help we got, we realised that perhaps it would be wise if we gave the manor some much-needed love and a rather new look.”

“So, you renovated a building that’s centuries old? Nice,” said Harry, staring. “I’m sure saying that would’ve been easier than talking in circles about giving the building a splash of new paint.”

“We couldn’t just add new wards and vanish the building, the Muggles would’ve gotten suspicious about a rather large estate vanishing,” said James, ignoring his son’s sigh. “We reached out to the local Muggles and they came around and aided us with the house. It had almost twenty-four seven construction and it was built rather quickly, even more-so with magic.”

“What James is saying, is that we had the house fitted with Muggle technology,” said Lily, taking over. “Lights, televisions, fridges, freezers, et cetera.”

Harry sat up a little straighter. “Won’t that interfere with our magic?” he said rather quickly, before either of the adults could begin about the house and the televisions that had been installed. “It’s basic magical theory. Our magic uses the same energy in the air that Muggles use to power their electronics. If we cast a spell at the wrong time, then it could backfire on us and cause devastating effects. There’s more magic at Hogwarts then there is electricity, so when Muggle electricity tries to function, it just shuts down and explodes, the same what would with our magic, just smaller.”

“Well,” said James, dragging out the word. “I’m not exactly sure, Harry, as I wasn’t the best student regarding magical theory.”

“That’s because it’s not taught and a lot of witches and wizards don’t care enough about it,” said Harry, his face blank, despite the excitement in his voice. “Magic and electricity cannot coexist, at least in large quantities.”

“I think Arthur found the right balance,” said Lily. “He spent a few years tinkering with various things and found out how much magic can be placed into certain things.”

Harry leant forwards slightly, intrigued. “Did he?” he said, not even caring that it was a Weasley that figured it out. “And so I assume he passed his findings on to you?”

“He did,” said Lily. “We then handed that to Dumbledore and he worked his magic and almost every electronic device in the house is protected against magic. You could cast a charm on the television and nothing would happen. It’s good, as the estate has a few close neighbours who seemed thrilled that the house was being renovated and that it would no longer be an eyesore. I think it would be a good idea if we all stayed in contact.”

Harry bit his lip, not wanting to offend his mother by stating that he didn’t care for the neighbours and he didn’t wish to interact with them. He had noticed it last year during his time at the Dursley residence. Muggles didn’t like anything that couldn’t be explained and sudden change frightened them. Something floating, which was normal for most witches and wizards, would freak them out and cause them to scream and shout. He remembered how Vernon acted when he saw two woman dating. He shuddered and decided that it would be better to just listen to James’ inane ramblings about the television.

“Anyway,” said James, aware that he was speaking to himself as his wife had rolled her eyes and his son was lost in his own thoughts. “Arthur has been hounding us to come over and watch the television sometime, hoping that his family would understand his need to watch the blasted thing. Enough about that, though. Would you like to continue the explanation, Lily?”
“Of course, dear,” said Lily, her tone filled with happiness. “After we had our future home all renovated and made safe to use magic inside, we decided to decorate each room in a unique style. We’ve still got to do yours, but we decided to allow you to pick your room.”

Harry watched in amusement as his mother beamed at him, as if this was the best thing in the world. ‘At least I’ll be able to pick an awesome room,” he thought, listening as his mother described the various guest rooms. ‘Maybe I’ll be able to get one with a nice view.’

‘– there’s a surprise for you at home, when we get there,” continued Lily, unaware that she had lost her son up until this point. “Do you want to guess what it is?’

Harry allowed plenty of various things to flicker through his mind on what the surprise could be, ranging from a new potions lab to a new broom. He did hold the snort and the sigh that wanted to escape at the sheer dumb thought that he would receive anything that extravagant for no reason. “I’m not sure, mother,” he said, a smile appearing on his face. “Perhaps it would be better if you just told me.”

Lily smiled brightly, her green eyes displaying how excited and happy she really was. “When we get home, you’ll be able to meet the newest addition to the family,” she paused there and waited for any kind of reaction to what she had said. She clenched her husband’s leg tighter, warning him to remain quiet and allow their son time to process the information. She knew that her son would over analyse this piece of information and may connect it to the fact that they had ignored him slightly and he may feel unwanted. She had told James to expect a bad reaction and not to get annoyed if Harry walks out without a word. She knew her son.

Harry was feeling a massive sense of déjà vu, even more than usual, seeing as he had recently read the book on the Black Rose and it was still fresh in his mind. The circumstances were different, but the cause was the same. He was being replaced because he wasn’t good enough. It made sense that James would want a Gryffindor heir, to bring honour to the Potter line, and he could just see the lines connecting as he blinked.

Staring at his mother with an expression that no one would be able to understand, he simply stood and walked out of the Leaky Cauldron without saying a single word.
Harry walked through Diagon Alley with his head slightly lowered, not that he was afraid or shy of anyone around him, the lines of the cobblestone path, which were merging together with each rapid step, were helping him calm down and clear his mind. He heard the chatter from a middle-aged woman, who was chatting to another old lady, similar in age, about their grandchildren. He heard the huffs and groans of the unfortunate husbands that had been dragged along for the shopping trip and made carry everything. He veered around a young couple, who were searching for some new baby furniture and made his way around three bends before he realised where he actually was.

His bright green eyes locked onto a pale man standing near the entrance of Knockturn Alley, his crimson eyes narrowing with disdain every time a witch or wizard stepped near him. From what he could see of the man, he realised that the man had a bored expression on his face as he watched the many witches and wizards shuffle past him.

He knew, at that moment, that the man had known he was being watched, as if he had some kind of sixth-sense about it. The two looked up and connected eyes, crimson into green. Shuddering he broke the connection and focused solely on the cobblestone path, not wanting to meet the eyes of the shady man that was lurking near the entrance. He instantly realised that he man with crimson eyes most likely worked in Knockturn Alley and was in the shadiest part of business. Stealing kids for ransom money, pickpocketing, thievery, selling illegal items. A street version of Borgin and Burkes.

In a split decision, he decided that it would be best if he left Diagon Alley completely and got away from the odd man that was lurking around, not wanting to be snatched. He may be talented in a lot of aspects, spells one of them, but he couldn’t outduel a snatcher, despite how dumb they appeared. Life on the streets had honed them and gave them knowledge that none could rival. Spells that would slow, trace, hinder, et cetera, were passed down the lines, from one snatcher to the next. They were best avoided, especially when they were on home territory.

Spinning on the spot, he made his way back towards the Leaky Cauldron, wanting to venture out into Muggle London, hoping to find something entertaining there. He blamed the Dursleys for showing him that Muggles could be interesting, even if it was their stupidity that provided entertainment.

He walked by the old women again, noting that they hadn’t really changed topics, even though it had been about forty-five minutes. He moved into the Leaky Cauldron, instantly realising that his parents had vanished and had most likely returned home to care for their other child. He gave Tom a polite nod as he pushed open the dusty door and made his way out onto the streets of Muggle London.

It was around twenty minutes later when he realised that he was undoubtedly lost in the many small alleys of London. He tried to figure out where he came from, but it was like a maze. Of course, if anyone asked if he was lost, he would say no, smile, and then state that he was exploring the uncharted. Even if he knew of a spell that could show him a direction, he couldn’t use it because he couldn’t do magic out of school. Yes, he could do it last year without the Ministry banging on his Aunt’s door, but that could have been because of the obvious Squib that lived up the road.
He paused when he heard a bunch of rowdy sounding teenage boys, most likely drinking or doing other stupid things to annoy the locals. It was the Muggle equivalent of Gryffindors. He soon learned that he was going towards them and not away, as he had hoped. Frowning as he glanced upwards, finally noticing the identical buildings that lined each side of the road, which was made out of nice red bricks. He frowned as one of the signs, which was held up by a slightly rusted chain, made a whining noise, as if it was going to topple down at any moment.

‘What a shame it would be if you were slain by a simple sign,’ said Tom, his tone implying a sneer. ‘A Muggle sign, no less.’

Perception was Harry’s forte, at least in every aspect that he had learned from. He had often heard from Lucius that he had a keen eye and that not much could get by him. While it was about chess and not everyday situations, he liked to think that he was perceptive and saw everything. Alright, maybe he was grasping at nothing, hoping it was something, but he did have a keen eye and he had a lot of Slytherin self-preservation. He hadn’t expected to be followed into Muggle London, and therefore when he heard the tell-tale sounds of consistent footsteps, which had been following him for the previous three streets, he knew that he may be in a little trouble.

‘I know exactly where the man or woman is,’ said Tom. ‘Would you like a hint?’

Harry ignored Tom, seeing as that voice was a part of his head, and started to walk just a little faster, the rowdy teenagers were an ant compared to this crazed stalker that he had. He could easily lose the crazed stalker in the many twists and turns of London.

‘This is rather humourous,’ commented Tom, pausing as Harry ducked around a trash bin. ‘Back in my day, which wasn’t that long ago, a wizard wouldn’t run away from a Muggle.’

‘I’m not running,’ thought Harry, directing the thought at Tom. ‘I’m simply retreating in a tactical manner.’

‘You’re simply running.’

‘Don’t mock me, Thomas,’ thought Harry, glaring as he weaved around a post box. ‘You’re simply irrelevant.’

‘Mind the old lady ahead of you, you wouldn’t want to simply run into her.’

Harry weaved around the old lady with a shopping cart at the last moment and sent her a warm smile, ignoring her cries about youth. He turned into an alley, almost sliding on a puddle and cursed as he was met with a dead-end. ‘The day I ask Nagini to stay at Malfoy Manor, I get chased by a crazy stalker,’ he thought bitterly, hoping he lost the stalker. He heard footsteps coming around the corner. ‘Please be that old lady, asking if I’m alright.’

‘Rest in Peace, Harry James Potter, aged twelve,’ said Tom. ‘Died to a Muggle stalker…’

Harry felt a hand land on his shoulder as he was debating climbing over the two-story high wall. He yelped and dived forwards, bouncing off the wall rather painfully and almost crashing into one of the bins headfirst. It was only the man’s tight grip that stopped him from falling. “What do you want?” he said, glaring at the man, channelling his inner Draco. “I’ll have you know that I’m trained in three levels of fighting and I have never been beaten.”

‘Proficient in fighting styles and you almost fell into a bin,’ said Tom, sighing. ‘Sometimes I do wonder.’

“What do I want?” said the crimson-eyed man. “I don’t want anything, child.”
Harry was now spooked, of that was the correct word for how he felt. The only person he knew who had crimson eyes was Voldemort and he doubted that this man was Voldemort.

‘It’s not Voldemort,’ said Tom, amusement in his voice. ‘It could be his twin brother.’

“I noticed you leave a certain establishment,” said the man, his voice completely calm. “You left it alone and you looked like someone had just kicked your only puppy –”

“I don’t like dogs.”

“– so I did the mature thing and followed you,” said the man. “Surely you don’t live here, child?”

Harry muttered something offensive under his breath and paused when he realised that the crimson-eyed man had heard him as if he shouted it. “No,” he said, his ears going slightly pink. “I don’t live here.”

“Respect, child, gets you a very long way in terms conversation… not to mention that it can save your hide when you’re at a more mature and respectable age,” said the man, kneeling. “You remind me of someone that I once knew, many years ago. Such a tragedy. A boy, near your age, made a joke and when no one laughed and praised him, he began to run his mouth to someone very, very influential – he was killed almost instantly.”

“How’s that even relevant to my situation?” asked Harry, his tone bitter. He didn’t like that this man was talking about a child’s death as if it was nothing. “You can’t expect a child to act like an adult, no matter how smart and how decently they were raised. They’re not adults, they’re children.”

“Ten in appearance, a century in age,” said the crimson-eyed man, holding back a laugh. “You’re rather mature for your age.”

“I am,” said Harry. “But I’m smart and I know when to speak and when to remain silent.”

“Maybe in conversations that you control,” said the man, a knowing glint in his eyes. “But if you knew when to remain silent, you would have allowed me to speak until I was finished and not interrupted me.”

Harry folded his arms over his chest and glared at the man.

“Child, do you even know what I am?” said the man, resting his arm on his knee. “Surely you didn’t just make idle conversation with a complete stranger.”

Harry hummed, actually debating the question as he studied the man in front of him. There were so many clues that he could piece together and get an answer from that, but beyond that, he wasn’t sure. “I can see that you’re not human,” he said, studying the man, who was kneeling in a dirty alley. “Despite your attempts at speaking as if you’re from this generation, you’re clearly older than what you appear to be, and I shouldn’t have to mention the fact that you call me a child, when you’re about twenty in appearance.”

“And?”

“And you’re a creature of some sort,” said Harry, ignoring the hurt look on the man’s face. “At least, that’s what I assume.”

“Creature is a derogatory term!” hissed the man. He didn’t move, nor did he allow the anger he felt fill his voice. “You impertinent brat! How dare you call me a creature?”
“I did state that I assumed you were one,” said Harry, shrugging. “You asked me what I thought you were and I simply guessed. How can you get angry or annoyed by that when it was your own fault? Anyway, there’s plenty of various species in the world that all fall under the creature label: anything that isn’t human is a creature. It’s highly prejudiced, but it’s the human way.”

“You’re rambling, child,” said the man, his smile wife. “I made it obvious what I was and my taking offence should have been another massive clue on what I am. I assumed that you would have figured it out from the first moment we met each other’s eyes.”

Harry pursed his lips and stared at the crimson-eyed man, his eyes slightly narrowed in deep thought. He wondered what this man could be as nothing could have crimson eyes and it was rare. ‘Maybe a glamour or contacts,’ he thought, studying the man intently. “I honestly have no idea on what you could be. The eyes should be an obvious clue, but they aren’t…”

The man allowed the small child to rant about Muggles, witches, and wizards and how they were all creatures in a sense. It was amusing to listen to as the child countered his own arguments and then debunked that same counterargument with another counterargument. “You’re ranting for the sake of ranting,” he said, putting an end to the child’s ranting. “Muggles are humans… wizards are humans… a werewolf, however, is a foul beast that walks among the earth, forever tainting and destroying anything pristine that the earth once provided. A werewolf is nothing but a disease, a virus, even, and maybe even a small annoyance that has luck on its side. If you open a dictionary and look for werewolf, the text next to the word simply reads a monster.”

Harry stared at the man, his mouth slightly open.

“Forgive my anger, child,” said the man before the child could speak. “I don’t much like werewolves, you see, one killed my child.”

Harry felt a pang at what had just been said, as if he was feeling the misery of losing his own child. It was really odd. “Your child?”

“No, not my birth child, child,” said the man, as if reading the child’s mind. “I very rarely take various children under my wing and teach them various things, things that should help them in life. The child that I took was no older than fourteen. She had a sturdy head on her shoulders and at least had the brain of a thirty-year-old. Very mature. Very understanding. She was caught off-guard one day, just having come from her training lessons. She was tired and could not fend off her attackers with her usual grace and precision. She managed to slay one werewolf, but the second proved to be her downfall and it was able to pass on the curse. She pleaded for death rather than live her life as a monster. Her friends turned hostile and she lost everything and everyone because of it.”

Harry was unsure on how he could cheer the man up. He hadn’t seen such a defeated expression on any man’s face up until this point in time. “Your child, she would’ve preferred death than live life as a werewolf?”

“Yes, she did,” said the man. “She couldn’t bear to disgrace me as so, and she instantly took to my beliefs that all werewolves were monsters. I attempted to soothe her and state that she wasn’t a monster because she was different, but it didn’t matter. She was as stubborn as you can get and stated that she would kill herself if her life wasn’t ended. I didn’t want her to severe her soul like that and done the deed myself, no matter how much it hurt. I have seen many things in my life… old and new, death and birth, but this was much worse – nothing has ever hurt as much as this did. I have not taken on another child since.”

Harry watched the man as he shuffled around, getting to his feet and brushing his knees in the process. He wanted to say something to keep the man interested in him and his conversation, but had
no idea on how he could keep this conversation going without offending the man. “I don’t like werewolves either,” he said rather lamely. He berated himself for speaking so freely and admitting something like that out loud.

“Why, child? Why do you dislike werewolves?” said the man, leaning closer to the child. “How do you know that I’m not a werewolf in disguise, hoping to figure out your opinion and then capture you when you provide the wrong answer?”

“I’ve read a lot about werewolves. They’re one of few creatures that don’t act ashamed or stealthy about themselves,” said Harry, proudly repeating knowledge he had learned from the Malfoy library. It was a shock when he learned that previous Malfoy heirs once hunted werewolves. “Being turned into a werewolf overrides everything you’ve done, rendering you mortal if you’re immortal.”

“Incorrect, but an admirable attempt none-the-less,” said the man, smiling as an outraged expression appeared on the boy’s face. It was always nice seeing intelligent people upset. “The werewolf bite or scratch will only affect the immunity of vampires. If a vampire is bitten or turned into a werewolf, they’ll be as mortal as anyone else. The werewolf virus destroys the vampiric one and it’s a clash inside the body – some may not even survive the initial transformation.”

“That’s fascinating,” said Harry, leaning forwards. “Tell me more.”

The man ignored the demand and just smiled. “The fight may appear one-sided, but it really is an equal chance for each. The vampire is one species that is truly capable of destroying a whole pack of werewolves with ease,” he paused and studied the small child, who appeared to be enamoured with the knowledge he was receiving. “Regardless, no one may truly live forever, child, no one can defeat Death, at least not in the sense that you mortals think. Seeking immortality is for those that lack the strength. Once you achieve immortality, you begin to see all the downsides. You’ll watch all your friends die of old age, no matter how much you seek to help them. You’ll bury your parents, your children, and their children. Immortality is a curse, not a blessing.”

“I don’t understand,” said Harry, staring. “Living forever has no downsides. There’s so much to be done and explored…”

“Watching those you love grow old and perish into a natural death while you’re still in your adolescent body isn’t something that most wouldn’t like to witness. If you’re immortal, then you keep it a secret as people will fear you and hunt you. Only Gods may live forever, child.”

Harry frowned. “People don’t fear Gods… they respect them and idolise them in every aspect.”

The man smiled and nodded slightly. “Many people fear the unknown, child, whether it’s death and comes after, Gods, or anything that cannot be explained by their pitiful minds. Many fear immortality as it can upset the balance. People tend to think that fate exists and that it’s a living person that stalks through the world, hoping to find anyone ruining her plans – stupidity at its finest. Legends say that Death himself was once a wizard who sought immortality, and succeeded, but was cursed into being alive, but dead at the same time – death, in all aspects.”

Harry couldn’t help but snort. “Legends are based on small things and then exaggerated beyond what they should’ve been,” he muttered, trying not to reveal that Death was actually a real person, but not in the aspect that people assumed. “Death isn’t sentient, you know. Death haunts us, no matter how hard we attempt to seek refuge against it. It’s not some all-powerful being that holds ancient laws and such, it’s easy to escape.”

“Child, what are you going on about now?” said the man, looking a mix between amused and concerned. “Oh dear, would you look at the time – I must be going before I’m late. Child, if you’ll
allow me to ask one thing?”

Harry nodded, curious.

“I see… great things in you,” said the man, staring directly into the green eyes of the small child. “I’ll be around, child, just out of sight, in the shadows. The instant you learn of what I am, simply whisper it and I’ll come to you. Until you learn what I am, we’ll be parting ways.”

Harry wasn’t sure what he should do, nor say, and so he just nodded and tilted his as the man twisted on the spot and fled from the darkened alley with billowing robes. ‘A lot like Professor Snape,’ he thought, holding the snort. He sneaked towards the corner of the alley and peered his head around the brick corner, wondering if he’d see the man standing there. ‘Of course not.’

His eyes widened as he quickly scurried from the dark alley finally realising that he was alone in it and rather frightened. He quickly set off down the road.

Draco sat cross-legged on the rather large sofa, one that he had claimed as his, wondering when Harry was going to come back from the meeting with his parents. He glanced at the large grandfather clock and sighed, realising that Harry had been gone for more than a few hours. He knew that Harry had left his pet snake here and that meant that he had to be back soon. “Mother,” he said, sitting straight up on the sofa. He knew that he had slightly startled his mother, who was reading a new copy of Witch Weekly, a day before it was released. “Harry’s pet snake, do you know where it is?”

“I don’t know, dear. The last I saw of her was when I allowed her outside to hunt for those annoying mice in the hedges,” said Narcissa, turning a page. She had put a lot of extra emphasis on the gender of the snake. “You must remember that Harry’s snake takes offence when you call her a ‘he’ or an ‘it’. Lucius only did it once and didn’t do it again after the snake appeared to torment him until he got it right.”

Draco glanced around warily, as if suspecting the snake would jump out at random, scaring him. “I really want to know why she can understand English. Snakes have their own language and generally don’t obey commands like other animals.”

“A snake is a reptile, dear.”

“I know!” said Draco, huffing. “I was just simply – ugh – forget it.”

“It’s most likely because Harry and Nagini have bonded, dear,” said Narcissa, not even bothering to glance at her son. “You do know that the moment you buy an owl, it imprints on your magic and it will always find you, no matter what. Other animals and reptiles do this, not to the extent of an owl, but it can be done.”

“I know that, mother,” said Draco. “I just don’t understand why his snake can understand English as well as she does. It’s like he can command the snake in English.”

Narcissa hummed. “It may be because Harry is a Parselmouth, dear – oh my,” she threw down the magazine, uncaring if it got crinkled. She stared at the magazine in disgust, as if it was the fault of the magazine. “You heard that, didn’t you dear?”

“Harry told me last year that he could speak to snakes and that he was a Parselmouth,” said Draco, hiding the betrayal on his face. “I cannot believe he told you before he told me!”

“He didn’t tell me, so-to-speak,” said Narcissa, trying to calm her son down. “Lucius and I found him one day in the garden hissing to a snake. We’re not sure what was said, but it was obvious he
was distressed. He came to us later claiming that a snake had died in the yard and we sort of pieced it together on why he was so distressed. He was trying to coax the snake back to life, but failed. He was about seven then, so I’m sure he’s forgotten all about it.”

“That was shortly after he regained the ability to speak, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, dear,” said Narcissa. “I’m sure it’s wise to leave that memory buried. If Harry has forgotten about it, then you can be sure he has his reasons behind it.”

“Hmm – that could be why he never really spoke about it,” said Draco, piecing it together. “As far as I’m aware, no one in the Potter line has ever been able to speak to snakes… so why can Harry?”

“I’m not sure, darling,” said Narcissa, summoning the magazine with a flick of her wand. “We did our research on Lily a while ago and we found no ties to anyone that ever bore that name inside Europe and she’s not an orphan as she looks a little like her sister and parents. As for Harry, well, he’s a little different in terms of magic. He’s an anomaly.”

Draco couldn’t help but roll his eyes behind the book that he was using to hide his face from his mother. “Do you know that his motto, which has spread throughout most of Slytherin, is: knowledge is power?” he paused, trying to think of his next words. “Sometimes I fear that he’ll have far too high ambitions.”

“Harry is a dreamer, dear,” said Narcissa. “He’ll always have high ambitions, no matter what it’s regarding. No matter how childish they may seem. When Harry states that he wishes to be a king, then he wishes to be a king.”

“And I’ll be dragged into it, somehow.”

Narcissa couldn’t help but chuckle at the slightly whiny tone of her son. “Harry knows that no matter what happens, we’ll always be behind him,” she paused, holding up her hand to silence her son. “Even if he was condemned to death, we would remain behind him.”

“Mother!” said Draco, his tone increasing in pitch as he spoke. “How could you say something like that?”

“It’s a figure of speech, dear,” said Narcissa, ignoring the look on her son’s face. “It’s meant to sound horrific. Needless to say, it only takes a very little amount of dark magic to get a firm grip on you before you get lost in the sense of power it offers. Bellatrix was such a sweet thing before she fell to the Dark Arts.”

“I don’t like Bellatrix,” muttered Draco softly, as if speaking any louder would cause said woman to come and strike him down.

“You’ve never even met her, Draco, and I ask you to not badmouth my sister. Bellatrix is family and no matter what things she has done, she’ll always be family.”

Draco nodded and watched as his mother once again checked the time. “That’s the twelfth time since Harry left.”

“I’m worried,” said Narcissa, her brows furrowed in an unladylike fashion. “He should have been back by now, even if the meeting did go a little later than it should have.”

Draco nodded and went back to his reading. He didn’t want to question anything as he really wished to do, instead, he remained quiet and tried to lose himself in one of the books that Harry frequently read. An hour went by and he sighed, tossing the book down. “Mother, I know it’s a horrid thing to
“Then don’t say it, dear.”

“– but I really want Harry to dislike his parents so he can come and live here with us.”

Narcissa frowned. “I should scold you for speaking like that as I can feel for both Lily and James, but given the circumstances…” she trailed off with her formal speech before deciding on a path she would take. “He has been a blessing in disguise, if I must say so myself. He turned this large manor into something of a home. I, by all means, consider him to be the little brother that I couldn’t give you.”

Draco laughed. “I can’t really see him as anything less than what he is, just Harry. I don’t think he and I would even speak if we were related,” he paused and thought about it for a moment. “We might speak, but I honestly doubt we’d have the friendship or the closeness that we’ve got now. He’d be in the library all day and I’d be outside socialising, like a normal person.”

“You doubt Harry’s ability to be charming when he wishes to be, dear,” said Narcissa, giving her son a knowing look. “You also forget that he can be rather cute and childlike at the same time. He was rather blessed in the looks department, especially considering that he hardly looks his age. He looks much younger than he is and that could make many witches fall head-over-heels for him.”

Draco scowled, not able to imagine Harry being cute, of all things. Harry wasn’t cute, he was… something else that he was unable to describe. “I don’t think Harry’d appreciate being called cute, mother. I’m sure he’d scowl at us and retreat to the library and spend all day brooding with his books.”

Narcissa nodded and picked up a different magazine, not wanting to bother reading Witch Weekly. Her attention soon drifted off, not even hearing her son yelp when Harry’s snake slithered over him. She was far too interested in those new shoes.

Harry walked up the street, which was illuminated by tall light posts. He had cave din and asked for directions a while ago, not at all taking a hit to his pride. Despite the unhelpful instructions by a local man that did nothing but splutter and gesture in vague directions, hoping that something he said was right. ‘I’m sure if I was asking for directions to the nearest takeout store, he’d know, the fat lard,’ he thought as he made his way down the street. He noticed a line of similar looking townhouses, which had their lights on. He noticed a rather well-kept half brick wall, which had a long line of dark green hedges.

As he walked towards the nearby park, he heard a few different sounding laughs, shouts, and yells. He tucked his arms around his chest and hastened his steps. He pulled the fabric of his jumper closer to him and set off at a much faster pace than he was going.

He soon realised that he was moving closer and closer to those rowdy sounding people. If the advice from the man before was anything to go by, he said to avoid them as much as possible as they were degenerates. He shuddered and continued, trying to be as quiet as he could, hoping that he wouldn’t be spotted. Nothing good could come from being spotted walking alone towards a bunch of idiotic teenagers. He had remembered a few rants that Vernon had shared about these particular people. He had called them drunken freaks with little regard for anyone else besides themselves.

“Oi, look at what we’ve got here,” slurred the brown-haired teenager. His voice was slightly shaky and rather rough. “A little boy attemptin’ to drink with the big boys, hm?”
Harry scowled, hardly understanding the teenager. He understood very little of what the man had actually said, but he caught the gist of it. Green eyes locked onto brown, which had strands of red throughout them, showing the tiredness of the teen. “I’d rather not, thanks,” he said staring at the drunken idiot. “I’m pretty sure that you’re not meant to be drinking alcoholic substances here, at least according to that sign over there.”

“Damn, the times have bloody well changed since I was a kid,” said the teenager, laughing boisterously as one of his mates came up and leant on the fence. He grinned as one of his friends laughed like a lunatic at the statement, obviously agreeing. “When I was your age, we were leaning how to spell cat and dog and other things like that, not those large words you’ve used.”

“Do you think I’m in reception or something?” said Harry, glaring at the teen. He watched as more drunkards walked over towards him and began to look at the scene that was happening. “Depending on the word you’re surprised about, it had around three syllables. I can’t imagine not learning such simple words at a young age – maybe your vocabulary isn’t what it should be? I have a theory that you’re so dim-witted because you drown your brain in alcohol.”

“God damn it, Josh, would you leave the poor boy alone?” yelled one of the girls as she stalked over towards the commotion. “Just because your parents were actually smart and did things with their lives, doesn’t mean that you inherited their brains. You’re the most stupid person I have ever met and I went to one of the worst schools in the whole country.”

“Sarah…”

“You know, this kid is probably right in his guess that you’re stupid,” said Sarah, looking rather livid. “All the alcohol and other things you do has turned your small brain into mush! It’s no wonder that you were kicked outta school and forced into a much worse school.”

Harry watched in amusement as the girl, Sarah, continued to belittle the other boy. Of course, he heard a few rather vicious swear words used in the next few statements she used, as well as a low-blow towards his ‘manhood’.

“The fact that you’re even trying to attempt a kid is beyond pathetic,” said Sarah, waving around her hands around frantically. “I have no idea what my stupid sister sees in you!”

Harry’s attention was snapped back towards the group of teenagers, mainly the female that had all the males cowed under her intense glare. He realised that Josh, the teenager, had recoiled back as if struck with every single word the girl had said. He had seen Lucius take a step back – or two – when Narcissa had been annoyed or upset, but never this bad. Narcissa was a little different in the sense that she would smash something and then repair it and be fine afterwards – that is, of course, if you ignore the minor muttering about incompetent males and praying that her son had a brain. This girl was a step above Narcissa, in almost every aspect regarding arguments. She just kept going! One thing turned into the next, which turned into something from eleven years ago. It was at that moment that he made his silent, yet swift getaway, mainly from the woman, no longer fearing the group of males which were all cowed under her screeching.

He had barely made it up a few streets before he was engulfed in bright lights, which had obviously been following him. He turned around when he noticed that the car had stopped and wasn’t going as fast as it should be. He instantly noticed the familiar pattern on the car and knew that it was the Muggle police, the Muggle version of Aurors. He grimaced as he lifted up his right forearm to block the blaring lights from his eyes.

“Hello there lad!” said the man that stepped out of the vehicle. “I’m sorry about the bright lights, they’re pretty much needed for the fog that’ll appear later on tonight.”
Harry smiled at the man, noticing that the man’s uniform was rather tight and constricting his movement. “No problem,” he said, trying not to stutter or look guilty of anything. He wasn’t sure whether he should call the man ‘sir’ or not, so he just left it at that.

“Someone called up about a young boy walking around alone,” said the man, eyeing the child warily. “I took the call as I’m already in the area and it wasn’t too much of a drive. Now, I have rambled, but I assume that you’re the lone boy that we’re looking for.”

“I assume so, sir,” said Harry, watching the man carefully. He frowned when he felt the man’s hand land on his shoulder, but allowed said man to direct him out of the light and next to the car. He watched with interest as the man lifted up something and began speaking into it as if he was having a conversation with someone ‘Salazar, he caught me staring,’ he thought as he gave the man a sheepish smile, hoping said man didn’t think he was insane for gaping at him.

“Never seen a cell phone before?” said the man, amusement flashing over his face. He tucked the phone into his pocket, ignoring the rather large bulge that said phone left. “It’s an interesting invention. I’m sure not even five or so years ago, everyone was mailing letters by post instead of looking at a screen and sending the message instantly. It’s all texting and ignorance these days. I’m rambling…”

“It’s alright.”

“I need to give you a lift home as I cannot allow you to walk around alone, even more so at night.”

Harry sat there, his mouth slightly open. He wasn’t sure what the address of the Malfoy Manor was, just that it was called Malfoy Manor. “My – uh – address?” he stuttered out, actually fearful at the moment. He had heard of witches and wizards being caught and being called ghosts. They’re soon tossed into a home and then never heard from again as they’re shipped off somewhere. “I don’t want to go home!”

“Why not, lad?”

“They’re dead,” said Harry, the panic in his voice far too real for his standards. He tried not to look at the frowning policeman. “Well, not dead, but my father may as well be! He’s on something that m-makes him aggressive and then ignorant of everything!”

“He does drugs?”

Harry realised that the man’s look was far too real for his taste. The policeman looked ready to wrap a blanket around him and coddle him. “I don’t know!” he wailed, the increase in pitch wasn’t intentional, but it was a good thing as it made the police officer’s facial expression soften. “H-he frightens m-me, s-sir! You w-won’t t-t-tell him, w-will you?”

“Of course not, lad,” said the man, trying not to get angry when he saw the child’s lips quiver. “I cannot just leave you here.”

“I’ll be fine.”

“I cannot leave you here by law, lad,” said the man, grinning. “Not that I would if I wasn’t a police officer, but I must take you in.”

“That sounds rather menacing,” said Harry, smiling at the man to show that he wasn’t afraid. He assumed that ‘being taken in’ meant that he was going to be questioned.

“There’s a room at the station that’ll allow you to stay safe and warm,” said the man. “It’s not a
massive room, nor is it comfortable, but it’s dry. You can stay there until the morning and then we’ll work it all out, yeah?”

Harry wondered why most Muggles added the word ‘yeah’ onto the end of their sentences. He realised that this man did it less frequently than a few others, but it was still common. ‘Weasely does it as well,’ he thought, almost grinning at the comparison. ‘Well, that’s because Weasely may as well snap his wand and live amongst Muggles.’

‘He wouldn’t last,’ said Tom. ‘Not belittling him or anything, but many wizards wouldn’t last with Muggles. Your pal, Draco, would be the quickest of them all to vanish.’

Harry ignored Tom the moment he said that he wasn’t trying to belittle Ron Weasley. That wasn’t acceptable. “Of course, sir,” he said to the man, smiling. “That’d be lovely.”

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Harry sat on the bed in the small room, which was eerily similar to one of the cells that he had walked past with the guard that he was assigned. A few people tormented him with jeers and whistling as he walked by, but they were quickly silenced by the guard that was escorting him to the room. He had listened to the man as he explained some irrelevant things, mainly that the room would lock if there was ever an alarm of an escaped drunken person to assure his safety.

He looked around the small room once more, taking everything into detail. The bed was by far the nicest thing in the room and that was simply because the bed had sheets and a very thin mattress. It was pretty much a slab of concrete and that was it. He knew that if it was for people that were actually lost and had nowhere to go, it would be luxury. He, however, grew up sleeping on the finest beds, bigger than this room. There was a toilet and a sink off to the side, both obscured by a wall that would allow him privacy from the glass window in the metal door.

“Are you alright?”

Harry nearly jumped as he twisted and saw the same police officer as before strut into the room. “I’m fine, just a bit startled,” he muttered as a small chocolate bar was pushed into his hands and a warm cup of cocoa followed. “Thanks.”

“I realise this room isn’t much, but it’s better than shivering under a park bench,” said the man, smiling. “Because I won’t be starting work until around three in the afternoon tomorrow, I’ll try and get all this swept up now. I just have a few standard questions.”

“That’s fine,” said Harry, eyeing the pen and notepad in the man’s hands warily. “You can call me Harry, if you want.”

The man grinned, nodding. “Alright, Harry. The questions aren’t anything personal, like your showering habits – not that you smell! You’ve already answered half the first question, so that’s some progress,” he paused and tapped the notepad with the black biro. “My name’s David, in case you’re wondering. Now, the most important question of all… what’s your full name?”

Harry paused, debating whether revealing his full name would be ideal. He knew that he was considered a ‘ghost’ and according to Muggles, Harry James Potter never existed, at least no one with his age, height, and eye colour. He had nothing to prove that he was who he said he was and therefore maybe it wasn’t a bad choice at all. “My name is Harry, Harry James Potter.”

David took a sharp intake of breath, hoping it wasn’t a strange coincidence. “Forgive my next question, Harry, but it’s an important one. Is your father James Potter? Recently began renovating the old Potter Estate?”
‘Ha!’ barked out Tom, sounding delightfully amused. ‘Serves you right for thinking he wouldn’t be able to connect the dots.’

“Yes,” said Harry, regretting his choice already. “My mother is Lily Potter.”

“But you stated that he was a drug user!” said David, looking a little paler than usual. He had spoken to James Potter a few times before, mainly when said man came and introduced himself as a ‘special agent’ that was assigned to look after the Prime Minister and the Queen. “I don’t want to call you a liar, but I know for a fact that your mother is alive and that your father doing drugs makes very little sense…”

“I lied,” said Harry, shrugging. “It pained me to lie that my mother was dead – I’d never want that. Ja – father and I had a little bit of an argument about something trivial and I didn’t want to go back. I understand that it was rather childish of me to lie, especially to a police officer.”

“Of course, Harry, but you do know that lying like that could have got your father in plenty of trouble?” said David, frowning as the boy nodded. “You’re a pretty good actor, though, you had me going. Is there a story behind your adventures? Surely you didn’t just aim to wander around the streets of London and pray you found your way home.”

“I was going to go to a friend’s house, but I – err – got lost.”

David wrote something on his notepad and looked up. “There’s one thing that I’m confused about,” he paused and then summoned up all his courage. “You seemed surprised that I knew where you lived, as if you didn’t.”

“Didn’t what?”

“Didn’t know where you lived – oh my God! You don’t!”

“I’m bad with addresses,” admitted Harry. “I don’t even know the addresses of any of my friends’ houses. I just know where they are and what they look like.”

David studied the boy, looking for any signs of physical abuse. “Has James ever hit you?”

Harry realised that this had gotten very, very serious in the blink of an eye. “No,” he said truthfully. He couldn’t remember ever being hit by James, by spell or hand. “Not even when I was young.”

David hummed, trying to figure out if the child was lying. The boy was a decent actor and appeared as if he didn’t fidget under pressure or an intense stare, as if he was used to such things. “You don’t need to fear him, Harry. If he’s hurting you physically or emotionally, then you should report him.”

‘Here’s the chance you’ve been after,’ said Tom. ‘You can get James into a lot of trouble.’

Harry was confused. Why wasn’t he taking advantage of this, telling the police officer everything about James and his neglectful ways, spinning the story to make James look worse than Voldemort? He could have done it easily, without even batting an eye. He knew that David was waiting for an answer, an answer that he couldn’t give as his mind was just a swirl of various things.

‘Maybe you don’t want to get him in trouble,’ said Tom. ‘Getting soft, are we?’

‘Getting him into trouble with a Muggle police officer isn’t what I was aiming for, Tom.’

‘Sure. You think that if it’ll help you sleep at night.’
“– Harry?”

“Hm? Oh, yes. Father has never neglected me in any way besides working too much.”

David sighed in relief. “I’ve met your dad a few times and I didn’t see anything of the sport that hinted at abuse, whether emotional or physical, but for a moment I just had a feeling that I was wrong,” he said, looking at Harry. “Anyway, your dad works with the Queen… the backlash would’ve been massive.”

“I’ve always wanted to meet the Queen.”

“Subtle change in conversation, if I must say so,” said David, laughing. “I am amazed that you’ve not met the Queen already! Then again, James did state that his work had a ‘no visitor’ policy and that he couldn’t bring you along to see her and the palace.”

‘I had no idea that James worked with the Queen,’ thought Harry, studying David, making sure he was being truthful. ‘I wonder if mother knows.’

“– said that you attend a rather prestigious school located in the middle of nowhere.”

“Oh, yeah, for ten months of the year I’m off at a boarding school,” said Harry, hoping that David wouldn’t ask for a name. “But a lot of parents talk up their children’s education. Talking it up, to make the child appear more smart and cleverer than they really are. Sadly, the child is then thrust into a light that they had no idea existed and forced to meet unforeseen standards.”

David laughed, his hands clenched around his stomach as he sent the smaller child a grin. He threw down his notepad and biro, not bothering with it as it was moot now. “I really should get you home,” he said, finishing his cocoa. “You’d be safe here, no doubt, but your parents are probably worried.”

Harry muttered something under his breath that sounded suspiciously like ‘doubt it’ and sent David a wide smile. “A small part of me wishes to make them suffer, but the large part of me doesn’t want my mother to suffer like that. I’m sure she’s already pacing the hallways, worried and fretting that I’m injured…” he continued speaking, as if telling a story, until he realised what he was doing and abruptly cut himself off.

“It’s that particular reason that I want kids,” said David, his tone bright, despite how much the subject hurt. “I’ll drive you home now, shouldn’t take long.”

“You want kids because they ramble?” asked Harry, highly confused.

“Not really, no,” said David, leading the boy towards his car. “I’d love kids because they’d do things that’d make me worry about them. Being up late, not eating properly, or even doing badly at school. Sadly, I cannot have children.”

Harry got in the car and the two sat in silence, the only noise coming from the radio, which, as usual, was reporting various crimes and calls that came in. “Why can’t you have children?” he asked, none of his usual decorum. The question had been eating at him since he had heard David say it. “Sorry if that’s a personal question.”

David made a noise of some sort, desperately wanting to look at the boy as he spoke. “I’m not sure how to say this, Harry, but I don’t like women that way,” he said, keeping his eyes locked firmly on the road. He was sure the boy was old enough to know what a homosexual was. “I haven’t ever walked that path, so a child is impossible.”

“Couldn’t you just adopt?” asked Harry, looking as innocent as possible. “I mean, there’s plenty of
kids out there that have been abused and neglected, begging for a home. Why not provide them one?"

“That’s not allowed, Harry, which is a very sad thing,” said David. “Only a male and a female couple may adopt, not a male and male, or a female and female.”

“That’s stupid,” said Harry, his tone rather harsh. He drummed his index finger against his chin, debating on what he’d say next. “There’s plenty of kids stuck in orphanages, obviously lacking in almost everything that kids need when growing up due to the harsh conditions of an orphanage. I’m sure if you asked the kids, they wouldn’t care what gender their parents were, as long as they were loved and had a home.”

“If only everyone thought like you, Harry, the world would be a better place,” said David, not at all noticing the look on the young child’s face. “We’re not too far now.”

“Did you know that the Romans never allowed a child to be without two parents? It wasn’t in their ideals that a child should only have one parent. They didn’t believe that a child should suffer for their parents’ mistakes.”

“Really?” asked David, smiling. “I never studied the Romans.”

“Yes. The Romans were nothing short of brutal relating to male on male relationships,” said Harry, his face flushing as he continued to explain how the Romans treated the homosexual couples that were in their communities. “A lot of the men in powerful positions had many male lovers, all ages between thirteen and twenty.”

“You have an impressive amount of knowledge on history, Harry,” said David, pulling up at a light. “I think you’d do rather well at the school debates that are held every now and then. You have a good head on you.”

“I wish to be more than just a simple debater! I’d love to be the Prime Minster, or, maybe, the king!” said Harry, ambitiously. His mind drifted towards the perfect world where he was in charge. Yes, he wanted to be the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, but that wasn’t a long-term goal of his.

David laughed. “Damn well had you imagined as an adult trapped in a child’s body for a moment,” he said, still laughing. “That little remark blew that out of the water, heh. I still remember when I wanted to be a king… I settled for the next best thing: a cop.”

“One day, I guess,” said Harry, smirking. “Only the best ideas can be thought up by dreaming. Sometimes, even the smallest of ideas can turn out to be the largest and the most important.”

“Wise words, Harry,” said David, turning a corner at a faster speed than needed. “I wonder where you heard such a quote. These days, I’d guess the internet, but aside from that, I assume a book or a magazine.”

“Internet?”

“Rather new invention, came out a while back, but got popular three years ago,” said David. “I assume you got it from a book then?”

“Yeah,” said Harry, still confused on what the internet actually was. “Eventually everything ends up in a book or two.”

“I trust you read a lot of books?” said David. “Not like most kids these days. Instead, they’re sitting in front of the television or the computer.”
“Nothing beats a nice book,” said Harry, his eyes flicking towards the row of houses on his left. “This is a rich area, I guess.”

“Ha! Property values here are about as much as I earn in ten years,” muttered David, his tone holding no malice. “A lot of people were happy the old Potter Estate was being fixed up as it was a bit of an eyesore. People’ve tried to buy it before, but the owners couldn’t be found. Your father then pops up outta nowhere and starts fixing it up.”

Harry found the house almost immediately. It was nothing short of extravagant and modern, at least compared to the style of most of the houses in the area. The fence was far too luxurious for his stands, a short black iron fence that had a warm yellow coloured pillar every few meters. On each pillar near the lavish gate, which had a golden ‘P’ in the circle, were two lanterns and a small letterbox, which would never be used.

“Well, we’re here,” said David, pulling up. “It’s such a nice place you’ve got. Holy. Anyway, Harry, do keep in touch.”

Harry nodded, slowly stepping out of the car. “Thank you, David, I appreciate it,” he muttered softly. “Who knows what could’ve happened if you hadn’t shown up. You can always write to me, if you want. I’ll reply in the same way. Call me old-fashioned.”
Harry stood on the brick pathway that led into the property of Potter Estate for a while. He waved to David as he drove off and glanced at the little box near the gate. He wondered what the purpose of the thing was. It looked like one of the radios in David’s car, at least a more modern and compact version.

It took a while, but it finally clicked in his head that the box was a radio and allowed for him to contact the people inside the house as there was no way of knowing if anyone was at the gate from the distance of the house to the actual fence. He felt rather foolish for the idiotic thought that it could be for anything else.

The house was magical, and he could feel it, not that it made any sense to say it like that. Being around magic for so long allows you to sense it, as a normal person would the smell of food or the touch of water. It’s an unforgettable feeling.

‘Do I use the radio thing or just push through?’ he thought, wondering which option was the smartest one to choose. ‘Using the radio thing could be funny and if I act like someone else, they’ll never know.’

‘However?’ said Tom. ‘There has to be more to your thought train than just that simple piece. There’s something else you want to say.’

‘Well, yeah,’ replied Harry, sounding as sarcastic as always. ‘I really want to see if I can just open the gate without consequence as this house is magical and I’d have to be keyed into the wards, right?’

‘I assume so,’ said Tom. ‘Anyone not keyed into those wards you speak of wouldn’t be able to feel the magic from the house. You may be talented and gifted in some things, but you’re not that special to actually sense magic. No one is.’

‘No one?’

‘Sensing magic is impossible,’ said Tom, sounding rather amused. ‘Magic can do many things, such as: making you immortal, making objects float and hover, allowing you to appear anywhere you wish, kill, revive, and command with a few words. Some, and you know who I’m talking about, have attempted to push magic beyond its capabilities and have paid the price for it. Attempting to speak or touch magic is impossible, it’s the same with learning where it comes from.’

‘You could be lying.’

‘Have I ever lied to you, Harry? I promised to teach you all I knew in good time, but I cannot do that if you refuse to believe what I’ve said,’ said Tom. ‘Magic is just like your blood, Harry, it’s in
you and that’s all that matters. Just like blood, it replenishes, but if you lose too much of it, then it could be fatal.’

‘And what about Squibs?’

‘They can feel magic, just as you can, just not push the energy outwards,’ said Tom. ‘Some believe that Squibs could do magic with enough attempts and time around magic, but it’s not a proven theory. Squibs aren’t born from inbreeding either, as you think would, it’s a birth defect.’

‘Because of inbreeding? That’s the only thing that could cause something like that.’

‘You were very close to being a Squib,’ said Tom, the amusement clear in his voice. ‘Cruel irony, isn’t it? You, born of fresh blood, were almost a Squib. Instead of losing your magic, it took your voice. You had an abundance of extra magic for a very long time and that’s why you’re as smart and intelligent as you are now. Are you following?’

‘Somewhat…’

‘Sometimes, when a child is born, they lose certain things, such as an arm, leg, voice, hearing, eyesight, et cetera. A magical person loses the ability to push forward the energy that is magic and they’re then called a Squib,’ said Tom, in his lecturing tone. ‘The funny thing about it is that Squibs are generally better at flying and potions than a magical person. Because they have magic, but cannot push it outwards, their other senses increase tenfold and they end up with near perfect eyesight, hearing, and reflexes.’

Harry allowed Tom to just keep explaining his own theory behind Squibs and magic. Despite Tom being a voice in his head, the voiced seemed to have a personality of its own, and a knowledge source that should have made him check into a mental hospital many years ago. He knew that Tom knew some of the most powerful spells known to wizard kind and could draw up runes in his sleep.

He glanced up at the estate, trying to get a better look, even as he pushed open the black iron gates, hoping that he wouldn’t get a nasty shock for doing it.

The estate appeared to be two storeys and was the same warm yellowish colour as the pillars on the fence. He had to admit that it had a villa feel to it and while it was modern looking, it wasn’t overly modern. He had seen the previous building in a few pictures and the house had the same layout, just slightly renovated. A lot of the walls and roof were the same, just no longer stone.

The yard was lavish, more lavish than the one at Malfoy Manor. The stone path went in a circle, which had hedges and trees in it, as well as a marble fountain which was squirting fountains of water into the air at a rapid rate. It was almost mesmerising watch the water as it bounced around the fountain, dropping off in one section only to rise in another.

Sighing, he broke his gaze with the fountain and walked swiftly towards the hedge that obviously held a makeshift garden, if the greenhouse off to the side was anything to go by. He followed the slabs of stone wedged into the grass, forming a makeshift path, and studied the flowers that had been planted.

He found a rather large gathering of lilies, just sprawled out over a small hill. He gazed at them and followed the cluster as it slowly made its way off the side of the property, going closer and closer towards the small lake behind the house. For a brief moment, he wondered whether they were planted or grew naturally.

Herbology wasn’t his strongest subject, in fact, it wasn’t even close to his second or third. It was a
painful statement to make as he simply wanted to excel in everything he did. Failure wasn’t an option. Maybe he struggled with Herbology because the most interesting thing they had done so far was plant a few Mandrakes, which were easily done that you could easily spot them in your sleep. He knew that most Potion Masters were adept at Herbology as collecting the rare plants that were used in potions took a lot of knowledge to do perfectly.

His next thought actually startled him. Longbottom, even if he was reluctant to admit it, was a prodigy at Herbology. Longbottom was the only other student, besides himself, who managed to get an ‘Outstanding’ in a subject two years in a row. While he, unlike Longbottom, got an ‘Outstanding’ in every subject, Longbottom got one in Defence Against the Dark Arts and Herbology.

Granger didn’t count as she cheated in her lessons. Not the good kind of cheating, either.

“Harry!” said Neville, surprised at seeing the boy out in the gardens. He lifted his head from a nearby plant and shook the dust from his hands. “I didn’t expect to see you out here! Of course, we knew you were coming as your pet snake came ahead, along with Draco.”

“A friend of the family dropped me off, Longbottom,” said Harry, his adventure in the gardens of Potter Estate were ruined by him seeing Longbottom, of all people. “And what do you think you’re doing here? Don’t you have a house of your own or have you given it to Weasley so he can have a decent house for once in his life?”

“Must you be so mean to Ron?” said Neville, sounding somewhat defeated. “He’s not bad once you get to know him.”

“Whatever,” said Harry, ignoring Neville. He didn’t really care about Weasley. “I guess my suspicions were correct and it was you who planted most of the plants around the building.”

“Yeah. Lily and I planted them not too long ago, actually,” said Neville, grinning at the memory of him planting most of the plants. “Whether it was raining or sunny, we still sat down in the mud and planted them. We were both amazed at how quick the plants actually grew. Even Professor Sprout was rather shocked to see them blossoming when they’d only been in the ground for a few days.”

“Well, Longbottom, I’m sure you lack the intelligence to understand that plants tend to thrive on the magic that’s been cast near them. Surely you knew that, I mean it’s basic knowledge,” said Harry. “The restoration of the estate would’ve helped greatly with the growth of the plants. Plants feed from the energy of magic, which is from spells and such. The spell residue lingers around the plant and the plant then soaks it up, as it does with water. That’s the reason why they don’t advise you to use spells on the actual plant as it’ll overload it with spell residue and cause it to wilt and die.”

“Well, yes, but there’s spell made to be used directly on plants,” said Neville, lifting his hands and gesturing at a bright blue plant that was in the greenhouse behind him. “Y’know, the logic that you’re using is flawed and highly outdated.”

“My logic isn’t flawed!” snapped Harry, kicking at the stone slab in the grass. “I have studied the logic very closely and have determined that it’s true! Casting any sort of magic on the flower will cause it to wilt!”

“You’re wrong.”

“I’m not wrong!” shouted Harry, his eyes narrowed. He kicked the slab harder, as if trying to prove his point. “These so-called plant helping spells don’t help the plant at all. Instead, they hinder the growth and eventually cause the plant to die. Plants feed and grow from ambient magic, which is why the Forbidden Forest is so luscious and well-kept. All the magic from the castle seeps outwards and
the forest gets the brunt of it.”

“No, Harry, you’re actually wrong,” said Neville, his tone was soft, as if not wanting to agitate the black-haired boy any further. “A plant, most flowers, thrive from all sources of magic… the best sort is, of course, direct magic. The spell must be designed for that particular type of flower, though. For example, a spell designed for an apple tree won’t work on a rose. Casting any sort of spells on the plant will affect it. If you float a strawberry bush across the room, then the harvest will be lighter due to it being in the air, even if it was in a pot. That’s why we tend to plants with our hands, not magic.”

“I’m never wrong, especially not about something like this!” said Harry, glaring. “I have done more research into magical theory than anyone else alive – that includes Dumbledore! I have studied this, Longbottom, and I’m not Granger and I won’t recite it straight from a book… these are facts, real facts!”

Neville sighed.

“Using a direct spell on a plant will kill it,” continued Harry, a knowing look on his face. “You’ve backed up my theory with what you’ve just said. You stated that a plant will yield less harvest if it’s floated. That proves my theory.”

“You’re impossible when you’re like this,” said Neville, shaking his head. He had said it to himself, but he was sure that Harry heard him clearly.

“Like what?” said Harry, stressing the word. “I’m impossible when I’m like what, Longbottom?”

Neville shook his head and closed his eyes for a moment, debating on how he should handle this situation. “Just ask Professor Sprout when we get back to Hogwarts… she’ll back me up about this. It was her that told me.”

“Oh, oh, oh!” said Harry, dragging out each word a little longer than the last. His tone of voice indicated at someone just realising something stupid that they shouldn’t have even forgotten about it. “That makes a lot of sense now. You’re a lot like Granger in the sense that you just repeat knowledge instead of studying it. You just repeat things that aren’t even in your own words and take credit for it. I should’ve known, honestly, it was far too professional for you to know. Taking credit for what Professor Sprout had told you, why I never!”

“No, no. No, Professor Sprout and I learned it together!” said Neville, flicking his hands outwards, a gesture that had no real intention behind it. “You weren’t there, Harry, so you have no idea on what happened.”

Harry gave Neville a light shrug, not worth much more than that and began to walk towards the front doors of the state. He wondered what they actually looked like as they looked to be made of glass. “What do you want, Longbottom?” he asked when he realised the boy was walking towards him. “I was clearly done with the conversation and your ignorance, hence why I was walking away.”

Neville paused mid-step, his right foot still hovering in the air. “I was just thinking,” he said. “You should eat more, Harry, you’re looking rather thin.”

“What are you, Longbottom, my mother?” said Harry, a sneer on his face. He started to walk again, planning on just throwing his next words over his shoulder. He continued his walk and finally lost Longbottom, who was standing outside in the dark, not that he cared. He pushed open the front door to Potter Estate and entered the large open room, a circle sofa was placed in the middle of the room and off to the left was a closed French door.
He avoided that door and walked up the circular stairs, ignoring the archway with a darkened room and a red ceiling light on. He walked around aimlessly, for what appeared to be around three minutes before he found himself back on the ground floor with nothing to show for his adventure but a look of frustration.

He walked past a few portraits, which were magical, and scowled at them as they did everything normal magical portraits should do, such as: bicker, complain, whine, and any other synonym for those words. He wondered why magical portraits were out in the open, so close to where Muggle guests would be.

“A charm is placed over us, boy,” said a portrait, taking pity on the curious expression. “Only people that are magical can see us move and if we sense that a Muggle can see us, we report back to the main study and then one of your parents come and investigate.”

Harry nodded and continued his journey. The sound of his feet echoed throughout the corridors, despite how nicely decorated they were, an echo was still present. He poked his head into each room, looking for someone or a house-elf to help him find his room. The latter was preferred.

“Master Harry, sir, you being lost?” said the house-elf, looking concerned. “Visy will being showing you to your bedroom!”

“Master Harry?” said Harry, stressing the word. “Have I grown enough to no longer be considered the ‘Little Master’?”

Visy’s eyes bulged slightly. “Well, Master Harry, you are being Little Master, but you’re not being Little Master.”

Harry ignored the house-elf and followed behind, wondering why the title, one that he hated as a child, was annoying him so much now that it wasn’t his. He couldn’t wrap his head around the small detail of losing a nickname and a title from the house-elves.

“No, no… you is still being Little Master,” continued Visy. “There’s being a Littler Master in the other room and Little Master and Littler Master is being confusing. Visy is being very sorry, Young Master, Visy is being a very bad elf!”

Harry allowed the house-elf to direct him down various hallways and through a sitting room without much complaint. On the walk, he had tried to soothe the house-elf in various ways, hoping that something he said would cheer the thing up. All his attempts failed and he found solace in the fact that the house-elf, Visy, would cheer up remarkably once he had given her a task to do.

He had studied house-elves closely during his few years, even sinking to asking Tom, the one in his head, and Tom Riddle about them. The former wasn’t very much help about them, claiming that like all creatures, they’re free to do what they want, and questioning them about their lifestyle will offend them. The latter, Diary Tom Riddle, claimed that house-elves were more powerful than wizards and they were forced into a contract. He had read a few rare books three or four times just to understand the basics of the house-elves.

It seemed wrong that they loved to wait around on witches and wizards without wanting anything. He first assumed that they had been forced into it, which Mopsy claimed wasn’t true many years ago. Funnily enough, he wasn’t the only person to take an interest in house-elves and their past. The other was a distant relative to the Smith line.

“Here you are being, Young Master. If you being needing anything, anything at all, then you being calling Visy, and Visy will come,” said Visy, beaming up at the wizard. She vanished soon after
with a soft crack.

Harry slowly pushed open the door to his bedroom, which was a nice dark brown colour. He wondered whether his room would be fully decorated or if it would be empty, with just the bare necessities in it. A part of him wondered how his parents would get the required information of what he liked and didn’t like.

He poked his head into his bedroom, holding his breath as he wondered what it could contain. Would he have a large bed which was more than half the room, or would he have a small bedroom with lots of wall space? The possibilities were endless and it was making him highly curious.

He remembered far too late that the room had a light switch for the light and not a torch bracket. He glanced into the pitch black room and felt alongside the doorframe for a light switch, which he found after twenty seconds of running his hand up and down the wood.

His bedroom was an ‘L’ shape, one that had been rotated to the left, with the long side away from him. On his left was a box that didn’t have a door and he assumed that it was something, perhaps pace for a walk in wardrobe. There were some shelves and hooks on the small wall, which allowed for a coat or jumper to hang up near the door. The right side, which was his favourite by far, held a floor-to-ceiling bookcase, which was currently empty, but he’d fill it up really quickly. There was a small desk and a small chair that look like what the Muggles called a beanbag.

There were two arched windows that were covered by a black curtain that was drawn shut, overlapping slightly so that no light got through at all. Just beyond that was a rather large queen size bed, one that you couldn’t move an inch without it blocking something. He made his way towards the wooden wall, which was to the left of his bed, on the box that he thought was the walk I wardrobe and he was correct.

When he opened the walk in wardrobe, he was rather surprised at how big and spacious it was. He bent down and studied a place what he assumed was for his shoes and when he pulled the lever, a part of the wardrobe merged into each other and revealed a small staircase, which was going downwards. He wondered what was down there.

Wasting no time, he dashed out of the room and aimed his wand at his bedroom door. “Colloportus!” he muttered, smiling as the door shone a blue and then he heard the click that indicated the door was locked. Dashing back into his wardrobe, he made his way down the stairs, set on doing some exploration.

‘Don’t trip down the stairs,’ said Tom, helpfully. ‘Wouldn’t want to break your neck.’

Harry ignored Tom and crept down the stairs, leading into what appeared to be a hidden dungeon. He threw an Incendio at the empty torch bracket, his voice echoing around the room. He smiled when the entire room was lit up, thanks to the Protean Charm on the torch brackets. He glanced around, wary if the many cobwebs, which he disposed of in a timely manner. ‘This room is amazing,’ he thought, knowing that this simple dungeon room was about three times bigger than his bedroom.

The thing that almost made his mouth water was the potion lab that had four different sized cauldrons, ready to brew in. The shelves had very few ingredients on them, and the few that were there looked about five hundred years old.

He made his way over towards the shelves, studying the few completed potions with amazement. His green eyes were filled with excitement as he studied everything in the room. “I wish it was fully stocked,” he said out loud, a breathy sigh at the end of his statement. “I could probably use Mopsy to
Harry spun around, his head slamming into the shelf in his shock. Really, was today just the day for people to sneak up on him? “Who’s there?”

“I’m sorry I startled you,” said the man in the portrait, his frame coated in dust. “I’m Linfred, Linfred of Stinchcombe, later known as the Potterer, but you may call me Linfred Potter. I am, as you should know if you looked up Potter history, the founding patriarch of the Potter family. Who might you be?”

“Oh! It’s a real pleasure to meet you, Linfred!” said Harry, brushing a bit of dust off his jumper. “I’m Harry, Harry Potter. One of your descendants… obviously.”

“I can see that, yes, but you don’t look like you are. Maybe the traditional Potter looks have changed over the years. As a boy, you’d look more like your father than your mother, at least you should.” Muttered Linfred, studying the young boy closely. “You don’t have much of the infamous Potter qualities… I know this because each Potter portrait I have communicated with has looked something like me.”

Harry’s smile widened and he couldn’t help the chuckle that escaped. “I didn’t exactly get the Potter looks, at least not as I grew. According to my mother, I looked the spitting image of my father for a while. As you can see, they’ve vanished,” he paused, trying not to fidget under the intense gaze of the man that was around in the thirteen hundreds. “According to Salazar Slytherin, I look like him when he was a child. Of course, that makes sense as I am technically his heir.”

“Now, I know that the Potter line has never crossed paths with the Slytherin line,” muttered Linfred, trailing off somewhat. “How are you his heir? And if you are, it can’t be by blood.”

Harry stood straight. “I’m not exactly sure how I’m his heir, just that I am,” he muttered, stressing the two words. “It’s not by blood, no, but I have spoken to Salazar’s portrait many times.”

“Access to his properties?”

“No claim to the Slytherin vault, properties or name,” replied Harry. “I could ask Salazar and get him to oversee the name change, but aside from that, I can’t just use it.”

“Makes sense, I think,” said Linfred. “Just like we have no claim to the Gryffindor estates, vaults, and names.”

“Oh, yeah.”

“It’s been many years since I’ve spoken to an actual living descendant,” said Linfred his kind smile vanishing and was replaced by a concerned one. “I feel as if I need to inform someone of the old forgotten Potter heritage. If you would like to listen, pull up a stool.”

Harry nodded and moved across the room, pulling a dusty stool with him. “Tergeo!” he muttered, tucking his wand away as he sat on the stool, looking up at the portrait on Linfred. “Sure!”

Linfred couldn’t stop the wide smile from appearing on his face. “I shall start from the very beginning, avoiding my own childhood as that’s irrelevant. I do hope you’re comfortable, as this will be a long story,” he paused and waited for the boy’s nod. “Right. As you’re most likely aware – at least I hope you are – I grew up in a small village that had a community like a family. The village of Stinchcombe, Gloucestershire. I lived next to Muggles, not that they were called that at the time,
hidden from them, but still in the open enough that I wouldn’t be questioned. I had a slight façade of being absent-minded – actually, no, I was rather absent-minded… I guess my real façade was being eccentric.

“I was a kind person, and everyone knew that. I would help anyone, no matter if they were actively condemning the death of other witches and wizards. It wasn’t like what was written on those cards that everyone collects, it was horrid.

“A lone woman knocked on my door one night, her eyes filled with tears and her newborn infant wailing in her arms, despite her soothing. She quickly told me that her son was rather sick and I was her last hope, having spotted the various plants in my front garden. She assumed that I was a druid or something, a gift from the heavens.

“I had to help her. I just had to, if not for her then her son. I invited her inside without a thought of the things that she may see and gestured her into the kitchen. I handed her a potion to feed to her son, which she did. She never knew that her son was being treated by a wizard and I never even had the thought to tell her that magic had saved her son. They would’ve killed the son for it.

“After a few days, she came back to my house with no tears in her eyes. She thanked me for about twenty minutes, saying that the fever her son had vanished one night. What I didn’t know was the woman was rather popular in the town and soon enough everyone began to praise me for saving the life of the future prince! I had no idea. I just smiled and said that it was no issue and that she should keep a close eye on the child as herbal remedies may not remove it instantly.

“I do hate to admit it, but I wasn’t magically powerful. I guess that it worked for me as no one saw me as a threat, just a thin man who worked with plants. A druid. Back then, a druid wasn’t considered magical, instead, they were someone who was in touch with nature. Your facial expression has slacked and that means you already know this. Good, good.

“I soon began selling the remedies I made to other people, commoners, and started off a fortune. I never did it for the money and I never aimed to. I just wanted to help people. Regardless, a few weeks later I was presented a pure white robe, which I still grin at, and was announced as a druid, my title was prestigious and many people knew my name.

“The family of the prince that I saved tracked me down and thanked me once again, giving me a piece of land that would last for an eternity. I smiled, thanked them, and began to move. The land you’re currently on is the land I was gifted by saving an infant prince. The original building was in place and it took some work to get it up to living standards, but I pushed through it and turned it into a small two room house. The second room was underneath the first, which was where I did all my brewing.

“I met my wife a short time later and we had seven lovely children. You see, my wife and I liked that number as we both had strong ties to it. We had a theory that our seventh child would be strong and would change the world. Each of my children did amazing things and despite what some did, I’ll never forget them.

“My first-born was magically powerful, more so than my wife and I combined. He helped set up the wards around the property, not hiding it, but making anyone who wanted to harm us or steal our research turn away, unsure of what they actually wanted from us. Amazing piece of magic.

“My second-born was by far the most charismatic of the lot. He could – and would – talk the pants off anyone to get what he needed. He became a force in the royal scene and an advisor to some of the most prestige names known in the world.
“My third-born was different and one I regret the most out of all my children. I don’t regret having him and I’d never take that back, but I regret raising him how I did. He was a very proud wizard and he refused to bow to non-magical people. He, unlike myself, was very powerful in the aspect that he had a drive to learn and study everything. He vanished at the age of fourteen and came back at the age of sixteen, a very changed boy. There was something missing in his posture and I just knew that he had killed in his time away and that he enjoyed it. I couldn’t hate him for killing, as I loved him. He turned into a monster and became feared under another name. He ruled with fear and was leading a vast war against the non-magical people. He did inherit my ability at healing and was able to heal himself after each battle. The issue is that he rallied the repressed witches and wizards and began fighting. It was chaos. He was fatally wounded sometime in his twenties, I don’t remember his exact age, and he was unable to pull through. The world suffered eight years of his reign. His final words were wishing death on me, as I was a coward. I watched him die and told him that I wouldn’t heal him, even as tears ran down my face. Watching your own child die is the worst experience. I buried him, of course. His bedroom hasn’t been touched since. If you’d like to explore, I urge you not to disrupt his belongings. He invented many curses that have no cure, despite being almost seven centuries old.”

“Is his room down here?” asked Harry, not really wanting to speak. “If you need a break, you can take one.”

“His room is indeed down here,” said Linfred, his eyes glittering with tears. “He preferred living in the dark. I should’ve known instantly.”

“I’ll have a look later,” said Harry. “I promise I won’t touch anything.”

“Good lad,” said Linfred, a smile on his lips. “It has been many years, as I said before, since I’ve spoken with a living human and I won’t allow this change to go to waste because I’m an emotional old man. I did love him, I always will. Moving on.

“My fourth-born was a girl and she was beautiful, fully inheriting her mother’s good looks. She married off almost as soon as she could. She fell in love with the only son of a blacksmith. It was a good arrangement as it allowed us the material to upgrade the house a little more, despite the fact most of my children were already of age.

“My fifth-born was a quick learner, a genius. He worked with me to improve my older remedies and make them more efficient and less magical. Things that worked instantly was a sign of magic and it took a lot of effort to make them take time. He fell to a disease that neither of us could cure, despite the hundreds of hours. I buried him next to my other son.

“My sixth-born was a lot like my second-born and followed the same path, except he married into royalty. He used the fame of the family to get the hand of a princess. Fascinating tale.

“And finally, my seventh-born, who was a perfect replica of me. He was a master potioneer and adept at healing. He and I sat down and remade each remedy I made, including the ones from his deceased brother. I was an old man at that point, going on eighty, and earning a few glances from the locals as the average age to pass on was around thirty-five. They had heard of my abnormal healing prowess and left it.

“My life was clearly overlived, twice over, and I felt my age. I’m not sure if I lived longer because I was magical or because of all the remedies I made. My last achievement before passing on was inventing some of the most obscene potion bases ever seen and it appears I have succeeded as most potions made these days are based on what I made all those years ago.

“We can now move onto the part that my wife should explain, but she never had a portrait done. Our
children’s love life.

“My eldest son, Hardwin, married Iolanthe Peverell. Allowing us to join a very powerful family. I didn’t care for the powerful family part, as you know, but I was surprised to see him marry off so quickly.

“My second-eldest, despite his ability to charm females into his bidding, was killed for homosexuality, which I still despise to this day. He was in a position of power and because he was seen as the feminine part of a homosexual relationship, he was slain on the spot.”

Harry listened to the story of the children, learning their names in the process. He learned how they grew up, aged, their achievements, and their prowess in certain branches of magic and magical theory. His interest in the third-born son was the highest, as he was related to what would be a ‘Dark Lord’. Despite the fact that Voldemort was the first Dark Lord in many years, none other had claimed the title. He learned that the third son’s name was Harry. It almost made him snicker as he listened.

“– it was my youngest that eventually found and met Gabrielle Gryffindor, the last of the Gryffindor line, and won her heart easily with his talents and his like-mindedness towards her ancestor, especially when she realised that he had helped with the invention of many potions, saving the lives of thousands,” said Linfred, pride entering his chest. “The two had children, which didn’t bear the Gryffindor line, not that Gabrielle had even argued the point. She was just as happy to continue her ancestor’s legacy with such a sweet and loyal family. She had mentioned that Godric would be proud plenty of times.”

Harry sat up, his back cracking in the process. “That was interesting, Linfred,” he said, smiling. “I never knew that the Potter line had such a brilliant history. I was never really informed of it.”

“Think nothing of it lad,” said Linfred. “Now, get to bed, you look dead on your feet.”

Harry quickly pulled himself from the stool, his legs numb, and muttered a quick goodbye and made his way up the narrow staircase, hoping to get into bed and get a healthy amount of sleep before he set off to restock the hidden room.

Harry sat in the lounge room, at least that’s what he assumed it was called, staring at the child that was in the middle of the room, in the spot where the coffee table should have been. He stared the child, his brother, up and down, trying to figure out anything about the boy. He watched as the small boy, not really that small, reached for something on a shelf, his chubby fingers stretching for the object. He listened as the boy began to make small grunting noises, as if that would help him reach the small toy that he wanted.

If he had to guess at the child’s age, he would put some Galleons on one and a half, perhaps two, which means he was born sometime during his first year at Hogwarts. He had hazel eyes, just like James, but his hair had a slight red tinge to the black. He had to admit, the boy would have nice hair when he was older.

When he heard the sound of sniffing and the sure signs of tears forming, he glanced up from the book he had been reading. He realised the child was starting to become annoyed at not being able to reach the toy and was about five seconds away from a temper tantrum. He pulled out his wand and flicked it towards the toy, a split-second later, it began to rattle and fell down onto the ground, almost hitting the child in the process. He ignored the accusing glare of the child and went back to his reading.
“Fwy! Fwy!”

Harry glanced up, feeling something tug on his jumper and looked into the hazel eyes of his brother, who had one hand on his jumper and the other holding a toy in the air. “You want it to fly?” he asked, eyeing the toy with concern. Surely it couldn’t hurt to make the blasted thing fly.

The little boy nodded and tossed the toy into the air.

Harry, being as amazing as he is, hit the little toy mid-air with a nonverbal Levitation Charm. He could only do that spell nonverbally and he hadn’t mastered it wandlessly yet, but he was getting there. Despite what most say, being able to cast nonverbal spells at twelve, almost thirteen, was beyond what would be recognised. One spell – and it was the easiest – but it hardly mattered. He could do it.

He listened to the sound his brother was making with a small smile, unable to fully stop one from gracing his lips. His brother would scream in delight every time the toy sped by his head, his little arms reaching out to catch it, but never being able to. He watched as his brother stumbled and fell over, laughing childishly, and then picked himself up, ready to repeat the cycle.

Lily had been lurking near the doorframe for a while, watching how her sons interacted. She knew that Harry wouldn’t be like James thought and jealous of his younger brother. Harry would always put family above everything else, even studies and his rampant desire for knowledge.

She was wary of her eldest son’s perception, even more so as she was planning to snap a picture of her sons playing around. She wasn’t that type of parent, she’d allow her boys to have a camera free life, but this one was just too adorable.

Without even thinking, she waved Narcissa over.

Harry flicked his wand upwards, making the toy jolt upwards. He realised far too late that it was just mere inches from the boy’s hands. “I could handle the fact that you spent the last three minutes standing there like a lunatic, and I, of course, could handle the one picture. But, did you have to wave Narcissa over? I also assume that Lucius is behind her, ready to swoop in and look at the picture as well,” he paused and flicked the toy in a circle. “None of you are as quiet as you think you are. You, mother, made some kind of cooing noise, of all things. Narcissa’s shoes are louder than a firecracker. Lucius has a very knowing walking pattern, it’s very determined. It’s very easy to know when he’s around, even more so on wooden floors.”

Lily’s left hand instantly went to her forehead, in a fainting gesture. “You knew that I was there, didn’t you?”

“Of course I did, mother. You, of all people, should know that I tend to examine my surroundings frequently,” said Harry, grinning. “It’s a Slytherin trait, at least according to a few of them.”

“A lot of Slytherins have the awareness of a hawk, but some, unfortunately, have the awareness of a rock.”

Harry grinned at Narcissa’s explanation, as if it made all the sense in the world. “As you’re now here, mother, I do have summer homework to complete and I don’t wish to leave it too late,” he smiled and allowed the toy to drop into his brother’s waiting hand. “Have fun, and no more pictures!”

“If you’re lucky!”

Harry grinned and made his way towards his bedroom, intent on instantly diving down the secret
stairway and into his little potions room. Recently, Linfred had taken to chastising him about how he brewed potions. Despite how asinine it may sound, it was a little bit of fun banter that he enjoyed.

“You’re back!” said Linfred, his tone eager. “For a moment, I thought you’d decided to run away and never come back because I corrected your brewing and God forbid you get corrected in something.”

“Cool your cauldrons, old man, I’ve been rather busy,” said Harry, smirking. He knew that Linfred was rather impressed with his vast knowledge in the quiet art of potions. Linfred had explained to him that he was able to see the room because he knew a certain amount about potions. “I’ve told you, Linnie boy, four instead of three would produce a much better quality potion. Not only that, but it’d also produce more.”

“Not at all,” said Linfred. “You’re just obsessive over the number four!”

“I’m not!” said Harry, folding his hands over his chest. “You’re wrong.”

“It’s a psychopathic trait, you know.”

Harry laughed. “Now that’s false and you know it. There’s no indication that a psychopath has any sort of fascination with numbers,” he said, scowling. “That, and I’m sure you already know, I’m not a psychopath.”

Linfred snorted. “Clearly not, Harry, but you do have an unhealthy obsession with the number four.”

“And you with the number seven,” retorted Harry. He heard the sounds of a mock gasp. “Check and mate.”

“I had no such thing!” said Linfred, defending himself. “The number seven is known to be more powerful than anything else, at least in ancient times. It’s back up by my seventh-born son being the most powerful and talented of them all.”

Harry scoffed.

Linfred’s smile grew wider. “Did you know that you count to the number four without even realising? You do it rather frequently as well.”

“What?” said Harry, his voice increasing in pitch slightly. “I don’t do that. I’d realise it if I did something like that!”

Linfred smiled at the boy, his smile reaching his eyes. “Just think back on a memory, any memory will do, and study it closely.”

Harry stood alone, leaning over a cauldron, a trail of dirt up his cheek. He was around eight and his eyes were set in a determined expression that most children would never use. He tossed in four pieces of leather wings from some creature and stirred the potion four times, a smile appearing on his face as he studied the potion. “Excellent,” he muttered, watching as the hue of the potion changed. “Just a bit more time.”

Draco, who had just entered the room to bring his best friend some food, smiled and nodded. “Alright,” he said. “When you’re done, can we please play tag or something? We can even do it on brooms if you’re feeling brave!”

Harry nodded, muttering under his breath.
Harry snapped from the memory, and as if it was put in a VCR, he went back in the memory, focusing on what he had actually muttered.

“One, two, three, four.”

“Oh my God!” said Harry, vanishing the memory as if it had burnt him. “I actually do it.”

“You often count to four, then you stop and smile, then continue with whatever you were doing,” said Linfred, waving it off completely. “At first I had assumed that I was hearing things and just going a bit off in my old age, but when I actually heard it echo back when you were near me, I knew that I wasn’t just hearing things.”

“I’m going insane,” said Harry, frowning. “I’ve gone off my rocker…”

“I did assume that you were counting and most of the time you were,” said Linfred, ignoring the boy. “You didn’t just stand there and count to four for no reason, you were always doing something that required the number. You do things in fours often, though, and you also look for an excuse to use that number for things.”

“Is there a reason why?” asked Harry. “I haven’t even realised that I’ve been doing it. I wasn’t aware that I was doing anything that odd!”

“It’s not that odd, Harry. DO you know that plenty of people have little quirks and obsessions over numbers? My third-born son was highly obsessed with the number six and believed that if he did certain things with it, he’d become more powerful than anyone could imagine. A lot of dark wizards and those bent on domination have had obsessions with numbers. Herpo the Foul, who was obsessed with the number eight. Also, Emeric the Evil, who was obsessed with the number thirteen. Herpo’s obsession laid with the fact that the eight could be turned sideways into an infinity symbol, hence why he shifted onto darker things, rendering himself immortal, or so was claimed.”

“Herpo the Foul is related to Salazar Slytherin,” said Harry softly. He had studied Herpo the Foul fondly over the years. He also wouldn’t admit to Linfred that the name was on the family tree in the Chamber of Secrets.

“Ah, yes, Herpo the Foul, one of the original dark wizards, he invented many vile spells that couldn’t be stopped. I am glad that I was after his time,” said Linfred, shuddering lightly. “I didn’t wish to place you as a dark wizard, or a Dark Lord, my boy, but you know. Most normal people aren’t obsessed with a number, especially numbers with ulterior motives.”

Harry had a confused expression on his face. “I must admit, I’m not very good at culture.”

Linfred sighed, shaking his head slightly. “The number four, in Japanese, is Shi, which is of course, pronounced as she. It is the exact same pronunciation as the word for death, hence the stigma that four is an unlucky number that relates to death. Most Japanese people will try and avoid using the number.”

Harry frowned at that. “Surely not, you’re just pulling things from thin air,” he said with a scowl. “It’s just coincidental, it could mean a lot, to be honest.”

Linfred laughed, he acted in a manner of wiping invisible tears from the corners of his eyes. “Harry Potter in total has four syllables in the name, which is of course what I would have brought up had I been grasping at thin air, as you called it,” he looked down at the scowling boy and sighed once more. “The Japanese have always been rather superstitious, yet it has held true on most accounts. I’m not making it up, you can research it anytime you wish and you may find a more modern
Harry huffed, putting everything that he had just been told behind proverbial mental walls, locking them away from his thoughts. Surely this was just a cruel joke by Linfred to make him fret and question his potion work. His four-step system had never failed before. Further thoughts about his habits had proven Linfred to be slightly correct, though. He often stacked ingredients in four, clumped them in four, cut them in four, some being in groups of four, even if it was two too many.

He turned and glared at the portrait, who had the audacity to laugh at his predicament. ‘Linfred may be a breath of fresh air with his old man attitude,’ he thought, scowling. ‘But that doesn’t mean I’ll forgive him for laughing at me.’

“Don’t overthink it, Harry, we all have our odd little quirks,” said Linfred happily. “I used to pace around the house for no reason at all, twice per day, once in the morning and once at night. My wife was so used to cooking for nine people that she continuously cooked nine servings, even when most of the kids had moved out. Oh, we wasted so much food, but it went to the soldiers and the poor children with no homes.”

“I know, I know… but now that I do it, I’ll always catch myself doing it and that’ll cause hesitation, and hesitation breeds defeat.”

“I have heard a rather familiar saying to that before, just a little different. It’s almost the same, just slightly different, but instead of defeat, it breeds weakness,” said Linfred, an odd expression going onto his face. “Of course, none of that, there’s plenty else discuss besides my ravings about what I heard centuries and centuries ago.”

Harry nodded in slight agreement. “Besides, you still have to help me perfect this base on this potion, something about it seems off, and I have invented my own potion before and I cannot for the life of me figure out why it’s like this…”

That’s how Harry spent the remainder of the first month of the school holidays, hiding in the room under his bedroom and brewing a potion that he kept a secret, a very big secret. Of course, he was rather social, when he needed to be, and spoke to everyone in the house. It also led to him hunting for an alert type ward that went off in the room below when someone was approaching the door to his bedroom, which allowed him to quickly dart from the room and get into a façade of a position, mostly reading as it took the least effort to replicate.

Chapter End Notes

If anyone’s curious, the saying that Linfred is basing it from is the one his third son used, which is: if you hesitate, you may as well just lay down your weapons as you’ve already lost.

Also, many people like this pre-rewrite and asked for more depth on the third son, so I have given it. I’m not sure if Harry was used back in those days, but it’s a nice strong name and much better than Hadrian and Harrison, at least in my opinion.

Also – Jesus – some people enjoyed Linfred and because of that, I decided to not cut him from the story in the last scene. I also lowered Harry’s obsession with four. It was a bit overkill last time. Also, made him only able to perform the Levitation Charm nonverbally instead of nonverbally and wandlessly as many people thought a twelve-
year-old doing that was rather unrealistic (lol) and I agree. Harry’s smart, not super powerful.
Happy Birthday, Harry!

Chapter 6 – Happy Birthday, Harry!

“Speech” | ‘Thoughts’ | ‘Tom’ | “Parseltongue” | Memories / Flashbacks / Letters

Rewritten: 15/September/2016

Harry knew, like all people with a brain, that today was his birthday and that meant that he’d have to go down into the hidden dungeons and greet a certain portrait that had vowed to make his day Hell on Earth.

Of course, Linfred, the aged git, made his day worse by grinning at him and muttering things like: becoming a teenager and entering life as an angst-driven rebel under his breath.

“If you’ve got something to say,” said Harry, waving his hand in a warning gesture. “Then I suggest you say it.”

He didn’t stick around after Linfred began spewing nonsense about how his body would change and he would become a man, a young man that spent his life ruled by emotions, and a primal emotion that he’d discover in due time. ‘Emotions are for the weak,’ he thought dumbly as he stormed up the stairs. ‘Slytherins aren’t driven by emotions and we’d never get upset over something so small and tiny that we lose focus.’

Tom made a snorting sound.

‘If you’ve got something to say –’

‘– then say it,’ finished Tom. ‘Is that your new catchphrase, Harry? I must say, it’s better than that knowledge is power drivel that you go on about.’

Harry’s day was already ruined and he hadn’t even been told about acne, which, despite potions, still ran rampant among witches and wizards. He didn’t like the idea of having acne at all and he was set on avoiding any food that could cause it. Maybe, just maybe, he could invent a potion that got rid of it for once and for all?

He walked out of his bedroom with a scowl on his face, his right foot kicking the basket as he walked past it. He stormed through the corridors, ignoring the chuckling portraits as he stomped by them. A sneer didn’t even shut them up! The nerve. He bit his lip and threw himself into the armchair in the lounge room, wondering where Nagini was.

“Little Master!” said Mopsy, her eyes going wide. She had just popped into the room with something hovering above her head. "Mopsy is glad to being seeing you on this brilliant and warm day.”

Harry, despite wanting to yell at the house-elf, smiled at Mopsy’s antics. “Good morning, Mopsy,” he said softly, his voice betraying nothing of how agitated he was. “And what are you doing on such a fine day?”

Mopsy’s eyes went wide and she shook her head slightly. “Mopsy is be – doing nothing, Little Master,” she said, correcting herself. “Mopsy is just visiting Visy, Little Master… just visiting Visy.”

“And what’s that above you?” asked Harry, lifting his right hand to gesture at the package. “It looks
suspiciously like a gift.”

“Mopsy has not being lying to Little Master,” said Mopsy firmly, her eyes going slightly wider, but she held her ground. “It’s not a gift, Little Master. It’s a gift for Visy for being such a – such a good elf.”

There were so many things that Harry could have corrected in that simple statement, most of them blaringly obvious, but house-elves didn’t think like humans did and their speech made sense to them. “Alright, Mopsy, have a great time with Visy, and be sure to say hello for me,” he said and watched as the house-elf scurried from the room, not even bothering to Apparate. He could have demanded that Mopsy tell him what she was doing, and he knew that the house-elf was trying not to blurt out her secret, but that would ruin the surprise and he really wanted to see how this would play out. It was rare for a house-elf to do anything secretive.

He twisted his head towards the larch arched window and evaluated the day. Yes, today was his birthday and he was officially thirteen, entering the teenage stage. Technically, he was thirteen at 11:59, a minute before midnight. It always amused him that he was born just mere moments before July ended and that he would have missed Hogwarts by a year had he been a minute later in birth.

Just yesterday. They had celebrated Longbottom’s thirteenth birthday, which had a spectacular and a boring and dull birthday part to accommodate it.

**FLASHBACK**

Harry stood in the drawing room of Longbottom Manor, his black hair combed over into a neat and respectable comb over, something you wouldn’t expect to see on a young boy that was soon to be a teenager. His bright green eyes slowly filling with boredom as they flickered over each person in the room, silently pleading that something exciting would happen. Maybe that old woman who was cradling that slightly alcoholic beverage would take one sip to many and start ranting about something, causing an unforgettable scene.

Neville Longbottom’s birthday was celebrated by the entire United Kingdom, at least the magical part of it. Some countries, mainly those in the European region, understood what the boy had done, a lot of them didn’t care. Neville had been pushed and prodded out into the world, forced to expand his fame and money in such a manner that would make the Malfoy family look like a bunch of peasants.

The Longbottom family, while not poor, went from average to one of the richest families from donations alone. Add in the book deals, the biographies and all that other asinine garbage that they didn’t need and they had enough money to do what they needed.

Harry snorted and decided to scan the bookshelves that were in the room. Longbottom had no class and stored his books in the drawing room like an idiot. His eyes landed on the cover of Neville Longbottom and the Battle with the Banshee. It was by far the most popular and full of it book that he had ever seen. It was the best-selling book among children for three years with no sign of actually slowing down. The worst part of it all was that Longbottom had taken his idea and implemented. He was sitting with his mother and he stated that it was foolish that the book hadn’t been altered and sold to Muggles.

Augusta Longbottom did it the very next day and now the book is a best-seller with Muggle children as well! A threat of a lawsuit and some threats and he was able to make Neville hand him forty percent of the profits.

The sequel was just as bad as the first. Neville Longbottom and the Distraught Dragon was just as
popular and just as talked about as the first. It starred Neville, at the age of ten, riding around the world on the back of a lonely dragon.

Many didn’t blame Neville for the fact that his fame had been milked, none at all. Longbottom could have walked up to the Minister and killed and everyone would cheer and applaud. If he did that, he’d be tossed into Azkaban.

The fault of the boy’s name being monetarized laid with the matriarch of the family, Augusta Longbottom, not that she would ever admit to doing wrong, after all, Neville was more famous than her own son had been, and to her, this was a major accomplishment. One that she frequently shared.

Augusta Longbottom had handed Neville a wand before he could even walk straight and then threw a book in front of him and forced him to read it. Harry knew that Longbottom was actually rather talented with a wand and knew a lot of spells that most fifth-years would blink at. Yes, Longbottom could beat most of Hogwarts in the blink of an eye. Except for him. He’d never lose to Longbottom.

Harry’s musing was cut short as he saw Granger, of all people, stumble into the room, her arms loaded with books. She gestured towards Longbottom and waited for him to walk over, a wry smile on her face. He sneered, knowing that the moron wouldn’t actually read the books, instead, he’d just sit there and act as if he had.

“Neville!” said Hermione, her hand reaching out to slap the boy on the arm, her cheeks flushed. “I did not do that!”

Harry, having had enough, walked over towards the two of them. “Longbottom,” he said, smirking at the boy. “You’re wanted in the other room.”

“Thanks, Harry,” said Neville, walking from the room, leaving behind Hermione and Harry.

Harry took a step forward, making Granger take a step backwards. “I had a question, Granger,” he said, smiling. “May I ask it?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t need to sound so frightened, Granger, we’re both mature and in an open place,” said Harry, stressing the open place. “I’m not evil, Granger, I wouldn’t harm you.”

Hermione sniffed. “You back me into the wall,” she said, her eyes narrowing. “Of course I’ll be frightened.”

“I find you rather attractive, Granger,” said Harry, leaning forwards slightly. “Your lips and your face are rather divine, if I must say so myself. I have never seen such beauty.”

“Go away, Potter!”

“Hush, hush, Hermione. The only reason I’ve been mean to you was because I liked you. Haven’t you heard that saying before?”

Hermione ignored the use of her first name and pushed away from Potter. “You’re up to something.”

In the blink of an eye, Harry had her back against the wall and his hands next to her shoulders, pinning her in place. “I like you, Granger,” he said, leaning forwards. His lips were mere inches from hers.
Hermione could feel his breath on her lips and it made her shudder. She knew what he was trying to do and her parents had said to not fall to it. They may’ve been dentists, but they were rather smart as well.

“Potter!”

Harry smirked as he heard Weasley’s footsteps approaching. Longbottom was obviously following behind. “Can’t you see I’m busy, Weasley?” he said, smirking as he pulled away. “Granger and I were having some alone time.”

“You’re a jerk, Potter,” said Hermione, huffing. She pushed him away and went to walk next to her friends. “I knew what you were doing straight away, not that you weren’t subliminal about it at all.”

“Hermione, darling, what do you mean?” said Harry, his eyes widening. “I don’t understand.”

Ron pulled out his wand. “I’m warning you, Potter!”

“Warning me?”

“Stay away from Hermione!”

“She came on to me,” replied Harry, waving the redhead off. “She told me that she wanted to see my wand, Weasley, and then she leant in real close and –”

“Shut up you dirty git!”

Harry put a hand over his heart and grinned. “Jealous, Weasley?”

“I swear to Merlin, Potter, I’ll shove my wand so far up –”

“Would you be quiet, Weasley? You’re causing a very big scene at Longbottom’s amazing birthday party,” said Harry. “Also, now I see why you’re jealous. You want me, not Granger.”

“W-what?”

“Come on, kids,” said Arthur Weasley. “We just need to borrow the birthday boy and his friends for a moment.”

“You best watch out for her, Weasley,” whispered Harry as the boy walked by. “One way or another, I’ll take her from you.”

Ron glared and followed his dad, Neville, and Hermione.

Harry glared at their retreating backs. He had been planning that little one for a while and the reaction he got wasn’t satisfying at all. He had been told about seduction and wooing the ladies by Linfred, but that wasn’t what the man said would happen. Maybe trying it on Granger was a lost cause as the witch wasn’t worth the effort. He did learn one thing, however, and that thing was that Weasley has a crush on Granger and is acting if the girl needs defending. As if his first kiss would be with Granger, how gross.

He stood and watched as the Golden Trio slowly dispersed and shifted away from Weasley’s father. He made his way back towards the spot he had claimed near one of the windows that overlooked the grounds of Longbottom Manor. He glanced at Granger, noting that she was directly under a rather large golden vase. The sudden thought of having that fall on her head and knock her out looked very appealing to him.
Dropping his wand from his forearm, he leant against the wall and very discreetly aimed his wand at the vase. A quick nonverbal Levitation Charm had the vase slowly wobbling towards the edge. Because the thing was so heavy, he had to put a bit more force and intent into the spell than he would normally do, but there was a reason that wizards weren’t levitating houses.

The vase wobbled off the ledge and fell straight towards Hermione Granger. It appeared as it was falling in slow motion, each rotation of the vase was seen by the people standing near, watching as the vase spun through the air, intent on crashing onto the head of the oblivious Hermione Granger.

Hermione stood there, frozen. She was unable to move or think.

Neville, having heard the vase slightly rattle, was the first to move and act as soon as it began to fall. He didn’t bother to speak, nor did he even think to use his wand. He rushed forwards and shoved Hermione out of the way, as fast as he could, and watched as the golden vase crashed into the spot where Hermione was just mere seconds ago. “Wow,” he breathed as ash and gold pieces of the vase flew into the air. He rubbed the cut on his arm warily.

“Y-you s-saved me!” said Hermione, wrapping herself around her best friend. The realisation that she could have been seriously injured or even killed made her sob. “I-if not f-for your quick r-reflexes, that c-could’ve f-fallen s-straight onto me! I would’ve d-died!”

Harry scowled and flicked his wand at the broken vase. “Reparo!” he muttered and watched as the vase knitted itself back together in a swirl of gold shards. He tucked his wand away and lifted his head, addressing the looks that he got. “There’s no point in leaving the thing broken on the floor where little children can run into the room and cut themselves on it. My little brother is walking around and I’d hate to see him hurt because people lack the common sense to clean up broken things. If you’d excuse me, I need to do something.”

Neville watched Harry leave, noticing the slightly annoyed look on his face.


**END FLASHBACK**

Harry pulled from the memory and sighed. He cursed the fact that he had acted so rash and allowed his inner emotions to take over and make him do something so foolish. Even if the vase had fallen on Granger’s head, there were plenty of witnesses and various people that would be checked by the Aurors. He didn’t care about the consequences of the vase hitting Granger at that moment in time… he just wanted the girl to suffer for thwarting his plans. A very foreign feeling in his usually composed mind, but one that he was able to ignore it and push it aside as once occurring thing.

He found himself walking around the Potter Estate, his feet carrying him along the path as his mind was unusually blank. He saw James in the kitchen, a half-eaten croissant sitting on a plate in front of him. He studied James as he drank his steaming tea, his right hand tucked behind him and scratching at the back of his head. ‘Must be stumped on an Auror case,’ he thought as he fled the room, beginning his journey towards the library.

James sat at the kitchen table, his lunch pushed aside and his quill smearing ink into his hair as he drummed the back of his head. He sipped on his tea as he debated on what he should do for his eldest son’s big day. He knew that Harry wouldn’t care much for a big birthday party and that he would much rather get books and begin his antisocial behaviour. Yes, Harry wasn’t one for birthday
parties. He knew that and still, all he had written down was a birthday party.

Gone was the little shy boy that Harry once was, staring wide-eyed up at everything as he took it in. That small boy had changed and flourished into an intelligent and somewhat charming young man. He was still somewhat bitter about everyone and everything that he saw as wasting time, but he was still in pursuit of knowledge.

He knew that his son was rather bitter towards Neville, despite all that Neville had been through. Ron Weasley got the same amount of hatred because he was an enemy by association. He could almost say that his son was jealous of Neville. It did make sense and it would have filled in a lot of blanks that were apparent in their lifetime. He couldn’t blame the Gryffindor and Slytherin rivalry as the two seemed to hate each other the first time they met. It was like hate at first sight.

He knew deep-down that he hadn’t been the best father to Harry, but wasn’t that the joy of learning to being a parent? He made roughly the same mistakes that his own father did for him.

He huffed and flicked the quill out of his hair. He heard the sure tale sounds of footsteps going down the hallway and he wondered who that was. They definitely belonged to a child as the steps were light and they weren’t heavy like most adults tended to step. “Most likely one of Arthur’s children,” he said, reminiscing on the Weasley family and their luck.

The Weasleys had won some Galleons and were taking a trip in August to visit Egypt, which was where Bill was staying. He didn’t know how Arthur had won it, but he had and the man had been ecstatic and almost quivering in happiness as he tried to hide it from his family so he could surprise them.

“James!” panted Lily, snapping her husband from his thoughts. She skidded to a halt in front of her husband, who glanced up and gave her a goofy grin. “Harry’s door is locked and I cannot open it with any spells that I know! What if he’s hurt and needs our help?”

James watched as his wife picked up his tea and finished it off. “I’m sure he’s fine, Lily,” he said. “It’s Harry. He won’t harm himself in any way, especially not with potions and he cannot do magic and he knows that.”

“He did magic yesterday!” said Lily, frowning. “No Ministry letter came. Not to mention all the other times during this holiday!”

“I’ll look into it,” said James, thinking. “He was with an adult and at a place where adults usually are. The Ministry won’t track that as he’s around an adult and they can’t send out a letter in case it was the adult doing magic.”

“I know that, James,” said Lily, placing her hand son her lips. “What are we going to do about Harry?”

James frowned as he thought about it. He knew that his son couldn’t be hurt and that he hardly did anything that could endanger him in any way as it wasn’t the Slytherin way, as they said. He also knew that his son hadn’t set up a brewing station yet. “Well, Lily,” he started, running his hand through his hair. “Lils… Harry’s thirteen now… maybe he’d like some alone time.”

Lily didn’t catch the drift and continued to rant about how her son could be injured. “I always make him lunch, James, always! This time, he hasn’t come down to get it and it’s going cold! It’s our tradition.”

James sighed. “I don’t want to embarrass Harry,” he muttered, not knowing that Lily had lunch for
Harry almost every day. “He’s thirteen now, Lils, he wants and needs to be left alone for a while.”

“I don’t understand, James,” said Lily, getting slightly hysterical. “We always do this, James! Every birthday, without delay. Always.”

“Lily, please…”

“No.”

“If I explain this to you, will you promise to never bring this up to Harry? The last thing a teenager wants to hear is what I’m going to say. Trust me on that. It was my worst experience when I heard about it.”

Lily nodded, her hands still holding the cup firmly. “Yes, James, I’ll keep it a secret.”

James sat quietly for a moment, unsure of how he should start this. “When a boy turns into a young man, he soon discovers that his body is changing and the boy wishes to explore his new body. Skipping over a few things that you already know. Harry, our son, is most likely doing the deed, Lils.”

Confusion flashed across Lily’s face until it all pieced together. “H-he’s doing what?” she said, releasing the cup. She didn’t even register that the cup had shattered on the ground. “Oh my! I never – I never had a brother so I – oh my God!”

James stared. “It’s not a big deal, Lily,” he said, trying to soothe his wife. “All boys do it.”

“Are you two alright?”

Lily jumped half a mile in the air at the sound of her son’s voice.

“I heard the cup shatter from outside,” said Harry, righting the cup with a flick of his wand and a mutter of words. A house-elf, which he hadn’t seen, got the liquid. “Are you alright, mother? You look rather pale, as if you’ve seen a ghost – one of the unfriendly ones. Actually, you look a lot like the first-year students that have just met Peeves.”

“Are you – have you been – have you been outside all this time,” asked Lily, holding her hand over her heart. “I was out there before and I didn’t see you.”

“No, mother, I was in the library,” said Harry, studying his mother. “I lost track of time and I was just coming to collect my lunch.”

“Your door was locked,” said Lily, still looking rather pale. She ignored the look she received from her husband. “I thought something had happened. I’m just glad to see you out and about.”

“Alright,” said Harry, still confused. “I was testing out a new spell on my door, that’s why it’s locked. I’ll be putting it on my trunk to stop thieves from stealing my stuff. Crabbe and Goyle lack common sense and tend to barge into my things as if it’s theirs.”

“Uh, okay.”

Harry smiled at his mother and took the plate he was given. “Thank you, mother. I’ll eat in my room today as I need to perfect the spell,” he fled the room, hoping to practice the spell that way he wasn’t caught out in a lie.

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Harry sat in the formal dining room, which was primarily used for partied and large events, and
studied the mahogany table with slight annoyance. One was built from stone and had a large fireplace directly in the centre, each side had an arch that led into the hallway. The three other walls were built from big glass planes, allowing the room to be submerged in natural light. Of course, there was a small pond with a waterfall and various plants that blocked the glass, allowing for a nice view as you ate.

His eyes flicked up towards the ceiling. He stared at the arched roof, which was supported by wooden beams that entwined around the base of a chandelier that was made of crystal with scarlet and gold patterns on it. He had to admit that the thing was nice, even if it held Gryffindor colours.

He watched as people slowly entered the room, people that he didn’t even know. If attending and hosting the Malfoy annual balls, he knew that no matter what, you had to be polite and greet them as if you liked them. He heard the various snippets of various conversations, some about the dresses, some about the food, and some about trivial things like the layout of the estate. He focused on the two teenage girls and winced as they began speaking about how cute boys were and how they wished they would find a boy that was handsome, rich, and intelligent.

“Look at him, Sarah!” said the girl in the red dress, her eyes not focused on anyone in particular. “Open your eyes and take a look at him! Look how hot he is.”

The girl, Sarah, sighed and followed the not so discreet head tilt. “Honestly, Emily, how can you be so bold? We’re only here because Uncle David knows the family and he dragged us along so that we’d actually get out and talk to people,” she paused and took a good look at the boy. “Doesn’t he go to that fancy school that’s only for rich kids?”

“I dunno,” said Emily. “I don’t care where he goes –”

“Stop fanning the air like that! You look like one of those idiotic girls that do that when someone attractive enters the room. It’s sickening.”

“Speaking of boys, what do you think about the birthday boy?” said Emily, leaning towards the boy who was staring at the far wall with a strange glint in his eyes. “I think he has good hearing, so keep it down.”

Sarah snorted. “He’s cute, but something about him is off,” she whispered. “I’m not sure what it actually is, but something about him just has this feeling of dread. He reminds me of that boy at school that was suffering from depression. He has this look of tiredness on his face.”

“What you just said was depressing, Emily,” said Sarah, staring at her sister. “You should go over there and talk to him. He seems like your type.”

“Depressed?” said Emily, looking amused. “Thanks for the vote of confidence.”

“Nah, Emily, he’s quiet and calculating,” said Sarah. “He’s the type to sit there and assess every situation. He’ll be a politician for sure.”

“I don’t know, Sarah, he’s what? Thirteen? He’s too young for me.”

“You’re fifteen, two years older,” said Sarah. “Talk to him, I bet her uses long words that no one uses anymore. I also bet he can speak flawless French and’ll seduce you with poems and roses.”

“He’s wearing a purple jumper –”

“That’s a cardigan.”
– he could be gay!” said Emily, frowning. “And you just backed up my point… what boy wears a cardigan?”

“It could be a sweater,” said Sarah. “Or some kind of exotic clothing.”

Emily huffed. “I don’t care!” she said towards her sister, whispering. “He could be gay… I’m not embarrassing myself by trying to flirt with him and him turning around telling me he prefers men.”

“Don’t be ignorant, Emily. Boys can wear purple without it being gay,” said Sarah. “D’you know that dad wore purple throughout most of his school days? I’m a hundred percent sure that our dad isn’t gay.”

“Uncle David is and he doesn’t wear purple…”

“Speaking of Uncle David, he’s going to the boy now.”

“Harry! Happy Birthday lad!” said David, pulling up a chair next to the boy. “I was debating about getting you a porn mag, as is tradition for a boy going into his teenage years, but I had no idea what you’re into and handing minors illicit material is against the law.”

Harry blushed and glanced out one of the windows, hoping the few seconds he stared at the small plants made his cheeks lose the redness. “I’m sure you’d have found a way to leave it behind accidently. I’m glad you didn’t, though, I don’t exactly want any porn mags,” he smiled briefly at David. “I’m glad that you thought of continuing a tradition for me, though.”

David barked out a laugh. “If I had a son, you can bet what he’d be getting for his thirteenth birthday,” he muttered. “I still remember my teenage years and I won’t ruin the experience, but it’ll be something you remember for the rest of your life. Sadly, my brother had two daughters and not a son, so I cannot torment the boy with various male issues.”

“At least you can help protect his daughters,” said Harry. “A police officer like you? No one would dare lay a stray hand on them. Do you know that they’ve been over there plotting most of the night?”

David sighed, nodding. “I figured. Those two are hopeless with boys. They work together to find each other boyfriends and always pick the wrong ones. They fall in love with the bad boy and then cry to me when it all falls apart because the boy didn’t care for them.”

“Girls confuse me,” said Harry, admitting his inner thoughts about the opposite sex. He couldn’t wrap his head around the fact that girls would rather chase a boy that wouldn’t treat them right. “Why don’t they just focus on their education and make something of themselves? The excuse that the world is driven by men hasn’t been valid in many years.”

David beamed. “If only those two would pick up a textbook instead of a magazine.”

“There’s not much you can do about it,” said Harry, somewhat cryptically. “It’s impossible to control another person… it’s impossible because a person will always value their own thoughts over what you want, even if they don’t show it outwards. Their thoughts will always come before yours.”

“That makes sense,” said David, a confused expression on his face. “Well, Harry, I best leave and show my partner around and see if I can get him to build me a house like this!”

Harry laughed.

“Thanks for inviting me, Harry, it means a lot.”
Harry had no idea why he was being thanked, it’s not as if he set this up and invited anyone. He was glad that David came, though, as he liked the man. If he had set this party up, it would be more magical and less mundane. He shouldn’t have to worry about slipping in his speech because of Muggles, not that he despised them, but he wanted to cast magic and show Draco his new ability in nonverbal magic.

He turned his attention back to the table and got lost in his own rampant thoughts, mainly about how he had signed up for Muggle Studies, despite being highly knowledgeable about the subject. Yes, he would beat Granger in all the lessons.

He honestly just wanted to slip away and read one of the new books that he had been given permission to take from Harry’s room in the secret room under his bedroom. Linfred had finally caved and allowed him to take a book from his third-born son’s bedroom. He wanted to read it as soon as possible. He was sure that many people would call him insane or a lunatic for wanting to study massacres that had happened, but he didn’t care. He knew that he was different from everyone else, especially his parents. James hated anything regarding death, and his mother was rather squeamish about anyone being harmed.

He needed to study and figure out where the impulse to actually hurt Granger came from. Tom was silent and he didn’t dare tell Linfred that he did it. He would normally use petty jabs, insults, and sabotage were his forte. But never, absolutely never, would he ever think that his first thought would be to drop a vase on her head. What was he? Some kind of psychopathic murderer? No, that wasn’t it. He was just an intelligent boy, now a teenager, which wasn’t to blame, it was the hormones. Yes, it was the hormones… they were to blame.

His musing was interrupted by a rather colourful slur by one of the girls, who didn’t even bat an eye at the word she had just used. He watched as the girl, Emily, sat on the chair with her back towards him. It was funny, if he had to say so, that she was sitting on the chair like a rich girl sits on a horse. In the blink of an eye, the other girl, Sarah, nudged her sister and caused the girl to slip off the chair, landing on her back. The very few words out of her mouth were more colourful slurs, which were drowned out by the laughter of the other sister.

If either he or Draco had said one of the words that the girl used, they would have soap in the mouth for months until they learned their lesson. Narcissa was a Black, as most know, and the three Black sisters were taught how to behave and that they should teach their children the same methods. He remembered a story that Narcissa said about Bellatrix, who swore once and couldn’t even eat without tasting soap for three months. Witches and wizards swore, mainly at the age of eleven and twelve, when they started going to school and the parents wouldn’t find out. If you wanted to hear swearing, all you had to do was listen for it. Plenty of boys were armed with the latest swear words and jokes about their ‘boy parts’.

“Sarah!” hissed Emily, glaring at her sister as she pulled herself from the floor. “You did that on purpose! You made me fall! You want me to look like an idiot in front of everyone, don’t you?”

“You don’t need me to make yourself look like an idiot,” said Sarah, grinning. “Right. That made very little sense, but I have no idea how to word it. You’re just clumsy. Two left feet.”

The two sisters continued to argue softly, small barbs thrown under breaths and generally trying not to cause a scene as they went on and on about their childhood. A few adults had even begun to listen in, chuckling as the unaware sisters bickered on.

Harry soon learned that they were born very close together and despite not being twins, they shared the same birthday. Emily was exactly one year younger than Sarah. They looked exactly the same, though. Emily had long black hair, which was put up in a ponytail. Sarah was obviously the
rebellious one and had bleach blonde hair, with various colours streaked throughout it. It was amusing how much they appeared to be the female counterparts of Draco and him. Their personalities were even the same.

Harry sat in his bedroom, his legs crossed as he stared at the blank wall to his right. He had the blinds drawn and allowed no light into his brooding state of mind. His mind flickered with foreign feelings that would have most Slytherins concerned that he was showing weakness, even if that was just a stereotype forced to be held. No one in Slytherin cared if you had emotions or not. He was concerned about his present, about his future, and about how everything would happen.

He had a deal with Nicholas Flamel, the most talented alchemist in history and he would never have money issues, he would never worry about ageing or dying of natural causes. There was an issue that despite how driven he was to learn and know everything, what if some accident happened and he couldn’t do anything about it? What if Draco needed him and he just froze and did nothing about it? So many different scenarios that could go badly because of his faults.

A small lick of flame began on his palm, his control of fire better than any other magic at the current stage. Salazar had stated that he would have an amazing grasp of fire and water magic, due to his lineage. Fire and water spells would come naturally to him and he’d be able to control them with ease, should he ever need to. There was a downside, but Salazar never said what it was. He never told anyone, not even Salazar, the man guessed, and that’s how it would stay.

A tear slipped from his left eye, trailing down his cheek and dropped into the small ball of fire that he held. ‘Damn water ability.’ he thought, ignoring the other tears that followed. He watched as the fire started to overpower the tears, but the more that came, the more the fire struggled. “Damn water ability.”

When the flame was extinguished, he clenched his quilt close to him, not understand why he was crying like a baby. He was strong, powerful. Powerful people don’t cry!
Harry woke up with the sun beaming down on his face, the blinds were raised and the curtains pushed aside, allowing a thin beam of sunlight to break through into his normally pitch-black bedroom. Ignoring everything as he got out of bed, groaning, and grabbed a handful of clothes. He may have stumbled on a piece of furniture once or twice before he managed to escape his bedroom. He had forgotten the socks, as he usually did, and muttered under his breath.

He made his way through the hallways and towards the bathroom that was near his bedroom. He had claimed that bathroom for himself and it had all his things in there. His favourite shampoo and conditioner, his soap, his towels, and, of course, his toothbrush.

The bathroom wasn’t what you could call lavish. The room was decorated rather simply, considering the décor of the estate. The walls were littered with pristine tiles that sparkled as if they had just been cleaned twenty times over. One wall was covered in a large mirror that went from the ceiling to the roof, just stopping to allow the small box light to illuminate the room. Off to the side was a row of frosted square pieces of glass, hiding the shower from prying eyes. On the right was a small area where the toilet was located, a sink placed firmly next to it.

He had barely been in the shower for fifteen minutes before he heard his mother knock the door.

“Breakfast will be ready in fifteen minutes!”

“Yes, mother!” said Harry, hastening his pace at cleaning himself. It was if he had Apparated out of the shower, as he had moved in the blink of an eye. He tossed the fluffy towel into the small basket and smirked as he pulled his shirt over his head.

He fled the bathroom and took a detour, wanting to avoid the offensive portrait that had vowed to make his life hell because that was the Potter way, at least according to the delirious portrait that claimed that he walked like he had a stick up his backside. The two of them ended up in verbal spats the moment the met each other. It may take an extra minute to get around the portrait, but it was worth it so he didn’t have a headache each morning.

“There you are!” said Lily, her face instantly going into a very happy expression. She placed a plate of hot food in front of her son, who smiled up at her in thanks. “James has already left…”

“Doesn’t he usually start at nine?” said Harry, taking a small sip of the tea. “He’s gone rather early, isn’t he?”

Lily slid a small spoonful of food into her youngest son’s mouth. “Almost every Auror in the country has been called in early,” she said, trying not to sound grim about it. “They’ve been rather tight-lipped about it all.”

Harry knew that if every Auror in the country had been pulled into the Ministry and asked to come in early that something was going on, something massive. He half expected it to already be on the front page of the Daily Prophet, along with Skeeters name and her unique flair for destroying everything
that could be useful. Rita had an infamous following in Slytherin as the woman somehow managed
to get a lot of the important secrets from many pure-blooded witches and wizards.

“I’m sure James will let something slip when he gets home,” said Lily. “We had things planned
today. Damn it all.”

Harry grimaced. He didn’t mind these excuses as to why James was never around as these were
important. Staying at work all day, even when you didn’t have to, and leaving at six in the morning
and not saying goodbye was what annoyed him. Do you live for your job? Do you live for your
family? James had never questioned the latter. James was nothing but a slave to his job.

“Eat up, Harry,” said Lily. “A growing boy needs all that he can eat.”

“Yes, mother.”

“Even Daniel wants you to eat,” said Lily, placing another spoonful of food into said boy’s mouth.

Harry wanted to sigh at the name his brother received. It wasn’t a strong name that the boy should
have. It was Potter tradition to name sons after masculine names and females often received sweet
and soft names. He had received a strong name that meant home ruler, but Daniel? Daniel meant
‘God is my judge’ and that wasn’t a strong meaning at all. At least Daniel’s middle name wasn’t
James, no matter how easily it rolled off the tongue.

His thoughts were disrupted when a familiar owl barged through the arched window, flicking its leg
at him. He studied the owl carefully, trying to piece who the thing belonged to.

“What is it?” asked Lily, studying the brown paper bag with interest.

Harry took the package from the owl and studied it intently. He shooed the owl off and turned over
the package, already knowing what it was. “It’s a book,” he said, trying not to laugh at the
expression on his mother’s face. He unwrapped it and glanced at the title, scowling as soon as he
realised what the book was called. “Granger!”

Lily peered at the book, trying to get a better look. “What book is it?”

“That filthy, vile, disgraceful upstart! I wish that vase landed on her.”

“Harry!” said Lily, shock instantly appearing on her face. “You shouldn’t wish something like that.
She could have been seriously injured and then you wouldn’t be laughing as it wouldn’t be funny –
not that it is now!”

Harry sighed.

“That book is highly discussed,” said Lily, peering at the book. “I’ve heard multiple people
discussing this book in various places. It’s a bestseller. I haven’t read it, but I’ve heard it’s rather
contradicting.”

“The book is very contradicting and is wrong in so many places that I couldn’t get beyond page one
without finding some error with it,” said Harry, pushing the book away from him. “It calls people the
Devil because they’re somewhat different. The quote on the cover would make me skip over this
book.”

“No need to get upset about it, Harry,” said Lily, attempting to soothe her already irritated son. “At
least she got you a present and it’s the thought that counts. I’m sure she wasn’t attempting to call you
“Granger knew exactly what she was doing,” said Harry, his voice slightly deeper as he spoke. He carefully placed the book on the table, despite wanting to set fire to the damn thing. The book wasn’t at fault, so he couldn’t exactly burn it. “Granger’s had it out for me since I first beat her in grades. She’s a known know-it-all and begins to rant and rave if something happens that she doesn’t know. Her very, very small attempt at being a decent Slytherin was petty and horrid. It’s fine. It’s alright. I’ll allow this to pass and I’ll let it slip.”

Lily smiled at her son the moment that he had stated that he would let it slip. She was proud that her son was mature enough to know when to leave something and when to act on it. She knew that her son had a big mouth and tended to be easily offended, he knew better to than stick his head into a confrontation and harm another person. Her son was a perfectly normal hormonal teenager. He was charming, polite, and had no hidden mental illnesses.

“What’s that?” said Harry, looking around, trying to locate where the burst of warmth and happiness was coming from.

“That’s a Patronus, Harry,” said Lily, locating the large white stag in a heartbeat. “That one belongs to James.”

Harry noticed the stag butting heads with the table, waiting for something. “And what’s it doing?”

“Waiting to deliver a message,” said Lily, leaning forwards, waiting for the message to come.

Harry, unaware of what was going on, started to eat his breakfast, uncaring about the Patronus that was intent on making his breakfast go cold. He heard his mother gasp and he lifted his head, his eyes reflecting the bright light above them. “What happened?”

Lily sighed and slowly put her shaking hands onto the table. “A prisoner has escaped from Azkaban,” she said. “That’s all the information I got. Not who, or when, or how. Just that someone had escaped.”

“Just like that? Escaped? Wow,” said Harry, pushing aside his empty plate. “I honestly thought that no one could escape because the Dementors made it impossible. If you’re in close proximity with them for too long, they make you feel far too weak to even bother getting up, let alone escape.”

“That’s what we thought,” said Lily. “All Aurors were called in to investigate it. The Minister is furious.”

“Whoever escaped deserves some sort of medal,” said Harry, amused. “Or some praise and Galleons…”

“Harry!” said Lily, a slight amount of annoyance entering her voice. She felt as if she had been saying his name in that manner rather often these past few days. Perhaps her eldest son wouldn’t be the picture perfect teenager she hoped he would be. “A criminal escaped! And not just one of the lower ones, he escaped from one of the topmost cells. It could be a murder, a child snatcher, anything! He could be a threat to us.”

“He’ll be found, mother,” said Harry. “I’m certain the Auror department isn’t that useless and they’ll have a lead on him soon. Witches and wizards aren’t like Muggles and they don’t stand by and do nothing. If someone spots him, they’ll report it instantly.”

“I know…”
“Let’s not forget that unlike Muggles, wizards can easily play the hero and stun the escaped convict.”

“I know, Harry, I know,” said Lily, her bright eyes reflecting the worry that she felt. “It’s not just the dark wizards I’m afraid of, it’s all the other criminals in there. I just want you, your brother, and James safe. I have no idea what I would do if either of you were hurt.”

“We’ll be fine,” said Harry. “I doubt anyone’ll even bother us in that aspect. I’ll be at Hogwarts shortly, in less than a month, with Severus, a massive amount of professors, and Dumbledore. You’ll be here, safe, with Daniel.”

Lily still looked rather panicked, but she nodded.

“Plus, if anything bad did happen, Nagini is around and she’d make quick work of any attackers. She’s rather quick, you know… you should’ve seen her with the most recent rat that she ate a few days ago.”

“Thanks for the pleasant image, Harry,” said Lily, amused. “I’m sure she would be the very first to attack and be alerted should anything ever go wrong.”

Harry smiled at his mother and stood. “Speaking of Nagini, I better go and get her some food, else she’ll eat me for breakfast.”

Lily watched her son leave the room without saying another word, which she couldn’t fault him for. She was aware that he had somehow managed to float his dirty dishes to the sink without even showing it. She had seen him tuck his wand away as he turned the corner, however. Perhaps she would do the same with Daniel and nudge him towards books and studying. She knew that Harry must have spent a lot of time with his magic and casting it to have such a solid bond with it at a young age.

She turned to her youngest son and smiled at his childish antics, which was to be expected. She vowed, at that moment, to never attempt to steer her children in the direction she wished for them to go. She would stand by them both and would help them both with whatever they needed.

Harry had already made it into his bedroom, having ignored the portraits as he walked by swiftly. The first thing he did was slip the book from Granger onto an empty shelf and glare at it with slight hatred. Yes, he had chosen a secluded section, one that was out of sight from everything else.

“You have destroyed books before,” said Tom. “When you were younger, you used to slobber on them.”

“So?” said Harry, tidying up the bookshelf. Whether he spoke out loud or thought it, Tom would hear it and reply. Tom was just that invasive.

“You could easily destroy that book and feel no guilt about it,” said Tom. “And I’ll ignore that petty jab from you, Harry. You’re just holding onto the book because you have something you wish to do with it, something big.”

Harry gave a mental shrug and focused on finding Nagini, who had been silent for most of the week. He found her on her trademark rock, which she was currently wrapped around. ‘Looks like a small child hugging a teddy,’ he thought, amused. ‘Waking her up would be cruel.’

As if sensing that she was being watched, Nagini lifted her head, studying the scent in the room. “Youngling,” she hissed, surprised. “What are you doing here?”
“Nothing,” hissed Harry, studying the book with a less interested gaze.

Nagini slithered off the rock and towards Harry, hoping to get a good meal in with a few slightly charming and cunning words. She was, after all, a growing snake. “Just nothing, Youngling?”

“Nothing gets by you, Nagini,” hissed Harry. He shifted from the bookcase and slumped on his bed, a small gesture at Nagini made her join him. “I’ve been plotting, Nagini. Nothing bad, of course.”

“It’s not good plotting if it isn’t bad.”

Harry chuckled. “I guess you’re right,” he said, grinning at the snake. “And don’t even start with the whole ‘I know I am’ nonsense.”

“Tell me exactly what you’re plotting and I’ll help you.”

And so Harry did. He spent no less than an hour plotting over minor details with his companion, flawlessly planning for things that would change the year. No one cared about petty pranks or even dumber ‘prank wars’. Any fool can prank someone. It takes a touch of genius, and maybe a subtle hint of insanity to do what he was going to do and he needed it to be perfect.

He got all the small details out of the way, with some help from Nagini and Tom, who seemed amused at what would happen.

Well into the afternoon, the plotting continued. Nagini added things often, as well as demanding things be removed and she be fit in somewhere, as she was a snake and she knew it all. If Nagini was a human, she would consider herself to be a princess or even the Queen. She said as much herself whenever she got the chance.

He wouldn’t even bother arguing, having done it once and learning his lesson. Snakes tended to see themselves as superior and held themselves at great heights. They believed that they were on the top of the food chain, both Muggle snakes and magical snakes. Nagini was different from the other snakes, and he noticed that without even looking. Nagini was a lot like him in personality and traits. She held a high regard for herself, but didn’t show it unless she had to.

He always wondered how each descendant of Salazar Slytherin felt, at least those that had pet snakes. Many were afraid of snakes, despite being able to speak to them. That had led him to studying the Gaunt line, which was a family distressing subject to study, as the Gaunt line was once incredibly wealthy, talented, and well-known. These days, the Gaunt line was known for the insane rambling Parselmouths that didn’t know a lick of English. Bedding cousins and siblings was the downfall of that house. They believed that none besides themselves were worthy of the ability to speak to snakes.

That’s what inbreeding did. His goal was to make every other pure-blood see that what they were doing was awful and would bring the end to them, if not now, then their descendants. Keeping it pure, as many of them said, was destroying the wizarding world before their very eyes.

“Youngling,” hissed Nagini, annoyed. “Stop daydreaming and return to our plotting!”

“Hurry up, Harry,” said Draco, the agitation clear in his voice. “It took father ages to get these reservations for this restaurant and when it takes a Malfoy ages to get something, then you know the place is good.”
“A week isn’t – ah – ages, Draco,” said Harry, panting. “And shut up for a minute, you prat, I’m having issues with the zipper… it’s not going up.”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“It’s obviously broken,” said Harry, frantically zipping up and down the zipper, trying to get it beyond the bit it was stuck on.

“You’re clearly broken,” said Draco, sighing. “Just pull it up and be done with it. Honestly! How hard can it be to zip up your zipper?”

“Shut up, git. I think you’re the one who’s broken,” said Harry, still struggling with the zipper. He let go of the piece of metal with a growl and threw his hands up. “D’you think I’d get away with wearing something else besides these?”

“Not a chance,” said Draco, already predicting how his mother would react if she noticed Harry was in the wrong trousers. “She’ll know as soon as she sees them whether they’re the correct trousers or not. I swear she puts charms on them so she can tell.”

Harry sighed in defeat.

“How can you not pull up a zipper?” said Draco, dumbfounded. “I’ve never worn clothes that have them and I did fine on my first attempt.”

“Liar!”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yep,” said Harry, smugly. “You’ve worn Muggle clothes before, most witches and wizards have. You act as if all you wear is robes and nothing else. I could go through your wardrobe and spot twenty plus trousers with zippers.”

“Stop trying to change the topic.”

“I’m not,” said Harry, glaring at the door that separated him and Draco. “Can we swap trousers? I’ve seen yours and they’re similar. I’m sure Narcissa wouldn’t even notice. We’re almost the same size, you’re just a tad taller.”

“A tad?” scoffed Draco. “You’re about as tall as a house-elf.”

“Whatever,” said Harry. “Are you going to swap trousers or not? I’m sure you’d get this zipper up…”

Draco muttered his breath and leant against the wooden door. “You think that I’d fall for that obvious small bit of trickery? Trying to push your faulty trousers off onto me, I see. You’ve got three minutes before I go and get mother and she can yell at you for taking hours to get ready. I have no idea how a zipper can even get stuck.”

Harry took a small breath, as if preparing to dunk his head in water. “Well, Draco, you see that it can be a rather common issue when the teeth of the zipper are slightly bent and the –”

“I don’t care! Just fix it!”

“What do you think I’ve been doing?” said Harry, snorting. “I’m not like you and I’m not combing my hair for thirty minutes.”
“You know I don’t take that long, you git!” said Draco. “Merlin help me. Are you at least decent in there? I don’t want to walk in and see your bits.”

“No, Draco, I’m putting on the trousers without pants on,” said Harry, his voice pretty much dripping with sarcasm. “If the trousers didn’t fit, I’d’ve said so much earlier than now. The zipper is just stuck.”

“Fine! I’m coming in to help you because you’re so incompetent,” said Draco. He threw open the door and glanced at his best friend, wondering when Harry had gone back to trying to tug the zipper back up. It was rather amusing to see the normally composed boy stuck with such an everyday thing. “I still have no idea how you’re struggling with such an easy task. You can memorise full spellbooks, and what you had for dinner years ago, but you can’t zip up a zipper?”

“That joke is getting old, Draco.”

The two boys didn’t notice Narcissa creep into the room, a curious expression on her face. She was about to say something, but stopped when she realised that her son’s hand was on Harry’s zipper and he was tugging at it. She shook her head and coughed, causing the two boys to fly apart as if a fire had been set in-between them. “Is everything alright?” she said, forcing the amusement to stay off her face. “There’s only five minutes before we should leave.”

“Harry’s zipper is stuck,” said Draco quickly, his eyes darting between Harry and his mother.

“I asked for Draco’s expertise, seeing as he had spent the last three minutes bragging that he had no issues with his own zipper and that lead to this,” said Harry, unconcerned about the whole ordeal. “We were just debating whether to come and ask you for help.”

“I see,” said Narcissa, a gentle hum followed afterwards. She stalked into the room and watched as Harry began to yank on his zipper, as if showing what was happening. In the blink of an eye, she had her wand pointed at Harry’s zipper and sent a silent spell towards it. She watched as the zipper slowly zipped up. “There we go.”

Harry yelped, having no idea that Narcissa had even had her wand out. “What spell was that?” he couldn’t help but ask, hoping that it wasn’t anything bad. It was aimed at a very important area and if it had missed it could have spelt disaster for his future.

“A spell that I often use when designing clothes,” said Narcissa, amused. “Don’t worry too much about your man parts, Harry, it wouldn’t affect them even if it hit them directly. The spell seeks out the zipper on trousers and zips it up, holding it in a state where nothing can hold it down.”

“Doesn’t make me feel any safer,” said Harry as he trailed behind them. “Did you make it or is a spell that many witches know?”

“It’s a common spell that’s used for creating clothes, Harry,” said Narcissa. “I know that it’s rather childlike, but please inform me when you need the toilet. Nothing short of burning the trousers will get that zipper down.”

Harry, going a slight shade of red, just followed behind Narcissa and Draco, wishing they could just Apparate to the place and save an awkward journey there. He was still annoyed about the comment about the toilet and wondered if Narcissa did it on purpose. Even if he did manage to break the spell, he would have to run back to Narcissa with his zipper down and ask for her to fix it.

“Sorry about the car today,” said Lucius, directing Narcissa, Draco, and Harry towards the sleek black four-door car. “Would have just used the Floo or Apparated, but the new business installed
cameras out the front and us just appearing would be suspicious. Plus it will show them that I actually own a car. A running joke is that I walk or butch the bus."

‘Own a car?’ thought Harry as he wrapped the seatbelt around himself. ‘Oh, Lucius, you have more cars than most people have rooms in their houses.’

“Cameras?” said Draco, confused. “Like the wizarding ones?”

“Better,” muttered Lucius, looking rather sour. “Think of them like our pictures without stopping. They capture everything.”

Harry listened as the explanation continued. Outwardly he knew that the Malfoy’s would never associate with Muggles, business or pleasure. However, if you knew Lucius, then you knew that he had no qualms about using Muggles and taking their money for himself. A vast amount of popular Muggle businesses were owned by this man, either under a different name, or by him as a rich man that thrived on owning things.

It was a very popular topic, with everyone getting involved.

Harry, however, was watching Narcissa and when she smirked, her eyes glittering with something, he knew that something was going to be revealed.

“You will never guess what I saw earlier today, Lucius,” said Narcissa, smirking even more when her son choked on his mouthful of water.

Lucius lifted his head slightly. “And what did you see, dear?” he asked, stopping at the corner, waiting.

“Never, in all my life, have I seen such a thing,” said Narcissa, her tone dramatic. “I wasn’t sure what to do, nor how I should approach it. I had just walked in on it, startled.”

Poor Draco had gone as white as snow, as pale as a ghost. He appeared as if he had just seen Death and was waiting for the being to snatch his soul and send him to the depths of Hell. He had stopped spluttering on the water and just sat there deadly still, as if the slightest movement would shatter him.

“The roses,” said Narcissa, smiling. “The roses that had recently wilted just bloomed back to life. A miracle.”

Draco let out a relieved breath, knowing that his mother wouldn’t talk about him being caught attempting to zip up his friend’s zipper. It was odd, in every aspect.

“Also, I caught Draco zipping up Harry’s zipper,” said Narcissa, shrugging slightly. She made sure she had waited until her son had felt safe and secure that she wouldn’t say something. It was best that way. “He was slightly bent over, studying it as if it were his N.E.W.T.s. When I entered the room, I saw him tugging at it. I was rather confused on what was happening. At first, I assumed that –”

“Mother, please!” said Draco, cutting off his mother from what was going to be an embarrassing story. “Harry couldn’t get it up! I mean, he couldn’t get his zipper up and it was stuck.”

“What’s wrong, dear?” asked Narcissa gently. “You look a little flustered.”

Draco, like many other children his age, had received the ‘talk’ when he had turned thirteen, which was during the school year, so he got it when he got home for the holidays. Aside from that, he got many other talks and speeches about growing up and that soon responsibilities would come. However, many of those wouldn’t start until fifth-year and later. As for the ‘talk’, he had received
That from both parents, once from his mother, about how to treat a lady and what they liked, as well as a few minor details about changes in his body. The talk from his father was a little more laidback and relaxed. Not tense like the one from his mother.

“That’s about all the embarrassing stories that I have for this week,” said Narcissa, sighing, as if she needed more things to gossip about. “Draco’s at the age where a lot of embarrassing things tend to start occurring. So, no matter what, I’ll have things to talk about.”

“Mother!” said Draco, a slight whine entering his tone. He turned towards Harry, a pleading expression on his face. “Help me!”

“Harry the Knight!” said Narcissa, beaming. “What a great fairy-tale that would be! Perhaps we could find someone that has a way with words and write it down. We could sell it as a book.”

Draco sighed, cupping his face with his hands. “Please don’t.”

Harry couldn’t hide his amusement. He did wonder why Draco got so worked up over it, as if it embarrassed him. He always knew to never allow it to show that Narcissa had found a weakness about him, as the woman was ruthless and would keep pushing at it just to annoy you. It wasn’t done maliciously, nor was it done to make her son uncomfortable. It was done as an embarrassing thing, something to embarrass Draco in the best possible way.

He eventually tuned out their banter and focused on the buildings that flew by as they drove. He hoped that their destination would be just as entertaining as the drive. He felt the car slow, and pull up at a building that appearing to be more glass than stone. There were many cars that appeared to be brand new lined up outside the building, young men in road coats rushing forwards to collect them.

The four of them whirled past everyone, almost in a display of royalty. The Malfoy’s had no issues with looking as revered and well-known when all the attention snapped to them. A few people greeted them and waved them inside without much thought. What startled Harry the most was that he received the same attention and it didn’t appear to be any different from the same attention Lucius, Narcissa, and Draco received.

He realised that the four of them look similar. Draco was quite clearly his father’s son and pretty much shared the same walk style that Lucius had, as well as the trademark Malfoy hair. There were small amounts of Narcissa in Draco, softening him slightly, but he was still quite clearly the son of Lucius Malfoy. Narcissa had something that most pure-blooded witches wouldn’t dare, and that was two-toned hair. She had lovely black hair with blonde tied around it. He realised that he looked like Narcissa, at least with the black hair and that could explain why he had black hair and Draco had blond.

It was at that moment that he knew that the small family looked just like that. A small family. The realisation stuck with him during the entire walk through the large building, his eyes ignoring all the finer detail on the walls and floors, his eyes locked firmly ahead of him as his mind pulled apart the details that he had just learned about this second family of his.

“Harry,” said Narcissa, attempting to nudge the boy from his reverie.

“I’m sorry, what did you say?” said Harry, trying to compose himself as best as a thirteen-year-old could, which wasn’t very well.

Narcissa sent Harry one of her usual looks and then smiled. “I asked if you were alright. You appeared as if you just had the biggest revelation and that your life depended on knowing the answer at that very moment. Not a nice look for someone so young.”
Harry nodded, not trusting his voice to work properly. Linfred had mentioned something about his voice cracking in odd places as he got older and that made him avoid using words when he was stressed on the situation required control. He knew that Narcissa already knew what was going on in that department and she just brushed it off with a laugh. “Thank you.”

“No problem at all, Harry,” said Narcissa, still smiling. “As for your revelation, if you ever need anything, anything at all, you can come to us.”

Harry once again nodded, hoping to convey his message without words. It was just gold, as Muggles tended to say, that Narcissa had just proposed a solution to the issue that he was currently facing and had no idea that he would have already gone to them if he wanted. If it weren’t for his mother, he would have already jumped ship and moved in with the Malfoy’s. There would have been absolutely no hesitation in it, but his mother held such a high place in his heart and he would never leave her.

He thanked the Heaven’s, not that many witches, wizards, or Muggles said that phrase, he had picked it up in a book and it stuck, that he had a lot of self-control and prided himself to not act rationally, at least when it counted. He felt his self-control slipping as he got older, giving into the thoughts that plagued his mind, the repressed ones. He could feel the proverbial veil that blocked them slowly vanishing for even daring to think about abandoning his mother.

He enjoyed the meal, despite it being a day after his birthday and he was still full from being fed copious amounts of food from his mother. He enjoyed spending time with the Malfoy family. These dinners after birthdays were a common thing and were celebrated instead of a party and a cake with presents being shoved at your face. There was no overbearing people that forced themselves into your personal space, or groups of people, just a nice meal out with your family, or in his case, your best friend’s family.

“Harry, are you alright?” said Lucius, catching a look from his wife. He ignored the questioning look on his son’s face and studied Harry, hoping to find something that would show why the boy appeared to be so conflicted.

“I’m fine, Lucius. Thank you for asking, though. I’m just a little overwhelmed with the meal,” said Harry, trying to string the words together coherently and not ramble, which he failed at as now Draco was staring at him with the same thoughtful expression that his father has. “It’s just been a lot to take in since the school ended.”

Lucius didn’t believe the boy for one moment. When you spend twelve years with someone, you tend to know their behaviour and mannerisms. He knew that Harry was a decent liar, but not to those that he cared about. His face got conflicted and when he lied to someone that he didn’t want to lie to, his eye would slightly twitch. He watched hopelessly as the internal battle in Harry’s mind continued. He debated about turning to Narcissa and asking her for advice or sending her off to talk to the boy, but she gave a small shake of her head.

Draco broke the tense silence with a simple joke, one that wasn’t really funny, and he knew that, but it did its job and made everyone chuckle. It was a pleasant surprise to see the sudden influx of teen-angst be quashed by a simple joke.

The night as a whole was best described as perfection. The ambience of the place, as well as the
meal and discussion just made it perfect. It had set Harry up for the last month of his summer
holidays without a fuss.

The second month of the holidays had gone by at a rapid pace, faster than the first half, which had
shocked Harry as it was usually opposite. He always anticipated the next year and that caused them
to go by much slower than they should have, but currently, they had sped by in the blink of an eye.

Narcissa and Lucius remained to be an issue and were constantly after him, at least trying to get him
to talk about his issues and feelings. He had evaded them both for a while, at least he thought so, but
one day they had been quicker and cornered him before he could escape.

He decided on half-truths, not wanting to outright lie to Narcissa and Lucius, but keep them both in
the dark and not allow them too much information. It had nothing to do with being a Slytherin, nor
was it a manipulative trait that Slytherin prided itself on. It was him being strong headed and refusing
to bow and bend to issues.

He knew that neither of them took what he said as truth and pushed on, demanding more and more
until he cracked and started to say things he vowed he wouldn’t. It really wasn’t fair as they knew
him inside and out, knew how he twisted conversations. It was impossible to outwit them both. He
was forced to sit in that surprisingly comfortable chair and squirm as he tried to scrape by in the
interrogation, revealing that all of a sudden he felt a surge of emotions and then they would vanish.
How was he going to explain that?

Thankfully Draco came and complained that he didn’t understand a question on the homework and
demanded that Harry came and aided him. Lucius and Narcissa could never say no to Draco and
thus he escaped because of his best friend.

He honestly felt as if he had gone from one interrogation to another. Draco had been adamant that
something was wrong and that he wasn’t sharing for some odd reason. He laughed until Draco
muttered about taking away books until he told the truth.

Not the books!

Draco had gone full mother hen mode, as if that would make it easier for him for explain his
dilemma. It had been one of the most bizarre things he had ever seen. Draco the Mother Hen. It had a
nice ring to it.

In the end, Draco had demanded that he stop being in a snit and acting like Weasley.

It was probably what Harry needed the most, light humour, but at the same time something to make
him see reason. For that, he thanked Draco, but cursed him at the same time. Maybe in itself, it was a
defining moment, but at the time it was the worst thing ever, losing control of your emotions and
lashing at your best friend that has been in your life since you could walk wasn’t pleasant.
Harry sat in the brightly lit dining room, which had been his morning routine for the better part of the summer holidays. He ignored the slightly crackle of the fire and the gloomy clouds that lurked in the sky, despite the fact that it should be clear weather. He spied a familiar look owl flying towards the dining room with what appeared to be a package tied to its leg. He knew it was a school owl, there was no one else that would write at this time and send along a package that held letters. He watched, amused, as the owl flew in and sat on one of the chairs, avoiding the table as if it would turn into fire and burn it.

Perfect training of the owls so they didn’t fly into Muggle houses and land on the table, disgusting said Muggles.

He carefully took the package from the owl and watched as it left instantly. He picked up the one addressed to him and began to read.

_Dear Mr. Potter,_

_Please note that the new school year will begin on September the first. The Hogwarts Express will leave from King’s Cross Station, platform nine and three-quarters, at eleven o’clock. Third-years are permitted to visit the village of Hogsmeade at certain weekends. Please give the enclosed permission form to your parent or guardian to sign. A list of books for next year is enclosed._

_Yours sincerely, Professor M. McGonagall, Deputy Headmistress_

“Hm,” said Harry, flipping over the letter to see if anything was on the back. He slid it across the table and allowed his mother to read it. “Hogsmeade visits. You have to sign it.”

“Ooh!” said Lily, quickly snatching up the letter. “I’ve been waiting for this letter for ages! You’ll absolutely adore Hogsmeade, Harry, it’s so perfect near Christmas.”

“I’m not sure if you’re forgetting that we used to live there,” said Harry, pulling the second envelope out of the small box. “This one is mine as well, I feel famous.”

“Open it, Harry,” said Lily, sliding back over the Hogsmeade permission slip. “I want to see what the professors are saying about my darling boy.”

Harry let out an annoyed breath. He picked up the letter and slowly raked his eyes over it.

_Dear Mr. Potter,_

_We are pleased to inform you that you have been selected as a Quidditch Captain for the Slytherin House. Your impeccable school record shows that you have experience and the know-how to deal with a vast amount of stressful situations that occur both on and off the field._

_We are certain that you will continue to be a model student to both your peers and the students of_
your Quidditch team. I, personally, am sure that you will take your new responsibilities and duties seriously.

Enclosed is your new Quidditch Captaincy Badge, please attach it to your robes and wear it at all times. Congratulations.

Severus Snape,

Head of Slytherin House

Harry grinned and flicked the letter over, knowing that Professor Snape would leave some kind of informal message on the back. The writing wasn’t done in the usual elegant script of Severus Snape, and he knew that.

I know, more than anyone, that you will handle this position better than any other student. Don’t let me down. You were, as of last year, recommended by none other than Marcus Flint.

“I was made Quidditch Captain.”

Lily looked up, shocked, and saw the badge that represented said position. “Wonderful!” she said, studying it closely. “Your badge looks a little different to the one James received when he was at school. I can say that easily because he often shoved it in our faces at any given moment. I am so proud that you got the position! And in your third year too.”

It was rather hard for Harry to lose that little goofy grin that was plastered over his face. Each tie his mother praised him, it got a little more lopsided and goofy. It was as if one side of his face just refused to work. He looked like an idiot, stuck between a half grin, half smile, and a half smirk. He quickly set off to sort out the letters before he fled the room, admiring his new badge in private.

Lily watched her eldest son flee the room with a smile. She knew that her son was going to rush off and begin gaping at his badge where no one would see. Although, she did wish he said goodbye and not just fled the room as if his entire book collection was on fire.

Harry, having fled the dining room, made it to his bedroom in record speed. He placed the letters on his desk, trying to fit them in somewhere without leaving them scattered all over the tabletop. He wasn’t a neat freak like some, but he did dislike meaningless clutter that only served to take up space.

Not to mention that Nagini intentionally slithered over them if she was denied something.

He placed the letter next to the book that Granger had bought him and grinned at them, his plan and excitement merging together and causing an overwhelming sense of happiness. He would never write on a book, even if it was one as dumb as the book Granger had bought him. His mother was different, however. She would jot down whatever she had on mind, making half her books half-books, half-diaries.

Speaking of diaries, he hadn’t written in his for a while. He had a unique spell that could be of use to the Ministry if he perfected it. It wouldn’t take him long to alter a certain spell, despite having zero knowledge on the creation of spells. Well, he had the Dark Arts books by Tom Riddle, who was Voldemort, so he had a massive lead on other students, plus all of Tom Riddle’s memories and spells that he’d created.

Harry had been given a money bag from his mother just before he left, which he smiled at and promptly stated that he wasn’t six and didn’t need a little bag with a set amount of Galleons, Sickles, and Knuts in it. Despite his attempts at trying to persuade her that he was a little boy anymore, she
still shoved the moneybag into his hand and sent him on his way.

He, just like his mother, knew that he had poor self-control regarding money, whether it be Muggle or wizarding money. He could step foot into any number of stores in Diagon Alley and spend ninety percent of his money before the shopkeeper could blink.

Just off to the right was the most well-known potions shop in all of Diagon Alley, and they had currently stocked a new book which had every recipe, every small bit of detail, and every theory in it. It was a hundred and seventeen Galleons. There was also the case of brand-new robes, just imported in from France, employing the finest silk that money could buy. Not only that, but there was a new set of Gobstones, made of solid gold, which squirted a rather foul liquid at the player who lost a point.

No one played Gobstones. If they did, however, they kept hush about it to the larger crowds.

There were many things that tested his resolution to not splurge on trivial things, such as a new chessboard, new books, new quills, et cetera. The biggest, and most trying thing, belonged in Quality Quidditch Supplies.

Harry, who had dragged Draco along, paused just in front of the window, curious. He already knew that it had to be a new broomstick on the market, the issue was actually getting an eye on the thing and seeing what it looked like and who made it. They slowly edged around the large families that blocked their vision, gently nudging people out of the way so they could see the broom, not that they were going crazy like a few other people.

“Just came out,” said a square-jawed wizard eagerly, his eyes going up and down the sleek broom. “They say that this is just a tease, not the finished product.”

“D’you reckon it’ll be the fastest broom in the world?”

“Most likely!” said the square-jawed man, smiling. “It will be many years before a new broom can be made better.”

Harry cut out their conversation, trying to locate the owner of the building, who was most likely around, trying to snag sales early. He weaved around a small boy hanging off his father’s arm and frowned when he could locate the man or woman he was looking for.

“The Irish International Side’s just put in an order for seven of these beauties!”

Harry glanced up, finally locating said man.

“And they’re favourites for the World Cup!” said the proprietor of the shop, addressing the crowd as a whole. “Limited stock, though, so if you would like to place an order, you better get a hurry on.”

Harry wished the fat woman in front of him would move so he could read the golden plaque, which he could only see the corner of.

AS if the fates smiled down on him, the woman moved out of the way, allowing him to read it.

**THE FIREBOLT**

This state-of-the-art racing broom sports a streamlined, super-fine handle of ash, treated with a diamond-hard polish and hand-numbered with its own registration number. Each individually selected birch twig in the broomtail has been honed to aerodynamic perfection, giving the Firebolt unsurpassable balance and pinpoint precision. The Firebolt has an acceleration of 0–150 miles an
“Interesting,” said Harry, pulling away from the golden plaque. “I’m guessing that it’ll be around six hundred to seven hundred Galleons, seeing as the Nimbus was about that.”

“I’m guessing a little more than that,” muttered Draco, pulling away from the broom. “I think as the store has limited stock, they’ll be a lot more expensive as well.”

“There’s no limited stock, Draco, they have plenty of stock,” said Harry, grinning. “It’s a strategy to make people lose rational thought and dive on the broom, making a sale they cannot afford.”

“True.”

“Anyway, the broom isn’t worth it.”

“WHAT!”

“It’s not worth it, Draco,” said Harry, shrugging. “Especially not for school Quidditch.”

Draco instantly frowned, wondering where Harry was going with this. “But…” he started and trailed off. “I know. The nimbus is just as good.”

“The Firebolt may’ve been in development for seven or so years, by some of the top broom designers –”

“You’re not making the point that you think you are,” sniped Draco, grinning when Harry scowled at him.

“Shut up, you. The broom is designed for professional Quidditch, not measly school Quidditch. You’d be going too fast for the Snitch, and I’ll not have you outshine everyone else simply because you have the latest broom,” said Harry. “I could outfly anyone on a Cleansweep Five, even if they flew on one of them.”

“Is that so, lad?” muttered a man that was staring lovingly at the Firebolt. “This thing nearly doubles the speed of a Cleansweep, and let’s not mention that it has better handling and acceleration.”


“Debatable?” said the man. “I don’t think that a Cleansweep has better handling than this fine craftsmanship.”

“Considering the rider handles the handling, and not the broom, you logic and statement is flawed,” said Harry. “Nice try, Firebolt representative. There’s more of you in the crowd gaping at the broom, bragging about things no one should even know, at least, not yet. Most children won’t have the knowledge or forearm strength to handle the broom’s top speed, therefore, it’s pointless.”

“Pointless, is it laddie?”

“Yes, that’s why I said what I did,” muttered Harry, attempting to leave. “Anyone who buys this broom for a child is nothing short of a moron and shouldn’t have children in the first place. I say that loosely as anyone who buys this broom and has no desire to go into professional Quidditch is wasting their money. Let’s not forget that there’ll be a better broom by the time half the kids are old enough for Quidditch.”
“I see,” said the man.

“So, what else did you need?” he said, taking in the empty streets of Diagon Alley. “Mother is collecting my books and such, while father gets my potion ingredients and a new cauldron.”

Harry rolled his eyes as he dragged Draco into the apothecary. He started to collect everything that he needed plus some extra, bartering with the shop attendant to get a better deal so he could get more. It didn’t take much to talk the woman into a bargain, as she was going to lose her job if she didn’t get more sales. Of course, he knew just how to talk her into better sales and bigger sales, securing her job for a little longer.

“Language, Harry,” said Draco, grinning. “What if mother had heard that? You would have been tasting soap for months.”

Harry followed Harry from store to store, hoping that said boy would be finished shopping soon. “Where are we going now?” he asked, wondering when this torture would be over. Harry could be worse than his own mother when it came to shopping.

“Go in and get your trousers and socks, I’ll be in and out within two minutes.”

“Are you gonna buy the pants that have little trains driving around the waistband?” asked Draco, grinning. “I saw you eyeing them a few years ago.”

“Yeah, right,” muttered Harry, grinning. “I’m buying you them for Christmas this year, so watch out for that.”

Whatever,” said Draco, not at all pleased with the turn of the conversation. “Go in and get your trousers and socks, I’ll wait outside.”

Harry came back two minutes later. “All done in there,” he said. “They’re going to just send them to the house.”

“Good. I assume this last stop will be at your favourite place in all of Diagon Alley?”

“Sure is.”

“So we’ll get to spend the rest of the day drooling over new books,” said Draco, sarcastically. “What fun that will be.”
Harry was going to remark, but paused the moment he caught a glimpse of something in the window. “What the heck?” he muttered, mainly to himself, as he saw something that looked like a crazed beast in the bookstore. “What’s that thing?”

“I dunno,” said Draco, nudging girl out of the way. “But it looks good.”

Harry, moving forwards at a careful rate, studied the books with trepidation, hoping that something hadn’t been released in Flourish and Blotts. Instead of the usual display of gold-embossed spellbooks the size of paving slabs, there was a large iron cage behind the glass which held about a hundred copies of The Monster Book of Monsters. Torn pages were flying everywhere as the books grappled with each other, locked together in furious wrestling matches and snapping aggressively.

Draco looked rather excited about the whole ordeal. “Now that’s a sight that I like to see. I’m glad that I was able to come and see this today,” he said, nudging another girl out of the way. “Look, Harry – Harry, look!”

“Yes, Draco, I see them,” said Harry, yawning into his hand. “Fighting books? How quaint.”

“Be quiet! Go and buy your ordinary, boring books,” said Draco. “I’ll be here watching these ones tear each other apart.”

“You do know that you’d get a much better look if you went inside the building? You’re pretty much staring at dust and – never mind, forget it,” muttered Harry, knowing that Draco hadn’t heard a single word he said, too captivated by the fighting books.

A man bowed. “Good morning.”

Harry repeated the action to the man that opened the door for him, hoping to clear out the crowds easier that way. He wanted to get the books ne needed quickly, that way Draco couldn’t complain about him taking too long getting them.

“Mr. Potter! I didn’t think you would be in here until a day before school went back,” said the manager, her eyes roving over the boy. “I assume you’re in here to get your books for your third year at Hogwarts.”

Harry nodded, his attention flicked from the elderly lady onto the fighting books. “What are those? They don’t look too friendly.”

The manager sighed, sweeping her hand across her face. “Those?” she said, wishing the blasted books away. “Those are the Monster Book of Monsters. I have no words that could be used to describe the experience I’ve had with them. Please tell me that you’re not interested in them! The information inside of the blasted things can be learned in a normal book.”

“I hate to make you upset, but I do need one of them as it was listed as a required book.”

The manager sighed. “I didn’t think you would be taking Care of Magical Creatures…”

“Expanding my horizons,” said Harry. He twisted back towards the books and winced. “I… may be able to get one of them out of their cage. That’ll save you a bit of extra work.”

“Thank the Heaven’s for that! I’ve been bitten five times already, and that’s just within the last two hours,” said the manager, frowning.

“Just five?” said Harry, grinning. “You’ve done amazing to avoid much more than that.”
The manager was about to say something else when a loud ripping noise rent the air; two of the Monster Books had seized a third and were pulling it apart. “Stop it! Stop it!” she cried, staring at the books like they were the devil. She poked a stick that was pressed up against the wall between the bars, knocking the books apart. “I’m never stocking them again, never! It’s been bedlam! I thought we’d seen the worst when we bought two hundred copies of The Invisible Book of Invisibility – cost a fortune, and we never found them.”

Harry remembered her telling him about that particular incident. He had claimed that she should have contacted them and asked for the spell that would reveal them all, or that she should have contacted the Aurors and sued. He learned that she didn’t really mind about losing the money, just that she used it whenever she was upset or angry. “Any bets on whether I can get one of them out without a scratch?”

The manager let out a laugh that echoed throughout the store. “Alright, alright. If you can get one of those books, without a single cut, scrape, or a bruise, then I’ll give you a discount.”

Harry carefully approached the rattling cage, aware that eyes were on him. He wasn’t unnerved, not at all, but he was being extra careful. He stopped just in front of the books and pulled out his wand, catching the manager of the store frown when he did something she hadn’t. “Stupefy!” he watched as one of the books fell closed and stop moving. He smiled in satisfaction for a split-second and then levitated the other books away from the book he wished.

“That’s cheating!”

Harry levitated the book out of the cage and dropped it in his hands. “I’m a Slytherin,” he said a she conjured a rope around the book, already feeling the thing start to struggling in his arms.

The manager frowned. “You know, I actually never thought of stunning the books,” she said as she inspected the book for any sort of damage. “I’m actually surprised it worked.”

“I learned that some books are actually sentient enough to be stunned,” said Harry, smiling at the manager. “They’ll be a little more agitated than usual as the spell increases their mood and it causes them to remain annoyed and agitated for quite a while.”

“You’ve been in the Restricted Section,” said the manager, a knowing look on her face. “I went in there once and quickly left straight after. Dealing with some of the books there weren’t really appreciative of being opened.”

Harry snorted. “I’ve come across more than one of them, but my pursuit of knowledge won’t be stopped by a book that screams.”

“Ha-ha, well then,” said the manager. “Is there anything else you need – oh of course there is. What’s next on your list?”

Harry nodded. “I guess the next book I need is Unfogging the Future, by Cassandra Vablatsky.”

“Starting Divination, are you? Come with me, I’ll take you to the section where we keep the Divination books.”

Harry followed behind, wondering how far away the Divination books actually were. “How far away did you put these books?” he asked, passing down three different isles of books.

“Just – about – here,” said the manager. She gestured towards the corner, which seemed to be devoted to fortune-telling. A small table was stacked with volumes such as Predicting the Unpredictable: Insulate Yourself against Shocks and Broken Balls: When Fortunes Turn Foul.
“These are the books we have.”

“Alright,” said Harry, knowing that the woman hated this section, judging by her short tone.

“Unfogging the Future. Very good guide to all your basic fortune-telling methods – palmistry, crystal balls, bird entrails…”

Harry allowed her to continue describing the book with her scripted speech about it. It was obvious that she didn’t believe in any form of Divination. His eyes drifted towards another book in the store, which was among a display on a small table: Death Omens: What to Do When You Know the Worst Is Coming.

“Oh, I wouldn’t bother with that one if I were you,” said the woman, staring at the books disapprovingly. “You’ll start seeing death omens everywhere, it’s enough to frighten anyone to death."

“Death omens?” repeated Harry, taking the book that was thrust into his hands. He turned it over and read the title: Unfogging the Future.

“What’s next, dear?” said the woman, smiling. “It doesn’t matter what I say about the subject, you would read it no matter what.”

“Right you are,” said Harry. “I need Intermediate Transfiguration, the Standard Book of Spells, Grade Three and, of course, the Standard Book of Spells, Grade Seven.”

“Grade Seven? Good Heavens, you don’t waste time do you?” said the manager, smiling. “What will you read when you’re in that year?”

“I’ll find something,” said Harry. He stopped and handed the manager the rest of his small list, hoping to save time. “Perhaps someone’ll release a new set of books by the time I’m in my seventh year.”

The manager hummed and took the list and started to collect the books that were on the list. She handed him the last book and sighed in relief. “I would love to know what they’re making you study up there these years. I only had to buy a few books, and all those were core. You’ve got no less than fourteen!”

Harry kept quiet about how many books he was getting and just smiled. Soon enough, he exited the shop with all his books shrunk and hidden in his pocket, and with a much, much smaller amount of Galleons in his moneybag. He found Draco in the same place he had left him, slouched over the window, watching the books fight.

“You ruined it.”

“Ruined what?”

“You taught her how to stop them fighting and now they’ve separated the books,” said Draco, pulling away from the window. “Not to mention that you taught her how to get the books out without getting mauled by them.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Come on then, you drama queen, let’s go and get some lunch and maybe she’d’ve forgotten how to get the books out of their cage safely.”

Draco muttered under his breath and began to follow Harry, hoping that the Leaky Cauldron was serving something edible today. He knew better than everyone else that the Leaky Cauldron hardly
served food that was filling and delicious.

“What do you want, Draco?” said Harry, pushing open the door to the Leaky Cauldron. “I’ll buy it.”

“Ugh, I see Weasley,” muttered Draco, sneering at the large family that came in and then instantly split off from each other. “Even they don’t want to be around each other.”

The two sat in silence until Tom, the barman, came and dropped off their food. They ate in relative peace, even when Tom came to them and harassed them during their meal, which was typical of the man.

Harry sneered, but remained quiet. No, it was much better to just remain quiet about Tom and observe the rapidly declining clientele and the fact that the establishment was pretty much falling to bits, despite the fact that it was held together by magic.

‘Not to mention that luncheon is nothing formal and you’re just given a glass of wine,’ said Tom. ‘Just a bit of what you call bread, meat, and cheese. All sloppily thrown together.’

It was twenty minutes later when Harry gave up on trying to eat or enjoy the peace and quiet. Even with Draco’s lopsided and all over the place conversation, which was somewhat drowning out the two arguing idiots in the centre of the building.

“Inconsiderate, aren’t they?” said Draco, pushing aside his glass and shifting around the table to sit next to Harry. “She’s such a bossy, annoying, and an utter know-it-all.”

Hermione Granger stood in the middle of the Leaky Cauldron, her hands placed on her hips as if she was an adult scolding her younger child. She narrowed her eyes at the red-headed boy in front of her. “Crookshanks didn’t kill your cat, Ron!” she said, somewhat yelling. “And now? Now he’s missing.”

“Good!” said Ron, blurting out the first thing on his mind. “Keep your bloody beast of a cat away from Scabbers or I’ll turn it into a tea cosy!”

“It’s a cat, Ronald, what do you expect? It’s in his nature.”

“A cat?” repeated Ron, his voice lifting in pitch. “Is that what they told you when you got it? Looks more like a pig with hair, if you ask me.”

“That’s rich!” said Hermione, aghast. “Coming from the owner of a smelly old shoe brush!”

“Excuse me!”

“Oh, Crookshanks, where are you?” said Hermione, whispering.

Harry was officially fed up with how long this argument was going. It started with sleeping in until ten, then about a cat, and now it was about something else. Of course, within two minutes, it was back to the cat and how her cat was missing, as if anyone in the building cared. “No one in this building cares about your cat, Granger, be quiet.”

The room went silence, unsure of how the argument was going to continue. Many were pleased that the screeching teenager was finally silenced and they could now eat their meals without listening to the ranting of a girl about her cat.

“You know what?” said Harry, speaking before Granger could. “No one in the building cares about your cat, your argument, and your constant ear-piercing screeching about said subjects. People came
here to enjoy their meals and peace and quiet during said meals. I understand that you’re challenged and lack the proper etiquette to remain quiet and take your argument to private rooms, not in the middle of a dining establishment.”

“Let’s go,” said Draco. “Granger’s ruined my appetite.”

Harry left the correct amount of Galleons and fled the building, glaring at Granger as he walked by her. He attempted to pull Draco away from that Firebolt, but it appeared as if Draco gravitated towards it, as if he was being compelled to see the broom. That was until Draco saw Longbottom near the broom.

“Look at him!” growled Draco, glaring at Longbottom. “I bet he’s over there trying to get one for free!”

“The Boy-Who-Lived endorsing a broom? That’ll go down well, I think,” said Harry. “It’d put sales through the roof, if we’re being honest about it. Nimbus is just as good, if not better than the Firebolt.”

“Did you hear about the escape from Azkaban?” said Draco, weaving around an elderly couple. “Father was at the Ministry when all the Aurors just barge din and then rushed off somewhere else.”

Harry nodded and took the nearest seat at Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour. “Longbottom, Weasley, and Granger are coming.”

“I know,” said Draco, scowling. “Anyway, you never told me that you, of all people, made Quidditch Captain.”

“I was gonna tell you today,” said Harry. “Today. I was gonna tell you today.”

“What a liar,” said Draco, laughing. He smiled and went back to eating his ice-cream that had just appeared from nowhere. He often wondered how Harry could be so quick and subtle with things. “Thank you, Harry. You even got my favourite.”

“You?” said Ron, somewhat gaping. “You made Quidditch Captain?”

“Of course, Weasley,” said Harry, grinning. “Unlike some, I’m not completely useless and I have a knack got strategy. I’m perfect for the position.”

“A knack for strategy, you have, and you’ve never played me in chess?” said Ron, knowing that he had this argument in the bag. “You’ve always had a different excuse for why you’d never verse me.”

Harry snorted. Maybe Weasley had a point, not that he would ever admit that out loud. He relied on himself, the King, rather than the other pieces as they could be sacrificed. Every other piece was replaceable, he could not. Weasley was the opposite and spent most of his time hovering near the action, often using himself to block off escape routes. “It would be such a waste of my own time to verse someone as incompetent at chess, such as you, Weasley.”

Ron appeared to be mulling something over in his head. “I’ve played chess games that are next to impossible to win, and I’ve won,” he paused. “I beat an International Master in a Muggle chess tournament this past holiday. Have you beaten an International Master, Potter?”

“Like your family could afford a slot into an International Master championship,” said Harry, smirking. “You needn’t need to lie to boost your already small ego. No one here believes that you’ve even been in a tournament. You may be somewhat good at chess, Weasley, but you’re not even close to my level. I’d have you checkmated before your primitive mind could comprehend what even
“You’re all talk, Potter,” said Ron, laughing. “You say you can do a lot, you say that you know a lot, but in reality? You know very little.”

“What are you raving on about now, Weasley?” said Harry, humming. “Here, make yourself useful and take this empty bowl back to the counter. Maybe you’ll even get a job that way you can pay for your books this year.”

Draco snorted.

“Well then, Weasley? Go and take this bowl. You won’t earn your wages if you slack off.”

“Harry, that’s really mean,” said Neville, frowning. “What would you do if your parents couldn’t afford the things you have, or if they didn’t have as much money as they do now? What if you didn’t have any money to buy your books?”

“Like any person with a brain, Longbottom, I’d get a part-time job at a business and earn myself money,” said Harry. “Then, if that failed, which it wouldn’t, I’d ask my parents to stop having so many children that they clearly cannot afford.”

A silence filled over the small group of Gryffindor and Slytherin students. Even the noisy entrance of Seamus and Dean didn’t dare disrupt the tense silence. None of them were wearing robes, so it was nothing more than a petty jab to greet someone as what house they’re in.

“You know that you could easily be in the same situation, Harry. How does money change how you act?” said Neville, unsure on how he would get Harry to see some sense. “Just imagine it –”

“I’d never allow that,” said Harry, cutting across Neville. “I’ll always strive to be the best. I’ll never allow being poor, or having no money, to hold me back. I would earn money, even if it required me to do such mundane things as cleaning a house from the bottom to the top.”

The discussion shifted and morphed into different things, with different people talking about different subjects. It changed the moment the seething red-head and his gang left, clearly upset that their plan hadn’t worked.

Each discussion on the tables was different. Young children laughed and grinned at anything said, as if it was the funniest thing they would ever hear. Teenagers lingered around the Firebolt and complained. The elderly just shook their heads at the repeat action of every child, teenager, and young adult every year.

As for Draco, he was currently mulling over the words said by his best friend. Those few words haunted him: I’ll always strive to be the best. It wasn’t something a normal child would say, instead it sounded like something an adult would say when they were joining a business. There was an uneasiness in Harry’s voice that made him scared. If his friend didn’t have what he did now, what would he do for it? Plenty of situations flicked through his mind, but he ignored them and smiled at his friend, praying that he wouldn’t ask questions on why his face was pinched.
Harry woke up at six on the dot, unbothered by the sun that had somehow found its way into his room, despite the thick curtains. He wouldn’t have complained about an extra hour or two of sleep, not that he needed it, but today was the big day that they went back to Hogwarts and he could show off his new badge, which would make everyone respect him, as he would be the one making Slytherin win from now on.

Maybe now that he held a position of power, he could force that useless hierarchy chart back into play, putting himself at the top with no competitors.

’That’s not even cunning, it’s just pure childish behaviour,’ said Tom. ‘You weren’t on the top before, so you ignored it, but now that you’re on the top, it’s suddenly relevant. You are such a narcissist.’

Harry, ignoring Tom, snuggled deeper into his quilt, silently demanding more sleep and warmth that bed provided.

“Don’t you dare!” hissed Nagini. “We had a deal! You said you would summon me a delicious fat rat as soon as you woke up! If you go to sleep now and break our deal, you shall feel my wrath.”

Harry groaned as he threw his hand out, searching the top of his bedside table. He found his wand and muttered the spell that would get Nagini her rat. “There you go, Nagini,” he hissed, sounding perfectly awake, despite being somewhat tired. “Enjoy.”

He rolled over and closed his eyes, wondering if his mother was awake and cooking breakfast already.

Lily, who was down in the basement, which had been claimed by the few house-elves on the property, began preparing breakfast. She stood next to the little house-elf, who was preparing things with her watery eyes, the size of the small saucers that were hidden inside a cupboard. It had taken her a few days to get the house-elf to allow her to help with the breakfast.

As James would say: if anyone could get a house-elf to not do work, it would be you, Lily.

She took pride in being able to treat them all equally, despite wishing she could just set them free and do it all herself, as that’s what she was accustomed to. There was a few that stared at her funny when she entered the basement, mainly her son’s house-elf that came around to help Visy out as much as she could.

She toasted the bread and then handed it towards the house-elf, who would happily butter it with
various spreads, with magic, of course.

“Visy is love being with Mistress!” said Visy, her eyes going slightly larger. She buttered a piece of bread with strawberry jam and levitated it towards an awaiting plate. “Mistress being leaving now. Visy will clean.”

Lily smiled at the elf and left the room, smiling even wider when she realised the house-elf had made her leave after toasting three pieces of bread. Of course, she had vowed to not disrupt the hierarchy of the elves and avoided cleaning, cooking anything besides breakfast, and tending to the animals that were on the property.

Now for the easy task of making sure her son was awake and ready for the day. She had a lot planned for today and she only had a few more hours before he left to go back to school.

“We’re going to the Weasley’s house today, Harry,” said Lily, tugging her son by the shirt that he was currently wearing. “Don’t argue, it will be explained as soon as we get there.”

“Do we have to?” said Harry, his tone filled with a small hint of a whine. “Their house smells odd, it’s also cramped, and it looks horrible.”

“Stop whining like a three-year-old and get in the fireplace.”

“Fine,” muttered Harry, stepping into the fireplace. He threw down the Floo powder as he shouted the name of the Weasley’s house. He briefly wondered if the Floo would take him there if he said something degrading about the house, such as calling out a place that was horrid.

He stepped from the fireplace with his usual grace, as if he had been born in it. When you spend time with the Malfoys and stumble out of a fireplace that you have just used to Floo, then you’re going to be forced to Floo from room to room until you have it right and you don’t even stumble, not even an inch. It took him a grand total of three hundred and sixteen attempts to not stumble, flinch, fall, or cough as he stepped from the fireplace.

He sneered at the room that he was in, not even bothering to look up and greet those that were in it. He wiped the small traces of soot from his shirt and trousers before the overbearing Molly Weasley could do it and scowled at the room, which hadn’t changed since he was last here.

‘At least it’s clean,’ said Tom. ‘Not that it would make any difference to you, but at least there’s not clothes and rubbish thrown over the floor.’

Lily stepped out behind her son, weaving around him, and searched for Molly. “Molly! It’s great to see you again!” she said, wrapping said woman in a loose hug, minding not to squish Daniel in the process. “How are your children?”

Harry tuned the conversation out and instead debated silently in his head whether it was worth it to make the spell he was debating to ensnare at the feet, or to make a solid cage.

“Harry!” said Arthur, smiling. “How are you doing?”

Harry glanced up and looked at the man. He knew that Arthur was smarter than he seemed, even more so if he laid the groundwork for allowing magic to interact with electronics. “I’m fine,” he said, not wanting to talk to anyone. He decided to add a quick ‘thank you’ after a slight pause.

“If you’re wondering the time, its seventeen past nine,” said Arthur, standing. “Still have a little bit more time until you need to be at the station.”
Thankfully, for Harry, at least, the conversation quieted and no one made a scene at all. It was fifteen minutes of blissful silence before Molly Weasley came into the room, mentioning loudly that the twins had almost blown out a wall in their bedroom. Soon after, Percy walked down the stairs, glaring at his twin brothers. Ron, Hermione, and Neville came straight after Percy, muttering to themselves about the upcoming school year.

Percy peered down at Harry Potter, who was sitting there with a book that he shouldn’t be reading until fifth-year and held out his hand, trying to perfect his skills that he would use in the Ministry after he graduated. “Harry,” he said, as if they were old friends. “How lovely it is to see you.”

Harry’s eyebrows shot up. He was aware that everyone was looking at him, waiting to see what he would do. “At least one of you has manners,” he said, ignoring the bitter taste that he imaged that was filling his mouth as he shook Percy’s hand. “The nice manners are a shock, actually. Maybe you should ask Percy for some aid, Ronald, maybe then you would earn a bonus Sickle at your future job at Florean Fortescue’s Ice Cream Parlour, collecting the dishes. Such manners would go a very, very long way.”

“Harry,” breathed Lily, feeling embarrassed. “Maybe I should send you their next summer. Maybe the job would teach you to be nice to people when you’re in their home.”

“I wouldn’t want to take Weasley’s future job, mother,” said Harry, sneering at said wizard. He was proud that he still managed to make Weasley look bad, even when he was being told off. “I doubt very much that I was dragged here to discuss Weasley’s future, no matter how droll it may be,” he paused and waited for the sure-fire signs that his mother was about to scold him again. “However, it would be a lovely place to work, after all, you would get free ice-cream whenever you wished. I may enquire about a position next year.”

“I hope you’re well,” said Percy, looking rather amused about what was said about his brother.

Harry was about to reply when the twins began harassing the Golden Trio, mainly about ridiculous questions such as why they were alone in the room together and if there was any more room.

“Fred! George!” said Mrs. Weasley, glaring at her two immature sons. “First you almost blow out a wall, then you have the audacity to attempt to sneak one of your potions into the pot of tea, and finally, you harass Neville, Hermione, and your brother!”

Harry rolled his eyes, ignoring the impolite scene in front of him with practised ease.

“Oh, Harry, dear, I didn’t see you there,” said Mrs. Weasley, edging forwards slightly. “I suppose you’ve heard our exciting news?”

Harry shook his head, even if he saw her pointing at the badge on Percy’s chest. “I haven’t,” he said, realising that the woman was looking at her son with a proud smile. “Congratulations, Percy. How does it feel to be the last Head Boy that will attend Hogwarts in this generation?”

“Harry!” said Lily, exasperated. “Must you be so rude?”

“It’s alright, Mrs. Potter,” said Fred, a mischievous expression on his first. “George and I will never get that position, and our dear little brother –”

“Has more detentions in his two years at the school than most people get in their entire seven years,” said Harry. “Not to mention that I’m in his year and whoever would get the position when I’m there? No detentions, no lost points, no failed essays or work handed in. I’m a model student. Weasley is… Weasley.”
“When is James coming along?” said Arthur, getting in before anyone else could start a verbal war in his living room. “He’s running a bit late, isn’t he?”

“I’m here now, actually,” said James as he walked through the front door of the Burrow. “There’s a lot of good and bad news from the Ministry and the Auror department.”

“Start with the bad news, I say,” said Mrs. Weasley. “That allows for some good news before we send the children off to Hogwarts.”

“The escape from Azkaban happened years ago,” said James, trying not to wince as the other adults in the room winced. “We still have no idea how the person escaped, seeing as every precaution was taken and every matter of escape was tested by four different people.”

“Who escaped?” asked Ron, looking a little pale. “I mean, no one has escaped before, and now —”

“Someone has escaped from Azkaban and has been free for years before the Ministry and Auror department even got wind of it,” said Harry, cutting off Weasley. “It’s funny that you say every matter of escape was covered because he or she escaped years ago and no one had any idea.”

“The worst part is that the person could have either left the United Kingdom or changed their appearance,” said James. “There’s no viable way to track them as they left behind no evidence in their cell —”

“I have a theory.”

Everyone turned and looked at Harry.

“Dumbledore has all this sway in the magical world and no one would bat an eye if the destroyer of Grindelwald broke a prisoner out of Azkaban to use in a nefarious plot to allow Longbottom to best them sometime during the school year.”

“That is preposterous, Harry,” said Lily, shaking her head.

“In our first year at Hogwarts, a possessed professor managed to sneak Voldemort – don’t wince at his name – into the school under his turban, which Dumbledore, the supposed greatest wizard alive, didn’t notice. Coincidence? I think not. Dumbledore knew that Quirrell was hiding Voldemort and allowed the events to play out, seeing if Longbottom could defeat him again.”

“Are you calling Dumbledore evil?” said Hermione, shocked.

“I’m calling him manipulative, Granger,” said Harry, glaring. “Many people get the two confused, but they couldn’t be more different. Now, as you’re not up to speed, I’ll explain it a little better. A manipulative person tends to be politicians, war leaders, and, of course, people in highly powerful positions. Dumbledore checks all three of those —”

“You still called the headmaster of our school evil!”

“I did not! I said he was manipulative! If you cannot tell the difference, then that’s your own fault.”

“ENOUGH!” said Lily, sending both of the teenagers an annoyed glance. “We’re not here to discuss whether Albus Dumbledore is evil or manipulative.”

“You’re right,” said Harry. “We’re discussing how incompetent the Auror department is.”

“Please stop interrupting, Harry,” said Lily. “Just allow your father to finish.”
“I was certain the explanation was done,” said Harry, flicking his hand in an overdramatic way. “The Auror department once again flopped it up, allowing a convict escape, and then tried to cover it up. It’s nothing new.”

“If you wouldn’t be so crude, Harry, we could finish this up,” said Lily, cutting off whatever Fred was going to say about the word ‘flopped’. “Unless you’d much rather miss Hogwarts this year?”

“I wouldn’t miss it, and even if I did, I could just steal a flying car and get to Hogwarts that way,” said Harry. “Taking a train? How positively droll.”

James waved off his son’s dramatics. “Anyway,” he said, addressing the rest of the room. “The good news is that we’ve figured out who escaped and their possible location.”

“Who?” asked Molly, leaning forwards slightly, her face pale.

“Peter Pettigrew.”

Harry didn’t have time to ask who that was and why it made his mother look so frightened. He sat back and listened to James as he began his tirade about how Azkaban would be increasing security and so would Hogsmeade, Diagon Alley, and Hogwarts. He listened to the report about suspected looks and details about said wizard, as if any of that would help in the search.

Chapter End Notes

Shorter chapter than usual, just coming in at 2,300 words, but I wanted to give you something as it was my birthday and I decided that you were such lovely people. DO note that this chapter was originally almost 4,000 words, but much was cut as it was nothing but the ramblings of Harry regarding how manipulative Dumbledore is. He also mentioned his theory that Dumbledore was Voldemort using a timeturner... oh Harry. Just ignore his theories, if you wish, as that'll save you a headache. :^)

Next chapter will be up soon! (80% done) and that's my apology for such a small chapter.

P.S: Tags'll be rewritten-done soon. Most of them are no longer applicable.
Harry checked the time, yet again, and frowned when he realised it was only twenty past ten, leaving forty minutes until the train departs from the platform at Kings Cross Station. He had run out of things to do fifteen minutes ago, at least not wanting to start reading a book only to be interrupted shortly after.

“Harry,” said Lily, ignoring the Muggle theme that her son was currently humming as he strolled through the corridors. “We should get going in about fifteen minutes, else we’ll be late. Molly was saying that it was going to be a big year this year as plenty of children were born after You-Know-Who fell.”

“Makes sense,” said Harry, halting his hum. “While some have children during the war, most wait until it’s safe.”

“Also, make sure you have everything you need and check it twice.”

“I always do, mother.”

“I know, but there’s going to be no visits and very limited mail this year due to the escape of Peter Pettigrew.”

Harry frowned, realising that all forms of communication in and out of the school would be either blocked or severely monitored. That didn’t bode well with him as that meant that he couldn’t write to Lucius asking for information on Peter Pettigrew and asking his parents were out as they seemed to close up the moment the man’s name was said.

He smiled at his mother, bidding her a silent yet polite farewell and shuffled over towards his trunk, planning on double-checking that he had all his books and clothes that he would need. He remembered getting this trunk by James, who had taken his old one into the Ministry and got an Undetectable Extension Charm placed on it, increasing its size by almost triple.

He needed the space with all the subjects he was taking.

In the blink of an eye, he found himself standing near the Hogwarts Express, a large puff of smoke coating the top of the train. He watched as various children clattered towards the train, awed by the thing.

He shifted out of the way of the rampart children and stood near his mother, who was proudly recalling her tales of the first time she saw the Hogwarts Express. He listened to each story, each explanation, and each small detail, smiling as they idly chatted, passing the time.

“You better get on the train and find Draco,” said Lily, nudging her eldest son towards the train. “I’m sure he’s wondering whether you’ll be coming or not.”

“Alright,” said Harry, smiling. “I’ll try and write you as much as I can. Goodbye, mother.”
“Say bye to your brother, Daniel.”

Harry wanted to roll his eyes and mutter that Daniel couldn’t say bye yet, and if he could, then he was more intelligent than most other babies. Instead, he stood there and gave a small wave and said a farewell to his younger brother, who smiled brightly.

“What were you doing?”

Harry turned and looked at Draco, who was already dressed, just like him, tapping the wall with the back of his foot. “Saying goodbye to my mother and Daniel.”

Draco nodded. “Let’s find a compartment before all the good ones get taken by the first years.”

Harry followed behind, finding a compartment that appeared to be empty, but only held one person. “I guess this’ll have to do,” he said, peering at the person who was asleep. “If they wake up, we can just say that this was the only compartment left.”

“Do you know who it is?” asked Draco, studying the student closely. “Wait a second, that’s not even a student.”

“What if it’s Peter Pettigrew?” said Harry, staring at Draco. “What if he’s hitched a ride on the Hogwarts Express and warded the compartment so that no one can enter.”

“That’s not funny!”

“I thought it was,” said Harry, sitting down in the empty seat. “Anyway, as you’re curious, his name is Professor R. J. Lupin.”

“How’d you know that?”

“You’ll never believe this, Draco, but I, Harry Potter, am a Seer –”

“You’re right, I don’t believe that.”

“– I saw the man’s name with perfect clarity. I cleared my mind, allowing a blank space for the name to appear in crisp lettering, which spelt out his name. I had no idea who it was, at first, but then a vision of this compartment flickered into view.”

“You’re a prat,” said Draco, glancing around the room, trying to locate where Harry had seen the name.

“As a Seeker, Draco, I would’ve hoped that you’d seen the case above him with his name and profession written in gold.”

“Professor R. J. Lupin,” said Draco, reading the gold lettering. “Wonder what he teaches?”

“Defence Against the Dark Arts.”

“Let me guess, another one of your visions?”

“Nah,” said Harry, grinning. “That’s the only position that has an available slot. I have a theory that the position is jinxed or cursed, causing the professors to meet an unfortunate end. I had a look in the registry of former professors and the one for Defence Against the Dark Arts is considerably larger than all other professors. Ever since nineteen fifty-seven, no professor has held it for more than a year – something always happens to get them fired, killed, or forced to leave.”
“And your proof?”

“Professor Quirrell was killed after having the position for a year,” said Harry. “Professor Lockhart lost his memory after having the position for a year.”

“All coincidences,” said Draco, sitting down. “I’m sure each professor could be investigated and tracked down. No curse could last that long, not even by an exceptionally powerful wizard.”

“If the spell is tied to an object, then it could,” said Harry, thinking. “Wards power up by your magical signature, such as you being there. If you vacated Malfoy Manor for fifteen or so years, the wards, spells, and everything else would fail and fall apart.”

“So?”

“So, Draco, something is powering the jinx and that means whoever cast the jinx is still in Hogwarts and visiting it frequently.”

“I’m not following,” said Draco, highly confused. “It honestly makes no sense.”

“Magic is tied to the soul, Draco, which despite claims, actually exists. When the soul departs, so does all the magic that it left behind. We could say that magic comes from the soul and...”

“Can we join you?” said Neville, peering into the compartment. “Everywhere else is full.”

Harry sniffed and looked up to see Weasley and Granger lurking behind Longbottom, as if they were lost puppies. “No.”

“No?”

“You may not join us, Longbottom, as we’re having a very private and intellectual conversation,” said Harry, glaring. “So, if you would take your two dogs and go harass someone else, I’d appreciate it.”

Ron pushed through and slumped down onto the seat next to the man. “You don’t own the compartments, Potter, Nev only asked because he wanted to be polite, which is something you could try being once in a while.”

“Actually, I do own the compartments, Weasley, which must be a shock to you, seeing as you own nothing.”

“And your point is?”

Harry sat down next to Draco. “Must feel really bad to have to wear clothes that your brothers once wore,” he said, glaring. “D’you share pants as well, Weasley? Is that some kind of kink your family has?”

‘Mention his sister,’ said Tom. ‘That will provoke him nicely.’

Harry thought that was a good idea and prepared himself. “So, Weasley, how’s your sister going? I hope she’s recovered nicely from the possession by Voldemort, and the fact that her face has a scar across it. I actually feel bad for her, you see, every time she looks into a mirror – if your family could afford one – she’ll remember what happens when you cross me.”

“Shut up, Potter.”

“What’s wrong, Weasley? You barge into our compartment and cry when the topic of conversation
“offends you,” said Harry, grinning. “Get out if you don’t like it.”

“He’s just trying to provoke you, Ron, ignore him,” said Hermione. “Over the summer holidays, my parents gave me some tips to help me deal with people like him.”

“People like me?” repeated Harry, trying not to laugh. “I’m sure your parents made good use of that book that you thought was funny to send me. I’ll be honest, Granger, that book made a book torch stand, which is exactly all it’s good for.”

“You got him something?”

“I’ll explain later, Ron,” said Hermione. “As for you, Potter, Ginny is fine and recovering.”

“I see.”

“No thanks to you, though.”

“Ron!”

“I did what I had to do,” said Harry, tapping his chin as he thought. “Maybe if you actually cared about your sister, you’d have noticed the signs that she wasn’t alright. Granger could’ve gone into her room and seen if she was alright, but she didn’t. I’m sure you would have just allowed her to leave, possessed by Voldemort or not.”

“This conversation is pointless.”

Harry had to agree and put all his efforts into his book that he had instantly opened and prepared to read once the train began to move. “I was given this book by some stranger I saw in Diagon Alley,” he said to Draco, who peered at it. “It came by owl a few days ago. The owl looked rather ruffled, as if it had seen its greatest fear.”

“I don’t think father even has that book,” said Draco. “After you read it, I’m sure he’d buy it from you.”

“It’s really rare,” said Harry, caressing the spine of the book. “It’s full of evil, vile things that would make even Voldemort shudder.”

“Oh, be quiet,” said Draco, sighing. “You know better than I that it’s a book on creatures, one that the Ministry disapproves of because it explains things they’d rather no one know.”

“You should hand it in, then,” said Hermione. “Keeping an illegal book…”

“The book isn’t illegal, Granger, it’s simply discouraged,” said Harry. “The book was written for creatures by creatures, so the Ministry, who hate creatures, hate the book on the same principle. They see it and they’ll destroy it.”

“Maybe that would be a good thing.”

“Not really,” said Neville. “Not much is known about creatures that are frequent in the wizarding world, and much less is known about the rarer species. Take the basilisk from last year for example. Everyone should have realised that a basilisk can petrify and no one thought twice about that when it was happening because most people don’t know and those that do keep the knowledge quiet.”

“So, if more people had these books, then…”

“Then incidents like last year would be quickly handled,” said Neville. “It was only because of
Madam Pomfrey and her knowledge into rare medicines that helped with the undoing of the petrifactions that the basilisk caused.”

“The wizarding world is backwards,” said Ron. “At least that’s what dad says.”

“It’s not backwards, Weasley, it’s just tradition,” said Draco, sneering. “Our world is stuck in the medieval ways and refuses to move along, causing many things to become lost or rare.”

“And, of course, back then, creatures at the top of the food chain,” said Harry, tapping the spine of the book. “There were no potions and spells to deal with them and so they ran rampant. Werewolves destroyed entire villages, but at the same time, any werewolf was actively hunted and killed.”

“It’s all complicated,” said Draco. “And this book explains it perfectly. From what I have heard, it explains why the vampires were at constant war with the goblins, orcs, dwarves, and the werewolves. It also explains that because the groups fought amongst themselves, humans were able to survive.”

Harry wasn’t sure why he was explaining this to the Golden Trio, as they were called, but he instantly stopped and began to ignore them, claiming that he was wasting his breath explaining something so in-depth to a bunch of idiots.

He flicked open the book and started reading, hoping to get at least midway through before arriving at Hogwarts.

“How thick would Nev have to be to go searching for a nutter that’s out to kill him?” muttered Ron softly, as if trying not to wake up the sleeping man next to him. “No one, not even the Head of Azkaban, knows how he got out of Azkaban, seeing as every precaution was taken. No one’s escaped before… no one has even tried before.”

“Not to mention that he was a top-security prisoner.”

“They’ll catch him, won’t they?” said Hermione, slightly worried. “I mean, they’ve even got the Muggles out looking from him, too.”

“James said that he’d escaped years ago, some time before our first year at Hogwarts,” said Neville. “He’s been out for three years, Hermione, he could’ve changed his appearance.”

“Maybe not,” said Hermione. “Most wizards aren’t smart enough to think of that.”

“He could use a Glamour Charm.”

“Any decent wizard would see straight through one of those, even if it was just to change an eye colour. There’s a reason that they went out of fashion three hundred years ago. Most people just use Polyjuice Potion now.”

“So he could be using Polyjuice Potion?”

“For three years straight? Unlikely,” said Neville. “I’m sure Harry’d know more about this than me, but constant Polyjuice Potion use can kill you. I think they said something like a year is far too much and it’d cause irreparable harm.”

“If you’re curious,” said Harry, looking up from his book. “Polyjuice Potion can only change physical appearance. DNA, traits, and everything else inside remains so. The issue is the fact that a fat person is different to a thin person on the inside and the Polyjuice Potion must create an illusion of
fat so that your skin appears correctly. This affects your heartbeat and raises the chances of a heart
tack drastically, as your body isn’t used to being so heavy. Not only that, but it can cause damage
to your bones and skin.”

Hermione frowned. “So, how long can someone use Polyjuice Potion for?”

“A year before they’ll die,” said Harry, ignoring the rest of what was asked afterwards. “It’ll induce
severe madness before you die. You’ll start to ramble and begin repeating information before you go
insane and your entire body shuts down. We learn more about it in our sixth year.”

“And you know this how?” said Hermione, her eyes gleaming with suspicion.

“Do I have to explain this each year, Granger? I was taught everything potions by Professor Snape,
who is one of the greatest Potion Masters in the last two centuries. Remember that that title isn’t due
to teaching. He is a literal master of potions.”

Granger was about to reply but paused when a faint whistling sound echoed throughout the
compartment. “What’s that noise?”

“Sounds like it’s coming from your trunk, Nev,” said Ron, staring at Neville’s trunk with trepidation.
“I think it’s that Sneakoscope I got you.”

“Sneakoscope?” asked Hermione, staring at the two boys as they got up and began to dig around in
Neville’s trunk, hunting down the Sneakoscope. “What’s a Sneakoscope? I haven’t seen them
mentioned anywhere.”

Ron held up a small object, which was spinning very fast in the palm of his hand, and glowing
brilliantly. “This, Hermione, is a Sneakoscope –”

“What does it do?”

“– mind you, it’s a very cheap one. It went pretty haywire just as I was tying it to Errol’s leg to send
it to Neville.”

“Were you doing anything untrustworthy at the time?”

“No!” said Ron, shaking his head towards Neville, who had narrowed his eyes in suspicion. “Well…I wasn’t supposed to be using Errol. You know he’s not really up to long journeys… but how else
was I supposed to get your present to you, Nev?”

“Ronald!” snapped Hermione, looking aghast at the sheer thought. “That’s not –”

“Would you three shut up and toss it back in his trunk?” said Harry, interrupting another one of
Granger’s tirades. “The constant whistling is actually driving me crazy. It’s probably going off
because Pettigrew is lurking around.”

“That’s not funny!”

“I wasn’t trying to be funny, Granger,” said Harry, rolling his eyes. “Plus, if you three keep it up, it’ll
wake up the man sleeping. How inconsiderate of you.”

“We can get it checked in Hogsmeade,” said Ron, tossing the Sneakoscope back into Neville’s
trunk. “They sell that sort of thing in Dervish and Banges, magical instruments and stuff, Fred and
George told me.”
“Do you know much about Hogsmeade?” asked Hermione keenly. “I’ve read it’s the only entirely non-Muggle settlement in Britain.”

“That’s false,” said Harry, grinning. “I lived there and plenty of Muggles are around there daily, hiding in their houses.”

“Stop lying,” said Neville. “Some shops have houses above them. I assume they drew inspiration from Muggle apartments, at least that’s what Lily said.”

“I just want to get inside Honeydukes!”

Hermione glanced at the excited Ron. “What’s that?” she asked, her eyes flickering with the excitement of new learning possibilities.

“It’s this sweetshop!” said Ron happily, a slightly dreamy look filled his face. “Where they’ve got everything… Pepper Imps – they make you smoke at the mouth – and great fat Chocoballs full of strawberry mousse and clotted cream, and really excellent sugar quills which you can suck in class and just look like you’re thinking what to write next –”

“But Hogsmeade’s a very interesting place, isn’t it?” said Hermione, trying to steer the conversation back on track. “In Sites of Historical Sorcery it says the inn was the headquarters for the 1612 goblin rebellion, and the Shrieking Shack’s supposed to be the most severely haunted building in Britain –”

“– and massive sherbet balls that make you levitate a few inches off the ground while you’re sucking them,” continued Ron, finally taking a breath, clearly not listening to anything that was said by Hermione.

Hermione looked around at Neville, who would at least listen to her. “Won’t it be nice to get out of school for a bit and explore Hogsmeade?”

“I expect it should be,” said Neville. “For you two, at least.”

“What do you mean?”

“I’m not going to Hogsmeade this year,” said Neville, his shoulders slumped. “My Gran said that it was best if I avoided leaving the school grounds this year, even more so with Pettigrew on the loose. James almost signed it after convincing Gran that keeping me locked in the castle isn’t good for my health, but Lily put a stop to it.”

Ron looked horrified. “You’re not allowed to come? But – no way – I’m sure McGonagall could sign it for you, she’s the Head of Gryffindor, after all.”

“Professor McGonagall, Ron,” said Hermione, sighing.

“Maybe we could ask Fred and George, they know every secret passage out of the castle –”

“Ron!” said Hermione sharply. “I don’t think Neville should be sneaking out of school with Pettigrew on the loose.”

“I expect Professor McGonagall will say the same thing if I was to ask her,” said Neville, just accepting his fate. “Perhaps it’s for the best if I stay at Hogwarts?”

“But if we’re with him, Pettigrew wouldn’t dare!”

“Oh, Ron, don’t talk rubbish,” said Hermione, her facial expression morphed into one of annoyance.
“What could we do against Pettigrew? He has –”

“Murdered far more people than you can imagine, at least according to trusted sources, caused three different families in hiding to be exposed to Voldemort, kept the Minister in Voldemort’s pocket, tortured various witches and wizards, and finally, is the sole reason that Longbottom has no parents.”

“How do you know this?”

“All my Death Eater friends were bragging about it while we were slaughtering Muggles,” said Harry, sneering. “Pettigrew knows what the three of you look like and he’ll kill you in the blink of an eye before either of you can draw your wand.”

Hermione, not wanting to say something rude, began to fiddle with the straps that caged her cat, Crookshanks. She didn’t wish to reply to Potter, as that was something that her parents advised her not to do. She knew that people like him thrived on a successful bait and causing her to be angry or upset.

“Merlin, Hermione!” hissed Ron, panicking. “Don’t let that bloody beast of a cat out!”

“What?”

Crookshanks leapt lightly from the basket, stretched, yawned, and sprang onto the knees of Ronald Weasley.

“Get off me!”

“Ron, don’t!” said Hermione, standing up. “Don’t hurt my poor Crookshanks.”

Ron was about to answer back when Professor Lupin stirred. They watched him apprehensively, but he simply turned his head the other way, mouth slightly open, and slept on.

The Hogwarts Express moved steadily north and the scenery outside the window became wilder and darker while the clouds overhead thickened. People were chasing backwards and forwards past the door of their compartment.

At one o’clock the plump witch with the food trolley arrived at the compartment door.

“D’you think we should wake him up?” asked Ron awkwardly, nodding towards Professor Lupin. “He looks like he could do with some food.”

Hermione approached Professor Lupin cautiously. “Er – Professor?” she said. “Excuse me – Professor?”

He didn’t move.

“Don’t worry yourself, dear,” said the kind looking trolley lady. She handed Neville a large stack of Cauldron Cakes. “You, Mr. Potter, are in big trouble.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you!” said the witch. “Don’t think I would remember that time you left without claiming your free treat when you helped me with the stuck cart. Take what you like and if you don’t take something, then you’ll regret it very much the next pass I make.”

Harry lifted an eyebrow and took a Chocolate Frog from the trolley. “Thank you, ma’am.”
The lady turned back to Hermione. “If he’s hungry when he wakes, I’ll be up front with the driver,” she said with a nod towards Professor Lupin.

“I suppose he is asleep?” said Ron quietly, as the witch slid the compartment door closed. “I mean – he hasn’t died, has he?”

“No, no, he’s breathing,” whispered Hermione as she fell back into her seat, taking the offered Cauldron Cake from Neville.

The rain thickened as the train sped yet further north; the windows were now a solid, shimmering grey, which gradually darkened until lanterns flickered into life all along the corridors and over the luggage racks.

The train rattled, the rain hammered, the wind roared, but still, Professor Lupin slept on.

“We must be nearly there…” said Ron, leaning forward to look past Professor Lupin at the now completely black window. The words had hardly left him when the train started to slow down. “Brilliant!” he muttered, getting up from the seat. He carefully slipped by Professor Lupin, not wanting to wake the man as he glanced outside. “I’m starving, I want to get to the feast.”

“We can’t be there yet,” muttered Hermione suspiciously, lifting her arm she checked her watch.

“So why’re we stopping?”

The train was getting slower and slower. As the noise of the pistons fell away, the wind and rain sounded louder than ever against the windows.

Neville, who was nearest the door, got up to look into the corridor. All along the carriage, heads were sticking curiously out of their compartments.

The train came to a stop with a jolt and distant thuds and bangs told them that luggage had fallen out of the racks. Then, without warning, all the lamps went out and they were plunged into total darkness.

“What’s going on?” said Ron, pushing himself against the seat.

“Ouch, Ron!” said Hermione, hissing in pain. “That was my foot!”

“D’you think we’ve broken down?” asked Ron nervously, still glancing out the window, not that anything could be seen.

“I dunno, mate,” said Neville, feeling his way back towards his seat. “What about you, Malfoy? What do you think?”

“No idea,” said Draco, uninterested. “Do you have any idea, Harry?”

“I have my suspicions.”

“There’s something moving out there,” said Ron, using his sleeve to wipe a small patch of condensation off the window. “I think people are coming aboard…”

“Pettigrew is boarding the Hogwarts Express to kill Longbottom,” said Harry. “That is the only possible explanation.”

“You wish!” said Ron.
“I do, I do,” said Harry, sneering, not that anyone could see it. “Why don’t you go and fight him, Weasley? Maybe he’ll kill you and his bloodlust will be sated. That’s a win-win situation, Weasley, you die and Pettigrew doesn’t kill Longbottom.”

“Quiet!”

“Excuse me?” said Harry, turning towards the professor. “I’m not sure who you think you are, but I refuse to be told to be quiet.”

“No arguing,” said the professor. “Stay where you are.”

Harry stood, scowling. “I’m not sure who you think you are, professor, but I’m not a child that needs to be babysat. I’m not sure why you think I’m going to listen to you, but I’ll deal with this myself and I’ll be fine,” he said fiercely, pulling out his wand and shoving open the door. “Just try and stop me.”

“Wait –”

“Just let the prat go,” said Ron. “He’s a Slytherin anyway.”

“Excuse me, Weasley,” said Draco, highly offended. “Harry’s most likely going to help the first-year students as they’re scared. He’s a model student, you know.”

“I’m not sure you understand the danger that boy is in,” said the professor, summoning a handful of flames that illuminated the compartment. “He won’t last a minute out there alone, no matter how smart he may be.”

“Potter is an idiot and needs to be taught a lesson,” snapped Hermione. “It would be good for him to be knocked down a peg or two.”

Everyone gaped at Hermione.

“What?”

“Do you mean Potter, as in James Potter?”

“Yes,” said Neville. “James is Harry’s father –”

“Not that he acts like it,” muttered Ron.

“That’s just another reason that it’s vital we make sure he’s alright,” said Professor Lupin. “I haven’t seen him since he was a little baby… he certainly changed from looking like a baby version of James to looking like Lily.”

“Potter will be fine,” said Ron. “Somehow he’ll survive and then brag about it when we get to Hogwarts.”

Professor Lupin didn’t look convinced.

“Trust me, professor,” said Ron, trying to calm the man down. “Potter’ll be alright.”
Harry set off through the tiny corridor on the train, his wand pointed forwards, emitting a small light. He ignored the chatter from the compartments that as he walked by, hoping that the girls would stop screaming about the dark and use their heads and use a spell to light up their compartments.

He was somewhat glad that Draco hadn’t followed him as he left the compartment. He didn’t want his friend to be hurt or attacked if it was Peter Pettigrew that had boarded the train. The whole situation was eerie and it seemed like a thing that a crazed mass murderer freshly escaped from Azkaban would do.

He wasn’t afraid of some man that had been around Dementors for ten years, not even with the three years of recovery away from them.

A lot of what was going on had to be a scare tactic, and that’s why he wasn’t bothered by it. There would be no creatures lurking in the darkness, waiting to strike out when he walked into each different compartment of the train. He wasn’t scared of the dark, either, so that wasn’t an issue.

The worst that could happen was Peter Pettigrew was waiting just outside the door into the next carriage. And if he was, which wasn’t likely, it would be to attack Longbottom and not him, which meant that he was safe from harm. Not that some old washed up Death Eater posed a threat to him.

‘Many of these washed up Death Eaters are more powerful than you believe,’ said Tom, a hint of amusement filled his voice. ‘They didn’t make the orders, they followed them, which limited their own power in the process. When they fought, they fought with all they had else they would have been killed by their master, who was never pleased with them.’

“So?” replied Harry, uncaring if it seemed like he was talking to himself.

‘There is so much more to magic than what you’re being taught. Many witches and wizards have thought about it, but never actually increased that into searching and studying. You yourself have had many theories regarding magic and where it comes from and how it’s used, but you have never really dug any deeper besides your base thoughts.’

Harry was surprised. In all his years of knowing that voice that he called Tom, the voice had never said more than twenty words in a sentence before. Ever since dealing with Tom Riddle’s diary, he couldn’t help but feel as if this Tom was relatively the same. Tom had to be sentient and had at least some sort of memory or knowledge of his own, as he hadn’t ever thought about certain things that Tom said.

He knew that there was more to magic than what was shown to the naked eye. He knew that magic came from somewhere inside their bodies and when the body was destroyed, then the talent wouldn’t crossover to a new one.

‘Your theory on magic belonging to the soul is actually rather sound,’ said Tom. ‘A soul can transfer between bodies, assuming the person has dabbled in necromancy, and things will have to be
returned, but all the knowledge and abilities will always be there.’

“A soul can transfer, but the chances of that happening are less than one perfect, or even a fraction,” said Harry. “There’s a reason why necromancy is primarily focused on raising the dead as walking corpses rather than guaranteeing a long life.”

‘Every witch and wizard, at least those from pure-blooded lines, has a tiny piece of necromancy in them, coming from the Black line, after they diverged into it, causing the infamous ‘Black madness’.’

“That’s such nonsense,” said Harry, shrugging. “That’s a statement that was said once and is continued to be repeated throughout the ages. I mean, look at Phineas Nigellus Black, he was a professor of an amazing degree, the most students achieving the highest grades under his tutelage, and then headmaster of Hogwarts. He held none of the supposed ‘Black madness’.”

‘Your mother has the title of ‘greatest witch of her age’, do you disagree with that?’

“Yes,” replied Harry. “There’s no way to prove that as correct, even if she’s talented beyond her peers. Take Granger, for example, she has been called that same title twice, but she’s book smart, not magic smart. It’s nothing but a title to make her feel good.”

‘A pity title?’

“For Granger, yes,” said Harry. “There’s no ‘greatest wizard of his age’ for men because the men don’t want things like that. Witches have only just been given extra things, such as being able to vote and work, mainly due to the rapidly declining magical numbers. It makes them feel good if they have a silly title like that.”

‘Let us not delve into a debate about man versus woman, it’s moot and an age-old argument that will result in a stalemate,’ said Tom. ‘Titles are made and distributed by weak men to appear strong. Take Lord Voldemort for example, he called himself a Dark Lord, something that hasn’t been done in centuries. In fact, the last wizard to label himself a Dark Lord was back before Hogwarts was even founded. That means that Voldemort will be known as a Dark Lord for at least another millennium, even if he perishes, as taking another’s title is considered weak.’

“What happened to the previous Dark Lord?”

‘Died, like all mortal men,’ said Tom. ‘I have wasted enough time speaking to you – go and hunt for Peter Pettigrew. The man is nothing but a rat.’

Harry’s lips slightly curled at what Tom had said, but he carried on without making a fuss. He was continuously getting shocked by Tom and his conversational skills, something that he didn’t think was possible. He hadn’t realised that he had moved a great deal while he was idly talking to Tom, nor that he wasn’t actually speaking.

He walked past each doorway, which had been slightly open, no one even daring to speak, with a somewhat concerned expression. It was quiet, far too quiet considering the train was supposedly under attack.

Windows rattled, rain crashed harshly against the slightly frozen windows, the wind howled, but no noise from another human was evident.

“Come…”

Harry spun around, trying to figure out where the voice had come from. It sounded as if the person was frozen to the core and shuddered as each letter of the word came out. It was the slow pace that
the word was said that made it so creepy.

“To us… come!”

Harry was about three seconds away from just shouting for the voice to shut up, but he had read enough battle reports that James had left around that revealing your position and state of mind wasn’t a good idea.

He pushed himself against the wall, ignoring the cold glass behind him and debated his actions, wondering what the voice belonged to and why it was speaking to him. A small part of his mind sent of proverbial alarm bells, telling him that he should turn and go elsewhere.

“Follow…”

Harry edged across the glass window, hoping to just evade the creepy voice and make it back to the compartment with Draco in it. He could spin a tale about scaring Pettigrew away and no one would dare question him. He had awards, perfect attendance, and was Quidditch Captain. People wouldn’t doubt him, no matter what he said.

“No! Follow!”

Harry dove from the voice and made it three steps before he felt a forearm push into his neck. “Get off me!”

“Quiet!” said the cold voice. “Follow… us…”

Harry studied the cloaked figure, who had just materialised out of nowhere. Perhaps it was the fact that the thing’s cloak was as black as the sky outside, or because he wasn’t able to actually see further than an arm’s length in front of him. “You want me to follow you?” he said, exhausting all other options that he could think of. That one made the most sense.

“Yes… you… follow… us…”

“Follow you where?” said Harry, trying to press for some details. “Where do you want me to go?”

“You… die…”

“No,” said Harry, not even thinking. “How about you die first and I’ll come after.”

“No… you… die.”

“No,” said Harry, glaring. “How about you die?”

“No!” said the voice, sounding panicked. “You… die…”

Harry didn’t have the time to analyse what the thing was saying with its long drawn out words, speaking one word per three seconds. He wanted to learn what the thing was saying any why it was saying something. It wasn’t Pettigrew, even if he was delirious from his stay in Azkaban.

He edged across the wall, loosening the grip that the beast had on him and breathed a sigh of relief as he felt the cold hands slip from his skin.

The elation that he felt from escaping his captor was short lived, vanishing almost instantly the moment he felt the door that he was pushed up against begin to move. He sucked in a harsh breath and attempted to balance himself, not wanting to stumble out of the train.
“Good… bye...”

Harry glanced up, a scowl on his face, at the dim-witted reply that he got from the creature. He was about to demand that the creature explain why it was harassing him and speaking as if it was learning a new language. His eyes travelled downwards and locked onto the slowly moving arm, which was heading straight towards him.

He attempted to swivel out of the way, but something was locking him in place. Both his voice and body refused to work. He could only watch completely helpless as the creature jabbed out its scabbed hand and gave a hard shove, sending him plummeting off the side of the train.

He fell towards the frozen river below silently, unable to scream or shout due to whatever that creature did to him. His final thought was revenge.

Neville awoke with a whimper, his body jerking roughly as he felt large hands pull him onto the seat. His eyes instantly shifted towards Hermione and Ron, who both looked pale and slightly concerned.

“Are you alright, Nev?” asked Ron, his voice coming off slightly shaky. “You kinda fainted – ow!”

Hermione moved from Ron and knelt down next to Neville. “Eat some chocolate,” she said, gesturing towards the professor, who was holding some. “Professor Lupin said that it would help.”

“What happened? Where’s that – that thing? Who screamed?”

“No one screamed,” said Ron, rather nervously, his arms were tucked around his legs. He sat down next to Neville. “I don’t think anyone made any noise at all.”

Neville sighed. “But I heard screaming…” he trailed off, turning his head away from the concerned look on Hermione’s face. “I swear I did.”

Professor Lupin shifted into view, his eyes filling with something that no one could determine. He snapped a large piece of chocolate into two pieces and handed half of it to Neville. “As Miss. Granger said: it’ll help.”

“Neville nodded and snapped his piece in half. “D’you need any, Harry?”

“He’s not here, mate,” said Ron. “Malfoy left about ten minutes ago to hunt him down.”

“Professor,” said Hermione, getting in before the conversation could continue. “Do you know what that thing was?”

“A Dementor,” said Professor Lupin. “One of the Dementors of Azkaban, a place that has eluded many books and reports since the Ministry founded it.”


“The very same,” said Professor Lupin, slipping the chocolate back into his coat. “I need to speak to the driver, excuse me.”

Hermione watched the professor leave. “Are you sure you’re alright?” she said, looking at Neville.

“I – I don’t get it, Hermione… what happened?” whispered Neville, his facial expression morphing into a slightly pleading one. “I remember Harry leaving and then nothing.”

Ron looked at Hermione and nodded. “Well – that thing – the Dementor – stood there and looked
around, I mean, I think it did, I couldn’t see its face — and you — you —” he trailed off and let out a shaky breath. “I thought you were having a fit or something. You went sort of rigid and fell out of your seat and started twitching.”

“And then Professor Lupin stepped over you, and walked towards the Dementor, and pulled out his wand,” said Hermione. “And he said something, but the Dementor didn’t move, so Lupin muttered something, and a silvery thing shot out of his wand at it, and it turned round and sort of glided away.”

“It was horrible,” said Ron, his voice slightly higher than usual. “Did you feel how cold it went when it came in?”

“I felt weird,” said Hermione shortly after, her shoulders shook slightly. “Like I’d never be cheerful again.”

Neville blinked and let out a small nervous laugh. “But didn’t any of you — fall off your seats?”

“No… none of us had the same reaction as you, but Lupin seemed concerned about it as soon as it happened,” said Ron, pausing to recall the event. “Potter escaped mere moments before it happened, the lucky sod.”

Hermione frowned as Ron continued his tirade about Harry Potter and how the Slytherin escaped before any danger began. “Eat Neville,” she said, pointing at the chocolate. “I’m sure Professor Lupin has found Potter by now and given him some.”

Neville stared at Hermione for a moment and bit into the chocolate, his eyes going wide as soon as he felt warmth spreading throughout his entire body, leaving the tips of his fingers tingling slightly.

“We’ll be at Hogwarts in ten minutes.”

Neville jumped sky-high when he heard the voice. “I didn’t see you come in!” he said, staring at the professor.

“Are you all right, Neville?”

“I’m fine,” said Neville. “Did you find Harry?”

Professor Lupin paused for a moment, internally debating something. “We haven’t found him yet, but Mr. Malfoy is searching, as well as a few other Slytherin students.

“YOU SHOULD HAVE CHECKED BEFORE YOU STARTED TO MOVE THE TRAIN!”

Neville stopped at the familiar sound of yelling and peaked through the slightly open door. He needed to be quiet so he could figure out what was going on. He had been at Hogwarts for a day and all the professors were being quiet about something.

“IT SHOULDN’T HAVE TAKEN YOU A DAY TO SEND ME A NOTIFICATION THAT MY SON WASN’T AT THE SCHOOL! HE SHOULDN’T BE LOST IN THE FIRST PLACE!”

“Mr. Potter, please remain calm.”

James breathed in and out, sighing. “I’m sorry, Albus, but this just isn’t what I thought would happen. Why was the train started without a simple headcount?” he paused and slumped onto the chair with a defeated expression on his face. “Lily doesn’t know what she should do and I cannot
send out all the Aurors to look for my son as its abusing manpower, at least that’s what the Minister is saying.”

Neville frowned. So Harry hadn’t been on the train like he had suggested to Hermione and that he was right and that something did happen.

“– an act! When has Harry ever done something like this? He may be my son and I may have been a prankster in my youth, but never on this level. Harry’d never do something that would upset Lily, and vanishing off a train during an attack isn’t something that would cross his mind. Stupid man!”

Neville listened as the headmaster replied in his usual way and suggested a few things that could help locate Harry. Spells that find witches and wizards weren’t working and Harry hadn’t activated the Ministry trace yet. He listened as James claimed that his son wasn’t dead and that he was alive.

He heard footsteps approaching promptly hid behind a large statue of armour. Within two minutes he was back at the door, on his hands and knees, listening in.

“– attacks on Muggle-born students, Dementors attacking the train… clearly the standards of this school continue to fall,” said Lucius Malfoy. “I needn’t bother with claiming that last year two students were kidnapped and almost killed while you did nothing about it besides ignore it. Surely a wizard of your… calibre would be able to handle a few stray situations such as this?”

“It is not in our best interests to fight while a student could be harmed,” said Dumbledore, concern lacing his voice. “If you really feel like my place at Hogwarts is no longer required then feel free to resubmit that application that you pulled shortly after applying it last year.”

Neville celebrated silently as Dumbledore got one over Lucius Malfoy. Yes, he tolerated the man because Harry vouched for him and that’s the only reason why he hadn’t ever said something about the man’s past. It would hurt Harry more than he would get enjoyment out of putting Lucius Malfoy in his place.

He moved closer to the door, almost pressing his entire body against it, trying to listen for more details.

“There is the pressing matter of actually finding him, headmaster,” said Professor Snape. “If I recall right, Lupin was on the train to keep watch and he clearly failed his job.”

“You cannot blame Remus,” said Albus. “He was watching over a thousand students by himself.”

“Hearing much?”

Neville jumped and turned his head slowly, hoping that it wasn’t a professor and that he hadn’t been caught eavesdropping on the staff meeting. He frowned when he saw Lily Potter standing there, the brim of her eyes red. “They’re just arguing with each other,” he said, watching as Lily slide down the wall and sat next to him. “They’ve got Professor Dumbledore and James, I’m sure they’ll find him.”

“Every year seems like fate is testing us,” said Lily. “Last year he was taken into the Chamber of Secrets and this year he just vanishes during an attack on the Hogwarts Express…”

Neville nodded, unsure of what he should say. In this situation, it would be Harry thinking up some kind of comforting words, even if he didn’t mean them. He just let Lily talk about everything. “I’m sure he’s fine,” he said softly. “He’ll find some way out of whatever happened and barge into the Great Hall, making everyone turn and look at him.”

“I know that he’ll be alright, Neville. He’s resourceful and will wait until he thinks it’s safe and he’s
still alive because Nagini seems unbothered by it all,” said Lily. “Harry said that they were bonded
and that if he was to ever die, Nagini would follow.”

“He believes that?”

“With all his heart,” said Lily. “I think that he’ll fight to stay alive so that Nagini will live.”

The two lapsed into silence, not sure on what to say. Neville sighed and summoned up all his
courage. “If you know he’ll be alright, why are you so upset?”

Lily stared for a moment. “It’s the thought of losing him, Neville. Last year, when he was taken, I
didn’t do much besides sit and cry, hoping that it was a joke and that he would pop out of
somewhere and surprise me. I didn’t even come when he was found because I was frozen mentally –
I felt so bad that I couldn’t come because I couldn’t tell him that I’m afraid to lose him again. If I had
it my way, Neville, he wouldn’t be here. I had to make myself come this time because if I ignore
him, then he’ll detest me for not caring, despite the fact that I care so much – I’m sorry if that makes
no sense, Neville, I really am. I cannot put it into words.”

Neville choked on his saliva. “You really do love him, don’t you?”

“With all my heart,” said Lily, wrapping an arm around Neville. “I envy your mother because she
loved you enough to give her life. Her love for you outshone You-Know-Who’s power. If anything
happened to me, I’m sure that Alice would look after Harry as much as I do you.”

“You’re my godmother, aren’t you?”

Lily nodded. “I shouldn’t have derailed this conversation as I have,” she said, standing. “Come on,
let’s go in and get some answers.”
Harry blinked, his eyes feeling like they were made of lead, forcing themselves to close. He strained to keep them open, trying his hardest to determine his surroundings and figure out how he would escape without breaking half the bones in his body.

Being that optimist that he was, he instantly began to plan an escape route the instant his mind recovered from the slightly foggy feeling that filled it. He couldn’t actually see the tracks above him, nor could he see anything that wasn’t lit up by some of the magical plants that surrounded him.

He wasn’t even sure if he could move.

He stopped attempting to sit up and just decided to rest a bit more, maybe his body would heal a little quicker and he could soon stand and leave.

“What’s today?”

“Today is Sunday, Lily,” said James, his hazel eyes locked onto the wall behind his wife. “Today’s Sunday.”

Lily broke down into tears, unsure of what she should say or do. “Three days, James,” she said. “Three days and we haven’t found him yet.”

“He’ll be alright, Lils, he’s a fighter…”

“I know that he’s a fighter, but that just makes it so much worse!” said Lily, sobbing. “While he’s out there fighting for his life, we’re in here doing nothing.”

James just wrapped his wife into a tight hug, hoping to try and ease her sobbing. He pretended not to hear the muffled cries about wanting to find Harry. He wasn’t good with words and every time he said something, it just upset his wife more and more.

“The Slytherins look like they’re going to attend a funeral,” said Ron, pulling a piece of toast from the large platter and slipping it onto his plate. “It’s kinda odd to not see them looking like they usually do.”

“Honestly, Ron,” said Hermione, sighing. “That’s because Potter is missing and they don’t want to show that they’re hurting about it, but they’re still kids and they’re affected by it.”

“That’s confusing.”

Neville nodded and tried to force himself to eat the breakfast and not look at Professor Lupin, who
looked worse than Lily and James put together. He knew that the professor was beating himself up over letting Harry leave and that the man would never live it down if Harry never came back, not that he wanted to think that.

“It makes perfect sense,” said Hermione. “They’re trying to be like their parents who are composed most of the time and they copy those actions, trying to imitate them –”

“Sorry, Hermione, but I don’t care,” said Ron, rolling his eyes. “Potter’s just doing this for attention.”

Neville paused halfway towards his mouth, his fork clattered to the plate and he took a deep breath. “I know that you don’t really care about Harry, at least not in the way that others do, because he was mean to you when you were children, but he could be dying! How can you just sit there and belittle him like that?”

“I –”

“Must you be so insensitive?” shouted Neville, his voice carrying over the entire Great Hall. He stood and fled the Great Hall before anyone could recover from the shock.

“Bloody hell…”

“You didn’t mean that, did you Ron?” asked Hermione, her eyes slightly wide. “Please tell me you didn’t.”

“No, Hermione… I just – I just don’t know how to control what I say like you and Nev – it slipped out.”

“I’ll go talk to him,” said Hermione, standing. “You can come too, if you want.”

“So,” said Harry, dragging out the word as he studied the crimson-eyed man staring at him. “Are you just going to stand there and admire me, or are you going to tell me how you found me when everyone else missed me?”

“Maybe I’m just talented,” said the crimson-eyed man, his eyes showing the mirth of the situation. “Or, maybe, I just knew where to look and actually looked instead of flying over. Speaking of that, how many have flown over you?”

“Seventeen. That’s all that I’ve seen,” said Harry. “They go by too fast to cover the large distance of area that I could be that they miss where I actually am.”

“Did you read that book that I sent you?” said the man, leaning against a rather sharp rock. “It was hard to track down an owl that would allow me to approach it. It took a little persuasion and a fair amount of magic.”

“I read half of it,” said Harry. “Most I already knew, but I learned a lot of new things. It’s still in my trunk thankfully.”

“Are you not frightened that they will search your things?”

“Nah,” said Harry, a hint of amusement in his tone. “I am the greatest sorcerer… they’ll never get into my trunk.”

“The greatest sorcerer,” repeated the man, amused. “Not many people use the word ‘sorcerer’ these days.”
Harry just stared at the man. “Are you going to help me, or are you just going to leave me here?”

“If you’re so great, why haven’t you got yourself out of this situation yet?”

“Maybe I like it here,” said Harry, unbothered. “No matter if I’m stuck here for a week, I’ll get out and show everyone that no matter what happens, I’ll always come out on top.”

“Interesting,” said the man, grinning. “You need help, desperately, but you refuse to accept it.”

Harry glared, although it lacked the usual bite of his icy glare. “I’m not refusing anything,” he muttered. “I’m perfectly fine to just stay here and see if anyone else will take the time to save me. Maybe I just like sitting on sharp rocks?”

“Speaking of sharp rocks, how did you survive that fall?” said the man, leaning forwards. “You fell from a moving train, landed on some sharp rocks and you look like you just stepped from a warm shower and ready to face the day.”

“You seem surprised,” said Harry, grinning. “You should just start accepting that the fact that odd things happen to me and I’m always alright. I always come out on top, no matter what.”

“Odd things?”

“I was once a mute, but then I could speak –”

“Explains why you’re so mouthy all the time,” said the man. “Do go on.”

Harry glared. “If you’re going to interrupt me, then you will not be hearing about my amazing adventures.”

“I have better things to do than listen to trivial tales about a small boy that has no idea on how life works,” said the man. “I shall take my leave, for now. They’re getting closer, child. Very close.”

“Are you going to look for Harry? If so, I want to come.”

Lily turned and looked at Draco Malfoy, who was standing proudly. “We want you to come, Draco, we really do, but the more people that come along, the harder it will be to find him and keep everyone in check.”

“What you’re doing now isn’t finding him!” said Draco, refraining from clenching his fists. “Flying overhead at the fastest speed that a broom will go isn’t going to find him, it’s just speeding up the search so that all those other people can go home. They don’t care like I do! I won’t leave until I find him.”

“That’s the issue,” said Lily. “The issue is that none of us want to leave, but we’re forced to. He could be moving and when we leave, we lose track of him. If I had it my way, Draco, you would be able to come with us and help us, but it requires permission from people who don’t want you to leave.”

“Dumbledore…”

“Actually inquired about getting the students to help, but the Minister wasn’t having it. If one student is missing, putting more out there won’t help, at least according to him.”

“I tried, Mr. Malfoy,” said Dumbledore, approaching the group. “As powerful and influential as I am, it has limits.”
“But you’re the headmaster!”

“I am, and not all choices are up to me,” said Dumbledore, his eyes twinkled slightly. “But your parents have final say, no matter what.”

Draco remained confused for a moment, watching as the headmaster walked towards the podium. He flicked his gaze towards Lily, who looked just as confused.

Dumbledore silenced all the chatter with a hand motion. “When I first learned that a student was declared missing from the Hogwarts Express, I instantly began to send out letters to every students’ parents or guardians. Many replied back, some more favourable than others, but they all replied back. The contents of my letter were asking for permission of a schoolwide search for the missing student,” he paused and assessed the facial expressions of the students. “Even if your parents gave you permission to help, you do not have to attend the search.”

Some students breathed a sigh of relief and others shuffled nervously.

“I understand that Mr. Potter may or may not have been rude to you, but are some childish words worth his life? Another situation could be that he’s a Slytherin and that he does not need the assistance because he’s evil or in league with certain Death Eaters. That is false.”

Draco listened as Dumbledore continued his long-winded speech, changing the topic from Harry to house-unity and working together to achieve a common goal. He listened as the headmaster complimented each house, pointing out their strong points and then dove in and amplified them by listing the strengths that could happen if all houses worked together.

He wanted to shout and interrupt the headmaster, claiming that he was taking over Harry’s thunder, as said boy liked to call it. He also wanted to laugh that Dumbledore was actually mimicking one of Harry’s speeches that he was going to use when he was older.

“If you do not wish to join in the search, you may leave the Great Hall now.”

Draco watched as a few students left, mainly the Gryffindors. Every single Hufflepuff and Slytherin student remained, as well as a few Gryffindors who remained because of Longbottom, and a few Ravenclaw students remained as they were in awe of Harry’s knowledge, obviously.

He knew that no Slytherins would dare leave, not because of looking out for their own, but they didn’t want Harry to hurt them when he got back, not that said boy would do such a thing. As he waited for Dumbledore to wrap up his little speech, he silently debated how it would be different if Harry was in each house.

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“If you do not wish to join in the search, you may leave the Great Hall now.”

Do you think we’re close, professor?” asked Hermione, walking along the rocky riverbed. “We’ve been searching for hours and there’s been no reports that he’s left the area.”

“I think so,” said Professor Lupin, leading a small group of students across the rocky terrain. “Something has been here, so we have to be on the right track.”
“‘Something’?” repeated Draco, following behind the other students, not wanting to be near the group that he was forced to join. “That’s not exactly helpful on what we could be facing.”

“I assume that it’s left,” said Professor Lupin, looking around with alert eyes. “If we follow the path it took, then we will be able to cover a larger area.”

“Was it human?”

Professor Lupin paused before giving his answer. He hushed the group and crept forwards, hoping to find the lost student as soon as possible. “We’re close.”

“That’s about as helpful as saying that something is out here,” said Draco, snorting. “We’re in a forest that hasn’t been explored in years and you’re saying that something is here? Funny.”

“No need to be sarcastic,” said Hermione, frowning. “You should be more concerned for your friend.”

“Harry will be fine,” said Draco. “He promised me that nothing would ever happen to him, Granger, and he doesn’t break promises.”

“You’re going to – ow!”

Hermione glared at Ron. “Professor, do you think we could take a break?” she said, rubbing her forearm. “Just for a moment.”

“Sorry, Miss. Granger, but we cannot stop, not when we’re so close.”

“What’s wrong?” whispered Ron. “Is your leg hurting?”

“No, no,” said Hermione. “It’s just gone numb.”

“Do you think that Potter’s still alive?” said Ron, still whispering. “I mean, like, Dumbledore said that he fell from the train. That’s a massive drop…”

“I’m not sure, Ron, I’m not sure.”

“Harry will be fine,” said Draco, glaring. “He’s not useless like Longbottom and would’ve cast a Cushioning Charm.”

“A Cushioning Charm won’t stop a fall from that distance,” said Hermione. “Besides, we’ve not learnt that spell yet.”

“When has a spell not being taught ever stopped Harry from learning it?” said Draco. “He was casting fifth-year spells in his first year. I can guarantee you that he’ll be fine.”

“Do you say that because you want it to be true?” said Hermione, studying Malfoy with a keen eye. “I know that he knows some spells that haven’t been taught yet, but a Cushioning Charm is highly advanced.”

“I say it, Granger, because I know that it’s true,” said Draco, ignoring the professor telling them to be quiet. “It’s pretty obvious that you envy Harry and you’re trying to make him appear incompetent. I don’t need to remind you that he’s beaten you in every class the past two years and he’ll do it again.”

“Doesn’t it bother you that you’re always going to be in the shadow of Potter?” said Ron, glaring. “I’m amazed that you haven’t already backstabbed him and taken credit for everything he’s done, which isn’t much.”
“I’m not you, Weasley, I’m not jealous of Harry like you’re jealous of Longbottom.”

“You wish, Malfoy!”

“Stop fighting!” scolded Professor Lupin as he pushed aside a large fern. “You will be getting graded on how well you perform during this exercise.”

“Harry won’t like not getting a mark,” said Draco as he debated on how Harry would react when he was told there would be a grade for this. “He hands in everything, no matter if it’s not needed. If it can be done, he’ll do it and demand a mark for it.”

“What’s Potter gonna get a mark for? Being dumb and getting tossed off the train?”

“Maybe the fact that he has some survival skills?” said Draco, sneering. “And you cannot blame him that he was attacked by Dementors.”

Ron snorted but remained quiet after another warning from the professor. He wondered how Neville’s group was doing and if they were alright. He almost laughed at how everyone wanted to get into the headmaster’s searching group and Neville just walks up casually and nods, making the headmaster beam.

“Why are you so eager to find Harry, professor?” asked Neville, trying to piece it all together. “I can’t help but feel like you don’t trust him.”

Dumbledore stroked his beard as he used a spell to push aside a rather sharp looking branch. “Mr. Potter isn’t like other students,” he said, unsure of how he should actually continue. “Do you remember Tom Riddle from last year?”

“How could I forget?”

“Forgive me, Neville,” said Dumbledore. “If I had known that something like that would happen, I would have taken more active steps to prevent it.”

“It’s alright, headmaster, you did all you could.”

“As for Mr. Potter, I fear that one day he could snap and become something that none of us can stop,” said Dumbledore, his tone sounding grave. “I am not calling him evil, nor am I calling him the next Dark Lord, but he has that drive that pushes him above other students, as well as talents that haven’t been seen in many centuries.”

“I’m not following.”

“The best way for me to describe Mr. Potter, would be to label him as an antihero,” said Dumbledore. “It’s a loose word, and one that I do not like to use. The issue is that if Mr. Potter’s support group vanishes, he would do many things to get them back or seek revenge.”

“You mean Malfoy?”

Dumbledore nodded. “The Malfoy family, Severus, and, of course, his mother.”

“So you don’t think he’s evil?” said Neville. “Ron does, and Hermione thinks he has something wrong with him, but I know that he’d never really harm anyone.”

“I did not think that Tom Riddle was evil either,” said Dumbledore. “In his youth, at least. He was just a young boy trying to make a name for himself, not unlike many other young men.”
Neville frowned.

Dumbledore leant down and rested a hand on Neville’s shoulder. “I do not believe that people are born evil, Neville. I do believe that events and actions can change a person, whether for the better or the worse.”

“That does make sense,” said Neville. “What made Tom Riddle the way he was, sir?”

“I believe that it was that he grew up in the middle of a war,” said Dumbledore, thinking back. “War is a terrible thing.”

The two continued in silence, keeping an eye out for the lost student as they brushed past dead trees, fallen logs, and various species of wildlife. Neville spotted a pair of footprints off to the side and quickly pointed them out.

“Well done, my boy,” said Dumbledore as he leant down and studied them intently. “Whatever came by had light steps.”

Neville’s face screwed up in confusion. “That means what, sir?”

“That they were sneaking.”

Neville’s eyebrows shot up. “Sneaking? Maybe it was a hunter.”

“Very well may be,” said Dumbledore, standing. “It’s leading away from where we’re going, so we should be fine.”

Neville nodded and just followed along, hoping that they would find Harry soon.

“Still here?” said the crimson-eyed man as he leant against the fallen log that he had made his prime spot these past few hours. “You are, without a doubt, lucky to be alive, child. You have some of the strongest accidental magic I have ever seen.”

“I haven’t done accidental magic since I was two,” said Harry, leaning back against the rock that he had made his bed. “I know how to use my magic.”

“You speak as if it is sentient.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “It’s a part of me,” he muttered. “I really wanted to survive, so I did.”

“Interesting.”

“You doubt what I’ve said,” said Harry, his eyes narrowing. “No normal witch or wizard could’ve survived a fall that high, no matter how ‘powerful’ they are. I could’ve tossed Dumbledore off the same height and Hogwarts would’ve been out of a headmaster.”

“But you’re not a normal wizard, are you?” said the man, grinning. “I do wonder what you call me in your head. Do you just call me ‘the man’ or define me by the colour of my eyes? You seem to have forgotten manners and not asked me for my name.”

“If I had asked, would you have told me?” asked Harry, already knowing the answer. “You do have unique eyes.”

“Tell me, Child, tell me something unique about your house at Hogwarts and I may reveal a letter in my name.”
“Odd,” said Harry. “Fine. Slytherins don’t look after their own, they seek to backstab you at any given moment. Many believe that we will stick together, but the moment you turn your back, a knife will be placed in it. Loyalty is a Hufflepuff trait, not a Slytherin trait.”

“Interesting,” said the man, a smile gracing his lips. “The first letter of my name is an ‘n’. If you can guess my name right now, I’ll tell you my surname.”

“Not yet,” said Harry. “As for that question, why’d you want to know that?”

“I never attended the prestigious school and because of that, I feel as if I should make up a version of my own using the knowledge of other people.”

“That’s… weird,” said Harry. “From what you’ve learned from other people, what house do you think you would be in?”

The man paused for a moment, debating his answer. “Hufflepuff,” he said, staring at the boy with challenging eyes.

“Fascinating,” said Harry. “I think you’d fit more in Ravenclaw, as Hufflepuff aren’t known for menacing looking wizards.”

“I do not look menacing,” said the man. “I like perfectly fine and inviting.”

Harry snorted. “‘Inviting’?”

“Would someone not inviting bring you food?” said the man, pulling out a nicely packed package from his pocket. “I made certain that it was in a sealed container and that said container was durable.”

“Got any tea?”

“British as ever,” sighed the man, pulling out a teacup. “You’re very lucky that I have a brain and I came prepared.”

“Hm.”

“Ah, Mr. Malfoy, it seems as if our paths have crossed.”

Draco looked up and saw the headmaster with his usual ebullient expression, despite the events that have taken place. “Headmaster,” he greeted. “Have you made any progress on finding Harry? If our paths are crossing, then it must be good news.”

“Ah, Mr. Malfoy, conversation with you is much like it is with Mr. Potter,” said Dumbledore, his beard twitching slightly. “Your greetings are genuine and proper, but Mr. Potter tends to lace his words with false enthusiasm and hidden emotions.”

“Harry’s just polite…”

“No, Mr. Malfoy, you’re the polite one.”

Draco frowned, not understanding. He silently pleaded for an explanation, knowing that the headmaster just seemed to know whether a student was curious or not.

“What I mean, Mr. Malfoy, is that your actions and speech tend to be more genuine and real feeling, whereas Mr. Potter tends to hide it behind backhanded remarks and overusing titles. There are but a
few titles that Mr. Potter has not called me during one sit-down, but he has come close.”

“Oh.”

“I do believe that you asked me on information about Mr. Potter’s whereabouts,” said Dumbledore. “We have not found him just yet, but our paths are merging and that means that we’re ending this section.”

“You have Harry wrong, sir,” said Draco, unable to let that last bit of conversation go. He knew that Harry wasn’t here to defend himself, so he had to defend Harry instead. “He has this façade of spitefulness, but he’s really a nice person.”

“To those he cares about,” said Dumbledore. “Your heart is in the right place, Mr. Malfoy, but you cannot say that Mr. Potter is polite to everyone. The little sneers and scowls that he does towards those that he feels serve him no purpose. If you, at the current time, have no use to him, he’ll treat you like dirt, but the moment you have a use, he will be quick to befriend you.”

“That’s not nice…”

“I meant no disrespect, Mr. Malfoy,” said Dumbledore. “There are over a thousand students in Hogwarts at the moment, that’s just in Hogwarts and not counting the six hundred out here. This year has had the largest attendants for a very long time. Forgive my rambling, but I was getting to the point that I care about every student, no matter what house.”

“What about that stunt in my first year?” said Draco, stepping over a small pond in the middle of the dirt path. “Y’know, how we won and then you almost took it away from us.”

Dumbledore chuckled. “The points were already granted to Gryffindor long before the leaving ceremony. No points can be given or lost in the last week of the term, which is a flaw, if I must admit. I was attempting to be dramatic about it all. I was shocked to walk in and already see the banners changed.”

“But…”

“Professor McGonagall did not know that the points had been assigned, but not added into the hourglass,” said Dumbledore. “It is all confusing, but I took the fall for her because it was my fault.”

“So that means Gryffindor should have won.”

Dumbledore couldn’t help but smile. “No. It was a draw. It would have been the first draw in house points in over three hundred years. I was quite excited. But Mr. Potter decided that the events were not fair and he made Professor McGonagall act before I could give him points. It’s a very long story, one that makes the professors look rather incompetent, but I’m sure it will be a joke in a few years.”

“How lovely.”

Draco jumped and spun around, looking at the voice with a shocked facial expression. He ignored the fact that the headmaster didn’t even react. “Harry!” he breathed, looking a mix between relieved and furious. “I can’t believe I’ve finally found – where did you get that teacup?”

Harry smiled.
Sorry for all the PoV shifting. :D

Another sneak peak on the stalker that Harry has.
The first half of the week went at a snail pace, especially considering the excitement that happened before the term had even started. The student population were still on some sort of natural high from the holidays and despite all stories being told on the first night, they still came up with new ones. They ranged from a Hufflepuff learning a new complex spell, a Ravenclaw getting a new pet rabbit and a Gryffindor trying out Muggle fighting.

More than half of the third-year students groaned when they realised that today was the day that they had Divination, the so-called easy class. It worsened when they noticed their professor for the subject beaming at them.

“Why are you groaning?” asked Harry, spreading a piece of toast with a copious amount of butter. “You chose the subject because you said it would be an easy ‘Outstanding’ and now you’re going back on it because of some rumours?”

“I’m not talking to you until you tell me how you were on a sharp rock and lived,” said Draco. “And the fact that you had a teacup with you! FULL OF TEA!”

“Oh, Draco, he’s not going to tell you,” said Rosier. “He’ll just smirk at you and shrug it off, claiming you were seeing things in your hysteria.”

“He was sipping on tea while he eavesdropped on the conversation the headmaster and I were having.”

“Careful, Draco, the headmaster will convert you to the Gryffindor side,” muttered Harry. “I think you would look dashing in red and gold.”

“I would not!”

Harry snorted. “Be quiet and eat your breakfast, you need all the nutrients to grow into a healthy young man, as your mother has said frequently.”

“Oh, really,” muttered Draco, grinning. “Maybe you’ve been skipping meals, then. Tell me, Harry, do your feet even touch the floor from the stool or do you need to hop off the stool to stand?”

“Hmph.”

“Granger looks like she’s spent every day awake all night,” said Rosier, watching the frizzy-haired girl stumbled onto the bench. “I heard she’s taking Muggle Studies –”

“I’m taking that class as well,” said Harry. “The professor is more of a fraud than Lockhart, but it’s an easy class, I guess.”
“How many people are in that class?” asked Draco. “It seems like such a dead subject.”

“Loads,” said Harry. “It’s pretty much full, which can’t be said for any other class that isn’t forced on you. Many witches and wizards find Muggles interesting.”

“They’re dull…”

“Muggles have been on the moon, Rosier,” said Harry, glaring. “Have wizards stepped foot on the moon?”

“Well… no, but who cares?”

“You don’t understand that they’re more advanced than us – no one does,” muttered Harry, shoving aside his plate. “Voldemort – don’t flinch – had the wrong idea. Attacking Muggles and exposing ourselves with warfare would only serve to kill us off. They outnumber us, outgun us, and they have us beat in technology. We still use torches whereas they can light an entire building with a flick of a switch.”

Rosier prepared for a long argument on the pros and cons of magic versus electricity. “But –” he paused when he heard the bell ring out and sighed. “Lucky, Harry, I had the best argument prepared.”

“Yeah, whatever,” said Harry. “Enjoy your free break while Draco and I go and divine the future.”

Draco snorted. “Maybe we’ll see your perfect argument during the lesson.”

Harry ignored the banter and continued on to the Divination classroom, which was on the other side of the castle. He had a theory that a majority of wizards were underweight because of the distance between classes. He compared the Muggle school towards Hogwarts and realised that the Muggles had classes closer together, equalling less walking.

Of course, his theory was simply because he was bored and needed something to think about.

“Don’t you have Ancient Runes at this time, Harry?” said Draco, studying the location where the classroom should be. “I swear you said you had it at this time, but I didn’t really think about it.”

“You’ve seen my timetable, Draco, not once, but twice,” said Harry, sighing. “You know that I only go to certain classes on certain days. I spoke with Professor Snape about it last year and we figured out a lesson schedule that could make it work. I’ll attend every Divination lesson and take Ancient Runes work as catch-up work during the weekends.”

“I know that I’ve seen it twice, but I still cannot make it out,” said Draco, glaring at the wall where the door should be. “For the love of – where’s the class!”

“Look up, Malfoy.”

“Fancy seeing you here, Granger,” sneered Draco, ignoring the comment about sneering from Harry. “If I remember right, you called Divination ‘hogwash’ on Monday and yet you’re here, taking the class.”

Hermione ignored him and pulled on the rope, allowing for the ladder to slide out of the trapdoor and land next to the Slytherins with a loud thump.

“Moody,” said Draco, snickering. “Come on, Harry, let’s go and see our futures.”
“This is our classroom?” said Harry, sniffing at the strong smelling aroma of something. “I am speechless.”

“That’s a first.”

Harry ignored Draco and proceeded to study the classroom, if it could have even be called that. He honestly thought that it looked like an old-fashioned teashop. A really old-fashioned one with the dirt and webs included. His eyes were drawn to the twenty small, circular tables, which were pushed together, almost overlapping. He eyed the chintz armchairs and fat little pouffes with disdain as he made a move forwards, halting his steps when he noticed the crimson light settling over the room.

“Gryffindor colours,” said Draco, saying what had flickered onto Harry’s mind. “Never thought that I’d see the day where more than seventy percent of the teaching staff were in Gryffindor.”

“I don’t think Professor Trelawney was in Gryffindor, Draco.”

Draco grunted but didn’t change his mind. He saw all the red and gold decoration around.

Harry sighed. “It doesn’t make someone a Gryffindor because they have some red and gold decorations hanging about in their room,” he said, rolling his eyes. He pointed at one of the tables that was near the large window. “We’re sitting there as it’s the best place.”

“How do you know that?”

“A friend told me,” said Harry, stealing the table from a group of Gryffindor girls. “Move it! This is our table.”

“So rude…”

“I know, right!”

“Please don’t tell me that you’re in a mood,” said Draco, watching the two Gryffindor girls moan about being kicked out of the table with natural light. “It’s like talking to a snake when you’re in a mood.”

“Nice comparison,” said Harry, glancing around the room once more. “And no, before you decide to repeat yourself, I am not in a mood, I am just bored and the lesson started two minutes ago and the professor still isn’t here.”

“Eight more minutes and we can leave,” muttered Draco, sounding rather hopeful. “Maybe she got lost.”

“I doubt that, Draco,” said Harry, looking up, hearing footsteps. “Her living quarters are above her classroom.”

“I guess,” muttered Draco. “Do you know what the first practical thing that we’ll be doing?”

“I’m not sure,” said Harry, eyeing the teacups and teapot with narrowed eyes. “At least someone left us some tea.”

Draco snorted as Harry picked up the teapot and gave it an experimental shake. “D’you think it’s safe to drink?”

“Of course,” said Harry, grinning. “Would you care for a spot of tea, Mr. Malfoy?”

“You can’t do an impression of the Queen, Harry, don’t even try,” said Draco as he rolled his eyes.
He held out his teacup and watched as said boy attempted to pour the tea in a posh manner. “Thank you.”

“You know what we need now?” said Harry, tilting his head. “We need biscuits.”

“You’re right!”

“I’m always right,” said Harry as he looked over towards Granger. “Granger!”

Hermione jolted and glanced up at who called her name. “What?” she muttered, sighing after she learned who had called her.

“Get me and Draco some biscuits,” demanded Harry. “We need something to go with our tea.”

“Draco and I –”

“No, Granger, not you, me and Draco are eating the biscuits and you’re going to be a good student and go and get them.”

“No,” said Hermione, sighing. “And it’s ‘Draco and I’ not ‘me and Draco’.”

“Alright,” muttered Harry. “I and Draco are hungry and we want some biscuits.”

Hermione clenched her fists and muttered under her breath, counting to ten.

Harry sipped his tea, internally debating why no one else was helping themselves to the tea when it was right there. He grinned when his eyes met Granger’s. The class hadn’t even started yet and he was already making her angry.

“Welcome, my children,” said Professor Trelawney as she entered the room. The innumerable chains and beads that were hung around her spindly neck flicking around wildly with her overdramatic welcoming gesture. She lifted her left arm, which was almost covered in bangles. “I saw all of your stunning faces as you entered.”

A Gryffindor girl looked up, mesmerised. “Wow!” she said breathlessly. “You saw us before you even came here?”

“Sit, my children, sit,” said Professor Trelawney. She watched as the students that hadn’t sat all dove for a spot at the same table. “Welcome to Divination.”

Harry waited for something else to be said, but the professor just stopped and stared at them as if she was frightened to move or speak. He didn’t believe it when people said that the professor was like a first-year and was timid.

Professor Trelawney seated herself in a winged armchair in front of the fire. “My name is Professor Trelawney. You may not have seen me before. I find that descending too often into the hustle and bustle of the main school clouds my Inner Eye.”

Harry mouthed the word to Draco, his eyebrows lifted. He smirked when everyone remained silent, not even bothering to ask about the ‘Inner Eye’. He watched as the professor nervously rearranged the hideous shawl that she wore.

“So you have chosen to study Divination, the most difficult of all magical arts. I must warn you at the outset that if you do not have the Sight, there is very little I will be able to teach you. Books can take you only so far in this field…”
Harry tuned out the rest of the speech and grinned at Granger, knowing that she would be horrified that she couldn’t use books to achieve easy grades. He turned back to the professor and caught the tail end of something intriguing.

“– many witches and wizards, talented though they are in the area of loud bangs and smells and sudden disappearings, are yet unable to penetrate the veiled mysteries of the future,” said Professor Trelawney, her enormous, gleaming eyes moving from face to face. “It is a Gift granted to few.”

“Then why are we here?”

Professor Trelawney turned towards the boy that spoke and met his bright green eyes. “Your future looks to be bleak,” she said, her large eyes slightly widening. “You will need to find yourself before you lose yourself.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “That makes no sense,” he muttered. “And my future will be bleak? How detailed and in-depth. Everyone’s future is going to be bleak at some point, no matter what you do or try.”

“He lies!” said Professor Trelawney, her voice going slightly off-key. “If you continue, your path will be filled with treachery, doubt, and the journey will be very lonesome indeed.”

“I’m not lying!”

Professor Trelawney shifted her focus towards the blond boy across from the black-haired boy and pursed her lips. “You will get what you have always wanted, but the cost will be high.”

Draco’s eyes widened.

Professor Trelawney lifted her gaze to address the entire class. “We will be covering the basic methods of Divination this year. The first term will be devoted to reading the tea leaves. Next term we shall progress to palmistry.”

The class nodded, even as they shifted nervously.

“By the way, my dear,” said Professor Trelawney, eyeing a student warily. “Beware a red-haired man.”

The girl gave Ronald Weasley a startled look and promptly edged her chair away from him.

Harry couldn’t help but roll his eyes at this load of tripe. “She said man, Parvati, not a boy.”

The class snickered, even as the professor continued.

“In the summer term,” said Professor Trelawney, ignoring the snickering. “We shall progress to the crystal ball – if we have finished with fire-omens, that is. Unfortunately, classes will be disrupted in February by a nasty bout of flu. I myself will lose my voice. And around Easter, one of our number will leave us forever.”

That sobered up the entire class. Everyone stopped snickering and focused on the professor.

“I wonder, dear,” said Professor Trelawney to Lavender Brown, who was nearest and shrank back in her chair. “If you could pass me the largest silver teapot?”

Lavender, looking relieved, stood up, took an enormous teapot from the shelf and put it down on the table in front of Professor Trelawney.
“Thank you, my dear. Incidentally, that thing you are dreading – it will happen on Friday the sixteenth of October.”

Lavender almost tripped over as she walked back towards her seat, her eyes directly on the ground.

“Now, I want you all to divide into pairs. Collect a teacup from the shelf, come to me and I will fill it. Then sit down and drink; drink until only the dregs remain. Swill these around the cup three times with the left hand, then turn the cup upside-down on its saucer; wait for the last of the tea to drain away, then give your cup to your partner to read. You will interpret the patterns using pages five and six of Unfogging the Future. I shall move among you, helping and instructing.”

“How did you get the tea that was on our desk?” asked Draco, narrowing his eyes as he watched Harry nervously shifted the teapot aside. “Well?"

“It was on the professor’s table and I decided to just summon it, Draco. Don’t tattle.”

“I wasn’t going to ‘tattle’,” muttered Draco, standing. “Can’t you summon another one?"

“I can, but the professor is in here.”

“Fine!”

Harry watched as Draco glared and then made his way towards the shelf. He saw Professor Trelawney stare at Draco and then move at a speed that he had never seen before.

“You, boy!” said Professor Trelawney, clutching the boy’s arm. “After you break my green teapot, would you be so kind to accept the white one patterned one? I’m rather fond of the other sets.”

Draco snorted and took the green teapot, just to prove her wrong. Midway back he was stepped on the robe of Weasley and got tangled, dropping the green teapot in the process. “Weasley!” he hissed, glaring at the boy. “Would you get your cheap rags out of the way? I could’ve broken my neck because of your carelessness!”

“Please get the white one patterned one,” said Professor Trelawney, unbothered that her teapot had just been broken.

“The great Draco Malfoy, heir to the famous Malfoy line stumbles on a Weasley robe.”

“Don’t start!”

Harry grinned. “Go on, then, fill it up.”

Draco filled the teacups, making sure to make Harry’s wrong. “There you go, your highness.”

Harry took a quick drink of the tea and screwed up his face. “This tastes awful,” he muttered. “I’m not sure if I can even finish drinking this.”

Sure enough, the two boys finished their tea and soon handed over their cups to study the dregs. Most of the class was doing the same thing.

“So,” said Draco, studying Harry’s cup with confusion. “What did I get?”

“You have a symbol of a brain in here, which is where yours has clearly gone.”

“Excuse me?” said Draco, pushing Harry’s cup aside. “My brain is perfectly fine, thank you very much.”
“Well,” said Harry, debating on what he should say. He just grunted and dropped it. “What’d I get?”

“I’m not actually sure,” said Draco, peering into the cup. “Let’s ask the professor.”

Harry kicked Draco under the table. “I’d rather not, hand it –” he sighed when Draco called out and dragged the professor over here. “We’re fine, professor, Draco just needs some glasses.”

“Let me see, let me see,” said Professor Trelawney as she gently took the cup from the hands of the blond-haired boy. “Hm. You have an apple, which means you have good knowledge. There’s a snake as well… you would be wise to check your pets. A club is also in the mix as well, I suggest you brush up on your defensive spells. Finally, I see a… cross.”

“How exciting,” said Harry, amused. “And what about Draco’s cup?”

“Hm, just as complicated,” said Professor Trelawney. “I can see a cat, which means a friend is being deceitful. I can also see a bird, which appears to be the primary focus of the leaves. Finally, there’s a skull.”

Harry watched the professor place down the cup and walk off. “What a load of rubbish,” he muttered, flicking through *Unfogging the Future*. “She just got things from the first page and ignored everything else – look, on the second page there’s a river, a sun, a moon, and some clouds that are in both our cups.”

“She did guess that I would break that teapot.”

“She put ideas in your head, Draco,” said Harry. “She made you doubt yourself and then you tripped and instantly thought she was correct. None of her predictions have been complex. I could do the same thing right now.”

“Right, right.”

“Look,” muttered Harry, gesturing towards Longbottom. “Now she’s tormenting Longbottom and his posse of Gryffindors.”

“The Grim, my dear, the Grim!” cried Professor Trelawney, who looked shocked that Neville hadn’t understood. “The giant, spectral dog that haunts churchyards! My dear boy, it is an omen – the worst omen – of death!”

“Looks like a donkey,” muttered Ron, studying the so-called ‘Grim’.

“I think we will leave the lesson here for today,” said Professor Trelawney, in her mistiest voice. “Yes… please pack away your things…”

Harry couldn’t get out of that room fast enough. He waved off Professor Trelawney’s farewell and went down the stairs at a rapid pace, almost leaving Draco behind. “Keep up, Draco, else we’ll be late for Transfiguration.”

“We’re not going to be late, Harry,” said Draco, panting. “Trelawney let us out twenty-five minutes early.”

“Even if we weren’t out early, Transfiguration is on the other side of the castle.”

They made it to class on time with a few minutes to spare, despite Draco’s reassurances that they would have plenty of time to set up. Many other students straggled in, scuffing their feet as they found a seat to sit in.
“Today is a very special day,” said Professor McGonagall, pacing in front of the class. “I’m going to show you something rare.”

No one said anything.

“Really?” said Professor McGonagall, her lips pressed tightly together. “Not even one ounce of curiosity?”

“I’m curious on what rare piece of magic you’re going to show us.”

“I never said it was magic, Mr. Potter.”

“Ah, yes, but this is Transfiguration and you’ve been talking about this day since the first lesson,” said Harry, looking at the professor with a slight grin. “Not to mention the pacing, which is something that witches and wizards do before a piece of magic that requires a lot of focus.”

“It is nice to see one person listens to what I have to say in class,” said Professor McGonagall. “Mr. Weasley! Would you stop drawing on the table with your ink and pay attention!”

“I – I’m not, professor,” said Ron weakly. “Sorry.”

“Now,” continued Professor McGonagall after giving the entire class a slight glare. “Ten points to the person that can tell me what I was speaking about – hand down, Mr. Potter.”

The class murmured different things, none knowing what had been said.


Nothing.

“Mr. Finnigan? What about you, Mr. Thomas?”

Nothing.

“Let’s try the other side of the room,” said Professor McGonagall, mainly to herself. “Mr. Crabbe?”

“You were talking about – err—animals… or somethin’.”

Professor McGonagall sighed and gestured to the next student, and then the next, and then the next. “Mr. Potter,” she said. “Please inform the class on what we were talking about.”

“You were talking about how some wizards have the concentration and patience to become an Animagus. Unlike most magic, becoming an Animagus isn’t dependent on intent, instead, it’s dependent on patience. Most witches and wizards aren’t patient and therefore lack the ability to become an Animagus, hence why the ability is so rare and sought after.”

“A very detailed and in-depth description,” said Professor McGonagall. “Anything else? Perhaps a few examples.”

“Godric Gryffindor was a lion, Helga Hufflepuff was a badger, Rowena Ravenclaw was an eagle, and Salazar Slytherin was a snake,” said Harry. “Merlin’s Animagus form isn’t known, but many scrolls that date back to him claim that often a bird of some sort left his window. Some believe that his form was an owl. Morgan le Fay was confirmed as a bird.”

“Five points to Slytherin,” said Professor McGonagall. “Pay attention, as you will be graded for this.”
Harry listened as Professor went on to explain that neither Dumbledore nor You-Know-Who was
Animagi and that they both lacked the ability due to a lack of patience. It was obvious why You-
Know-Who wouldn’t become one, but not why Albus Dumbledore, a so-called master of
Transfiguration, couldn’t.

He made note that it was impossible to have more than one form, no matter how powerful or patient
you are. Your Animagus form was much like the reflection of your soul and you couldn’t have two
souls.

“Are you going to become an Animagus?” said Draco, copying Harry’s notes.

“No,” replied Harry. “I lack the patience for it. If something doesn’t happen instantly, I give up.”

“You haven’t even tried yet.”

“I know, Draco, I just know that it’d be a waste of time,” said Harry, pushing aside his parchment. “I
personally don’t see the thrill with becoming an Animagus. Not to mention that if you don’t want to
spend five years of study, you need to be naturally gifted in Transfiguration, something that I’m not.”

“What a liar you are, Harry,” said Draco. “You’re the best in our year.”

“Yes,” replied Harry. “I am, but I’m not good at Transfiguration. Do you not remember our first year
and the utter failure I had at it? We’re still on the very basics of Transfiguration… once it gets more
advanced, I won’t be as good as I am now.”

“If you say so.”

Professor McGonagall walked around the tables, collecting the work that had been done. “I’m
surprised that so many of you chose a cat to be your preferred Animagus form,” she said, flicking
through them. “There’s a few odd ones. It’s not possible to be a phoenix or a dragon, I’m afraid.”

Harry rolled his eyes and continued to poke his page with his quill, wondering when Professor
Snape would sign that form that would allow him greater access to the Restricted Section.

Chapter End Notes

I wanted to change Divination so badly. I had so much plans for that class and then I
realised that I literally couldn’t. I tried to change it up, but damn is that professor a pain
to write.
Harry lifted his head and focused on Draco, who was struggling with the book for Care of Magical Creatures. “Yes, Draco?” he muttered, already knowing what his friend needed help with.

“How did you get your book closed and cooperative?” said Draco, grunting as he avoided the book, which had attempted to deliver a sharp bite to his hand. “Mine is… not listening.”

“Force it to listen to you,” said Draco, placing his book back into the slot on the wall. “Just stun it or wrap a belt around it, like everyone else has done.”

“Have you seen Rosier?” said Draco, his voice laced with sarcasm. “He’s struggling worse than I am and he was told how to get the thing under control. I swear…”

“So? Use a belt.”

“I’m not using a belt on the book!” said Draco, glaring. “My belts are worth more than this stupid book.”

“Then act like the wizard you are and conjure some rope and tie around it,” said Harry. “You’ve got five minutes before lunch ends and we’ve got to start heading towards the lesson.”

Draco glared at Harry for a few seconds before sighing and focusing back on the book, which was still going rampant on the floor. He flicked his wand and muttered the spell under his breath and watched as the rope flicked out of his wand and wrapped around the book, which had begun thrashing wildly.

Harry hit Rosier’s book with a softly muttered ‘Stupefy’ and strode by, grinning. “That oaf, Hagrid, is teaching and he’ll take as many points as he can from Slytherin as he’s very, very bias against us.”

“So he’s like Professor Snape?” said Crabbe. “Just for Gryffindor and not Slytherin.”

“Most intelligent thing you’ve said all day,” muttered Harry. “Hagrid will look for any excuse to take points from us and he can now as he’s a professor. Don’t give him a reason to deduct points, especially if Longbottom gets all buddy-buddy with him in the lesson.”

“You know he will.”

“Of course he will, it’s Longbottom,” said Harry. “Granger and Weasley are in the lesson as well, so it’s going to be even worse.”

The Slytherin students slowly made their way out of the common room and towards the Entrance
Hall, which was filled with Gryffindors, waiting for the lesson to start before they made their way there. Sneers were exchanged, despite the fact that no one sneered anymore.

“No idea why you’re taking this class,” said Ron, glaring. “Shouldn’t all of you be in Dark Arts, or something?”

“Oh, yes, Weasley, you’ve caught us,” said Harry, sighing. “We were on our way to steal some small animals and then Crucio them to practice.”

“Ignore him, Ron,” said Hermione, tugging at Ron’s sleeve. “Let’s go.”

The group of Slytherins and Gryffindors walked at a distance away from each other that would have looked like each group smelled of something foul to an onlooker. The narrow path wasn’t enough for all the students, and it was a stroke of luck that pushing didn’t start.

That could have been because Hagrid was standing near his hut with his crossbow in his hand, his eyes locked onto the students.

“Nice to see we have a professor that waves around his crossbow,” muttered Daphne, talking to no one in particular. “No wonder the Gryffindors like him. What a brute.”

“Are you speaking to us, Greengrass?” said Pansy, glaring. “Why don’t you talk to one of your own friends?”

Daphne glared, already knowing what was coming next.

“Wait, you don’t have any.”

Daphne flicked her blonde hair from her eyes. “You little pug-faced, backstabbing, unintelligent disgrace!”

Harry sighed. “Must you two have your squabble here?”

“You call me a backstabber?” said Pansy, scoffing. “You talk about everyone you come across. You moan and you whine about every boy and girl that tends this school, Gryffindors included. Really, you’re such a bad example for your sister.”

“I am not!”

“Can you –”

“Shut up!”

Harry glared at Pansy for having the audacity to tell him to shut up. “I’ll allow that interruption to go unnoticed as it’s clear you’re having issues, but don’t tell me to ‘shut up’. We all know that there’s no face or ‘mask’ to maintain out in the open as you’re all trying to imitate your parents with this haughty pure-blood etiquette, but can you actually mature a bit and stop trying to use backhanded insults at each other?” he paused and studied them both. “Your weak imitation of the gossiping your mothers do has caused a divide between you. I also don’t want to hear this constant fighting day and night.”

“Defused that catfight, Harry,” said Draco, watching the two girls glare at each other and focus on other things. “Well done.”

“I can feel a headache coming along from that screeching,” said Harry, rubbing the side of his head.
“This lesson is going to go badly. I just have this feeling.”

Draco muttered his agreement and stopped when they got in front of the professor.

Hagrid beamed at the class as he tucked his crossbow onto his back. “Got a real treat for yeh today! Great lesson comin’ up! Everyone here? Right, follow me!”

“You’re not going to bother with the role?” said Harry, curious. “You’re just going to peer at the group and decide that everyone’s here?”

“Everyone’s here,” said Neville, peering over the students. “There’s not many people in our year.”

Hagrid beamed at Neville. “C’mon, now, get a move on!”

“Told you he’d favour the Gryffindors,” said Harry as he followed the professor towards the nearby clearing. “Looks like we’re going to the Forbidden Forest…”

“Hm?”

“Maybe he’s going to put us down,” said Harry. “What if that oaf is Peter Pettigrew?”

“Must you keep joking about that?”

“Yes.”

“Everyone gather round the fence here!” called Hagrid, startling more than half of the students. “That’s it – make sure yeh can see. Now, firs’ thing yeh’ll want ter do is open yer books –”

“How?” said Draco, not able to help himself stay quiet.

“Eh?”

“I said,” said Draco, dragging out the word as he spoke. He paused for a moment and pulled out his copy of *The Monster Book of Monsters*, which had been slowly devouring the piece of rope that kept it closed. “How do we open the book?”

“Hasn’ – hasn’ anyone bin able ter open their books?”

“I have,” said Harry, unbothered by the glare that Draco sent into the side of his head. “It was rather easy once I figured it out, which didn’t take me long at all.”

“I figured it out as well,” said Goyle, holding his now placid book in the air.

Harry was astonished that Goyle had gotten the book open.

“Yeh’ve got ter stroke ‘em,” said Hagrid, as though this was the most obvious thing in the world.

Draco repeated the words to himself, sounding more and more sceptical as he said each word.

“Look,” said Hagrid, sensing the doubt. He took Hermione’s copy and ripped off the Spellotape that bound it. The book tried to bite, but Hagrid ran a giant forefinger down its spine, and the book shivered, and then fell open and lay quiet in his hand. “Easy as tha’.”

“Oh, how silly we’ve all been!” sneered Draco. “We should have stroked them! Why didn’t we guess?”
“Shut up, Malfoy!”

Harry slowly placed his index finger against his closed eye. He could feel a headache coming on and he knew that he was far too young to be getting regular headaches at the petty arguments of other children. “Can you just go stand over there, Longbottom? Your mere presence is practically headache inducing.”

“Righ’ then,” said Hagrid, who seemed to have lost his thread. “So… so yeh’ve got yer books an’… an’… now yeh need the Magical Creatures. Yeah. So I’ll go an’ get ’em. Hang on…”

Draco hummed. “God, this place has really gone to the dogs, hasn’t it?” he said, not noticing the look that Harry gave him. “That oaf teaching classes… father’ll have a fit when I tell him about this…”

“Draco,” said Harry, watching as Hagrid slowly shuffled around a corner and hid behind some trees. “Lucius hardly cares about what is and isn’t being taught at the school. While he may be on the Board of Governors, he hasn’t got much say over the professors that are taught. You know this, Draco, as he tells you each time you complain about something. After Dumbledore accused him of being the one to give Ginny the diary, which isn’t true, he’s been on a very, very short leash.”

Draco went silent. He didn’t bother to scowl or sneer at the girls as they fawned over beast that appeared at the fence. He remained silent when he saw Hagrid stumble with the leash and almost fail to tether the creature to the fence. He just remained silent.

“Hippogriffs!” roared Hagrid, glancing at the one tethered and then the two others that were slowly approaching from behind the trees. “Beau’iful, aren’ they?”

“You can make sounds, Draco,” said Harry as Hagrid went on and on about the creatures. “I know that you look up to your father and that if you go to him with what you think is wrong that he’ll praise you for it, but he already knows. He knows that this lesson is a joke… it was his words when he saw we were taking it. If you want to impress him, Draco, you need to be yourself.”

Draco stared at the leaves on the trees, watching as the wind gently blew them in a gentle motion towards the castle.

“I like when you’re outspoken, Draco,” said Harry. “I like that you can easily say what’s on your mind and still come off polite about it. You’re going to be a great politician when you’re older. You’ll be better than Lucius, he and I both know that... I’m sure even you know that.”

“You’re thirteen.”

“I know,” said Harry, somewhat confused on why Draco was pointing out his age. “So are you.”

“Act your age!” said Draco, his gaze locked on the side of Harry’s head. “You walk around like an adult, you use big words and then mentally criticise people that don’t understand them, you act like you’re a judge and what you say is the final say, and you’re a massive hypocrite!”

“Got it all off your chest now?”

“No!”

Harry sighed.

“You don’t tell me anything anymore,” said Draco. “You’re also being slightly distant, avoiding me and favour of endlessly studying the new books that you got this year. I understand that you’re
taking like thirteen classes, but you should still have time for me."

“I do have time for you, Draco,” said Harry. “You just waste that time arguing about this and that and then spending half the time moaning about Longbottom and his broomstick or fainting near Dementors. I want to talk to you and about you, not Longbottom.”

Draco glared at the ground and took a deep breath.

“Lucius said last year that it is not prudent to appear less than fond of Neville Longbottom,” said Harry. “We instantly forgot that he said that and went back to tormenting him, Granger and Weasley. He reminded me again before we got on the train by a letter.”

“But why?”

Harry paused. “I’m not sure…”

The lesson continued rather tensely between the students of Slytherin. They only plus side is that there was no inter-house rivalry between Gryffindor and Slytherin as the two were separated by no less than half the clearing.

“Yeh always wait fer the Hippogriff ter make the firs’ move,” said Hagrid. “It’s polite, see? Yeh walk towards him, and yeh bow, an’ yeh wait. If he bows back, yeh’re allowed ter touch him. If he doesn’ bow, then get away from him sharpish, ‘cause those talons hurt.”

The class goggled at the creature that was strutting around like a four-legged peacock. Despite the fact that it was tethered to the fence, it acted like it owned the place.

“Right – who wants ter go first?”

The entire class, both Slytherin and Gryffindor students, backed away hastily. No one knew what ‘going first’ meant, nor did they trust the professor to not do something foolish and make them sit on the winged beast. Everyone noticed the fact that the professor looked rather upset that no one was brave enough to raise their hands for the task.

“I’ll do it.”

Everyone turned and gaped at Ronald Weasley, who had pushed out his chest and was staring at the creature with a slightly fearful look.

“Good man, Ron!” roared Hagrid. “Right then – let’s see how yeh get on with Buckbeak.”

Quite a few students whispered the name in awe. Flicking through the Monster Book of Monsters revealed that naming the creatures was often a poor thing to do.

Hagrid untied the leash, leading the grey Hippogriff away from the fence and slipped off his leather collar. “Easy, now, Ron,” he said quietly. “Yeh’ve got eye contact, now try not ter blink – Hippogriffs don’ trust yeh if yeh blink too much…”

Draco leant forwards in anticipation, hoping that the Hippogriff would tear Weasley apart so he could laugh about it. He was going to say this to Harry, but remembered their previous argument and remained quiet. He also noticed that Weasley began to force his eyes to remain open as he peered at the Hippogriff.

“Tha’s it,” said Hagrid, his tone somewhat proud. “Tha’s it, Ron… now, bow…”
Ron slowly crept forwards after Neville gave him a discrete thumbs up, which he was sure many people missed because they were watching him. He couldn't help but wish his mum, dad, and brothers were around to see him walking up to a Hippogriff, fearless, without faltering.

He did feel a little worried that he was exposing the back of his neck to the animal and that it could easily swipe down on him before he could react.

That fear was clearly unwarranted as he slowly, and respectfully, lowered his head, hoping that Buckbeak wouldn’t be offended and decide to bite his neck or kick him in the face. He knew that Hagrid would save him if anything did go wrong.

He waited for something from Hagrid, a clap or a cheer, but nothing came.

“Ah,” said Hagrid, sounding highly worried. “Right – back away, now, Ron, easy does it –”

Ron froze, his mind going at a faster speed than the fastest broom ever made. He was sure that Hermione would scold him and then smile, stating that Muggles used a different term and that he would have known that if he took Muggle Studies like he had joked about. He imagined Neville shaking his head with a smile, saying that he was always quick to jump in front of things for his friends.

Even if he felt like his life was flashing before his eyes, he felt proud that Neville Longbottom saw him as a friend.

“Well done, Ron!”

Ron opened his eyes and glanced up, surprised to see Buckbeak bowing towards him.

“Right – yeh can touch him! Pat his beak, go on!”

Ron, already feeling brave enough, slowly inched forwards and gently stroked the beak of Buckbeak, which almost made him snicker at the thought.

“Righ’ then, Ron,” said Hagrid, looking highly pleased. “I reckon he migh’ let yeh ride him!”

Ron paled slightly. He had ridden a broom before, as any pure-blood child would have, and he wasn’t afraid of heights, but riding on an animal that was quick to anger and easily offended made him nervous. “Hagrid,” he said slowly, making sure he kept the man’s attention. “What if I pull some feathers out or something?”

Harry was already sick of Weasley this and Weasley that. He heard Lavender Brown whisper something about the red-haired man as Weasley climbed onto the animal. A small part of him wanted to barge in and demand the thing show him respect, but he had more intelligence than that and knew it would backfire.

He wondered if Weasley would manage to hold on and last the entire flight. He knew that hippogriffs weren’t accustomed to flying with people on them and that would cause it to have issues staying in the air.

“Yeh climb up there, jus’ behind the wing joint,” said Hagrid, helping Ron with his leg. “An’ mind yeh don’ pull any of his feathers out, he won’ like that…”

Harry watched, bored, as the creature took flight and began circling the paddock. He listened with a sigh as Weasley began shouting and screaming because of the thrill of it. He fought that yawn that threatened when Weasley and the hippogriff landed, Weasley bucking wildly in the process.
“That was awesome, Ron!” said Neville as he carefully walked towards his best friend. “You looked like you were having so much fun!”

Hermione fiddled with the necklace around her neck and threw herself around him. “I’m glad you’re alright!” she said before pulling away. “That was foolish of you!”

Harry watched as Draco strode over to one of the hippogriffs, a determined expression on his face. He knew that Draco wouldn’t do something stupid like provoke the thing or insult it. Nagini had informed him that magical creatures actually understood emotions and intent, due to their status as magical.

He had relayed this information back to Draco the instant he found out about Draco being in this lesson. He had to make sure that his friend wouldn’t do something stupid like insult an animal that could harm him.

“This is very easy.”

Harry’s head snapped upwards when he heard the familiar voice of Draco Malfoy. He was wary that the creature would lash out, taking self-confidence for arrogance. He knew there was a fine line between the two and Draco often came off as arrogant rather than confident. He narrowed his eyes, watching as Draco stroked the beak of the creature.

‘He doesn’t need a watcher,’ said Tom. ‘He needs someone that will listen to him… he needs someone that will be there for him, and, most importantly, he needs someone that he can trust.’

Harry wanted to snap at Tom with a childish taunt that he knew what Draco wanted and needed and that he wasn’t his watcher. He decided to ignore Tom and focus on the lesson and everyone else.

He watched as Pansy Parkinson and Daphne Greengrass gushed over one of the smaller hippogriffs. He rolled his eyes and turned his attention towards Tracey Davis, who was standing there looking out of place. He knew that she wasn’t an outdoorsy type of person. He found the quiet Sally-Anne, who had been mostly forgotten over the years, and rolled his eyes as the girl took notes.

“Not going to pet one of them?”

“No,” said Harry, not even turning to look at who the voice belonged to. “I don’t care for the abominations.”

“I dare you to say that to one of their faces.”

“Are you five, Rosier?” muttered Harry. “I dare you to say that to one of their faces’.”

Rosier laughed. “I’m sure you’d do it if the reward was worth it.”

“Of course I would,” said Harry, flicking his eyes from Crabbe and Goyle to Draco. “He’s going to do something and get himself hurt.”

“And?” said Rosier, grinning. “I’m sure you’ll be there to help him.”

“What if he doesn’t want me there,” said Harry. “Maybe he’s tired of me acting like a protector and saving him all the time.”

“I doubt it.”

“Do you?” said Harry as he turned towards Rosier. “I can think of many different scenarios that he’s
been annoyed with me when I’ve saved him like he’s a helpless damsel in distress.”

Rosier snorted. “We can all see that he enjoys that you care enough to look after him.”

“Cut the sentimental crap, Rosier,” said Harry, twisting back to watch Draco. “You and I both know that Draco doesn’t really mind what I do and don’t do. He’s a lot like his father and we all know that.”

“Not as ruthless or cunning –”

“But he is just as arrogant and has the same sense of self-worth that makes him feel like he’s at the top of the food chain,” said Harry. “Do you think I could’ve walked into their house as a child and demanded that he listen to me? Even as an eight-year-old, Draco was the leader and made everyone listen to him. He hated it when I came along and threatened that.”

“You need to tell me how you managed to worm your way into the hearts of the Malfoy family,” said Rosier. “I’m sure many still doubt that you’re not being used by them.”

“Maybe because I didn’t judge them or attempt to show them pity?” said Harry. “Every pure-blood family has a history that is questionable. In a sense, we could say that no family is redeemable and they all have something to hide.”

“Hm?”

“The Blacks attempted to breed humans with animals, hoping to make a half snake half man combination. They also attempted to make their children immune to the Cruciatus Curse by using it on them frequently.”

“Really?”

Harry grinned. “Where do you think the infamous ‘Black Madness’ comes from?”

“You’re lying,” said Rosier. “You have to be lying.”

“Do you know the Potter family had a son that ended up being a famous dark wizard that held half the world before he died of old age?”

“Liar!” said Rosier, glaring. “You are such a liar!”

“Alright, Rosy, if you want to believe that.”

“Don’t call me that name!”

Harry watched as Draco looked around, glaring at Longbottom as the boy climbed onto the back of the creature. His shoulders tensed when he realised that Draco was getting jealous because he lacked the courage to climb onto the thing and prove that he could do whatever Longbottom and Weasley did.

He pushed Rosier out of the way and climbed over the gate, which was somewhat difficult as his robes got in the way, and made his way towards Draco, who was getting more and more jealous as the seconds ticked by.

He stepped around a Gryffindor, intent on making it to Draco before the boy could get himself hurt.

Draco stared at the hippogriff, his eyes slightly narrowed and his mouth set in a scowl. “I bet you’re not dangerous at all, are you?” he muttered, watching to see if the beast would react. When it didn’t,
Harry watched as the hippogriff jumped onto its hind legs, its eyes staring directly at Draco, and lifted its front legs, ready to strike. He stumbled with the side of his robe, trying to find his wand to do something to protect his best friend from the creature that could do some massive damage if it landed a strike against flesh.

Draco wasn’t sure what happened as it all happened in a split-second. One moment the hippogriff was staring at him and the next there was a searing pain across his arm and chest where he attempted to defend himself from the attack of the creature. He had heard people describing how the Cruciatus Curse felt and he had to say that this was so much worse.

His vision swam and he swore he could hear the hippogriff crying or struggling next to him. He heard footsteps and he felt a relieved sigh, knowing that it was Harry and that Harry would make everything better. “Harry,” he said, trying not to cough in a dramatic way. He closed his eyes for the briefest of seconds. “I should’ve l-listened.”

“Someone help me – gotta get him outta here –”

Hermione was the first one to act and ran towards the gate that led into the paddock and opened it as wide as it could go. “I’ll make sure all the students remain behind,” she said, twisting her fingers nervously. “N-Neville!”

Neville looked up and moved towards Hermione, his eyes following Hagrid and Malfoy. “Yeah?” he said. “Class has been dismissed, Hermione, come on.”

Hermione waited for the students to leave the field. She watched as another Slytherin boy went to collect the frozen Harry Potter and edged him out of the gate, a sneer on his face. She closed the gate and the latch and followed after Neville and Ron.

“They should sack him straight away!” said Pansy Parkinson the instant they stepped into the deserted Entrance Hall, her words being met with nods from the rest of the Slytherin students.

“It was clearly Malfoy’s fault,” said Seamus Finnigan. “He threatened the hippogriff.”

“The professor should’v been watching over the students instead of fawning over him,” said Daphne, pointing at Neville Longbottom. “Not only that, but he didn’t explain anything that could happen like this.”

The students all glared at each other.

Pansy turned and gave Neville Longbottom a withering look. “Draco’s father is going to be so displeased.”

Hermione dropped into a sofa in the Gryffindor common room. “Do you think he’ll be all right?” she asked, somewhat nervous about the whole ordeal.

“Of course Malfoy’ll be fine,” said Ron. “Madam Pomfrey can mend cuts in about a second – just ask Neville, he’s been there more times than anyone else.”
Neville laughed for a second then sobered. “It was a really awful thing to happen to Hagrid, especially in his first class of the year.”

“Trust Malfoy to mess things up for him…”

“You can’t really blame Malfoy for what happened,” said Hermione, ignoring the looks she got. “He is a child and he doesn’t understand what’s going on. You see, when Potter is with him, he’s decent.”

“That’s because Potter does all the bullying.”

“No, it’s because Malfoy wishes to impress Potter and thinks that acting like the child he is will make Potter dislike him. However, when he’s alone, he can’t help it.”

“Speaking of Potter, did you see him?” said Ron, holding his stomach as he attempted to muffle his laughter. “He looked like he’d seen his worst fear –”

“Probably because he did,” interrupted Neville. “I’ve never really seen him not have a plan formulated, but today he just kinda stood there helplessly and watched as it happened. He even forgot that he keeps his wand in a holster on his wrist instead of in his pocket.”

“Wait, if he didn’t have his wand out, then who cursed the hippogriff?”

“No one did,” said Hermione. “It looked like it hit itself with its talons. I’m sure it was startled when Potter appeared in front of it. They can sense intent and I’m sure it knew that Potter wanted to hurt it for hurting his friend.”

“Whatever,” said Ron. “Let’s go to dinner, I’m starving…”

Neville rolled his eyes but laughed. “We also need to pay Hagrid a visit and make sure he’s alright.”

Chapter End Notes

When I started this chapter, my first goal was to try and flesh out Ron some more. Instead of having Neville do the initial flying, I decided that Ron would do it and that would show the readers (you) that he can be brave and not just a useless ‘sidekick’ for Neville.

A friend of mine also asked about the Malfoys and how come they’re so passive now. They’re not. Remember, Lucius still gave Ginny the diary, he still tried to get Dumbledore kicked out. There’s more that he’s doing at the moment, as well.

Basically, this chapter was another one of those ‘just because Harry calls characters useless, doesn’t mean they are.’ Crabbe and Goyle, much like Pansy, are fleshed out and massively different from canon, Harry just sees them as dumb so you do as well. He’s slowly noticing that they can be smart.

Anyway, sorry for rambling. Hope you enjoyed.
Chapter 15 – The Goblin Nation

“Speech” | ‘Thoughts’ | ‘Tom’ | “Parseltongue” | Memories / Flashbacks / Letters

Rewritten: Not Applicable

Harry had spent most of the next week sitting in the hospital wing, a book propped open on the white sheet, reciting all the work that he had been given to Draco, who hadn’t yet recovered. He continued to explain things, things that he knew that Draco had no interest in learning at all. He completed the alchemy three times, even though Draco was entirely confused and just nodding along.

“What’ve you learned about hippogriffs?” asked Draco, interrupting Harry’s fourth repetition of the alchemy table. He smiled stretched out just a little, being careful of Harry’s book. “You’ve talked about everything but that. By the end of my stay here, I’m sure I’ll know the entire alchemy table in my sleep.”

Harry stared at Draco in silence for a few seconds before he sprung into an explanation. “The talons on a hippogriff are coated in a water like substance that is invisible to the naked eye. The substance, which hasn’t been named, renders skin tissue weak and unable to correctly stitch back together… resulting in the tissue to dissolve rather rapidly,” he said as if he was reading from an invisible book. “The substance slowly seeps into the wound, as well as numbing the wound and making you feel like you’re better, but you’re not. The numbing is what creates the issue with healing as your mind believes itself to be healed – pure theory, of course. Many compare it to basilisk venom in terms of pain and damage.”

Draco nodded along. “And?”

Harry’s eyes dropped towards Draco’s torso, which had been wrapped in a tight bandage. “The only known cure is rumoured to be some sort of goblin ale or mead. Some believe that it was created by a goblin shaman that used to experiment with alcohol in his healing methods.”

“Go on.”

“Many don’t believe that the cure works,” said Harry, his emerald eyes flicking back towards Draco’s face. “Even with the proof that goblins used to actively hunt and kill hippogriffs to use their talons as another weapon that none can defend against.”

“What else?”

“The wound must be healed within three weeks or it’ll spread,” said Harry. “Eventually your body will go numb, which is your muscles shutting down. It spreads at a slow rate, no matter how big the wound is.”

“At least it’s not all bad news,” said Draco, shifting the book that Harry left near his pillow. “Mother has expressed concern that you’re neglecting your own needs and studies to help me.”
“Nothing I can’t catch up on.”

“I’m sure you’re gonna go to the goblins to chase this cure,” said Draco, trying to meet Harry’s eye.
“Are you going to sneak out or get permission?”

“Mother wrote a note and excused me for tonight,” said Harry. “Dumbledore wasn’t too happy about
it, but he’ll get over it. He expressed his concern that I should let the adults deal with it.”

“Like you’re gonna just let the adults deal with it,” muttered Draco. “I wouldn’t be surprised if you
just barged into Gringotts and demanded that they hand it over.”

Harry snorted and rubbed his temple.

“Just don’t forget the proper greetings and treat them with some sort of respect,” said Draco. “You
know how goblins are towards us wizards.”

Harry snorted again and shook his head. “You know that I don’t believe in that, Draco.”

“Oh, yeah, you’re just the epitome of politeness to creatures in the wizarding world.”

Professor Snape walked into the Charms classroom, his dark eyes narrowing at the students that were
chatting idly about the next spells they would do. He wanted to sneer at the fact that none of them
were listening to the professor as he was explaining something that would help the students in the
future. “I am here to collect Mr. Potter,” he said as a girl almost screamed when he appeared behind
her.

Harry stood as soon as he heard Professor Snape speak. He moved his book onto Rosier’s desk and
walked out of the room without a word said to the students or Professor Flitwick. He followed
Professor Snape down the empty corridors and through various archways that he’d never seen before
and then out through a tunnel that looked like it had been made recently.

“Tell no one of this tunnel,” said Professor Snape as if he could read Harry’s thoughts. “The
headmaster has made three or four of these connecting to various places in Hogsmeade and
surrounding locations. Each professor has access to their own tunnel and if it’s breached then he will
know that there is a traitor in the midst of us.”

“Rather intelligent of the headmaster,” said Harry. “But also highly stupid to allow access into the
castle via tunnels.”

“Ah, but it cannot be uncovered,” said Professor Snape. “It requires a sacrifice to be opened and
closed. The more that are entering, the greater the cost.”

Harry pondered it for a moment and just decided to watch as Professor Snape carefully retrieved a
silver blade from a crevice in the wall. “Blood,” he muttered. “Not only is it silver to deter
werewolves, but it appears to be coated in a substance that is lethal to vampires.”

“A potion that you helped complete in your first year, whether you know that or not.”

Harry didn’t reply, instead watched as Professor Snape dripped blood onto a star shape on the floor
and then placed the silver dagger into the crevice, which on a closer look was actually submerged in
the potion. A vampire would die before it could even touch the dagger. He had to admit the whole
tunnel system was ingenious.

‘Overly complex,’ said Tom. ‘You either trust someone completely or you don’t trust them at all.’
However, it may be wise to search who actually has access to these tunnels and what the defences are as I doubt they would be the same.’

Harry agreed. Professor Snape would have things relating to potions and darker curses as he was talented with them, whereas Professor Flitwick would use various charms and logic puzzles. It was essentially an ‘amped up’ version of the tests that led into the Philosopher’s Stone.

‘Just imagine what that half-giant’s tunnel would contain,” said Tom, a slight hint of amusement evident in his voice. ‘Creatures of all sorts…’

Mentioning the name ‘Hagrid’ around Harry was almost just pleading to be attacked. It was a cliché and a terrible phrase to say that you never forgive and you never forget, but that’s how he felt regarding that lesson that is putting his best friend’s life on the line. He glared and he scowled and opted to take all Care of Magical Creature lessons via homework, uncaring about the practical side of the subject.

He was also furious that the professor had got out of it without punishment.

“We’re almost out of the tunnel,” said Professor Snape. “I wonder if you noticed the other traps and defences that lined the walls.”

Harry hadn’t noticed them as they walked down the tunnel and he still couldn’t see them. He wasn’t exactly sure if Professor Snape was attempting to psych him our or deter him from exploring the tunnels in the future.

He decided that it was a little of both.

“You’ll need to watch your step around here as it’s rather steep,” said Professor Snape as he climbed up a rocky outcrop. “It’s also charmed with a spell to make it appear safer than it actually is.”

Harry sighed and carefully climbed up the wall. “We can’t just take a broom out?”

“I’m afraid not,” said Professor Snape, holding out his arm for Harry. “Anyone flying will find their broom uncontrollable.”

Harry thought on it as he was pulled up. “So, it’s like that curse that Professor Quirrell used on Longbottom?”

“A more advanced and stable version of it, yes,” said Professor Snape. “The one Quirrell used wasn’t powerful, which was done intentionally, and served as a distraction rather than to kill or heavily maim Longbottom. He planned to use the chaos and excitement to slink off and then seize the Stone. It failed when Granger set my robe on fire as he was knocked down and noticed.”

“Hm,” said Harry, humming. “I never exactly thought of it that way. I just thought he was incompetent.”

“He was anything but,” said Professor Snape. “You and I both know who we’re talking about. He was a very powerful wizard with access to magic that has been long forgotten. He wants Longbottom to underestimate him.”

Harry sucked in a breath.

“The headmaster fell victim to the same tactic in the recent two years.”

Harry noted that and shifted the topic. “So, professor, where are we going? I cannot see us waltzing
Harry stood next to Professor Snape in a camp that looked like a war had just been waged inside it. He had studied goblins, orcs, and dwarves constantly since the dilemma in his second year at Hogwarts.

“You – w’z’rd!” barked a roguish looking goblin as it toyed with the sword hanging off his belt. “M’ve der! Y’u’d be gutt’d b’for’ you can ev’n th’nk to w’thdraw yer po’nty st’ck!”

“Does it upset you that your elders think so little of you that they send you to collect humans?” said Harry, directing the goblin a look of amusement. “It must make you so angry and so livid that you’re being treated as a mere escort goblin rather than being on guard duty. The guards aren’t here to defend you, they’re here to defend us should you fail.”

“F’lthy w’z’rd knows n’th’ng!” hissed the goblin, its beady eyes filling with anger. “St’p’d w’z’rd boy th’nks he can jus’ wal’ ‘nto our camp and d’m’nd th’ngs from our leader? W’z’rd will be cr’sh’d b’for’ he can e’en dr’w a bre’th!”

Professor Snape was rather concerned that Harry would be killed for angering the goblins. The amusement on the faces of the guards that wore very little armour and had spears larger than him wasn’t really helping ease his concern, either. He was also struggling to even understand the goblin, let alone argue with it.

He was aware that the goblin was screeching about being laughed at and threatening his own guards with death if they continued. He listened to the conversation as they began to walk deeper and deeper into the camp. He felt excited that he was going to be one of few wizards in the last century to step foot into a camp and live to tell the tale. He expected the extravagance of Gringotts plus some more, seeing as this was the Goblin Nation, after all.

He was sorely disappointed.

“I told you that goblins were bloodthirsty and lacked any form of law system,” said Harry, noticing the look of disappointment on Professor Snape’s face. “Did you expect to walk in here, say a simple polite greeting and have them gape on you? Complimenting a goblin is the best way to get killed – so please don’t even think of saying thank you or please.”

“How do you know this?”

“A friend sent me a book on creatures,” said Harry, grinning. “Rather convenient timing, actually. Also, professor, be wary of your right, there’s a head rolling in your path.”

Professor Snape glanced and saw a head of a goblin rolling into his path. He was glad that he had a strong stomach, even more so when he glanced left and saw another goblin raised a bloodied blade in triumph.

Everything he was told about goblins had been shattered in no less than five minutes of being in this place.

“Why do you think Voldemort never bothered with goblins?” whispered Harry. “No matter what immortality he claims, they would kill him the moment he stepped foot in this place and demanded they join him. Oh, they may join him, for a split-second, at least, and the moment he relaxed or turned his back, he would be cut in half.”
Professor Snape’s eyes widened.

Harry snorted. “It feels odd that I’m teaching you, professor,” he said. “The wizarding world is very ignorant on creatures. This may be the Goblin Nation, but only a small percent of goblins have the strength to remain here.”

“How many are here, do you think?”

“Around twenty thousand or more,” said Harry. “Goblins breed for war and mayhem, nothing more and nothing less. They have three new leaders per day. That shows how much they breed and slaughter.”

“You be’t’r not f’rg’t it e’th’r, w’z’rd.”

They walked down a dirt path, the rattling of the armour from the guards the only defining sound as each step was taken. They saw small huts that had goods lined in the cracked and dirty windows, presumably for sale. They saw another fight, and one behind that fight; and another off to the right, right next to the hut that was selling items.

Off to the left was another hut that had a large weapon rack, the blades on the swords gleaming with the sunlight. The large mace that had some sort of tag attached to it had a few blunt spikes and appeared as if it had been used in combat more than once.

Harry snorted and decided to keep his comments about the lacklustre stands of the weaponry to himself. He decided to start telling Professor Snape facts about goblins, revealing that the one son the outside were stupid and lacked any form of intelligence. “The one escorting us is a perfect example,” he said, sneering at the goblin in question. “He’s probably half-orc, which would make him about as dumb as your average troll, especially regarding English.”

“Don’t they have their own language?”

“That one is a disgrace and can barely speak English, one of the easiest languages for magical creatures to learn due to Latin roots. He can’t speak his native language.”

The goblin in question scowled and began sharpening his blade.

“Probably the runt of his group…”

The goblin grunted and slammed his small fist against the wooden gate. “We got a gro’p of w’z’rds w’th me, s’ op’n up.”

“The one – and only – good thing about goblins is that they learn very quickly,” said Harry as the goblin growled and swore at the wooden gate. “They learned that they must maintain their position in Diagon Alley, which they took from the dwarves, so they can pass back information to the Goblin Nation. You give them a front and they’ll hold it until their entire race is dead. This place’ll never fall, no matter how much force and power is thrown at it. Greedy beasts.”

“The dwarves?”

Harry scratched his head. “Seriously?” he said, concerned. “I understand not knowing about goblins, seeing as their race is nothing but barbaric and a waste of oxygen, but dwarves built Diagon Alley. The caverns where all our gold is used to be is where the dwarven king sat and the goblins strode in and took it by sheer number. The one thing to remember is that dwarves may be foolishly in love with gold, but they never forget.”
Professor Snape was silent for a moment as he compiled his thoughts. “The dwarven king just allowed the goblins to take his throne?” he said, more to himself. “I thought that dwarves were some of the best fighters in the world.”

“They are,” said Harry. “But for every fighter the dwarves had, the goblins had a hundred.”

“Fodder…”

“They were overwhelmed almost instantly,” said Harry. “And, despite arguments, the dwarves had to retreat by hastily digging out and then collapsing the tunnel. One day soon, when we all forget about it, they will strike back and no one will be ready. The dwarves had guns while every other race were poking each other with sticks.”

“I don’t appreciate your kind discussing our enemies in our own camp,” said a lanky looking goblin. His left eye, which had a V-shaped scar going across it, twitched as he took in the two intruders. “The dwarfs retreated like the cowards they are – the caves, by goblin law, were rightly ours.”

“Must upset you greatly that whatever ground you had is now pretty much invalid, seeing as according to most humans your kind hardly deserves to stay there,” said Harry, staring the goblin in the eye. “I’m sure the Ministry would enjoy killing off your race with a bloodlust that’d make even your race look weak.”

Professor Snape shifted nervously, not sure if he could take on thousands of goblins to save Harry should to the boy offend the race and get attacked. He was sure that not even Albus Dumbledore could take on all these goblins and live to tell the tale.

The whispered ‘trust me’ from said boy didn’t help ease any concerns he had. He felt like he was repeating himself, at least in his mind, about the whole situation and he didn’t want to be here at all. It was Draco that he had come. And maybe because if he didn’t, Harry would have gone alone and he couldn’t have that.

“Having your tongue cut would be worth the loss,” muttered the goblin fiercely. “I’m not sure whether your silence or pleading to keep it would satisfy me more.”

“And here I was thinking that you lot were the bloodthirsty race,” said Harry, shrugging at the goblin. “Perhaps I should take my business to another clan that’d do a little more than cut a tongue.”

Professor Snape was somewhat startled that Harry would even make a joke about that. Sure, he knew that the boy was talented, smart, cunning, and everything else that was apparently a label for Slytherin, but this was just borderline crazy and he knew that not even Bellatrix would do a stunt like this. The woman may not have always been crazy, but she was often delusional when she got a small taste of power.

He wasn’t sure what to do and he couldn’t meet Harry’s eye to give him one of the looks he gave Hufflepuffs who asked stupid questions.

“You know nothing about our kind, wizard,” said the goblin, sneering. He toyed with his sword as he debated his next words carefully. “Stop wasting our time with your petty politics and small words and state what you want.”

“No one is using petty politics,” muttered Harry. “Politics with your uneducated kind is like talking to a wall.”

“State. What. You. Want!”
Harry sighed. “A friend of mine was attacked by a hippogriff and he was hit by the talons,” he said, keeping it simple for the goblin. “Your race lacks any form of intelligence, but you’re the only ones that know how to counter any diseases and ailments from various creatures.”

The goblin leant back, his long, dirty nails raking over his slightly scarred hand. “You could say that,” he said as he clenched his sharp teeth together. “Not many creatures can handle a fight with a goblin and live to tell the tale.”

“The numbers you’ve lost throwing bodies at them would counter that argument without much of a thought.”

“We delved deeper than you petty humans ever have,” said the goblin. “We may have lost more clan members, but none died without a cause. A cause will always be there, whether it’s clear or it isn’t.”

“I don’t need to hear a speech that took your kind hundreds of years to think up, what I want to hear is you giving me your ale that cures a hippogriff wound.”

“Who do you think you are to come here and demand our ale without a care in the world? You, a wizard, think you can just walk in here and demand ale from me? The leader of the clan, the leader of the Goblin Nation?”

Harry really wanted to snort at the goblin, but that would be going too far. There was showing no respect and being downright rude, and being rude to a goblin would be the last thing he would ever do. “If I was demanding, goblin, I’d’ve come in here with my wand out and curses flying, but I took the more mature approach. Perhaps your race would’ve yielded if I did kill a few of you, who knows.”

“Yes, yes,” said the goblin, his large eyes narrowing onto the face of the wizard. “You have a side that would win us over. I have a deal for you, should you accept…”

“What’s the deal?”

The goblin gave a bloodthirsty smile, his eyes sparkling in delight as if he just found delicious prey. “I will give you the ale, all the ale you want, if you beat a goblin in one of our clan duels, a one on one duel, to the death, for whatever you want, which is the ale.”

“I can use magic?”

“No!” hissed the goblin. “You must fight like a goblin! Hands and swords only.”

Harry debated this proposition as quickly as he could before Professor Snape sought to intervene and decline on his behalf. You can only say no to a goblin once. “This is a rare opportunity,” he muttered when Professor Snape made a move to speak. “I don’t think there’s been any recorded humans being offered to participate in a clan duel.”

“But none have survived,” said the goblin, excitement lacing his tone. “You’re not the first wizard to think they are better than us goblins. I don’t think you’ll even be the first to prove us wrong, either.”

Professor Snape watched as Harry seriously considered the option. He was still so confused on how come this goblin could speak English better than most humans. He knew that there was a hierarchy and not all goblins could speak it fluently. The one that escorted them in struggled to say certain letters and often stumbled on his words.

“Can I fight that incompetent goblin that escorted us in?”
The goblin gave a delighted look and leant back against his throne. “I could just grow to like you, wizard,” he muttered. “You think with your bloodlust and not your conscience. It will be a pity when you die.”

Professor Snape wanted to express his concern over this fight and that it should be him doing the fighting, seeing as he has actually used a sword before. In order to create one of his trademark spells, he had to imitate the movements, so he knew what he was doing.

“Right,” said Harry, unaware of the dilemma that he was causing the professor behind him. “A sword can’t be that much different from a wand…”

The goblins smile got wider and wider. “There are a few rules to clan duelling than mindlessly shedding blood. This is an ancient tradition that we goblins take very seriously. Before the duel begins you’ll be given a list of the rules and regulations. Breaking any is an instant disqualification.”

Harry shrugged and walked towards the wall of various weapons, some of them bigger than him by almost double the length. He ran his fingers over a short sword, feeling the engraving that was once carved into the hilt. “Is this melee combat only or are there ranged weapons?”

“You may only use one of the provided weapons.”

Harry made an acknowledging sound and went back to studying the weapons on the wall. He saw weapons that he’d never seen before. He picked up a sword that glimmered green and shrugged, showing it to the goblin that was sneering at his back. “I’ll use this one.”

“Will you?” said the goblin. “That blade was once in the hands of a rather famous elf hunter. Grimdark the Green was his name. All his equipment had a green tinge to it, no matter how it was made. He stalked the night and was quick in taking down his targets. Entire encampments fell before anyone knew better.”

“Grimdark the Green,” repeated Harry. “Fascinating.”

“Fighting the Green is what goblins used to say when they had a fight with him,” said the goblin, still sneering. “Never once lost a fight – we added his sword in the mix, as all legends are added. Should you be the first human to survive, a weapon will be added for you. I doubt it will happen, but you never know.”

“I don’t know why you’re doing this, Harry,” said Professor Snape as he paced around the small room that he and Harry were given to prepare for the upcoming duel. “I’m not going to doubt that you understand goblins far more than I do as we would be dead if what you did was wrong, but I cannot agree to let you walk into that arena and fight a goblin with a sword!”

Harry sighed and rested his palm on his chin. “Only death would get me out of this tournament,” he said. “I can use a sword, Severus, you don’t need to worry about that. I chose a weaker goblin for a reason.”

“A weaker goblin’?” repeated Professor Snape, his eyes narrowing. “That goblin that escorted us in is now being treated like a king and is being waited on by other goblins!”

“Of course he is,” said Harry, peering out the window. “He’s gonna participate in an ancient tradition. Even if he loses, which he will, he’ll still be praised as it takes some serious sway to be in one of these.”

“I’m sure you would have found another way…”
“Draco’s dying, Severus,” muttered Harry, standing. “I’ll do whatever I have to so that he’s fine. I’ll give him a simple whitewashed version and say that we just walked in, intimated them, and then took off with the ale. He doesn’t need to know about any of this.”

“How do you think Draco will feel if you fail and I have to go back and explain to him that you foolishly died?”

“I won’t die!”

Professor Snape’s jaw clenched. “I have been in war, Harry. I have seen people claim that no matter what, they’ll live and then they’re struck down without any chance to react. This fight is like a first-year against a seventh-year. You’re at a massive disadvantage.”

“I may be, but I have to do something and I refuse to rely on – forget it.”

“You don’t want to rely on Dumbledore,” said Professor Snape, putting all the pieces together with the ease that a highly perceptive person would be able to do. “You don’t wish to be indebted to the headmaster, nor do you wish to have him owe you anything. Foolish.”

Harry clenched his fists. “He wouldn’t be willing to come here and get the ale from the source. He would send one of his lackeys to do it and that moron that dabbles in Knockturn Alley would be tasked with it as the ale is closely watched. He. Would. Fail.”

“You don’t know that,” said Professor Snape. “When I spoke to the headmaster, he tasked me with hunting for a cure. I went to you because I thought you would appreciate the opportunity…”

“And I do appreciate it,” said Harry, sliding himself back into the dominant spot in the conversation. “But that doesn’t mean that I would’ve used any other method than what I’m doing now. Draco is worth the few cuts and bruises I’ll get.”

“Is he worth losing your life for?”

Harry stayed silent. He got up and began walking around the room, his attention fully on the bits and bobs that were plastered around this obvious guest room.

‘Sometimes words aren’t enough to convey how you really feel,’ said Tom. ‘You need not feel pity for the silent man… instead, you should envy him.’

Harry seriously debated about turning his anger and frustration onto Tom. In the end, he realised that it wasn’t worth it. He also didn’t wish to repeat what Tom said to the professor as he’d be stared at in Professor Snape’s usual way that makes you feel like a toddler who just broke the jar to the sweets.

‘I could easily explain that you will win the fight against the goblin, whether you believe you will or not, as you’re not one to go down without a long, drawn-out fight. You feel as if what you’re doing is right and that’s all that matters. What you want, and how you get it, is all that matters. Do you want the ale? Seize it.’

“This journey could’ve gone so many ways that I can’t even begin to explain how it could’ve gone wrong,” muttered Harry. He lifted up his hand and began to tick things off as he listed them. “We could’ve been killed the instant we approached the gate, no matter if we were sent as envoys or to seek the ale. We could’ve been allowed entry and then killed when our backs were turned – that is the goblin way, after all. We could’ve been allowed to enter, take the ale, and then killed before we walked out of the gate…”

“I get it,” said Professor Snape, interrupting all the ‘what ifs’ or ‘could haves’. “We were lucky and
we only lasted as long as we did because your typical arrogant attitude was useful.”

“‘Typical arrogant attitude’?”

“Don’t try and act like you have no idea,” said Professor Snape. “Everyone, including those dim-witted, can see that you hold yourself above everyone else and when you feel like you’re being threatened, whether intentionally or not, you react like a seven-year-old and aim to knock them down with retorts.”

“No I don’t,” said Harry, glaring. “I act like a reasonable adult –”

“The arena is ready for you, wizard.”

Harry turned his attention towards the goblin and grinned. “Alright,” he said calmly, glad to be out of the conversation that he was slowly being dragged into. “I’ll be there in a minute.”

“I don’t want you to go through with this,” said Professor Snape as he swiped a cup from the table. “I’ll be turning this into you-know-what and if anything goes wrong, please tell me that you’ll use it and escape.”

Harry gave Professor Snape one of his usual smiles and shook his head. “Fleeing like a coward would make my death more painful if I were to die. Have faith in me, Sev. I’ll be fine.”

“Thirteen and already getting into duels with goblins…”

“What would life be without a little adventure?” said Harry, still smiling. “You should be thankful that I’ve never really had much contact with them besides when I was eleven and set foot into Gringotts for the first time. I would have enjoyed making a fool out of half of them…”

Professor Snape couldn’t think of anything to say as he watched Harry lean over and pick up the green sword that he was going to use to fight. He remained silent as he continued to watch the boy, looking smaller than ever as he walked out of the door behind the goblin that was almost taller than him.

He strode out of the room a few minutes after Harry had left and joined the other goblins in the stands, watching over the poorly lit arena. The cheers from the goblins didn’t help ease the nervousness he felt about the upcoming duel between Harry and a goblin.

Chapter End Notes

I decided to split this chapter because I was curious on how people felt about the goblins. I always had a plan for them, but it wasn't like this.

Next chapter will be up soon (hopefully).
“Pick up the sheet!”

Harry sneered at the goblin, daring it to try and jab him with its spear, and picked up the sheet of parchment that looked as if a three-year-old had drawn on it with charcoal. His eyes scanned over the rules and regulation of participating in a sacred clan duel with slight amusement. It was somewhat amusing to see all the rules fall back to one thing: cowardly behaviour, no matter how big or small, is not tolerated.

He chuckled and decided to question it just a little bit. “So, the only rule is to not flee or act cowardly?”

“Obviously,” said the goblin before letting a string of choking noises. “I am not sure on how to put this in your language, wizard, but the agreement is sacred and should be honoured in every possible way. The crowd and gods decide the victor, not you or your opponent.”

“And what happens to cowards?” asked Harry, already knowing the answer.

“Cowards are hung up by their ears and then executed in the most embarrassing way for a man,” said the goblin, a bloodthirsty grin appearing on his face. “Tied up, hung, and then forced to eat their own —”

Harry did what most innocent children would do and pretty much placed his fingers in his ears and screamed to drown out what the goblin was going on about. It didn’t matter of the goblin trailed off into his guttural sounding noises, but he knew what was going on and what happened. “Interesting,” he muttered. “And, of course, I have one more harmless question.”

The goblin sneered.

“You speak in Gobbledegook, obviously, but no one else does in this camp,” said Harry. “It’s the official language of goblins, yet no one here speaks it besides you.”

“I have said a measly seven words in Gobbledegook since we started speaking, wizard. Do not presume that I speak the language every moment in the day.”

“Well, no, but —”
“We goblins stopped speaking Gobbledegook around you wizards because you got offended by not being able to understand or speak the language within three seconds of hearing it,” said the goblin in a rough voice. “We goblins spent many years in positions to learn the language that you humans use frequently. The less we speak our own language, the less you can learn about it.”

Before Harry could even think of something to say, the goblin had jumped up and appeared to be looking around as if alert. He decided rather quickly that stay out of the way was the best course of action.

It took him by complete surprise when he was swept from the room in a twirl by something and deposited harshly onto the sand below. The cheers were deafening and the sand that erupted around him by his impact caused him to cough and splutter as it went down his throat.

“There will be no elegant swordplay, no formalised duels – just brutal melee combat that decides the victor.”

Harry glanced up and fought the urge to rub at his eyes. Standing on some sort of dais was a robed goblin, a long flowing white robe with soft purple accents. The crown on the goblin’s head glittered as the sun hit it.

“We goblins can be very ruthless and cunning, especially during warfare, but this is a fight of will and strength, not slippery tactics,” said the goblin king, his large, beady eyes going from face to face. “No ranged combat, no magic combat, and no feigning defeat. The victor will be decided by the person who is still breathing at the end of the battle.”

Harry barely had time to stand and ready his battle stance before the goblin king roared for the battle to begin. His eyes flicked towards his opponent, who’s eyes had pretty much turned to stone, a cold, unyielding look entering them.

A gong was banged and the cheers from the goblins in the crowd reached near battle worthy. Their shout was loud enough that it could have been heard clearly in Diagon Alley.

Harry sucked in a deep breath and clenched his fist around the short sword that was in the sand. Small amounts of sand dropped out of his fingers as he pulled it closer to his body, preparing to strike or defend himself.

The goblin hadn’t wasted any seconds waiting about. The instant the gong sounded, its claw-like fingers clenched around the spear and began charging forwards.

With a small jump and a determined expression, the goblin lunged through the air, intent on driving his spear straight through the chest of the wizard in front of him.

Harry dashed to the right, his eyes filling with concern as he watched the goblin yank its spear from the sand, a stream of sand following upwards.

“Ev’n ‘f ‘m d’fe’t’d,” muttered the goblin, clenching the spear tighter. “Grexle Pepperknob w’ll be a n’me th’t ev’ry gob’n kn’ws!”

Harry couldn’t help but snort at the name of the goblin. “Your name is Grexle Pepperknob?” he said as he watched the goblin, silently thankful that the goblin had also stopped fighting for the moment of banter or taunting – probably the latter of the two. “If my recent take on goblin history is correct – which it should be – your job or duty is to pepper knobs?”

Grexle didn’t dare respond to the taunts. He instead charged at the wizard with a burst of anger and some kind of deep hatred for the entire wizarding kind. He jabbed his spear in every direction. He
spun and spun, hoping that he would clip the wizard.

He heard a soft grunt and grinned victoriously. His tactic was already paying off and working on the boy wizard.

Severus clenched the side of the shabby stool that had been assigned as his spot with determination. He watched, transfixed, as the duel raged on. He hadn’t known that Harry would have the grace and ease of a dancer – or a duellist. He knew that the boy had often danced with Narcissa, as was the custom in many pure-blooded households.

He knew that this fight could go two different ways as that’s how it was worded and it only had two possible outcomes. One, Harry could be defeated and killed, which result in him being hunted down and killed by Lily, Draco, Narcissa, and then Lucius. Maybe even all of them at once. Two, Harry could win and do something no other human has clearly done before and defy history.

He knew that the boy had it in him to pull off a victory. It wasn’t in Harry’s nature to stand around and lose, no matter what was at stake. Another part of him fought hard that Harry couldn’t actually kill and that he was that small innocent boy that everyone seems to see. He could just imagine seeing the boy drop the sword after he won and claiming a cease, making the goblins drop their heads and bow.

But another part of him knew that Harry was far from innocent, not a psychopath waiting in the shadows, but a part of the boy was darker than the rest and it was just waiting for a chance to escape and take over.

He regret teaching the persistent boy the Dark Arts, as he knew, just like Dumbledore said, that it would be a terrible decision. It was like trying to deny a small kitten food, no matter how cruel and cold you were, it was almost impossible to turn one down.

He sighed, repeating a small prayer in his mind that Harry would win and come out unaffected, and watched on as the duel got more and more intense as the seconds went by.

Harry sidestepped another thrust of the goblin’s spear. He had long given up trying to block the spear with his flimsy sword that never seemed to cooperate in his strikes. He understood tradition and knew that the goblins favoured hand-to-hand combat, but this duel, if it could even be called that, was trying his patience. He was about three seconds away from pulling out his wand and blasting the goblin across the sandy arena.

‘Don’t give up just yet, Harry,’ said Tom. ‘The goblin is tiring and you’ll be able to strike soon. Just keep moving on your feet as if you’re dancing and never remain in the same place.’

Harry had noticed that the goblin’s strikes had less enthusiasm behind them and that it wasn’t attacking as often as it was before. He didn’t need to be talented with swords, daggers, or anything else besides magic if he could just dodge, weave, and dance his opponent into a slumber.

He couldn’t get too cocky or confident about what was happening, he needed the goblin to think that he was also tiring and that he was unintentionally leaving certain sides of himself open to attack. He needed to provoke the goblin into attacking him and then he needed to strike back while the goblin was open.

He ignored the taunt from Grexle and narrowed his eyes, his forehead scrunching up in concentration as he gave a fierce jab forwards, hoping that the tip of the blade missed the small
leather chest piece that the goblin was wearing.

Grexle let out a low hiss of pain and then a long string of guttural noises that would have even the most seasoned goblin wide-eyed. He had been careless and allowed the wizard to strike him! Foolish!

‘Well done,’ praised Tom. ‘Continue the pattern and you’ll have him dead in no time.’

Severus sucked in a breath each time the goblins cheered or booed. He didn’t know if they were cheering for Harry, booing him, or just cheering for the sake of cheering and booing.

He could hardly see anything in the arena due to all the sand that had been kicked up into the sky with each attack or dash to the side. He had no idea if the fight was still in a stalemate or if Harry was badly injured.

He stood when the dust settled, his hand going to his wand without hesitation.

‘Strike,’ muttered Tom, his voice laced with approval. ‘End this trivial fight now.’

Harry lunged forwards, unblinking, hoping to drive his small sword into the crook of the goblin’s neck. He didn’t think it would work, but he believed Tom would never lead him astray, nor would the voice intentionally hurt him in any aspect. He pushed every bit of strength he had left in his body into that one slash with the sword, the blade glowing green as it soared through the air, clipping the neck of the goblin.

He watched as a steady stream of what appeared to be blood followed the head of the goblin, his eyes widening as he realised that he just decapitated the goblin with the blunt sword.

It was if a small part of him left the moment the realisation hit, and that that confused him. Even Tom’s whispered promises that it was just the adrenaline leaving him didn’t deter the feeling that something was missing. Something very important.

His left eye closed and he put it down to the fact that there was sand in it and it was hurting to keep it open.

‘Well done, Harry,’ said Tom, sounding like a proud father who just witnessed their only child doing a feat that shouldn’t be possible. ‘I am so proud.’

Harry gave a bloody smile and wobbled a little, falling to his knees with a grunt.

Severus hit Harry with a Freezing Curse, a somewhat darker version of the Full Body-Bind Curse. The curse would literally freeze Harry in place, no matter what happened. It had other names, of course, some that made it sound far more sinister than it was.

He ignored the goblins, which were starting to get agitated that he interfered, and dashed towards the small wooden fence. He vaulted over it, amazed at his own stamina and ability to actually vault in a robe, and landed on the sand.

“STOP!”

Severus paused, despite wanting to continue and aid Harry. He kept his jaw lifted and his dark eyes swirling with anger. “Yes?” he hissed out between clenched lips, his trademark sneer firmly in place.
“You interrupted a sacred duel with your magic,” said the goblin, standing. “What rights do you, a mere wizard, have to cause such a distraction.”

“Do not mistake me for Harry,” said Severus. “I know not your ancient traditions, nor do I care for them. By wizarding duel standards, Harry had won and I simply used a spell to keep him upright. I hardly interfered.”

“What if the wizard was going to fall onto a spear?”

“You think him so clumsy?” said Severus, glaring. “I can assure you, goblin, he would have been alright no matter if he was surrounded by hundreds of spears. I just wished to minimise bruising so that his mother, who is going to be beyond furious, doesn’t hex me.”

“Hm,” said the goblin, toying with the golden spear next to it. “You cheated in a sacred duel, claiming that it was for the boy wizard – you, and your wizard boy, have lost. You will get no ale.”

Severus stood still for a moment. “Harry will not like leaving empty-handed,” he said as he sent the boy a look. “He won your sacred duel with ease. He has never wielded a sword before and he killed a goblin with minimal injuries…”

The goblin tapped his golden spear. “Your point, wizard?”

Severus sent the goblin a stony look, his anger evident in his facial features. He straightened up and sent one last withering glance towards the goblin king. “Should Harry leave empty-handed,” he said as he sent the boy a look. “He won your sacred duel with ease. He has never wielded a sword before and he killed a goblin with minimal injuries…”

Severus grinned. “The first wizard to best a goblin,” he said it once more, noticing the goblin wince. “Bested a goblin with something he has no idea on how to use – imagine him with magic... imagine him using something he has used fluently since he could walk.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm so sorry this was so short. Next chapter will be a bit longer. I ran out of ideas for the duel so I kept it short and simple.
Severus pushed his hand over the wound that Harry had received and took a deep breath, preparing himself mentally. Lily was going to kill him without a second thought. He knew that Lily may not have been the best mother in the recent months and years, but she did have a love for her son that no other mother could even come close to.

He knew that many mothers would kill for their child, whether intentionally or unintentionally, but Lily Potter would turn into the next Bellatrix if it would keep her son safe.

He shuddered as he Disapparated from the Goblin Nation, heading towards Hogsmeade.

Without any hesitation, he reapplied his hand to the wound, attempting to slow the bleeding and continued walking towards the castle, hoping that someone would be awake and able to help him. He loved his godson, but it wasn’t in his nature to be overly caring and affectionate. He would simply linger and allow other people to handle it. He also liked that Harry allowed him to not be that godfather that lingers around and stalks.

“Oh, what happened?”

Severus realised that he couldn’t pull out his wand without dropping Harry. He tensed and turned towards the voice, trying to locate who it was and why they were lurking around Hogsmeade. “What do you want?” he said coldly, his dark eyes darting around the street. “Do not test my patience. Tell me what you want so I can be on my way.”

“Can I not be… curious?”

“No.”

The man slid around the man and the boy, a predatory gleam in his eyes. “You’re not his father, but you protect him as if he is.”


“I could have the boy at the castle before you even make it to the first step,” said the man, eyes glowing. “The boy and I are acquaintances.”

Severus took a step towards the castle. “What makes you think that I’ll believe that? What makes you think that Harry would be foolish enough to associate with the likes of you?”

“Because he wishes to,” said the man, red eyes glowing. “He and I have been exchanging gifts for a while now. He likes books, so I have been finding rare and obscure books and handing them to him.”
Severus snorted. “If you really care about him, you’ll allow me to get him help.”

“He’s fine,” muttered the man. “A few of your potions and a few hours of rest will have him back on his feet.”

Severus remained quiet.

“Go, if you must, and tell him that I popped by,” said the man, grinning. “Do not tell him what I am, but allow him to continue to guess what I am. It’s amusing to see someone so smart be so stupid and foolish.”

Severus muttered under his breath and continued towards the castle, his legs carrying him and Harry at a speed that shouldn’t be possible for a human, but he needed to get out of here and away from that man. “Once you’re awake, Harry,” he said, looking at the pale boy. “You and I are going to have some very serious words about you talking to strangers.”

“What happened?”

Severus felt like a small child that had been caught sneaking cookies. He was a grown man and he still shied away from Lily’s rising temper. He watched as she began pacing around the bed of her eldest son, her eyes, just like his, locked onto his somewhat still form. “He walked into the Goblin Nation, which I am still shocked to see that it exists, and began insulting and demanding things.”

Lily remained silent.

“You know how he is, Lily,” said Severus. “You know how headstrong and ignorant of danger he is when he thinks that someone is hurting someone he cares about. He had that look on his face that told me he was certain that what he was doing right and he filled me in on a lot of things before we arrived – things that I never knew.”

Lily swallowed and continued to walk around her son’s bed. “Sometimes I wish he wasn’t so intelligent,” she said, surveying her son. “I’m not sure on how he gets his information, but the moment I figure it out, I’m cutting the source.”

“Is that wise?” said Severus, thinking of the man in Hogsmeade. “I’m sure that he will just bend your orders and get others to get it from the same source. He’s a Slytherin, after all.”

Lily scowled at the far wall, not wanting to snap at Severus for holding onto that ‘Slytherin are cunning’ tripe that every single one of them spews. “Harry’s as Slytherin as you are Hufflepuff.”

Severus spluttered. “That is a highly offensive thing to say,” he muttered, ignoring the look he was given in return. “He is cunning…”

“Everyone is a little cunning, Sev,” said Lily. “I’ve been telling you, and James, this since our second year at this school… James took a little more time to learn it – you’ve got me trailing off from our original subject! Harry… Harry, Harry… why must you do things that will give me grey hair?”

“It’s his job as your eldest son to drive you insane and then he’ll be doing it all over again when he’s seventeen and leaving the house –”

Lily glared. “He’ll not be leaving the house at seventeen, Sev,” she muttered fiercely. “Maybe I’ll let him leave at twenty… maybe twenty-five.”

Severus couldn’t help but snort. “He’s far too independent. If he had it his way, he’d already have
his own house in Diagon Alley. I assume he would talk his way into a job and then attempt to seize control of it or redirect the customers to his own business, which he would conduct out of his home until he could afford a business.”

“If this starts to come true, Severus, you better watch out!”

Severus just shook his head and continued to sort the potions that Harry would require when he finally woke up.”

“So, Draco, what happened to Harry?”

Draco regarded Rosier with a look that would’ve made Harry proud. “He got injured finding something to cure me… that’s all there is to say.”

“He’s got three days or he’s gonna miss the Boggart lesson!” muttered Rosier, his eyes lighting up. “I can’t wait to see what the Gryffindors are afraid of.”

Draco couldn’t help but roll his eyes. He had to admit that he was curious to see what Longbottom was afraid of. “What about you, Rosier? What do you fear the most?”

Rosier went silent for a moment and just shrugged. “I dunno, you?”

Draco shrugged and attempted to deflect the question away from himself. His attempts just made Rosier more curious and demanding. “I’m not sure what I’m afraid of, Rosier! Stop asking!” he huffed. “Look – I’m gonna go and take Harry his books and work from today’s lessons and spend some time working on Snape’s essay that he set. He’s been a real pain in the neck since Harry got injured.”

“His star student is injured,” said Rosier. “He’ll be furious now that there’s no one to complete the work assigned without blowing things up.”

“Right,” said Draco as he walked away. He and Rosier were friends, but not like he was friend with Harry. He put up with Rosier because Harry did.

He made his way towards the hospital wing, using every shortcut that Harry had taught him to get there. He dug around in his book bag and felt the parchment that had all Harry’s future work that he would do once he was better.

“No visitors!”

Draco froze at the door. “But –”

“No excuses!” snapped Madam Pomfrey, still busting around the hospital wing, her hands trembling. “I’m busy!”

Draco couldn’t blame her as he knew how hard it would be tending to a bunch of children that missed their parents, got into duels and disfigured themselves, or tried many things that they shouldn’t. He debated shifting forwards and sneaking in, but he couldn’t see anyone else in the room except for Harry.

It was at that precise moment that a cold sensation was slowly filled his body. He felt his legs buckle and it got harder and harder to breathe. For the first time in his life, he was afraid. He did the only thing that his brain reminded him to do, and that was to run to his mum.
“Hush, Draco,” said Narcissa softly, attempting to soothe her son. “I can’t understand what you’re saying if you scream it at me.”

“Harry!” choked out Draco, his voice muffled by the fabric of his mother’s dress. He felt so weak and pathetic for barely making it into his house before collapsing on the marble floor. It had been many years since he cried on his mother. He considered himself to be stoic and manly.

Narcissa had a keen sense of hearing, having two children running around the manor with various breakables made sure of that, so the word, which had been muffled, was clear as day to her. “I’m sure he’s fine, Draco,” she said, trying to sound as confident as possible. “He was stabbed with a weapon that has been coated in something that Severus is identifying. I don’t want to make you feel worse, but I can assure you it’s a long and tiring process that is keeping them both awake.”

Draco sniffed. “You think?”

“I think Harry would be very offended that you think he’d die,” said Narcissa. “He’s brave, intelligent, loyal, and a great friend, especially to you, I don’t think he’d leave you behind.”

Draco pulled away, his eyes bright red. “Thanks, mum.”

“No problem,” said Narcissa. “Go have a nice long shower and meet me back here in an hour,” said Narcissa as she watched her son nod and then flee the room. She groaned slightly and waited until it was safe and her son was out of the room before she vanished.

“Mrs. Malfoy,” greeted Dumbledore, surprised to see the woman at his gate. “I was just about to send you a letter regarding Mr. Malfoy.”

“He had a traumatic event and needed to come home,” said Narcissa. “He’s fine now and I’ll bring him back within the hour. I think it foolish that you disallow students to go home when they please.”

“It’s unfair for those that don’t have wizarding parents,” said Dumbledore, his eyes reflecting the light. “Students that are of age can come and go as they please, as you’re aware.”

“He’s concerned about Harry,” said Narcissa, silently cursing the headmaster and his ability to make you admit things that you didn’t wish to admit. It took someone with a strong will to not blurt out certain things around this man. “He was distraught and certain that his friend had… left him. You understand, headmaster, that I needed to be there and allowed him to step through the floo.”

“I understand,” said Dumbledore, his tone was soft and understanding. “But it cannot happen again, Mrs. Malfoy. I realise that Mr. Malfoy often goes to Mr. Potter with his issues, but if this gets around that students can use the floo to return home —”

“I understand that it would be catastrophic if students vanished and then reappeared at the front gate hours later,” said Narcissa, interrupting. “But I must stand by my son and his actions. He was ejected from the hospital wing and did what he thought was best. Some of the students are ageing into their more dramatic years and who better to help them than their parents?”

“I will allow it to slip just this once,” said Dumbledore. “I urge you to remind him that my door is always open.”

“I will, headmaster,” said Narcissa. “May I come in? I wish to see Harry for a moment – not to speak or harass, just to assess his condition so I can pass it on to my son, who is almost frozen with concern.”

“It will have to be quick,” said Dumbledore. “Madam Pomfrey is highly busy.”
Narcissa muttered her thanks and walked by the headmaster with a curious look as she realised he had remained behind as if scanning the gates for a threat. Her mind flicked back towards Peter Pettigrew and she shuddered. She hoped that killer of a man wasn’t near the school.

She made it to the hospital wing in less than a minute, having known all the shortest routes for when she debated about working here part-time when she was in her youth. She wasn’t the best healer and that particular branch of magic tended to elude her, she wanted to learn things for when she had a son.

She had to make sure that Harry wasn’t in any danger before she sent her son back.

“Mrs. Malfoy,” said Madam Pomfrey as she bustled around the room. “He’s stable, but I cannot allow any visitors – I even had to turn down Lily and James.”

“That’s all I needed to know,” said Narcissa. “Thank you.”

“Harry!”

Harry turned and saw the figure that often was frequent in his dreams. “Hello,” he said softly, sounding much younger than he was. “I haven’t done anything wrong, have I?”

“You killed a creature today, Harry.”

“I’m sorry,” said Harry, merging the two words together. “I didn’t mean to kill it… I just want – needed something.”

Do you know what killing does, Harry?” said the man, his eyes narrowing down. “Do you know what you have done?”

Harry looked at his shoes. “No.”

“You have fractured your soul,” said the man. “You felt no remorse at what you did and you saw it as perfectly acceptable. A small part of you, quite small, actually, has been chipped away and is now lost.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “How do I get it back?”

“Take my hand, Harry, and I will lead you to where it is located.”

Harry took the man’s hand and began his adventure for his missing soul piece.

“Why hasn’t he woken up yet?” asked Lily, sweeping her son’s hair from his face. “You said that his body was fine and that he should already be awake!”

“You know the reason, Lily,” said Madam Pomfrey. “He isn’t ready to wake up yet. He’s forcing himself to sleep and we need to respect that. He is healthy, though.”

Lily dropped onto one of the conjured hospital chairs with a sigh, her eyes slowly closing. She knew that, as did her husband, who was equally frantic, but she didn’t like this situation one bit. She demanded, against her better judgement, the details of his injuries and she had been glad that she was sitting at the time. The famous Potter luck had saved her son once more and she couldn’t believe that the joke by James was actually real.

She scoffed every time the man had claimed that it was because of ‘Potter luck’ and here it was in...
plain sight just for her.

“Still no progress?”

Lily shook her head, hoping that she could report something. “Hasn’t moved or made even a hint of being there.”

“He did this after the troll incident,” said Severus. “He was perfectly fine and he just remained in a self-induced sleep.”

Lily frowned, her eyes flicking between her son and Severus. “What if he decides that he likes life better when he’s in his mind and not in the real world with us?”

“As he’s a capable Occlumens, it’s possible that he can convince his mind that it would be safer to be sleeping rather than awake, but that’s all he would be doing,” said Severus as he quietly sat down next to Lily. “He will wake up, Lily, do not fret.”

Lily dropped her head into her hands and just remained silent.

“What’s that?”

The man shook his head and squeezed his hand slightly. “That, Harry, is something that you needn’t worry about at this particular moment,” he said, directing the boy towards a soft grey blob in the distance. “We can discuss those in the future if you are so curious.”

“I’d like that,” replied Harry, his bright green eyes going taking in everything around him. “Everything feels so familiar… but so different.”

“You’re not going to let this go are you?” said the man, watching as the boy shook his head. “Of course not. You do know that curiosity killed the cat?”

“But satisfaction brought it back!”

“Right you are,” said the man, pausing his movements. “What you’re seeing are your memories, but different versions of them. In that one – no, not that one – you decided to ignore your mother and simply wandered off into the forest and something else happened, something that could have changed everything else. Maybe you decided to befriend Neville Longbottom instead of belittling him. Maybe you decided that Slytherin wasn’t for you and you went to Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, or Ravenclaw instead. Maybe you never met Draco Malfoy until Hogwarts and you weren’t used to his attitude and you were offended by how much of a prat he could be.”

“Wow!” said Harry, wide-eyed. “There must be hundreds of these little blobs.”

“Trillions,” said the man. “Every decision could have different reactions. A different reaction could cause three different reactions and so on. Some believe in this and some don’t.”

“But I can see it! It has to be real.”

“You can see it because you believe it, Harry,” said the man softly. “Now, I hate to cut our little journey short, but I need you to do me something.”

“Anything!” said Harry, grinning.

“Wake up.”
“God, you’re finally awake!”

“Shut up, Rosier,” muttered Harry as he opened his eyes and took in the few people around him. “You visit someone in the hospital wing and don’t even bring me any food to eat? Gee, thanks.”

“I did,” admitted Rosier, shrugging. “But I ate it when you didn’t wake up when I teased you with it.”

“Now,” muttered Harry, making a mental note to raid Rosier’s ‘stash’ of treats later on in the day. “Tell me what I’ve missed.”

“For starters, Draco is furious that you’d do something as stupid as what you did! His only instruction was that you don’t get hurt and you spend more time in the hospital wing than he did!”

“Are you done?”

“No,” said Rosier. “Weasley lost a hundred and twenty points in potions because he badmouthed you. I have never seen Professor Snape so furious and not in control. He went so rigid and it looked like he was about to curse Weasley into next week.”

“I really do owe him an apology,” said Harry as he studied Rosier. “He saved my life with a spell after the fight.”

“He did?”

“He froze me, which locked me in place, stopping me from falling headfirst onto the goblin’s spear, which was snapped and pointing directly towards my face.”

“Wow.”

Harry rubbed the side of his face and glanced towards the mirror. “My hair looks horrible,” he muttered as he attempted to push some strands back into place. “Looks worse than that Lee Jordan kid from Gryffindor, the one with dreadlocks.”

Rosier shuddered and stretched out, hoping that Draco wouldn’t be too much longer. “You have a lot of work to catch up on, by the way.”

“Won’t take me long,” said Harry confidently. “Twenty minutes per subject at the most.”

Harry had to admit that the day he awoke was rather eventful. His mother was a mixture of angry, annoyed, and elated. She threatened and asked at the same time, demanding that he spend the future year safe and secure in the castle and nowhere else. She was so close to revoking his trips to Hogsmeade.

Draco had been a little different regarding the entire situation. He tended to come off like a big brother who was coddling his younger brother, trying to protect said brother from the harsh world. He was also furious, but his somewhat caring nature outranked the anger.

James, who had shocked him by coming, was more like his usual self and resorted to joking and humour to attempt to cover his concern. It actually upset him that James’ joke about him being in Slytherin and that he should be cunning, not reckless like a Gryffindor made him smile. He was almost certain that it was James that kept his mother from going absolutely berserk this time around, so he was somewhat thankful for that.
Professor Snape was silent and just observed. He knew that the man cared because he would hover in his own unique way, always finding reasons to come, but not chat or hover around like most other people would.

Nagini had been the most displeased with him because of the situation. She had spent every moment that he was awake demeaning and abusing him for leaving her behind and breaking his promise. She threatened to leave or leave dead mice in his bed for when he woke up. If snakes could slam doors, she would have slammed every single door in Hogwarts twice over.

Harry did his homework, which was really his lesson work, as he waited to be given the all clear for him to leave the hospital wing. He really wanted to attend the Boggart lesson which was later today and he had to put on his brave face for Madam Pomfrey, who assumed something was still bothering him.

He had may have a small pain near his rib, but she didn’t have to know that.

“Mr. Potter,” said Madam Pomfrey as she bustled over towards him, nudging a few chairs out of the way as if they were on wheels. “I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but it looks like you may need to stay in for another few hours.”

Harry wanted to give the kind patron a nasty remark about how he was an adult, essentially, and he didn’t need to be coddled and that he would be leaving no matter what she said, but he wasn’t like that. He smiled and nodded, being very patient and hoping that the woman would take mercy on him and let him leave. “A few hours I can do,” he said, smiling brightly. “But I really want to attend that lesson about Boggarts.”

Madam Pomfrey sighed. “I know,” she said as she lifted a few potions onto the bedside table, ready for the next student to end up in here. “Do you want to guess what my Boggart is?”

“Like most adults, I would assume Lord Voldemort.”

Madam Pomfrey winced and shook her head. “You would think that, wouldn’t you, but it’s not – it’s me losing healing permit. I’ve been a healer, or whatever you wish to call it, for more than half my life.”

“Explains why you’re so good at it,” said Harry as he sent the woman a disarming smile, whatever that was. He had read about it in one of those Muggle teen magazines last year and ever since, he had been practising it. “Not many can actually regrow bones, despite how simple it is. I’m sure you’ve done that procedure more times than most students can count.”

“I have said it before, Mr. Potter, your subtle attempts flattery need some massive improvements,” said Madam Pomfrey, sending the boy a look of her own. “As for that smile you did, never do that again… it was horrid.”

“Noted,” muttered Harry, rather discouraged that his disarming smile hadn’t disarmed Madam Pomfrey with his smile. “It was worth the attempt.”

“Drink these two potions and then I may let you leave.”

Harry sighed and studied the potions. He realised that Madam Pomfrey was trying to distract him and make him drink the potions without overthinking it and that was a massive red flag in his mind. “I’ll drink the potion that doesn’t induce sleepiness,” he said softly, listening for the sigh that Madam Pomfrey would no doubt let out when her plan was foiled.

Madam Pomfrey sighed and shifted the potion that would put the stubborn boy out of the way. “This
one should ease any lingering pain you have,” she said. “That is, of course, if you have any. Better safe than sorry, I say.”

Chapter End Notes

I split this one in to two chapters... I'm rewriting the next chapter, so it should be up soon. :)
Harry was finally released from the hospital wing after doing a few tests that he shouldn’t have to do but was made do because Madam Pomfrey wanted to punish him for that smile that attempted. It was now his sole goal to do it to her every time he saw it.

Just the sheer thought of how upset she would be made him smile all the way to the lesson, which had moved classrooms for some unknown reason. He had a theory that it moved so the students would read the lesson plan and not fall into a routine, which was a core thing to know when learning to counter dark spells.

He pushed open the door to the lesson and took in the lesson. “I realise that I’m late,” he muttered, taking the shabby looking professor in. “Madam Pomfrey kept me behind for a little longer because she thought my injury was severe. I’m fine, though.”

“It’s quite alright,” said Professor Lupin, noting that the boy didn’t actually apologise for being late. “We were just about to head into the other room where our lesson will take place. As I was saying, you won’t need your books today. Today will be a practical lesson.”

The class followed the instructions without much of a complaint, already knowing from a few older students that the lesson was going to be a practical one. They followed as the professor weaved and twisted in the deserted corridors that seemed to be like a maze.

“We’re going to the staff-room,” said Harry, remembering where said room was when he needed to give something to Professor McGonagall in his first year. “That also explains the change of classroom.”

“Correct,” said Professor Lupin as he opened the door. “Everyone inside.”

The staff room, a long, panelled room full of old, mismatched chairs, was empty except for one teacher. Professor Snape was sitting in a low armchair, and he looked around as the class filed in. His eyes were glittering and there was a nasty sneer playing around his mouth.

“I suggest you leave that door open,” said Professor Snape, gesturing to the door that Professor Lupin had just opened. “Your class contains Longbottom, a student that’s unable to put two and two together. I would advise caution when assigning anything that requires careful handling. He’s almost as bad as Weasley, who only grazes the lowest score possible because Granger whispers the answers into his ear.”

Harry remembered Rosier’s words about how Professor Snape was displeased with the Golden Trio and he could see it now. He knew, as well as many other students, that the infamous Potions Master was nothing but a bullying adult who often made it his goal to belittle and reduce children to tears.
His mother often said that if you pretend to be a monster, you’ll become one without even knowing it. He never knew who she was speaking about, but over the years it got more and more obvious that she was talking about Professor Snape. He dug more into it and learned that the man was a former Death Eater, words from the man himself, and that he was a spy. It was after that was said that Professor Snape got tight-lipped.

“As I’m sure you’re all aware, we’ll be learning about Boggarts in this lesson,” said Professor Lupin, closing the door behind him. “From the work that you have all handed in, it shows that you all know a little something about them, but who can tell me some key things that most would have missed?”

Hermione threw up her hand.

“Just a second, Mrs. Granger,” said Lupin quietly, his steps carrying him towards the rattling wardrobe. “We all know that Boggarts like dark, enclosed spaces such as wardrobes, the gap beneath beds, and the cupboards under sinks. This one moved in yesterday afternoon, and I asked the headmaster if the staff would leave it to give my third-years some practice.”

“Wow,” said Seamus Finnigan, surprised. “It moved into the staff-room?”

“It’s not as used as often as you’d think, Mr. Finnigan,” said Professor Lupin, smiling. “Now, back to our questions. What is a Boggart?”

Hermione, who still had her hand up, shifted from foot to foot. “Professor,” she said as she tried to make herself as tall as possible. She grinned when the professor motioned for her to speak. “A Boggart is a shape-shifter. It can take the shape of whatever it thinks will frighten us most.”

“I couldn’t have put it better myself,” said Professor Lupin. “The Boggart that’s sitting in the darkness inside the cupboard hasn’t yet assumed a form. He doesn’t know what will frighten the person on the other side of the door.”

“What does a Boggart look like?”

Professor Lupin beamed. “Nobody knows,” he said as sternly as he could, making sure the students knew he was serious. “At least when he is alone, but when I let him out, he will immediately become whatever each of us most fears.”

Hermione nodded along with each word that the professor said. “But it won’t do much if you open the door because there’s plenty of us here,” she said, more to herself than the professor. “It won’t know what form to take in.”

“Precisely,” said Professor Lupin. “It’s always best to have company when you’re dealing with a Boggart. He becomes confused. Which should he become, a headless corpse or a flesh-eating slug? I once saw a Boggart make that very mistake – tried to frighten two people at once and turned himself into half a slug. Not remotely frightening.”

“Is there a reason why you keep referring to the creature as a male?” said Harry, finding it rather odd that the professor kept doing it. “If no one has ever seen one before, how do you know that it’s a male?”

“Why don’t you tell me?”

“It’s not my job to be teaching you, professor.”

Professor Lupin paused and studied the boy who he had realised long ago was the son of James and Lily Potter. Never would have Lily been so rude and argumentative in a lesson, and James usually
reserved his shenanigans for outside of lessons. The worst thing is that he couldn’t assign detentions or take points for it because it wasn’t back mouthing or being disrespectful, it was just plain rude.

“How can we counter a Boggart if we see one?” said Neville, sensing the hesitation in the professor. “I know there’s a spell…”

“Right,” muttered Professor Lupin. “The charm that repels a Boggart is simple, yet it requires force of mind. You see, the thing that really finishes a Boggart is laughter. What you need to do is force it to assume a shape that you find amusing.”

The class began pulling out their wands, all too familiar with the protocol of learning spells from Charms.

“We’ll be practising the charm without wands,” said Professor Lupin, coughing. “After me, please… *Riddikulus*!”

Harry held his snicker as he heard Draco mutter something about the class being ridiculous. He, along with many other students, didn’t bother with the stupid wand movement or incanting. He already knew the spell as it had no wand movement and was simple to pronounce.

He glanced at the students who were doing something about their greatest fear, which the professor had mentioned, and imagining it in the funny way that you were supposed to. The class was smaller than usual, as well, as this was a lesson that you could opt out of and quite a few chose to sit aside and not reveal their greatest fear to other teenage students.

“Miss. Parvati! Forward!”

Harry had to think on what his greatest fear was as he actually had no idea. He knew that most adults inherently feared the Dark Lord, but most children only grew up hearing bedtime tales about him and that if they misbehaved, the Dark Lord, or You-Know-Who, as they called him, would come for them in their sleep.

He feared dying, as did most sane people, but he didn’t actually fear death. He had the Philosopher’s Stone, so he wouldn’t be dying anytime soon, or in the future. Nagini could be protected with spells and enchantments. His mother, while he feared her dying, he could also protect by lacing her food with traces of the Elixir of Life, which would keep her strong and illness free.

He watched as the Boggart turned into a mummy, clearly the fear of Parvati. He couldn’t help but think about what if someone’s greatest fear was heights or a basilisk. How would the Boggart replicate heights with it being believable? Also, could the basilisk just kill and petrify everyone? That was something he had to study, and something that he had to do some in-depth search into.

“Mr. Finnigan! If you would.”

Seamus took brave strides forwards, his wand slightly shaking in his hand, his eyes determined. “*Riddikulus*!”

The Boggart, which had been a Banshee – a woman with long black hair, a face that looked like it had been coated in slime, and bloodied fingernails – began to grasp her throat, her eyes bulging as she then croaked out loudly like a toad.

Seamus roared with laughter, as did everyone else.

Professor Lupin looked pleased. “Mr. Thomas!”
Dean, following in Seamus’ footsteps, stepped forwards with confidence.

With a soft crack, the Boggart morphed into a mutilated corpse. It slowly shambled towards the boy, hoping to feast on his flesh.

“R-Riddikulus!”

The corpse tripped over its own feet and came crashed down onto the floor with a squelch. It was hard to laugh at that, as it was so disturbing, but when it tried to get back up and kept tripping over is when everyone began laughing.

Harry watched, amused, as each person was called up and asked to ‘fight’ the Boggart. He realised quickly that only Gryffindors were being called and he wondered if he assumed the Slytherins’ greatest fears were the Dark Lord denying them a position in his army.

“Mr. Nott!” said Professor Lupin. “Please step forwards.”

Harry leant forwards slightly, his eyes following the shaky form of Theodore Nott. They may have been friends, or at least acquaintances, in his first year, but they kind of fell apart after Rosier and Draco occupied all his time. The boy was bookish, but not the good kind of bookish. He lurked in old books that had stained pages and stunk of crusted paper.

He realised that Theodore Nott feared his father. He was sure there was more to this than a father leaning over his son with obvious anger in his eyes. Nott wouldn’t get an ounce of pity or attention from him because of this. He had his own problems.

“Riddikulus!”

The Boggart changed forms and instead of a menacing man, a man covering his crotch and blushing scarlet.

Theodore burst out into a nervous laughter, increasing when he realised that his father had wet his trousers.

“Miss. Parkinson! Your turn.”

Pansy’s Boggart wasn’t actually scary, it was humorous.

“What the – I’m BALD!” screeched Pansy, ignoring the laughing behind her. “My hair! It’s – it’s gone!”

Professor Lupin stood, trying to stifle the chuckle. “Please cast the spell, Miss. Parkinson.”

Pansy took a deep breath and tried to imagine the Boggart as something funny. It was a hard task, but she managed it in the end and the entire class roared with laughter.

All except for Daphne, who didn’t find what the Boggart changed into even the slightest bit amusing.

Professor Lupin shook his head. “Mr. Goyle! Step forwards please.”

Goyle walked towards the Boggart, which was still Daphne in a rather degrading position, with his shoulders slumped. He, like all the others, had his wand hanging limply from his fingers as he watched the Boggart transform into something that no one besides Crabbe would understand. He was sure that Crabbe would see the same thing that he’s seeing now, perhaps just a little different.
“Riddikulus!”

Professor Lupin barely had time to see what the Boggart changed into before the spell was cast. “Five points to Slytherin,” he muttered as he directed the next Slytherin student to approach the Boggart.

Vincent Crabbe’s Boggart was remarkably similar to Goyle’s, except for the two were swapped. It was clear to all students that the two below average students had a very close bond formed and were almost like brothers. Daphne Greengrass feared her sister being bullied and humiliated, which for siblings was a rather common fear.

“Millicent Bulstrode!”

Millicent was rather wary about this Boggart ordeal, as she was afraid of serpents! She lost count of how many times Potter’s pet snake had slithered in front of her and she almost dropped her books. She loved pictures of the things, but seeing them in person was vastly different to real life.

That was why she screamed when the Boggart changed into a large snake.

Harry laughed so hard at the snake as he watched it try to manoeuvre into position to torment the girl. It was hissing such absurd things in broken Parseltongue.

“Ah!” screeched Millicent. “Riddikulus!”

The class already laughing, so even if the spell didn’t work, the Boggart would sense the laughter and shy away.

“Mr. Malfoy!”

Draco swaggered up to the abomination that was once a snake and stared at it, willing it to turn into whatever he feared the most. He held his breath, waiting for the change. He was thoroughly surprised when it turned into Harry. Je didn’t fear Harry, no matter what his friend did, he’d never fear him.

Harry was just as confused as Draco. It wasn’t until he saw the Boggart turn that he realised what Draco feared the most.

The Boggart Harry turned towards Draco with wide eyes, hands drenched in blood. “Draco,” he said softly, his wild eyes searching the boy’s face. “Help me…”

Draco’s hands, which had been clenched tightly, shook as he took in the Boggart form of Harry.

“Draco…”

Harry shifted, ignoring the look that the professor gave him, and stood directly behind Draco, who was frozen. He placed a hand on Draco’s shoulder, ignoring the slight jolt. “Draco,” he whispered softly, his hand pressing down a bit tighter. “I know that it may be hard to make this situation funny, but I know you can do it.”

Draco nodded and simply incanted the spell, picturing the dying Harry with frizzy hair, mismatched shoes, and maybe his trousers were covered in a failed potion, mainly because that would be funny. It made him feel a lot better when he kept adding things to his mental image, which seemed to reflect the Boggart.

“Well done, Draco.”
Draco beamed despite knowing that it was stupid to fear your best friend dying. It could be interpreted plenty of ways, though. He could fear being hopeless, or he could fear not knowing what to do. It was complicated.

“Good job, Mr. Malfoy. Come forwards, Miss. Granger.”

‘Saving the Golden Trio, as you call them, for last,’ muttered Tom. ‘Fascinating.’

Harry didn’t even bother saying that he hadn’t had his turn yet. He just sighed as he watched Granger walk up to the Boggart with a concerned expression on her face. He wondered what she would see and how the years at this should have changed it, if at all. He knew that most thirteen-year-old students had childish fears, Pansy Parkinson was a prime example.

The Boggart grew bigger and bigger until it was a towering monstrosity. The familiar looking troll swung its club, smashing the side wall in the process. Bits of debris and glass flew down towards the children.

Harry remembered the troll rather vaguely, despite the fact that he was in the situation. His memory was fuzzy about that area, and he was sure it had to do with the fact that the troll hit through his experimental shield. Tom was to blame for that.

It was odd how the troll incident only happened two years ago. It honestly felt like much, much more than that.

The troll began swinging its club around more viciously and Hermione Granger looked much like the first-year that she was when she first encountered the troll.

‘Boggarts aren’t studied as closely as they should be,’ said Tom as Hermione Granger dealt with her fear. ‘Much like the fabled Sorting Hat, they use a branch of Legilimency that cannot be blocked. However, they cannot, under any circumstance, predict what your fears will be if you don’t already know them.’

Harry really wanted to state that it was obvious that the Boggart worked in that way.

‘Sometimes I question you,’ muttered Tom. ‘If you don’t know your own fear, the Boggart cannot predict it. It’s a form of Occlumency, as you’re aware, to block your thoughts, but if you can block anything regarding fear…’

“So if I hide all my fears, then it won’t do anything!”

“Hm? What’d you say?” said Rosier, staring curiously at Harry, who had just whispered to himself. “Talking to yourself is a sign of madness.”

Harry rolled his eyes and watched Ronald Weasley take on the massive six-legged spider that was almost as big as Granger’s troll. He had to admit that spider was somewhat creepy and the look that Longbottom had on his face one thing.

The rather large spider that appeared to have no real distinct markings or qualities besides being huge was staring at Ron Weasley with malice in its eyes. Much like what occurred with Hermione Granger, the Boggart appeared to be from a recent traumatic event.

The spider clicked its fangs together and shuffled ominously as if preparing to lunge or attack. It didn’t, though. It, instead, remained in place and continued to just torment the boy with its mere presence.
Ron shook with fear as the freakishly large spider slowly inched forwards. “R-Ri-Riddikulus!”

Harry did have to admit that the end result was rather humorous. He stopped himself from chuckling when he realised that he was essentially laughing at something that Weasley had caused. A spider dancing around on ice wasn’t that funny.

“Well done, Mr. Weasley!” beamed Professor Lupin, his tired eyes beaming with amusement. “Mr. Longbottom, if you’d kindly come forwards.”

Neville did just that, his brown eyes filling with concern and fear as he slowly inched towards the Boggart, which would very shortly assume his greatest fear. He waited, holding his breath, as the Boggart shifted from a large spider into a tall, lanky figure with a blackened hand and a rattling voice.

The Boggart’s black cloaked billowed around it as it hovered forwards, a scabbed hand reaching out towards the boy. “Fear… die…”

Professor Lupin slid across the floor and stopped dead in front of the Dementor and Neville, separating the two. “Here!” he hissed, watching as the Dementor vanished into a silvery white orb. “Riddikulus!”

The Boggart flew back into the cupboard with a thrash and a loud whine. It began beating on the cupboard, intent on getting out. The sounds vanished after a few seconds as it slowed down, preparing to strike when the time was right.

“Right, well,” said Professor Lupin as he walked back to his shabby table. “Five points to everyone who handled the Boggart, and five points to anyone who answered a question. Class dismissed.”

“I didn’t get to face it,” muttered Neville as he picked up his books. “I know it was a Dementor, but it would’ve been nice to face my fears…”

“And so we have it,” said Harry, sneering. “The great, desirable, perfect, Boy-Who-Lived moans about not getting a chance to tackle his Boggart. Unfortunate, isn’t it? I am so glad that you at least got a chance. I was forgotten, as usual.”

“Wait!” said Neville as Harry left the room was one last glare. He sighed and dropped into a seat. “Damn it.”

“He seems rather bitter about it, doesn’t he?”

Neville nodded. “He goes through these phases, I think,” he said. “He’s always been jealous of that one title that I have. I think he’d gladly take the scar and all the wealth and fame that came with it without being affected at all…”

“Phases?” said Professor Lupin, confused. “You mean this isn’t anything new?”

“He used to be such a – ugh, I dunno. He used to be a giant prat,” said Neville, colouring slightly. “He’s not as bad as he used to be. I think he grew up a bit and his childish behaviour merged into this – what he is now. I guess he’s a bit bitter, but there’s a lot more to it.”

“I’ll see if I can ask around and see if I can sort anything out,” said Professor Lupin. “If you don’t mind, I have some work to grade.”

Harry dropped into a sofa that was facing the black lake, a small warming glow covering the sofa
with an orange light. This was his favourite spot in the entire castle, without a doubt. It was secluded, warming, and had a nice view of the vast lake that covered one-half of the castle.

He propped one of the books that he had found in the Restriction Section onto his legs and began to slowly read the book, hoping that he would find something about Boggarts.

‘If you weren’t so independent and stubborn, I could have told you what I know.’

Harry ignored Tom and began to read the introductory chapter on Boggarts, his mind whirling with all the information that he’ll learn. As much as he did love Defence Against the Dark Arts, Professor Lupin was a questionable teacher. Everything the man said came off as bias and foreign. He was sure that the professor knew what he was talking about, but it seemed like his lessons had been written by someone else.

Chapter 14: Theory and Speculations of the Boggart

The creature known as a Boggart is nothing short of an anomaly. The Boggart are one of three creatures that use a branch of Legilimency against its target. Many Occlumens have attempted to defeat a Boggart by hiding all their surface thoughts, but no one has had any desirable results.

Others, however, believe that the Boggart has no counter and cannot be defeated in any manner besides having no fears.

The only known way to counter or defeat a Boggart is with laughter, which causes the Boggart to become confused and assume a different form. There have been various spells created over the years to help aid with the Boggart, but none actually work in the same sense of a spell.

The most known spell to counter Boggarts is ‘Riddikulus’. It is nothing more than a play on the English equivalent, which is ‘Ridiculous’. Many other witches and wizards do not understand the spell and how it counters a Boggart, but it does so because you assume the situation is ridiculous, and by proxy, your greatest fear is ridiculous.

The Boggart-Banishing Spell is not a spell. The fact it is being taught as one in the current ages is ridiculous! The purpose of the incantation is to act as a conduit and help you, the caster, focus less on your fear and more of the funny thing you want your fear to morph into.

You could shout out anything and it would work the same. All you are doing is tricking your mind into believing that you fear a troll in a dress and then the Boggart assumes that because it feels like that is your fear.

This, in a sense, is how you counter a Boggart. You cannot defeat or kill a Boggart, however. No amount of dark magic, light magic, or even sex magic – if that exists, which it should not… what a horrid branch of magic – can defeat a Boggart. You can only deter a Boggart, just like their close counterpart, the Dementor.

“How do Boggarts move around?”

They break apart and then morph in the air, using the dust as a method to move around. Dust surfaces are home to a Boggart and if an area is dusty enough, they can then make a lot of noise. From what many researchers have gathered over time, the Boggart can create a dust tornado and they use that to bang around and, in some sense, move around.

As I said: the creature known as a Boggart is nothing short of an anomaly.

Harry stopped reading the book when he realised that it was nothing more than a journal of some
crazed wizard that liked to joke about various branches of magic and things that would make most witches and wizards shudder. He learned a few things and they weren’t helpful for his current situation at all.

He was glad for one small fact, however, and that was that he didn’t need to use a spell for them and he could rub it into Longbottom’s face that he didn’t have any fears so the Boggart assumed something randomly.

That was, of course, if Professor Lupin ever let him face the Boggart.

“Harry,” said Rosier, frowning. “Professor Snape wishes to see you.”

Chapter End Notes

The program I use to hunt for mistakes isn't working... feelsbadman. I apologise in advance.
Harry didn’t immediately go to Professor Snape, knowing that it wasn’t an immediate summons, instead just something to let him know that his attention was required before the sun sets. He knew better than everyone else that Professor Snape expected teenagers to be tardy, hence why his summons were never a ‘come now’ ordeal. If he wanted your presence at that moment, he would have stated in the summons that his presence was required at that instant.

He made his way towards the owlery, remembering Draco’s reminder that he did have an owl and that he should pay more attention to it before it grows to hate him. Owls were much like snakes, in that regard. They demanded constant affection and soothing words that they were loved, adored, and any other soothing words that their owners could provide.

He did debate about giving the owl to Longbottom, not as a gift or anything, but he didn’t really want an owl. He disliked gifting gifts, but Draco had only got the thing to see how much he could push his family name around.

“I know you said that I can’t eat them, but can I just have one?”

Ah, yes, Nagini. Harry would never push her aside or forget about her. He had allowed her to tag along, regretting the fact that he hadn’t spent as much time with the snake as he usually would. He also knew that Nagini disliked the Dementors.

“Just one, Youngling?” hissed Nagini. “I’ll leave no remains.”

Harry snorted. “I have no doubt, Nagini.” he hissed. “The stairs are your mortal enemy, Nagini. Allow me to help you up.”

“I don’t need your help,” hissed Nagini, displeased. She climbed up the offered arm without hesitation, however. She gave her best insult at the stairs and the human who made them.

Harry gave her a knowing look and hurried up the stairs that had gaps that would cause most snakes issues. The climb itself was sharp and narrow, causing most humans to almost topple down with the stairs being so far apart and so high. No matter how large a snake was, getting up the stairs was pretty much impossible.

That is, of course, not even mentioning the various charms that repel any reptile that sets foot (or scale) on the stairs. A very basic spell, but one that has lasted over three hundred years and has allowed many owls to live long and safe lives without fears from their predators.

And, if by slim chance, something got through, all the owls have charms placed on them that emit a cause of fear for other animals, making them wary.
Nagini was lucky, in that sense, that Harry told her what was going on and she knew that it wasn’t her prey sitting there, but something she could feast upon, if only allowed.

“You can’t eat them,” he hissed. “The headmaster won’t appreciate that.”

“I would like to see that old man try,” hissed Nagini, highly displeased. “If he wishes to tell me what to do…”

Harry rolled his eyes and gently placed Nagini on the stone floor so she could explore the surface of the owlery. He narrowed his eyes and searched for his elusive owl, which shouldn’t be hiding as decently as she was. “Hedwig,” he called, glancing around the rafters. “Are you here?”

A hoot sounded from somewhere above, but it wasn’t a pleased hoot, no, it was a displeased hoot. It was hard to explain how he could tell that it was a displeased hoot, but it was.

“Filthy feathery creatures…”

Harry felt an owl drop onto the railing next to him. “Hello, Hedwig,” he greeted with a small smile. He watched as his owl began tilting her head as she studied him closely. “I thought I’d come and say hello –”

Hedwig hooted, her eyes boring into her master’s.

“– I also have a letter for you to send off.”

Hedwig’s demeanour changed instantly. She sat up and began preening, her wings fluffed and she hooted in pleasure. She nipped gently at his fingers as if searching for the letter.

“I still have to write it, you know,” said Harry as he moved towards the small stone table and cheers that were sitting in the middle of the owlery. He muttered his thanks to whoever had the foresight to add a small spell over this table that removed any owl droppings.

Mother,

Before I start this letter, I just want you to know that I have missed you. I realise that I haven’t been the ‘best’ son that you have, but I’ve been trying to make you proud. I can’t say that I don’t regret what I’ve done, because I don’t, but I do feel like I owe you an apology, even if it doesn’t make a lick of sense.

I know that you gave up a very prominent career to have me and that you refused to return because of me. I thank you for that, but maybe it’s time for you to begin working again. I realise that I wasn’t the easiest child to look after, but I did try.

My biggest issue at the moment is that I have forgotten how to address my issues to you in a letter. You know that I’m more of a face the issue with words rather than with letters.

Harry sighed and shook his head, finishing up the letter in a somewhat rushed manner. “Sloppy letter,” he muttered to his owl as he attached the letter to her leg. “Take that to my mother, if you can. She should be in Potter Estate.”

“You seem upset.”

“Of course,” hissed Harry. “There’s a reason why I decided to not write to her because I just can’t. I don’t know what I should and shouldn’t say and it all comes out weird or it gets
“Then don’t do it,” hissed Nagini. “I’m sure your mother will understand that you lack the ability to compose those scratches on a page.”

“If only it were that easy, Nagini,” said Harry, speaking in English. “Come on, we’ve got to pay our favourite professor a visit.”

“Our?” hissed Nagini. “He’s your favourite professor, not mine.”

“Whatsoever you say, Nagini,” hissed Harry as he picked up Nagini. “You like him because he often gives you things to kill or force into submission because you can be such a cruel mistress. Let’s not forget that you like the atmosphere of the dungeons.”

He continued down the stairs, still conversing with his snake. Had he glanced up he would have seen the crimson-eyed man’s smirk.

Harry stood in the centre of Professor Snape’s office, his eyes jumping from each ingredient that lined the walls. He could easily understand why most students feared to come in here. Professor Snape was menacing himself, and then you add in the hundreds of dead ingredients lurking around all around you. It was no wonder most first-years opted to meet with him elsewhere.

He wasn’t sure where Snape had run off to. He had hardly said anything before he walked out of the room and said that he’d be back in ten minutes.

He was certain that it’d been fifteen minutes.

“Mr. Potter,” said Professor Snape as he walked back into his office. “Because summoning you instantly has always been a fruitless adventure, I decided to wait on you before I prepared the meeting. Follow me.”

Harry was, without a doubt, curious on what this so-called meeting was about. He was going to ask but ceased before the question his lips. ‘Must be a meeting for the entire Slytherin house,’ he thought as they drew closer and closer towards the common room entrance.

Professor Snape directed all the students into the hidden duelling room, which had been replaced with a barebones circular table, one that was large enough to seat the entire Slytherin student body. “Sit,” barked Professor Snape, waiting for the first-year students to shuffle into their seats. “No one speak. No one move. No one breathe.”

A first-year went blue in the face.

Harry watched as Severus, not that he’d say that in school, pace around the room, muttering to himself. He was curious on what was going on.

“As you are aware,” began Professor Snape, speaking slowly. “Peter Pettigrew has escaped from Azkaban. The first to ever escape from the prison, let alone from a high-security cell. Pettigrew, much like most of you, knows this castle inside and out. He knows every secret passageway… every nook and… cranny. Pettigrew, despite being a Gryffindor, should have been in Slytherin, but I dare not insult our own house as he is nothing but an abomination.”
A boy raised his hand and waited for a nod. “Is he – I mean, uh, is Pettigrew dangerous?”

“Is Peter Pettigrew dangerous?” repeated Professor Snape, somewhat amused. “Yes, you foolish boy! I am not here to praise him, nor do I seek to make any of you think what he did was right. He has no ties to any of your families, so you need not worry about offending some distant relative. Pettigrew got as far as he did because he’s a leech. Imagine a fat, less attractive, and obviously less talented Gilderoy Lockhart.”

Harry really wanted to snort at that.

Professor Snape glared. “The point of this meeting is that Hallowe’en draws closer and if any of you use your mind, you would know that each year something drastic happens on that day.”

A small girl, a first-year, rose her hand, her hand shaking. “Sir,” she said shakily. “What happened each year?”

“In Longbottom’s first year at this school, a troll decided to attack the castle and find its way into the dungeons,” said Professor Snape. “Something that should never happen as trolls should not be able to enter the castle at all, let alone sneak around. Last year, and this is about as bad as it gets, the Chamber of Secrets was opened on Hallowe’en.”

“Wow!” muttered the same girl. “So it was true? It really was opened?”

“Yes,” said Professor Snape, glaring. “But it was not opened for the purpose many of you would think. Now, as we have wasted enough time, I am going to discuss what I called you here for. Pettigrew, or one of his accomplices, has been located near Hogsmeade. The headmaster is offering anyone third-year and above to reconsider their option to attend without any consequence.”

“We’re all pure-bloods, though,” said a seventh-year. “I doubt he’d attack us.”

“You are under the impression that Pettigrew is a pure-blood himself,” said Professor Snape, his dark eyes filling with slight amusement. “Pettigrew cares not if you are light or dark, pure-blooded or a Muggle-born, or whether you are fat or thin. Pettigrew is attempting to seek out and kill Neville Longbottom, who is, as you should know, a pure-blood.”

“Pettigrew escaped Azkaban years ago,” said Harry. “Why now? I can’t wrap my head around why Pettigrew waited so long to start his plot to kill Longbottom. He escaped Azkaban, so he clearly isn’t as insane as we’re lead to believe. There’s something else that we’re missing… something big.”

“Right you are,” said Professor Snape. “Pettigrew could be waiting for an opening that he has not had available in these past years or maybe now is the time that he’s prepared. Pettigrew is a weak wizard, but he uses that against other people. He is cowardly and will stab you in the back the moment you turn. Do not, under any circumstances, attempt to aid him or capture him.”

“We’re not Gryffindors…”

“That may be so,” sneered Professor Snape. “But some of you are young and stupid. Capturing Pettigrew is an easy way to a position you want. Do not pursue Pettigrew!”

“I’m not going to Hogsmeade.”

Draco almost tripped over his feet. “Why not! There’s so much that we’ve got to look at and do there!”
“I lived there for a very long time, Draco,” said Harry. “I’ve been in all the shops, I’ve been in every nook and cranny, and I’ve seen all the famous sights. I want you to go, though.”

“I don’t want to go there without you,” muttered Draco, looking despondent. “It’ll be boring and Rosier is a prat!”

“The first Hogsmeade weekend falls directly on Hallowe’en, Draco,” said Harry, stressing that word. “Something is going to happen and I want to know what it is. Longbottom’s not going to Hogsmeade and I want to see why, considering his aunt came in yesterday and offered to sign it.”

Draco glared. “Fine!”

“I’ll go next time, Draco,” said Harry. “My form is signed so I can go no matter what, but I want to sit this one out. Maybe use this time to play a joke on me for the next Hogsmeade weekend. I promise I’ll attend the next one with you.”

Draco reluctantly gave in and planned on bringing his best friend back some treats.

Harry walked around the corridors of Hogwarts, somewhat regretting his choice of staying in the castle when almost everyone else was gone. He ignored Draco’s pleading look to give it up and just go to Hogsmeade with him.

‘Why not go and speak to the first and second-year students,’ said Tom. ‘They are at your intellectual level.’

Harry sneered as he walked around, mentally directing the sneer towards Tom. He didn’t want to talk to those students as they were boring.

“Neville?”

Harry paused and smirked at his luck. The famous Potter luck, as James said, always put a Potter where he would be benefitted the most. His mindless walking led him entirely to Longbottom and their Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, who was looking a lot better than he had in their first lesson.

“What are you doing?” said Professor Lupin, his head poking out of a classroom door. “Shouldn’t you be in Hogsmeade with your friends?”

“Yeah…” muttered Neville, trailing off. “Ron and Hermione are in Hogsmeade, I decided to give it a pass.”

“Oh?”

“Yeah, I, uh, decided that I didn’t want to go.”

“Ah,” said Professor Lupin. He considered Harry for a moment. “Why don’t you come in? I’ve just taken delivery of a Grindylow for our next lesson.”

“A what?” said Neville as he walked into the classroom, which wasn’t the usual classroom for the classroom. “I should know what that is, but I just can’t remember.”

“You’d be surprised at how many people don’t know what one is,” said Professor Lupin. “It’s going to be a good lesson, I think.”

Harry silently debated whether he should gatecrash the meeting between Lupin and Longbottom. He
could say that he overheard and was on his way to the library to study some small things about the Grindylow. It was a perfect excuse to try and squeeze some things out of the man, who kept staring at him during lessons and meals.

It was also obvious that something was off about this teacher. He was sure that the man would become a threat in a few months, just like Quirrell.

“Mr. Potter.”

Harry nearly jumped out of his skin. He wasn’t sure how the professor had seen him, or how the man had snuck up on him and managed to startle him so badly. “Yes, professor?” he said in a would-be casual tone, even though his mind was racing.

“Would you like to come in and have some tea?” said Professor Lupin. “You can also study the Grindylow that I have planned for our next lesson.”

“Sure,” said Harry, shrugging. “I don’t have anything better to do.”

“Excellent,” said Professor Lupin. “Neville’s already in there, looking at the Grindylow.”

Harry followed the professor in the classroom with keen interest. He had many questions to ask, many facts to check, and a lot more information to gather about Longbottom and Lupin. Both were as suspicious as each other, especially concerning Peter Pettigrew. He had noticed that the professor froze for a moment as if recalling old memories, the instant the name was mentioned.

‘Didn’t your father mention a man named Lupin a few years ago?’ said Tom. ‘Your mother and father were discussing something with Dumbledore and you decided to eavesdrop.’

Harry tried to recall the memory but found that he couldn’t remember that at all.

“Would you boys like some tea?” said Professor Lupin, beaming. “Although, from what I’ve heard, you’ve probably had enough of tea.”

“Tea week,” muttered Neville. “I have had three cups today because of a tradition.”

Harry listened, intrigued.

“Ah, yes,” said Professor Lupin. “I remember that tradition for third-years and above. I can’t remember how it started, but many students get sick and stop drinking tea for a few months.”

“Seems like a stupid tradition,” said Harry, pulling his face from the green glass. “Drinking so much tea in a day?”

“I agree,” said Neville, accepting a small glass of water instead. “That and Divination… I swear Trelawney makes her money predicting my death each year.”

“You’re not worried, are you?”

“No,” said Neville. “I don’t pay it much attention, to be honest.”

“Is there anything worrying you, Neville?”

Neville shook his head, his left eye twitched. “Yes,” he sighed as he put down his cup of water. “D’you remember that day we fought the Boggart?”

“Yes.”
“Why didn’t you let me face it?” said Neville, ignoring the look the professor gave him. “I could’ve, you know.”

“I would have thought that was obvious, Neville.”

Neville sat there gobsmacked, somewhat confused. “I don’t – what do you mean?”

“I didn’t stop you facing it because of anything you did, Neville, I just didn’t want the Boggart to turn into You-Know-Who – something I was certain it would. The headmaster had the same concern. Neither of us really wanted to see You-Know-Who materialise in a classroom full of children.”

“I –”

“I was clearly wrong,” said Professor Lupin, cutting off Neville. “I stand by my decision, though. I don’t think it would be wise if You-Know-Who appeared in the room.”

“I actually did think of Voldemort first,” said Neville. “But then I – I remembered those Dementors.”

“How can you fear Dementors over Lord Voldemort?” said Harry, leaning forwards. “It doesn’t make any sense. Lord Voldemort was much crueler than anything a Dementor has ever done.”

Professor Lupin smiled. “It’s actually a good thing. It shows that what Neville fears the most is fear itself.”

Harry snorted. “You didn’t let me face the Boggart either,” said Harry. “I’m certain that it wouldn’t have turned into Lord Voldemort as I never had any interaction with him at all.”

“You have a snake that you’re close to, right?” said Professor Lupin. “You’ve thrown out the word bonded a few times, according to a few professors.”

“Well,” said Harry, rubbing his chin. “In a sense.”

“If you were truly bonded to your snake, you’d fear your snake’s death more than anything and seeing it would be shattering for you. No matter your control, you wouldn’t know what to do and you would most likely shut down and begin rejecting the bond, causing your familiar distress.”

Harry’s reply was cut short by a harsh knock on the door. He swivelled around and was surprised to see Professor Snape standing there.

“Ahh, Severus,” said Professor Lupin, smiling. “Thanks very much. Could you leave it here for me?”

Professor Snape place the steaming goblet onto the desk with a sneer when he saw Neville Longbottom. “Not in Hogsmeade, Longbottom? Curious.”

“I was just showing Neville my Grindylow,” said Professor Lupin pleasantly, pointing at the tank.

“Fascinating,” said Professor Snape, without looking at it. “You should drink that directly, Lupin.”

“Yes, yes, I will.”

“I made an entire cauldronful,” continued Snape. “If you need more.”

“I should probably take some again tomorrow. Thanks very much, Severus.”
Professor Snape sneered and stopped at the door. “Mr. Potter, I require your aid on the seventh-floor. Peeves broke something and I trust no one else with potions.”

“Oh alright,” said Harry as he stood. “Thank you for the tea.”

For it being a minor accident, it had taken close to three hours to clean up and fix. Professor Snape had retrieved him dinner and sat it on a conjured table while he scrubbed at the spill of a rather contagious potion.

Someone, most likely a Gryffindor, was going to be in trouble for dropping and carrying the phial of potion around.

The potion wasn’t dark or illegal, but it did cause damage when the phial it was in was smashed instead of drunk. The air contaminates the potion and causes it to solely morph into a mist that slowly chokes the person who breathes it in. It was a curious potion that couldn’t stick to food or anything like that. It had to be breathed in to be lethal.

He tossed off the facemask that had been conjured for him and studied the now pristine floor with a smile.

The two hundred points he got for it was worth the detention-esque task. Not to mention that he was able to hear, not see, the Gryffindors as they complained about.

“Potter,” said a Gryffindor. “What are you doing near our common room?”

“Cleaning up a potions mess,” said Harry, giving a gesture with his hand. “I’m sure it was explained at the feast, so stop harassing me and let me finish.”

The Gryffindor boy muttered under his breath and fled the corridor.

Harry stood, his knees cracking, and began his walk towards the staircase, intent on getting back to the Slytherin common room before night fully fell. He heard a chorus of shouts and screams and he snuck closer towards the Gryffindors, who had all paused on the stairs out the front of their common room.

“Why isn’t anyone going in?” said Ron curiously, studying the door with a treat from Honeydukes in his hand.

“I dunno,” said Neville as he tried to peer over shoulders blocking his vision. “Something big, I’ll bet.”

Harry, who could see the situation, almost smirked. He looked at what would be the remains of the portrait leading into Gryffindor’s common room with interest.

The portrait, if it could even be called that, was smashed into three pieces, with the top left side burning fiercely. A slash was present across the canvas, a claw-like shape going from the top right-hand side to the left-hand bottom side. A black liquid slowly oozed out of the canvas, dripping onto the floor. The most interesting part was the holes above the portrait and the dents in the wall on the sides.

A cool breeze filled the landing as Percy Weasley tried to usher students away, muttering about being a Prefect.

“Oh my,” said Hermione as she took in the scene. “Who – who’d do such a thing?”
Dumbledore waved his wand over the fire, extinguishing it with the correct amount of water to further damage the canvas. “It’s quite fortunate that the Fat Lady was able to escape her portrait in time,” he said as he flicked a flap of the portrait with the tip of his wand. “We must find her as quickly as possible.”

Professor McGonagall nodded. “What should we do?”

“Please go to Mr. Filch at once and tell him to search every painting in the castle for the Fat Lady.”

Harry, like every other student, glanced up towards the hundreds of portraits that littered this very room. He knew the woman wouldn’t stray far from her home portrait.

“You’ll be lucky,” cackled Peeves as he grinned at all the students, some ducking in fear. His grin vanished when he noticed the headmaster. “Sir –”

“What do you mean, Peeves?” asked Dumbledore, interrupting the poltergeist. “She’s not hurt, is she?”

“She’s ashamed, sir,” said Peeves, his voice sounding rather oily. “She doesn’t want to be seen. She’s a horrible mess. Saw her running through the landscape up on the fourth floor, sir, dodging between the trees. Crying something dreadful.”

“Did she say who did it?” said Dumbledore, his eyes fixing on the poltergeist.

“Oh, yes,” said Peeves, a slight smirk reappearing on his face. “Poor thing almost had a heart attack when she saw him demanding to be let in!”

“Who?” pressed Dumbledore. “Who wanted to be let in?”

Peeves went rigid for a moment. “Peter Pettigrew.”

Ron held onto Scabbers tightly, sensing the rat’s fear. “It’s alright, Scabbers,” he said, soothing the rat. “That nasty man isn’t here anymore… I hope.”

Scabbers squeaked in reply.

Chapter End Notes

Is it just me or are these chapters getting shorter and shorter? I think they are… I’ll rectify that in a few chapters. My muse for this chapter left me completely. I actually planned for Harry to reach the frame first and see it being attacked while he was dealing with the potion. I also planned a mini fight between him and Peter, but scraped it when I couldn’t get it into words.

A few things regarding Peter as these won’t be mentioned at all.

1) Peter’s a lot more competent in this fic. He’s not a coward like in canon, who was pretty much scared of his own shadow. He knows some powerful spells that could easily turn the tide of a duel, but he’s not a frontline fighter. He’s deceptive and sly.

2) Peter attacked the portrait to garner fear. He wants the headmaster to know that he can be in the castle whenever. He attacked Gryffindor because it shows that he knows
where it is and he’s willing to do whatever to get in there.

3) Scabbers is Peter. Ron found him prior to school while searching the garden. Percy never had him and none of the other Weasley family know about him. James and co. have never seen Scabbers, just heard him described.

4) Sirius? Sirius is around, but he’ll come about in future chapters.

Sorry about the long note! :)

Harry scowled at Professor Snape’s back as he was forced to grab a sleeping bag, something he didn’t even know he needed. It wasn’t until he found the note from his mother that he knew she’d somehow slipped it in stating that she had a ‘motherly feeling’ that it would be needed. It was the small things like that which made him thankful that his mother at least cared and wasn’t overbearing about it, such as Molly Weasley.

“Stop whispering,” said Professor Snape, directing it at the girls at the back. “A murderer has infiltrated the school, something that should not be possible. This isn’t a holiday or a special occurrence. You will behave and not giggle at this and that throughout the night.”

“Pettigrew didn’t attack our common room, how come we have to go with the Gryfffindors?” said Harry. “I doubt he even knows where the Slytherin common room is.”

“He could follow a Slytherin and figure it out that way,” said Professor Snape. “Even so, the headmaster wants all students in one place so that it will deter the criminal. With everyone in one area, it is marginally easier to keep wards and enchantments up to stop Pettigrew from sneaking in.”

“Right.”

“Speed it up,” hissed Professor Snape. “Some of us need some sleep to handle the class of first-year Hufflepuffs.”

The horde of Slytherin students snorted and laughed as they followed along. Many noted that they were taking a rather different route to the Great Hall. They walked through open corridors that had lights illuminating every potential hiding place.

They were stopped at the entrance to the Great Hall by the headmaster, who was peering at them with concerned eyes.

“Figures that he thinks we’re the accomplice,” muttered a sixth-year. “The dark, evil, low-life Slytherins are always up to something.”

“I don’t think he’s looking at us like that,” muttered the girl next to him. “It’s clear he’s taking this event seriously. I mean, I don’t think the school has ever set up in the Great Hall before and Hogwarts: A History claims the castle is impenetrable.”

“You think –”

“I think the headmaster is just as concerned as us and he’s making sure we’re all here.”

“It’s good to see all of you,” said Dumbledore, his eyes going from face to face. “Please go into the Great Hall as quickly as you can.”

The Slytherins walked into the Great, holding their chins up high. Some looked back and noticed the
Harry climbed into his green sleeping bag and shuddered at the coldness of it. “Do you know how Pettigrew was caught?” he asked Draco, who was snuggled up in a ball.

“No one really knows how he was caught,” said Draco, sounding rather sleepy. “Different versions appeared and either took the form of it being like that or whatever. Some people say that he failed to Apparate correctly and landed in the middle of the Ministry of Magic. Others claim that he was defeated in a duel and carted off to Azkaban without a trial or a mutter about it… some even cry conspiracy and that Pettigrew never existed and was made up.”

“That last one is a load of crap,” muttered Rosier as he turned over. “Only idiotic people believed that one…”

“So anyone who reads the Daily Prophet?” said Harry, grinning.

“Stupid git,” muttered Rosier. “Go to sleep.”

It didn’t take long before all the students started to fall asleep, even those that were afraid of the looming threat of Peter Pettigrew.

The professors were frequently entering and exiting the Great Hall, sometimes reliving certain Prefects of their duties of watching over the children. It depended on the professor, some allowed chattering about what was going on, as long as it was quiet, and others didn’t. Professor Snape was a stickler for the silence or twenty points would be taken.

At around two in the morning, Harry was woken up by Rosier, who was shaking him gently. “What?” he mumbled, forcing himself to not go back to sleep.

“Come to the toilet with me,” whispered Rosier. “I don’t want to go alone.”

“Girls are the ones that go in groups, Rosier,” said Harry, sitting up slightly. “I’m sure the Prefect or professor will keep you safe.”

“The other students have said that they’re in the bathroom with you if you’re alone…”

“I seriously doubt that, Rosier,” said Harry, trying not to laugh. “That’s a serious invasion of privacy, even if there’s a murderer on the loose.”

“Just come,” said Rosier, pleading. “I wanna tell you something, as well.”

“Fine,” said Harry, kicking off his sleeping bag with forced enthusiasm. “It better be good, though. I am not walking around the castle for no reason at all because of some small gossip.”

The two of them slowly walked across the Great Hall, taking care to not kick anyone in the head or step on fingers, no matter how tempting it was to accidentally trip over Weasley’s face. They stopped at the door that led off to one of the side rooms and stared at the Prefect, who was doing the same thing.

“Bathroom?” said the Prefect. “If so, follow that sixth-year Hufflepuff and he’ll take you. Girls take girls and boys take boys.”
Harry refrained from stating the obvious. He walked over towards the male Prefect and rose an eyebrow. “We need the bathroom,” he said. “You need to take us.”

“You can say ‘please’, you know.”

“I know,” said Harry. “But it’s urgent, you see, less chit-chat, more walking to the bathroom.”

The Prefect leant backwards and lifted a bucket, a smile on his face. “Here you are,” he said, stifling a chuckle. “You can either go at the same time or one can wait.”

“I’m not using that.”

“Why not?”

Harry stared. “Because I’m not using a bucket like some kind of animal,” he said. “Take us to the bathroom.”

“What Harry’s trying to say is that we’d like to use a bathroom where there’s some privacy,” said Rosier, stopping any form of argument. “Would you use that thing?”

The Prefect laughed and tossed the bucket behind him as he stood. “Of course not,” he said. “Follow me.”

Harry and Rosier followed the Prefect as he walked towards the other Prefect. The two exchanged words and the girl wrote on a piece of parchment, presumably the names of the students, the reasoning, and the time that they had left.

“Because it’s not possible to conjure a bathroom out of nowhere, especially with the plumbing, the professors have a dedicated room for it. We’ll walk along one of those fully illuminated corridors and then you can go into the bathroom. If you see anything odd or suspicious, just yell out.”

Harry pushed open the door to the boys’ toilets and immediately did a double take. It was just like the corridors in the sense that the entire roof was just one big light. The wall that held the door was charmed to be like a one-one mirror. They could see out and were able to watch as the Prefect leant against the wall, presumably waiting for them.

Rosier pulled Harry into one of the stools. He walked up to the nearby bowl and unzipped his trousers.

“I am not being in here while you pee,” said Harry, glaring at Rosier’s head. “I like you as a friend, Rosier, but not that much.”

“Oh, OH! Get in the next one,” said Rosier, blushing slightly. “Just lean against the cubicle so I don’t need to shout…”

Harry rolled his eyes and did what he was asked. “Alright,” he said. “Now do me a favour and hold it as I don’t want to listen to this story as you do your business.”

“I heard a few things about Pettigrew,” whispered Rosier. “I heard that he once attended this school and was friends with Professor Lupin, which is why he’s acting now instead of waiting like he used to be doing. A lot of the older students are saying that Lupin knows when you’re doing something wrong or where you’re hiding – he actually caught one of the most discreet couples who were in a broom cupboard under a Disillusionment Charm.”

“So?” said Harry. “That Charm is tied to your emotions and if they were doing what I imagine, then
I doubt the charm was that strong to begin with. Higgs does you-know-what under those things and you can tell where he is when he does it.”

“He does it in public places?”

Harry snorted. “From what the guys on the Quidditch team have said, it’s not something that only he does. They say it’s pretty much a male ‘instinct’ and when said male can vanish from sight and block sound… you get my point.”

“Speaking of Quidditch, your first game as Captain is tomorrow – today, right?”

“Nah,” said Harry. “We were given a free pass because of what happened with the Hippogriff. I didn’t have time to actually train or put a team together. Gryffindor is versing Hufflepuff instead.”

“Sly,” muttered Rosier. “Anything to do with the upcoming storm?”

“Nah. I trust the Slytherin team to perform optimally every game, no matter the conditions. It’s not cunning to flee from a match that’s in our favour. The Gryffindor team struggle in stormy weather – Longbottom hates storms, something I remember from his childhood.”

“Wow.”

“Anyway,” said Harry, huffing in annoyance. “Tell me more about Pettigrew.”

“A lot of his strength lies in being underestimated,” said Rosier. “He was friends with a few different people… pretty much bullies but he was the brains behind each prank – not intelligence wise, mind you.”

Harry snorted. “He knew the when and where I assume.”

“Right,” said Rosier. “He knew the when and where just not the how. The odd thing is that he’s talented in almost every branch of magic, just hasn’t mastered any. Look at Professor Snape… his mastery of spells exceeds almost most of the current wizards, with the exception of the headmaster. Pettigrew knows a lot of branches of magic, but is average in the, hence why fighting him is harder than people think.”

Harry took in the information with ease, the underlying message clear. He was to not underestimate Pettigrew if he ever came across the man. He already knew about James’ cruel streak and massive bullying from his school years, so it was easy to not portray all Gryffindors as golden beacons of light. He snorted and wondered if Pettigrew and his father were ever friends.

He waited for Rosier to finish his business and wash his hands before he stepped out of the cubicle. Despite not doing anything, he washed his hands as well, something about standing near a toilet for ten minutes made his hands itchy. “Ready?” he said to Rosier who was standing frozen near the door. “Rosier?”

“Look!” said Rosier, pointing at the collapsed form of the Prefect. “He was – he was attacked!”

Harry shifted around and stood next to Rosier. “Hm,” he said as he studied the Prefect, noting that blood was slowly dripping from his nose. “I’m not sure if he was punched or hit with a curse and he hit his face on the way down.”

“Does it matter?”

“In a sense,” said Harry. “If he fell or something, we could be overreacting and cause a scene. The
entire school is on edge because Pettigrew got into the school with Dementors lurking around… if he’s still here and attacking students, then the Dementors could be replaced by Aurors and this school will get so much more oppressive than it is now. We won’t even be able to shower alone soon.”

“You want to attempt to hush all this up?”

Harry stared, disbelief washing over his expression. “No, no. No, of course not. I simply meant that we shouldn’t start running through the halls screaming about Pettigrew. We have no real proof,” he said. “He could’ve fallen and we’ve got no idea what actually happened.”

“Pretty sure he was attacked,” said Rosier. “Even if it doesn’t make sense.”

“Why would Pettigrew follow us? I could understand Gryffindors, but not us,” said Harry, walking closer to the door. “The corridor is empty, Rosier. All I can see is the Prefect and a rat, which isn’t unlikely at all.”

“What’s a rat doing here?”

“It’s a large school, Rosier,” muttered Harry. “It’d be odd to not see a rodent around. It’s probably searching for food.”

“That’s still disgusting,” said Rosier. “Lucky this place isn’t near the kitchens…”

“If you’d read *Hogwarts: A History*, you’d know there’s an enchantment around the kitchens that repels everything but humans and house-elves. Not only that, but the house-elves wouldn’t stand a rodent being in the kitchens.”

“No one is idiotic enough to read that book,” said Rosier. “It’s like four thousand pages of utter nonsense.”

Harry coughed. “Anyway, I think we should get this Prefect back to the Great Hall.”

“Us? I don’t think so, Harry. We’re Slytherins –”

“They’re not gonna blame us for it,” said Harry, interrupting the rehearsed ‘I’m a Slytherin and the school hates us’ speech. “However, you’ve got a point. Maybe we should just wait for a professor to drop by and then we can act like we only just noticed it.”

“How are we gonna explain the fact that we’ve been in here for thirty minutes?”

“Say you were constipated,” muttered Harry, repressing a snort. “They won’t question it as they’ll be so disgusted.”

“And you? What’re you gonna use as an excuse?”

“I was here helping you as I am such a role model student.”

“Helping me with my constipation?” said Rosier, confused. “You’re – you’re actually unbelievable.”

“You love me for it,” said Harry. “Let’s just go and have a look around… there’s got to be something that we’re missing.”

The two slowly crept out of the boys’ bathroom and stepped over the fallen Hufflepuff Prefect, who was still unconscious. They discussed the lacklustre protections for anyone out of the lit up areas, claiming that the professors should have just lit up everywhere.
“Stop!”

Rosier almost walked into Harry’s back and before he could ask why he saw the large stone statue walking around. “What – what in the hell is that!”

“It’s one of the statues that are around the school,” said Harry, squinting at the statue. “I remembered Dumbledore speaking about them briefly last year when the Chamber was opened… I guess he decided to implement them this year.”

“Anything about them in *Hogwarts: A History*?”

“Read it and you’ll find out.”

Rosier glared. “I mean, are they deadly?” he asked, whispering. “And don’t give me a generic ‘yes’. Are they dangerous to us?”

“Rosier,” said Harry softly as if he was addressing a small child. “What are they made of?”

“Stone…”

“And does stone have a brain?”

“No?”

“Then yes, Rosier, they’ll be dangerous to us as they have no idea who’s an enemy and who’s an ally. It’ll attack the first human it sees. That explains the lights and the charm that went over them. The statues would be deterred from going into those zones and would avoid them, even if a threat was there.”

“So these things will attack us?” said Rosier, shaking slightly. “Can we leave now?”

“No,” said Harry. “We’ll never see these things in motion again – I want to get a better look.”

“You’re such an idiot,” said Rosier, watching as Harry threw stones and rocks at the stone statue. “It didn’t react, Harry, which means it needs a human – and I’m not being your testing dummy.”

“You’re actually no fun –”

“If it isn’t the Potter brat!” said a gravelly voice. “The son of James and Lily Potter. I expected James’ firstborn child to resemble him one hundred percent… I was wrong, clearly.”

Harry turned slowly. “And if it isn’t the famous Peter Pettigrew!” he said, fake enthusiasm in his voice. “What’re you doing in this part of the school? Shouldn’t you be in the, you know, Great Hall, ending the life of Longbottom?”

“I could have killed you both and no one would’ve been the wiser,” sneered Peter. “I could have killed you before you knew what was going on… but my master… no, no. No, he wanted you left alive! Lily would often ask me to prepare your bottles… I could have easily slipped a poison in, killing you… Lily would have blamed herself, yes. She was always scared of harming you – doubting herself…”

Harry blinked. “Okay,” he said softly. “And you’ve come to finish the job now, I assume? Well, good luck with that. I know a wide variety of spells.”

“Master always told me to keep an eye on you and get information on Longbottom as he was the real threat… Potter wasn’t the threat that was prophesied, no… it was Longbottom. A pure-blood the one
to cause my master his downfall? No… Longbottom, the cowardly boy, was meant to join my master… not – not defeat him! The half-blood was the enemy but my master was so sure… I do not doubt my master, but the Potter brat! So alike… no, no.”

Harry turned and looked at Rosier, who was gaping at the clearly insane man. He mouthed his opinion on the matter and watched, amused, as Rosier attempted to hide his grin. “I doubt you’re gonna let us leave, right?” he said, addressing the clearly insane man. “If your master wants me left alive, then you should leave me alone.”

Peter laughed. “No!” he barked out, the laughter leaving his body in an instant. “Dumbledore knows that his castle isn’t becoming any safer… he knows that I am still here, waiting for him to make a mistake. Everything that has happened has been because of me and my master will be so… proud! I gave Ginny Weasley that diary that almost killed her… I found the location of the Stone and passed it on… I am most faithful!”

“Right.”

“It was me who set everything in motion, allowed all these events to occur to take everyone’s mind off what’s really happening! The Dark Lord, my master, will rise again and again and again! He cannot be killed!”

“I don’t want to doubt you, Pettigrew,” said Harry. “But you sound like you love the Dark Lord. I understand doing certain favours and earning his favour, but what you’re going on about seems like you’d do anything for his attention…”

“I would! You dare think I wouldn’t?”

Harry leered at Peter. “So, hypothetically, if he asked you for a –”

Rosier slapped his hand over Harry’s mouth and glared. “Harry, shut up!”

“I’ll kill you now… Dumbledore would never know what really happened… Potter brat was walking in the halls and all of a sudden a statue attacked him. He didn’t tell the students, just the Prefects and you can’t blame a death of a curious teenager on me. James and Lily will be sad, and my master displeased, but I had to do what I had to do. Master’ll understand in due time that I saved him a great deal of work… yes.”

Harry watched as Peter edged around him, circling him as if he were injured prey. Listening to the man ramble on about his master and how he could have easily poisoned his bottle of milk was somewhat amusing. “Hey, Peter,” he said, interrupting the man’s ramblings. “How does it feel to be reduced to your current position by the Dark Lord? I mean, you’re essentially nothing but a babysitter.”

“Stop antagonising serial killers!”

“Pettigrew isn’t a serial killer,” said Harry, ignoring said man. “He killed a few Muggles with a Blasting Curse, betrayed multiple families and cast a few Unforgivable Curses. His crimes are mainly to Dumbledore and the light side, hence his severe punishment. He had hundreds of chances to kill Longbottom and hasn’t. His attack on the Gryffindor common room was done at a time that no one was near there or actually in the common room. His sole purpose to the Dark Lord is just existing and using a title that no one cares about. If you put Pettigrew in a room with Bellatrix Lestrange, you’ll find out who’s more feared.”

“I don’t care about fear,” said Peter, brandishing his wand aggressively. “Lestrange has her uses and
I have mine…”

Harry snorted, unfazed. He watched as Pettigrew grew more and more agitated and finally cast something at the roof, which dispelled the bright white light. He was about to remark about how the man knew how to do that when he heard the thundering steps from the stone statue charging towards him.

“We don’t have long before the headmaster comes and then he’ll find you dead and I’ll be long gone,” said Peter, turning. “Have fun with the statue!”

“Come on!” said Harry, dodging rubble from the swing of the stone statue’s sword. He grabbed Rosier and the two ran down the darkened corridor, aiming to avoid more of the things. “Keep up, Rosier, I don’t wanna end up as a decoration for one of the statues.”

Rosier narrowly dodged an arrow from one of the statues. He barely had the time to examine the chunk of stone that was fired like an arrow before another came flying towards him. “Pettigrew removed all the lights,” he said as they turned a corner. “There’s no safe place…”

“There’s always a safe place, Rosier,” said Harry, huffing. “You’ve just got to find one.”

The two of them continued to run through the dimly lit corridors, carefully avoiding the stone statues, which seemed to instantly hone on them when they were near. They had attempted to attack the statues, but they weren’t able to penetrate the stone of the statue with mediocre Blasting Curses.

They’d managed to work together and hit one of them with a Tripping Jinx, which caused the stone statue to topple over and shatter into hundreds of pieces. Their celebration was short-lived when the statue proceeded to piece itself back together and run at them faster than before.

“That’s ridiculous,” said Rosier as soon as they walked into one of the lit up areas. “The sad thing is that using those statues isn’t even smart, it’s just dangerous.”

“Welcome to the safest place in the wizarding world,” said Harry, smiling despite the situation. “Fifty Galleons that this whole situation is covered up.”

“You’re on!”

“Explain yourselves!” said Professor McGonagall, her face pinched into a concerned expression. “We’ve been looking for you two for almost an hour.”

Harry launched into a tale of how Peter Pettigrew attacked them while they were in the bathroom, dealing with Rosier’s constipation. He explained that the statues started to attack them and they had to run as they’re model students and didn’t want to damage anything. He briefly touched the fact that Pettigrew had cornered them and that they were lost due to all the twists and turns.

“Sorry, I’m late, Professor Lupin?”

The entire class turned to gape at Neville Longbottom, who had entered the class ten minutes late.

“That’s one way to interrupt a class so rudely, Mr. Longbottom,” said Professor Snape, sneering. “Fifteen points from Gryffindor. Sit down.”

Neville didn’t move, he instead just stood there and gaped at Professor Snape. “Where’s Professor Lupin?” he asked, confused.
“Lupin isn’t feeling well today, Mr. Longbottom,” said Professor Snape. “I do believe I asked you to sit down.”

“Is he alright?”

Professor Snape’s eyes glittered. “I’m sure that he will be fine in a few days,” he said. “It’s not threatening to his life, nor is it permanent. I do believe, Mr. Longbottom, that I have asked you to sit down twice now. Five more points from Gryffindor, and if I have to ask again, it will be a hundred.”

The class watched silently as Neville Longbottom walked towards his seat and sat down. No one dared to speak out despite wanting to ask questions on what made the boy so late. Not even the Slytherins laughed at the point loss.

“As I was saying before Longbottom interrupted, Professor Lupin has not left any record of the topics you have covered so far –”

“Sir,” said Hermione quickly, her bushy hair blowing into the side of Ron’s face. “We’ve done Boggarts, Red Caps, Kappas and Grindylows. We’re just about to start on –”

“Quiet!” hissed Professor Snape coldly, his dark eyes zooming straight onto Hermione Granger. “I did not ask for what you have and have not learned, nor do I remember actually addressing you, Miss. Granger. Fifteen points from Gryffindor… the next student that speaks out of turn is going to lose fifty points and serve three months detention with Filch. Do I make myself clear?”

“Yes, sir,” said Hermione.

Professor Snape glared but said nothing else on the matter. “Today we shall discuss –” he paused and started to flick through the textbook at a rapid pace. “– werewolves.”

“But, sir,” said Hermione, her hand half raised. “We’re not supposed to do werewolves yet, we’re due to start Hinkypunks –”

“Miss. Granger,” said Professor Snape, his eyes locking onto hers. “I was under the impression that I was the professor of this lesson, not you. I would advise you to not. Speak. Out. Of. Turn. Now, turn to page three hundred and ninety-four.”

Harry turned to the correct page with a sigh. “Professor,” he said, staring at the page with a strong sense of boredom. “What page were we meant to turn to? Three hundred and forty-nine?”

“Three hundred and ninety –”

“Thank you, professor,” said Harry, flicking to page three hundred and ninety. “This isn’t on werewolves, professor…”

“Three hundred and ninety-four!” snapped Professor Snape. “I will take points, Mr. Potter, if you continue to antagonise me.”

“Sorry, professor, my hearing’s not as good as it used to be from where the stone statue hit me.”

Professor Snape counted to ten and picked up the textbook. “Which of you can tell me how we distinguish between the werewolf and the true wolf? Put your hand down, Mr. Potter. If you have trouble hearing what page you turn to, I’m sure you misheard the question.”

Everyone sat in motionless silence; everyone except Hermione, whose hand, as it so often did, had shot straight into the air.
“Anyone?” said Professor Snape, ignoring Hermione. His twisted smile was back. “Are you telling me that Professor Lupin hasn’t even taught you the basic distinction between –”

“We told you,” said Parvati suddenly. “We haven’t got as far as werewolves yet, we’re still on –”

“Silence!” snarled Professor Snape. “Well, well, well, I never thought I’d meet a third-year class who wouldn’t even recognise a werewolf when they saw one. I shall make a point of informing Professor Dumbledore how very behind you all are…”

“Please, sir,” muttered Hermione, pushing her hand further into the air. “The werewolf differs from the true wolf in several small ways. The snout of the werewolf has a –”

“That is the second time you have spoken out of turn, Miss. Granger,” said Professor Snape as he sent a glare towards the student. “I think that will be another twenty points and two months of detention…”

“Honestly,” said Harry, staring at the Gryffindor in question. “Just because you know the answer to a question, Granger, doesn’t mean you need to shout it out. I know almost everything that’s been asked and I only put my hand up rarely. There’s a difference between being intelligent and being an insufferable know-it-all.”

The entire right-hand side of the classroom turned to glare at the Slytherin student that dared insult Hermione Granger. A vast majority of them had called her a ‘know-it-all’ and other hurtful comments almost daily, but they didn’t do it in the open and they didn’t make her cry.

Ron glared and turned back to Professor Snape, his glare intensifying. “Why ask us a question if you’re not gonna listen to the person who has the answer? Sir.”

Professor Snape advanced on Ron slowly, and the room held its breath. “Detention, Weasley,” he said silkily. “And if I ever hear you criticise the way I teach a class again, you will be very sorry indeed.”

The rest of the lesson was surprisingly quiet, much like a Potions lesson. Many of the students enjoyed Defence Against the Dark Arts, even the Slytherins, because it was a loud lesson, unlike Potions, which were delicate. The only sound that echoed throughout the room was the professor, who was examining the work they had been doing with Professor Lupin.

Hermione glanced towards the old clock on the wall and sighed.

“Very poorly explained,” said Professor Snape, stopping in front of Dean Thomas’ table. “That is incorrect, the Kappa is more commonly found in Mongolia… Professor Lupin gave this eight out of ten? I wouldn’t have given it three…”

Dean’s eyes widened as his old essay was tossed back on his desk with the eight removed and a dreary looking two placed there instead.

When the bell rang, at last, Snape held them back. “You will each write an essay, to be handed in to me, on the ways you recognise and kill werewolves. I want two rolls of parchment on the subject, and I want them by Monday morning. It is time somebody took this class in hand. Weasley, Granger, stay behind, we need to arrange your detentions.”

Harry snorted at the two Gryffindors and made his way out of the classroom, his Captaincy badge gleaming in the light. He had a few hours left before the match between Gryffindor and Hufflepuff started and he wanted to make sure his team was there, assessing them both.
After the fiasco in Defence Against the Dark Arts, many students were rather sullen and hopeful that the lesson would never be taken by Professor Snape again. Of course, each and every one of them got their wish when the headmaster announced at breakfast that Professor Lupin would once again be teaching his lesson and that he was now healthy.

It would be the third-year Gryffindor and Slytherin students that would be the first to have Defence Against the Dark Arts with Professor Lupin.

The excitement was short-lived after Professor Lupin stood and claimed that anything that Professor Snape had set as homework was to be handed in and marked on Monday.

Ninety-five percent of the students hadn’t bothered to even start the ridiculously long essay that Professor Snape had set.

“Professor Snape’s right, though,” said Harry loudly as he refilled his goblet with some chilled pumpkin juice. “We’re so behind in both practical and theory just for that one lesson. We’re still studying creatures when we should’ve moved onto curses months ago! I seriously mean months, Rosier, so don’t give me that look. We should’ve finished up creatures at the start of our second-year.”

“How d’you know that?” asked Rosier, glancing at Harry with a confused look. “Maybe we’re not meant to be learning creatures at all.”

“We have Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them listed as a first-year purchase for a reason, Rosier. The book would only make sense to be purchased for third-year when taking Care of Magical Creatures, right?” said Harry, making sure to keep Rosier’s attention on him and not his food. “That’s because that particular book is a secondary book for Defence Against the Dark Arts. Care of Magical Creatures has its own booklist, much like every other subject. Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them isn’t on it at all.”

“Maybe it’s ‘cos of the DADA Curse…”

Harry sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose. “Please, I’m begging you, do not bring up that conspiracy theory.”

“Shut up, Harry,” sneered Rosier with a slight grin, showing that he hardly meant it maliciously. “Ask any of the sixth or seventh years and they’ll all tell you the same exact thing: no one has held that position for more than a year. Something always happens to the professor, whether it be due them leaving, getting injured or sick, or dying.”

“It’s a dangerous field.”

Harry verbally agreed with Draco. “There are spells and curses flying around everywhere – should two of them connect and hit someone, well, it could be fatal.”
“Many suspect that the Dark Lord, You-Know-Who, cursed the position when he was denied a job by Dumbledore,” whispered a fifth-year, attempting to hide his face. “It’s a rumour at best, but it seems very likely. Who else, besides Dumbledore, would have the power, knowledge, and ability to do something like that? A spell like that would require constant presence to power the spell.”

“You mean the spell’s tied to an object?” said Harry, leaning forwards. “That means that Voldemort’s in the castle right now, or has been recently, powering his object with his magic to keep it going. It makes no sense. Do you know what I think?”

“No.”

“Dumbledore’s doing it,” said Harry instantly, ignoring all the looks he got. “Look at it from this perspective. He’s in the castle almost twenty-four seven without anyone even questioning him being here as he’s the headmaster. He has access to everything – think about it.”

“I could see how it could be possible,” said Rosier. “But it’s just stupid to assume that Dumbledore, of all people, would sabotage his own school.”

Draco sighed. “Dumbledore isn’t out to control the world, Harry,” he said with a shake of his head. “If he was, which is rather unlikely, he would have taken the position of Minister for Magic when it was offered to him on a silver platter. He declined, of course, because he has enough titles as it is.”

Harry snorted and shook his head. “There’s something off about him.”

“No one denies that,” said Draco without hesitation. “But he isn’t some kind of mastermind that’s slowly pulling strings and controlling the world. If what my father said is true, then he has less sway in the Ministry than we’re led to believe.”

“Your point?”

“My point is that he’s not out to control the world,” said Draco. “And even if he was, he’d have done it by now and wouldn’t be fooled by a couple of third-year students! You’re smart, Harry, I’ll give you that, but it’s ridiculous to assume that you could foil years of planning.”

Harry scoffed but decided to remain quiet and allow the others to continue the discussion, which was rather obvious by the body language of each of them.

A fourth-year boy snorted at what had just been said. He scratched at the few hairs on his chin, his brown eyes filling with amusement. “You make a fair point,” he said honestly. “But I don’t think that Dumbles –”

“What?”

Draco snorted, amused at the look on his best friend’s face.

Harry gaped for a second before shaking his head slightly. “What did you just call the Headmaster?” he asked in a whisper, making sure that he had heard correctly.

“I, uh, called him Dumbles,” said the fourth-year, confused. “It’s what my brother calls him.”

“What a horrendous nickname for someone,” snapped Harry, infuriated that this nickname was sued by more than one person. “Just imagine some student jumping up in the middle of dinner and shouting out ‘Dumbles’ when confronting the Headmaster over something.”

Draco and Rosier both laughed, imagining Harry being the one to use it.
“It honestly reminds me of something a three-year-old would name their toy bunny,” continued Harry. “That nickname was so awful I think it gave me an incurable disease.”

“Oh, alright,” muttered the boy, somewhat offended.

“Honestly,” muttered Harry after a short silence, his fingers tapping on the wooden table. “I can’t wrap my head around that nickname for him! Dumbles! Just hearing that nickname has ruined my day.”

“Don’t be dramatic, Harry.”

“I’m not being dramatic, Draco,” replied Harry. “It’s just awful.”

“Well,” started the fourth-year boy. “It’s not meant to be a nice name, you know.”

“I know that,” snapped Harry. “The nickname is just so awful it makes you cringe when you hear it.”

“I’ll give you a hundred Galleons if you call Dumbledore ‘Dumbles,’” said a boy that had been eavesdropping. He jingled his velvet money pouch with a lifted eyebrow. “You have to do it right now and wait to see what he says.”

“Is that it?” replied Harry, not even bothered by what he was asked to do for so much money. These rich, poncy pure-bloods had no sense at all when it came to money. “I’ll gladly take your money. You’re pretty much just throwing it at me.”

“If you fail,” said the boy, stopping all movement with three words. “You must give the Weasley’s a hundred Galleons instead.”

Harry didn’t understand how this boy got into Slytherin when he’s as dumb as a rock. Everyone knew that he wouldn’t turn away from a bet or a dare, no matter how foolish or childish it was. Hex a seventh-year? Done. Prank a professor and not get caught? Done. Everything was child’s play and was just free money.

He knew that the fail part of the dare was if he chickened out and didn’t do it. He wasn’t afraid to insult Dumbledore a little.

He stood with the bravado of a Gryffindor and stalked towards the tables where the Headmaster was sitting. He knew that Dumbledore was watching him curiously. He knew that no one dared walk towards the professors and interrupt their meal. He would be the first and he would do it without a single trace of fear or trepidation.

He stopped directly in front of Dumbledore, his green eyes locking onto blue. He flashed the headmaster a brief smile. “Good morning, Dumbles,” he said as loudly as he possibly could, making sure everyone had heard him say it.

“Mr Potter,” said Dumbledore with twinkling eyes. “Can we help you?”

“No,” said Harry instantly. “I just came to say a quick ‘hello’.”

Dumbledore watched as the boy twisted on the spot and returned to his friends, all of them having expressions of amusement or disbelief. He chuckled in amusement, even more so when the Gryffindors began glaring at the Slytherin boy for being rude.

“Are you not going to punish him, Albus?” asked Minerva McGonagall with a slightly raised
eyebrow. “He should be showing you the utmost respect, especially during meals.”

“Has he ever?” said Dumbledore with a smile. “Every time Mr Potter has decided to address me, he would use a different name or title, often straying from the proper one to use, but always making sure that he still sounded as respectful and polite as he could. I do not think that he liked the name that he used, either. He screwed up his face as if he was disgusted with it.”

“Still not the point,” said Minerva McGonagall. “He’s an intelligent young boy that should be using his intellect for good things, not some petty act of rebellion!”

“Are you forgetting that he is the son of James Potter?”

“Of course not,” said Minerva McGonagall. “But he’s so much like Lily that it’s hard to shift away from that. She would never sink to such things for money.”

Dumbledore chuckled. “I think it is rather nice that he is not throwing away his adolescence to studying,” he said. “Miss Granger is on a similar path where all that matters are grades and knowledge. You must not forget to live and enjoy life.”

Harry dropped onto the seats of the Slytherin table with a triumphant smirk. “Taking money from you guys is just so easy,” he said as he pocketed the bag of Galleons. “I’m actually surprised that you haven’t wised up yet and learned that I’ll do almost anything. I’m not afraid.”

The boy who was down a hundred Galleons snorted and returned to his food.

“Are the Quidditch tryouts today?”

Harry turned with a sigh and gestured towards the large window pane behind him. “Do you fancy flying in that storm?” he said, waiting for the boy to shake his head. “No, of course not. They’re tomorrow.”

“Alright,” said the boy softly, his eyes locked onto the Quidditch Captain’s shoes. “What time?”

“Nine.”

The stormy weather that had been thrashing against the castle for most of the previous night and morning hadn’t slowed even the slightest. In fact, many assumed that it had gotten worse as the time went by.

Many students, despite their rampant love for the sport, were deciding whether they should give the upcoming Quidditch game a pass, knowing that the conditions would be almost unbearable.

Those in Slytherin were also at an impasse on what they should do. Most of them wished to attend the match to belittle the Gryffindors and laugh when they were defeated by Hufflepuff. Some had decided to give the game a miss and would lurk around and wait for the faces of the Gryffindor students to learn the outcome of the game.

Others, however, had turned to their appointed leader, Harry Potter.

Unfortunately for them, Harry, who was the Quidditch Captain for their House, demanded that anyone who wanted to try out for the team had to attend the match, as well as anyone that was currently on the team.

The few that had their hearts on trying out but avoiding the match stared at the Captain with a wide-
eyed look that screamed betrayal.

“It’s really good practice,” muttered Harry as he rubbed his hands together. “It shows dedication and a lot of sacrifice. In a team based game, such as Quidditch, sacrifice is an important trait to have because it means you’re willing to do more to win. I don’t care what you do as long as our Seeker isn’t throwing himself in the path of a Bludger to protect a Chaser.”

“How’s freezing dedication?”

Harry looked at the girl with a smile. “Let’s put it this way,” he said. “Putting aside one day of warmth is a huge bonus to my opinion of you. I’m not saying that you need to be out here in the pouring rain or glaring sun for me to be proud of you, just that you’re willing to put something minor aside to better the team.”

A second-year girl, who had been staring at Terence Higgs, coughed. “I don’t understand why we have to attend the games of the other teams,” she said shyly. She avoided eye contact and stood a little straighter, hoping to sound more confident. “I mean, it didn’t happen last year, did it?”

Harry had noticed that girl lurking around the Chasers. He knew that it wasn’t anything malicious as she was essentially an open book. “It’s something that Flint did,” he said with an approving nod, finally understanding why she was lurking around. “He called it ‘scouting’ and that’s about it. He did it every game, no matter the weather or who was playing. I spoke to him briefly before he graduated and he told me that I should inform the next captain that they should continue his technique as it gave Slytherin a huge advantage.”

“Can’t argue with the results,” muttered Terence. “But the weather – what’re we gonna do during the stormy weather? I can barely see my hand in front of my face. I mean, I get what we’re gonna be doing, but I just don’t know what we’re meant to do.”

Harry’s grin went impossibly wide as he heard what had been asked. “You’re meant to observe and improve,” he said. “Let’s use Draco as an example, shall we? Draco would observe the enemy Seeker during the match, spotting any potential flaws, strengths, or weak spots. What are some of Longbottom’s strengths?”

No one spoke.

“Longbottom is considered to be a passive Seeker,” said Harry. “He will play patiently and won’t be upset if he doesn’t spot the Snitch as soon as possible. He’s a decent flyer, one of the best in the school, despite everything, and will abuse that frequently, making you look for him.”

The entire group just stood there silently, utterly baffled at what was being said. None of them knew what to do or say, especially when the explanation got more and more in-depth, resembling a crazed obsessive psychopath at how in detail their Captain had studied other players.

It sort of started to sink in when comparisons from professional players and their strategies were pulled in, but some were still just as confused as before.

Harry held up a hand, not silencing everyone, but signalling that he wished to speak. “If any of you want to pursue a career in Professional Quidditch, then you’re going to have to know this.”

A few hours later and almost the entirety of the school could be found sprinting towards the Quidditch stands. The older students were trying to steady the first and second-year students as the ferocious winds threatened to blow them off their feet.
The rumours that were floating around the school were that this was going to be the most attended Quidditch game since James Potter’s seventh year.

“I’m so glad that we won’t have to play in this,” muttered Draco as he climbed up the many stairs that led towards the top of the Slytherin stands. “I can’t see anything that isn’t in arm’s length.”

“It’s actually pretty good practice,” said Harry. “Gryffindor and Hufflepuff will be at a serious disadvantage because of the conditions whereas Slytherin and Ravenclaw have a massive advantage.”

“And that means?”

“Means that Gryffindor and Hufflepuff will get injured and may perform badly in their future games,” said Harry. “Injuries to them are good.”

Rosier couldn’t help but snort at that. “Any injury they have can be cleared up by Madam Pomfrey in less than a week,” he said loudly, trying to speak over the howling of the wind. “So, there’s no real point in hoping and praying that any of them will get hurt.”

“Some injuries can’t be fixed instantly,” replied Harry, glaring at Rosier. “Magic isn’t a ‘fix all’ for injuries, you know. In this weather, you can be assured that injuries are going to be an inch close to fatal. There’s gonna be a lot of damage done to the players.”

“Such as?”

“A bludger to the face,” said Harry. “Someone crashing into the stands –”

“We get it,” said Rosier, gaping. He shook his head, knowing that it was a possibility that it could happen, especially in these conditions.

Harry took his seat, which was directly behind Crabbe and Goyle, who were to be his meat shields from the harsh weather that was intent on drenching everyone. He folded his right leg over his left leg and sighed, waiting for the match to begin.

“Stop sighing.”

“Shut up, Rosier,” said Harry with a chuckle. “Pay attention! See here, the Hufflepuff Chasers are some of the best in the school, not including ours, of course. Watch ‘em.”

“Fine,” said Rosier. “I’ll watch the stupid Chasers, not that I plan on playing Quidditch at all.”

Harry glared for a split-second before turning away from Rosier. “Would you just shut up and sit quietly? Make sure you watch the Chasers – both of them,” he muttered as Madam Hooch blew the whistle that signalled the start of the Quidditch game. “I’m certain I know what play Wood’s gonna go for.”

“And what’s that?”

“He’ll be super aggressive,” said Harry as he studied the Gryffindor Captain. “It’s his last year at Hogwarts and he hasn’t once got the Quidditch Cup. He wants it badly. Wood’s obsessed with Quidditch and winning the Quidditch Cup is like being Head Boy in most Quidditch teams.”

“And?”

“And I’m gonna make sure that he doesn’t get his grubby little fingers on it,” said Harry with a smile.
“I want it in reach but forever out of his grasp. I will make sure that it’s Gryffindor versus Slytherin for the final game and when he checks the score it’s going to be on that game. When we beat them and win the cup, I will hold the Quidditch Cup in front of his face, taunting him. I will achieve what Wood’s been seeking in my first year as the Slytherin Quidditch Captain.”

Rosier gaped. “You can be quite cruel, Harry,” he said, watching the Gryffindor Chasers like he had been asked to. “You’re allowing him to continue to have faith that he may win what he’s desired and then you’re going to crush it at the last moment. God, Harry, that’s – that’s pretty extreme.”

Harry laughed and smiled for a second before turning back to the game. It was rather difficult to keep track of the game when the sky seemed to be darkening at a rapid rate. Whether it was due to the rain that had seemed to get fiercer as time went on. It was thanks to the flashes of lightning that allowed the spectators to get a glimpse of what was going on in perfect detail.

Rosier turned to Harry, rubbing his temple. “Why d’you think Wood called a timeout?”

“Well, according to Lee Jordan, that annoying and ignorant announcer, Gryffindor is about fifty points ahead,” said Harry, scratching at his forehead. “His bias and unnecessary comments are easy to see through. When Gryffindor are ahead, he compliments the game. When Gryffindor are losing, however, he calls cheating and unfair plays.”

“Fair enough,” said Rosier. “But I did ask for the reasoning why he called a timeout, not the points in the game. I don’t care how many points Gryffindor are winning by.”

“I may be amazing, Rosier, but I am not omnipotent, nor do I have the amazing ability to know everything. I have no idea what Wood’s doing. For all I know, he could be correcting his Chasers for not scoring enough, belittling his Beaters for not protecting Longbottom, or scolding his Seeker for not catching the Snitch when they have an impeccable lead.”

“Err, right.”

“I do believe it’s the last point I made,” said Harry. “He’s asking Longbottom to catch the Snitch before the game drags on and Gryffindor’s aggressive playstyle tires them all out. He’s afraid that they will burn out and the game will drag on into the night.”

Rosier snorted as a flash of lightning nearly struck the Hufflepuff Keeper. “That was rather close,” he muttered to himself. “I’m amazed that Dumbledore’s allowing his to continue. I would’ve put it on hold, to be honest.”

“If I’ve learned anything over the years about Quidditch, it’s that cancelling a match or putting it on hold is pretty much seen as treason by the masses of brain-dead Quidditch fans,” said Harry. “It could be raining the Draught of Living Death and those crackpots would still play.”

Draco, who had been eavesdropping, grunted in confirmation. He kept his eyes on the Seekers in the game, taking Harry’s word seriously. “It’s the only competitive thing that we’ve got,” he said. “So, naturally, we all take it seriously.”

They all fell silent and watched as Neville Longbottom fell slowly from a sky that had been filled with hundreds of Dementors.

Harry stood on the Quidditch pitch, an amused expression on his face, watching as most of the Slytherin house were slowly shambling onto the field, looking a mixture between tired and frustrated.
Being a hundred honest, today was the perfect day for a Quidditch game. Not a single cloud in the sky.

“You’re all taking your sweet time,” he said with an amused grin, especially at the second-year boy that got his foot stuck in mud and face planted. “The tryouts start at nine thirty, officially. You’ve all got about forty minutes to compose and prepare yourselves, making sure that you’re all up to expectations.”

The students that had been lounging around since they had arrived at eight forty began to slowly organise themselves into four groups. They moved faster when they were glared at.

“You want Seeker,” said Harry as he directed a second-year towards one of the groups. He knew exactly what the second-year wanted, even if the boy didn’t know himself. “To your left, not your right.”

“How’d you know what I wanted to do?” the second-year boy asked, highly confused. “I didn’t even say anything at all!”

Harry grinned and gave the boy a light shove. “I know everything.”

The boy gave a wide-eyed look and ran towards the Seeker group.

Harry had decided to allow the first-year students to attend the tryouts alongside the others. He felt that it gave the Slytherin house a slight sense of teamwork. The first-year students wouldn’t make the team, no matter how good they were. He had stated that it would aid them in the flying lessons which spanned the entire year, once per month.

The very same lessons that he had disregarded and never attended again after that first failure of a lesson.

He had been quite surprised with how many people actually turned up to the tryouts, especially considering he had made them use their heads and figure out the time and place without their hands being held.

The only people that knew the time and place where himself, Draco, and Rosier.

“So,” he continued loudly, drawing the attention towards himself, making sure that everyone was listening. “I can assume that you’re all here to try out for the team, which is… admirable, but I’m afraid that not everyone can make it. Even if you’re at a professional level, there’s things that could force you away and off the team.”

“Wait,” muttered a boy in the back. “We may not be chosen for the team, even if we’re the best here?”

“You could be the best Keeper in the world and I’d pass on you if you had no idea on how to play as a team,” said Harry. “Quidditch is, after all, a team based sport.”

“Is that why you left the team?”

Harry paused in his slight reverie of how each of the people would work on the team and studied the brown-haired boy who had asked the question. He hadn’t really given thought about why he had decided to step down from the team.

At the time, he hadn’t really had a viable reason. Everyone, including Flint, accepted it and listened to his advice, putting Draco as a Seeker.
“In a sense, yes,” he said after a period of silence. “I dislike relying on others, and when I realised that my attitude wasn’t good for the team, I did the best thing and I stepped down. I began to assist Flint with all the issues and problems relating to Captain and what captain’s do.”

“Some thought it was ‘cos you were afraid –”

“Not even close,” said Harry, interrupting the boy. “Maybe, and I mean this seriously, I just don’t like sitting on a piece of wood all day, hm.”

The group snickered for a few seconds before they quietened down.

Harry paced for a moment. “Because our first match is a few months away, two, in fact, I feel like we’re gonna take a different approach regarding the tryouts and how we, the team, are going to handle them. Not all of you will make the team, and I mean that in the nicest way possible, but you all have your uses,” he paused and turned through the small crowd of students. “You – yes, you – what are you good at?”

The young boy went wide-eyed at being addressed and stuttered his first few words, trying to sound smart and give him some more time to figure out his strengths. “I’m pretty good at, uh, defending the goals,” he said. “And I, uh, never mind.”

“Alright,” replied Harry. “And what about your weaknesses?”

The boy gaped. “I, uh, I’m scared of the, err, Bludgers.”

Harry stared for a moment before sighing. “Alright, so, you weren’t much use to use as an example for what I had in mind,” he muttered more to himself than the other students. “I didn’t say what I did to belittle him so I would suggest that all of you shut your mouths and quit laughing. Not everyone can be perfect at everything, no matter how they try. The whole point of this process was to find your strengths, assess your weaknesses, and then learn from them. You could be an amazing Seeker, but you could be an even better Chaser.”

“Kind of like me,” said Draco, whispering to the few younger students near him. “I’m a fantastic Seeker, but I think I’d be an even better Chaser.”

“Not only that,” said Harry loudly. “But there’s nothing in the rules that state that no reserves may be used. In professional Quidditch, depending on whether it’s the world cup or not, you can only have one reserve for each position on the field and that’s it. I plan to abuse this obvious oversight and allow reserves to fly on and off when needed, allowing us to counter any strength the other teams may have. Their strengths will be useless.”

“How?”

“Our Seeker could act like he or she has seen the Snitch and all of a sudden all eyes are on them,” said Harry. “Easy time for a Chaser to swap on and off and no one would be any the wiser.”

“That could work,” said Miles. “It’d be even easier of the weather was bad.”
Harry nodded and slowly moved from group to group, making them line up in age. He watched the players carefully, making sure to look for any signs of nervousness. He spent most of his time with the current time, trying to figure out what they thought of each person who wanted to be on the team.

He needed one Chaser and that Chaser was going to be Rosier, no matter what the boy said to try and get out of it.

He needed more reserves. He needed reserves for the reserves, and reserves for those reserves. Reserves for the reserves for the reserves. That was going to get confusing really quickly.

Within thirty minutes of the tryouts beginning, he had three mock games of Quidditch going, different groups doing different things. Seekers were versing each other, hoping to eliminate future competition in the easier rounds.

Everything was everywhere and he knew where everything was, despite the chaos.

If you won your respective role you received a small stripe from one of the six players on the current team.

Some had three stripes, some had four, and some had none. Those with none just tried harder and never gave up.

‘Determination,’ said Tom. ‘I believe that determination is one of the most marvellous things that humans ever experience. Neither of us know whether they are determined to impress you or make it onto the team, but they are all driven by determination.’

‘It’s a little of both, I think,’ thought Harry, making sure to direct it at Tom, even if the voice understand when he was talking to him. ‘They want to impress the captain because it will give them an edge over others.’

‘It will not be long until that determination turns to admiration.’

“What do we do now?” asked Miles. “There’s still a few of ‘em that don’t have any stripes and they’re looking rather upset about it.”

Harry glanced over and frowned. “Your brother, Kevin, is trying out for Keeper, right?”

“Yeah,” said Miles as he glanced over to where his little brother was, unaware that Harry had followed his gaze. “I’m teaching him, Harry, so you don’t need to worry about his ability. In a few months, he’ll be as good as me.”

Harry locked eyes with Kevin and snorted when the boy blushed and looked away. “He has the potential to be better than you, Miles,” he said, turning back to Miles. “He wants to be on the team with you, no matter if he’s a reserve or not.”

“How’d you know that?”

“I know everything,” said Harry with a knowing grin. “I just so happen to know that your favourite colour is red and not green. You quit liking red openly when you realised it was the colour of Gryffindor. I know that your favourite food is toasted bread, no matter what’s being served.”

“Alright,” muttered Miles. “I get it, Harry, you’re a stalker that knows way too much about people, but all of that is pretty much public knowledge. A lot of people know I like red instead of green and that I eat toasted bread daily.”
Harry snorted. “What about that time that you intentionally made sure to walk in on someone when they were alone? I know you never told anyone about that.”

“How did – how do you know about that?” hissed Miles. “Also, if you ever breathe a word of that too –”

“Do you think I care?” said Harry, interrupting Miles’s rant. “Do you really believe that I care what you do in your spare time? Nope. I’m not going to give you the whole ‘I don’t care what you do, as long as you stay in decent shape and health for Quidditch’ speech as I just. Don’t. Care. I’m not going to spread your secret around, Miles, as I just do not care.”

Miles stood still for a second. “Did you really have to say you don’t care so many times?” he asked with a sigh and a muttered thank you. “I’m just going to go and speak to my brother, I think.”

Harry grinned. “Teach him how to fly,” he called out. “He’s unsure on how to actually fly. He can hover great, but not fly.”
Harry sat down at the Slytherin table in the Great Hall, his eyes locking onto Neville Longbottom as the boy dropped onto a seat at the Gryffindor table. He had been watching Longbottom closely since last night, trying to figure out what had transpired since the Quidditch match.

It didn’t take a genius to realise that Longbottom appeared to be suffering greatly.

The average mood of the students was suffering, actually. A few had gone home for the Christmas holidays, but most had decided that the brief exposure to the Dementors wasn’t a good idea and wrote home, explaining that they felt safer at school.

Many of the students had heard from Professor Lupin, the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor, that Dementors fed from happy memories, such as spending time with family and feeling safe.

He never understood why the man had so much knowledge and looked like he couldn’t afford to purchase a book or afford a house. The fact that the Weasley’s looked richer than someone made him highly curious.

He had a theory that Professor Lupin had a contagious disease and no one wanted to be around him for extended periods. It was a sound theory and Professor Snape’s hatred towards the man.

“What’s wrong with Longbottom?”

Harry knew that Draco would pick up on the despondent mood that seemed to be engulfing Longbottom but he never thought that he, of all people, would be asked about it. “I dunno,” he muttered as he stirred the cup of tea that had appeared in front of him. “And, just because I know you’re going to ask, I’m pretty sure that I had nothing to do with his foul mood.”

“You’re pretty sure that you had nothing to do with it?” asked Draco, somewhat amused. “I’m pretty sure that if you go on the defensive straight away you’re instantly guilty.”

“I swear to God if you keep putting so much unneeded emphasis on those words I’m going to curse you.”

Draco snorted and put that in his mental list of things that annoyed Harry.

Harry decided that the best course of action was to make eye contact with Longbottom and use Legilimency to find out what was going on. He needed direct eye contact for some reason. He wasn’t sure if his ability in Legilimency was waning or Longbottom was developing some form of mental shields that were repelling his weaker attempts to see into Longbottom’s thoughts and memories.

He was certain that if he continued to push the branch of magic that he could achieve great things, such as reading the minds of those that he was familiar with if they were on the other side of the castle.
“That look that he has is familiar,” he said, trying to recall the last time that Longbottom looked like that. “I’m trying to piece it, but I just can’t remember.”

“The heir of Slytherin fiasco,” said Draco. “Weasley refused to speak to Longbottom because of that and he looked just like he does now.”

“Right,” said Harry, the memory of his bitterness surging to mind when he learned that Longbottom could be the heir of his own house. He was now the heir of Slytherin and no one would take that from him. “I’m not sure if it’s even worth it for us to pry into it, to be honest.”

“Maybe not,” said Rosier as he sat down next to Harry. “It’s always nice to have some blackmail material that isn’t completely made-up. I mean, most of the things we have on them are false and can be pulled apart easily.”

“All you want is blackmail material?”

“Yes, Harry,” said Rosier. “I mean, look at Granger! She looks like someone’s kicked her pet dog or cat, whatever she decided to buy and bring to school. I don’t think I’ve ever seen someone look so distraught over something that shouldn’t involve them.”

“It’s hard to admit,” said Draco. “But Rosier’s right.”

Harry ignored Rosier’s cry of disagreement and turned his focus onto Granger. “You’re right,” he said when he realised that she was rather distraught. “Maybe it’s the Dementors making them all miserable.”

“No one else is, though.”

Harry observed more, hoping to get some sort of clue to what was going on. He didn’t want to obsess over the Golden Trio because that would be bad for his reputation. “They’re both giving her a look that makes it seem like she’s done something,” he said. “Weasley’s is an annoyed and betrayed look whereas Longbottom’s is more of a sad look.”

“Longbottom broke his broom, remember?” said Draco, peering at the people in question. “Gryffindor’s next match is in a few months and they haven’t got a replacement.”

“That explains Weasley’s annoyed expression, but it doesn’t explain why Longbottom’s so upset over a broken broom when he can afford to buy thirty of them without even fearing that he’s dipping into a percentage of his money.”

“Hm.”

Harry sighed and tapped his chin. “It honestly looks like Granger’s annoyed at Weasley for some reason. I’m sure it starts there. Longbottom’s just sad that his lackeys are fighting once again and it makes him look bad.”

“I heard he fainted again,” said Rosier. “Zabini was mentioning it just yesterday. He said that Longbottom met with Lupin and during their meeting Longbottom collapsed in some sort of fit.”

“What?”

“Zabini found him on the ground,” said Rosier. “Lupin was leaning over him, trying to wake him up.”

Harry had to think about that for a moment, curious on what could have been happening. He didn’t
want to jump to a false conclusion. “Longbottom only faints around Dementors, right?” he said and paused until Draco and Rosier both nodded in confirmation. “That explains it, then. Lupin’s in league with Voldemort and is using Dementors to weaken Longbottom.”

“That’s ridiculous.”

“Think about it,” said Harry. “Lupin can handle Dementors with relative ease, something most wizards fail to do. Dementors just so happen to surrounded the castle, allowing Lupin a cover story.”

“A cover story for what?”

“Longbottom getting the Dementor’s Kiss.”


“I think he’s getting private lessons,” said Rosier. “Lupin’s teaching him how to beat the Dementors seeing as Longbottom faints like a woman every time he sees one.”

“You mean that Longbottom, a lacklustre third-year student, is getting one on one lessons by our professor on how to defeat Dementors and we’re getting nothing?”

“Yup.”

“That’s complete nonsense,” said Harry, furious. “Dementors are dark creatures and we’re not being taught how to defend against them? What a joke.”

“We’re not being taught about ‘em either,” said Adrian as he walked by, looking for some strawberry jam. “Lupin’s been all hush-hush on the subject, not saying anything at all. When we asked him about them, he changed the subject and said that the spell was beyond our level.”

“You mean the Slytherins, right?”

“Yeah,” said Adrian. “He’s not really bias towards us, but he’ll default to Gryffindor no matter what. He has some severe trust issues against us.”

Harry nodded and watched as Adrian made a noise of happiness and picked up the jam. “Well,” he whispered, glancing towards the shabby professor. “There’s only one thing we can do to uncover this plot.”

“And that is?”

“We follow Longbottom.”

Rosier snorted. “And that’ll work?” he asked. “I mean, I know Longbottom is going alone, but he’s not daft. He’s not Weasley.”

“It should,” said Harry. “We may have to take it in a more stealthy approach.”

“You mean you’ll go first and then come and get us.”

“Precisely!”

The trio fell into an off-topic chatter about everyday things. They made sure to keep a close eye on Longbottom and his posse, making sure that he didn’t slip out of the Great Hall without them noticing.
The last thing they wanted and needed was Longbottom escaping before he could be followed.

“It’s nice to see you awake at a respectable time, Rosier,” said Harry. “Normally you sleep in until lunch on a Sunday.”

“Waking up and finding yourself submerged in snow isn’t a pleasant experience, I can assure you,” said Rosier. “After the first six times, I started to make sure to be awake before ten so that I wouldn’t have to wake up to snow all over my bed.”

Harry snorted.

“Why do you have to test these spells out on me?”

“I tried ‘em on Crabbe and Goyle once but they just kept on sleeping as if nothing even happened.”

“Fine!” said Rosier, trying not to laugh. “I can understand waking me up with snow, I mean it, but did you really have to put snow in my socks?”

“Your socks?” said Harry innocently. “I thought they belonged to Nott. I apologise, Rosier.”

“Liar!” hissed Rosier, stabbing a sausage in the process. “You can’t just banish something somewhere and not have any idea. You banished it towards those socks on purpose.”

“You can, actually,” said Harry. “I wanted them in the socks that I thought belonged to Nott. The snow went in because I wanted it to, no matter who the real owner was. The spell wouldn’t fail because the socks weren’t actually Nott’s.”

“Whatever you say, Harry,” said Rosier with a soft groan of annoyance. “None of that excuses the fact that you did it on purpose.”

“Serves you right for not checking your shoes and socks,” said Harry, laughing. “It’s a habit that you should get into, you know. You never know what could be in there.”

“Shush!” said Draco, gesturing towards the Great Hall doors. “They’re leaving and you two would’ve never known! Should we follow them?”

Harry was against it at first, even with their plans. “Longbottom won’t be going to his meeting with Lupin,” he muttered. “Not sure if it’s even worth it to follow him.”

“So?”

“I don’t want to develop stalker habits, Draco,” said Harry. “I’m only gonna follow them if it’s worth it.”

“Where d’you think they’re going?”

Harry didn’t have to think about that. He caught Granger’s eye and dug around until he heard the word ‘Hagrid’, which was being mentally screamed by the frizzy-haired girl. There was something else that he couldn’t pick up, but had no idea on how he should delve deeper into her mind and get what he needed.

He was a natural Leglimens, for God’s sake, he shouldn’t be having this much issues reading a Muggle-born’s thoughts.

‘You are coming into your natural power,’ said Tom with an amused sounding tone of voice.
‘Somewhere between the ages of twelve and fifteen a witch or a wizard will begin puberty. It is
during this time that their magic also matures.’

‘So I’m going through puberty?’

‘In a sense,’ said Tom. ‘Your body may not be, but your magic is. During this period, your magic will be a little on edge and may refuse to work as you wish it to. You will be able to cast spells flawlessly, just any innate talents will stop working properly until your body and magic are evened out.’

‘I assume I’m producing too much magic,’ thought Harry. ‘Something like that, I guess.’

‘You got it in one,’ said Tom. ‘There is just too much going on and your magic has no idea what it wants and needs to do. I guess I can help you this time. I suggest following them to the library.’

“Library,” said Harry, trusting Tom to give him the correct information. “We can easily act like we have business there so they shouldn’t get too upset that we’re also in there.”

The three of them followed Weasley, Longbottom, and Granger at a close distance. They made sure to keep the chatter down and their footsteps soft. They also kept an idle discussion that they could revert to if anyone else besides the people they were trailing came near them.

The cover story was that Rosier had overdue work to complete, which he did.

They stalked the Golden Trio into the library, slipping by Madam Pince without much effort.

‘He is going to another lesson.’

Harry muttered an excuse to Rosier and Draco and left the Slytherins common room, intent on reaching the Defence Against the Dark Arts classroom before Longbottom did. It would be a close one, but he was sure that he could utilise a few shortcuts that he had been shown to make it to the classroom way before Longbottom.

‘I do not claim to be all-knowing, but I am certain you will beat him if you keep your pace.’

Harry nodded to himself and set off through the castle, easily sidestepping the students that were still lurking around in the corridors or the various classrooms around the school. He made his way towards the History of Magic classroom, which is where the lessons were taking place, oddly enough.

He stopped outside the doors and heard talking, his eyes narrowing as he pushed against the door.

“Mr Potter,” said Professor Lupin as he gently opened the door. “You don’t need to eavesdrop, you know.”

“I know,” said Harry after a moment of silence, mentally wondering how the professor knew he was there. “I was just walking by and I heard some noise. I thought that it may have been a younger student that’s lost. Hogwarts is a big place.”

“That’s nice of you,” said Professor Lupin, gesturing the Slytherin boy in. “Mr Longbottom and I were just beginning a more advanced lesson.”

“I heard,” said Harry, sitting on a nearby wooden chair. “There’s been rumours that you’re giving him one on one lessons on how to defend against Dementors. You see, I thought that it was incorrect because you, a professor, wouldn’t show such blatant favouritism and only teach one student.”
Professor Lupin looked at Neville for a second before nodding. “You can join in if you would like.”

“I would like that.”

Professor Lupin dragged the large packing case and put it in the middle of the room, his eyes darted to Neville’s once again before he cleared his throat. “Neville has been learning a spell to repel Dementors, seeing as he is unusually susceptible to their influence. We’ve just been studying theory for now and only spent a few minutes with one last lesson.”

“Fascinating,” said Harry. “You’re using a Boggart.”

“Well done,” said Professor Lupin. “As Neville’s Boggart is a Dementor, it makes practising much easier than it would be for everyone.”

“Can I face the Boggart?”

Professor Lupin shuffled about before nodding and giving a small speech, not that it did anything because he knew that the boy already knew everything. “Go ahead.”

Harry waited for the Boggart to be released, a confident smirk on his face as he waited and waited for the Boggart to emerge so he could put it in its place and face his fears. He gripped his wand, his eyes narrowing.

After what seemed like hours the Boggart emerged and twisted around, changing forms to torture the human in front of it.

His eyes widened slightly when he realised that his fear was his own death. He had died when he was six and met Death, who looked rather normal compared to what people assumed. He had already faced his fear when he was much younger and this did not please him.

He was about to cast the spell to be rid of it when the Boggart began to twirl and twist, changing forms.

His mother sat on her knees, her hands clenched and her eyes filling with tears, pleading with a tall, unrecognisable man that continued to threaten her. She continued to plead, ignoring the rambling and delirious remarks the man was spewing.

He paused and stared in shock as he watched the man threaten his mother.

His first reaction was to attack the stranger to protect his mother, but not with the spell that would actually work. He knew that it wouldn’t work, but that wouldn’t stop him from trying it. He was intelligent enough to know that his mother was at home and that she wouldn’t be here.

Only an idiot would be startled by such a memory, especially when he knew better.

He allowed Lupin to dispel the Boggart and gave a nod, indicating that he was satisfied with the Boggart and what he had seen. He stood back and allowed Lupin to begin teaching Longbottom, taking notes.

“Now,” said Professor Lupin, sitting on a chair. “The last thing that we discussed was the theory behind the Dementor, potential memories you can use, and different effects that they, the Dementors, have.”

“Yes,” said Neville.
“We haven’t really begun discussing the Patronus, which is what we’re going to be learning today,” said Professor Lupin. “A Patronus is a guardian that repels Dementors. It is surprisingly simple to explain, but much harder to perform.”

Harry understood that. There were many spells that were easy explained but almost impossible to cast. He loved those kind of spells as it meant people like Granger would fail as she was hopeless unless the book she was reading from gave perfect instructions.

“– the Patronus is a kind of positive force, a projection of the very things that the Dementor feeds upon, such as hope, happiness, the desire to survive, but it cannot feel despair, as real humans can, so the Dementors can’t hurt it.”

“You said before that it was complicated,” said Neville, swallowing. “Just how hard is this spell?”

Professor Lupin frowned. “It is highly advanced,” he said. “So much so that only a handful of qualified wizards can actually cast it. Being able to cast this spell is an instant ‘Outstanding’ on your N.E.W.T.s.”

Harry would master this spell with ease and achieve something no other student has ever done. “And what does a Patronus look like?” he asked with a curious glance. “Can you cast a Patronus?”

Professor Lupin just smiled. “That one is a secret,” he said. “It’s a good thing to keep the form of it a secret as there is so much more than you can do with the spell than just ward off Dementors.”

Harry’s interest piqued, especially when he realised that Lupin didn’t really want to admit what his Patronus was. He was certain that the other things would be mostly defensive, seeing as the spell was a guardian, or so he assumed.

“Expecto Patronum.”

“Huh?”

Professor Lupin chuckled and shook his head. “That, Neville, is the incantation,” he said. “Concentrate on your happy memory and flick your wand like this – don’t say anything just yet.”

Neville smiled and practised the wand movement, alongside Harry, silently. He had his memory firmly in mind and he knew that Harry had the same. He knew that Harry would probably get the spell on his first cast, even if he had no idea what he was doing.

“Allright, Neville, you go first and then you, Mr Potter.”

“Okay,” muttered Neville, forcing his memory to occupy his mind. “Expecto Patronum!”

A silver whispery substance filled the air, sparkling slightly before it vanished.

“Did you see that?” said Neville, excited. “I think I did it!”

Professor Lupin beamed. “You did indeed! You conjured what we call a non-corporal Patronus, congratulations!” he turned towards Harry Potter and explained the same thing that he did with Neville. “You will need a very powerful memory.”

Harry thought of a memory that he wanted to use and clenched his wand tighter. “Expecto Patronum!”

Nothing happened.
He knew that the spell had failed when he felt nothing when he had attempted to cast the spell. He should have felt something but it felt like he had just muttered random words and waved around a stick and that was it.

He was bought out of his angry musing when he saw Longbottom collapse and the Boggart Dementor be banished back into the travel case.

“Sorry,” muttered Neville as he sat up.

“Are you alright?” asked Professor Lupin. “I know that you have a reaction to them but that wasn’t what I expected.”

“Yeah,” said Neville as pulled himself up and leant against one of the nearby desks, his breathing erratic.

Professor Lupin dug around in his pockets. “Here,” he said as he handed Neville a Chocolate Frog. “Eat this before we try again. I didn’t expect you to do it the first time. In fact, I would have been astounded if you had.”

Harry continued to mull over his failure, ignoring the soft snicker that was obviously coming from Tom, who found this entire situation amusing. He couldn’t understand how he would fail such a simple spell. It had to be simple if Longbottom could cast it.

“It’s getting worse,” muttered Neville, rubbing his knee as he ate the Chocolate Frog with the enthusiasm of a child. “I could hear her louder this time, much louder than all the other times – and him – Voldemort.”

Professor Lupin went pale. “Neville, if you don’t want to continue, I will more than understand –”

“I do!” said Neville. “I’ve got to! What if the Dementors turn up at our match against Ravenclaw? I can’t afford to fall off again. If we lose this game we’ve lost the Quidditch Cup!”

“You’re putting Quidditch before your own safety?” said Harry bitterly. “Is that what Wood has drilled into all of your heads? Die for me so I can win the Quidditch Cup? That’s pathetic.”

“Now, boys, let’s not resort to arguing,” said Professor Lupin. “Would you like to try again?”

“Would I like to try again,” mocked Harry, glaring. “No, I would not like to try to cast this stupid and useless spell again. When am I ever going to need some sort of sparkling protector? Never, that’s when. I don’t need to cast a Patronus because I’m never going to faint when I’m near one.”

“There is more to the Patronus than just warding away Dementors.”

“I don’t care,” said Harry. “You said that only a handful of wizards can cast it, then I just don’t see the point. What a waste of time.”

“I did say that the spell is complex,” said Professor Lupin. “Neville making wisps on his first attempt is something that I have never seen before. It took me months to reach that level. I failed many times but I never let that deter me.”

“I don’t fail,” said Harry. “I have never failed at anything I have ever done. I excel in everything. I was walking while other babies were still rolling around on their stomachs. I could read while others were still babbling. I was making third-year potions when I was six-years-old! Have you ever heard of a six-year-old brewing any kind of potion?”
Professor Lupin frowned. “I urge you to keep pushing to successfully cast the spell, Mr Potter,” he said. “The feeling of happiness is the finest thing you’ll ever experience. The first time you see your Patronus cannot be explained.”

“I don’t care.”

Neville watched as Harry tucked his wand away and glared before swinging open the door and storming off down the corridor. He didn’t get a chance to ponder where Harry was going as Professor Lupin turned to him with a sad facial expression.
Harry walked through the empty corridors of Hogwarts with one destination in mind. He ignored the constant chatter of the portraits, most of them gossiping about what they had seen when they were out and about.

He kept a neutral expression on his face and walked down each corridor with renewed strides, his eyes darting to each picture on the wall, making sure that they weren’t watching him. While it was impossible for anyone to ever force something out of a portrait, it was possible to coherence it into giving the information.

The portraits were gossipers, though, and that was a massive threat to him if they decided to rat him out.

“Open,” he hissed towards the circular sink and climbed in. He closed the sink with another hissed command and slid down the pipe with a slight smile. He opened the next two sets of doors and closed them before stopping in the middle of the Chamber of Secrets.

“Harry Potter,” hissed a voice from the side. “What brings you to our Chamber?”

Harry smiled at the man that had always taught him rare and obscure branches of magic without a second thought. “Not much, if we’re being honest,” he said as he sat down on a chipped stool that he had bought in from somewhere in the castle. “I just needed somewhere that I can relax and mull over my thoughts.”

Salazar remained quiet for a second. “I assume you are having a tough day?”

Harry nodded.

“I did not willingly go along with this change of scenery so that you could communicate with me by nodding! Speak, boy!”

“I failed my first spell today,” said Harry after a few seconds of silence. “I couldn’t cast the spell, no matter what I tried to do – felt nothing as I cast it, as well.”

“You felt nothing?”

“When I cast any spell I get this feeling,” said Harry, explaining. “It’s always been there and when I tried this spell I got nothing.”

Salazar rubbed his chin. “What spell did you attempt to cast?”

“The Patronus Charm.”

“That spell was created years before Hogwarts was founded,” said Salazar, planning to go into a massive lecture about the spell. “I am uncertain if the spell remains the same as it did when I was
around, but it was used to defend against Dementors, better known as Death’s Minions. It was highly complex and even we struggled with the spell. All of us mastered it, of course.”

“That’s not making me feel any better.”

“It should,” said Salazar. “Being able to cast such a spell at the age of thirteen is extraordinary. I managed it at twenty-seven – years of research was needed for it, though. Mine was a serpent, which is why my house symbol was a serpent.”

“So, Godric’s Patronus was a Lion?”

“No,” said Salazar. “I chose my symbol after my Patronus, the others did not.”

“Oh.”

“We should be getting back on track,” said Salazar. “Not every wizard can cast a Patronus, just like not every wizard can perform wandless and nonverbal magic. You, if I recall correctly, are rather proficient at both, especially considering your age.”

Harry really wasn’t sure on how he should respond to that seeing as he still failed a spell that Longbottom had successfully cast.

“The Patronus is a feeble piece of magic that can be used to attack or to defend,” said Salazar. “The general belief by wizards is that only those that are pure of heart are able to cast a Patronus. This has been countered many times, but each counter has an argument that can halt any and all progress. I could, as you know, cast the spell and I was a dark wizard.”

Harry blinked. “You mean the tale of Raczidian?”

Salazar laughed. “Oh, Raczidian, what a great tale that was.”

“You have heard of it?”

“Of course,” said Salazar. “Raczidian was a dark wizard that was highly competent in many branches of dark magic. Something caused him to attack a nearby village with hundreds of Dementors – how he acquired them is a mystery – and was defeated by maggots.”

“You’re skipping over some vital information,” said Harry, unamused. “The fact that he could control the Dementors and was unaffected by their aura.”

“Dark wizards are often ignored by dark creatures,” said Salazar. “Dementors are loyal to those that free them. They are chained, so to speak, to their feeding ground and they cannot leave until someone releases them.”


“Towards the end of the battle, he was foiled by a small Patronus that was a mouse. You must remember that Raczidian was a wizard that thought bigger was better and therefore he was infuriated by the fact that a simple mouse had overpowered his Dementors. He learned that you did not require a memory to cast a Patronus – as I said, he was highly intelligent – you just needed the emotion, feeling, and desire.”
“This is where he went wrong,” said Harry, understanding slightly. “The legend goes that he attempted to cast his own Patronus and was then devoured by maggots.”

“I am glad that you can keep up,” said Salazar. “Now, the tale diverges here depending on who you ask. Many say that the Patronus failed because he was a dark wizard and dark wizards do not have a pure heart whereas others say that the spell failed because he used a fake emotion.”

“What do you believe?”

“I believe that it is a mixture of both,” said Salazar. “Dark wizards lack the proper emotional drive that light wizards supposedly have. For us to create or conjure a Patronus, we have to put in more effort. I believe that Raczidian forced an emotion because he did not make use of a memory and the spell believed it to be a fake emotion and he was devoured because of it.”

“That’s interesting,” muttered Harry. “I wonder why we’re not taught about the Patronus and it being able to devour the caster.”

“Because it would cause panic and even fewer people would attempt the spell,” said Salazar. “The moment something has the slightest risk of death it is forgotten. Potion making was once done by all wizards, no matter their skill, as a home thing. There were no shops or dedicated brewers. One witch died due to a potion exploding and all of a sudden many stopped because it was dangerous.”

“That’s basic human nature,” said Harry. “Everyone fears dying, no matter who is saying it. There are always things to do and see.”

Salazar nodded. “Wizards have many ways around death. Some are highly foul and should never be attempted unless you would rather suffer eternally and others are seen every day, such as a portrait or a diary.”

“Like the diary Tom Riddle had?”

“No! That was foul magic,” said Salazar. “You can preserve yourself in a diary just as you can a painting. You will have to look back into the BC era, but you should find something on it.”

“How is this any different?”

“Because no matter what, you cannot return to life,” said Salazar. “No ritual or sacrifice could bring you out from the book. You could also jump between your book and a portrait, assuming you had both. Before even attempting to create this, however, you will need to delve into some rather morbid branches of magic.”

Harry stared. “What branches?”

“The first branch would be Necromancy,” said Salazar. “Before you ask, I am not talking about that petty beginner nonsense that is reanimating corpses and giving them a simple order. I am talking about real Necromancy – the black arts.”

“Where can I find information?”
“What do you know of the black arts?” asked Salazar. “If you answer my question with satisfaction I will tell you more.”

Harry sucked in a deep breath and thought back to the book he had read. “The black arts are hardly ever practised due to the stigma of them being vile,” he said. “No one has ever really mastered the branch of magic due to the fact that a lot of the information is lost or untranslatable.”

Salazar snorted. “I mastered the black arts,” he said, ignoring the accusing glare he got. “I was, and always will be, called a dark wizard for a reason. I think it is nice that you try and defend my legacy, but you should not waste your breath. There were a few wizards after me that also mastered the branch but not many lived as long as I did.”

“Oh,” muttered Harry. “Did you not make anything that would allow you to live forever?”

“No,” said Salazar. “I did not chase immortality as it is pointless. Why would I want to live forever when everyone I have ever loved has died?”

“Makes sense,” said Harry. “What did you get from all the black magic?”

Salazar studied the boy with an amused expression. “Tell me, curious one, have you ever done any studying into the branch of magic that is labelled as vampiric magic?”

“Never even heard of it.”

“Then I shall be explaining that first,” said Salazar. “Vampires are the strongest of all magical creatures known to man. They can move at incredible speeds, a blur to the human eye. They have unmatched strength. They can survive without food, including blood, for three months before they feel hungry. They can summon undead minions at their command. They can appear and reappear whenever and wherever they want, assuming they have been invited in…”

Harry listened, captivated, by the sheer amount of things that vampires could do that wizards could not. The list seemed endless and it got better and better as more things were listed. He couldn’t understand how vampires were so strong and so anonymous.

“For each power they gain, they inherit some kind of weakness as well,” said Salazar. “Let us just assume that one inherits the ability to move highly fast, they will need to feed every two months instead of three. The ability to summon the undead would give them a gaunt pale, causing them to be unable to blend in with humans.”

“Wow,” said Harry. “But wouldn’t other vampires respect it?”

Salazar nodded. “Vampires have to pick their powers carefully and if they take the wrong ones, they could be weaker than a newly turned vampire. I suggest you look into it as it really is interesting.”

“I will,” said Harry. “How does this relate to –?”

“This relates to black magic because they both follow the same principle,” said Salazar. “Tom Riddle did not heed my warnings and foolishly made a Horcrux – the worst kind of black
“magic there is.”

“What did it do to him?”

“Deteriorated his appearance,” said Salazar. “His once soft skin became hard and gaunt. His eyes became slit and he looked the monster that he really was. He embraced the look, of course, as he detested his father, which is who he looked like. The Horcrux has more drawbacks than any other spell or ritual that is labelled as black magic.”

“What did it do to him?”

“Do you know what the others are?”

“I do, but I cannot confirm their validity,” said Salazar. “Let me see – right, got it – the first change is the looks as I have explained. The second is insanity, which explains how insane Tom Riddle became. The third is that his magic will slowly be eaten away and he will become less powerful.”

“What?”

“You cannot expect to live forever and not pay the ultimate price,” said Salazar, smiling. “He demanded I teach him about the Horcrux when his research hit a dead-end. I gave him the information he sought and just left a lot out. Why do you look so surprised? My house is known to be cunning.”

Harry was still gaping a minute later. “So, Voldemort’s going to become a Squib?”

“It is impossible to take magic,” said Salazar. “His magic will just shift to his Horcrux and he will spend all eternity as a wraith, unable to summon the power to actually craft a new body. He perished about twelve years ago, correct? He has about three years to resurrect himself or he will be unable to return.”

Harry blinked. “I see,” he said. “I’m curious on why you kept it from him besides him demanding to know.”

“There were a few reasons, but none of them are important,” said Salazar. “When he learns that I have betrayed him and doomed him, he will come for me. I must admit that my intentions regarding you were not honest in the beginning as I was looking for a way to protect myself from him, but I have grown to appreciate your presence and talents.”

Harry laughed. “Well, I don’t think I can fault you,” he said. “I think I’d have done the same if it meant I could survive – speaking of that, how are we going to keep him at bay when he realises he’s no longer a part of the Slytherin line?”

“He will never know unless he comes down here,” said Salazar. “And, he knows this as well, you cannot learn Parseltongue. Any future body he creates will not inherit the talent.”

“So, you’re safe?”

“For now,” said Salazar. “Now, I would like you to study some books and then come back in two weeks and I will teach you some things. Do not come any sooner or you will draw attention to yourself. The headmaster knows where the Chamber of Secrets is, as does that Longbottom kid you are always raving on about.”
Harry spent the next week with his face pressed between books that were almost thicker than he was. He picked up that book on creatures he had received from his crimson-eyed acquaintance and read through it twice before the realisation hit him.

The crimson-eyed man was a vampire. Not just any vampire, though, a highly respected and powerful vampire, second only to Count Vlad.

He really wanted to do a small jig, knowing that no powerful vampire would ever stalk Longbottom and give him advice and books, but he didn’t. He nodded and wrote a letter with a page number. He sent it off and received a reply from the same ruffled bird that looked like it had seen Death, which made sense, which held a congratulatory message.

“I am rather surprised that you figured it out,” said the crimson-eyed man as he pulled up a stool. “I am not calling you stupid as you seem to think, more that the wizarding world hid such things. They have us all wrong.”

“I wouldn’t have guessed it without the book you gave me,” said Harry. “Salazar Slytherin was a great help as well.”

“You may call me Lord Atieno,” said Lord Atieno with a snort. “As you can see, I am not of African descent. It was the name people began calling me because I was a vampire and they assumed we are all born or turned at night.”

“That name is familiar,” said Salazar, putting use to the English he had forced himself to learn perfectly. “Are you the same Lord Atieno that made news after you left my school? Do not lie to my heir, vampire, you called yourself Lord Atieno while you studied within these walls. I personally invited you in, despite your condition. Godric vowed to end you if you ever touched a wizard. I remember you, Lord Atieno, as a small, confused newly turned vampire with ambition seeping out of your fangs.”

Harry was rather surprised to hear Salazar speak with such emotion. Parseltongue was all bland and held no emotion, no matter how something was said. English, however, made Salazar sound so much more menacing than he was.

“And it was I, and I alone, that stopped the coven from flocking this place when that fool killed targeted a high-ranking vampire in the open!” hissed Atieno. “They were ready and willing to tear this place down, should they have to.”

“Is your old age making you daft, boy?” said Salazar, laughing. “I thanked you and invited you to the chamber that I was building in secret, the very same chamber that you stand in today. I may be a painting, but behind that wall is a sixty-five-foot basilisk that will make short work of you.”

Atieno laughed loudly. “Not afraid to see your heir hurt?” he studied the boy in question. “A thousand-year-old basilisk is in the school and no one is none the wiser.”

“No serpent can touch a Parselmouth,” said Salazar. “I made sure of that when I created the ability to communicate with snakes.”

“You mean when you captured, killed, and consumed the Gorgon known as Medusa?” said Atieno. “I had a thousand years to figure out how you created the ability and made it inheritable.”

“All myths,” said Salazar with a disinterred tone. “She gave herself to me willingly when she realised that her snakes did nothing against me. My mother was part Gorgon, I will have you know. My affinity with snakes did not come from nowhere.”
Harry looked between the men and sighed. “Medusa was slain by Perseus way before your time.”

“Muggle sources are incorrect,” said Atieno. “While I am not denying the Greek legends completely, many happened differently. Witches and wizards had a hand in all of them – I do not mean that they were all wizards as that is nonsense.”

“What Atieno is trying to say is that anything that wizards did was explained away somehow,” said Salazar. “What are you learning in History of Magic?”

“Goblins,” said Harry, ignoring the muttered ‘still’ from Salazar. “We started learning about their rebellions in our first year and we never moved on from it. The professor is incompetent.”

“Foul creatures,” muttered Atieno. “I heard that you are their champion.”

“I killed one,” said Harry, shrugging. “They were rather surprised I had won.”

“They will forget about that in a few weeks and your achievement will vanish,” said Atieno. “They care only for breeding and war.”

Harry turned to Salazar and realised the man was gone from his portrait. He turned and gave Atieno a confused look before folding his arms and sighing.

“I assume he has gone to check on his school,” said Atieno. “He was obsessed with this place. I am so surprised he did not perish here.”

Harry snorted.

“Shall we entertain ourselves with a friendly duel?” asked Atieno with a smirk. “I have been looking forward to a duel with you, young child. You have grown considerably since we last met.”

Harry considered it and decided that he would indeed duel the vampire. He didn’t care about rules as it was stated to be a friendly duel, which meant that no lethal curses, hexes, or spells would be used.

“If you should be injured, my blood will be a rather potent healing source,” said Atieno. “That is the one thing Muggles supposedly got right. Our blood heals almost as quickly as phoenix tears.”

Harry nodded and followed Atieno towards the makeshift duelling ring, or rectangle, in wizarding terms, and waited. He wondered how he would fare against a vampire in combat, knowing that the vampires were often rather brutal in their attacks, even if they didn’t mean to be.

He waited for Atieno to start bowing before he bowed, knowing that the duel would start when Atieno wished for it to start.

He barely avoided the spell that had been sent towards him the second the duel had officially started. The purple and black fire based spell had singed the hairs on his arms.

He wasn’t impressed.

He retaliated with enthusiasm, keeping Atieno on his toes, which was saying something considering Atieno had inhumane speed and could move and dodge faster than he could blink.

“I must admit,” said Atieno. “You have some raw talent – imagine what you could be if you were a vampire. I think you would cause old Vlad to start to panic.”

Their brief yet satisfying duel was cut short when Salazar Slytherin reappeared and coughed, instantly drawing their attention towards said man.
Salazar looked at Harry. “I have been in contact with Phineas Nigellus Black, a previous headmaster that was rather disliked by the masses, it would seem,” he said. “He has informed me that a ghost named Binns has been teaching History of Magic since he himself had attended. A ghost teaching a lesson! Rowena would be furious. I will not allow this to continue. You, as my heir, will rectify this. I will not have the students focusing solely on those foul creatures!”

“I'll see what I can do,” said Harry, nodding. “I'm sure I can get rid of him, but I would appreciate any advice you can offer.”

“I will be in touch,” said Salazar with a bored look. “The vampire, Atieno, is getting frustrated that he is, as per usual, being left out.”

“Can Black be trusted?” asked Harry, looking at Salazar and Atieno with a curious expression. “I know that he’s a Black and all, but can he really be trusted with the information that you have an active portrait?”

“Phineas worships me,” said Salazar. “He will not inform anyone that I am seeking to make changes to the staff. He will be honoured that he was able to speak to me, even in death.”

“Besides that,” said Atieno. “No.”

“Explain!” said Salazar, somewhat annoyed. “He would not have been chosen as a headmaster of he was not trustworthy.”

“Phineas Black succumbed to madness from his untreated and rampant paranoia,” said Atieno. “All Black’s have that drive that they are never safe and that someone is always after them or their money. It was exceedingly obvious in Phineas. He feared every creature in existence, ranging from goblins to dwarves to werewolves.”

“Seems logical, though.”

“He believed that they were out to get to him,” continued Atieno. “When he became headmaster it increased tenfold and he began adding to the enchantments, securing the school with spells that would put the Black Manor to shame. In his stage of paranoia, he almost invited every vampire to the school without needing access. He opened the enchantments to us to ward away werewolves.”

Salazar looked furious. “Headmaster’s should not, under any circumstances, be able to alter the enchantments around the school! Rowena made sure of that.”

“They have been,” said Harry, remembering what Professor Snape had said recently. “Dumbledore has added an enchantment that blocks Voldemort from ever putting a living foot on the grounds of Hogwarts.”

“It should not be possible.”

“It is, though,” said Atieno. “They lasted around nine hundred years. You should be impressed, not upset.”

Salazar shook his head. “It matters not whether they lasted a thousand years or ten years. They should still be active and the headmasters should not be able to alter them at all. Voldemort was a student and should always have access to the castle, no matter what foul deeds he has done.”

“He claimed to be your heir,” said Atieno. “Could he not lay claim to the castle?”
“No,” said Salazar, smiling maliciously. “He could have blood from all of us, which is impossible as the Ravenclaw line has been extinguished, and he could not lay claim to the castle. It does not work that way. No one can claim the castle as theirs, it would not accept. Just because you have my blood, however diluted, does not mean you are a Slytherin.”

“Gringotts works the same way,” said Harry, looking at Atieno. “The British wizarding world is smaller compared to other nations. It’s got nothing to do with our traditions or pure-bloods, we just have a smaller pool overall. So, as you can guess, we’re all somehow related. The Potter line has Black blood in it. I can’t walk into Gringotts and lay claim on the Black vault because I’m not a Black by name.”

“Claiming a name that is not rightfully yours is seen as treason,” said Salazar. “I am uncertain if it has changed since my time, but it should be the same. Claiming something that is not yours is punishable by death.”

“Overly complicated, but it works.”

“As for Voldemort,” said Salazar. “The castle will grant him entry as he was a previous student. It is a flaw that I had wanted gone, but Godric and Helga believed that we should trust our students. He could attack the castle and it would bow to his whims.”

“That makes no sense,” said Harry. “Why hasn’t he already done that?”

“Because the castle will bow to the headmaster before an attacker,” said Salazar, chuckling. “It takes a while for a new headmaster to be chosen and he could use that time to get a foothold and claim it for himself and the castle would protect him if he urged it to attack the traitors.”

Atieno snorted. “That is way too confusing,” he said. “Giving a building the ability to be sentient? I have no words for that.”

“I think it’s nice,” said Harry. “It feels like home.”

Salazar beamed proudly. “Helga did that,” he said. “She wanted each and every student to feel like they belonged. When the students were sorted we would ask them what they liked and did not like and those foods would not be placed near them. The Sorting Hat passes that information on to the house-elves now and students enjoy their first meal here.”

“As interesting and amusing as that is,” said Atieno. “We really need to discuss Voldemort and his erratic movements.”

Salazar and Harry shared a look.

“Do not speak silently!” hissed Atieno. “He has been active since late last year. I believe he somehow learned that they Chamber of Secrets had been opened and he began moving ever since.”

“He has found a host body?” asked Salazar, frowning. “This is not good news.”

Atieno sighed. “From what I have gathered, he has had a few select host bodies. He made sure to only possess wizards that were mediocre in most fields. His most advanced host had been that professor that he used two years ago. He planned to steal the Philosopher’s Stone, which was taken by our little friend Harry instead. He would have succeeded if he was not draining his host in the process.”

“He weakened the host,” stated Salazar. “The mistake of a fool.”
“Desperation,” corrected Atieno. “He has been lurking around the school ever since, looking for a way in. He, like every other person alive, believes the Philosopher’s Stone to be destroyed. He attempted to get in last year when the Chamber was opened but was warded off by the headmaster, who looked highly furious that he had come back so soon.”

“I assume nothing about that had been said.”

Harry nodded. “Swept under the rug, of course.”

“Pettigrew escaping and then appearing this year is no coincidence,” said Atieno. “The few vampires that worked with the Death Eaters have reported that no one knows who anyone is. The only known Death Eaters are those that were exposed or those in the inner circle.”

Harry nodded. “You think Pettigrew’s up to something.”

Atieno laughed and muttered to himself softly. “No, child, Pettigrew is no longer up to anything.”

“You killed him?”

“No,” said Atieno, rolling his eyes. “Pettigrew has completed one of his many tasks and is now in hiding, waiting for the opportune moment to strike. He knows what he wants and he will invade the castle, as he has already done, to get it.”
Christmas came and went without much fanfare by the occupants of the castle. Decorations had been strewn all over the bare stone walls of the castle to breathe some Christmassy life into the castle, shielding the occupants from the harsh, desolate aura of the Dementors.

Hundreds of owls had chosen their moment to strike and bombarded the students with perfectly wrapped gifts. The food had vanished just in time for the tables to be lined with parcels, cards, and sacks of money.

Harry had received a generous amount of clothes, a few new looking books, and a small bag of Galleons from his mother. He had torn into the presents with the enthusiasm only a teenager could muster, not at all caring about what other people thought.

He had also received a parcel that was covered in pink and white wrapping, a flamboyant note on the front which was promptly burned. He glared at the parcel and flicked his wand, changing it to a dark green and black colour before he was pleased enough to open it.

Inside was a dark purple grimoire that had golden edges around each corner, slowly bleeding into the centre of the book. He knew that the book was from Atieno. No one else would have such an old and beautifully decorated book or grimoire, as Atieno called them.

Not to mention that the book smelled just like Atieno.

He had spent the next few days with his head pushed into the dark purple grimoire, learning as much as he could.

That was why it was no surprise that he currently had his head pushed between the pages of said book while everyone was socialising.

**Vampiric Corruption**

*(I translated this for you, child, lest you be lost in our old way of speaking – Atieno)*

*The aura of corruption a vampire leaves behind when it dwells in one place for too long is the easiest way to spot when a coven of vampires are lurking by. The aura will fade with time and a lack of vampiric presences, causing said lands to become habitable once more.*

*The aura of corruption empowers vampires beyond their natural ability and enhances anything they do, whether that is speed, strength, or necromantic powers. Vladistrous III was able to raise entire graveyards in a matter of seconds, without much thought, while surrounded by corruption. He managed to live a long life by just remaining and strengthening the vampiric corruption around his home and lands.*

*Should the land and earth, respectively, have a certain threshold of vampiric corruption, a vampire may walk around in the sunlight without any consequence. The corruption will act as a shield and will defend the vampire from the harsh and damaging rays of the sun.*
A vampire cannot, under any circumstance, die or perish in direct sunlight. Vampiric corruption present or not. Sunlight is not fatal to a vampire, no matter how experienced or powerful. The sunlight will instead cause the vampire to suffer and become much weaker. The harmful rays of the sun sap our power, leeching basic abilities and rendering them pointless. Even the most powerful vampire would be no more powerful than a human in the sunlight.

All vampires, no matter how old or new, are immune to the aura of a Dementor. This may be because a vampire carries the corruption, even if it has not spread, and the corruption overpowers all other auras in the vicinity. Many vampires have debated why they are ignored by Dementors completely, seeing as Death’s Minions, no matter what sort, have always sought to end those that live forever.

Some believe that Dementors are vampires that lost themselves in despair and the dark arts, corrupting them to a point of no return and Death turned them into his minions to punish them for seeking immortality. Their desire and lust for human souls stems from their old vampiric desire and the need for fresh human blood. Their breeding or turning is also similar to vampires that more comparisons can be drawn. Unlike a vampire, though, when a Dementor sires a new Dementor, it is destroyed and released once it has met the quota of souls Death set.

Harry closed the book and rubbed at his eyes. He had spent a lot of the last few days just reading as he had done in his first and second year. It was extremely hard to not just pounce on the knowledge and information that he had been given.

He did feel bad for Draco, though. His best friend had spent the last two days trying to get his attention and he had just waved him off with a gesture towards the dark purple grimoire and the case was closed.

He heard the door to the third-year boys’ dormitory slowly open. He twisted around and lifted an eyebrow at the obviously distressed, not to mention half-naked, Rosier.

“Sirius Black – he was found in the Gryffindor common room,” panted Rosier. “Their new portrait let him in ‘cos someone, a Prefect everyone is assuming, dropped the list of passwords.”

“They keep lists of their passwords?” said Harry, laughing. “I have no words for that.”

Rosier nodded. “A first-year girl kept forgetting the passwords,” he said. “Her memory is apparently bad because of something when she was young, so Granger said. Still, they’re pretty shaken up about it.”

Harry nodded. “I don’t understand why Black, of all people, would be in the Gryffindor common room,” he mused. “Black’s not like his family at all. Mother knew him and she stands by the fact that he would sooner die than do anything Voldemort approves of. There’s not an ounce of darkness, as they call it, inside him.”

“No idea,” said Rosier. “It’s almost time for breakfast…”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Yes, mother, I’ll go get dressed now,” he said with the enthusiasm only a child could muster. “What, you gonna watch me get dressed as well? Get out.”

Rosier spluttered for a few seconds before he turned around and stormed from the room.

A few uneventful weeks later found another Hogsmeade weekend. It was the only Hogsmeade weekend before the Slytherin versus Hufflepuff match that had the entire school divided. One game could ruin each house in a matter of seconds and the Slytherins loved to be the centre of attention.
with the other houses pleading them to beating each other and not throw the game.

Harry had made a second-year Gryffindor cry because he said that he would throw the game to make sure the boy’s hopes and dreams were crushed.

“Everyone will behave!” said Professor McGonagall as she opened the gates of Hogwarts, allowing the students to pile down the stone path. “If I hear one bad remark about your decorum, all your visits will be terminated!”

The crowd of students, who were now sufficiently cowed and rather quiet, began their journey towards Hogsmeade.

“So, what are you all planning on buying?” said Draco, directing it towards the small group that he was in. He breathed into his gloved hands and rubbed them together. “I’m planning on getting myself a new scarf.”

“What happened to your old one?” asked Harry innocently. “I haven’t seen you wear it in a while.”

Draco glared. “Someone, and I’m not saying any names, decided to banish it into Nott’s pants,” he said as he looked at his friend. “I refuse to wear it after that, no matter how many spells are thrown at it to purify it.”

Harry snorted.

“I want to get more chocolate,” said Rosier. “Seeing as someone ate all mine.”

Harry snorted again, ignoring the accusing glare he received.

“I want to get something for Astoria,” said Daphne. “She’s been rather upset that she cannot attend.”

Harry honestly had no idea why Daphne Greengrass was with them and not walking with her group of whiny friends, better known as Tracey and Pansy. It wasn’t that he disliked the girl, but her mere presence was annoying and she kept gravitating towards Draco, intentionally stumbling so he would keep her standing.

He wanted her gone.

“So, Harry, what are you going to buy?” said Rosier. “Maybe a replacement for the chocolate that mysteriously vanished. No one would complain and I’d let you have some.”

“If I was buying chocolate, it would be for myself and only myself,” said Harry. “If you want me to buy you chocolate, just ask.”

“No.”

Harry hummed. “Is that a no to wanting chocolate or a no to asking for it?”

Rosier muttered under his breath, his eyes narrowing.

“Couldn’t hear you,” said Harry with a soft laugh. “So that means that your answer defaults to no for both.”

“Selective hearing isn’t an attractive trait,” said Daphne, giggling. “You should work on that.”

Harry clenched his fists and counted to ten, hoping she would just leave already. “Say, Daphne, do you know where Pansy is?”
“No,” said Daphne with a soft sniff.

Harry gave up with Daphne and decided that he would just attempt to ignore her to the best of his abilities. He could ignore her rather easily if it was just verbal annoyance, but the physical and constant touching of Draco, his best friend, was pushing him to the absolute limit.

He watched very, very carefully, always keeping the daft girl in the corner of his eye. He was petty enough to always pull Draco off to the side when Daphne got a little too close and he made sure to do it abruptly, making her stumble.

He would love to see her trip, fall, and then roll across the muddy cobblestone path. It would be hilarious.

The small group of Slytherin students dodged and weaved around other students and visited every single store that was open on the main street of Hogsmeade.

Hogsmeade may not be as big or extravagant as Diagon Alley, but it did contain a few select shops that could not be found anywhere else. The entire village felt more personal than a shopping alley. Weaved in between stores were houses that had smoke billowing out of the crooked chimneys.

A lot of stores sold handcrafted objects that were the highest of quality, made with meticulous care and adoration. Each book has a spell cast individually on it instead of a group casting, making the spells last longer and protect the book far more easily.

Also, unlike Diagon Alley, the stores were much cleaner and often very welcoming. This led to increased business by the fussy Hogwarts students and the even more fussy foreigners.

Harry, who had lived in Hogsmeade for half his life, had barely seen half of the sprawling village that was very close to losing that label and becoming a city.

“So, Harry, where should we go next?” said Draco as he ignored another one of Daphne’s unfunny jokes. “We’re slowly running out of things that we can do that would be considered fun.”

“I really want to see the Shrieking Shack!”

Harry grit his teeth. “We could call it a day,” he said flippantly, ignoring Daphne. “I mean, we’ve already got everything that we needed and even a little more than that. Look at Rosier – twenty-five Chocolate Frogs…”

“You eat them all!” said Rosier, cradling his Chocolate Frogs closer. “I wouldn’t need this much if you didn’t help yourself to them.”

Harry caught Daphne huffing out of the corner of his eye and he smirked. “Maybe we could go see the Shrieking Shack,” he muttered in a bored tone of voice, making sure not to sound pleased at how interested Daphne got. “It is the most haunted building in the world, after all.”

Draco sent Harry a curious look and followed along as they turned around and walked towards the Shrieking Shack. He contributed to the small chatter that began but kept a close eye on his friend. He, much like everyone else, knew that look in Harry’s eyes that means he’s up to no good.

They stopped near the rickety fence and peered at the building.

“So,” said Harry as he turned to look at Daphne, who appeared to be excited. “Who wants to go inside?”
“What! No!”

Harry hummed and laughed for a second. “Why not, Greengrass?” he asked with another one of his famous smirks. “You, a pure-blood, is frightened of some old shack that was built from lies. Don’t you want to be the one to explore the building?”

“Well,” said Daphne, her eyes darted between Harry Potter and the Shrieking Shack. “It would be nice to be the first person to explore the building and live to tell the tale.”

“You lot can have fun exploring some creepy old shack,” said Rosier. “I’m going to explore these Chocolate Frogs.”

Harry rolled his eyes and crept towards the front door of the Shrieking Shack, his hand resting gently on his wand. “You see, Greengrass, the building has no real enchantments protecting it. There are no traps or hidden things you need to look for, either. Go ahead and unlock the door.”

Daphne looked at the door and muttered her refusal at doing anything that could get her in trouble. She ignored the scathing remark she got in return and held her ground.

Harry waved his wand, mumbling the Unlocking Charm, and opened the door with a flamboyant gesture. “That was hardly hard at all,” he said. “If you want some credit for our adventure you better pick up your slack and do something.”

“Draco’s not doing anything.”

“Draco didn’t have the idea to look at the Shrieking Shack, did he?” said Harry. “You wanted to stand outside and gape at the building from afar? How pathetic. I am not wasting my time with something unless I can see it all.”

It took a few minutes, but the three of them were walking through the creaking and ratty hallways of the Shrieking Shack. Some of the walls were waterlogged, some were covered in dirt and grime, and others had cracks running through them.

The longer Harry spent in the Shrieking Shack, the more he realised that the building was named incorrectly seeing as the Shrieking Shack was really a small Victorian manor. The dirty red drapes that were clinging to rusted rods were the first sign that this building was much more than it seemed.

The second clue was that the architecture of the build hardly represented a shack. The ceilings were rather high, not that having high ceilings was an obvious sign, not that it matter that much when almost every wizarding house had higher than average ceilings.

No matter what anyone said about the Shrieking Shack, it was clear that the Shrieking Shack was not a shack at all.

Harry would get to the bottom off this building by the time he and Draco left. He climbed through a small hole in the wall and cast a Wand-Lighting Charm, his eyes going over the design of the dining room.

“Look at this furniture,” he said to Draco. “The Shrieking Shack used to have someone living in it, rather recently.”

“You don’t say,” said Draco, wiping the dust off the surface of the table. “Someone had to have lived here.”

Harry snorted. “I meant recently, you buffoon,” he muttered. “While someone probably lived here
many years ago, someone has been here recently.”

“What do you mean?”

Harry blinked at stared at his friend as if he had three heads. “The first sign was that there’s no protective enchantments or spells to keep anyone away from the building,” he said, gesturing at the room they were in. “An Unlocking Charm shouldn’t work, no matter how young or old the wizard may be. While everyone else was looking at sweets, I was asking around about this particular building and many claimed that whenever they got too close, they were compelled to leave.”

“You mean something like the Muggle-Repelling Charm?” said Draco, connecting the dots. “A Wizard-Repelling Charm, perhaps.”

Harry nodded in confirmation. “That’s where something doesn’t add up, though. Spell, as you know, can last a very long time if they’re just left and ignored. A Muggle-Repelling Charm will last longer if cast on a building that no one enters compared to, let’s say, the one at King’s Cross Station.”

“Right,” said Draco. “You’ve mentioned ambient magic before.”

Harry ran his hand along the walls and paused when he felt a deep scratch in the wall. “My theory of someone being here has been disproved,” he said. “Something, a creature, is living here.”

“A creature?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Whether it was trapped in here or actually lived here is anyone’s guess. Maybe this could be just decoration, but these scratches look like they were done in a frenzy or an attack.”

Draco glanced around, looking at the scratches on the wall with an intense curiosity that nearly matched the look his friend was giving them. He couldn’t pinpoint what the creature was and he knew that neither could Harry.

“I think we should go.”

Harry turned and looked at Daphne with an intense look of boredom. “This place is long abandoned, Greengrass, stop panicking.”

“I don’t care if there was a massive party going on here, I never wanted to go inside!”

“And, as I said, what is the point of looking at something from a distance when you could be looking inside it?”

Draco rolled his eyes and looked around for a perfect distraction that he could use to distract his friend. “Hey!” he said, surprised. “Look over there!”

Harry stopped glaring at Daphne and looked towards the direction that Draco was pointing. “Whoa!” he said, amazed. “Look at these scrolls!”

Draco watched as Daphne made an annoyed sound and headed towards the exit. “Just take them and let’s go. I’m getting that feeling that something bad is going to happen.”

“– and you just left her there?”

“She deserved it, Atieno,” said Harry, bored. “I got these scrolls and then Draco and I left, not even phased where she was or if she had left.”
Lord Atieno shook his head and sighed. “That does not mean you had to intentionally lock all the doors with more spells and enchantments. I know you used some that she, no matter what, will never come across.”

“She got out fine,” said Harry, dismissing it. “She needed some help getting you, but she did handle it in a very Slytherin manner.”

“Claiming Confundus and acting like a damsel is not a Slytherin way to handling any situation that arises.”

“Thought it was very well done,” said Harry. “Especially when she started crying and claiming that if she was held any longer, her father would start looking into it himself.”

“You cannot expect much from thirteen-year-old children,” said Atieno, mainly to himself. “In a very short while, this is going to come back and bite her. Someone casting Confundus Charms and sending her into a haunted building? There will be an investigation and every student that ventured into Hogsmeade will be checked.”

“Well –”

“No matter,” said Atieno with a raised hand. “These scrolls are very, very interesting, if I may say so.”

“You can read them?” said Harry, peering at the scrolls. “Just scribbles to me.”

“Your ignorance of foreign cultures is showing,” said Atieno. “You will rectify that as quickly as possible. This scroll contains the foundation for a spell to raise the dead. I do not mean Inferi, I mean a spell to create skeletons.”

“And what was something like this doing in the Shrieking Shack?”

“Sometimes the best hiding place is the most obvious,” said Atieno. “I suspect that Pettigrew was looking at something to do with necromancy and left this behind. It really is a shame the Shrieking Shack is crawling with Aurors as I am certain there would be more scrolls like this.”

“Is that why you’re angry with my plan to lock Greengrass in there?”

“Yes and no,” said Atieno. “I am angry, as you put it, because you do not think when you should be. Your plan to invite her in, coerce her into exploring the building, and then locking her in was flawed and could have backfired. She may not know that you did it on purpose, but she knows that you did it.”

“If she should cry, complain, or make a scene that I was involved at all, I will deal with it,” said Harry, unbothered. “She won’t dare attempt to push blame onto me, though. She knows that I’m close to having complete control over the Slytherin house. She knows this and will not try and push me down.”

“The mind games of young, wannabe politicians,” said Atieno. “If she, Daphne Greengrass, wishes for you to be thrust into the light as a suspect, you would be in the light without a thought. Being a Slytherin matters not beyond the age of sixteen where your actions have real consequences. All these pure-blooded witches and wizards are going to be in for a massive shock when they step out of school and realise everything they learned in Slytherin is null and void because it applies nowhere.”

“You are as dramatic as Harry,” said Salazar from his portrait. “All the trials and tests in Slytherin are useful in the real world, as you put it. If you put yourself at the top you will always have a following
behind you. This following carries over into life after Hogwarts."

“Hey!”

“Do sit down and be quiet,” said Atieno with an annoyed look. “Now, Mr Potter, you are going to be taught something **very** rare today. Both Salazar and I will be teaching you a few things considering something is going to be happening soon and we want you ready.”

“Cut the dramatics, Atieno,” said Salazar. “I am sure that Harry will listen and behave properly.”

Atieno glared at the portrait for a second. “You will be the first human in centuries to learn the fine and secret art of vampiric magic. If you place one toe out of line, child, I will slice it off without mercy.”

“Must you threaten my heir with idle threats of violence?”

Atieno sniffed and turned his attention back to the scrolls that had been laid out on a table. “The first spell that you will be learning is one to resurrect a rodent,” he said. “Most new vampires start with this as a means to expand and enhance their powers.”

“Fool!” hissed Salazar, furious. “You cannot start with necromancy, especially when your pupil is a **human**! A thirteen-year-old **human** boy, to be exact. I cannot think of anything worse to start with. Having him make a Horcrux would be less damaging to his psyche and mental stability.”

“Now who is being overly dramatic?”

Harry listened to the two ancient men argue it out with an amused smile. He appreciated the both of them, especially seeing as he was going to be taught some rare, obscure magic, but the two of them constantly attacked each other over the smallest things.

He decided to busy himself with the scrolls on the table while the two adults, if they could even be called that, bickered about the harm that certain branches of magic can cause onto his mind.

“Because a certain someone has decided that even the basics are far too much for a human’s fragile mind, you will be learning what we teach our children.”

“I didn’t think vampires could breed,” said Harry, gently sliding the scroll back into the middle of the wooden table. “It makes very little sense because you lot supposedly have no blow flow and you need blood to –”

“More rumours,” said Atieno. “Powerful vampires can have children, but only the female. The weakest male could somehow impregnate the most powerful female. Isabella von Karling, for example, gave birth to a vampire son who ended up ruling the von Karling vampiric bloodline. That, however, is extremely confidential.”

Salazar nodded along, unsurprised at what he heard. “Your age and experience are causes for concern, Harry,” he said. “The Dark Arts are not something you should face head-on when you are young. We do not have a choice.”

“What the old man is trying to say is that the circumstances have changed and we believe that it is time for you to quit learning schoolyard tricks,” said Atieno. “If you want to be anything in the world, you need to learn every language fluently. There are a few methods to learning languages. Some painful, some painless, and others will have a mediocre throb. Fast, slow, and medium, respectfully.”
“The issue is that you will only know the basics of the language,” continued Salazar. “They are not like Parseltongue where you know everything instantly. You will know basic grammar, words, and phrasing – enough to pass as a knowledgeable tourist.”

Harry listened to every other explanation he was given about languages, wand movements, pronunciation, and the ability to cast non-verbal magic in duels. Of course, Salazar and Atieno got into another heated debate about keeping talents and spell creations a secret.

“It is stupid to keep your talents and spell creations a secret,” said Atieno. “A duel is based on skill and knowledge, why limit yourself?”

“That is ironic seeing as it is coming from someone that has hidden for the past two hundred years,” said Salazar. “The less the enemy knows about you, the better.”

“The more they know about you, the more time they have to spend mentally countering any action you may take.”

Salazar sighed. “The less they know about you, the less they can do to stop any surprise attacks you may launch.”

Atieno decided to be the more mature one, for once, and drop it. “There are many different strategies in duelling that you can use,” he said. “In the duel you and I had, I could tell you are an aggressive duellist and this works perfectly because Salazar and I are exactly the same.”

“Many believe that each style of duelling has an underlying psychotic reasoning. Aggressive duellers are more prone to be more powerful, demanding, impatient, and ruthless. Defensive duellers are the complete opposite,” said Salazar. “The summary is that many believe aggressive duellers are more prone to the Dark Arts because – well, I have no real idea as anything those people say is nothing but lies, but you understand what I am getting at.”

“Stop going back to these useless topics!” said Atieno, annoyed. “The Dark Arts are not combined into a small, easy to read book. It has taken me many a year to collect just these scrolls. Even the smallest collections can take a decade to just get a small collection.”

“So, the Black family aren’t swimming in books about the Dark Arts?”

“Large families like the Black line will have more than any other family, but they will not have an entire library full of books,” said Atieno. “People do not just jot down each spell, ritual, or potion they encounter. Some do for families and that book is lost and is then spread around and had copies made, but you will not find a massive library of Dark Arts books.”

“I apologise for the information bombardment, Harry,” said Salazar. “There is no point in me explaining most of the repercussions, emotions, and experiences about the Dark Arts because it is different for everyone.”

“Except vampires,” said Atieno, smiling. “When we practice the Dark Arts, we get a sense of eternal happiness. We were created by the Dark Arts.”

“Right,” said Harry.

“I will be in touch in a few days,” said Atieno. “I want you to learn the basics of Greek and then we will begin preparation.”
Harry gently closed the newest book from Atieno with a soft sigh. He was thankful that Atieno had sent him a few rare and obscure books that had a pretty heavy spell that hid the real title. He was certain that Dumbledore knew something, especially with all the curious looks, but he had no evidence.

‘I told you,’ said Tom, interrupting Harry’s thought. ‘Keep that book, or any book that vampire gives you, away from the Headmaster. The more he sees it and realises it has a small compulsion to look away, the more he will piece the information. All professors are taught to counter compulsion based spells.’

Harry already knew this and he didn’t need Tom muttering it every time he opened and closed the book. He needed to keep up appearances because Daphne, the attention seeker, was stirring up trouble, as Atieno had predicted.

He had been forced to avoid the Chamber of Secrets due to everyone watching everyone, trying to spot the person who would attempt to lock a poor, innocent little girl in the Shrieking Shack. Everyone, even those that have done nothing, were walking on eggshells.

“This is so ridiculous!” huffed Draco in anger. He dropped onto the bench with an annoyed sound. “This is what happens when a little girl is the sole heir of a family. She is the reason why younger people cannot inherit anything family related.”

“Daphne’s the heir of the Greengrass line?”

“In a sense,” said Draco, digging at the table with his nails. “She’s the heir because her father is dead and her mother, who’s a woman, cannot inherit anything as she’s an outsider. If Daphne has her son, he will become the heir and leader of the family. If Daphne has a daughter, which is common in the Greengrass line, it will fall to her daughter to have a son.”

Harry nodded along. “Wait a moment,” he said, thinking back. “I saw an old man with her the day the Aurors came to investigate. I assumed that was her father.”

“That’s her stepfather,” said Draco, snorting. “Daphne’s father died under suspicious circumstances a few days before You-Know-Who was killed. The rumour is that he disallowed You-Know-Who to recruit his wife and daughters.”

“Confusing.”

“Not really,” said Draco. “The stepfather cannot inherit anything because he isn’t technically related, just married in and changed his name as he came from a minor pure-blood family.”

“I understand that part as I’m not stupid,” said Harry with a snort. He intended to drop this boring topic as quickly as possible, knowing that Draco wouldn’t object to a change in discussion. “Want to hear a secret?”
“Of course,” said Draco as he buttered some toast. “As long as the secret is worth knowing and not something stupid.”

Harry grinned. “You have Quidditch practice in a few hours,” he said, ignoring the glare he got in return. “Just in case you’ve forgotten.”

“Forgotten?” repeated Draco. “How can I forget something I was never told?”

“I have to keep you on your toes,” said Harry, ignoring the pout on Draco’s face. “I don’t support dropping things for Quidditch and putting it as a priority, but I want to see how people work around a conflicted schedule.”

“What a useless statement,” said Draco, sighing. “You’re a severe control freak that wouldn’t allow any room for failure. You would, if you had to, make sure we all appeared.”

Harry glared but said nothing. He listened to the chatter, mainly about the upcoming practice, continued up the Slytherin table. “Do you hear all those sighs?” he asked Draco. “Music to my ears.”

A few hours later, after a gruelling Quidditch practice, Harrys at on one of the sofas in the Slytherin common room with a highly amused expression. It was partly due to all the tired Quidditch players that were moving very slowly and party to Nagini’s remarks that they all stank.

“You’re working them like slaves,” said Rosier as he took a seat next to Harry. “If you keep pushing and prodding them, they’ll rebel.”

Harry turned his head and studied his friend. “They?” he questioned. “Are you not a part of the team as well? I am certain you should be using ‘we’.”

“Maybe I have no desire to ever rebel,” said Rosier. “And, assuming we’re being a hundred percent honest, I never really considered myself to be on the team as I was bullied into it.”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” said Harry, snorting. “No one bullied you to join the Quidditch team.”

“You forced me into being a Chaser,” said Rosier. “You turned to em and dropped so many hints that you needed a Chaser to replace Flint, no matter who it was. You slowly bullied me into joining as a reserve and then just swapped me to a full Chaser without even informing me.”

“I did no such thing!” said Harry. “I asked you if you wanted to be a Chaser and you said yes!”

“Yes, you did!” said Rosier, his hands clenched. “You pressured me into joining because you were afraid you’d fail at being a Captain in your first year as one and you needed a new Chaser, one you could rely on.”

“Someone I can rely on?” repeated Harry, confused. “Where’s that coming from? I could’ve chosen any of the other fifty or so people that wanted to be a Chaser and not you. You put forth an interest in it and I decided to let you have a chance as I’m your friend.”

“Don’t act stupid,” said Rosier. “Stupid and Harry Potter should never be said in the same sentence, especially when you’re being referenced. You wanted me on the team because I’m your friend and if everything went wrong, you could turn to me or Draco and we’d bail you out.”

“That’s not how it was at all,” said Harry. “I wanted you on the team because we’re friends and I thought you wanted to be on the team. You kept dropping subtle hints about it.”
“You pushed me into a corner with it!”

“I did not!” said Harry. “You joined on your own free will and now you’re turning that choice onto me for some odd reason. I never took away any decision that you could have made! You could have said no.”

“You have your fingers in everything,” said Rosier. “You knew that I’d accept because my family has always been decent Chasers and you used this against me, hence you mentioning it in public and then the entire team dove on me, asking questions!”

“I don’t have my fingers in everything,” said Harry bitterly. “I made sure my friends were in a position where they could do what they enjoyed without the waiting that would normally happen.”

Rosier snorted. “Don’t try that with me, Harry. You made sure that you, and only you, were in Flint’s good books when he graduated school. Did you know that he hadn’t had a job lined up and was remaining in school so that he had somewhere to be that was safe?”

“That’s nonsense,” said Harry. “I spoke to him last week and he said that he’s doing fine in his new job that he got straight out of school.”

“Not the point.”

“The point is that he came to me asking for help,” said Harry. “He came to me, pleading that he needed to pass the year, no matter what. He had already been scouted by a few teams and he had to graduate. No team wants a player that isn’t able to pass the N.E.W.T.s.”

“Regardless,” said Rosier. “You manipulated him to groom you into the next Quidditch Captain. You were one of the best Seekers that Slytherin’s had in many years and you resigned from the team to take on Captaincy issues? Flint knows that losing you was a massive loss and he did what you asked. You played him like a fool and no one saw it.”

“Except you, obviously.”

“I am not understanding how this little argument you had with your friend is causing you so much distress,” said Atieno, leaning forward in a sofa that he had somehow dragged into the Chamber of Secrets. “I chose you because you were always so calm and collected. I never pictured you pouting.”

“I’m not pouting,” muttered Harry. “I’m just shocked he would call me manipulative.”

“Are you not?”

Harry turned his glare towards Salazar. “No,” he said bluntly. “I am not manipulative.”

“Does it really offend you so much that you were called manipulative?” said Atieno. “I can think of many things that would be more offensive than being called manipulative. You are overreacting.”

“It’s the principle.”

“Does it really matter?” said Atieno. “No matter what way you look at it, your friend is correct. Every human is manipulative and the fact he was able to call you out on it makes him an even better friend. I know many people that would never dare speak about their friends negatively.”

“Do not speak for a moment, Harry,” said Salazar, a stern expression appearing on his face. “I realise that you are growing and maturing with each passing day –”
“If you are going to give him the talk,” said Atieno, interrupting. “Please allow me to leave.”

“Do not interrupt me!” hissed Salazar. “As I was saying, before I was rudely interrupted, you are maturing with each passing day and that is probably playing havoc with your emotions. I, however, believe you are just annoyed and you are venting. Tell me, does your friend come from a family that has strong ties to the Dark Arts?”

“Yes.”

Atieno sighed. “Do not bring up this theory again,” he said, exasperated. “No one is born dark or light. While some families may have lingering genetics that comes from their ancestors practising the Dark Arts, I doubt it would cause madness or the begin stages of the Dark Arts.”

“It is worth investigating,” said Salazar. “The soul can do many things.”

“The soul?” repeated Atieno. “There is no such thing as a soul! Souls, as you lot call them, are an inherently narcissistic and anthropocentric idea that arose from humanity’s desire and need to feel special. You are defining killing by killing another soul, but killing animals and creatures do not count in that regard.”

“Every living being, whether it be a human, vampire, or a simple insect that lives for a single day, has a soul,” said Salazar. “Any Seer or Necromancer will tell you the same thing. Any study into the latter would reveal exactly what I am saying.”

“I have studied both branches of magic and nothing points towards what you are saying.”

Harry listened to Tom for a second, who seemed to be whispering. “The soul will pass on without delay if the human or creature dies a natural death. If the death is caused by murder, the soul will linger on Earth until the killer also dies.”

“Then the two souls pass on together,” said Salazar. “I am not sure how and when you learned this.”

Atieno snorted. “I cannot even stand the mere thought of that,” he muttered. “A killer and his victim crossing some magical line that no one can see together? It makes no sense.”

“There is no animosity in death,” said Salazar. “All souls are considered to be equal. The afterlife will always be shrouded in mystery because that is how it should be.”

Harry heard, or felt, Tom snort in his mind and raised a curious eyebrow, knowing that said person hardly agreed with that sentiment. He wondered whether he would be told or not.

“Enough of this,” said Atieno, annoyed. “It is good that you came today, even if it was for a childish reason. Today is a good day to begin your training.”

Salazar dropped all signs of annoyance and instantly agreed. He waved towards the desk in the room. “We have given you a lot of theory over the past two weeks. I want to see how you can utilise that information in an everyday situation.”

Harry allowed himself to be redirected over the room by Atieno, who seemed to be intent on making everything perfectly clear.

“We would like to teach you how to duel in a real-life environment,” said Salazar. “

“We want you to learn to duel in a real-life environment,” said Salazar. “While I would love to see you wipe that smug grin off Atieno’s face, it would be impossible. Not even Riddle in his prime
could beat a vampire in a one on one duel.”

“Why haven’t vampires taken over then?”

“Well, that explains it.”

“I will teach you all about us in due time so that you can use that knowledge to earn respect,” said Atieno. “Even a human can be considered a king amongst the vampires if he has the knowledge and strength of a vampire.”

“Are you ready?” asked Salazar, dimming the mood once again. “Are you ready to take a plunge into the unknown and the unexplored?”

Harry thought back to when he was six-years-old and presented with a similar choice; the black book in Death’s house, or whatever it was called. He had chosen the more inquisitive path, the path of knowledge and power.

The fact that all these unknown branches of magic would be taught to him made him giddy. He knew, just as Atieno had explained, that any vampire could teach him all this magic if they wanted. It would, however, come at a price that none would pay, not even Voldemort.

He was being taught magic that no one could counter. Magic that no one even knew, for free. No cost or sacrifices needed.

“You are just giving him more things to think about!” said Atieno, amused. “You know that Harry’s a thinker and that he overthinks anything he is told.”

“A trait that comes from me, I assume,” said Salazar, a bored expression instantly appearing on his face. “Riddle was rather horrid at duelling when he first began due to his increased memory and that rampant desire that he had to know everything. He would plan out everything as it went, always accounting for the next moves, even if they had changed. It slowed him down substantially.”

Harry listened to the explanation on Voldemort’s abilities continued and he learned with each piece of information. He learnt that Voldemort, or Tom Riddle at that stage, was a quick study of wand movements and no one at Hogwarts could cast spells without the aid of a movement. Each spell had a unique start and that was his cue for what to cast to counter their spells.

He also learnt that Salazar had a training room in the Chamber of Secrets, which was far too convenient.

“Rowena was working on something similar,” said Salazar when he was questioned. “Godric worked on something, as well. Helga worked on the greenhouses and – have we not already had this
Harry laughed. “We have,” he said with a smirk. “However, I want to know more about the Chamber. You’ve only shown and told me such a small amount.”

Atieno shook his head and sighed. “Do not seek to inflate his ego any more than it already is,” he said, smirking at the portrait in question. “You will not like the consequences.”

“Be quiet, you,” said Salazar, glaring at the vampire with feigned hatred. “I do trust you a great deal, Harry, and as much as it pains me so, I trust Atieno, as well. However, the many secrets of the Chamber of Secrets are best kept secret. There are secrets that could leave weak spots in the castle and I cannot have that. It is impossible to track spells as the enchantments do not cover the Chamber of Secrets. A flaw that I welcomed because I enjoyed having one over Godric, Rowena, and Helga.”

“In short,” said Atieno with a flamboyant gesture of his hand. “There is no Muggle-Repelling Charm around the Chamber and if they broke into the Chamber, they would have an easy, undetected way into the school.”

“If they bypass the spell, they will always know that the school is here,” said Salazar. “A Muggle, as you call them, will see the castle the second they step foot into the Chamber of Secrets, even should they instantly leave, because they will have been welcomed by the castle.”

“Now, Harry,” said Atieno, a serious edge to his voice. “We are starting you off with the Dark Arts. Because the room that Salazar made for training is the work of a genius, you will be able to learn much quicker than anyone else. There are warnings.”

“Just tell him them!” hissed Salazar. “We are running out of time.”

“The Dark Arts leave a potent aura on you that anyone well-versed in dark magic will sense,” said Atieno. “Your friends could turn on you, no matter their own affiliation with the dark, light, or whatever they want to label themselves as. People may suspect you to be far more powerful than you are and they will either seek to destroy you or pledge themselves to you. Both have severe consequences. Do not, under any circumstances, accept the pledge! You are far too young.”

“Dumbledore…”

“Is a light wizard,” said Salazar. “He cannot sense the aura of the Dark Arts or he would expel half of the Slytherin students. Only a dark wizard can sense a dark wizard.”

“Won’t that increase the risk that someone could snitch on me?” said Harry, concerned. “I mean, if they’ll know I’m practising the Dark Arts…”

“Should they inform Dumbledore, or any other professor, that you are currently practising or beginning the Dark Arts, they would sell themselves out in the process,” said Atieno. “Not to mention that they have no proof that are you delving into the Dark Arts.”

“And, before you ask, no one will explain the aura as it would then be used against us and small children would be hunted and either rehabilitated or brainwashed,” said Salazar. “No matter how much the witch or wizard hates you, they will not reveal a secret that most claim as a family gift.”


“Are you ready to see the room I created a long time ago to hone my own ability in duelling?” said Salazar. “Godric was a renowned duellist, the best in the world, and I sought to beat him – I was never successful in that endeavour, but this room is highly impressive. You will be awed.”
Atieno repeated the last four words with a childish laugh. He, however, followed along without any further comments.

Harry stepped into the room with a small amount of trepidation. He did trust Salazar, but it was always a scary thing walking through the unknown rooms in the Chamber of Secrets. He knew, much like Atieno, that the room would be very bland as it was meant to be.

And he was right.

The room was just pure cobblestone and torch brackets that had flickered to life the second he stepped foot into the room. There were also floor-to-ceiling long drapes that covered what appeared to be fake windows.

Of course, that thought vanished into thin air when the dark emerald drapes were slowly pulled open, revealing a bunch of expressionless mannequins that looked like they were made of cement.

The mannequins slowly wheeled forwards, congregating in the centre of the room. Each of them, in unison, drew their wands and aimed them at the intruder.

Harry glanced around, searching for Atieno and Salazar. The worst thing is that he knew that the mannequins assumed he was an intruder. They had basically screamed it at him.

“Expelliarmus!”

Harry wasn’t sure where it had come from, but he knew that it was his towards his left side. With the speed that no one would have assumed possible, he cast a quick Shield Charm. He smirked, knowing that his shield would block the spell and he could strike.

Unfortunately, he was wrong. The spell speared through his shield and hit him in the middle of the chest. He felt a small electrocution and he was forced to drop his wand into his left hand.

This continued for a few minutes, the pain with each hit he took increasing, before he was about to throw in the towel, as the Muggles would say, and just give up.

“Riddle was stuck on this one as well,” said Salazar. “You need to quit using the Shield Charm and fight the Expelliarmus with your will. You will succeed if you feel nothing when the spell hits.”

Harry’s eyes widened when he heard Salazar relay the information. He had debated that for a split-second before he thought it was a horrid idea.

The whole point of this task was to strengthen his will against being disarmed. He couldn’t help but mentally applaud Salazar for coming up with something that no one would normally think of. While each Disarming Charm would be very different in terms of power and ability to allow the spell to wash over him and not take his wand.

“Stop!” said Salazar, commanding the mannequins to halt their attacks. “Defending against the Disarming Charm without casting a spell is a great way to bait your opponent into thinking they have won. Before we continue, I would like you to list three things that this also aids you with.”

Harry thought about it for a moment before an answer came to him.

“One, you don’t need to bother attempting to counter the spell because you can block it with your will to keep your wand. Two, you can use that time when you see the spell being cast to cast something else. The Disarming Charm has a very long windup and an even longer incantation, making it an easy spell to avoid if you use your head. Three, not having to block the spell removes
one spell you have to defend against in your repertoire.”

“Some of those are repeating information,” said Salazar, frowning. “I will allow that to pass as you have done remarkably well. You were very close to realising what you needed to do in this task and that makes me very proud. The only reason I even bothered to interfere was because we are running out of time and you are going to have to learn very quickly.”

Harry nodded, noticing the mannequins as they moved and stood in a line.

“This next challenge is rather simple,” said Salazar. “The targets will cast the Disarming Charm and you will strike them with any dark spell you know. You need to do this as quickly as possible. Losing your wand means you have to start all over again. Be warned, though, you can only use each dark spell once.”

Harry mentally prepared a list of spells that he could use in the situation, knowing that he had more than enough spells that he could use if he failed a few times, not that he would.

He began with a rather potent Cutting Curse, one designed to leave a small, shallow cut on the skin that would continuously eat at any Muggle treatment that would be applied. The spell fell out of favour centuries ago due to wizards coming up with their own healing methods.

The next few spells were rather similar in terms of damage and their uses. He focused on using spells that weren’t used anymore. No one expected older spells to be useful due to their innate weaknesses compared to more modern spells.

Despite all his knowledge, he had failed a few times due to being unprepared for the speed increase of the mannequins. He quickly realised that some attacked slower than others and some were almost inhumanly fast.

“I realise that this is not what you wanted when I said I would be tutoring you in the Dark Arts,” said Salazar, dismissing the mannequins with a soft remark. “It is impossible to just pick up a book, read a few lines, and then be proficient in the Dark Arts, even if you are talented and an innate genius. The descent is slow and can be unbearable, but that is just how it is.”

“I understand,” said Harry. “I knew this before we even started the training.”

A few weeks went by and Harry had spent all his free time in the amazingly complex duelling room in the Chamber of Secrets. He had missed Valentine’s Day, thankfully, and by proxy, the hundreds of love letters that were sent to him. Assuming he got the same amount as last year.

Really, being a Slytherin, a part of the evil house, should have deterred those love letters.

He had begun casting darker curses, often exploding the mannequins with a burst of magic that rendered them completely unrepairable, which made Salazar extremely happy that his creations were being destroyed.

The aura that he was talking about was in full effect and a few of the sixth and seventh-year Slytherins were being pulled into it. He radiated power due to the curses he cast, which was explained as the lingering effects of the Dark Arts.

The Dark Arts used an astonishing amount of power, some of which lingered, and that is what caused the air of power to surround those that practices the art.

“Riddle had cast some astonishing things,” said Salazar. “He always had an aura of darkness around
him due to his constant use of the Dark Arts. Dark wizards flocked to him in droves because of this and that is how he coined the term ‘Dark Lord’. The other students considered him a lord of dark magic.”

Harry nodded, already knowing this piece of information from last year when the diary of Tom Riddle taught him everything he knew. He slowly moved around the room, his posture tense and his eyes cautious. It was impossible to guess what could jump out at you at any given moment.

“I have a few questions,” he said when Salazar fell quiet. “Nothing important or relating to our training.”

“You may ask without hesitation,” said Salazar. “How many times must I say this before you stop being so awed and wary of interrupting me? I am dead.”

Harry snorted and leant against the stone wall. “Why do you and Atieno speak so formally?” he said. “This has been bothering me since the ‘whom versus who’ tirade Atieno went on about yesterday. It’s pretentious.”

Salazar chuckled. “I was taught English, the more modern form, by Atieno,” he said. “Even in my youth, I was always well-spoken. Godric and, if you believe it, Rowena were very common speakers of what you now call slang.”

Harry’s eyes widened. “I don’t believe it.”

“All fool can speak properly,” said Salazar with a small snort of laughter. “Allow me to use myself as an example. I can speak fluently, but I still make mistakes. I taught myself English and the rules of English, despite what Atieno has tried to teach me. I may not shorten words, but I do not add unneeded words just to get my point across.”

Harry nodded in understanding. “I should’ve seen that one coming,” he said. “I was never one to believe that speaking eloquently, unlike Professor Snape, would make you more intelligent.”

“You are a child,” said Salazar. “If you spoke like an adult I would be far too suspicious to deal with you. Let us look at the current headmaster for a moment. He is very old, wise, and very powerful yet he speaks in shortened words from time to time. Riddle did the same. He was not as charming as you would be led to believe. He cursed rather frequently.”

“Did speaking about the English language really require you to stop your lessons?” said Atieno, appearing from nowhere. “I want you to be able to cast that spell we have been working on, without a single flinch, no matter how small, by the end of February. If you are still struggling, you will know how deadly the ire of a vampire can be.”

Harry grumbled under his breath and set off back towards the training room.

February had drawn to a close and Harry felt like he was the most powerful wizard in the castle, Dumbledore be damned.

He had learned that the Dark Arts had a unique feeling for each person and it could be pleasantly welcoming, painful, blissful, or any other emotion or feeling a human could experience. It was different for most vampires because they had an aura of dampened emotions and hardly felt anything.

He guessed that his feeling was that of power and feeling like he was at the pinnacle of the proverbial food chain of wizards.
He had to tread carefully, though, because that feeling was just a feeling and not a guaranteed thing. He may have an innate ability to cast any spell she wanted, assuming it wasn’t some stupid, pointless spell, but that hardly meant he could take on anyone that he came across.

The addiction to that power was another concerning trait. He found that he was overpowering a lot of his spells and it had earned him a few odd looks for sending a simple object through a stone roof with a mere thought.

That wasn’t even including the fact he had wandlessly and non-verbally banished a plate of food at Weasley’s head during dinner because the boy dared to look at him and then whisper to Granger.

It was a mess of emotions mixed with power mixed with a strong desire to better himself. It was, as everyone predicted, a very astonishing period.

The lucky thing is that most people were starting puberty and it was just worthy of an eye roll and a mutter about teenage angst.

He was pleased that he wasn’t being suspected for reacting the Dark Arts under everyone’s noses, but it also annoyed him that everyone was so stupid and blind.

He wanted, maybe just slightly, Dumbledore to pull him aside and question him on his actions. Dumbledore was meant to be a powerful, perceptive, and all-around competent wizard and here the man was, clueless.

It was petty, he knew that, but he was allowed to be petty. He was Harry Potter.

“Harry!” said Draco, catching his friend in the corridor. “Are you alright? You’ve been a little out of it recently. You’re not pushing yourself to cast that dumb spell that Longbottom can do?”

“Oh course not,” said Harry, smiling. “I don’t care about some silly spell that summons an animal to protect me. I can protect myself.”

Draco nodded. “Good,” he said. “Sometimes you get so focused on studying that you push yourself and do something stupid. I know you remember that time when we were nine and you tried to make everything in my room float at once. You were exhausted for days!”

“There’s no such things as magical exhaustion,” said Harry. “It was purely physical because I used muscles I wasn’t used to using, especially at nine.”

“I never implied magical exhaustion,” said Draco, sniffing. “I said exhaustion, you deaf git.”

“You should’ve been more specific,” said Harry with a slight chuckle. He tugged Draco along the path he desired, mentally questioning why his friend was putting up a slight fight. “You have plans?”

“No?” said Draco, confused. “I don’t have any plans.”

“Are you sure?” said Harry, pressing for information. “You seem nervous.”

“I’m not nervous,” muttered Draco. “I just needed to go to the library and do some studying. I forgot that there was a Quidditch game today.”

“There are two things wrong with what you just said,” said Harry. “One, you’d never go to the library willingly, especially not for a mediocre subject that you don’t care about. Two, I know you and I know that you’d never forget about a Quidditch game, no matter who was playing in it. You
knew every team and their schedule when you were ten.”

“Well –”

“If you have something that you have to do, you can say so,” said Harry, interrupting Draco. “I’m not gonna be mad because you’re making new friends. It’d be rather hypocritical of me considering you let me speak to Justin and Ernie without much fanfare.”

“You haven’t been around – not that I dislike you for that – and that means you’ve missed some things,” said Draco. “I have a meeting – a date – with Daphne…”

Harry nodded and released the arm of Draco, allowing the boy to slowly and awkwardly shift towards the direction where his date was. He remained quiet and allowed Draco to take a few steps backwards.

“Right,” he said, staring at Draco. “Have fun on your date, then. I’ll catch you up on the Quidditch game later.”
Harry watched Draco, annoyed, as he walked away in his usual awkward manner, which he often reverted to when he was certain he had made a mistake. It was almost as if he wanted to turn and look back, but his body was fighting his mind on the matter.

He knew that he’d have to attend the stupid Quidditch game as he said he would and Draco, as well as the entire Slytherin team, would get suspicious if he missed the game. Of course, he didn’t have to attend the game, but if he wasn’t present, no one else would turn up.

Not only that, but he really wanted to see how Wood would handle this game as it was important for Gryffindor. If Gryffindor lost this game, they’d be out of the finals and it would be between Slytherin and Ravenclaw instead.

Slytherin was already in the finals due to winning all their games. Points hardly matter in the long run as wins were more important. This was to stop teams banding together and allowing one team to win by thousands of points, pushing the leader out. Point tallies were only added in case of a tie between houses.

Also, there may have been a small desire to see how Longbottom would fly with no interruptions. He wasn’t ashamed to admit the boy had been flying every day and that worried him. He knew that Longbottom could become great at flying with small training each day.

The masses of sheep would adore it. Headline: Longbottom a natural!

Maybe a catchier headline or something that wasn’t so bad, but the point was clear: Longbottom was becoming a threat.

If he had learnt anything from Salazar, it was that a small rivalry would benefit greatly and help push him in his studies, making him work harder to be better. He had been shocked when he learnt that all the founders encouraged this by supporting a small, controlled grudge against each house. Of course, the man didn’t expect the current hatred that the rivalry was at.

Ditching that train of thought, he may his way outside and towards the Quidditch pitch. He weaved by people and found himself a prime position to spectate every position, assuming they didn’t lurk around too high.

Lee Jordan, who was always called back, despite his less than pleasing commentary, was preparing the small object that tallied the scores and amplified his voice. He gave a few words to make the audience laugh or boo, as per usual, and smiled towards Professor McGonagall when everything was ready.

“Wood, Davies, shake hands,” said Madam Hooch in a brisk tone, staring at the two captains, urging them to shake hands faster than they were.

Wood clenched down on Davies’s hand, his eyes narrowing, promising a swift defeat.
Madam Hooch rolled her eyes and blew her whistle. “Mount your brooms!” she shouted with a slight glare at those who were too busy awed over Neville Longbottom’s broom. “On my whistle! Three – two – one –”

The players zoomed off at speeds that no one would believe possible. Neville Longbottom had done two laps of the stadium before anyone could really track where he was.

“It’s really an unfair advantage.”

Harry turned towards the voice and nodded. “Some players are playing on brooms that are at least ten years old and then we have people on brand-new brooms that go almost three times faster,” he said. “Of course, having an amazing broom does not instantly give you skill, but it is an advantage in the Seeker position.”

Ernie laughed and waved around, making Justin appear within seconds. “I told you Harry would be here,” he said to his friend. “He may vanish throughout the weeks and leave half of us curious where he is, especially when we scour the entire library, but he’s always at Quidditch games.”

Justin chuckled. “No idea where you vanish to,” he said. “You just vanish and appear whenever you want.”

“Maybe I’m in the only place you two cannot enter?” said Harry. “I hide in the Slytherin common room all day and then leave only for Quidditch.”

The three of them laughed and turned their attention to the Quidditch game.

“And they’re off!” shouted Lee Jordan, his commentary starting a little too late, but no one complained. “The big excitement of this match is the Firebolt that Neville Longbottom, Gryffindor Seeker, is flying. According to a few sources, primarily Which Broomstick, the Firebolt is going to be the broom of choice for the nation teams at this year’s World Championship –”

“Jordan, would you mind telling us about the game?” interrupted Professor McGonagall. “I am certain the students would like to hear what’s going on in the match.”

“Right you are, Professor,” said Lee Jordan, a smile on his face. “I was just giving a little bit of background information to the students that were curious. Speaking of which, the Firebolt has a built-in auto-break and –”

“Jordan!”

“Alright, alright!” said Lee Jordan, throwing his hands up. “Gryffindor in possession, Katie Bell is heading for a clean shot of the goals…”

“No idea why they keep him on,” said Harry. “No matter what team’s versing Gryffindor, his commentary is often biased and favours his own house while he either trashes the other team, which is mainly Slytherin, or ignores them, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw, completely.”

“It’s amusing,” said Justin. “That’s the only reason why he’s allowed to continue.”

“It’s annoying,” said Ernie, glaring. “If I wanted a biased opinion of the game, I’d ask the team themselves. Look at the Ravenclaw team – they’re really strong and he’s not saying anything about it.”

Harry snorted.
“Look at that!” said Ernie, furious. “No mention of that amazing play by the Ravenclaw Chaser! Nothing!”

“Calm down, Ern,” said Justin, grinning. “You shouldn’t be surprised, honestly.”

“I am!”

“You could apply to be the commentator,” said Harry. “Everyone knows that you Hufflepuff lot are friendly and not at all biased.”

“Was that a jab at us?” said Ernie and Justin together.

Harry threw up his hands and grinned as he turned back towards the Quidditch game. He focused on Cho Chang, the new Ravenclaw Seeker, who was an amazing flier. She continued to cut across Longbottom, keeping up with him on an inferior broom. Each time she did it, Longbottom had to change directions, making him lose the Snitch in the process.

“– the broom, Neville!”

Harry watched, rather amused, as one of the twins continued to urge Neville to push the broom harder. He listened as Justin and Ernie bickered about the game, uninterested in what Longbottom was doing against Cho Chang.

“Gryffindor lead by eighty points to zero,” said Lee Jordan, excited. “And look at that Firebolt go! Longbottom’s really pushing its limit and it’s handling perfectly. Look at it turn – Chang’s Comet is just no match at all for the Firebolt! The precision and balance is really noticeable in these long –”

Harry heard Professor McGonagall’s angry retort, but he didn’t focus on it. He was far more focused on the fact that Ravenclaw had begun their usual strategy. It was a pretty good strategy if he had to admit it.

They would push the other team into positions where they could be squished and stuck, allowing the Ravenclaw Chasers the entire field. They were also rather prone to feigning shots at the goals, a tactic Slytherin was known for.

Zero points turned into seventy within minutes.

It really was a testament to how focused and brutal Ravenclaw could be when they used their strategies.

He wasn’t scared, though. The Ravenclaw captain had a one-track mind and did the same strategies in order. Anyone with a brain would notice it and exploit it, as Hufflepuff and Slytherin did. Gryffindor didn’t, however.

Gryffindor played with brute force and a playstyle set to intimidate and force the other team to do what they wanted.

Hufflepuff allowed themselves to be underestimated and then would lash out and destroy teams before they could blink. They, however, couldn’t adapt to on the fly changes and it often caused them to fall behind when teams did change their strategy.

Slytherin’s strategy was built on tricks and illusions. The entire team hadn’t liked the change that he implemented, but it was effective. There were plenty of strategies he used in each game and they all paid off. Fake shots were the most used and the other teams still couldn’t prepare for it as it was better to be safe than sorry.
He was also teaching the Chasers to capture the Bludgers and then release them towards the goals, making the other team’s Keeper dive for it, getting hit in the process. He was slowly bringing the cunning back into the Slytherin house and he was very proud.

He turned back towards the game when he heard a groan and realised that one of the Seekers, probably Longbottom, had lost the Snitch.

“That’s why people need to watch out for Chang,” said Ernie. “She’s not afraid to play dirty.”

“What’d she do?”

“So much for being the most perceptive person in the school,” quipped Justin, sniggering. “She’ll do it again, I think. She did it against us, as well.”

“Nah, she won’t,” said Ernie. “Longbottom’s not gonna fall for it twice in the same game. Anyway, Harry, she flew under him and slowly raised upwards. The foul would be on him if he went down so he had to go higher and higher, reducing his speed. It’s a smart move, but it won’t win her any points.”

Harry nodded in confirmation and turned his attention from Wood to Cho Chang. She was the reason why he wanted Draco to be here, watching the game, instead of frolicking with some idiotic girl that hardly even liked him. She just wanted the fame of daring a Malfoy. How disgusting.

He knew Lucius would object to the relationship. He knew Lucius would rather Draco date a Muggle than Daphne Greengrass. He knew that even Narcissa would object to the relationship.

“And Longbottom is soaring after that Snitch!”

Harry swapped his focus from Chang, who was still clueless, and put his focus on Longbottom, who was indeed soaring towards the Snitch. He knew that Longbottom would catch the Snitch before the game even begun.

Cho Chang was good, in a sense, but she didn’t have the training or the experience on a broom that Longbottom did. Longbottom was a natural flier and he could play any role on any broom and hold up against most.

It wouldn’t surprise him if Longbottom could beat a professional.

“I reckon Longbottom will go pro,” said Justin, glaring when he heard Harry snort. “He has a natural talent in the sport and I think that will get him onto a team.”

“I agree.”

“Then why’d you snort!”

Harry laughed. “Because I was just thinking the same thing,” he said. “Chang’s looking tired. She’ll lose sight of the Snitch and won’t be able to chase it down if it is spotted.”

“The continuous flying…”

“Indeed,” said Harry. “It’s better for a Seeker to idle as the force of the wind is enough to make even the fittest player tired.”

“It’s a shame you don’t get muscles from Quidditch,” muttered Justin. “I’d play it if you did.”

Harry grinned. “Looking to get some abs, Justin?” he teased. “You should start doing push-ups.”
“Shut up, you git!”

Harry chuckled and turned his focus back towards the game, primarily Longbottom. He knew that the game would be over soon, especially when Longbottom changed direction and soared downwards, chasing the Snitch.

“Neville Longbottom has caught the Snitch! Gryffindor wins!”

Draco sat across from Daphne and listened as she spoke, his eyes slightly narrowed as she explained something he hardly understood. He had explained that he was required to attend the Quidditch game and she hadn’t listened.

“The Quidditch game,” he said, interrupting whatever Daphne was saying. “I can catch the tail end if you let me leave! You don’t understand that it’s a requirement to attend!”

“You would rather attend a pathetic Quidditch match over a date with me?” said Daphne, shocked.

“Forcing the players to attend other games is stupid! It’s such a waste of time and you learn nothing! Have you learnt anything from attending the games?”

“Not really,” said Draco, muttering under his breath. “I learnt that certain players can be a threat –”

“A threat,” repeated Daphne with a scoff. “No one is a threat if he just made people practice and not demanding they attend stupid games. No one cares about the Gryffindor and Ravenclaw game, but he’s made it out like it’s the best thing ever.”

“Most of the team likes the idea…”

“I never thought I’d see the day where a Malfoy, of all people, was bowing to the whims of a half-blood.”

Draco glared. “Harry knows more than any pure-blood would ever know,” he said, still glaring. “Who do you think I learnt from? Who do you think helped Flint win Quidditch last year? Sure, he does some questionable things, but he’s a good, intelligent, and caring person.”

“Potter is not caring!” snapped Daphne. “That moron locked me in the Shrieking Shack and then ran off with you!”

“He did not!” said Draco, shocked. “We left and you never followed us.”

“He hit me with a spell that locked me in place,” said Daphne. “He was hoping I would be stuck in there but I also know spells that most people would never know.”

“Daphne…”

“You are so enthralled by him,” said Daphne. “Tell me why a Potter, of all people, land in Slytherin?”

“I have no idea.”

“Because he’s using you,” said Daphne. “He’s using your whole family and one day he will make you regret ever inviting him inside your home – don’t snort! You’re blinded by him! I can help you see the difference.”

“The difference?”
“He hides things from you,” said Daphne, noting the look on Draco’s face. “See! He doesn’t trust you and he hides things from you. He’ll keep doing this because he doesn’t trust or care for you.”

Draco frowned. “He tells me things eventually,” he said. “He always waits so that what he tells me isn’t changed or something that isn’t perfect.”

“He tells you eventually,” said Daphne, snorting in disbelief. “You’re a pure-blood! He should be telling you as soon as possible!”

“What are you even talking about?” said Draco, confused. “Blood purity was abolished years ago! It was, according to Father, removed when Dumbledore released all of You-Know-Who’s personal information, which included his blood status. You-Know-Who proved that he was a half-blood when he reacted so violently and destroyed the Orphanage that he grew up in.”

Daphne snorted.

“You’re trying to bring back blood purity,” said Draco. “You’re trying to reincarnate a dead man’s dream. That’s low. It won’t work, anyway. Muggleborn and half-blooded witches and wizards are in positions of power.”

“I don’t want to bring back blood purity,” said Daphne. “I want to put ourselves back at the top of the chain of command. You-Know-Who is gone, I know that, but some of his ideals don’t have to be.”

“You’re talking about treason,” said Draco. “He was a terrorist, nothing more.”

“He lost,” said Daphne. “That’s why he’s a terrorist.”

Draco studied his date with confusion. “Your family was neutral,” he said. “Considered traitors amongst the other pure-blooded witches and wizards that followed You-Know-Who. Your line was almost killed by the same man’s beliefs that you want to resurrect! I don’t understand.”

“I’ll allow you to understand over time,” said Daphne. “I needed to get you away from Potter so we could have this discussion. He’s too ruthless, as I have already witnessed, and that means I would rather this be done discreetly.”

“Are you trying to blackmail me?”

Daphne laughed. “Trying? No,” she said with a triumphant grin. “Succeeding? Yes. I don’t have anything on you, but my adoring step-father has a lot of things on your entire family. He told me to do whatever it takes to get back at Potter for threatening my life.”

“Why not go after Harry then?”

“Because he’s far too intelligent and aware of his surroundings,” said Daphne. “You’re his weakness and I will exploit you to exploit him.”

“You’re pathetic –”

“Who really cares?” said Daphne, cutting in. “Here’s what you’re going to do...”

Harry knew something was wrong the instant Draco refused any request he made. Quidditch, chess, homework, assignments, essays or anything he had asked over the next week was denied. He promised that he’d never use Legilimency on Draco, and he would honour that promise until the boy
revealed that he could.

The next issue was that Draco no longer sat with him in lessons. He knew that Tom found it hilarious, but he didn’t. He was infuriated when Draco dropped down next his girlfriend, or what everyone assumed her to be.

He didn’t complain, though. He allowed Draco to make his own choices in life and he would be there to pick up the pieces when Daphne used him in the end. It was all the girl did. Use people.

He sat and did his work, not even bothering to look towards his best friend and his girlfriend. He did everything as if he had been doing it all his life. He solved the small riddle on the paper in Transfiguration and leant back, waiting for the bell.

“Well done, Mr Potter,” said Professor McGonagall. “However, please do not doodle on the paper as it is rather distracting to grade with your drawings over it.”

Harry smiled and nodded, noting that he shouldn’t draw on his work again. “Noted,” he said to the professor who just rolled her eyes and walked away.

He leant back and was startled when a small piece of parchment was dropped onto his table. He glanced around and saw Draco’s retreating back. He frowned and debated whether he should just toss the small paper or see what it was.

He knew that Draco wasn’t happy and maybe this was the reason why.

He slowly unfolded the paper and felt his eyes widen.

Inside the paper, written in small, elegant text, was six letters. Six simple letters that could mean almost anything.

DGIPAY.
“It is an anagram,” said Tom with a serious tone of voice. ‘I would have thought that your blond friend would have been above such trivial nonsense, but, and I mean this seriously, maybe he cannot say anything as he is being blackmailed and he cannot say anything without getting himself in trouble.’

Harry couldn’t help but agree with Tom’s statement. His mind whirled and he couldn’t think of anyone who would dare blackmail a Malfoy and get away with it. It wasn’t prestige or money that made people fearful of pushing the Malfoy’s, it was the fact that Draco’s mother was a Black and everyone fears Black’s, at least those that went into Slytherin.

He knew that Draco had written this, even if he hadn’t seen his friend hurrying away, as the handwriting had Draco written all over it.

He had known something was wrong Draco long before this note had been dropped on his desk.

He had spent the entire day debating what the six lettered anagram could mean. He debated it during lessons, almost failing to answer whenever a professor asked him something. The anagram filled every part of his mind.

During Potions, one of the most gruelling lessons that you could attend while distracted, he had almost failed and destroyed the potion he had spent the last two lessons brewing. He had slipped and stirred clockwise once too many and the result was a hastily closed lid before he lost his eyebrows and hair.

He was so distracted with that stupid anagram that he couldn’t even think without it occupying his thoughts. He considered himself lucky and his Mother a Seer for drilling this potion into him over the holidays.

‘Perhaps it would be wise if you focused on one letter,’ said Tom in his usual tone of voice that screamed he knew all. ‘It would be much quicker and you would not be as stuck as you are now.’

Harry, once again, agreed with Tom. He was currently focusing on the first letter, trying to see if it could be swapped around without anything being ruined. It was a testament to how much thought he could place into a simple six lettered anagram that could mean anything.

He would be using the upcoming Hogsmeade weekend, the last one, to its full advantage. He would make sure to focus on the few stores that sold Muggles variants of brain puzzles. He remembered seeing a few small books on anagrams that you had to solve, which would help immensely.

‘Good idea,’ muttered Tom. ‘Although, I would be very careful to not reveal your true intentions behind the search as it could lead trouble towards your blond friend.’
Harry scoffed and tried his best to mentally poke Tom in the side, which failed, of course. He knew that he had to be very secretive about this, especially if Draco was near as he didn’t want to seem inept at solving simple riddles.

He debated about contacting his Mother, knowing that she was really good at puzzles, Muggle or wizarding. He hadn’t spoken to her in a while and felt rude for not going home for Christmas, but there were things he had to do and she knew he’d make it up to her when school finished.

He rubbed at his hairless chin and began planning on what else he could do.

Neville paused in the corridor, his posture going tense when he heard the familiar snicker of Fred and George Weasley. He knew they had been planning something, as did Ron, who was equally as afraid of him.

He caught them, leaning over a piece of parchment, muttering and laughing to themselves about something that was going on. He knew that he was safe from their massive array of pranks and a large assortment of potions that turn people into all kinds of animals that were in development, but he couldn’t help but feel sorry for all the other students.

“– follows the same path each day, George,” said Fred. “We’ll be able to put something here and here, stopping him any further and then we can move in.”

“I know,” said George as he tapped a part of the parchment. “But it would be better if we did it where no one else is. The last thing we need is someone else triggering the trap.”

“That’s far too risky,” said Fred, muttering under his breath. “Snape walks that way as well.”

George shuddered and nodded knowing that his brother was correct. “He has been on our case for a while, we don’t need to give him anything he can use against us.”

“Planning a prank?” said Neville, watching as Fred and George whispered something and stood up straight. “I have never seen you put so much thought into one prank before.”

Fred rubbed his hands together and watched as his brother clasped his arm around Neville. He knew they could trust Neville with a lot of things, especially pranks, but he wasn’t too sure this time around.

“The person we’re planning to prank has been busy,” he said with a genuine laugh. “The person is very perspective and pranking him would be a challenge unless he was being careless, and he has been.”

“Harry…”

George nodded. “We know that you and Potter aren’t exactly friends, but you seem to care for him to a degree that would state you are his friend,” he said in a whisper. “We’ve been a tad cautious to approach you about it.”

“Why?”

“We trust you, we really do…”

Neville blinked. “I’m sensing an unsaid ‘but’ in there.”

“But we’re not sure how far your companionship towards Potter goes,” said Fred. “You could tell
“I’d never!”

“We know that now,” said George. “But we didn’t before and that’s why we were being cautious. We took you under our glorious wings, taught you some secret passages –”

“What George’s trying to say,” said Fred, interrupting his brother. “Is that we would never have taught you like we did if we never trusted you. We know that you’d never tattle, but you demanded that we stop looking at Potter like we were –”

“And let me tell you, mate, his attitude hasn’t really changed since we left him alone,” said George, frowning. “He’s toned down now that he has to think about stuff, but he’s still a prat.”

“I don’t think that will ever change,” said Fred. “That leads us to the fact that we think if he gets pranked he’ll mellow out a bit and stop thinking everything around him needs to be perfect.”

“Harry’s not a perfectionist,” said Neville, confused. “At least, I don’t think he is.”

Fred burst out laughing and George supported himself on the nearby wall, much to the annoyance of the third-year Gryffindor standing in front of them. They slowly steadied themselves and mentally counted to three before approaching that simple statement as maturely as they could, which wasn’t very.

“He is,” said Fred with a slight shrug. “He may not be overboard with it and demand perfection, but he is precise with everything he does – wait a minute! George, didn’t we have a list of all the things he does that’s odd?”

George gasped and rummaged around in his pockets. “We do!” he cleared his throat. “One, he always places a book back onto the shelf an inch away from the edge. No exceptions. Two, his quill and ink are always perfectly aligned, according to Dean. Three, his writing is always precise and evenly spaced. Four, he –”

“You two are stalkers,” muttered Neville. “Give me that list for a moment.”

“No.”

“No?”

“No.”

Neville shook his head in amusement and a decided that he was actually rather curious on what they had planned for Harry. He knew that Harry would fall victim to the prank, everyone always did. Being alert meant nothing when you were dealing with the Weasley twins.

“The prank,” he said, reminding Fred and George. “Anything I can do to help?”

The playful expression on Fred’s face vanished in a split-second and was replaced with a serious demeanour. He gently carted Neville into a nearby alcove and glanced around, making sure it was all clear.

“I am so glad that you have decided to finally speak up,” he said as he gestured to his brother to pull out the piece of parchment. “We found this little piece of brilliance when we were in our first year. We lined the corridors outside Snape’s classroom with soap and all the students went sliding into the walls. Ah, it was funny.”
“The issue is that we were caught,” said George. “Sent to detention with Filch, if you’d believe that. The best part is that no one cleaned up the soap so Filch left us in his office all alone. We behaved for a good two minutes before we realised that he would be gone awhile and we took that time to rummage and see what he had confiscated.”

“And you found that?” said Neville, gesturing towards the parchment. “I don’t –”

“Patience,” said Fred. “We had a look around and saw a draw that was labelled as Confiscated and Highly Dangerous. We saw a little bit of parchment sticking out of the draw and we, being the great students we are, carefully removed it and took it off his hands.”

“Wow!”

“He found out that something was amiss and we dropped a small Dungbomb and ran out of the office. He started shouting and threatening us with the usual –”

“– detention –”

“– disembowelment –”

“– death –”

“But he never came for us,” said Fred. “I don’t think he ever learned what it was, seeing as it’s just a blank piece of parchment, but he knew it was dangerous.”

“And how’d you learn how to work it?”

George chuckled. “We didn’t until it was in our presence for a year before it started displaying hints when we cast spells on it. We knew it was created by someone who liked to joke around because the advice it displayed was just humorous.”

“What did it say?”

Fred turned to George, who shrugged. “We can’t remember,” he said. “But, in our third-year, we finally cracked the words to open it and it changed our entire world. This piece of parchment taught us more than all the teachers put together.”

“It took you two years!”

“Sadly,” said George, “but it was worth it.”

Neville glanced at the two grinning twins and frowned. “You’re having me on, I know it.”

Fred barked a laugh and turned to his brother, who lifted up the parchment. He pressed his wand to the centre of the parchment and muttered a few different things, amplifying the anticipation.

“Just kidding,” he said, grinning. “I solemnly swear that I am up to no good.”

As soon as Fred had said the last word, small black lines that looked like webbing from a spider, began to form across the parchment, cause Neville to take a step back in surprise. He watched as the lines weaved around each other, causing pictures to form on the parchment that looked similar.

In the middle of the parchment, right where Fred’s wand was, words began to form in scarlet and gold lettering that proclaimed:

Messrs Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs
“Whoa!” said Neville as he peered at the map with the same intensity that Hermione uses when she finds a new book to read. “Hang – this is Hogwarts! And that – no – is that really –?”

“– Dumbledore –”

“– in his study –”

“– pacing –”

“– he does that a lot.”

Neville gaped for a moment. “And you mean this map shows everyone?”

“Everyone.”

Neville frowned. “Everyone?”

“Everyone –”

“– where they are –”

“– what they’re doing –”

“– every minute –”

“– of every day.”

“Wicked!” said Neville, excited. He ignored the fact that Fred and George were hurting his head with their rapid speech, swapping who was talking every second word. “I cannot believe something like this exists!”

“We didn’t believe it at first, either,” said Fred. “It was just like what Dad said, ‘Never trust anything that can think for itself, if you can’t see where it keeps its brain.’”

“A map of the school with everyone’s current position was just too good to hand in,” said George. “Plus, if we’d have said anything, we’d have been in trouble for nicking it.”

Neville stood silent for a moment. He knew that he had heard a few of those names before. He tried his hardest to think back on where he had heard them, but couldn’t.

“Lost in thought?” said Fred, smiling, as his brother muttered about owing Moony, Wormtail, Padfoot, and Prongs everything they had.

“I have heard some of those names before,” said Neville. “I swear I have.”

“We believe you,” said George. “Noble men, working tirelessly to help a new generation of law-breakers, of course, you’d have heard of them.”

“Oh, before we forget,” said Fred, lifting his own wand. “After you’re done, wipe it clear.”

“How?”
“’How’ he says,” said George. “Just tap it in the same spot where you activated it and say, ‘Mischief managed!’ and it’ll go blank.”

“If you don’t clear it, anyone can read it,” said Fred solemnly. “And we don’t want that!”

“You’re giving it to me?”

“It’s a wrench, giving it to you,” said Fred, “but we decided last night, your need’s greater than ours.”

“Anyway, we know it off by heart,” said George. “We bequeath it to you. We don’t really need it anymore.”

“You’ve memories this?” said Neville, curious. “Jesus.”

“We started drawing up copies in earlier this year,” said Fred. “Not as good, you know, nor does it show where everyone is, but it’s a layout and that’s all we need.”

“Go on,” said George, “clear it and we’ll let you go.”

Neville pulled out his wand and went to mutter the first word when he realised that he caught sight of Harry’s distorted name. “What’s wrong with Harry’s name?”

“We noticed this when he first started,” said George, peering at the map. “It really looks like he’s walking on top of someone else and the names are merging.”

“Could be his pet snake,” said Fred. “It happened to Ron when he had Scabbers on his shoulder. We assume some pets show up on the map.”

“Harry does claim to be bonded to his snake,” said Neville. “That could be why…”

“Look – he’s coming this way,” said George, pointing at the dot that was moving towards them. “Shh!”

They sat quietly and listened as the footsteps slowly approached.

“Hiding, are we?” said Harry as gave a disgusted look towards the alcove. “You’re not as quiet as you lot would think.”

Neville listened as Harry briskly walked away. “How’d he know we were here?” he said. “We were quiet way before he turned the corner.”

“No idea, mate,” said Fred, worried. “But that’s not too good for our pranking plan if he can sense us from so far away.”

“His snake!” said George. “It would have smelt us and hissed in the direction!”

Fred and George both turned towards Neville. “We need you to distract the snake,” said Fred. “You can speak to it…”

Harry sat down in the library, Pansy Parkinson opposite him, and stared at the nearby wall with disdain. He didn’t want to invite Pansy, but he realised that she could be helpful in what he needed to do.

There were three small things that he needed to be done. Three tiny things only Pansy Parkinson
could do.

One, he needed to discredit Daphne’s reputation to the point that Draco would question being with her, whether that be as friends or boyfriend and girlfriend.

Two, he needed her to be distracted with her reputation that she couldn’t focus on Draco.

Three, he needed her to be destroyed.

Pansy glared for a few seconds before her face morphed into a pleasant façade. “So, Potter,” she said with too much false enthusiasm. “Why did you drag me all the way towards the library when we could have just spoken in the common room?”

“Well,” said Harry as he cleared his throat, “I believe that what we’re going to be talking about is best kept from the gossipers inside Slytherin. Also, we shouldn’t be seen talking to each other. It’s better that way.”

“I guess I cannot argue with that,” said Pansy. “Now, what are we doing?”

“Greengrass,” said Harry simply, saying nothing more.

Pansy’s posture shifted from suspicious to furious with the mention of the name. She pulled herself in control and settled and a bad imitation of a confused expression. She twisted her fingers bitterly and waited, knowing that she wasn’t in control of the conversation.

“Greengrass is pushing her luck,” said Harry with a blank expression. “I must admit that I have been… less than accommodating of you and your presence these few years, but you must understand that you have a rumour about you.”

“Be quiet,” hissed Pansy. “Take your pathetic rehearsed speech and shove it down your throat. I am a pure-blood and I was raised as one. I know when someone is being contradicting and trying to lead a conversation that they should not be leading.”

Harry laughed softly, not wanting to draw the ire of Madam Pince. “Alright, I get it,” he said. “I heard that you’re becoming the next Rita Skeeter and I decided to shift myself away from you. A neutral position.”

‘Shut up and stop mocking her,’ hissed Tom, furious. ‘You need her and she will walk away if you keep patronising her.’

Harry mentally argued with Tom for a while before he sighed. “Sorry, Pansy,” he said reluctantly. “I’ve never really had any other friends but Draco and, you know –”

“I get it,” interrupted Pansy. “Being friends with Draco requires you to change your approach. However, you’re so lucky I did not get up and walk away when you compared me to that worm, Skeeter! Do you have any idea what she’s been saying about my Father? No, of course not!”

Harry rolled his eyes.

“Alright, let’s talk about Greengrass,” said Pansy. “What are your goals surrounding her? I detest her very existence, so I don’t care, but I need you to set up the gossip. I can’t say something and the have her coming in and making me look like a fool.”

“We could incapacitate her,” suggested Harry.
“Awful suggestion!” barked Pansy, annoyed. “We need her around to feel the burn of the rumours. If she’s unconscious or weak in bed, she won’t hear them. We need them to actually happen.”

“So, I need to make sure whatever we put together actually comes to light.”

Pansy nodded and thought for a moment, brushing her quill over her nose. “Wait – can you cast a Compulsion Charm?”

“You already assume that I can,” said Harry, not like the look she was giving him.

“Potter, please,” said Pansy with a sniff. “I am certain you already know how everything works but I can see and feel you.”

Harry frowned and watched as Pansy scrawled a note.

As you are aware, you imbecile, my family is labelled as ‘dark’ because we practice that branch of magic. I can faintly see an aura around you and I can feel it around you as well. It’s impossible to see magic, but we can see traces.

“Eat it,” said Pansy when she saw the note folded. “I don’t want that handed around. Eat it.”

Harry scoffed and balled his hand into a fist. “You don’t trust me.”

“No one trusts you, Potter,” said Pansy, sniffing. “Draco’s the only one because he sees you as a perfect idol. He wants to be like you, and he believes you can do no wrong. Now, eat it.”

Harry lifted his palm and gently blew the ashes of the parchment at her. “You could have laced your ink with poison,” he said. “Not taking the chance.”

“Paranoid, aren’t you?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “Now, let’s get back to planning as I have things to do.”

“So,” said Pansy, annoyed, “can you cast a Compulsion Charm?”

Harry nodded and decided not to notice the predatory look on Pansy’s face.

“Cast it on me and make me write something I would never write,” said Pansy. “Don’t hold back, either. I need to know if you can do it nonverbally as that would be good if you could.”

Harry debated whether he should actually cast it or do it silently like he had been practising. He knew that Tom told him that he should cast it nonverbally to assert himself as a powerful and competent wizard that could already cast dark spells nonverbally, but he felt that he was giving Pansy a massive amount of trust with that’s secret.

Not even Tom’s mutter about Pansy putting more on the line swayed him to thinking that it was a good idea, but Tom was mostly right.

‘I am always right,’ said Tom. ‘Now, cast the spell and compel her to write something.’

Harry sighed and cast the spell with ease. He made Pansy pick up her quill and right that she loved, adored, and wished to be just like Daphne Greengrass, which was so out of character that he was amazed she didn’t scream when she came too.

“Well done,” said Pansy through clenched teeth. “That proves how powerful and compelling your spells can be. I would never write something like that and when I was writing it, it felt like something
I’d do. I hate to say it, but it felt so natural. Now, if you even dare think about using that spell on me again and I find out, I will castrate you and shove your wand so far up your – Madam Pince, do you need anything?”

Madam Pince hovered for a moment. “You two are speaking loudly,” she said. “Please tone it down.”

Harry watched her leave with a shocked expression. “I have never heard her speak so politely before,” he said to an equally shocked Pansy. “I spend almost ninety-nine perfect of my time here and I have never heard her say ‘please’ before.”

“That’s because everyone loves and adores me,” sniffed Pansy. “Maybe someone complained or the staff are going through an annual revaluation.”

“You mean ‘evaluation’, right?”

“Whatever.”

Harry snorted and glared at the girl for a moment before he relaxed and turned towards the small piece of parchment that Pansy had been writing on. His eyes widened slightly.

“Some of those are ingenious,” he said. “But some are far too extreme for school.”

“We start small and then we get bigger and bigger until she packs her trunk and leaves,” said Pansy. “She can go attend Beauxbatons with the other cheap, lowlife –”

“We should start with this one,” said Harry, interrupting the girl’s abuse streak. “I can probably do this one tomorrow and she’d never know that it was me.”

Harry flicked his wand and watched solemnly as the fiery letters slowly rearranged themselves from ‘DGIPAY’ to ‘GAYDIP’. He chuckled and shook his head.

‘Real mature,’ said Tom with an agitated tone of voice. ‘No matter how many times you rearrange them or change them from green smoke to fire, it will make zero sense because you have exhausted everything.’

Harry had known this, of course, and he had spent the previous two hours ignoring that feeling because he wasn’t going to give up on whatever this was. He knew that Draco would never drop random letters on his desk for no reason.

‘I never said that he would do that.’

“Youngling,” hissed Nagini as she slithered up the chair. “Maybe it is not what you assume it is.”

Harry nodded and turned towards Nagini. “You think that it is not an anagram?” he hissed and sighed. “That would make a lot of sense, but I have no idea what else it could be.”

Nagini went silent and flicked out her tongue. “Maybe you could ask your other friend.”

“Professor Snape would not be acceptable of this,” hissed Harry. “Plus, I cannot get any teachers involved.”

It had taken Harry close to an hour to explain what snitching was and how it would be a terrible idea to do. He had to draw up comparisons that Nagini didn’t understand and in the end, he settled for
comparing snitching to cowardliness.

Nagini had been even more confused than she had at the start.

Snakes didn’t follow human idioms, phrases, or actions with ease. Simple things that humans did often confused snakes. They weren’t stupid or unaware, they just didn’t see the reasoning and that made all the difference.

Snakes didn’t do things they didn’t feel like they needed to do.

Harry had some leeway with Parseltongue and his ability to communicate with the various species that roamed the world. He could make any word he wanted and it would work because Parselmouth was based on Latin.

Salazar had confirmed this a while ago. He said that snakes wouldn’t understand contractions because all snakes communicated formally. Nagini was a special case because he had done it for so long she had begun to pick up on what don’t meant and what do not meant.

To humans, that would have made no sense, but to a snake or someone that could communicate with them, it made all the difference.

All snakes were educated in different things. Some were hunters and were taught how to hunt. Others were taught to look after their young. Some explored.

Harry had learned that not all snakes would obey him as they detested that a human stole their language. Humans that could speak snakes weren’t put on a proverbial pedestal or considered a legend. Many myths about Parseltongue and Parselmouths was debunked in ten minutes.

He had written it all down later and he would share it with the world.

“**It could be like your lessons,**” hissed Nagini as she turned her head towards Harry’s schedule that had been pinned on the wall.

Harry carefully shifted Nagini and looked at DADA, or, as he had corrected it, DAtDA. Defence Against Dark Arts sounded so odd to say, especially since all the professors added ‘the’ when they said the lesson.

He slapped his head and felt like destroying the room he was in for his own stupidity.

‘**It is not an anagram,**’ said Tom, laughing. ‘*The letters were an acronym.*’

A few minutes later had Harry surrounded by bunched up pieces of parchments, most turned into a ball and some crisp around the edges from where they had been set on fire.

“**The ‘D’ and ‘G’ have to be Daphne Greengrass. Pansy did the same on her notes earlier today,**” said Harry to Nagini and Tom. “**The ‘I’ could be just that or it could be is.**”

‘**And the next letter?**’ asked Tom. ‘*That could mean many things.*’

Harry lifted the parchment. “Daphne Greengrass is –” he paused and screwed up his face. “It could be pissed?”

‘**Are you asking me or suggesting it?**”

“Daphne Greengrass is pissed – no, I can’t see Draco saying pissed, of all words,” said Harry, rubbing his forehead. “Plotting. It’s plotting… it has to be. See – Daphne Greengrass is plotting
against you. DGIPAY.”

Chapter End Notes

I honestly prefer the movie scene where the twins give Harry the map. So, I altered that instead. Don't hate me. I dislike twin speak, but it's such a good scene.

Also, sorry for thrusting Pansy back in. I shafted her pretty badly and I actually like her character. Also, (again), this will not turn out as a Daphne bashing session. It's just typical school things and drama happens.
Chapter 28 – **The Fall of Daphne Greengrass, Part I**

Chapter revised: *Not Applicable*

“Speech” | ‘Thoughts’ | ‘Tom’ | “*Parseltongue*” | *Memories / Flashbacks / Letters*

Harry pulled his eyes away from the bright blue sky and focused back onto his empty plate. To his left sat Pansy, who was still writing in her book that was almost full of things on the other students. He really wanted to see what she had written about him.

He caught a shadow sitting next to him and he turned towards the person with a curious expression. It wasn’t every day that someone would sit in the seat that Draco had claimed. He, however, knew who this person was.

Rosier coughed. “Harry,” he said, fidgeting with the few utensils on the table. “I just wanted to say that I’ve been a bit of a prat these past few weeks –”

“You don’t say?”

“– and I just wanted to say sorry,” said Rosier, ignoring Harry for a moment. “It’s been a pretty tough few weeks for me, especially with Mother getting sick with Dragon Pox and I took it out on you because you’re the only one who isn’t afraid to defend themselves. I tried talking to Draco and he was far too busy with Greengrass to even recognise who I was.”

“Ah.”

“That’s not a reassuring response,” said Rosier. “I wanted to be on the team and all, I just wanted to earn it, not have it handed to me.”

“What makes you think that I’d put you on the team if you weren’t good?” said Harry, chuckling. “I want to win and that’s that. I wouldn’t put us down a Chaser if I really didn’t think you could play the position.”

“You mean it?”

“Of course,” said Harry. “You attended every practice, whether it concerned you or not, every game, whether Slytherin was in it or not, and you helped suggest the weakness of other players. I knew you’d be a good player and it proved to be true when you scored the most goals in our first match. Why do you doubt yourself so much?”

“I dunno,” said Rosier. “I just wasn’t thinking right. I was trying to help Mother and do what she asked, which is to be the best I can at school.”

“Is she not drinking the cure that Gunhilda de Gorsemoor made back in the sixteenth century?” said Harry, curious. “It’s not as good as it could be, seeing as witches and wizards still perish, but it helps.”

“Mother is old,” said Rosier. “I don’t think the cure would help at all.”
Harry watched as Rosier dropped his head into his arms and muttered about how it was hopeless. He felt a small pang of sadness for his friend and imagined if his own mother was going through the pain and suffering that Dragon Pox often left on its victims.

He also knew that no hospitals, bar St Mungo’s, would help the woman as she was, as everyone said, Death Eater scum.

“Come,” he said, yanking Rosier up as he stood. He was a lot smaller than Rosier, so it was quite a test, but he got here in the end. “We’re going to the Potion’s classroom.”

“What?”

“Because I said so,” muttered Harry as he weaved around students who were making their way towards the Great Hall. “I had a sudden realisation about something and I think you should come along.”

“I didn’t even get to eat anything,” said Rosier as he wrapped his arm around his stomach. “I need my food!”

Harry gave Rosier a disbelieving star and began weaving around the students that were regathering around the classroom door, waiting for their first lesson. He ignored the looks that he got as he muttered the Unlocking Charm and pushed open the door.

“Hey!” said a tall boy. “You can’t go in there without Snape!”

Harry rolled his eyes and shut the door on the boy with a satisfied grin. He turned back and began scanning the shelves, muttering that the door would automatically relock after a few seconds and that none of the students would dare try breaking in as he had.

“He can trust me,” he said when he noticed Rosier’s disbelieving look. “He knows that I’d never sabotage his precious classroom. He gave me permission to come in and brew whatever I wanted and I plan to use this whenever I can.”

Rosier still looked uncertain about being in Snape’s classroom unsupervised. He, like most of Slytherins, knew that Professor Snape was Harry’s godfather, but neither of them really used the title and abused it like some would imagine.

If anything, it meant that Harry was graded more precisely in Potions than anyone else and no one wanted that.

“Grab that purple phial and bring it over here,” said Harry, not looking up from the cauldron he was leaning over. “I think that it could stabilise this mixture, but I’m not sure.”

Rosier had just handed the phial of purple goo to Harry when the classroom door was thrown open and an irate looking Snape came in, leading a timid pack of students behind him. He froze, not wanting to draw Snape’s ire towards him for being in here.

He spared a quick glance towards Harry, who just laughed softly and pressed a finger to his lips, signalling him to be quiet.

“Hand me that,” said Harry, whispering. “Don’t speak loudly. If you interrupt his lesson, you’ll know it. He may favour us, but, of course, that doesn’t mean he won’t toss you out if you misbehave.”

“Alright.”
Harry smiled, amused, and listened as Professor Snape did the class roll for his sixth-year class, which was a reason why they would have given him an odd look just barging in. At this point, the first-year and second-year students thought that he was Professor Snape’s assistant.

“I said,” hissed out Professor Snape, “to get the ingredients and sit down quietly.”

Harry snorted softly and went back to his potion, knowing every student in the room was looking at him like he was about to be devoured. It didn’t help matters that Rosier was almost trembling from the furious look on Professor Snape’s face.

“Professor Snape’s not mad ‘cos we’re in here,” he said, whispering. “It’s more to the fact that he’s asked them to sit down and remain quiet. The first thing they did was begin a conversation like they were in the Great Hall.”

“Oh.”

“He knew I was in here,” said Harry as he gave the potion a slight stir. “I do believe that’s why he asked for silence.”

“Oh.”

“Say that again and I’ll dunk your head in this cauldron,” said Harry. “He’s about to start a lecture. Listen closely.”

Harry and Rosier slowly settled into a rhythm as Professor Snape began lecturing the class on a basic theory before he began writing on the board. Harry, of course, had already brewed the potion the class of fifth-year students were working on and ignored Professor Snape as he tore into one particular student for having the audacity to attempt to brew the potion without received an ‘Outstanding’ on the theory.

It was rather humorous, actually.

“I never understood why Professor Snape is so… nasty, I guess,” said Rosier, whispering softer than usual. “It just doesn’t make sense. Y’know, Mother once said that the previous Potions professor was rather calm and gentle.”

“That’s because Professor Snape has an absolute zero tolerance for stupidity when it comes to making potions of any sort,” said Harry, snorting. “Being one hundred percent honest, it was the first thing that I learnt when I was taught. I assumed that making potions was boring and ease at first, but that notion was quickly changed when I saw that one wrong stir could blow up an entire sitting room.”

“You blew up a room?”

“I’ve blown up multiple,” said Harry, sniffing. “Anyway, I’m not defending how he acts because I honestly believe he should turn it down a notch. I’d rather have a strict, no-nonsense teacher than one that hands out candy and pats you on the head when you’re being careless. Students will thank him later when they realise he’s saved their lives by being so strict and doing things that no one else would do. I mean, do you understand how hard Potion Masters are to find? There’s a reason why he was hired straight out of school.”

“Right you are, Mr Potter,” said Professor with a soft glare towards the other students. “I have been trying to drill this information into your thick skulls since you were in your first year. The very first lesson I said something similar. Now, seeing as Mr Potter has taught you the lesson in a few minutes when it has taken you more than five years, I want to see what else you lot know, considering you
are all in your sixth-year, passing your O.W.L.s with an ‘Outstanding’.”

Harry, finally realising that something was different, noticed that there were a lot of empty seats. He frowned as he counted from his fingers, trying to figure something out.

“Quit thinking so hard,” said Professor Snape as he peered into the cauldron. “Only people that achieve an ‘Outstanding’ on their O.W.L.s are allowed into my class. I do not tolerate slackers.”

Harry nodded and frowned when his potion didn’t do what he wanted it to. He muttered to himself and stirred clockwise a few times, causing the potion to become a viscous substance that was not close to being right.

“What’re you making, anyway?” said Rosier, covering his nose at the potion, which didn’t smell at all. “Going into construction, are you?”

“Ha-ha! Wow, that was so funny I forgot to laugh,” muttered Harry with a glare. “I am attempting something that I’ve had in my mind for many years. I want to improve on Gunhilda de Gorsemoor’s Dragon Pox cure.”

“Seriously?”

“Yes,” said Harry, unamused. “Just look at how many people have died due to it in the past twenty years. It destroyed the entire Black line, taking more than seventy percent of them in a matter of years. No one has even dared touch the cure, or potion as it’s now known, because they don’t know how.”

“And you do?”

“Never claimed that I did, did I?” said Harry with an amused expression. “I, however, have to try. No one had even bothered to try working on these old cures because they feel like they do their job. It makes no sense because everything can be improved. People are stuck in the ‘If it’s not broken, don’t fix it’ mindset.”

“It works…”

Harry fell silent and allowed the conversation to end as quickly as it had started. He really should have argued the point, but he really didn’t care all that much. He needed to figure out how the original cure for Dragon Pox was made before he could even think to begin creating another cure.

He had attempted various things that would make most shake their heads in confusion. Different ingredients that had been dried in the sun for hours or fresh ones that were damp from the rain.

“It looks like you are trying to either recreate an old potion that has been around since the founding of Hogwarts or you are trying to invent a new one,” said Professor Snape as he, once again, leant over and peered into the simmering cauldron. “You would be wise trying to figure out the recipe rather than throwing random ingredients into it. All old potions followed a very basic premise that has not differentiated since. Simple to make, hard, if not impossible, to alter.”

“Yeah,” muttered Harry. “That’s an issue that I have to work around. It could even be worth it to just start a new potion with the same goal: to defeat and eradicate Dragon Pox. It can be done.”

“I suggest you take some time, perhaps a few years, and mull it over,” said Professor Snape. “You do not want to rush potions in any sort. Rushing causes mistakes. As you are aware, even the slightest bit of progress could mean a successful potion or a complete failure.”
“I know that.”

Professor Snape glared. “I wish I could offer more advice,” he said as he turned towards his class. “I believe it would be a wise move if you sought a member of the Potions Guild and asked them for advice. They are rather catering to the youth that are interested in potions.”

“The Potions Guild doesn’t exist,” said Harry, mumbling. “There’s no reference to them or where to find them.”

“Trust me,” said Professor Snape. “They exist.”

“Potter!”

Harry turned at the familiar voice and stared at Pansy with disappointment. He watched as she shifted on her feet, looking rather unnerved.

Nothing about his stare was intimidating nor did he seek it to be. People being stared at made them question themselves and it always worked, especially with Pansy Parkinson.

He shrugged and joined her in the dim alcove, his eyes seeking out the torch bracket. A flick of his wand caused it to ignite.

“Yes,” he asked, still staring at her. “I hope you have a good reason to seek me out in public like this. It was you, after all, who said we shouldn’t be seen together.”

“And you completely ignored me whenever I sent you any sort of letter to arrange a meeting place!” said Pansy, glaring. “I tried for days and days and you just ignored them or burned them without even reading them! You dimwit.”

“Maybe you should be more verbal in your attempts,” said Harry. “Regardless, I burn all letters I get, no matter what. Keeping them is a serious break of character and would alert Greengrass to our mission.”

“She’s an idiot, Potter,” said Pansy, unamused. “She wouldn’t be able to tell if you decided to wear blue trousers instead of black.”

“Better safe than sorry.”

Pansy glared and tapped her foot impatiently. “You say that,” she muttered, “but you’re getting us nowhere in our plans. The year’s almost finished and we haven’t done anything at all to her! If we don’t do anything and she holds onto Draco, we both lose.”

“I’m not worried,” said Harry. “Should we fail, I’ll just compel her to ditch Draco and we’ll be back to normal.”

“Follow me,” said Pansy, grasping Harry’s arm as she led him through the dungeons and into the Slytherin common room. “Shut up about not being seen together! Now, there’s more to this situation than just a teenage drama. Sure, I’d love to take her down a peg, but there are just so much more things that are unsaid.”

“And I assume that I won’t be hearing what they are,” said Harry. “I mean, I don’t really care regardless, but I dislike being left out.”

“You’re a half-blood,” said Pansy nervously. “I know that blood isn’t important to many people.
these days, the Malfoy’s are one of them, but a few select families still believe that blood is everything and the Greengrass line are blood-traitors.”

Harry laughed. “Lucius isn’t as pro-Muggle as he puts on,” he said. “He still believes in the purity of magical blood. Half-bloods are magical.”

Pansy frowned for a moment before she regained her composure and pulled out a small piece of parchment, which, of course, had a border of pansies around the edges. She slid it into the palm of Harry and nodded.

“This is just the first part of our plan,” she said with a slight wink. “We’ll need a few things for our finale. Don’t panic, they’re all cheap items. We can get them soon.”

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Harry sat in the Great Hall, his hands resting gently on the bench, his eyes locking onto Daphne Greengrass. He watched as she sneered at someone before turning into a travesty of a polite smile. He didn’t remark on the fact that pure-bloods tried too hard to replicate everything their parents did. He turned towards Pansy for the first time since lunch began and felt like hexing her for the dirt look she gave him. It just screamed for him to get on with their plan. He was tempted to not do it just to spite her.

He shifted his right hand under the table and nudged Rosier back, who looked rather annoyed he was nudged, and softly muttered the Compulsion Charm. He felt the spell hit Greengrass and now all he had to do was compel her to do something.

He watched as Daphne shrugged off whatever was said to her and stood, rather robotically, and then began to walk out of the great Hall, her steps uneven and her stride cautious.

A bad sign.

He glanced over to Pansy, who mouthed a rather vicious string of words, assuming his ability to read lips was still accurate.

He felt a bit of parchment hit his cheek and he twisted back around to face her. When she mouthed for him to read it, he did.

She’s fighting it!
I didn’t know she could fight a compulsion!
This isn’t good.

“So, who has decided to disgrace themselves by sending you a love letter?”

“No one has disgraced themselves,” said Harry as he glared at Rosier. He flicked his wand at the letter, discreetly, of course, and ignored it as it caught aflame. “Someone must have misthrown their note and it somehow ended up over here. It doesn’t even mention me.”

“Right,” said Rosier, a disbelieving look crossing his face. “And what was this letter about?”

Harry remained silent, humming slightly.

Rosier glared. “And that’s not even forgetting that you burned another person’s love letter,” he said with an annoyed expression. “It’s not nice to burn other people’s things.”

“Don’t know.”
“‘Don’t know?’” said Rosier, repeating the words in the same tone they were said. “You don’t know what it said?”

“I know what it said,” said Harry. “I did read it, after all. It doesn’t concern us.”

“Sure.”

“You’re being awfully pushy for someone who normally detests any form of blackmail,” said Harry. “Are you prodding for blackmail material? Something to use against a rival?”

“Maybe I am.”

“And maybe I’m not saying,” said Harry, laughing. “We don’t know them. They don’t know us. No need to have it.”

“Come on!”

“Nope.”

“Please!”

“No.”

“Fine!” said Rosier, huffing. “I don’t really care about it anyway.”

“Of course you don’t really care,” said Harry in a weak imitation of Rosier’s voice. “That’s the only reason you pushed and prodded for information, isn’t it? Because you don’t care.”

“No need to be a prat about it,” said Rosier, mumbling. “I honestly thought you were hiding something.”

Harry laughed and made excuses to leave, watching as Pansy began the same thing once he was just about to exit the Great Hall. He frowned and shook his head, knowing that he was going to be accosted by her and demanded to answer a question he had no idea how to answer.

‘This is going to be horrid,’ he thought when he saw Pansy exit the Great Hall and give chase. ‘If she dares question my ability in magic –’

“Potter!” said Pansy, distressed. “I am so sorry!”

Harry blinked, confused.

“I forgot that her family went on some search for artefacts that could aid their daughter at school, seeing as she was attacked and left alone in one of the most haunted buildings in Britain,” said Pansy, barely taking a breath. “I didn’t even think about this…”

“It makes sense,” said Harry. “At least, in some sort of twisted way. I didn’t think that her father would use an artefact to help with the mind. That’s just not done.”

“Of course it’s not done!” said Pansy. “No one understands how the mind works.”

“There are no known spells to counter spells and enchantments that affect the mind and I highly doubt her father is powerful enough to make one or even wealthy enough to buy one,” said Harry, more to himself than Pansy. “There are things that you can do to hinder the spells that’ve been cast on you or a family member, but none of them make any sort of sense.”
“What are you aiming for?”

“Think of something that would cause someone, whether it be a wizard or a witch, to be more cautious.”

“I’m not sure,” said Pansy, unamused by the question she was asked.

“With spells,” said Harry, somewhat helpfully. “Not everyday things such as potions or political clout.”

Pansy stood silent for a moment, her posture in thought, glad that Potter had some innate ability to teach and was patient when he was actually teaching. She hated it, much like everyone else, that he was so calm and pretty much guaranteed a position as a teacher when he finished school. She also knew that it would be him to beat the legendary curse on the Defence Against the Dark Arts position.

She pushed the thought out of her mind and went back to thinking about what Potter had said and how he had said it. She knew that he already the answer and he was giving her a chance to stay on the same level.

She was both pleased and infuriated at the aspect.

She knew that it was almost impossible to prevent attacks on the mind. No one was insane enough to attempt to create anything defensive for their mind as it could render them insane and cause them to do more harm than good.

It took her a few minutes of deep thought before the answer popped into her mind and she almost couldn’t believe it.

“He used a Paranoia Curse!” she said, astonished. “He used a Paranoia Curse on the necklace that he recently gifted to her!”

Harry nodded. “That’s what I believe, as well,” he said. “The Paranoia Curse will make her paranoid, of course, and question everything she does. I mean everything. She will question whether she should go to the bathroom or not, whether she should eat, sleep, or drink, socialise. She will fear that everyone is out to get her, even if they aren’t.”

“That’s why it didn’t work, then?”

“Yes,” said Harry. “The Paranoia Curse kicked in and made her question the action she was doing. She’ll make it about halfway before she returns with a lame excuse, not wanting to draw attention to herself.”

“Is the curse bad?”

“Why does everyone assume I know everything,” said Harry, muttering to himself. “The curse is a few steps away from becoming an unforgivable. It has both good and bad uses, but the bad outweigh the good and it causes a person a lot of unneeded stress. It’s driven a few people to suicide because they thought their food was laced with poison.”

“That’s –”

“Barbaric?” said Harry. “I assume there’s also a compulsion on the necklace so she keeps it on. It’s probably woven into the Paranoia Curse and she would feel safer with it on.”
“Her father is a right git, but that’s just too much,” said Pansy, unnerved about what she heard. “I couldn’t even imagine people doing that under You-Know-Who’s reign!”

“I’m sure most fathers would see it as a fantastic idea to keeping their young daughters safe,” said Harry, snorting. “Let’s hope this trend doesn’t catch on or the next generation will be morons that are too afraid of their own shadow. The Paranoia Curse has long-lasting effects.”

“How long?”

“Unknown,” said Harry. “But from various sources, all effects of various dark spells linger for a few years. Some, mainly the darkest of them, last a lifetime.”

“God,” said Pansy, completely surprised. “If I didn’t detest her existence, I’d feel bad for her.”

Harry couldn’t help but chuckle at that.

“Anyway,” said Pansy, glaring at Potter for daring to laugh. “Daphne’s father is a rare sort of wizard, one that is almost still medieval in how he acts and he refuses to act. Her mother was going poor and she needed a husband for money quickly. She obviously took the first man she saw that was available.”

“Are you talking about her birth father or –”

“Her birth father is dead,” said Pansy, frowning. “Keep up, Potter. Anyway, as I was saying, that whole family is just a bundle of drama that’s waiting to be exposed and when it happens, it’s going to drag them all down.”

“What do you mean?” said Harry, prodding for more information.

“I could speak for an entire day and not even cover an inch of dirt that family has,” said Pansy. “I’m sure Skeeter would love anything on that family.”

“You’re a genius!”

“W-what?”

“We’re going to drop this compulsion crusade and g for something bigger,” said Harry as he rubbed his hands together in a horrid imitation of a comic book villain. The reference was, obviously, lost on Pansy. “We’re gonna write to the Daily Prophet, more importantly, Skeeter. We don’t bother with her. We go after her family.”

“That’s delightfully evil,” said Pansy. “I’m in!”

Chapter End Notes

I’m sorry that this one took a while to get out. I was going to post it a week ago and then I noticed a glaring fault that spoiled the end of book 3 and I had to rewrite the entire thing so that it didn’t.

If you remember back in book 1, there was a three-part series in it. The petty thief plotline. This is similar.
Harry slowly made his way down the corridor that looked like it had been styled by a Muggle. It was almost reminiscent of Aunt Petunia’s living room. Everything was done perfectly and was done with a Muggle style in mind, which made sense for the Muggle Studies classroom.

He was probably the only Slytherin to ever set foot in this corridor. They all acted as if it was cursed and would cause them to become Gryffindors and blood-traitors if they even dared to think about going near it.

He heard so many rumours about the professor that he was almost certain that the woman wasn’t even real. Many rumours pointed towards it being a pure-blood that had no idea how Muggles worked and some that it was a Squib.

He had met her once and that was in her office that was nowhere near this corridor. She seemed like a strict teacher that only settled for perfection.

“What are you doing in here?”

Harry had to do a double-take at the malice in the girl’s voice, but it hardly phased him that someone was afraid of him. He was in Slytherin, of course, and that meant his presence was probably for no reason besides to defile the pristine Muggle sanctuary.

“Well?” said the girl, placing her hand son her hips. “This is the Muggle Studies classroom! You’re not in this class.”

“Typical Ravenclaw,” said Harry, muttering. “Always assuming you know everything. Go and sit down before you say anything else foolish.”

“Look – this is a shared class across all years,” said the girl. “You’re not in this class. I know you’re not in it. Just leave before the teacher comes and you won’t be in trouble.”

Harry regarded the Ravenclaw with annoyance before muttering a quick ‘no’. He was rather pleased when the girl froze like she had been petrified. He smiled in delight when the girl had remained silent, even after ten seconds.

“Get out!”

“I will not be bossed around by some wannabe Prefect,” said Harry. “Just look around for a moment and you’ll see everyone shaking their head at you. You’re a joke.”

The classroom remained a tense affair until the professor waltzed in, her outfit a replica of something you would find in the seventies. She smiled and almost danced to her desk at the front of the room.
“Well,” she said happily. “Because there isn’t much we can do for an exam, especially considering this is a shared class, I have a treat for you.”

“Professor Burbage! Professor Burbage!” said the Ravenclaw girl, her hand waving around in the air. “This boy is refusing to leave!”

Professor Burbage smiled brightly, despite the obvious annoyance. “I see that Mr Potter has found the classroom without much effort,” she said. “If you would please take a seat so that we may get started.”

Harry slowly walked towards his seat, smiling smugly at the Ravenclaw girl all the way. He remained quiet, as did everyone else, as the professor began searching through her notes.

“I know you’re all rather curious about Mr Potter,” said Professor Burbage as she stood. “He’s been in this class since the beginning. Why don’t you explain, Mr Potter, while I look for those tickets?”

“Well,” begun Harry dramatically, “I am taking thirteen classes this year and I, naturally, need to balance out my schedule so that I can balance all the work and homework that is assigned. Most elective classes don’t overlap with the required classes, but elective classes can overlap with each other. Example, Divination is at the same time as Ancient Runes.”

“You’re taking thirteen classes?”

“Yes,” said Harry without a second thought. “I thought I would try and challenge myself.”

“Why?” said Ernie, confused. “I mean, I know you want to challenge yourself, but thirteen classes? How do you have time to do anything else?”

“I manage my time,” said Harry. “It’s not as hard as you think, Ernie. The real question is: why are you in this class?”

“Promised Justin,” said Ernie, shrugging. “It’s been a pretty fun class, though. Most of it is practical instead of theory.”

“You can’t learn about Muggles from a book!” said Professor Burbage with a cheerful grin. “Books can be biased because they’re written from the author’s view. I want you all to forge your own opinions.”

Harry couldn’t argue with that, as someone would. He knew that a lot of things that had been written in books and then sold were heavily biased, whether in a good or bad sense. Defence Against the Dark Arts was a prime suspect of being biased. Not only against an entire branch of magic but hundreds of creatures, as well.

He listened as Professor Burbage did the roll, his ears perking up at some of the names, especially Granger’s, who wasn’t here yet. He was rather curious on the fact that Granger actually attended this class and wasn’t doing what he was.

“I wonder where Miss Granger is,” said Professor Burbage as she tucked the class roll back into her desk. “I have bought in a few casual clothing in various sizes for you all to wear. They are cleaned and have not been worn before. You have ten minutes to find and put on an outfit – Miss Granger, you’re late! Ten points from Gryffindor!”

Hermione took a seat at her desk, her head lowered.

A few minutes later had the entire class up and rummaging through the expanded closet of clothes
that the professor had somehow acquired.

It was surprising to Harry that most witches and wizards weren’t as ignorant to Muggle culture as he’d thought. Of course, some pure-blooded wizards had question fashion choices, especially the boy who decided to wear socks with sandals, but aside from that, everyone chose decent clothing.

He went with grey trousers, a light blue t-shirt, a sweater, and a pair of sneakers.

“You all look wonderful!” said Professor Burbage as she gave out points for those that had a complete outfit. “There are a few of you that will need to change as we do not want to draw attention to ourselves.”

It was another two minutes before the students that had chosen bad clothes were back into the classroom, shuffling nervously as they were snickered at. The professor, who looked more out of place than any of the students, came back into the room a few seconds later, waving around a bundle of tickets.

“I wouldn’t be a good professor if I didn’t have on-the-spot quizzes!” she said, placing the tickets onto her table. “Can anyone tell me what I had in my hand?”

“Tickets,” said a boy who had been addressed.

“And what would those tickets be for?”

“A concert or a sports game…” said the same boy, trailing off, unsure.

“Close,” said Professor Burbage. “What about you, Mr Potter? Will you be able to tell us what these tickets are for?”

“I couldn’t say what exactly they were for unless I saw them,” said Harry. “You see, Muggles have a lot of events that use tickets that are quite familiar with each other. The tickets have names, dates, seat numbers, and anything else on them. I would need to actually look at the ticket to tell you what they’re for and if they’re genuine.”

“Genuine?”

“Well, yes,” said Harry. “Some Muggles seek to swindle unaware or unsuspecting people, scamming them of their money and giving them fake tickets. If you get them from a credible source, you’ll be fine.”

“Well done!” said Professor Burbage, surprised. “Of course, I knew you or Miss Granger would be able to answer more in-depth, but I didn’t expect that. Ten points to Slytherin!”

“Did you get those tickets through legal channels, Professor Burbage?” said Harry, a cheeky grin on his face. “It would be rather awkward if we were all turned down because the tickets were fakes.”

Professor Burbage remained silent for a moment before Snape’s warning came back into mind about the boy. She gave him a glare, letting him know that his attempt at making her confused had almost succeeded but she was wiser now.

“They are perfectly valid,” she said. “A distant friend, who is a Muggle-born, purchased them for me and I know he would never be taken advantage of.”

Harry just continued to smile as the professor explained what they were doing and how they were doing it. He was rather interested to go to a Muggle cinema as he hadn’t ever been to one. He knew
what a cinema was, of course. His mother often claimed that they should all go but things always came up and it was often forgotten.

“Excuse me,” he said to Professor Burbage, who nodded at his raised hand. “Will we need money to buy popcorn and drinks?”

“You will each share a bucket of popcorn each,” said Professor Burbage. “Yes, that means you will be pairing up! And, before you ask, I will not be giving any of you money for any drinks they are nothing but sugar and I will not be dealing a bunch of hyperactive students.”

Harry dropped next to Ernie, who was only a few seats away. “I am claiming you,” he said without allowing argument. He turned to the girl that was walking towards Ernie and hissed a ‘shoo’. “No complaints.”

Ernie laughed. “Did you leave any room for me to argue?” he said, watching the girl walk away, distraught. “Not that I’m complaining, of course.”

“You’re complaining,” said Harry, amused. “You just know better than to complain about it.”

“What?”

“I have no idea,” said Harry as he followed the class out of the classroom. “I was just trying to make conversation and you had to go and question my choice of said conversation. For shame, Ernie.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about,” said Ernie, somewhat confused. “How do you say complete nonsense and then turn it on me? It’s not fair.”

“It’s a skill you develop when you make it your life goal to argue with everyone,” said Harry, grinning. “It doesn’t work on Professor Snape or Dumbledore, but it works on everyone else.”

“Because they’re both observant?” said Ernie. “Not much gets by Dumbledore and almost nothing by Snape.”

“Because both of them know me far too well,” said Harry, amused. “Professor Burbage hasn’t ever spoken me outside of today, let alone see me, so she would be easy to confuse or push in the wrong direction.”

“Right,” said Ernie. “She’s marked your work so she knows you’re smart.”

“Don’t be another Granger,” said Harry as they stepped out of the gates. “She is smart as in a book sense, but you give her a problem without a book and she’ll stumble.”

“Was that a compliment?”

“Denying it would be stupid,” said Harry. “So, I guess, it was, in some small sense, a compliment. A backhanded compliment.”

“Please stop talking.”

“No.”

“Yes!”

“No,” said Harry. “I think I will just keep talking. I’ll even talk during the movie because that’s the real cinema experience.”
Ernie sighed and grabbed the Portkey, along with everyone else, and gave Harry one last annoyed look before he was tugged away.

“Everyone landed on their feet?” said Professor Burbage with an amused smile. “Excellent. Now, we’re going to have to walk towards the cinema and behave! No talking about magic, Hogwarts, or anything like that. I expect the older students to keep the younger students close by.”

Harry, who was unamused by Ernie knocking him over, stood up and brushed his clothes down. He muttered under his breath about clumsy Hufflepuffs and made his way towards the centre of the group, his eyes darting around at the random noises in the street.

“We’re in a Muggle alleyway,” he muttered to the girl next to him. “Did you know that almost ninety-five percent of all Muggle murders happen in alleyways?”

“W-what?”

“Muggles often drag their victims into dark alleyways, just like this one, and then mug them – stealing their money and possessions – and then kill them.”

“That’s not true.”

“It is,” said Harry. “Ask Professor Burbage. I’m sure she’ll tell you the exact same. Muggle alleyways aren’t safe for people like us. Young children that cannot defend themselves.”

“We can defend ourselves,” said the girl. “We have our –”

“Wands,” finished Harry. “Our wands that are back at the school. They have guns and knives. You’re finished if they decide to turn into this alleyway and decide that we look rather rich and want our stuff.”

The girl paled.

“Do you have to be so cruel?” said Hermione Granger, appearing from nowhere. “She was already frightened and you decide to rub it in even more! I’m sure she’ll never step foot into Muggle London ever again.”

“Granger, who is a Muggle-born, isn’t even denying it,” said Harry. “She knows it’s bound to happen, hence her defensive posture. She knows something will happen.”

“It does happen, but it won’t happen to us,” said Hermione. “And my defensive posture, as you put it, is because I want to hit you!”

“Try it.”

“Don’t fight!” said the girl.

“Yeah, Granger, we don’t want to fight in case a mugger comes to attack us,” said Harry as he walked away, pleased. “Be careful, ladies, you don’t want to be attacked because you fell behind.”

“Sit!” said Professor Burbage as she directed a pair of standing students towards some empty seats. “Anywhere, I don’t care, as long as it’s in this room.”

Harry snorted and allowed Ernie to drag him towards the very back. He liked where they were going to be sitting. It was at the back, under a small light, and had a great view of the screen.
“I assume the back is better than the front,” said Ernie. “Assuming it’s anything like school.”

“I agree,” said Harry, already hoping someone sat in front of them, hoping it would be Granger so he could kick her seat throughout the entire movie. “The lighting is often better up here.”

“Sure,” said Ernie. “The lighting is better. You have some kind of evil scheme going on, don’t you?”

“Evil?”

“Yes,” said Ernie. “And don’t give me that obviously fake hurt expression. I know you have a reason for sitting at the back. I’m just not sure what.”

“You have such a low expectation of me, Mr Macmillan,” said Harry. “All my plans and reasons for sitting at the back are honest and good and, just in case you’ve forgotten, you were the one to drag me towards the back.”

Before Ernie could even think of a response, the lights around the room dimmed and the screen flickered to life, showing an advert and a few warnings about rubbish and lowering voices. Of course, Professor Burbage was hard at work scribbling on a piece of Muggle paper, writing down everything she saw that happened.

Harry, on the other hand, instantly leant back and yanked the box of popcorn from Ernie.

“Hey!”

Harry shushed Ernie and continued to eat the popcorn. “The advert said not to speak,” he whispered. “So you best not speak. At all. Period.”

“Shut up,” said Ernie. “And I was designated as the popcorn holder.”

“And?” said Harry with a grin. “I am usurping your title of popcorn holder and claiming it as my own. No questions asked.”

“Really?”

“I said no questions,” said Harry. “You asked a question.”

Ernie glared and went back to watching the movie.

Harry remained relatively quiet during the first half of the movie, despite wanting to talk about what was and was not happening on the screen. He wanted to talk about the plot and how he, of all people, would have done it differently.

Most importantly, he wanted to ask why everyone seemed so engrossed in the movie. It was obviously made for younger children, not teens. He twisted his head, silently, when pinched and offered the bucket of popcorn to Ernie.

About three minutes into the movie, he and Ernie had developed a system where Ernie could ask for popcorn without actually asking. He was tired of said boy diving his hand into the bucket and snatching up a handful of popcorn without saying anything. The system worked and the only flaw was being pinched every two or so minutes.

Ernie was kind enough to pinch somewhere else each time. It was a small blessing.

Despite the system and the peace and quiet, he had questions that he wanted to ask as soon as he could. However, every time he went to ask, Ernie would shush him the second his lips parted in
“Alright,” he said with a huff. “This has annoyed me for far too long. Why’re you taking Muggle Studies when you’ve never really been inclined towards them at all?”

“Why are you?”

Harry glared. “I asked first,” he said in a whisper. “It’s common courtesy to answer the question you’re asked and not reply with another question.”

“Common courtesy,” mouthed Ernie, stifling a laugh. “You tell ’em first as I know you’re far more curious than I am. I can assure you my reasoning is nothing compared to yours.”

Harry glared and debated about dumping the bucket of popcorn onto Ernie’s head. He decided against it quite quickly as he really wanted to eat it.

“I am taking Muggle Studies because I would like to attempt to earn an ‘Outstanding’ on every N.E.W.T. that you can take,” he said. “The Muggle Studies N.E.W.T. can be taken by anyone, no matter whether they took their O.W.L.s or not. However, in order to take the O.W.L., you must actually attend the lesson.”

“I know how the O.W.L.s and N.E.W.T.s work,” said Ernie. “You can sit for your N.E.W.T.s at the Ministry of Magic, but you can’t sit for an O.W.L.”

“Do you know how many times we said ‘N.E.W.T.’ and ‘O.W.L.’?”

“Probably too much,” said Ernie. “Stop changing the subject.”

“I plan on dropping this subject, as well as a few others, in my sixth year,” said Harry. “I can still take the N.E.W.T. while at school, so it hardly matters. Aside from that, my schedule will remain almost the exact same from now until I’m in my sixth year.”

“You’re gonna take every class, aren’t you?” said Ernie with a sigh. “Why would you put yourself through so much stress and unneeded work? I mean, how many people have actually achieved thirteen ‘Outstandings’ on their N.E.W.T.s?”

“Six,” said Harry. “I will be the seventh.”

“You know that how?”

“Because only Granger and I are taking the classes for it,” said Harry. “We are the only people attending thirteen classes. I doubt she will take up Alchemy and Duelling in her sixth year, as I will be.”

“Right,” said Ernie, bored. “And how do you know that she won’t beat you in scores or draw the same amount of ‘Outstandings’?”

“Because she dropped Divination.”

“She did?” said Ernie, surprised. “I didn’t think she’d actually do something like that…”

“She can be very stupid at times.”

“Why do you hate her so much?”

“Because she’s throwing away her intelligence,” said Harry. “She’s smart in every sense of the
word. I’m far from ashamed in saying that she’s probably in the top three of our year, but she diminishes her potential by hanging around Longbottom and Weasley.”

“Wait a moment,” said Ernie, watching the movie for a second. “Why are you so off and on about her?”

“Because, as I just said, she is wasting her potential,” said Harry. “Longbottom is useless in every subject besides Defence Against the Dark Arts. He has no drive to better himself in any other subject besides that and it’s painful. Even if he wants to be an Auror, he’ll need to understand a lot of different potions, some basic healing spells, some warding spells, and a bit of curse-breaking.”

“A tough field,” said Ernie. “And what about Ronald Weasley?”

Harry made a disgusted sound. “He drags them both down,” he muttered. “I can understand him wanting to be friends with a famous person and an intelligent person, but he provides nothing for their friendship. Draco would never dare tell me that I couldn’t go study in favour of Quidditch. That is my issue with them. Granger and Longbottom would be so much better if it weren’t for Weasley.”

“So, your issue isn’t with Hermione Granger or Neville Longbottom, it’s with Ronald Weasley?”

“Don’t you even dare try and go all psychology on me!” said Harry. “It’s far more complicated than what I have said, but I detest Granger for limiting her potential and I will continue to jab at her until she realises it.”

“What if she never realises it?”

“If she’s still around Longbottom and Weasley in our fifth-year, then I will truly mourn for wasted talent.”

“Did everyone enjoy the movie?” said Professor Burbage once they were back in the classroom. “I hope you all remember what happened in the movie as you’re going to be writing an essay on it.”

“What!”

“Why?”

“No!”

“You don’t need to sound so distressed,” said Professor Burbage, laughing. “I did say this was your exam. I took in-depth notes and I will be handing them out next lesson. You have until the end of the year to complete the assignment and failing to hand it in is an instant ‘Troll’ and you will be removed from the class.”

Harry left the class amused. He knew that no one, not even himself, remembered anything about the movie they had watched. He spent almost the majority of the movie talking to Ernie and the other part wondering what Nagini had been doing.

He walked into Defence Against the Dark Arts twenty minutes late and took his seat without saying anything, despite the fact he was looked at questionably. He would wait until he was asked about why he was late. If the professor never asked why he was late, he couldn’t get in trouble.

Professor Lupin sighed and went back to folding his papers that had sat on his desk. He had planned for a surprise exam but then he realised that the students, besides a select few, wouldn’t be able to answer most of the questions.
It hardly helped that a few of the more brainy students were missing.

“Professor!” said Hermione as she entered the room, panting. “I apologise for being late—”

Professor Lupin put up a hand and silenced the girl instantly. “There is no need to apologise, Miss Granger,” he said as he gestured towards an empty seat next to Neville. “I would just like an expression as to why you and Mr Potter are both a good time late to the lesson.”

Hermione instantly began to explain that she had a note from Professor Burbage, who had taken them on a rather lengthy field trip into the Muggle world for the lesson. She pulled out her signed note and handed it to the professor, saying nothing.

“Your note excuses both you and Mr Potter,” said Professor Lupin, surprised. “I had no idea that both of you even took the class.”

“I wanted a different perspective,” said Hermione, unbothered by the inquisitive glance she received.

Professor Lupin looked towards the black-haired Slytherin. “As for you, Mr Potter, I could have sworn Lily would have taught you all about the Muggle world.”

“She did,” said Harry without a second thought. “We would walk through various parks each week and just spend time together. She would explain everything that was going on. Why are you so surprised, professor? You obviously know my mother, and she knows you, but you act like she would ever deny me something that I could learn. I was reading books when most other children were playing with blocks.”

“I never meant it like that.”

“Then how did you mean it?” said Harry. “Exactly. Please teach the lesson and quit trying to determine whether I’m using the knowledge of Muggles for some kind of dark and evil rituals.”

“Potter!” hissed Pansy. “Speak to me after this lesson. We need to start now! We’re running out of time.”

“Mr Potter,” said Professor Lupin, ignoring the whispers. “If I may ask, what did your Muggle Studies class do?”

“We watched a movie in a Muggle cinema,” said Harry. “A delightful experience. Muggles have improved in their ability to entertain. It may be a worth looking into. I’m sure the magical world would benefit greatly from movies.”

“What did you see?”

“The Lion King,” said Harry. “It has a pretty relevant message, honestly.”

“Oh?”

“Scar is obviously a Slytherin, or at least portrayed as one,” said Harry. “It doesn’t take a genius to realise that he’s evil, cunning, and somewhat ruthless. I am not repeating the plot, but it’s painfully obvious. Then there’s Simba, a Gryffindor to the core. The king of the lions. Brave, foolish. Whoever wrote the plot obviously based it on parts of the wizarding world. In some sense, I can see Scar as Voldemort, Simba as Longbottom, and Mufasa as Dumbledore.”

“Quite a theory.”
“Obviously,” said Harry, bored. “However, not everything is based on Hogwarts and the previous war. It does seem coincidental, though. It came out this year and the war is known history. Maybe a Muggle-born wrote the script.”

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry that this one took a bit longer. I've had a constant headache for the past week. I think I need glasses. I mean, I know I need glasses, but maybe I need-need them.
Harry exited the Defence Against the Dark Arts room as quickly as he had entered it. He leant against a nearby stone wall and watched as Draco followed behind Daphne Greengrass like a lost puppy that wanted treats.

It disgusted him that his best friend could be ensnared so easily and not put up much of a fight.

He knew that Slytherin wasn’t all political games like people assumed. He knew that most of them weren’t going to be awed because someone could cast an ancient spell or because their bloodline dated back to Merlin. All of that was irrelevant. Everything was irrelevant to Slytherins besides current ability.

Draco got to where he was by being an intelligent person. His family name had helped, somewhat, but that wasn’t the reason. Many children had no idea who Lucius Malfoy was. Why would their parents mention a threat? It was idiotic.

However, Slytherins were not stupid. They had an innate deceitfulness that made them excel in mind games. Cunning and deceit went hand in hand and that’s what Salazar Slytherin had been aiming for. Not dark or evil wizards. Cunning and political savvy wizards.

How Draco got hooked on Greengrass and fell into a trap was concerning. Draco, while not as intelligent and strong as him, was better at political manoeuvring than he’d ever be. That is why it was so concerning.

Whatever Greengrass had on Draco was massive.

At that current moment, he really wished to just slam Daphne Greengrass with the first curse that sprang to mind. He could do it and get away with it, too. He could propel her body off a tower and everyone would think it was suicide. He could do it easily and he wouldn’t bat an eyelid about it.

He would pull everything out of her head. Every little scheme. Every detail. Every insult. He would know it and he would then destroy her. Targeting Draco would be the last thing Daphne Greengrass ever did.

He went back to gently tapping the stone wall behind him in a gentle rhythm that he had never heard before. It was a calming rhythm that he would have to remember and hum it when he was annoyed,
angry, or just downright furious.

He was waiting for Pansy, who had given him one of her looks and he knew that their calming period had cooled. He would never say it out loud that Pansy was surprisingly intelligent. She had informed him that they would need to wait a brief period of time before they could attempt another assault against Daphne Greengrass. It, apparently, helped with suspicion and pushed them further away from the girl in question.

He had plans that he could use. Plans that he could use to frame other people in his steed, no matter who would be framed. Plans that he could use to easily destroy Greengrass and free his friend from her grip.

He had to be patient, though. He needed to know what Daphne Greengrass had on Draco and the Malfoy family before he struck. He couldn’t allow her to keep those memories, no matter what. This entire situation could have been over in a minute if she wasn’t wearing that stupid necklace. The Paranoia Curse would stop her meeting his eyes, or anyone’s eyes, and that was an issue. He could have just ripped the information from her head.

He needed to fix this himself. He needed to keep it hidden and keep it from spreading. Lucius would overact and cause a massive scene in the middle of the Ministry of Magic about honour and the rapidly falling status of those that don’t deserve magic.

It would be a tragedy. Lucius’s image would flicker and vanish in a second.

Narcissa would probably begin a plot to kill the entire Greengrass line. She wouldn’t even deny it, either. That was the typical Black approach to everything. The entire Black line had an issue where they couldn’t deny anything if they felt they truly did something.

He would protect his second family from public humiliation, no matter the cost.

He caught Pansy’s arm, gently, and twisted her towards him. He gave her a look and began leading her towards the first-floor. He knew where they could meet without being interrupted or spied on.

Many students had started a rumour that the portraits were under Dumbledore’s control, mainly Slytherin students, but this was far from true. You couldn’t control a portrait. It was impossible. They would report any suspected murder or plans to murder someone on their own free will. None of them wanted a young student to ruin their own lives. Of course, there were some portraits that would encourage murder.

He knew Pansy had questions that she wanted to ask, but she wouldn’t ask them until they reached their destination. He thrust open the door to Moaning Myrtle’s Bathroom and ignored the groan by Pansy, who realised where they were.

“Why here?” said Pansy the instant the door was closed. “After Longbottom and his posse used this last year, it has become a known spot where students plot things.”

“That’s nonsense,” said Harry as he walked towards the sink. “It’s just another thing people made up to deter said people from here. People are still making Myrtle out to be another Bloody Baron.”

“I don’t want to plot against Greengrass in a dirty bathroom!”

“It’s a good thing that we won’t be,” said Harry with a grin. “An oath won’t do anything besides grant me the satisfaction that your honour would be forfeit if you revealed this, but that’s nothing in the current age. An Unbreakable Vow is too extreme and I cannot cast it as we need another person —”
“Potter,” said Pansy, interrupting. “What did you just say about Wizarding Oaths?”

“Can we talk about it later?”

“No!”

Harry sighed and rubbed his temple, unsure on how he should explain this. If people just read books and put theory into test, he wouldn’t be explaining this issue. This one issue led to other issues that he didn’t want to explain at the moment.

“Back in the medieval days an oath, a Wizarding Oath as we now call them, was made when one party was serious and they were putting their honour on the line,” he said. “Back then, honour meant everything. Prestige was what a lot of dynasties sought and if one member broke an oath, their prestige would take a massive hit.”

“So, they’re nothing like Unbreakable Vows?”

“Not even close,” said Harry. “There’s an oath, an agreement, a contract, and then the Unbreakable Vow. That’s in order of severity. Many people say that breaking an oath will cause you to lose your magic – they usually then add something like ‘so mote it be’ on the end because they’re ignorant and aren’t creative.”

“Then they cast a spell. My dad’s done it.”

“Exactly,” said Harry, laughing. “It’s not possible to take magic. The Unbreakable Vow kills you in a painful manner. It causes your magic to eat at your body, but it doesn’t take your magic.”

“Alright,” said Pansy. “That’s nice to know, I guess. Why did people change the meaning and why has no one done any research?”

“Meanings of things change naturally,” said Harry. “There was a period of time where being magical was revered and then hated and then revered again. There was a period of time where magic was just that and had no labels. As for your next question, I’m going to quote Adolf Hitler. He says, ‘If you tell a big enough lie and tell it frequently enough, it will be believed.’”

“How is that relevant?”

“Because no one does research because they don’t feel they have to,” said Harry. “Think about it for a moment. When was the last time you actually questioned anything we learnt? How come ‘Wingardium Leviosa’ can make something float, but any other random string of Latin can’t? Words aren’t a part of magic.”

“I don’t know…”

“People see something written in a published book and believe that it has to be true because it’s written by a credible author. Just look at Lockhart.”

“He was somewhat convincing,” muttered Pansy. “He had everyone fooled.”

“That just backs up my point even further,” said Harry as he shifted towards the sinks. “I cannot bind you to any form of agreement as I don’t have the time to write one up, but if I hear even the slightest whisper of this I will come for you, no matter you are hiding. I don’t care if you’re cowering under Voldemort’s robe. I will blast him out of the way to get to you. Do I have your silence?”

“Sure,” said Pansy, unbothered by the threat. “We each demand each other’s silence on what’s going
Harry snorted. “Trust me,” he said. “What I have is worth much more than a simple schoolyard plot to take down some girl.”

“Yeah, right,” said Pansy, sniffing. “I’ll have you know that this is a very com – what the hell?”

“Don’t gape,” said Harry as the sinks submerged into the ground. “There’s no stairs, so you’re going to have to slide down. It’s safe, trust me. There’s a rather powerful Cushioning Charm at the bottom.”

Pansy didn’t have long to debate about going down as the sinks began to shift again. She sighed and jumped down the hole, praying that this wasn’t some kind of plot to kill her. She had heard Potter speaking in Parseltongue! She knew he was speaking it as she had heard Longbottom speak it in their second-year.

“You’re a Parselmouth?” she blurted out when she landed. “You – you! You can’t be a Parselmouth! You’re a half-blood…”

“So is Voldemort,” said Harry. “It’s stupidity to assume that Salazar’s line remained ‘pure’ for a thousand years. This is, of course, assuming you go by the laws that if your previous four grandparents are all pure-blood, you’re a pure-blood. Stupidity, as I said.”

“I’m not a blood purist,” said Pansy. “But it’s still surprising that you’re a Parselmouth. I mean, your father or mother must be related to Slytherin…”

“Actually,” said Harry with an amused grin. “I’m the first Potter to be able to speak Parseltongue. I’m not really an heir of Slytherin, despite the fact I appear on his tree.”

“I can’t believe this…”

Harry rolled his eyes and led Pansy through the recently renovated corridors of the Chamber. He had spent the previous year and a half fixing up the Chamber and making it as prestigious as it once was. He, of course, had done nothing regarding construction. He had listened to Salazar’s advice and sought out a few house-elves.

House-elves that Atieno had somehow acquired.

He listened as Pansy rambled on about how amazing and preserved the place was, which made him chuckle. He wouldn’t correct her, of course, he needed to keep as much as he could away from her.

“I can’t believe I’m the second ever person in a thousand years to step foot in here!”

“Actually,” said Harry. “Most of Salazar’s descendants didn’t attend Hogwarts, but one came and hid the Chamber when plumbing was added. So, technically, you’re probably about the tenth. Let’s see… There’s Tom Riddle, Ginevra Weasley, Myself, Longbottom, Lockhart, Weasley, and then you.”

“Weasley’s been in here!”

“Indeed. I removed the location from their minds, but they know they’ve been in the Chamber.”

“Right,” said Pansy to herself. “I still can’t believe this place is real… I was told it was a myth.”

Harry just shook his head and allowed the girl to ramble as he directed her through the maze-like
system he had implemented. Sadly, he couldn’t take credit for it all as Atieno had done all the spell
work, but it was extraordinary. A Parselmouth wouldn’t have any issues as the little snakes on the
walls would tell them where to go.

He didn’t really understand why Pansy Parkinson had such an awful record throughout the school.
Sure, he had participated in some of it and had a minor spat with her, but she wasn’t nearly as bad as
the entire student body made her out to be. Many first-year students had already heard about ‘Pansy
the Pug’ and treated her as if they’d be in the school for years.

Honestly, she hardly even looked like a dog. He knew Draco had an interest in the girl and Draco
wouldn’t settle for someone that looked like a dog.

He glanced at the portrait of Salazar Slytherin that protected the entrance and grinned. This was one
of Salazar’s more brilliant ideas. Many witches and wizards would expect the notoriously vain
Salazar Slytherin to have his portrait plastered somewhere in the Chamber. There were a few empty
portraits, as well.

He gently caught Pansy’s arm and twisted her away from the large, inviting archway that would
have led her to certain doom. Another one of Salazar’s genius ideas. Have death traps in the
Chamber. He grinned and turned towards the portrait of the man in question.

“Oh, mightiest of the four,” he said in his best impersonation of an old woman. “Please allow me
entrance into your fabled Chamber.”

“Be quiet, you little brat!” hissed Salazar with a soft, almost hidden sigh. “I will tell – oh, what is
this? What have I told you about bringing your lovers into our Chamber?”

“She’s not my lover,” said Harry, speaking before Pansy could. “We’re acquaintances.”

Salazar repeated the words, disbelief lacing his tone. “And Godric and I were the best of friends,” he
said. “I can think of no reason you would bring another person, a female, into our Chamber unless
she was a lover and you were trying to impress her.”

“Are you done?” said Harry. “You know why I brought her here. You’re not stupid.”

“You may not enter my fabled Chamber until you are being truthful.”

Harry muttered a spell under his breath and the portrait swung open, much to the distress of Salazar,
who was hissing about flaws. He knew that it could be abused, but no one would guess the spell and
even if they did, it wasn’t likely to work.

“I can’t believe he was so laid back,” said Pansy. “The portrait of him in the dungeons never speaks
as it’s believed that all he could speak was Parseltongue, but he always appeared so serious.”

“He’s anything but,” said Harry as he led her through the Chamber. “He’s nothing like what the
legends have painted him. I’m not saying his some misunderstood kitten that was starved and beaten
and only attacked in fear. The purpose of the Chamber isn’t known to anyone besides those that have
entered it in its prime.”

“I guess…”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Just be wary of Atieno,” he said. “I’m sorry, it’s Lord Atieno.”

“Who?”
“You’ll know who when you meet him,” said Harry. “He has taken refuge here and helped with the spells and building. I owe him a lot, really.”

Harry and Pansy had spent hours plotting and planning something that wasn’t just a schoolyard plot to take down an insipid girl. It had evolved and spread into a plot to take down her family, her life, and everything she loved.

Pansy had learnt rather quickly that the young boy sitting across from her had a malicious streak that she hadn’t ever seen. It wasn’t the sort of smile that appeared on certain faces when torture was mentioned, but the sort of smile that appeared when someone learnt they had ruined a life.

She was both intimidated and excited about the potential outcome of what they were doing. She also hated how calm Potter was when she knew what they were going to do. They would both remain quiet and never tattle, but it was still thrilling.

She also knew that after this plot, the closeness and friendliness they had formed would vanish. She had debated about dating Potter, and her parents approved, because of the potential power and prestige the boy would attain. Potter could leech his father’s fame, power, and prestige and usurp him and become Minister one day. It wouldn’t work, though. She knew this. Potter was far too observant and only really cared about his snake and Draco.

She couldn’t compete with either of them. It was pointless to even debate it.

“Are you ready?” said Harry as he shuffled about the papers on the table. “We should begin after dinner as that’d be the best time to strike.”

“Why then?”

“Because, Pansy, that’s when it’s easiest and most opportune time to strike without much issue,” said Harry with a slight glare. “We’ve been over this quite a few times. She does her nightly walk around the dungeons because, and I quote, ‘It’s safe there’. I mean, we figured this out a while ago when we studied the Paranoia Curse and the effects of it. She has to walk around to clear her head.”

“Right.”

Harry rolled his eyes and glared at the fourth-year Ravenclaw that looked at him curiously. “Your work looks decent,” he said calmly. “This is the last time I will ever look over it again, Parkinson. I’m only looking over it now because Longbottom has been farming points like a slave and we’re close to losing it this year. I don’t want to lose the House Cup because of your stupidity.”

He stood up, picked up his blank pieces of parchment, and walked away, leaving Pansy Parkinson alone in the library. He had a few hours until dinner. He wasn’t sure what he was going to do until then. Perhaps, maybe, he could speak to Nagini and see what she has to say about this situation.

Nagini, unlike anyone else, could be trusted with his secrets.

It didn’t take him long to find her, really. He knew where she liked to lurk around, frightening unsuspecting first and second-year students that seemed deathly afraid of her.

“Youngling,” hissed Nagini, displeased her secret location had been discovered. “Do you have nothing better to do? I was trying to rest, away from you humans, and yet you found me.”

Harry grinned and sat next to Nagini. “I’ll always find you, Nagini,” he hissed in reply. “Just like you’ll always be safe from other humans should they wish you harm.”
"I can defend myself, Youngling."

"I know," hissed Harry. "I, however, feel at ease when I know you are safe. Wizards should not be trusted, Nagini, you know this."

"I am one hundred percent sure I was the one who told you that, Youngling."

Harry shrugged, which infuriated Nagini to no end. He continued the idle discussion they were having, far from fazed by the lack of progress that it made to his end goal. Despite Nagini’s protests that no one was around, he continued to check and make sure now wandering students were near.

He knew full well that speaking Parseltongue in the middle of an open corridor was very different to speaking it inside the Slytherin common room, where it was somewhat safe and secure. Sure, both of them would have awful consequences if caught, but he was certain most Slytherins would take it better than any of the other houses.

Everyone knew that Voldemort was a Parselmouth and everyone who could speak it was claimed to be his reincarnation.

Longbottom, despite everything, was still suffering from the backlash of speaking it last year.

However, there would always be a few select few that adored the ability and even more that loathed it. It was the same for inside Slytherin. After Longbottom had spoken it caused a rift in the house that still hadn’t really been repaired. Some wanted to become Death Eaters, enthralled with the life that it once offered. Some wanted to just work mundane jobs and have a wife, children, and some pets.

No one, no matter who, claimed to be a Death Eater. It was something you earned, not called yourself. Anyone who did often found themselves friendless and without any sort of communication for extended periods. Voldemort was, and always will be, referred to as ‘You-Know-Who’. No Dark Lord, He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, or Voldemort in the Slytherin common room.

It was that respect that he one day hoped to achieve.

"Quit daydreaming," hissed Nagini. "I am rather tired of having a one-sided conversation."

Harry was a complete nervous wreck for the next few days. The deadline that he and Pansy had set regarding Daphne Greengrass was fast approaching. Everything was set and there was to be no more excuses. There would be no more excuses, no more delays. It was time.

Pansy had been thrilled, over the moon when she received a plain letter from her distant relative that worked for some shady Muggle company that specialised in human trafficking and kidnapping. She had quickly said that he had sent her a spell that could change your voice to anything. It was finicky and took some getting used to, but it worked.

He quickly learnt that this spell meant that she could belittle Greengrass and it could not be traced back to her. The only issue with the spell was that it couldn’t mimic someone else’s voice.

Despite the fact that everything had been planned for a while, he still felt that something important was missing. He had this gut feeling that something would go wrong and they would be caught and sentenced to Azkaban or expelled. Neither of those bothered him as his parents wouldn’t let him be taken to Azkaban, let alone the Malfoy’s, and being expelled meant he could just go to Durmstrang.

However, that sinking feeling was destroying him as he walked towards the Great Hall. Something
felt off and he wasn’t sure what was bringing that feeling to the forefront of his mind. He was aware that most people were watching him intently, whether that was because of what he was doing or because they always did and now he was doing something wrong. It hardly mattered, though.

He met Professor Dumbledore’s gaze, knowing that the headmaster knew something was going to happen. He knew the man was anything but stupid, especially when it came to the school. Of course, the previous years could add insult to the headmaster’s sanity, but nothing could have been done.

Who would’ve expected Professor Quirrell to be a host to Voldemort? It just seemed so unlikely that you would have been thrown in St Mungo’s Hospital for even daring to suggest such a thing. As for the supposed defences, anyone with half a mind knew they were nothing more than a decoy, a sense of easiness. They were a carefully devised trap. The Headmaster was cunning. He would give him that.

As for his second year, who could have predicted that would happen? Dumbledore wasn’t a Parselmouth, he couldn’t hear the Basilisk. A diary possessing people? Unheard of, especially in school.

No, until Dumbledore goes insane and starts spewing the first signs of dementia, he would not listen to the gossip. He knew, just as everyone else, that Dumbledore was the most powerful wizard in Europe, perhaps even the entire world. He would not be undone or made a mockery of by a school student in a school he ruled.

Pansy was his one and only weakness. He would deal with her as soon as he could without suspicion being placed on him. Slytherin did not follow a ‘we follow our own’ motto. A Slytherin would sell out another Slytherin if it meant they could climb some kind of ladder or prestige.

How dare Pansy even dare to think that he would allow her to come into his Chamber and retain the knowledge? How to open, access, and enter it. No. No. That was his Chamber and she would never remember the day she set foot inside of it. He would wipe it from her mind and leave nothing besides the fact that she plotted and acted alone on Greengrass. She would take the fall to ease his nerves.

Salazar and Atieno were nothing short of geniuses, even more-so considering their time. They had obscure knowledge that could rival Voldemort and Dumbledore combined. However, in his eyes, he was better than them. He wouldn’t say it to their faces, but he knew. He had devised, created, and perfected a spell that would be nothing short of perfection. It would become a new staple in a lot of circles.

A delayed Obliviate.

Oh, how he wished to coin this as his first ever spell that he invented. He was sure Dumbledore would go absolutely sparse if he learnt that a student had done something like this. He couldn’t, though. There was far too much room for abuse and the Aurors would have none of it. Not only that, but the spell wasn’t really created by him. He tweaked the spell, not created it.

‘And does that little titbit of information truly matter?’ said Tom, slightly amused. ‘You, and you alone, created the spell. Just because you used another person’s framework. Hardly removes the spell as yours.’

Harry ignored Tom, knowing that arguing was pointless as Tom only served to annoy him and make him question his own decisions.

‘You know that I am right,’ said Tom. ‘You know that I am always correct.’
Harry watched as the sun slowly went down, his posture getting tenser as each minute ticked by. He felt as if the previous few hours had been chopped, skewed, and distorted to the point where very little has made sense or seemed like it was out of place. Nothing seemed like it would be the same after this.

He had already weighed in the risk verse reward and he knew that Draco was worth it, he couldn’t help but feel stupid for going along with Parkinson.

“Is it time?” hissed Nagini. “Are you going to avenge the blond boy’s honour?”

Harry made choked sound. “Shush,” he hissed out, holding back a laugh at the sheer thought of what had been said. “You know that ‘the blond boy’, as you call him, would never allow me to defend his honour.”

“What he does not know does not concern him.”

Harry shook his head and left the room with a soft hiss to leave the poor rabbit alone, the same rabbit that somehow avoids everyone In Slytherin and finds a quiet place to hide. He honestly just wanted to leave before Nagini could make him question his decision and start thinking of things that could go wrong.

He was somewhat curious if all snakes had some sort of motherly drive to humans they had spent time with. Experts, which could either be true or false, said that most cats, dogs, and owls tended to develop a base instinct to protect or aid their owners in any way possible. Dogs would become your best friend. Cats would be a distant comfort that would ease your worry with its presence. Owls were owls and tended to affectionate in the oddest of ways. Snakes, however, didn’t seem to have that drive to develop an instinct to protect, at least in most cases.

Salazar had studied snakes for years and years. He had stated that most snakes were like humans. Some would be intelligent and be able to hold an hour long conversation, some would be able to communicate with the basics, and others would just hiss complete nonsense. He had also said that it was possible for a snake to understand basic human languages, much like cats, dogs, and owls.

He found himself standing at the entrance of the dungeons, his eyes snapping between people, searching. It appeared as if Pansy Parkinson was late. He would give her a few more minutes before he abandoned the plan. They had a very small window that they could act on and they didn’t have enough time to waste on standing around, doing nothing.

“Potter!”

Harry turned and caught sight of Pansy, who was lurking near a corner. He wanted to sigh.

“Are we going to do this now?” said Pansy, stalking around the corner with a determined expression on her face. “We’re running out of time to do something. She’s already talking with Astoria.”

“You’re the one that’s delaying us, Parkinson,” said Harry, scowling. “It’s you that’s delaying us.”

The two of them walked towards where Daphne Greengrass supposedly was. With how the day went, they were sure that something would go wrong and that she wouldn’t be where they thought she would. It had happened a few times before, at least during their planning phase.

Harry knew that she where they were heading. He had already checked with a few people and they said that she had been going there for a few days. He even spoke with her sister, Astoria, so it looked somewhat legit. He made sure that no one could follow him, but he showed some interest in her. A
fully clean record was worse than a somewhat stained one.

Dumbledore would be far too curious if he hadn’t involved himself in the inner workings of Slytherin, which was almost non-existent. He knew the old man would be on this in an instant, showing far too much interest in it.

He wasn’t frightened, though. Whether Dumbledore was here or not, he would do it.

“Come on,” he muttered towards Pansy, who was lagging behind. “I thought you would be more thrilled for this, Pansy, but you’re not. You’re slowing slipping further and further behind. Are you nervous?”

“I’m not nervous, Potter,” hissed Pansy, annoyed. “I’m just thinking.”

“‘Thinking’? repeated Harry. “You’re just thinking? Thinking about what?”

“About what we’re going to do and how we’re going to do it,” said Pansy. “I’m not sure how you’re so calm! This is ridiculous –”

“What’s ridiculous?” said Daphne, sniffing. “I mean, aside from your family and poor social standing. Has any boy even showed interest in you yet? We’re thirteen now, Parkinson. You best get a move on.”

“Unlike your family, mine don’t condone loveless marriages!”

“My parents’ marriage was far from loveless,” said Daphne, glaring. “No family does marriage contracts anymore. We haven’t done those in hundreds of years.”

“No one said they married from a contract!”

“You did!”

“I did not!”

“You did so,” said Daphne. “I know what you’re implying and it’s petty of you.”

Harry sighed and rubbed his forehead. Of course, the plan went to trash the instant the two girls saw each other and started verbally attacking each other. Once he heard Daphne speak, he just wanted to begin and not dance around in circles. The less she saw and heard, the better.

‘You should have just done it yourself,’ said Tom. ‘It would have been over and done with by now and you would not be going through this nonsense.’

‘I need Pansy,’ thought Harry, directing it towards Tom. ‘She’s a core part of this plan.’

‘You can do everything by yourself,’ said Tom. ‘There may be no I in team, but there is an M and an E. If you put them together, you get ‘me’.’

‘And?’

‘And I want you to parrot these words and use them in the future,’ said Tom. ‘You cannot and should not rely on anyone else. If they fail the task, you fail the task. Their incompetence and inability to complete even the simplest tasks should be obvious.’

‘Pansy Parkinson was required for a distraction,’ thought Harry. ‘I would’ve done it myself if she wasn’t a requirement to distract Greengrass.’
‘Your distraction only earned you enough time to speak to me,’ snapped Tom. ‘I am certain that everyone calls Slytherins, which is your House, the house of the cunning. I can think about ten other ways that you could have done this.’

‘How do you expect a bunch of kids in school to be cunning? Most of the students in Slytherin are just playing politician. None of them would last a minute in Lucius Malfoy’s shoes. That’s a fact and I can assure you that many of these kids aren’t even going to bother seeking anything political after school.’

‘I see your point,’ said Tom. ‘You claim to be different to them and yet you act like them. The Greengrass girl is pulling out her wand. Be ready.’

Harry really hated Tom at times. Speaking to the man was a complicated task that took way too much effort and time to achieve. He knew that Tom could understand everything he said but refused to respond unless the thought was directed at him directly.

“Now, Greengrass, you don’t need to pull out your wand,” he said, chuckling. “Put it away.”

Pansy jumped in surprise and narrowed her eyes towards Daphne’s hand, which contained her wand. She pulled out her own wand and adopted a defensive stance, one her father would use when threatened.

“Potter,” said Daphne, turning to the boy that just spoke. “I thought you would have better things to do rather than following around Parkinson like a lost puppy. Maybe you’ve run out of people to lock in the Shrieking Shack.”

“Are you still harping about that, Greengrass?” said Harry, grinning. “The Aurors I spoke to dismissed your attempt at a story as a petty attack on my person and fined your father for attempted blackmail. I swear you were asked to drop it and stop accusing me.”

“We all know that you’re wrong,” said Daphne. “You only got off because your father is an Auror and took pity on you.”

“If you had a double digit IQ, you’d know that he can’t have done anything regarding it as it’d be a conflict of interest,” said Harry. “This is why they ignored whatever story you made up because you’re delusional.”

“What are you doing, Daphne?” said Pansy. “I was talking to your sister and I learnt some pretty interesting things.”

Harry zoned the conversation out. He kept a close eye on Daphne’s hand that contained her wand but ignored a lot of what was being said. He realised far too late that he could have been pulled into a trap and neither he nor Pansy would have noticed. They were too focused on the objective to see any signs.

There wasn’t much reliable information on the Greengrass family. Every time Pansy said something about them, it would change in a few days. He didn’t know how to plan or react when his information was skewed and mostly incorrect.

Slytherins had this particular mentality where they had to be seen as better than everyone else. They got upset because they think that’s what Salazar wanted and planned for his House. He had learnt that the four founders covered everything, at least at the time.

Godric was probably stronger than Salazar, at least magically, but no Slytherin student would ever admit this, even though Salazar has admitted himself. Salazar simply held his own due to the sheer
amount of obscure spells he knew and created.

This all tied into the current event because Slytherins fighting Slytherins should not happen. Ravenclaw had debates, but not fights. Hufflepuff had disagreements, but not fights. Gryffindor had arguments, but not fights. Slytherins had, well, no one really knew because it was like fighting fire with fire. Someone ended up burned and then it became a mass panic when information was slung around.

“Potter,” hissed Pansy, annoyed. “Would you pay attention instead of daydreaming?”

“I’m obviously thinking, Parkinson,” muttered Harry. “You two arguing with each other is a headache waiting to happen. I am trying to prevent that.”

“Trouble in paradise?”

“Shut up, Greengrass,” shouted Pansy, enraged. “You couldn’t pay me to date him!”

Harry blinked and listened as the two girls began attacking him. He listened to it for a couple of seconds before he hit Greengrass with a curse that sent her flying towards a nearby wall.

“Now,” he said, twirling his wand in his palm. “If you’re done having your gossip session, I have things to discuss. Seeing as Parkinson is as useful as a wet piece of parchment, I need to do everything myself.”

“Hitting a lady, Potter?” said Daphne. “I thought your mother would’ve taught you better.”

“A shame that I’m not actually hitting a woman,” said Harry. “And, before you get smart, you’re not a lady, either. I used a spell on you, which isn’t against any rules nor is it considered violence against a woman.”

“You used a spell that picked me up and then threw me at the wall.”

“And, let me guess, you got a small cut on your arm and now you’re pleading abuse?” said Harry. “Please, Greengrass, I’m not thick. You’re not going to guilt trip me into feeling sorry for you.”

“It is abuse,” said Daphne. “It’s called magical abuse, Potter. It has nothing to do with gender, as you’re trying to imply. You’re horrid with words. You’re all brute force. People seem to think you’ll be the next Minister of Magic. The ambition, the intelligence. They’re wrong. You’ll become some sort of demented Auror that’s seeking fame, fortune, and a title that you will never achieve.”

“Are you done?” said Harry. “I was enjoying your rundown of my character. Where did you hear all this information, though? No one has ever said I would be the next Minister of Magic.”

“Not to your face,” said Daphne. “They don’t respect you enough to say anything of the sort to your face. People tolerate you simply because they believe you’ll be something special one day and they want in.”

“Is that so?”

“Just look at Parkinson,” said Daphne, laughing. “She could have asked a sixth-year to aid her and not you. She only did, even though she hates you because her father told her to. ‘You should try to start a friendship with that Potter brat’.”

“Did you honestly think I would be annoyed or upset by that, Greengrass? Did you think that your petty attempt at making upset would work and I would lash out and strike you with another spell?
Do you really believe me to be so transparent? You did! How pleasant. No, I’m going to be doing it all mentally. I see your panic. Aurors won’t check for mental tampering because almost no one can do it. It’s not custom. Potions, yes. Imperius, yes. Legilimency? Nope.”

“Everyone knows that you’re a Legilimens! Dumbledore will expose you instantly.”

“But the Headmaster can’t actually use Legilimency on you. He requires your consent,” said Harry. “They’re allowed to scan your surface thoughts if they believe you’re planning to commit murder or hurt people, but they have to do a lot of paperwork for it. They can’t actually go into your head.”

“My father could request it —”

“He’s not you,” interrupted Harry. “They require your consent. They could ask me, as I am your age and not bound by the rules of the school, but I couldn’t. We hate each other, Greengrass, you made that clear. If I go into your head, it would be excruciating for you, which could make it worse. Dumbledore won’t allow that.”

“Pansy, I can’t believe you – Pansy?”

“She’s gone,” said Harry. “Delayed Obliviate. I made it. She will believe we were studying, which we have been doing. She creates an alibi for me. Smart, right? No one to interfere or get in my way. How dare you even attempt to take Draco away from me?”

“Is that what this is about?” said Daphne. “You’re jealous that he found someone else to spend his time with? You’re angry that he’s branching out?”

“You’re blackmailing him,” said Harry. “He stopped talking to me period. He was forced to sneakily drop letters on my desk to let me know that you’re plotting something. I haven’t seen him in months and you’re going to answer for that.”

“This is priceless.”

Harry grabbed Daphne’s head and forced it backwards. He stared into her eyes and waited for the hook feeling before he was swept away into her mind. It was bland, boring. It was just like everyone else’s. All he saw was fleeting wisps of memories that were trying to flee.

He could sense fear, happiness, sadness, a small sense of smugness, and a whole onslaught of other emotions that would take hours to decipher. The emotions were leaking from the memories, causing a trail to appear that he could easily follow to the correct memories. Most memories those that were open and kind would lurk near the edges of the mind. The edge of the mind was nothing more than a watery looking orb that had swirling dark grey sifting through it.

It was a beautiful sight if you really thought about it. The mind was a beautiful place.

His goal was to track a memory that could relate to Draco and then push it against the wall, causing it to replay in Daphne’s head. It was far more complex than that, though. Every mind was different and that meant that every mind worked in a unique way. Some people could recall an event in perfect clarity, others, however, required a push to remember it.

He really did need to study Legilimency and the mind. It was something no one had ever looked into.

He moved through a few trails, searching. It was a long, tedious search, but he made progress. After what appeared like hours, he found the memory, which was hidden deep in the centre of the orb, protected by the depth.
“Let’s see what you’re hiding.”

“Daddy, I do not think this is a good idea,” said Daphne, barely whispering. “Potter will react and not in the way we want him to. You do not understand how overprotective of Malfoy he really is. He treats Malfoy like a small kitten or someone he must protect. He locked me in that haunted building and then laughed.”

“A harmless prank, perhaps?” asked the tall man, curious. “I remember James Potter, the boy’s father, being a well-known prankster that often did things that toed the line. This type of behaviour is nothing new for the Potter line. Fleamont was the same, honestly. Potter could be following in his father’s footsteps.”

Daphne shook her head. “Potter does not do pranks, daddy,” she said. “He did it maliciously. He led me there with Malfoy and then coerced me into going in there. I did it because Malfoy commented on how he liked his girls brave. I did not expect Potter to lock me in there and then leave.”

“We should contact the Aurors,” said a short brown-haired woman. “This has gone on too far! That boy, he put our daughter’s life at risk.”

“We will contact the Aurors but that does not mean they will do anything about it,” said the man. “If what James Potter said is to be believed, his son is talented, gifted beyond normal circumstances. A natural Occlumens? He could lie to their faces and not even blink. I also cannot demand Veritaserum as it happened on the school grounds.”

“The Ministry?”

“Would just put him on a pedestal and label him a prodigy,” said the man. “The Minister wants the boy for publicity and will not hamper that with petty accusations. That boy could kill someone and I am certain Cornelius Fudge would give him Order of Merlin for it. James Potter is also helping his son stay in a good light, no matter what the boy may do.”

The brown-haired woman thought for a second. “You don’t think that the boy is You-Know-Who?” she whispered the title with fear. “Dumbledore –”

“Would have already got rid of the boy if that were the case,” said the man. “I am sure he is suspicious, but he will not act on it unless the boy shows his true colours. I also do not believe that You-Know-Who would return as a Potter. Not to mention that the boy is far too reliant on the Malfoy brat, which is something that You-Know-Who would never do.”

“What do we do?”

“We need to keep Potter and Malfoy separate,” said the man, turning to his eldest daughter. “Potter will catch on and he will come for you. I doubt he will come for with lethal force, but you must be ready to try and turn it on him. If what you have said is true, he will be easy to provoke. Daphne, darling, please be careful and make it on your terms. Do not let Potter set the field.”

“I can do that,” said Daphne. “What about Draco?”

“You need to work on him some more,” said the woman. “Lucius and Narcissa are suspicious.”

“Alright,” said Daphne. “Anything else, mum?”

“Lucius and Narcissa are denying all requests we have made,” said the man, taking over for his wife. “You have done a wonderful job at keeping him at your side and not allowing him some freedom but
keeping it on your terms. Lucius is suspicious, however. I believe Potter has told him something and this causing all three of them to become defensive.”

“Potter blabbed?” said the woman. “That goes against his character. We were certain he would have remained quiet and done it all on his own.”

“I am certain he kept this quiet,” said the man. “No, I believe Lucius and Narcissa just read between the lines and figured that something was off. This was our fault for pushing a bit too quickly.”

Harry continued to sift through various memories until he came to a stop with new information. All the memories clicked together and formed a rather morbid and disgusting story about a desperate girl that wished to please a father that obviously hated her. He felt angrier and angrier with each memory that he had viewed, the emotions attached to them hardly helped.

He took a deep breath, willing himself to calm down before he did something stupid like curse the girl. He narrowed his eyes and looked down, taking note of the girl’s appearance. She looked like she had run a marathon through the desert without water or a wand. That’s what happened when someone who hated you used Legilimency.

He watched as blood slowly dribbled down her chin and drip onto her already blood-stained robes. She was bleeding from her nose, mouth, and the various nail marks he had left on her cheeks when he gripped her face in anger.

“Stupid girl,” he muttered as he kicked her leg out of the way. “Trying to appease a man that doesn’t love you for a boy that would never love you? How could you be so idiotic?”

He ignored Daphne’s blabbering and leant against the wall. He twirled her wand in his hand and shook his head. “You won’t be needing this anymore, will you?” he said as he tucked it into his waistband. “A trophy. I deserve this. I deserve to keep your wand for – a wand for a life.”

After a few minutes of debating, he draped the invisibility cloak over Daphne’s body and levitated her behind him. He waved a quick hello to a few younger students and smiled when they told him that Draco Malfoy was searching for him.

Things were looking up already.

He pulled the cloak from Daphne’s body and hurled her at the Slytherin table with a gentle flick of his wand. He ignored the blood splatter and summoned a knife from the kitchens. With a few quick motions, he cut her arms and placed the knife in her hands.

“A tragic tale,” he said as he repositioned her body into a more natural and less thrown manner. “The boy she loved left her and, in her sadness, she attempted to take her life. The pain left her delirious and she retreated into her mind to avoid said pain. Her magic unknowingly kept her alive, and now she’s nothing more than a waste of oxygen. Have a nice day, Daphne.”
“This situation is nothing short of a repulsive display inner house unity. I am sure this is not what Salazar Slytherin had in mind when he created this school. A member of your own House is in the hospital wing without a single emotion, thought, or ability to do even the smallest action and all of you just stand there in silence.”

Harry glanced upwards, looking at his Head of House with a blank look. He studied the professor, who looked like he was one piece of bad news away from just snapping and cursing any and every one that was in sight. He was curious on why Professor Snape seemed so intent on solving this issue as quickly as possible.

He leant back and sighed softly, knowing that this questioning, scolding, and general incident would last well into the night. He felt sorry for the first-year students, however. They looked like they were on the verge of tears.

“I was truly hoping we would resolve this issue before the Headmaster decided that he would take the matter into his own hands,” said Professor Snape. “I may have been able to convince him that the perpetrator was not from Slytherin if anyone of you acted like you showed even a slight glimmer of emotion to the demise of a girl. I can see it in your eyes. Every single one of you disliked the girl for some reason and you are glad she is out of the way. She annoyed you, stole something of yours, or took someone away from you. Does it truly matter when the girl has essentially been murdered?”

Harry watched as Professor Snape muttered something about Azkaban and then swept from the room in an angry fashion. He wondered who would speak up first. Someone would, most likely one of the prefects.

Only a few people had been awake and somewhat ready for the day when Professor Snape had stormed in, pulled out his wand, and cast some spell that pulled students out of bed and into the common room. If the spell didn’t wake you up, the screams of students that realised that was in their bedclothes or naked would have.

“What the heck is going on?” muttered a boy as he grabbed a nearby sheet and wrapped it around himself. “There better be a good reason why I was forced out of bed, completely naked, and made stand in the middle of a common room. I didn’t fancy being shouted at today.”

“Why are you even sleeping naked?” said a girl, laughing. “I didn’t realise you boys were so close.”

“From what I have gathered,” said Harry, cutting off the conversation. “Daphne Greengrass was supposedly attacked somewhere in the castle. Professor Snape mentioned the Great Hall. Because it’s now custom, the professors suspect one of us did it.”

“God,” said the same boy as before. “Did anyone in here even do it? I didn’t like the girl, you know, she abused my little sister because she was sorted into Ravenclaw and answered something correctly
when she didn’t, but I doubt anyone would attempt to kill the daft girl.”

“Of course none of us did anything to her,” said a nearby girl. “Judging by the damage, it was someone that’s older and more proficient with magic. I don’t know why anyone below seventh-year is even here. Regardless, it can’t have been any form of dark magic because it would have been noticed way before now.”

“What about the portraits?”

“They didn’t see anything,” said a boy. “Neither did the ghosts.”

Harry decided he would remain quiet and allow the other students to ponder what actually happened. There was no real reason for him to speak, anyway. His main focus point would be on Draco, who appeared to be slightly paler than usual.

‘I have my theory on what the girl was doing,’ said Tom. ‘If you would hear it.’

Harry rolled his eyes but would allow Tom to speak, not that saying no would keep the voice quiet.

‘Quite right,’ said Tom. ‘Now, I believe that the girl, Daphne Greengrass, was using something magical on your friend. Maybe something that gave off an aura of easiness around her – much like the necklace, yes. It is possible to apply magical attributes to objects, such as, let me think, your wand. That is just an ordinary piece of wood imbued with potent neutral magic. Your wand will never leave or detest you, no matter what you decide to do, as it cannot. I am no wandmaker, of course, but I have my theories…’

Harry, not at all interested, made vague sounds in his mind that he was indeed interested. All this was going over his head, really. He had no idea how this situation was linked to a wand or ‘potent neutral magic’. In every source he had that he had read over the years, whether it be in a book written by a proclaimed light wizard or even a dark wizard, no one had even muttered the existence of light, dark, and neutral magic.

‘You are missing the point,’ said Tom. ‘You need to open your mind and think about things. You live in a world where the possibilities are endless. You live in a world where you and only a few select others can say a few words and move around a stick and make something float. You have Seers, potions to cure things that the non-magical populace still cannot cure instantly, and creatures that can make you instantly happy if you are near them.’

‘Of course,’ thought Harry, understanding exactly where Tom was going with his argument. ‘Those things took decades to think about and create. We can stop Muggle diseases, but we can’t stop our own. Dragon Pox, for example, has killed how many people? We’re still not even close to a cure because we just don’t have the – I don’t know. It just can’t be cured at this point. We found cures for Muggle diseases while making a cure for Dragon Pox. It was all accidental.’

“Hey, Potter!”

Harry turned around and stared directly at the straw-haired boy, better known as Theodore Nott. “Nott,” he said as he rubbed his chin. Slytherin students were hot and cold with how they greeted you. One day it would be your first name, and then other days it would be your surname. “Do you need something?”

“I don’t need anything,” said Nott. “I have some information and I think you could use it.”

“You think I could use it?” said Harry. “What makes you think I care in the slightest for this situation?”
“I do sleep in the same dormitory as you,” said Nott. “I’m not saying you’re influential, but you are the Quidditch Captain and that does warrant you some respect. People are going to listen, whether it’s just for a moment or for the entire thing, to what you say. For a small piece –”

“You’re trying to extort me?” said Harry, scoffing. “What makes you think I don’t already know what you’re pushing for? What makes you think I desire to exploit a situation I have no interest in? Whoever did it won’t come forward and the headmaster cannot use means to make people talk. There is nothing any of us can do regarding this situation.”

“I didn’t mean it like that,” barked Nott. “I meant, what if you exploit the situation and turn it onto another House. Gryffindor.”

Harry snorted and debated it for a moment. He knew it could work and it working would be good in his favour. He could use the small amount of influence he had to turn Slytherins against Gryffindors, which would happen whether he influenced it or not.

“It has merit,” he muttered. “But what does provoking a childish rivalry do for me?”

“As you know, if you read the Pure-Blood Directory, which my ancestor wrote, you would know that the Nott line is famous for being successful tacticians,” said Nott as haughtily as he could. “I just have this feeling that this is the best course of action. I’ve had this feeling for ages.”

“Right.”

“We’re not Seers,” said Nott. “We can’t predict what’ll happen.”

“But you have this ‘feeling’ that I should jump on a table, clear my throat, and then spout off nonsense about how it was Gryffindor that attacked our Housemate.”

“No need to be sarcastic,” said Nott. “You’re a Potter in Slytherin, Quidditch Captain, friends with a Malfoy, and top of the classes. People are going to listen to you, even if you rambled and talked nonsense. Think about Dumbledore.”

“Dumbledore, while somewhat insane, is still the Headmaster of the school and getting to that position is harder than becoming the Minister of Magic,” said Harry. “Also, don’t compare me to Dumbledore.”

“Just think about it.”

Harry exhaled air through his nose and watched as Nott turned and left with a confident stride. He had no desire to think about fuelling a child feud between two Houses.

A week went by without many issues. The Aurors were still all over the school, as per usual, the Dementors that had been distant remained so, and the professors were on high alert, deducting points and assigning detentions when someone sneezed.

However, while everything may have been calm in the Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, and Ravenclaw common rooms, the Slytherin common room was filled to the brim with excitement.

An overconfident Theodore Nott stood in the middle of the common room, his feet plastered directly in the middle of the small table he was standing on. He waved his arms around, almost excitedly, as he spoke to all the Slytherin students in the room. He easily spoke of the conflict between Gryffindor and Slytherin, shouting, demanding, and easily manipulating the students into believing what he was saying.
To Harry, it was amusing to see how Nott had decided to take his own path and utilise the advice that he had tried to give out to other people. It was rather odd, though. While he wasn’t best friends with Nott, he would had to have been blind to not see the changes in the boy, especially when they shared a dorm and classes every day and had done for three years.

Another issue was how charismatic Nott was. The boy was more bookish than him and this unnerved him. He, himself, was hardly charismatic, especially not how Nott currently was. Not only that, but the boy was speaking as if it was already a real war, not like a simple house rivalry. It was confusing and aggravating at the same time.

‘You are angry that another boy has gone under the radar?’ said Tom, amused. ‘That is awfully simpleminded of you. No one is who they say they are. No one.’

Harry ignored Tom and continued on his musing, keeping a close eye on Nott and how he spoke. Something was off and he would prove it by the end of the year. He had the memory to prove it if the boy did anything suspicious. The boy, just like Pansy, would be somewhat of a threat down the road with all the dirt they had on him.

Pansy was taken care of, but Nott…

‘Theodore Nott will be far more of a threat than Pansy Parkinson,’ said Tom. ‘The girl was much less intelligent, cunning, and manipulative. The boy had you all fooled.’

“Harry! Stop zoning out for a second!”

Harry turned to see Draco, who seemed to look healthier and healthier as each day went by. It did make sense, though. He wasn’t really sick or cursed, most likely just exhausted and annoyed that he had somehow been trapped into someone else’s web of deceit.

“Yes, Draco,” he said as calmly as he could manage, ignoring the comment about zoning out. “What do you need?”

“What’s your opinion on this?” said Draco, gesturing discreetly at the situation in front of them. “This is something I never thought I’d witness.”

“Something about it seems to fit together,” said Harry. “No matter how much I think about it, nothing adds up. Quiet loner, better known as Nott, somehow finds the courage to speak out against another House and trying to pin everything on everyone. You know Nott, and so does your father, how out of character is this?”

“You’re right,” said Draco. “I know. I was asking because I’ve been out of it for a while and I thought maybe I’d missed something that happened – guess not. You really should read the Sacred Twenty-Eight and not skim over it like you’re prone to doing. I know it takes a while —”

“Draco.”

“Fine,” said Draco, muttering. “The Sacred Twenty-Eight seems to change each generation, no matter what happens inside the families. If I recall right, the Sacred Twenty-Eight is due to change sometime next year, a rewrite in progress…”

“Could that be why Nott’s on this spree of charismatic leadership?” said Harry, tilting his head. “Maybe he thinks that if he tries to become a leader – someone everyone’ll look up to – his family name will continue the good standing.”

“That… that works,” said Draco. “The Nott’s are usually the ones that write the book, whether it’s
called the Sacred Twenty-Eight or the Sacred Hundred. It all makes sense. However, why now?’

Harry thought on it for less than a second, still trying to piece it all together. He couldn’t piece it together, no matter how hard he thought. As per usual, Tom provided no helpful input.

“The real concern is: why are these things happening,” he said, squinting at Nott. “First we had Parkinson, who got far too interested in Greengrass and practically started to murder or bully the girl from the school – over what, I have no idea. Then we can go back to Greengrass, who seemed to be determined to somehow take over control of you, which would gain her nothing, on the orders of her father, who I learned isn’t her father, who… is her father… And now we have this.”

“A lot of the stuff about Greengrass and her family would make sense if you read the Sacred Twenty-Eight.”

“Yes, Draco, I know,” said Harry calmly. “However, I don’t have the time or patience right now to slog through almost a thousand pages of praise and gossip on families that have done nothing to me… or to you, for that matter.”

“The Sacred Twenty-Eight is far more than just that,” muttered Draco. “A lot of people treat it like the Muggle bible. It’s almost a religion and only people like the Weasley’s find being in it repulsive because it outs all their secrets. That’s what makes it so distinct and useful to have.”

“It’s a glorified gossip rag,” said Harry. “The Weasley’s detest their position and status as a pure-blood, but they still maintain that position without much fanfare. They banished their own family member for being a Squib. Banished, not just dismissed or kept in a separate, smaller house. Banished. If I want to learn about someone in a family, I will learn about them solely. I do see how the book would be useful for politics.”

“Just politics?”

“Yes,” said Harry simply. “This whole situation is just another child’s attempt at playing politician… another failure of an attempt at being a leader. I know how this situation with Nott will go down. He will start something he cannot control – he will lose focus and fall. Eventually, this will come crashing down on him and he will not know what to do because he’s –”

“Stupid?”

“Thirteen,” said Harry. “If I have learned anything from watching your father, reading books, and studying the current Minister for Magic, it’s that it takes a veteran to handle the basics of political movement. Everyone can dip their fingers in the political fudge, but only those seasoned enough can lie about not doing so, even with fudge over their fingers.”

“I, uh, see,” said Draco, somewhat confused. “I see now why you don’t give speeches.”

“Words can be rather scathing,” said Harry, his eyes narrowing. “Actions… actions have more severe and lasting consequences. I would rather be doing what I’m saying rather than standing on a small table in the middle of a room squeaking about them.”

“You’re directing that at someone,” said Draco. “Nott? Seriously?”

“He came to me,” said Harry. “He came to me, preaching that same nonsense he’s going on about now. He wanted me to do what he’s doing. I wish I knew what he was doing – his end goal. But, believe it or not, he was trying to manipulate me, as if I wouldn’t see it coming.”

“Potter,” said Nott, his arms dropping to his side. “You’re not finding my speech enlightening?”
“Should I be?”

“I would think so,” said Nott, laughing. “It’s not very… ambitious of you to not want the best for your House, is it? We all listen to what few Quidditch speeches you have given without falling into idle chatter, yet you can’t do the same for us.”

‘Something is very, very different with this boy,’ said Tom. ‘I would advise against antagonising him, especially when half the students around you are enthralled by his every word. In time, duel him. Knock him off his self-claimed pedestal and take that for yourself. Be cautious, however, as you cannot engage without thinking and planning.’

‘I’m not stupid!’

‘You had me fooled,’ said Tom. ‘You must create a stalemate until you can speak to Lord Atieno or, preferably, Salazar Slytherin. Antagonise him, but do not do it to create a magical conflict. You must put him in his place, keeping yourself at the top, but act like you are not there. Allow him to think he is the leader. Allow him to think he is above you. He is not, of course, but he must believe he is.’

“I thought you were planning something,” said Harry, leaning against a nearby wall. “All you’re doing is standing in the common room, shouting that you’ve got something planned and yet… I don’t see you doing anything. A member of our own House was attacked and nearly killed, and you’re doing nothing but ranting and raving about doing something. You’re all talk.”

‘Tread carefully,’ said Tom. ‘I said antagonise, not attack.’

“Talk?” repeated Nott. “Okay! Everyone, Potter thinks this is all talk but it’s – we’ll meet here, tomorrow, and go over it more. We will act tomorrow.”

“Harry! Harry! Stop, for God’s sake! Are you sure about this?” said Draco, spinning his friend around with as much force as he could. “Are you one hundred percent sure that you want to… to affiliate yourself with such nonsense? I mean, do you even know what Nott’s got planned? I can contact my father…”

“He isn’t planning much,” said Harry. “I promise that he’s not gonna do anything too stupid. I have money on the fact that he’ll spout off a bunch of gibberish, do a few school pranks, and then act like we won. You know how he is and this is nothing new. You don’t do a complete personality flip overnight.”

“Oh,” said Draco, thinking back to a few people that had seemingly changed their personalities overnight. “Weak point, but I’ll let it slide.”

“Excellent,” said Harry. “Nott’s thirteen, though. He isn’t a threat and there’s nothing that he can do that will surprise anyone.”

“So are we.”

“And?”

“You’re thirteen, too,” said Draco, stressing it. “You’re younger than him and you know far more at your current age than he will ever know. You are pretty much a walking barrier that deflects the excuse of age and knowledge.”

“Thanks, I guess,” said Harry, smiling. “But the point still stands for everyone else. It should only help back up that I know he has nothing too horrid planned.”
“Don’t mention it,” said Draco, sighing. “Now, how’re we going to handle this whole Nott situation? Yes, Harry. I said we, so don’t give me that look.”

“Did I imply that you couldn’t join?” said Harry. “I thought it would be odd if the Malfoy heir didn’t attend this breathtaking event.”

“Well,” said Draco. “I guess we better head off, then.”

Harry gave a slight nod and gestures towards the empty corridor. Within moments, the two of them made their way towards the location Nott had set for the apparent meeting that would change the entirety of the Slytherin House forever, or so Nott had said.

Not much about the room had been revealed, of course, but it was described as being an old and dank unused room in the dungeons that allowed very little sunlight and even less breathable air. It wouldn’t have surprised anyone if the room was once used as a torture room.

‘He will aim for you verbally,’ said Tom. ‘He will seek to demean, interrogate, and place you below him. You must not react defensively. Twist it on him and make him seem like the bad one. I should not have to guide you through basic social manoeuvring, considering everything you know, but you are incredibly inept.’

‘Thanks for that.’

‘No problem,’ said Tom. ‘Now, open the door with dramas and lean against the wall, refusing a seat. That will put him on the spot.’

Harry, following Tom’s advice, thrust open the door as loudly and as dramatically as he possibly could. He watched as the entire room turned out of their busted and worn stools, surprised expressions following suit. Before Nott could even speak, he pulled a stall across the room with a flick of his wand and leant against the wall, his eyes never leaving Nott’s.

“I’m glad that you finally managed to make a decision and join us,” said Nott. “I am sure your ability to follow even the most basic of commands will give us a massive advantage in the upcoming stages of my plans.”

‘Do. Not. Speak,’ said Tom. ‘Ignore him, nod, and let him continue. The more he speaks, the more he reveals. The more you listen, the more you learn. You cannot slip up if you do not speak.’

“Seeing as Potter has finally used his brains that earned him the title of being a genius, I think we can finally move onto the planning stage,” said Nott, spreading out his arms. “Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff aren’t a threat to any of my – our – plans and that’s good. It’s good because we can focus purely on Gryffindor and not a three-way directed attack. A few well-placed traps and a few traps that are executed perfectly… well, that’ll thin out Gryffindor numbers just a tad.”

“Thin?” repeated a soft-spoken Slytherin girl. “What in God’s name do you mean by that?”

“We cut down their numbers,” said Nott. “Not enough to put them all in the hospital wing, but enough to deter them from reacting and scheming against us. Essentially, we remove them from the conflict. We take them out and then we can focus on more important matters.”

‘This is pointless,’ said Tom. ‘Speak your mind. Speak it to the entire room. I know what I said, but you must silence this tirade as quickly as you can. You cannot allow him to continue this.’

“Is this what this is?” said Harry, pushing off the wall with an agitated sound. “Yes, that will show the Gryffindor students, some of which have barely been here a year, who’s boss. A glorified prank
war. That’s all you have planned, isn’t it? That’s what you wanted me –”

“Silence!”

Harry grinned, a satisfied expression slowly appearing on his face as he leant back against the wall. He could practically hear Tom screeching about being told to be silent by a teenager, but he was far from annoyed.

He won. Just like he knew he would. Nott was far from a threat, both he and Tom now knew that.

‘Being silenced by the brat is not something that we should allow,’ snapped Tom. ‘No matter how much you may think you have won in this minor argument. You should not allow yourself to be silenced by someone your age.’

‘You’re right.’

‘Of course, I am right.’

______________________________________________________________________________________________

“Stupefy!”

“Everta Statum!”

Harry roughly grabbed the back of Draco’s neck, pulling him backwards. He glanced at the jets of light, his eyes narrowing as he watched a fairly large chunk of debris rain down onto the stone floor. His eyes burned as he gently pressed Draco forwards, hurrying him along.

“Why are we even doing this?” said Harry, his eyes darting around the corridor. “I mean, what a complete waste of time this is.”

“You did decide to go through with it,” said Draco, blocking a spell as they continued through the corridor. “And I, being the idiot I am, decided to tag along with you.”

“I told you he wasn’t competent,” said Harry, peering around the corner. “He couldn’t even plan a simple plan without walking us into a – Oh, I feel so stupid.”

“Huh?”

“He planned this,” said Harry. “He set us up. He wanted us to get caught or injured. We’d both get into a lot of trouble for this and that was his goal.”

“You think so?” said Draco, confused. “I don’t see the gain in that, but you’re usually right. What are we going to do?”

Harry really wasn’t sure on what they could do in the situation. He could hear the footsteps of the Gryffindors as they attempted to sneak through the corridors in search of them. Of course, the Gryffindors were unable to find him and Draco because they were somewhat hidden, as long as they remained quiet.

He turned towards Draco and sighed, his index finger digging into his temple as he tried to think of something they could do in their situation. He couldn’t think, and Tom was eerily silent on the matter.

“I think we should fight them,” he whispered, studying the corridor around him. “Nott won’t expect us to do what he asked. No one in Slytherin will. We’ll do it, head back to our common room, and then tell Nott that we were able to do it easily and had no issues.”
“You think we should fight them?” said Draco, surprised. “Do you have a death wish? We can’t fight them… it’s two on four and then another one that’s lurking around somewhere else.”

“We can take them easily,” said Harry. “I have a plan that should give us an advantage.”

“What’s your plan?”

“We split—”

“Bad idea,” said Draco, sighing.

“– and take them on like that,” said Harry, ignoring Draco’s interruption. “I can take on these four with ease. You can split off and take on the lone one and complete our task.”

“Splitting up is a bad idea,” said Draco, trying to stress the point. “I know that I can take the lone one with ease as she was a second-year, I think, but you won’t be able to win a one on four fight!”

“I can hold them,” said Harry. “Once you do what you need to do, you can sweep back around and hit them from behind. That’s the plan.”

“It’s risky…”

“It will work,” said Harry as confidently as he could. “I can promise you that it’ll work. Just trust me.”

“I trust you,” said Draco, smiling. “Just not half your decisions.”

“I can cover you as you leave,” said Harry, matching Draco’s smile. “I’ll draw them to you and make sure to protect and deflect any spells aimed at you, just keep running.”

“Are you sure?” said Draco, staring at Harry with an almost petrifying gaze. “This is the last time I’ll ask before we do this.”

Harry gave a slight nod and whispered a spell that created a small black bird. He whispered another spell and sent it into the corridor, waiting to see if it would be attacked. He could hear talking, but that was about it. He turned towards Draco, holding his left hand near his face, and pressed his thumb and little finger against his palm, leaving his index, middle, and ring fingers up.

“On three,” he whispered, lowering his index finger on the count. “Don’t look back, I’ll be able to cover your escape. They haven’t attacked or spotted my bird yet, which is perfect. They’re there, though.”

Draco swallowed, watching as Harry lowered his middle finger, his eyes never leaving his friend’s fingers. He took a deep breath and prepared to sprint out of the little alcove that they were hiding in. He blinked, catching the wand movement from Harry, and jumped when he heard a loud crack, not as loud as thunder, but it would pull them towards them. He quickly began to move when he saw the bird explode into a wall of black feathers. Despite wanting to look back, he didn’t.

Harry sighed, watching as Draco sprinted away from the feather wall. He listened and heard the four Gryffindor students cast spells at his feather wall. It was a genius spell because each feather would absorb one spell before vanishing. It had many flaws, though, as Salazar had said when he had aided him in the making of the spell.

As he had predicted, his feather wall lasted around twenty seconds before it was completely destroyed. He watched as the feathers slowly fell to the ground before vanishing almost instantly.
That bit surprised him, even when he had planned the spell out with Salazar and Atieno. He hadn’t expected something like that to happen.

He stood in the middle of the corridor, his wand resting against his right leg. He was waiting for the four Gryffindors to speak before he would do anything. Maybe they would say something he could use against Nott. Of course, not much was really said verbally, at least not for a while. It was just a whole lot of staring.

“You’re either foolish, overconfident, or you’re just plain stupid,” said one of the taller Gryffindor students. “Maybe even a bit of them all. Thinking you can take on four of us at once. Maybe Slytherin was the wrong House for you.”

“Your Hogwarts House doesn’t determine your skill,” said Harry. “One of the best duellists in the United Kingdom was a Ravenclaw and he’s currently in the school. However, I guess I like a challenge and one versus four seems to be about fair… Maybe I should close one eye or tie a hand behind my back, just so it’s somewhat more difficult.”

“Okay,” said a brown-haired girl. “You’re trying to talk yourself up, even though we have the number advantage and you won’t be able to do anything but defend yourself. Why not just turn yourself into the professors and we won’t have to attack you?”

“There’s no fun in that, though,” said Harry. “Why try and talk yourself out of a fight? Are you scared?”

It didn’t take much more talking before the first spell was cast, which, unfortunately for Harry, was not done by him. Unable to get in a cheap shot, taking the four of them by surprise, he was forced to adopt a more defensive stance, which was not his speciality. He was aggressive and determined, not steadfast and calm.

It took only seconds before the gentle, calming orange glow from the torches was drowned out and engulfed by the ferocity of green, red, blue, and yellow. There were sparks, jets, and explosions of light that mixed, matched, and combined into something that had never been seen before. Jets of flame appeared and were extinguished in the same second. The murmurs and shouts of the students were drowned out by the crashing, exploding, and crackling of the spells being cast.

Harry quickly swept his wand upwards, having anticipated what was coming. He muttered an incantation, sending a jolt of orange towards the bright red spell that had been aimed at him. The two spells collided mid-air and ricocheted in opposite directions. The red jet went upwards, smashing into the roof with a rather frightening sound that resembled an earthquake. Bits of roof and dust cascaded downwards, showering the students in debris. His spell, however, went towards the left stone wall and the ground, smashing into it with deadly force.

He observed the damage he dealt to the wall with satisfaction, as he knew that the Gryffindor students would now be wary of his orange spells. There was a small crater in the wall, carving out a large mass on the wall, too. He caught sight of a few pieces of the wall dropping and crumbling into the hole in the floor.

He had to act quickly. Within moments, he had another spell on his lips and his wand moving in the correct pattern. There was a dead silence as water began pouring from his wand in a funnel, filling the crater almost instantly. He grinned, amazed that it had worked. The crater of water was a future plan, something he really wanted to try.

The four Gryffindor students were, while not specular in terms of duelling, covering each other’s flaws rather well. Three attacked while one defended.
Harry blocked a spell and grunted as it forced him back an inch. It was curious, he never really expected spells to have an impact force. That was something he had to plan for in the future. It was something that everyone who taught him about duelling had failed to mention. Severus, Salazar, and Atieno had never mentioned in their little teachings.

He caught a blue orb with his wand, twirling it around his body with a precise movement, his eyes never leaving the caster, who looked somewhat surprised, and tossed it back towards them. The spell did nothing but serve as a distraction for his next spell.

With a little jump and a sweep of his wand, he sent a thin cone-shaped fire towards the four Gryffindor students.

Turning back to the little crater of water, he sent Blasting Curses at the floor towards the Gryffindor students. He watched as the water slowly began to fill into the newly created craters.

He watched as three of the students backed out of the water, most likely on instinct, and one remained in the water, not really noticing. He licked his lips and deflected a fiery looking spell and flicked his wand upwards, creating a small ball of yellow sparks. He hurled the spell at a nearby wall, his eyes watching as the spell bounced off the walls, slowly making its way towards the four Gryffindor students. It didn’t take long before it slammed into the water and a small fountain appeared.

The lone student in the water jerked and was thrown backwards.

“Enough!” cried one of the Gryffindor students, dropping his wand. “We get it! You can last against four of us… Just leave, do whatever you have to. Just… just don’t hurt us!”

Harry glared, watching as one of the students cleaned up the electrified water with a simple ‘Tergeo’.

He did realise that he may have done something too far, especially since the other three students seemed rather panicked.

He didn’t debate it, though. He needed to find Draco and get away from the area before a professor walked by.

Chapter End Notes

This chapter went through many, many rewrites and changes over the month(s) I was writing it. There is one scene, towards the end, that is experimental and I just want to see how it fares in terms of people liking/disliking it. It was fun to write, but also very time-consuming.

Aside from that, a quick apology for the delay. Life’s been hectic and hard, but I’m getting through it. PC also died, so I couldn’t really write much and I don’t earn much money, so I can’t afford to just replace it.

I appreciate your patience. I hope you enjoy! :)
Harry, just like every other student in the Great Hall, sat as straight as a ramrod, listening as the Headmaster of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry begun to scold the entirety of the Great Hall. The students, professors, and the few scattered Aurors in the room were completely silent, unsure if this was a dream or a nightmare.

The normally jubilant Albus Dumbledore was currently furious. The man was well-known for having an unbreakable sense of humour, an equally unbreakable sense of happiness and cheerfulness that made him as respected as he was. Even during the rise of Grindelwald, the man had never been as furious as he was now.

The thing that made Harry cautious was not how the Headmaster held himself, nor was it how he spoke. It was how everyone in the room silenced. People obviously respected the Headmaster, knowing how powerful and influential he was.

‘Perhaps everyone is silent because no one has ever seen Albus Dumbledore this angry before,’ said Tom. ‘From what I have gathered on the man, it is that he is calm and accepting, never falling victim to anger and hatred before. I do not think the people calling him the greatest wizard of the century is a lie.’

Harry agreed. Dumbledore, despite his outward appearance to the Headmaster, was a very powerful wizard. He heard many stories about the man, but no one was able to stall Voldemort besides the man standing in the very room as him.

“I have had enough of the petty rivalries between the four Houses,” said Dumbledore, pacing at the front of the Great Hall, his eyes slowly sweeping over the room, assessing each student as they swallowed, blinked, or tried to distract themselves. “When Godric Gryffindor, Helga Hufflepuff, Rowena Ravenclaw, and Salazar Slytherin put their vast minds together, they did not think that the foundations they made would crumble as quickly as it did. To some, a thousand years may not seem like a short period of time, but to creators that still have their own thoughts, memories, and input, it really is short to them.

“Ever since I was chosen as a headmaster by more than one source, as many of you seem to believe, I have tried as hard as I can to bring complete unity to the Houses. I am not omnipotent, neither are any of the other professors. We are human and we make mistakes. Good deeds may be overlooked, bad deeds may be congratulated, and mistakes may be made. However, attacking each other, creating excuses for your behaviour, is not an excusable thing.

“There are some talented witches and wizards in the school at this very moment – witches and wizards that will move on, doing incredible feats that I could never imagine myself doing. Your time here is not a game or joke. Potential employers will come to the school and look at your records. You should be taking your education as seriously and respectfully as you can.”
Harry watched as Dumbledore gave a little bow and then sat down. He was somewhat curious about the speech. It wasn’t a lashing or a tearing, despite what he had heard through the corridors. Everything made sense, though. The headmaster was chosen by former headmasters that were hung in the office, the four founders who had a portrait done solely for advice on that, nothing else, and the current staff.

No one with malicious intent would be chosen as a headmaster, whether at the current period or in the future. It was slightly laxer with the faculty, hence why almost every single professor was trustworthy. The exception was Quirrell and Lockhart. The former was already a professor before his malicious intent was clear. The latter, however, was a curious case. Perhaps Lockhart wasn’t always malicious or had more good inside him than evil.

He, of course, ignored Tom on the subject of good and evil. They both knew there was no such thing. You weren’t either born good or evil. Everyone sat on a metaphorical line and never moved from it.

“Should we, I don’t know, maybe turn Nott in?” said Draco, whispering. “I mean, this is all his fault and if we get caught... I need a career, Harry. Dumbledore was serious about that. When has he ever given such speeches?”

“No,” said Harry as gently as he could. The last thing he needed to do was bark out a word in the quiet Great Hall. “If we do that, they’ll look at us to be rats or condemn us, too. It’ll tie us to whatever Nott’s done. We didn’t do much, really, but we still joined in and that’s all the professors need to pin it all on us. We can’t be the scapegoats.”

“Right,” said Draco. “You’re right. That was an awful suggestion.”

“Wouldn’t call it an awful suggestion, really,” said Harry, grinning. “It’s a great idea, Draco, one we’ll use when the time is right. If we go forwards now, they’ll be suspicious, as will Nott.”

“So, what do we do?”

“We wait,” said Harry. “Nott won’t stop what he’s doing. He’s hit a high peak and, while not a lot, a quarter of Slytherin is behind him. He’ll continue whatever he plans to do, trying to undermine Gryffindor and get more followers if we can even call them that. He’ll ride this as much as he can.”

“You don’t think he’ll last?”

“I know he won’t,” said Harry, muttering. “The change was far too quick. His personality flipped and everything about him changed. People aren’t going to forget that even though he studies all the time, he almost failed his second-year. His charisma came from somewhere, almost suddenly. It will vanish just like that, too.”

“You are far too suspicious of people,” said Draco. “It’s concerning, Harry, it really is.”

“I am curious, not suspicious.”

“Were you ever going to tell me that you have more than one portrait in the castle?” said Harry, panting. He paced around the portrait of Salazar Slytherin, a grim expression on his face. “This could change everything.”

“Nothing has or will change,” said Salazar. “The portrait in that room that the current headmaster of the school uses has no other memories or experiences that could hinder you in any way. I dare say that the portrait is a simpler version of myself that never once argued with Godric. Those were done...”
when we were all in synch and working as if we had one mind. That portrait is completely unbiased. Now, sit down and behave yourself while I think.”

Harry glared at the portrait for a split second before he dropped into a nearby chair, his mind going back to the little house-elf that somehow got the courage to bring the thing into here. Ever since he had stumbled upon the Chamber, he had slowly been preparing it over time, as anyone who knew about it would know. It was quite cosy now. It just needed a few more things and it would look the part.

He sighed and looked at Atieno, who seemed to be in some sort of meditative state. That man was a constant source of confusion for him. Each time he saw the man, he was doing something different and odd.

“You think so loud,” said Atieno. “Your underappreciation of meditation upsets me, child. There is an appreciation and a deep reflective state that no one, not even myself, has reached with meditation. You should attempt it.”

“No thanks,” said Harry. “Also, how can you hear thinking?”

Atieno cupped his hands into his face, his eyes closing. He exhaled air through his nose until the boy in front of him begun to complain about it. That was the perk of being naturally immortal and not requiring air.

“Can you stop?” said Harry, glaring. “That’s annoying.”

“So is your fatuous whining.”

“Quiet!” hissed Salazar. “You are both children.”

Harry and Atieno glared at the portrait. Neither of them addressed this, but they knew they were doing it and they wouldn’t remark on it until Salazar did. All three of them were exactly the same mentally. Stubborn.

“I do believe that I have come across something recently that you would be interested in,” said Atieno, pulling the still glaring boy along with him. “We shall allow the grump man a few moments of respite while I attempt to educate you once more.”

“What’ve you got planned?” muttered Harry, allowing himself to be tugged along by the stronger man. “It better be good, you know.”

“Good is an understatement,” said Atieno as he reached up onto a shelf that had been recently constructed. He grabbed a large tome and placed it on a nearby desk. “I stole this. Well, not stole, but you understand what I am going for. The previous owner cared very little for it and I decided that it would get more use between us. I decided this when the previous owned dared to laugh when he saw the title of the book. The audacity.”

“You know how wizards can be,” said Harry, peering at the book. “Just look at most of the students in this castle. Each of them fit into a category that neglects magic and knowledge.”

“I do not mean disregarding knowledge,” said Atieno. “I mean that the previous owner laughed in disgust. I really should not have to point out that the book is on creatures.”

Harry made a surprised sound. “Well,” he muttered with a soft sigh. “You know better than most that us wizards tend to be very self-absorbed and think we’re the best thing on the planet.”
“I believe that is just humans, no matter creature status, in general,” said Atieno as he opened the book and gestured towards it. “I have been alive and around civilization for a very long period of time, often spending years around people. Each century seems to contain the same thing, without any change. None of that, though, focus on the book.”

Harry rolled his eyes as he was given instructions to read chapter seven.

“Stop scowling,” snapped Atieno. “The book is in Elvish. You will not be able to read it and I had to painstakingly translate it so that you would be able to learn what the tome contains. This is a rare tome, child. A very rare tome.”

**Chapter seven: The Dark Elves**

*Note: The names for the Dark Elves and the Light Elves have no English translation, nor is it possible. They are not called Dark and Light. I chose the closest thing that related to them.*

The Dark Elves are a large portion of their Elven brethren, preferring to live in the snow and areas that warfare has raged. The chaotic climate is the best spot to settle because it allows for most of their rituals to succeed without failure.

Despite how much of a kinship elves have towards each other, the Dark Elves are hated by almost every single race alive, besides humans. They were, at one stage, well-known for their genocide of random villages, castles, or provinces, taking the captives to their own towns and sacrificing them to a God.

The rituals they used were utterly barbaric and nauseating to even the most battle-hardened veterans. In the words of the Dark Elves, they had to be. Humans were not as pleasurable to their God as other elves would be, but their numbers were dwindling as elves could only mate once every thousand years.

However, the other elven colonies were not bothered by this and decided to ignore it, leaving their brethren to slaughter the ever-increasing population of humans. They remained in their lush forests, paradise islands, or simple homes in the hills and observed.

It was all calm and peaceful until the Dark Elves pushed the barrier of morality and created a ritual that would allow them to create an endless supply of troops for their upcoming conquest of the providence they were in. It was not the conquest part that startled the Light Elves into action, it was the ritual that had been created and used. A ritual most foul, even by Dark Elf standards.

The Dark Elves were using the bodies of the human sacrifices in a way that most would not comprehend. They used the body, placed it in an elegant and lavishly designed pond, and filled it with their own blood. They watched and grinned as the blood slowly covered the hundreds of bodies and slowly drained out of the pond and into a massive container. It was so complex because the God they sacrificed to adored the dedication and showmanship.

Eventually, the Dark Elves would suck their own energy and very being. Elves, no matter what faction, were naturally immortal and never aged, which allowed them an unlimited supply of energy. With a large spike of pain that sunk most of the elves into insanity, creating more horrific rituals, pleasing the Gods further, they were able to push their energy into the container of blood.

After the ritual was done, the Dark Elves would feed their human prisoners the concoction and watch as they writhed and slowly morphed into a mix between an elf and a human. They soon became slaves, whether fighting or cleaning. They became House Elves.

Harry gently closed the tome, taking a quick note of the untranslated elegant letters and symbols of
what appeared to be elvish, and turned towards Atieno with a confused expression. He had so many
questions that he wanted to ask right now, but he knew the man and knew that Atieno wouldn’t
allow him to bombard him with questions without analysing what he had learned.

One of the more important questions, especially considering he had one, was about house-elves. He
had always assumed that house-elves were the elven race and the stories and fantasies about them
being beautiful and elegant were just tales. Everyone knew that elves were myths and bedtime
stories, but this disproved it.

“Dark Elves created house-elves,” he said simply, not really asking because the book stated that.
“They created an entire race with a ritual?”

Atieno hummed for a second before giving a slight nod. “Not that anyone really considers house-
elves to be an actual race,” he said, pausing momentarily. “House-elves are, in every sense of the
world, slaves. They do not have any freedom nor do they know any kind of kinship. They are far
from loyal, and should not be trusted. No one trusts creatures, not even other creatures.”

“You’ve said that before,” said Harry. “You say that no creature should be trusted, no matter their
appearance or personality, but there are exceptions to that rule. You’re a vampire and you break all
the known clichés.”

“I guess you are correct,” said Atieno. “Most of us would sooner kill you before befriending or
listening to a human. However, house-elves do not think like that. They are slaves and that is all they
will ever be. They did inherit a teensy bit of their strength from their creators, though. A house-elf
could take out ten or twenty wizards with a simple snap of their fingers. Dark Elves could level an
entire city with the same motion.”

“If they’re so powerful, why’re they still servants?”

“Because they were created to be servants,” said Atieno. “While they are powerful compared to
witches and wizards, they are a fly compared to even the weakest elf. While the Light Elves use
wells that allow them brief glimpses into the future, the Dark Elves make up for their lack of vision
by adding a failsafe to their creation. Should house-elves rebel, the entire race will be killed
instantaneously. They are born with this knowledge and are unable to forget it. No house-elf will
break free of servitude, though.”

“Why not?”

“Because they will die,” said Atieno, giving a little shrug. “I can already sense your question and you
will not even dare to verbalise it. They die over time, not instantly. You must remember, they are
elves, no matter how twisted and far from it, they may appear. They will survive hundreds of years
before the lack of servitude will kill them. It is painful and will make the house-elf a tad crazy and
neglectful. Some linger around their old masters and pray they come back, not understand the
concept of death because that does not register to them until they are dead.”

“Is it like a bonding contract?” asked Harry. “There has to be something that ties the house-elf to
their master.”

“That is as likely as stepping into Gringotts and getting a purifying ritual done,” said Atieno,
snorting. “Impossible and is complete nonsense. A bonding contract does not exist and the only thing
gnoblins will purify you of is your life. They are intelligent beings, child, they know who their master
is and they know who their potential master will be in generations. They are far more intelligent than
man, it is the ritual holding them back and keeping them so stupid.”
“That doesn’t explain why some house-elves are… eccentric.”

“You mean the house-elf the Malfoy family have, right?” said Atieno. “The eccentric creature that wishes he could be paid for his work because that is what his master gets and he thinks that he should be entitled to the same benefits. That is the elven shining through because they are, by far, the most entitled and narcissistic race ever been seen to this date.”

“Something I’m not understanding is why they listen to what we ask,” said Harry, scratching his forehead. “You hinted that they were made to only follow what their masters, who were Dark Elves, said. Why do they listen to us?”

Atieno frowned for a second before picking up the tome with great care. “Humans resemble elves,” he said. “They would never obey my orders because I am a creature and they know the difference between a human and a vampire. It is an innate feeling that bypasses all enchantments or potions, as well.”

“We will be ignoring whatever Dumbledore says,” said Nott, pacing. “We’re halfway through our exams and now’s the time to strike!”

No one cheer or shouted as they did in the very first meeting that Theodore Nott had called. There was an exhausted aura resting over the group, especially from those in their third year. The sixth-year and seventh-year students had deemed the entire thing a waste of time and stopped attending the meetings.

‘Now is the time to press against him,’ said Tom. ‘Undermine him and take control of his group, keep it small and allow the disloyal to forget the existence of these meetings. No one will rise against you should you defeat Nott.’

Harry nodded at the words and listened as Tom formed a plan inside his mind. He agreed with it, knowing that it wouldn’t be too flashy or amazing, else people would fear his power rather than respecting it, which is what he needed at this point. He would make his move, no matter what it may or may not cost.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the delay in the chapter. It was done on Hallowe'en, but I got a new keyboard and my God was it hard to adapt to. I ended up rewriting the second half of the chapter three times because some things made no sense because of my spelling.

Sorry for the info dump on creatures, too! Trust me, all races have been slightly changed. Goblins, elves, dwarfs, vampires, werewolves, etc. :)

I hope you enjoyed!
Harry listened to another of Nott’s boring and dull speeches that seemed to be all over the place, sounding like someone who had stage fright and was trying to claw back their charisma and façade of competence. He stuttered and coughed, choking on his own words as he tried his hardest to get across a message.

That was the issue with having a teenager trying to rally a group. It couldn’t be done. Teenagers couldn’t be political because they weren’t mature enough.

‘The boy is trying so hard,’ said Tom, amused. ‘Hold off your attack until next meeting, use this time to convince more people to come, claiming that the boy is amazing and has plans. When he stutters again, take over and demand he step down. I believe you will not require any of my advice on the matter, so begin a revolt and take over.’

Harry listened to another of Nott’s speeches before they were all dismissed with rather childish instruction to prank or harass the other houses. He wasn’t going to do it, neither was Draco, Blaise, or any Slytherin with even a slight amount of self-respect.

“This is stupid,” said Draco, walking up the corridor. “What is Nott trying to do? I can’t understand what’s driving him to make us prank other students. Pranking is pathetic.”

“I honestly can’t think of a single way that this whole pranking business will aid our House in becoming a top competitor,” said Harry, shrugging. He remembered the talk he had received in his first-year as a Slytherin. “Making a group that’s sole purpose is pranking doesn’t help any of us look mature or intelligent. It makes us look immature, idiotic, and disrespectful.”

“You’re right,” said Draco. “Even if the pranks are amazing and never been seen before, they’re still pranks…”

“And when you think of pranks, who do you think of?”

Draco thought about it for a while before. “Peeves?” he said, unsure. “He’s well known for pranking, but his pranks are well-known across all of the United Kingdom.”

“Close,” said Harry. “I was thinking more of Fred and George Weasley.”

“Oh God!”

“Exactly,” said Harry. “We don’t want our House to become the equivalent of Fred and George Weasley. That’ll be a hard reputation to shake in the distant future. It’s why I don’t care what Nott says. I’m simply going because we have to.”

“You don’t have to go,” said Draco. “It would just be counterproductive for you to not go. Nott
“Maybe,” muttered Harry as he took a seat near Ernie, who was playing a Muggle card game with Justin. “I had an idea – one better than whatever Nott’s trying to do. Why don’t we unite all the Houses together, besides Gryffindor, and then take over? We could create a minor rebellion and oust Nott.”

“Why not all the Houses?” asked Draco, confused. “I mean, you did say all.”

“Nott would blow a cauldron,” said Harry. “And that may be amusing, it’s not what we need. Before we can focus on other Houses, we need to secure our own. Most Slytherin students would freak out if they saw a Gryffindor in the room. Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students, however, they could see the use.”

“Nott won’t see it like that, though,” said Draco. “He’s too smart to not panic when he sees any of us talking to other Houses. If anyone that’s not in Slytherin shows up, he will react poorly and probably attack…”

“That’s why we secure Slytherin first,” said Harry, leaning on the couch slightly. He knew Draco knew what he was going for, the boy just wanted more information. It was so very Draco. “If they’re in our grasp, we can let them know in advance and they won’t react poorly.”

“They’ll react poorly, no matter what,” said Draco. “They’re Slytherins.”

“They really shouldn’t, though,” said Harry, thinking about it. He remained silent for a few moments, his eyes locking onto a nearby wall. “It’s just another stereotype for Slytherin that works against us. You could ask any student and they’d say they wanna be something ambitious, Minister for Magic or any other top position in the Ministry. I think that’s just human nature.”

Draco hummed and tried to think of a counter-argument, but he couldn’t. He wanted to be the Minister for Magic long before he heard about Slytherin. Sure, they could tie to his ambition, but if he had the thought, other people should’ve had the very same thought.

“We’re going off topic,” said Harry, dragging the conversation back. “There’s three weeks of the term left, give or take, we need to act now or he’ll force us to do something no one wants to do.”

It took a few days of nonstop scheming, which annoyed Harry because it cut into his studying time, which was ninety-nine percent of the year, to create an idea and end goal for their uprising. Ernie and Justin had willingly jumped on-board and began pulling in more Hufflepuff students, even managing to snag a few Ravenclaw students in the process.

Of course, Draco had been salty about that for a period of time, frowning that his friend had managed to accumulate such a vast following so quickly with next to no effort. He, however, didn’t realise just how lucky Harry was to get the small following so quickly, nor did he understand how lucky it was for Harry that the small following actually listened.

Harry had no skill in speaking or guiding people with words. He lacked the patience and ability to mask his annoyance when something went wrong. He was better at action and doing rather than saying and sitting around, doing nothing.

“Nott’s final meeting before the year ends is tomorrow,” said Draco. “Then we’ve got the Defence Against the Dark Arts exam.”

“Exciting,” muttered Harry, putting the book he was reading back onto the shelf. “A day until we
can finally set some plans in motion and make some progress on ridding Slytherin from Nott’s awful and childish influence.”

“It’s kinda funny, isn’t it?”

“What is?”

“This whole ordeal,” said Draco, sitting down. “But I’m mainly talking about how quickly our House jumped on Nott’s idea and then how quickly they abandoned his ideas and plans without a warning. It seems like what my Father said was false. Power isn’t hard to obtain and easy to keep, really, it’s easy to obtain and hard to keep.”

“Nothing really counts, though,” said Harry. “None of this will last beyond school. Most of us aren’t gonna be the Minister for Magic, nor will we have high ranking jobs. Most students will either be unemployed and living off their parents or working in what they call servant work. Parkinson is destined to work as a waitress at the Three Broomsticks.”

“Wow.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “We all grow up eventually,” he said. “Just remember back to us in our first year. We were prats, to be honest. We still are, but we’ve matured a bit.”

“Just a bit?” said Draco. “I’m insulted!”

“I aimed that at myself, too, you know,” said Harry, snorting. “It wouldn’t surprise me if we remained as immature and childish as we are well into our adult lives. Some people do, and they’re often the most mature you’ll ever meet.”

“What do you expect from Nott’s final meeting?” said Draco, deciding on a change of topic, knowing that Harry had all the arguments prepared for maturity and he would never step foot into that mess. “I know we’ve talked about it a little, but I can’t help but feel as if something will go differently and we’ll all be thrown back a bit and left hanging upside down.”

“You’ve known him longer than me,” said Harry. “You knew him as a kid, a pre-teen, and now a teenager. I only ever knew him as a bookish Slytherin that didn’t want to disappoint his father for fear of retribution. Nott’s father is, well, crueller than Bellatrix, and that’s saying something.”

“Yeah,” said Draco, remembering back. “He had it out for you, I think. He said you reminded him of, well, you know. It was very unsettling and father demanded that he not make such comparisons. Ever. After that, he couldn’t stand the sight of you.”

Harry muttered something and shook his head. “Some people,” he said. “But, going back to Nott, he seemed to want me to lead the Slytherins. Could this whole thing be something his father came up with? Fanatical people are so unpredictable.”

“Who knows,” said Draco. “Father has things that he would like me to do in Hogwarts, but he has silenced himself because he wishes for me to have a normal childhood. I do assume Mother has something to do with that, too. Greengrass’s father has taken an active role in pushing at Hogwarts, so has Goyle’s, if you’d believe that. Almost all the pure-blood parents are pushing for their children to do something.”

“Who, out of all the students, poses the most threat in terms of that?”

“Nott,” said Draco, not even thinking. He did pause afterwards and took a few moments to think about the rest. “Zabini’s mother is also pushing for a spouse so he can retire to their trashy cottage in
Scotland and never see the world again until the next generation. She’s very racist and will not speak to anyone that does meet her insanely high criteria. No one with Italian blood at all. None.”

“That’s not really a concern, is it?”

“It is, especially if she feels like you’re moving in on her son’s potential wife and then she will use every ounce of cunning she has. She has Skeeter in her pocket. You won’t survive with your reputation intact and she won’t dirty her hands, according to my father.”

“How about the other boys? Crabbe and Goyle.”

“People tend to underestimate them and ignore them, calling them my slaves or lackeys,” said Draco. “You’d be surprised to realise they’re by far the most cunning and ambitious in Slytherin. Their whole ‘act stupid and like a walking and talking rock’ plan has fooled everyone. They’ll be underestimated when they finally hit their N.E.W.T.s. Crabbe is insanely good at spells, able to weave them together insanely well. Goyle is amazing at shielding. Pair them together and you have an army of two.”

“And you know all this how?”

“I figured it out,” said Draco, sound smug. “I heard them talking about spells that not even I knew and it all clicked in place. They’re so appreciative of me and listen to what I say because I see them more than what they try and be.”


“You should,” said Draco. “Especially after this meeting. Neither of us really looked at Nott and look at what happened before we even really thought about it. He amassed a small following that failed, thankfully, but it could’ve gone very badly very quickly.”

“Indeed,” said Harry. “Maybe we were lucky, or maybe Nott knew he’d fail and that’s why he wanted me to do it.”

“I’m so glad that you all made it,” said Nott, smiling. “I understand that the location moved and I’m sure the very few of you are curious about that.”

Harry leant against the wall and just listened, waiting for something that could allow him to give a signal outside, which is why he was poised at the door, ready to make a sound that would allow his friends outside to storm in and begin the overthrow, especially considering all the Slytherins were ready.

The only two students that he hadn’t somehow recruited to his ploy was Crabbe and Goyle, who he always assumed too stupid to handle it. He was so thankful for Draco and his ability to see people for who they really were instead of what was expected.

Every single Slytherin had been swayed by him or Draco and agreed that it was time for Nott to go. More people had come simply to overthrow Nott, as was the Slytherin way. It hardly mattered to them if Nott was a student in his third year or whether he was Head Boy. Slytherin students needed to be at the top of that list that everyone seemed to forget about until something provoked it.

The list was useless and written by someone to boost and hurt egos. He had no regards to it, and, thankfully, neither did Draco or Rosier.
Speaking of Rosier, his eyes drifted to the boy who liked so exhausted it almost had a contagious effect. He felt tired just looking at the boy and that wouldn’t do. Rosier had been so quiet and meek over the past few months and it was really hard to figure out why.

Why did everyone in Slytherin have to try so hard to be a puzzle?

“‘The meeting was moved because some Gryffindors were lurking around the old spot and I thought that it would cause alarm if we all walked into a room and didn’t come out for a period of time,’” continued Nott, his eyes roaming over the seated students. “This foresight of mine only caused minor issues instead of big ones.”

“I am glad we missed the bunch of first-year Gryffindors,” said a boy with a sigh. “You’ve done us a great deed, Nott.”

Nott, who didn’t seem to care about the subtle sarcasm that had been said, preened under the words and nodded, ignoring any animosity in the group. “That it is,” he said simply, waving his hand in the air in a dismissing manner. “We can now move beyond this little inconvenience and push onto more pressing matters.”

The meeting seemed to drag on, and, despite it only being twenty minutes, it felt like hours to most of those in attendance. Almost every single person would send discreet glances at their appointed leader, which was a broad and unused term, wondering when he would strike and end this travesty of a meeting.

The meeting was naturally drawing to a close, especially considering Nott was slowly losing the audience. As was the issue of controlling teenagers who had little to no attention spans and wanted to just do whatever they wanted. Sure, creating a secret group that plotted and schemed may have worked sixty odd years ago, but it wouldn’t now.

It was amusing how everyone knew these meetings were a waste of time, except for Nott.

“Nott,” said Harry, hitting the door in an attempt to give a signal. He played it off as a stroke of annoyance, which worked. “More people are here this week because we put in the work to get more and more people. The very same work you didn’t do anything for. Really, I expected more considering you forced yourself at the top and allowed for no one to contest you.”

“Do you wish to contest me, Potter?”

“You’re not worth my time to even debate about contesting, Nott,” said Harry, standing straight. “It took you weeks, perhaps even months, to think of this and then get it together and it fell apart as quickly as it started.”

“Did it?” said Nott, his voice low. “It failed spectacularly yet everyone still came.”

“They came because I invited them,” said Harry. “Every single person in this room came because I asked them too. They came for me, not you.”

“You’re delirious, Potter,” said Nott. “I gave you your chance to co-run this with me and you said no.”

“Funny,” muttered Harry. “You tried to give the idea to me and then realised I didn’t want to run some club that I knew was doomed to fail. A third-year student trying to run a serious meeting that had future plans and great ideas? Did you really think the students in their fifth, sixth, and seventh years would care for this pathetic attempt at learning to manoeuvre and control people?”
Nott paused and looked around the room, concern slowly etching onto his face as he truly realised everyone was behind Harry Potter. An ugly snarl appeared on his face momentarily before he stood to his full height, making himself much taller than Potter, which should count for something. Potter looked up at him, not the other way around.

“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” he said, glaring. “What I’ve held this entire year, all the work I’ve put into it won’t be done again –”

“Because it’s an awful idea that held no merit besides to attempt to thrust yourself at the top of some nonexistence social hierarchy,” said Harry, interrupting easily. He lifted his hand and began counting off different groups that had popped up in the school during its time. “There were groups when my parents attended, there were groups when your parents attended, there were groups probably the year after the school was founded. What you did was nothing new – wait, it was. You’re probably the first to ever make a group with so much ambition and crash it to the ground faster than you can keep up. Well done.”

“You think you have it all figured out?”

“I don’t think, Nott, I know,” said Harry. “I gather that you’re smart enough to realise that every single person, besides you, came to this meeting because they were asked to. Not by you, either, but by me. That should make you realise that your control and influence has crumbled. You pulled an immature power play, and it cost you everything. How’re you gonna react when you get a power play in return? Maybe you can grab that influence back, who knows. You’re not remarkably intelligent, really. You’re average.”

“Average?” said Nott, his eyes narrowing. “I’m far from average.”

“The fact you haven’t said anything to counter any argument I have provided just proves I was right all along,” said Harry, grinning. “You lost control of the group and you’ve been unable to get it back in control. Something’s off, but that’s understandable. You’re obviously a puppet for your Death Eater father – Oh, I struck a nerve, didn’t I?”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about,” snapped Nott after a period of silence. “Unlike some, my father was loyal to the Dark Lord.”

Harry tensed and swallowed the insult that he wanted to throw back at Nott. He had to admit, as did Tom, that it was a good jab and he shouldn’t underestimate the boy. Who knew what kind of façade the boy had in this group, especially considering he hardly paid attention to anything Nott said in
“Hardly,” he replied as quickly and stoically as possible. “Some parents only have one child, but that
hinders the growth of the wizarding world. Mine decided to either have two or three, which, if you
knew basic maths, would cause the population to climb.”

“Oh, yeah, I forgot,” said Nott. “I forgot that we should be polluting the world with more half-blood
witches and wizards. How silly of me.”

“Ah,” said Harry as if he was addressing a toddler that did something foolish. “Did you forget that
Voldemort, your father’s master, was a half-blood? Sure, we can all doubt Dumbledore’s credibility,
but he was never one for sly tactics and lying as a political figure. The fact Voldemort didn’t deny it
or show his lineage just proves it. Besides, if you follow the trail backwards, you’ll see that it’s true.
But that’s not what we’re talking about.”

The door slowly opened, revealing a group of students fitted in Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw robes.
They paused, searching the room, and then walked into it, hunting empty seats, unfazed about sitting
next to Slytherins. None of them even acknowledged Theodore Nott, they all turned and looked at
Harry Potter.

“Sorry we’re late,” said Ernie, looking towards Harry, as if he was the person in charge. “Got caught
up and didn’t want to bring anyone else along. You did say that we needed to be discreet.”

Nott stood there, still gaping. “What is this?” he blurted out, glaring at the new students with
something akin to pure hatred. “This meeting was for Slytherins!”

“It wasn’t hidden very well, was it?” said Justin, speaking slowly, a frown appearing on his face.
“We found it with the teeniest of hints, honestly. I suppose that we Hufflepuffs are great at finding
things and this was no exception.”

Harry regarded Justin with amusement. He was, honestly, the Muggle-born version of Draco. The
same manner of speaking with the same wealth, same etiquette, same everything. It was amazing the
two hadn’t been friends.

“So?” barked Nott. “I didn’t ask any of that, nor do I care! What I want to know is why you’re still
here!”

“Because we’re attending the meeting,” said Ernie, a small smile appearing on his lips. “We heard
such good things about it.”

“Like?”

“Uh,” said Ernie, pausing for a moment, his eyes darting around, looking at the walls and people.
“That it was run by, erm, a decent wizard.”

Harry watched the exchange with amusement. How could one student be so clueless but so good at
what he was doing that he was oblivious to it? He knew that Ernie may not end up in politics, the
boy would make a rather good reporter because he seemed to just make people speak, even if it was
done in a bumbling manner.

“Regardless,” he said, interrupting the chat. “We’ve all decided that you’re not a worthy leader,
Nott.”

“And you think you are?”
“Did I say that?” said Harry, enjoying the glare on Nott’s face. “I said that no one approved of you being the leader and that we have decided to get rid of you, so to speak.”

“You think you can get rid of me?” said Nott, laughing. “I created this club and it ends when I say it ends. Not you, Potter.”

“Can you please listen,” said Harry, pinching his nose in an imitation of something he saw his mother do when annoyed. “We’re not ending the club, just replacing who’s in charge. None of us agree that your guidance is good and you would serve better being the cleaner of the room or the servant. Do you understand now?”

“I understand,” said Nott, grabbing his wand from his pocket. “I understand one hundred percent, but I don’t agree with it and I don’t think you’re going to replace me, none of you.”

“Do you really think you could beat me in a duel, Nott?” said Harry, a bored expression appearing on his face. “There’s a reason why the professors label me as the best student to enter Hogwarts in decades. I’m not Granger, either, I know how to utilise magic outside of books and classrooms. My father’s the youngest Head Auror in history, my mother received her mastery in charms before she left school. You’re daft if you think none of that passed down to me.”

“You’re as bad as Malfoy,” spat Nott. “Always spouting off achievements that aren’t your own –”

“Hey!”

“– and acting like any of us care,” finished Nott. “Hiding behind other people proves that you’ve done nothing at all. You’re a half-blood and I’m a pure-blood. I am better than you.”

“Are you really going back to this?” said Harry, sighing. “What is up with you lot and trying to bring back this blood purity nonsense. Magic doesn’t stem from your blood, Nicolas Flamel proved this ages ago. Both Dumbledore and Voldemort are half-bloods and are considered to be the most powerful wizards of our time.”

“And what about all the old magical talents?” said Nott, grinning in success. “They only ever manifested in pure-bloods.”

“But you’re wrong,” said Harry. “A lot of the Black talents were introduced into the family by poor half-bloods and Muggle-born witches and wizards that needed money and offered their unique talents for money. A lot of the Parselmouths, while descended from Salazar, aren’t pure-blooded, nor is the talent extinct. It’s very common in Africa and forest areas. The Uagadou School of Magic actually released an article about Parselmouth. It wasn’t wide-spread, though, seeing as everyone in this country seems to think it’s an evil gift and talent.”

“You’re twisting facts!”

‘You are,’ said Tom, easily slipping himself into the conversation. ‘Parselmouth really is an evil talent because it controls the serpent. You can command them to do anything and they will not disobey. They may attempt to fight it, as all creatures, magical or not, have free will and their own attitudes and personalities, they will give in because they were brainwashed and believe Parselmouths are their considered to be godlike among them because the talent should not be possible. You should question Salazar about the gift, honestly. He did create it using a dark ritual.’

“So, Nott, you still believe that you’re better than me because you’re a pure-blood?” said Harry, waiting for Nott’s nod. “What’s the talent your family has, then? Every witch and wizard has an affinity with a branch of magic. Some are gifted at charms, or defensive spells, or potions, or
transfiguration, or anything like that. I almost forgot that some people can be gifted at more than one branch, but everyone has a weak subject, no matter how much time put into it. Your family isn’t notable for anything…”

“My father was an exceptional duellist.”

“Exceptional enough to earn him the lowest prison cell in Azkaban,” said Harry, staring at Nott with a smug expression. “The only Death Eater to be placed with thieves.”

“That’s not true!” snapped Nott. “You’re pushing me, Potter!”

“It is, though, and you know it,” said Harry. “Your families talent is writing, a lacklustre talent if I’ve ever seen one. The Sacred Twenty-Eight. Who cares what a jumped up, failure of a Death Eater has to say about the blood status of the families in the United Kingdom. Did anyone in this room believe anything written in that travesty at all? Don’t be shy, you can speak up. Nott’s a fly, he’s harmless, really, so you don’t need to be worried about him.”

“Potter!”

“Are you a wizard or a werewolf, Nott?” said Harry. “Don’t growl at me.”

“I did not growl,” said Nott. “You’re really testing my patience, Potter. Your attempts to try and thwart my plans and usurp my position haven’t gone unnoticed.”

“Have you been reading a dictionary?” muttered Harry, noting the improvement on Nott’s vocabulary since the other meetings. Who knew, maybe Nott was taking this serious. “Who really cares, though?”

“You do,” said Nott. “You’re here, aren’t you? Everyone that attended cares a little because they still showed up.”

Harry turned towards Draco, who had his lips pressed together, understanding that Nott had essentially won the verbal spar because there was nothing coming from that. It was the truth, really. Even he knew that what Nott had said had backed him into a corner that he couldn’t get out from. Despite the situation, it was amusing to see Nott look so smug.

“Words have never been my strong suit,” he said, turning back to Nott with a smug expression to rival Nott’s. “As most people know, I prefer to act. I hate sitting around, twiddling my fingers. So, how about we settle this in the proper manner and have a duel?”

“What kind of duel?”

“A proper one,” said Harry. “We’ll have rules planned out and drawn up and then we’ll meet in the Duelling Chamber and get this over with.”

“Speaking about Slytherin secrets while other Houses are here?” said Nott, glaring. “So stupid, Potter.”

“I assume you’ve not read the stupid book your ancestors put out,” said Harry. “Go and read it, Nott. Go to the Black part and see how much Slytherin secrets your family have tossed out in the open. Everyone knows that each House has a secret room or two for the students to seek and use. They’re all found the same way, besides the Duelling Chamber.”

“When?” barked Nott. “When can I finally do what I have wanted to do since you claimed yourself a genius? Now?”
“No,” said Harry, sighing. “I have to talk to Professor Snape and he’s currently brewing a potion for the end of year exams. Tomorrow, after the Defence Against Dark Arts exams, I think.”

Nott glared. “I can wait.”

Harry turned towards the students and shrugged. “Sorry to keep you waiting for the duel, I guess. I’ll try and make it worth your time,” he said, giving a little bow. “Now, I need to go think of what I want Nott to lose. Feel free to tag along.”

“How far can this duel extend?”

“As far as it needs,” said Draco. “You can’t request anything that would hinder his family or put them in harm, such as demanding their house or land, but you can demand a cut of their money or demand that they follow you or you have some sort of twisted right to punish them. That’s how You-Know-Who got most of his earlier followers. It’s why some are so blindly loyal to him that it makes you wonder.”

“That’s —”

“Asinine,” said Draco, nodding. “After people realised what he was doing, they just admired his brilliance. Regardless, there’s heaps of stuff you can do. Professor Snape can turn them down, though. I doubt he’d let anything pass through that results in Nott being expelled.”

“Wait,” said Harry, dropping the quill. “How’d Voldemort gain his followers if the system is monitored by the Head of House?”

“Old Head of House mustn’t have cared too much.”

Harry sighed and leant back, looking at his ideas with a soft glare. “How’s this?” he asked, thrusting the parchment towards Draco. “I think it’ll work out good and set us both up for the future.”

“You lack ambition,” said Draco, slowly reading down the list. He paused, gaped, and then turned towards his friend. “What’s this?”

“What’s what?”

“This list!” snapped Draco. “You know what? Never mind. Only you could make a duel with terms and conditions and have most of the things you demand not benefit you at all.”

Chapter End Notes

I know none of you cares about excuses, but I feel like I need to let you know what’s been happening. Lore. Lore has been happening.

I have completed everything that’s needed for vampires, goblins, orcs, dwarves, the four elven races, and a few more that I shall not address at this point.

I have also been crafting an armour set because you’re all gonna hate me after the next chapter. :(
Howl at the Moon

Chapter Notes

I want to try and avoid spoilers, but this is the chapter where I will be maimed. This isn't a happy chapter, so please forgive me.

It's also a bit longer than usual, hitting about 8000 words.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 34 – Howl at the Moon
Chapter revised: Not Applicable

“Speech” | ‘Thoughts’ | ‘Tom’ | “Parseltongue” | Memories / Flashbacks / Letters

Harry couldn’t get his mind off the duel that would happen later on today, his mind whirling and his thoughts merging into one. It was hard to think up strategies when all you could think about was the duel and the victory that he was so certain that he would achieve. Tom had said as much, not even proving any input on the duel and what tactics may be a good idea to use.

That wasn’t the only issue, though. For the past year, he had been feeling rather weak. His body felt as if he was a Muggle pushing their nineties and unable to walk without a cane or some kind of aid. It was a concerning thought because he, as a thirteen-year-old boy, should be at top form physically. Even then, speaking in itself was a chore and he often found himself gasping or choking on his breath, unable to continue the simple strain of speaking.

He was unable to explain what was happening, mainly because Tom never seemed to notice, Atieno was far too concerned with an event that he wouldn’t address, and Salazar was a portrait and couldn’t see or note his physical pain, let alone his inability to speak properly. Draco, his best friend, wouldn’t dare address it, even if he noticed. For Draco, it would bring up horrid memories and thoughts that he would never wish to remember. He could not blame his friend, really. Draco followed a simple thought train of, ‘If the issue isn’t addressed, the issue isn’t real’.

He gently placed down the book that he was reading, his fingers almost protesting the action, and sighed. It felt like he had been punching a stone wall for hours. That was the easiest way to explain the pain and soreness in his hands. He didn’t wish to seek out Madam Pomfrey, nor did he wish to seek out Severus, who would have an answer. He needed to find a solution. He needed to be the one to fix it.

He did toy with the idea of using or creating a potion that may help with his body and the constant ache that he felt. A potion wouldn’t be as helpful as an elixir, but it would take far less time and was infinitely easier to create. An elixir could take anywhere between three weeks to three months to create a base for an elixir.

Elixirs were tricky to work with, almost as bad as the rituals in the books that gave a longer boost to whatever you were taking. They were nothing permanent or outrageous, and you needed to take the elixir every three months for it to work. It was a double-edged blade, really. You would become dependent on the elixir as you needed it for the benefits it gave.
The Elixir of Life was a prime example, one that would last throughout the ages as being the most painful boon you could achieve. You had to debate about living forever with unknown consequences or spending days upon days standing over multiple cauldrons, trying to brew an elixir that would be without a single flaw.

Thinking back to the Elixir of Life, he thought that maybe that could be the issue. He had been using it, rather frequently, over the years and no one had studied the long-term effects of drinking elixirs. Some could make you mad, others sad, and some leave you comatose. But no, despite how secretive Nicolas Flamel and his wife had been, they had made a promise.

He thought back to his earlier ages in his childhood, being able to remember almost everything with perfect clarity. He wasn’t blessed with a photographic memory or an eidetic memory, but that didn’t mean that he didn’t recall things clearly that happened almost a decade ago. He was a very sickly child, often being unable to go outside or fly on a broom. It had gone away, but had recently come back and, for once, was glad that he dropped playing a Seeker. With how he was currently feeling, it would be a hard task to handle if he constantly felt out of breath while flying.

He eyed the book he had placed down, rather thankful for the fact that the end of year exams were all but done. He knew he had excelled in all of them, unlike Granger, who had looked as if she was about to crack and shout at any given second.

Speaking of Granger, he was unsure of how the girl was failing so dramatically with her time management. She spent nearly as much time as him in the library, even if Longbottom and Weasley were there. There was nothing that should have made the girl fall behind and drop subjects.

The classes were designed to be interwoven with each other, it was the only thing he could really praise Dumbledore about. The man was really an excellent and precise headmaster for the school.

Unless, perhaps, Granger was doing something different to attend the classes. He didn’t attend those lessons that were mainly theory, only going in to drop in homework or to sit on a lesson or two as something practical was done. Granger had been in every class, no matter the time or place the lesson took place.

That was it. She had attended every lesson and it had burned her out.

“Are you ready for the Defence Against the Dark Arts exam?” said Draco, keeping his voice low, not wishing to invoke the wrath of the librarian. “You know, it might not be like what you’re expecting. Lupin’s a beast of a person and’ll probably make us run laps around the Quidditch pitch.”

“I’d consider that to be a part of the duelling exam, not Defence Against the Dark Arts,” muttered Harry. “And yes, I am. I’ve read upto material that’ll be taught in our fifth year. Nothing’ll surprise me about this exam.”

“You overthink things and I can bet it’ll come back to haunt you.”

“Yeah, yeah.”

Professor Lupin stood near his makeshift obstacle course with an amused expression, his kind eyes darting between each face of the students. He had set up a course that would test the students on everything that he could think would relate to a battle. Teamwork, quick-thinking, endurance, and knowledge would all be tested extensively.

He couldn’t help but smile at the group of third-year students as they shifted nervously, finally noticing the course.
“Where are the desks?” asked Zacharias Smith, his face turned away from the obstacle course as if it didn’t exist.

“They will not be needed for this exam,” said Professor Lupin. “I believe that the Defence Against the Dark Arts exam should be what its name implies. You may learn things huddled over a book and cramming as much information that you’re bound to forget, or you could actually live that information and take home an important lesson. What I’m trying to say, seeing as some of you seem lost, is that the exam is practical –”

Harry glared at Draco.

“– so you will not be needing your books or quills,” said Professor Lupin, noting the glare out of the corner of his eye. It seemed some people had an idea what he planned, which was worrying. “I was an Auror for a short period of time, so I know how gruelling some of those exams can be. I kept the course short and pleasant, but it will be challenging.”

Harry groaned and finally turned to look at the course. He had been adopting Draco’s policy if things not existing if you couldn’t see them. It did not work.

The obstacle course really wasn’t anything too special. In fact, the course had an air of ease about it, as if it knew it was going to be easy. That was curious, really.

His eyes widened, almost comically, as he realised that he was almost – which was the keyword – by the very first thing you learnt about the Dark Arts. Never underestimate the Dark Arts. That had been a lesson that James had been intent on drilling into his head with his inane ramblings after he came home from work. He hardly cared for the ramblings of an Auror, as if he’d follow the path, but he was oddly thankful for it now.

The Dark Arts, despite most of the spells being flamboyant, were subtle and pretended to be far more harmless than they were. A simple cut on your hand was meant to distract you from the burning pain in your head as some curse ate away at your brain. Thankfully, that type of magic had been long forgotten and left well enough alone. However, the Dark Arts screamed you to be cautious. They wanted to draw you in, whether you were the caster or not. It’s what made Voldemort so feared among the dark populace. No one had the control of the Dark Arts like him. He bent the magic to his will and forced it to obey his command.

He glanced towards the professor, who had been studying him, and ticked something on the parchment he seemed to be carrying around. He nudged Draco and gave him a look that pretty much made it obvious what he wanted to convey.

That was the second lesson of the Dark Arts, never handle them alone.

“That’s it for the first part of the exam –”

“What!?”

“Miss Granger,” said Professor Lupin, a frown on his face as he checked the list once more. “Please don’t interrupt. As I was saying, the next part is to actually run the obstacle course. This is not a theory exam. I will not be holding your hand. You may consult your students for aid. The area has been warded so that I can hear everything. Be careful with what you say.”

Harry followed behind the group, softly speaking to Rosier and Draco, the former who had been relatively quiet the whole year. He was rather curious, really, not that he would prod and seek out an answer to the question that was on Draco’s mind, too. Perhaps Draco would save him the torment
and ask for him.

“I’ll tell you later,” said Rosier, sighing. “I know you’re both curious – don’t give me that look, Harry – and I’ll tell you when the professor isn’t eavesdropping.”

Harry nodded and squinted at the small building that looked like a converted garden shed. He assumed that this was the start and the exam would start into part two of it, at least he hoped so. He couldn’t take much more of this sitting and standing, which was really another lesson. Patience.

God, how he despised James right now. He despised him for pretty much existing with his infuriating ranting on how Aurors were sloppy when it came to magic and how they ignored the five basic rules on dealing with the Dark Arts. And, even though he had been so young, James had tapped his fingers and spouted off each one constantly.

It stuck in his head and he refused to use knowledge James had given him. It infuriated him. He wanted to scream and shout, cursing James’s name as loud as he could.

“– Harry! Harry!” snapped Draco. “I’ve been saying your name for, like, five minutes!”

“It was twenty-two seconds,” said Rosier, snorting. “Don’t exaggerate.”

“Whatever,” said Draco, waving Rosier off with a dramatic wave. “You had that look on your face, you know that look you get when you’re angry. Not ‘someone ate my bacon’ angry, either. That genuine look that makes you look like you want to burn the world. That one. You know it? Of course, you do. You had that look.”

“I do not look like that!”

“You do,” said Rosier. “I remember it at the end of our first year. Y’know, when Dumbledore tried to give the House Cup to Gryffindor.”

“Old news,” said Harry, glaring. “And I was angry on behalf of our entire House. How dare the Headmaster attempt to steal our glory for Longbottom?”

Draco sighed but nodded. He, like Harry, turned towards Professor Lupin, who had begun speaking quite a while ago.

“– I believe it will take you around twenty minutes to complete and will test your knowledge with and without a wand,” said Professor Lupin. “For those that were zoned out or discussing their plans for the summer holidays, I shall repeat what I said. In the course, you will find and face a few creatures that you have learned about this year. None of the creatures will cause permanent harm. In case you have forgotten, you will face a Grindylow, a few Red Caps, a Hinkypunk, and a Boggart. Any questions?”

“Will you be watching?”

“Are there any traps?”

“Is this a race?”

Professor Lupin blinked and raised his left hand. “I will be watching from that nearby platform over there. I will be able to see and hear everything that happens in the course. There will not be any traps for this exam. However, I may use that idea in the future, thank you. As for the last shouted question, this is not a race. You should be seeking to aid your fellow students, not hinder them. You will all be running together and if I see any sabotage, you will instantly fail this part of the exam.”
There was a loud ‘bang’ and when the students turned around, Professor Lupin was gone and in the watchtower that had been created for this task. He gave a wave and signalled for the students to start the course.

Harry watched as the Gryffindors charged the course as if their life depended on the course being completed as quickly as possible. The Hufflepuffs were slightly more hesitant but followed along after the Gryffindors. The Ravenclaws, seemingly satisfied with their study of the course, began at a slow pace through the course.

He, along with the other Slytherins, began to take the course. They were seemingly satisfied with the lack of screams and shouts from the other students. It had nothing to do with stereotypes on the Houses, more like pure-blood children being raised by paranoid parents that demanded their children remain safe and cautious. However, with the previous three years at the school having something happen, no one was going to rush into a course that could spell the end of them.

He trailed behind the group of Slytherins, a slight frown on his face as he waved Rosier ahead, who clearly wanted to rush ahead as if his life depended on finishing before all the other Slytherins. Of course, Draco refused to leave him behind and willingly slowed his own pace so that he could remain with his friend.

That was something he was never really able to grasp with Draco. Yes, they were friends. Yes, they were pretty much family in everything but blood. It still never gave him a solid reason to why Draco would intentionally sabotage his studies or future so that he wouldn’t fall behind. He knew that it wasn’t done because of how intelligent he was, like Weasley did to Granger, which was quite pathetic.

Perhaps it was because Draco himself knew that he wasn’t redeemable, no matter how bad that seemed to sound. He was smart, intelligent. He knew his own flaws and he knew them well. He wished to be like his father and would have to pick a side sometime soon, especially considering his father seemed to be prodding him into action.

Sadly, the side Draco would choose would be the wrong one and he would suffer endlessly for it. Draco would lie, cheat, and manipulate everyone around him if he was asked to by his father. His only redeemable quality was his loyalty to his family.

He sighed and ignored the curious look Draco sent him. “I’m fine,” he muttered, turning his attention from his friend to the dark corridor ahead. “Just thinking, which is probably a bad thing to do considering what we’re doing.”

“I didn’t say anything,” said Draco, his eyes going wide as he climbed over a broken tree trunk, which had a Hinkypunk hiding in it, trying to give them the wrong directions. “I simply turned my head to see if you were keeping up.”

“Nice half-truth,” said Harry, glaring.

“I know you better than anyone alive,” said Draco, a pointed expression on his face. “I know that you’re stubborn, more so than usual. You don’t want help because you’re independent, but not so much that you’re an issue or come off as a whiny child. I guess I should state that you won’t ever ask for help, but you will accept it if it’s offered.”

Harry made a soft dismissal sound but didn’t deny anything. “Look – I just don’t want to be like Longbottom, who relies on Weasley’s idiotically unwavering loyalty,” he muttered. “And before I forget about Granger, I don’t want to be used because I can remember things I read in a book. I’m not really intelligent, Draco, I just grasp things quicker than most people and retain what I learn.”
“People won’t use your intelligence – forgive me, I meant your smartness.”

“The same very people we associate with daily will come to exploit everything they learn about people,” said Harry, taking a breath. “Not just the Slytherins, either. You know damn well the people who wanna be Aurors are cataloguing each and every one of us, planning on using that in the future. The professors are the same, except for a different reason.”

“Yeah, but –”

“But nothing,” said Harry, interrupting. “You know that I’ve been experimenting with potions since I could brew a potion with my eyes closed. The Headmaster knows that and now sends me a look whenever something potion related happens. This will never vanish. I will always be looked at if something potion related happens. It happened to Professor Snape, too.”

Draco shrugged and aided his friend over a small gap in the ground. “Careful of the water,” he said. “Pretty sure there’s a Grindylow in it.”

“I’ve noticed that Professor Lupin’s rather fond of putting the creatures were meant to face in their natural habitats,” said Harry, studying the cave around them. “This also isn’t natural, there’s no way.”

“Of course it isn’t.”

“Look – not there, you dolt – there! There’s a bat!”

“Do you think it’s real?” said Draco, finally seeing the bat. “It looks like it’s real.”

“It’s not,” said Harry. “Look at it a bit closer.”

“Ah,” said Draco. “Conjured?”

“Transfigured,” said Harry, remembering a lecture Professor McGonagall gave him a few months back. “A conjured bat wouldn’t look so realistic. A conjured bat would have a slight glimmer around the edges where the conjuration slowly failed.”

“I think the bat’s tied to the exam,” said Draco. “I have this feeling that it will make, or do, something that will lose us points. There’s no way it isn’t there for something.”

“I think you’re right.”

“Of course I am,” said Draco, sniffing. “This exam is easy.”

Harry snorted. “I believe that there’s a spell attached to it that alerts Professor Lupin when you get too close, like a Muggle car alarm. The noise would signify a failure and lose you points. I think you’re meant to be cautious or do something that allows you past it.”

“How can we tell what sets it off?” said Draco, now glaring at the bat. “That’s such a stupid obstacle because it could be a million things.”

“I don’t think it’d be anything too complicated, else more people would be stuck here,” said Harry. “I know we’ve been slow, but we can’t be that far behind.”

Draco ignored the fact that they were pretty much near the start whereas everyone else would be finished by now. He couldn’t muster the strength to tell his friend that he really was looking like he was about to keel over and just give in, no matter how much that hurt him to admit. He looked away
from Harry and studied the cave again, looking at anything that may prove useful.

“Do you think that we’re meant to squeeze through one at a time?”

“That has merit,” said Harry. “I actually think you’ve solved the obstacle.”

“I… I did?”

“Yup,” said Harry, laughing. “We’re meant to go through one at a time, else the bat will probably make a loud sound. I suppose this is meant to show us caution. I, personally, would’ve just cursed the bat and gone through that way, but who knows.”

“How do you really know?” said Draco, curious. “I don’t want to fail this, I need to pass it.”

“Well,” said Harry, pausing for a moment. “I believe that Professor Lupin aimed to have us be cautious about the obstacle course. Caution seems to be a common theme.”

“Right,” said Draco as he slowly tip-toed the log that was over a puddle. He eyed the bat and sighed in relief when it didn’t do anything. “Alright, come across.”

“Give me a moment,” muttered Harry. “Look – how about you go on ahead while I catch up? I want to study this bat a bit and I don’t want to hold you up at all. I’ll be fine.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!” said Harry, nodding. “Go on, Draco, I won’t be too far behind.”

Draco crawled out of a hole with a triumphant smile. His hair was spiked up in all directions, no part of it in place at all. His smile quickly faltered as he looked for Professor Lupin, his dirt covered face seeking out the professor at once.

“Mr Malfoy,” said Professor Lupin. “Well done! It took you a little bit longer than everyone else, especially the Boggart, but you’ll receive full marks for being so cautious and patient.”

“Thank you, Professor Lupin,” said Draco as respectfully as he could. “The obstacle course was fantastic and a real challenge. I’m glad, but I have… something I need to ask.”

“Is this about Mr Potter?” said Professor Lupin. “I noticed he’s yet to finish.”

Draco gave a pained expression and turned towards the professor. “I think he’s stuck somewhere in the course,” he said, quickly looking around to make sure that no one was around and eavesdropping. ‘Harry’s, well, amazing with magic, but physical tasks seem to drain him. It’s why he left the Quidditch team. He tries to hide it, but we all knew.’

“Hold up,” said Professor Lupin. “You are glossing over things that are important. Start with why you think Mr Potter’s stuck in the course.”

“Harry’s been sickly all his life,” said Draco, sighing softly. “I’m telling you this because I think you can help him, not so you can give him pitying looks or tell him about it. If I can’t help him come to terms, I doubt you can. No offence.”

“You’re not going to speak unless I agree, are you?”

“No.”
“Alright,” said Professor Lupin. “I won’t tell anyone.”

“Harry bears a curse,” said Draco, a frown present on his face. “I actually don’t think a curse is the right word for it, but that’s what everyone who knows about it seems to call it. He was frail and sickly from the moment of his birth. Honestly, if it wasn’t for the potions and constant magic that had been cast on him, I don’t think… Anyway, Mother claimed that she had never seen a child look so awful in regards to their health. I remember, she told me once that one day, he might not be around.”

“What?”

“No one had high hopes for him,” said Draco. “Why do you think James and Lily just have no idea what to do with him? They were told by every healer, every Potions Master, besides Professor Snape, that their son would die before his tenth birthday. If they were lucky. He proved them all wrong, of course, but it came at a cost that he didn’t really know.”

“What was the cost?” said Professor Lupin, leading the student towards the obstacle course. “He always seems so full of life.”

“The cost is that he will always be frail,” said Draco. “The fact he seems to have an immunity to poisons is just another thing to be worried about. When he was about nine, he intentionally drank a poison so strong, it could wipe out a small city and walked away with no damage. He became obsessed with it, which just made him worse.”

“In what way?”

“Every way,” said Draco. “He wanted answers to questions no one could answer. He found his snake when he was six, she bit him and he lived. She hasn’t left his side ever since.”

Harry couldn’t remember what transpired in that course, but he remembered Draco coming back, mentioning that he got full marks, and then dumped him onto a hospital bed, demanding he not move a single muscle. Of course, he hardly listened and stood to collect a book before sitting back down.

“I’ll postpone the duel for you,” said Nott as he shifted closer to the injured boy. “I know you want to do it right now, and you probably believe I think you’re weak, but I want it to be a fair duel. I don’t mind if I lose, but I don’t want to win because you’re not at full strength.”

“Thank you,” said Harry. “It may just be my superstition, but tonight is a full moon and I have a feeling something will happen.”

“You think a werewolf will attack?”

Harry made a dismissive sound. “Attack Hogwarts? No. I just have this unexplainable feeling that something odd and life changing will happen tonight. Maybe I should speak to Professor Trelawney.”

“You think you have some kind of Seer related vision? Trelawney’s a fraud. She couldn’t predict anything.”

“If she wasn’t a proper Seer, I wouldn’t waste my time in her class,” said Harry, debating it. “She’s either very good at acting or she’s a Seer.”

“If you believe that,” said Nott, giving a slight glare. “I’ll leave you to it, then.”

Harry watched Nott leave with an amused expression. He did believe it due to the fact that he had
been ranting about Divination in the Chamber of Secrets and Salazar Slytherin had overheard and quickly muttered that it could very well be possible that she was a Seer. Of course, he had to break his golden rule of no Legilimency against the professors, but it proved true when he was unable to enter her mind.

Seers were natural Occlumens, but not as such. There was no way to pull anything from their minds as magic itself seemed to protect it permanently, something an Occlumens could manage for a few minutes on command.

Life for a Seer was supposedly horrid. They were prone to spouting off predictions, whether they could come true or not, at the whim of something no one understood. The prediction could rely on the weather being sunny, but if it rained, that prediction simply failed and was cast aside. Nothing was ever set in stone unless it was pursued.

“You are as healed as I can get you, Mr Potter,” said Madam Pomfrey gently. “The rest is on you, however. I do urge you to take a slow walk around the Black Lake – I will sign a note for you before you leave – and aid your recovery. It’s a rather warm night, believe it or not, I feel you would benefit from it.”

Harry said his thanks, took the note, and quickly retreated from the hospital wing. He wouldn’t stay there any longer than he needed to. The place made him feel uncomfortable. The place was far too quiet and far too clean for it to be considered natural.

He easily walked from the hospital wing and down towards the Black Lake. He had memorised most of the quickest paths to take last year, not wanting to be caught up when he was darting between classes. Some would have seemed to take longer, but when you added in all the students blocking the way, they were pretty much a shortcut.

Naturally, it hardly took him long to reach the Black Lake. He began a leisurely stroll around it, unsure how this would help him, but he wouldn’t argue with Madam Pomfrey. The woman was scary in her own right. He spotted the Minister for Magic hovering around the castle, a determined expression on his face.

“Ah!” said the Minister for Magic, jumping slightly as he turned his wand towards the footsteps. “You startled me, Mr…”

“Potter,” said Harry, a smile on his face as he held out his hand. “Harry Potter, sir. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

“What are you doing outside of the castle, Mr Potter?” said the Minister for Magic, taking the hand firmly. “Surely Dumbledore wouldn’t let a student wonder outside when it is quite obviously after curfew.”

“I doubt he would, but I have a note from Madam Pomfrey, allowing me to walk around the Black Lake every night for the rest of the year,” said Harry with a slight smile. “She believes that will help me somehow, but I am not one to argue with instruction from those wiser than me.”

“Goodness me,” said the Minister for Magic, his eyes going wide. “What was that?”

Harry pulled out his wand and took a careful step around Cornelius Fudge, no longer even considering the man’s title. There was simply no time for that. “It sounded like a werewolf,” he whispered, just loud enough for the man to hear. His eyes darted towards the nearby tree line. “Of course, there’s a werewolf when I’m outside… It’s alright, Minister, I’ll protect you as best I can.”
“You?” said the Minister for Magic, blinking. “I mean no disrespect, Mr Potter, but aren’t you a tad young to be defending me? I know a lot of people think I’m weak, but I am certainly not.”

“Please, call me Harry,” said Harry. “And I never implied you to be weak, but we stand no chance against a werewolf if we don’t work together. I do admit that I am saddened by the fact you haven’t heard of me.”

“Cornelius, then,” said Cornelius with a smile. “I can’t place your face with a name, I apologise. I meet with over a thousand people per day and it makes it very, very hard to remember names.”

“I’m almost certain that Lucius should’ve mentioned me at least every day that you spoke to him,” said Harry, looking a little saddened. “I pretty much live with him, his wife, and his son. As far as I know, they consider me their second son.”

“You mean Lucius Malfoy?” said Cornelius. “Surely – no, now that I think about it, he has mentioned you quite a few times. I just can’t remember what he’s said.”

Harry already knew that the Minister for Magic had no idea who he was, whether it was due to a lack of a care or not, or whether the man was genuine in his excuse that he spoke to thousands of people per day. However, it was time to prove himself with an introduction to the Minister for Magic, doing what Lucius had taught him on occasion.

“Well,” he said, still leading the man towards safety. “I am the only student in history to achieve an ‘Outstanding’ on all my exams in every year. I was able to do it in my first, second, and third year. This year, I also took every subject available and managed to pass without ever handing in a piece of late homework. I am sure it’s nothing on your achievements, but I am in the process of creating my own potion with my godfather, Severus Snape, who is a professor and a Potions Master.”

“Quite a list of achievements, Harry,” said Cornelius with a wide smile. “You sound like a young man that has his head on right. Judging by your clothing, I assume you’re in Slytherin?”

“Correct!” said Harry, whipping his head towards the nearby howl he heard. “We may not be foolish and charge into danger, but we are very ambitious, so you know that I will not allow you pain tonight as that would pretty much end any career I have in the future.”

“I don’t think we have any more time for idle chitchat,” said Cornelius, frowning. “I would love to get to know you a bit more, maybe I could arrange a meeting between us and we can work out an apprenticeship or something along those lines. The Ministry of Magic is always seeking quick-minded and excited witches and wizards.”

“I would love to –”

“Goodness me!” said Cornelius, easing himself behind the boy and his self-proclaimed protector, despite what he said a moment ago. “It’s here! It’s outside the castle, mere minutes from children! Where is Dumbledore? Surely there is a spell or enchantment that he has over the school that alerts the headmaster when a dangerous creature is on the grounds! Well, Harry, I didn’t want to have to use this…”

Harry watched as the Minister for Magic fumbled with his wand and cast some spell that wasn’t in Latin. He had heard about this spell and the controversy that surrounded it. The Ministry had interrogated the Death Eaters thoroughly and learned how the Dark Mark operated and then they replicated that in a less permanent manner.

“The spell I just cast alerts the Head Auror that I am in trouble or that he is required immediately,”
said Cornelius. “I dislike using this as I prefer to just use owls, but I think this is quicker than finding a piece of parchment, ink, a quill, and an owl.”

Harry faked a laugh and rolled his eyes. “We can easily buy some time while we wait for the Head Auror to show up,” he said, still watching the werewolf with a critical eye. “The thing looks feral.”

“Feral?”

Harry made a sound of agreement. “When you think of wolves, you assume the animal, right? A beautiful animal that deserves more respect than they give. Associating wolves with... that is a horrid way to picture them. You can see by the attempt at fur that the thing is meant to resemble the animal wolf, but something has caused it to not. It’s not even trying to be a wolf, it’s trying to be a human. It’s vile…”

“Not many people would ever attempt to study or defend werewolves,” said Cornelius, a slight frown on his face. “The facts have been set out for decades. We have no reason to question them now.”

“I didn’t want to change the facts,” said Harry. “I was simply making an observation and hoping to expand on those facts in the future. I’ve seen pictures of werewolves that actually accepted the wolf in all forms. They look like the animal. Those that abuse and use the wolf end up looking deranged. I can judge this is what you look like when you despise the wolf.”

“Something about this is wrong,” said Cornelius, looking at the wolf with disdain. “It isn’t – it hasn’t attacked us yet! It should have the moment it noticed us.”

“I think it’s plotting,” said Harry, unsure. “I assume that it thinks we’re a pack and that we could be a greater threat than it believes. It could also be debating the hierarchy of us. It’ll be trying to gauge who’s stronger and who’s weaker of us.”

“I don’t understand,” said Cornelius, frowning. “Surely it considers me to be the biggest threat due to the fact I am much bigger than you.”

“I guess it could figure you to be more intimidating, but size isn’t an overall factor of power,” said Harry. “Considering that you are behind me, it probably assumes that I’m the defender. However, as you said, you’re much bigger and a sizable opponent. It’s confused.”

“I thought they were savage beasts.”

“They are,” said Harry instantly. “Not the wolf part of it, the human part. Human and animal minds should never coexist together. Most animals are smarter than the average human, we just refuse to see it.”

“Do you think it will continue to study us?” said Cornelius, curious. “We could easily stall it by keeping it confused.”

“No,” said Harry, shrugging. “It’ll attack soon, really. As soon as it feels like it understands how we work. It will strike before any of us can even think about running, which is a bad idea.”

“What is?”

“Running,” said Harry. “It will catch you before you turn, its hunting instincts kicking in. By running, we lose any ground we may have on it.”

“Luckily for us, neither have any plans on doing that.”
Harry really doubted that the Minister for Magic hadn’t had the idea to flee the werewolf the moment he caught sight of it. He took the man for someone that would sell his own family if it meant that he could live. It made perfect sense, really. He knew that it would be him that had to do something about the werewolf, whether it was lethal or not.

“How good are you at Transfiguration?” he asked, turning to Cornelius. “Because that could be our way to stall the werewolf.”

“I am well-rounded,” said Cornelius. “Although, it depends on what we would be changing.”

“Anything we can find into silver, which would be quite a hard task as turning a wooden branch into silver is complicated, but I have faith in you, Cornelius.”

They didn’t get much done in terms of turning items into silver when the werewolf began snarling and adopting a threatening position. Of course, that was Harry’s fault for rushing the process by Transfiguration items into silver, which would have greatly annoyed the werewolf, but that was in the past.

“I thought the silver would make it docile!” said Cornelius, backing up slightly. “It looks angrier than before.”

“A double-edged swords, really,” said Harry. “It now considers us a huge threat, but it won’t pounce in case it touches the silver, which it knows is scattered around. It’s too stupid to go around. Dumb, vile creature.”

Cornelius laughed, his eyes showing some kind of mirth at the words. “Very well said,” he said. “But we should at least try and contain it in one spot until the Aurors come.”

Harry nodded, taking his eyes off the werewolf for a moment as he looked for more branches. He suppressed a scream as he caught sight of the werewolf lunging towards them. He knew it considered him more of a threat, which was smart, and it took its chance when he was distracted.

“Harry!”

Harry pushed the Minister for Magic out of the way and stumbled a little. He picked up a silver branch and tossed it at the werewolf, internally praising his skills at being able to hit the thing on the nose. ‘I’d make a good Chaser,’ he thought smugly, aiming his wand at the werewolf with trepidation.

Thankfully, Cornelius didn’t run and started summoning more branches and turning them silver. He copied the boy’s action and sent them at the werewolf with magic.

Harry only just managed to dive from the werewolf, the beast’s teeth missing his arm by a fingernail. He blinked and finally saw red. With an overhead flick, and an underarm jab, he created a small silver box around the werewolf on the ground.

The silver box did nothing for a few seconds before bars appeared diagonally, which was not meant to happen, and pierced upwards, catching the werewolf through the arm, chest, and leg.

A scream and shout were heard in the distance. Neither Harry nor the Minister for Magic turned towards the source, both focused on the werewolf.

“You killed – oh my God!”

“Hermione! Hermione, wait – oh God!”
“Why are you three out of bed?” said Cornelius, his posture relaxing now that the werewolf was dead. “Four students on the grounds when a rabid werewolf attacks? I will be having stern words to Dumbledore about this. His security is nothing but terrible.”

“We were –”

Ron nudged Neville and gave him a look. “Dumbledore knows we’re out here. Ask him and he’ll tell you that it’s true, sir.”

The five of them stood silently for a while, with Neville, Ron, and Hermione glaring at Harry with hatred in their eyes.

“Finally,” said Cornelius. “As is true to the stereotype, the Aurors arrive when help is no longer needed. “I am glad to see you – wait, I never pieced it together. You two are father and son – oh my, that makes sense now, considering your ability with a wand.”

“Harry?” said James, walking past Dumbledore and the other Aurors. “What are you – oh my God, Remus!”

Harry was rather annoyed that James went to his obviously dead friend over his son, who could be a werewolf. This is why he preferred his mother. She at least put him first and not second to some crazed beast that attacked him and the Minister for Magic. Even if the thing was alive, it would be dead or in Azkaban for stepping foot on Hogwarts and for attacking a student and the Minister for Magic.

“He doesn’t even care that he killed Remus!” snapped Ron. “Don’t you see, Neville? He doesn’t care! I saw him! I saw him do it and he did it on purpose! He could’ve stunned… he could have!”

“He should have,” whispered Hermione. “I just don’t understand why. What did you gain by killing Remus in such a cruel manner?”

“Because I obviously meant to kill it, Granger,” snapped Harry, enraged by his father mourning the beast instead of him. “I was trying to create a silver cage, but the polls on the side went to the side, not straight up. Maybe because it attacked me, and I lost focus. Who knows? If I didn’t do something, I would be dead.”

“I, too, would be dead if not for Mr Potter,” said Cornelius, sighing. “Mr Potter played a pivotal role in my survival, as well as his own, and we should not be condemning him. It is sad the outcome cost us another human, one who could have led a long life if they hadn’t made the mistake of coming onto the grounds as a werewolf. We can only move forward. However, Miss – Granger, was it? – the werewolf would have spent the remained of his or her life in Azkaban for attacking a student and the Minister for Magic. There would have been nothing either of us could have done. The laws are absolute.”

“Perhaps we can take this away from the body of an innocent man,” said Dumbledore. “This is not a conversation we should be having now.”

“How are you so calm after killing a werewolf with some kind of a torture spell?” screamed Hermione. “How can you stand there and act like Remus deserved it! He was a great man and you took that away…”

“That spell,” said Cornelius, waving off the girl. “I have never seen that before. Where did you learn it from?”

“I created it,” said Harry. “It’s not a torture device, as Weasley thinks. I had it in mind awhile go for the box to make rainbow coloured water. It would be a simple spell with small fountains of water
that changed colours. It wasn’t hard to change the water into silver, but it didn’t do what I wanted it to. It went inwards instead of straight up. It’s a coincidence that I stumbled across you tonight, but I had plans of passing it onto the Aurors once it’s perfected.”

“You can’t be serious!” shouted Ron. “You’re pathetic!”

“You created a spell at thirteen?” said Cornelius, surprised. “Forget the Order of Merlin, Third Class. I think you deserve an Order of Merlin, First Class!”

With those words, the three Gryffindors erupted into shouts and abuse.

“He’s evil!” screamed Ron, walking behind Hermione as they entered the common room. “I always knew something was off about Potter when I first met him and now I know why!”

“What’s happened?” asked Ginny, her finger trailing the cut across her face. Whenever someone mentioned Harry Potter, it burned. “And who’s evil?”

“Potter,” said Neville. “He… he – it’ll be addressed tomorrow. He’s getting rewarded for it! I have never seen James so distraught.”

“You’ll see what we mean tomorrow morning,” said Hermione. “I doubt there will be one person in Gryffindor, Ravenclaw, or Hufflepuff that won’t hate him.”

“Before you all have breakfast, I would like to explain a few events,” said Dumbledore, standing as straight as possible. “I would like everyone to remain quiet while this issue is addressed. It is only respectful and I’m sure this is exactly what the person would wish. All questions, no matter what they are, will be answered after everything is explained. Is that understood?”

The entire student body gave a murmur of agreement.

“Tragedy struck last night,” said Dumbledore, looking solemn. “A professor, Remus Lupin, was killed in an accident that could not have been prevented. His body has already been moved and buried, his family have been noticed, and I am sure he has already begun his next adventure. A moment of silence for a great man that always put others before himself. A moment for someone who would help anyone, no matter how much they denied or did not wish for that aid.”

The Great Hall remained quiet, pondering over how the Defence Against the Dark Arts professor had died. Some had a slight clue, due to the fact that the man was a known werewolf, but most didn’t look into it too much.

“You may ask your questions,” said Dumbledore. “I will answer everything to the best of my ability. Please do remember that I was not there. Only two people were able to reveal what transpired that night in perfect detail. I do urge that you do not seek them out or harass them. I will not tolerate any kind of aggressive behaviour because of what transpired.”

Harry had told the Headmaster everything that happened, with perfect clarity. He explained the fact that Madam Pomfrey had urged him to take daily walks around the Black Lake, that he had come across the Minister rather early in his walk and felt suspicious that the man was lurking around, and the grows and a prowling werewolf that had attacked. He mentioned that he had no idea that it may have been a professor, and that he wouldn’t have used an experimental method to apprehend the werewolf had he known.

The Headmaster, of course, did not trust his word and kept sending him looks of displeasure. He
knew that Dumbledore despised him. He committed murder and got rewarded for it. He wasn’t 
remorseful and he would do it all over again if he had to. It felt different than the goblin. It felt more 
impactful, but not in a bad way.

While a lot of students despised him for what he did, that despise turned into hatred when the 
Minister stopped by and handed him an order of Merlin. No one had said anything, out of respect, 
but he swore he could feel the entire population glaring at him if he was Voldemort reincarnated.

It would have been greatly amusing if not for the fact that he was unable to go home during the 
summer because James would probably blow something up. He had written to his mother and 
explained everything that happened as calmly and as in detail as he could do. He promised he would 
see her and that they would have to go out somewhere, away from his father, who would probably 
attempt to lock him in Azkaban.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for another note, but there's probably one chapter left and that will be the duel 
between Harry and Nott. This chapter will be late as I need to write chapter one of book 
4 before I can publish it. However, it will be a relatively short chapter, sitting between 
2500 - 4000 words. It'll also deal with the aftermath of... this. Oh, before I forget, it'll 
also explain why the timeline in this book seems so jumbled. That was intentional, in 
case people seemed odd. We missed Draco's birthday. Again. He's going to hate Harry 
soon. :'D

I hope you enjoyed! :)}
Harry hadn’t been having an easy time of things ever since that announcement that happened in the morning. He was almost one hundred percent certain that Dumbledore had orchestrated the whole thing on purpose. It made sense, even more so when he knew the Headmaster was out to get him. There was an underlying tone of mistrust and that meant the idiotic masses of stupid teenagers would use that distrust as a weapon.

The issue wasn’t Dumbledore, nor was it the blatant tone of mistrust that he had used. He knew, as did most people, that the Headmaster didn’t trust him because he held far too many talents that most people couldn’t ever dream of mastering. The same very talents that took decades to master, he knew at the ripe age of eleven. Occlumency, for one, was something that took a bare minimum of three years when you were well-versed in most magical arts, but he knew it well before he stepped foot into Hogwarts. Another issue was that it was impossible, literally, to learn Occlumency unless you had the desire to hide something so valuable you would limit your own mind.

That was the very first giveaway to Dumbledore that he was supposedly hiding something. Something big, if his supposed blocks in his mind, which was not how Occlumency worked, were to go by.

However, the issue was that the students had taken to attempting to curse him at every moment they could. Whether that be in the corridors or in class, even in Potions, which was just plain idiotic. The massive concern was that Gryffindors were sending curses at his back, which, if not for Draco and Rosier, he would have been thrown down multiple sets of stairs.

However, the worst of it was the fact that he had gone back fifty steps in the span of one night. Any alliances or friendships he made in Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw were now off-limits. He wasn’t dumb enough to think of them as lasting alliances, but as a Slytherin and highly cunning, he was able to lure himself into a false sense of belief, like everyone else, that they were. The fact he lost those alliances was the reason he was annoyed, not because he lost a few friendships.

He felt like Longbottom did when the whole Chamber of Secrets fiasco happened. Only one or two people dared speak to him, and that was his two closest friends who understood what had really happened.

“Well, well, well,” said a rather high-pitched voice off to the side, hidden behind a tapestry. “Look who it is, guys, it’s Potter! Didn’t think you’d be dumb enough to walk around alone after what you’ve done. Half the school wants you to meet the same fate as Professor Lupin and the other half believes you should be in Azkaban.”

“Would you have preferred it if I let the werewolf maul me?” said Harry. “Should I have just stood there, along with the Minister for Magic, and let it bite me? Is that what you think?”

“You should’ve tried to capture Professor Lupin,” said the boy. “You know, use that brain everyone thinks you have.”
“What do you think I tried to do?” snapped Harry. “Do you think I just picked up my wand, aimed it at Lupin, and cast the Killing Curse? The Minister and I used – you know what? Who cares? The spell I used was going to trap the thing in a silver cage, it got messed up and went the wrong way. Such is magic. The blame is on him. Why was he out of his assigned room that had been coated in silver? That’s his sole condition for working, that’s what the Ministry declared and he went against it and now I am suffering because of his carelessness.”

“That’s not what I asked!”

“That’s the answer you got,” said Harry. “Deal with it and leave me alone. I have things I need to do.”

“We’re following you,” said another boy. “We’ve got to make sure you’re not plotting any more murders. We did some research, with the help of Ravenclaw.”

“No surprise you morons can’t do your own research,” said Harry. “Why are you bothering me? I’ve had to deal with half your House already. Having a bunch of first-years trying to attack me with spells they can’t even cast is becoming annoying.”

“You’re the only student in the school to ever kill a professor,” said a boy, who was previously standing behind someone else. “Not even You-Know-Who killed a professor while in school, none of the other infamous dark wizards ever killed a professor. Students, yes, but not a professor. You’re worse than You-Know-Who.”


“No, we’re not!”

“You are,” said Harry, slightly annoyed. “You believe I’m the next Voldemort and that I’m worse than him, yet you’re still trying to torment me in the corridors of Hogwarts. By your logic, I intentionally killed a professor. What makes you think a bunch of students, who are in their second to fourth years, are a threat to me?”

“We’re Gryffindors,” said a brown-haired boy. “We’re brave and we’re not afraid of you or You-Know-Who.”

“So brave and you can’t even say his name,” said Harry. “You just about wet your pants when I said his name. So, what makes you think I care what you say when you can’t even say ‘Voldemort’?”

“We have another theory.”

“Oh my,” said Harry, interested. “This one will be great.”

“We think you’re that you’re the son of You-Know-Who – what’s so funny? Stop laughing!”

“So, my Muggleborn mother went and had an affair with Voldemort, a man who killed Muggle-born wizards and witches as he ate his morning breakfast?” said Harry, laughing. “And then, as I grew up, she realised I looked like him and she cast a series of strong Glamour Charms that hid me from the world and they would fade on my seventeenth birthday where all would be revealed? Ha!”

“Maybe…”

“The Headmaster can tell when Glamour Charms have been used,” said Harry. “Every professor can, they’re not hard to detect. I’ve also been into Gringotts, which instantly vanishes spells and enchantments on you. Your theory is flawed, as is everything else you idiots spout from your
“Who cares,” said the same boy that first spoke. “You’re still cosying up to the sons and daughters of known Death Eaters. Even the Headmaster considers you a threat.”

“If he considered me a threat, he would’ve expelled me by now,” said Harry. “And I am speaking to the other students in my House. Children are not their parents and most of them don’t share the same views because Voldemort was dead during their childhoods. Next, you’ll be telling me that Slytherin is the House where all evil people go and it’s this way to create House unity between three Houses.”

“Well…”

“You’ve all clearly run out of things to say,” said Harry. “Now, if you wish to leave me alone so I can go back to the Slytherin common room and get away from you fanatics, I would appreciate that. If you need a threat to move, I’ll gladly give you all a trip to the hospital wing. Free of charge, of course.”

It didn’t take all that long for the Gryffindors to wise up and scatter the dungeons. Harry watched in amusement and was somewhat glad that he was being left alone and would be able to think. He was glad that he didn’t need to threaten any more students. However, he was rather worried that the Gryffindors were ambushing him around the dungeons, a safe zone for Slytherins, no matter what, such as the seventh-floor tower and corridors were the safe zone for Gryffindors.

There was an unsaid agreement that none of the students would cross into those safe zones and cause conflict. It was set for the first-year students who were afraid and frightened of everything.

He slipped into the Slytherin common room after whispering the password, his eyes darting to each small group, before he shifted along the wall and hid behind a large pillar. He had spotted Nott, who appeared to be getting in some last minute study. He pressed his wand against a piece of stone and ghosted an ‘S’ shape over it, waiting for the sign Salazar had taught him about.

He stepped through the stone that had simply allowed him to walk through it and sat on a nearby green sofa, waiting for the torch to flicker to life. He glanced at the small little bookshelf and sighed. At least Atieno had left him something modern in this room. How the vampire had got in here without being spotted was another thing that made him curious.

Some last minute studying would do him good. It would take the edge off his mind and cause him to actually think and plan.

“Welcome, once again, to the Slytherin Duelling Pit,” said Professor Snape, scowling at the group of students that refused to remain quiet. He rose his hand and silence them. “This room is not a joke and you should not be repeating anything to anyone, regardless if they are family or not. It is a secret that has been kept a secret for generations. Should any of you break that secrecy, I will be… very displeased.”

Everyone nodded as frantically as possible, proving they wouldn’t dare speak on the matter.

“I will not be explaining what this room is, where it came from, and how to summon it,” said Professor Snape. “Just know this is room is as old as the castle and has traditions that must be retained. Now, because the two duellists have no idea what they desire, with no terms being set. I assume they wish to simply attack each other with spells because they lack the maturity to handle things like reasonable human beings.”

Harry sent Nott a nasty smirk, which was not returned.
“Not that I blame them,” said Professor Snape. “In Slytherin, there is a stage when words cannot handle situations and only duelling can resolve it. If you would believe it, I was the undisputed champion of the Duelling Pit when I attended this school. Now, before I steal the thunder from both of you, something must be clear. Do. Not. Severe. Dark. Curses! Am I clear on this?”

“Yes.”

“Of course,” said Harry, giving the professor a respectful nod. “I agree.”

When Professor Snape signalled the start of the duel, everyone was surprised when there was no instant spell casting. In fact, the surprise on the professor’s face was enough to throw most people off.

“They despise each other,” said Draco, turning to Astoria Greengrass. He spoke loudly so that everyone could hear, making sure they knew why Harry hadn’t attacked. “This could be a very, very long duel.”

“We do not require your commentary,” said Professor Snape, his expression eerily blank. “But, as they cannot hear us, I believe it would be prudent to allow such a thing so that we may be able to learn what caused this situation. I, for one, am surprised. In all the time I have known Mr Potter, he has displayed patience and rational thinking.”

“Harry’s always been like this,” said Draco, somewhat surprised. “He tends to keep it under control, but he slips and often loses himself to an impulsive nature that rears its head when he needs to remain calm. Sometimes, I think that people are too easily fooled by his intelligence.”

“Hm.”

“Are they ever going to do anything?” said Astoria, glaring at the two boys who were still standing still. “It’s been, what, three minutes?”

“This is how a duel should be, Miss Greengrass,” said Professor Snape. “It should take time, precision, and care. It is not something you should rush into. I applaud them both.”

“Harry’ll start being aggressive soon enough,” said Draco, already knowing that his friend was showing far more restraint than usual. “Once he thinks he understands Nott, there will be no more waiting. It’s his style, I think. He will seek to overpower Nott, avoid the more defensive side of the duel.”

As Draco had predicted moments ago, Harry began to attack with a cruel ferocity that no one, not even professor Snape, had seen before. With Nott’s stance studied, it was all or nothing because Harry felt like he knew his opponent. Harry had observed Nott’s posture, the pattern of how his arm moved, and how his eyes darted around. That was all that was needed before the one-sided attack began.

There was no such thing as a magical core that could be depleted. There was no such thing as a mana system that could be refilled on a whim. There was just a witch or wizard and their intent and their repertoire of spells. Some argued that constant casting had some kind of draining effect on the mind and body, but nothing had been proven. A strong mind and a healthy body could see a duel last hours.

In fact, the longest recorded duel in history was eighteen hours long. It was between two duellists that were very similar and were able to counter each other, but not get a hit in. It ended when one duellist’s arm was so sore he could not raise it.
“The thing that makes Harry so good at duelling is that he has this ability to seemingly switch between styles of duelling,” said Draco, watching the duel with fascination. “He’s unpredictable in what he does, but he retains a constant presence.”

“I’m pretty curious about how a boy in his third year knows spells that we won’t even come close to learning until we’re midway through our sixth year.”

“I assume that is because Mr Potter spends every second of free time he has in the library,” said Professor Snape. “Not only that but obviously he has adults teaching him. It would not surprise me if his father taught him the basics of duelling. As you all know, active Aurors are not allowed to give training to any minor.”

“Any reason for that, sir?”

“Because children like to talk,” said Professor Snape. “The Auror department cannot have their tactics and strategies getting passed around. It is also a safety risk because some of the things they learn can be lethal if done incorrectly.”

“You mean to other students?”

“That and themselves,” said Professor Snape. “I was never an Auror, so this is all assumptions from those that I do know.”

“And what about Nott?” asked another student, curious. “Potter can be explained as I see him in the library every day, but how’s Nott holding against Potter? The Shield Charm is taught in our fifth year.”

“Well, from what I’ve gathered, Nott’s a bookworm just like Harry,” said Draco, scowling at the sheer thought. “Really, I’d say Nott’s a worse bookworm because that’s all he did in his first two years here. Harry had Quidditch, Potions, and extra Transfiguration lessons from Professor McGonagall. Maybe that’s why Nott dislikes Harry… Harry put in less effort and learned it all quicker, learned it better, and got more recognition.”

“That does make sense,” said Professor Snape. “In a House where ambition is everywhere you look, it would not surprise me that Mr Nott felt threatened and instead of asking for help, began some kind of rivalry that he would not win.”

“You’re that confident in Potter?”

“I have duelled him before,” said Professor Snape. “He is quick to adapt and will not make the same mistake twice. I doubt he could beat a seventh-year in a duel, however. I am urging you not to keep challenging him. It will do you more harm in the future than it would good. He tends to hold grudges for a very long time.”

“Understatement,” said Draco, laughing. “When we were seven, I stepped on a book of his. He still hasn’t forgiven me.”

The excited chatter among the spectators continued in a hushed tone. They were half watching the duel, mainly because it was still in its infancy and nothing exciting was occurring. In fact, the duel was mainly Shield Charms and a few jinxes you would see cast around the school. No one had understood why it wasn’t professing as fast as they expected, but Professor Snape had simply said that both were holding back, waiting.

A few more students had trickled in, seeing the Duelling Pit in use. As Slytherins, they would seize anything they could that could give them an advantage over their peers. Knowing their signature
spells and duelling style would help with confrontations. You could learn a lot by watching and most Slytherins attempted to do just that.

Harry had kept Nott pinned to the corner of the platform, his eyes never leaving the face of Nott as he sent spell after spell, crumbling Nott’s shield each time it was raised. He wouldn’t end the duel this quickly, and the fact his simple spells could disintegrate Nott’s shield amused him very much. He sensed hesitation from Nott, no matter how insane that sounded. He knew Nott was holding back. He also knew that Nott seemed to think he knew that fact and was doing it now to anger him.

He realised that Nott’s plan on hiding his talents was smart, but he couldn’t stand it. When challenging someone to a duel, you should use everything you had. It was dishonourable to challenge someone and then waste time by hiding and acting sneaky. Perhaps it was time to use more serious spells rather than smaller spells, see how Nott liked that.

Within less than a minute, not had been hit with a fireball, which had set his robes on fire and left his arms pretty badly burnt. He was also hit by a small ball of water that put out the flames and caused a puddle of water to pool around his feet. A sharp rock followed the previous paths and collided with his face, leaving a jagged cut from just under his right eye to the corner of his mouth. The last spell was something that resembled a bolt of air that just tore at Nott’s robes, tearing the expensive clothing to shreds.

It was after that last attack that Harry paused, his head tilted. He watched as Nott raised a shield and did nothing else. When the nothing hit the shield, it vanished almost instantly. ‘He lacks the ability to hold a shield,’ he thought, watching carefully. ‘He can raise a weak one, but not hold one up, which shows he has something on his mind or he’s not all there mentally.’

“Why did he stop?” asked Rosier. “He should’ve kept attacking!”

“Because Mr Potter has realised that something is not correct,” said Professor Snape. “Duelling is not as simple as disarming your opponent, Mr Rosier, it is about you teaching them a lesson and making them learn. How is he meant to teach Mr Nott anything when the boy simply refuses to attack back?”

“I still –”

“You still do not understand,” said Professor Snape, cutting in with ease. “Many centuries ago, before this school was made, duels were considered to be the last resort. That style has gone out of trend, obviously, and now duels are initiated at the whim of every witch or wizard when they are offended in any way. Back then, a duel had to be accepted by the ruling king, which had a very small chance of actually being accepted.”

“So, Nott not – well, that’s a mouthful – participating is a sign of what?”

“Dishonour,” said Professor Snape. “It could very well be something else, but I am sure that is how Mr Potter sees it and he is simply waiting for Mr Nott to gather his wits and actually duel him.”

Perhaps, Harry’s biggest flaw was that he wanted to best Nott with every ounce of rare talent and skill he had in a fair duel that couldn’t be disputed. Sure, he could have simply duelled Nott in the corridor or the common room, but it would lack the lasting effect beating him in the Duelling Pit would. Nott would have to take him seriously here.

When he caught sight of Nott’s suddenly relaxed posture, something in his mind clicked. It wasn’t until Nott had stood, spun around, and shouted the incantation of the Blasting Curse did he realise that Nott had been planning this since the duel started. The boy had put everything on this cheesy, dishonourable tactic. He did admit, the plan had some merit, but it was far too cheap for him to
actually praise. It was pure cowardliness, not cunning.

It was rather surprising, even to himself, when he had batted away the curse like it was a fly. He didn’t even think or hesitate, just hit the Blasting Curse with a spell of his own, and ducked slightly as the two spells ricocheted off each other.

“My God!” said Draco, amazed. “Did anyone see that?”

It really was a testament to how fast and precise Harry Potter actually was. No one would have thought such a thing was possible at such a young age, but it had just been done and it had thrown them all through a loop. However, the thing that had startled most viewers was that most adult wizards lacked the ability to think that quickly on their feet. Spells connecting mid-air was almost unheard of, even in duelling championships where people had trained their entire lives for it.

That hadn’t been the only thing that caught the eye of the spectators. The spell that had intercepted the Blasting Curse had been done nonverbally. Reaction speed was essential, and being able to cast spells nonverbally allowed for that extra millisecond that could allow you to win. A large spell repertoire would get you across obstacles, but intense reaction speed would get you the furthest in duels.

After that incredible display, at least according to Draco Malfoy, the two duellists seemed to realise that there was far more to play for than just a simple grudge or some bragging rights.

Nott, who refused to lose now that he realised he could gain so much more followers and prestige if he took down Potter, used everything he had to push Potter as far back as he could, trying to get himself out of the corner he allowed himself to be pushed into. He had managed to force the duel into the centre with great effort. He quickly realised that he had underestimated Potter.

Harry, on the other hand, was somewhat amused at the whole ordeal. He knew that Nott couldn’t match his ability and insane spell repertoire that he had learned over the years. Constant studying, a source of untapped potential, and an innate ability to absorb most things he saw and read allowed for that. The duel was nothing but a learning experience, but it wouldn’t be one that he would lose.

Allowing Nott to push him back into the centre was one of his more obvious plans, not that anyone noticed it. Forcing someone into a little area was good and all, but without knowledge of more potent and damaging spells, it wasn’t an optimal choice. Something he had learned from Gemma was that the whole platform was a potential weapon, one that could easily win the duel within moments.

Even outside of duels, it amazed him how most wizards could ignore their environment as easily as they ignore Muggles. The possibilities in duels were endless when you thought about using Transfiguration and turning sticks, rocks, and other things into weapons or defences. Conjure a flock of birds and send them to attack the enemy from behind, summon a stick into your enemy. Anything could be done.

He cast a spell that he had used previously. This time, however, it had another use. He had become to understand Nott’s patterns, which were rather unpredictable and constantly changing, but he had them. Block, block, attack, dodge, right, attack, dodge. An amazingly simple pattern, but one that seemed to work exceptionally well. So, when Harry swapped his own pattern to counter Nott’s, it worked flawlessly.

The spell he had cast was a lightning spell, which meant it arced and shot forwards in a random direction. The main plus to the spell was that it moved in random directions and alternated in speed, making it insanely difficult to use a Shield Charm against. It just wasn’t viable in duelling to hold a Shield Charm up longer than a second because two spells hitting it would surely cause it to collapse.
Nott did the only thing he could think of: he summoned the rock behind Potter, which was easily dodged, as Potter knew it was there and pushed it into the path of the lightning spell.

Harry smirked and watched as Nott shielded his next basic spell. It was nothing major and Nott really should have just let it hit as it would do no harm at all. The harmless spell bounced off Nott’s shield and he just smiled at the boy, waiting. It wouldn’t take long and he knew Nott wouldn’t see it.

The lightning spell absorbed the rock and pulsated onwards, bouncing off the object.

Nott never saw it coming.

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