Quelling

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by FalconLux

Summary

1,033 years after the Battle of Hogwarts, the Master of Death is killed for the umpteenth time but finds himself waking up in his childhood once more. Confused by the unexpected second chance, Harry struggles to figure out what he may want to do differently. After a thousand years, the answer is... less than he expected.

WARNING: This is a Work In Progress. It is not finished. It may never be finished. Read at your own risk.

Notes

Disclaimer: I am not J. K. Rowling. Tragically, that means that I don't own Harry Potter. It also means that I make no money from the franchise nor from this story or any other I have written using her characters/universe/etcetera...
“Lord Potter!”

Harry gave a lazy salute in the direction of the obviously star struck young wizard he had just surprised on his way up to the battlements near New London’s north gate. The London of his youth had been completely eradicated in the decades following the Quelling – every trace of the Techs, or Muggles, as they were then known, had been wiped away. From the dust, New London had grown. In place of steel and concrete, the city was one of stone and magic.

Mounting the battlements, Harry’s eyes quickly found the ranking officer, General Tade Avery. The man was tall and powerfully built, his age just beginning to become strongly visible in the lines of his face as he neared his ninetieth birthday. Harry remembered giving a guest lecture at Hogwarts when Tade was a third year. Each year seemed to pass more quickly than the last, Harry noted privately as he stepped forward to catch the general’s attention.

“Lord Potter, sir!” Avery said immediately upon spotting him, spinning to fully face him and snapping off a sharp salute, fist to heart.

Harry returned it casually as he moved to join the other man in gazing over at the rolling plain below.

“Forgive me, sir, I was not informed of your arrival,” Tade said stiffly.

Harry waved him off dismissively, “I did not announce my intention, Tade.” He wasn’t surprised to see the other man blink in surprise then swell with pride as Harry addressed him by his given name. He tended to have that effect on people. “Brief me on the situation.”

“Intelligence reports a significant force of Tech Mages amassing to the north – less than fifty kilometers. The report is solid, but we’ve been unable to ascertain their exact location. We speculate that they’ve improved their cloaking technology.”

Harry nodded to himself, then cast his gaze toward the north again. “How about I go have a look,” he suggested.

“I…” Tade floundered, clearly not sure how to respond.

Harry smirked at the man. “I’m over a thousand years old, Tade,” he smirked at the man. “A little field work now and then keeps me young.” Well, that and the Deathly Hallows. It had taken Harry almost two hundred years before he’d managed to work a ritual to age his body into his early twenties instead of remaining terminally an underfed seventeen-year-old. Still, getting his hands dirty helped him to feel a little younger.

“Of course, sir.” He drew a string of pearls from his pocket and tapped one of them with his wand. Instantly, a map of the land north of New London materialized as a semi-corporeal projection in the air. “This is all the information we have on their location.”

Harry examined it critically for a long moment, committing it to memory with a mind trained through a millennium of occlumency experience. “I’ll let you know what I can find,” he nodded, then turned and stepped between the merlons and off the battlements. His magic rose to his call with no real conscious thought after so many years, supporting his body effortlessly. Invisibility came to him just as easily, as it had since he’d absorbed the Hallows, and he shot off toward the north with more
speed and maneuverability than his trusty old Firebolt had ever offered and more freedom than even the most impressive modern models. Personal flight was taught at Hogwarts now, starting fifth year, but not everyone could do it or do it well and it took a decent amount of power to be effective, so brooms were still commonly used. Harry found it vaguely humorous that, in the three thousand years since their inception, no one had managed to break the habit of building their flying devices in a model reminiscent of a cleaning implement.

A few minutes later, Harry circled over the same stretch of apparently empty land for the third time. He was convinced that he’d found the Techs. He couldn’t see them or hear them or even sense them magically. This was undoubtedly new cloaking tech, and very impressive, but there were a few benefits to being the Master of Death beyond immortality. He could sense a large concentration of sentient life down there.

Just as he was debating on heading back or investigating further, he sensed that he was in danger and half a second later he felt the impact of the D-round the Techs had been favoring lately. Fiendishly clever, the rounds were packed with tiny palladium shavings, which were laced with a particularly vicious acid. The rounds were armed upon firing and upon nearing a living body, they exploded, showering the victim with high velocity metal shavings, which ate away at any organic matter they touched. Essentially, a single D-round, or disintegration round, could put a ten centimeter hole through just about anyone.

The Master of Death was no exception – nor was this the first time such a wound had killed him.

As the pain tore through him, he had just enough time to launch a high-powered Pestilence Curse toward the center of the gathering. It was one of the best soft target spells that the Techs had yet to properly counter. The curse inflicted the victim with an extremely fast-acting, constantly mutating virus. It would burn itself out within an hour, but it only took a quarter of that time to kill a healthy man and it spread like the plague it was. It could do a lot of damage in an hour.

The D-round had hit Harry in his left shoulder and he suspected that it was ripping apart his neck and probably the top of his heart. He was dead before he ever felt the impact of the ground.

Harry opened his eyes and blinked in confusion when he found he was not lying on the open plain somewhere. Neither was he in a medical ward or a holding cell. There was something eerily familiar about the small space in which he found himself. Something he’d not thought about in centuries. Something…

Sitting up cautiously in the small space that had only the slightest illumination coming in around what looked like a door, he reached out in front of him and fumbled for a moment before his hand found the familiar shape. Swallowing uneasily, he pulled.

Light flared to life and Harry stared in complete bewilderment at the gently swinging incandescent light bulb.

After some time, he managed to pull his eyes away from the impossible light source to take in the fact that he was, indeed, in a perfect replica of the cupboard under the stairs in which he’d spent ten of the first eleven years of his life.

His mind spun as he struggled to make any sense of his situation. His first instinct was to think that this was some sort of dream or illusion, but a quick application of his magic proved both suppositions false. It shouldn’t be possible. Privet Drive had been razed centuries ago, along with the rest of Surrey and London and everything else muggle made in England. That light bulb burning so innocently in front of him was impossible. The Quelling had made electricity impossible for the
muggles to harness or utilize. What they used now was closer to magic than technology except that they’d devised means of harnessing it without having a magical core.

A sudden rapping against the outside of the cupboard door had Harry instinctively lifting a shield around himself before he processed the words that accompanied the pounding.

“Up! Get up, Boy! NOW!”

Harry stared at the door incomprehensively for a long while as his shield flickered out. It had been so long since any of this had even crossed his mind, but that voice, those commands, this place… He seemed to remember it all very clearly on a primal level. His body jerked with the need to obey and a chill ran down his spine.

Slowly, he began to entertain the possibility that he’d legitimately gone back in time. He had no idea how he could have done such, but then dying and spontaneously coming back to life had never been “normal”, so he couldn’t rightly say that dying and waking up more than a thousand years in the past in your younger body was any more impossible.

Trembling slightly with nerves, he lifted one hand and cast a Tempus charm.

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Harry stared at the result of his spell for a long time.

He was pulled from his stupor when the cupboard door was wrenched open. He released his spell instantly, preparing to fight or defend as necessary. Instead, he found himself staring in wonder at the equine face of his long-dead aunt. Except, of course, that she wasn’t dead in this time.

“Didn’t you hear me, boy! Get up! If you think I’m going to make breakfast so that you can lay in bed all day, you are sorely mistaken! Be in the kitchen in five minutes or you won’t eat breakfast or lunch!”

“Yes, Aunt Petunia,” was out of his mouth before he’d even thought to answer, an instinctive response conditioned into him from his earliest memories.

She slammed the door with a huff and he dazedly began pulling on the rags he was forced to wear in place of clothes.

So he’d come back in time. He was extremely curious as to how, but recognized the fact that he may never have an answer. He’d never figured out how he was able to die in any and every manner only to wake up in a perfectly healthy body a few seconds later. He’d tried all manner of tests, including vaporizing his body once when he was at a particularly low point. Nothing could keep him dead for more than a few seconds and he’d never figured out how or why beyond the understanding that the magic came from the Master of Death thing.

He ran a hand through his short, messy hair and curiously conjured a mirror. He shook his head slowly as he examined the face looking back at him. His body was truly eleven years old again. Well, eleven years minus one week. His mind and his magic, thankfully, did not appear changed from his most recent recollections.

There was no point in focusing on the how or the why right now, he reasoned as he vanished the mirror and finished dressing. He could explore that later if he wished. Right now, he needed to focus on what he was going to do about his unexpected situation. For now, he would assume that his present temporal alignment was permanent, and that he’d be forced to live through the same millennium again. Knowing what he knew of the coming events, he could change things.
How many times in his early life had he desperately wished that he could go back and make better choices? He now had that chance. He found himself somewhat baffled to realize that he had no idea what he wanted to change – if anything.

By this point in his life, he’d moved beyond bemoaning Fate. Things happened, people died, the world changed, and he endured. Those were facts of life. He’d made his peace with it almost five centuries ago.

In the interest of preserving his options, he left his cupboard and made his way to the kitchen to make breakfast. The combination of his distraction and the fact that he hadn’t cooked using muggle appliances in over a thousand years meant that the food took longer than it should and didn’t come out very high quality. By the time he’d finished serving breakfast, he’d lost his “dinner privileges” on top of breakfast and lunch. He found the Dursleys highly annoying and hated them on principle for the way they treated a child and for the fact that they were muggles, but he didn’t find them difficult to endure. After all he’d been through in his long life, the Dursleys were not overly bothersome.

When they had finished eating, he set to cleaning up the kitchen, his mind continuing to turn with the question of just how he wanted to approach this unexpected opportunity. He wasn’t overly bothered by the fact that he’d been ripped from his life in the future, possibly never to return. There was no way he’d do things exactly as he had before, so he knew that the future as he knew it would never come. Not exactly, at least. He’d never live that precise life again. Harry had become a loner in his later life. His need for companionship and physical gratification had faded over the years. He had a great many friendly acquaintances. He was a consultant to the Crown. He was a regular guest lecturer at Hogwarts and the Royal Academy. Most of his time was spent studying magical theory and writing books. When he did occasionally desire a lover, he usually sought outside Europe, and always under a glamor. He had no interest in those who would let him fuck them just because he was Harry Potter.

So, no. He wasn’t overly concerned by the fact that he’d left his life behind. He was slightly bothered by the concept of living through the next millennium for a second time. It seemed slightly pointless to him. Sure, he could use his knowledge to his advantage, but he didn’t have that much need for fortune beyond what he inherited from his parents and what he could add to that legitimately. He had neither need nor desire to build his fame. He didn’t even care to change the world. Yes, he’d hated some of the lives that were lost. The carnage had weighed heavily on his mind for a very long time… But he’d come to terms with it. The future had turned out okay, to his mind.

The muggles would find out about the magical world eventually, he had no doubt. They were too clever, their numbers presently far too numerous for them to overlook the hidden magical world forever. If anything, it was rather lucky that the magical world had come out as the victors of that particular war. If not for the Suppressor Stones that had made the Quelling possible, they would have lost, Harry didn’t doubt. The muggles were too many, their present technology too devastating.

He supposed, after the war was won, he could push for the total extermination of their species, which would prevent the constant ongoing wars of the next several centuries after the muggles had evolved themselves into the Tech Mages.

When he’d finished cleaning up the kitchen, his aunt gave him a list of chores and Harry set to work on that, occasionally resorting to discrete spells when he found himself lost as to how to do something the muggle way. He was remembering a lot of his young life and the muggle world as he was now faced with it again, but some things just wouldn’t come clear in his mind after so long.
After finishing his chores, he wandered down to the play park and hit himself with a small muggle repelling ward to ensure he wouldn’t be bothered, then settled down against a tree to think.

He spent the entire day thinking.

He had the chance to change the world and he found himself utterly at a loss as to anything he truly wanted to change. Despite hating muggles, he didn’t even think that he wanted to wipe them out. Oh, he thought it was entirely necessary to cull their numbers and eliminate their ability to harness the polluting technology that they presently utilized, but beyond that… Though they’d never learned to get along, they had learned to coexist, for the most part, the Magi and the Tech Mages. And Harry had seen what happened when the muggles were believed gone and no longer a threat. It hadn’t stopped wars or Dark Lords or corruption or killing. Without an outside enemy, the Magi fought each other.

Conflict was human nature, Harry had learned over the course of his long life. All sentient species, in his experience, existed in a constant state of conflict. Personalities came in every flavor imaginable and it was natural for those personalities to contrast. He could not imagine a world in which there was no conflict. Or rather, he didn’t wish to. Such a utopian concept of live and let live and love your neighbor and whatever else the pacifists preached was unnatural.

As the Master of Death, Harry strongly believed that World Peace would truly be known only when all life had ended.

Sentient beings, at their most base level, sought to survive. If survival was sustained, they next craved to better themselves, their situation, their surroundings, their offspring. Those things could not always be accomplished without stepping on someone else along the way. From that, was born conflict. The only way to avoid it would be to put everyone on an even keel. To ensure that everyone had exactly the same and could never have more nor less. And if that happened, then for what did one live? Where would be the passion in life if one could never do better tomorrow than yesterday?

So, no. Harry did not wish to wipe out every last muggle. It wouldn’t make anything better. Only different. Personally, Harry rather liked the fact that the muggles, the Tech Mages, were different. Not only did it keep things interesting, he just felt better when the battle lines could be so clearly drawn. There was nothing worse than civil war, and if all the muggles were dead, there would be nothing else left. Unless one of the creature species managed to attain significant power to make themselves real enemies, but that was unlikely, and even so it would still be magic against magic.

So… He didn’t want to change the future. He didn’t want to change the course of the war… It was evident that he was going to have to make his future decisions based on smaller, more personal interests.

If he truly was going to have to live the next thousand years all over again, what did he want to do to make his own life better? More enjoyable?

He’d found his Hogwarts letter among the mail that morning and banished it directly to his cupboard until he could figure out what he wanted to do about it. As novel as he found the concept of returning to Hogwarts and seeing everyone that he had known the first time, the idea honestly did not greatly appeal to him. Pretending to be a first year student did not appeal to him.

He opened his Hogwarts letter that night, knowing that it would register that he’d done so and prevent the flood of letters that Dumbledore had sent the last time. He did not need to deal with Vernon’s descent into madness right now. He didn’t send a reply, assuming that if they didn’t hear from him by his birthday, but knew that he’d opened the letter, Dumbledore would eventually send
Hagrid to take him shopping like before.

Harry spent the next three days pondering his situation before he hit upon an idea that struck his fancy. When it finally occurred to him, he put a silencing ward around his cupboard and laughed until he cried. For the first time since he’d come back, he found himself excited for the future.

With a cheerful smile, he transfigured his rags into comfortable hiking gear and apparated to Albania.
Severus woke in the middle of the night to searing agony in his left forearm. He lurched up and managed to roll onto the floor as he clutched the arm to his body in some desperate attempt to stanch even the smallest fraction of the pain.

And then it stopped, as suddenly as it had started.

Trembling, Severus reached under his pillow for his wand and spelled the lamps alight. Lifting his left arm into his line of sight, he shuddered at the vision of the fully restored Dark Mark burned into his flesh. He swallowed and his stomach lurched with the knowledge that the Dark Lord was back. After almost a decade of peace, he was back.

Stumbling to his feet, he pulled on his dressing gown with difficulty, trying not to touch the inflamed Mark, and staggered into his sitting room. He tossed a handful of floo powder into the low smoldering fire and sent himself directly up to Albus’ office. He was keyed into the ward, though he didn’t usually invite himself in without calling first. At the moment, he didn’t rightly give a shit.

It took almost a minute before Albus appeared from his personal rooms, tying a dressing gown around himself. By the look of him, the wards had woken him when Severus had arrived, which wasn’t surprising given the hour.

“So, Severus?” he asked gravely.

In answer, Severus bared the Mark.

Albus bright blue eyes shuttered at the sight and he tiredly dragged himself into his chair while Severus poured himself into another.

Albus looked lost in thought for a long moment before he shook his head slowly, “I hadn’t… I hadn’t expected it so soon,” he admitted. A second more and a concerned frown furrowed his brow. He glanced up at one of his trinkets and stared for a long moment. “Harry will be eleven tomorrow,” he said quietly, then glanced at the standup clock against the wall and corrected himself. “Today, now. He received his letter a week ago, but he hasn’t responded. I was going to send Hagrid today…” he trailed off, looking terribly concerned.

“You don’t think…” Severus said slowly. “Surely, not. Albus, the Dark Lord has only returned tonight, surely he could not have…”

“He? No,” Albus agreed. “But one of his followers… Harry would be an ideal ingredient to restoring Voldemort to full power,” he whispered. “If he was taken this past week, a ritual could have been prepared by now.”

Severus felt foreboding stir in his chest and tried to shrug it off. “I thought you said he was safe where you put him. You’ve always told me that,” he snapped out. He was tired and more than a little irritable and he didn’t appreciate having to now worry about the Potter brat that he had sworn to protect. Albus had told him the boy was safe. It is why he’d never felt the need to check on him.

“He should have been,” Albus admitted. “The blood wards are powerful. No one should have been able to find him there. But I could hardly chain the boy to the house these last ten years, Severus. Though he could not have been searched out while the blood wards were in effect, which they still are, I assure you,” he glanced at that trinket again, “it is not impossible that if the wrong person has come across him by chance while he was away from the house… He is alive, Severus. Of that, I am
certain.” Another minute glance at the device whirring away almost silently on the shelf.

Severus fought the urge to scream at the old man. Of course, he was right. Severus knew that. It wouldn’t have been possible to protect against every possible scenario for ten straight years. No one could account for every single possibility, but if the boy had been taken by the Dark Lord…

“If he summons you, Severus…”

“I will answer, of course,” Severus assured him immediately. The thought of returning to his duties as a spy was beyond repulsive, but he knew that he had no choice. For Lily, he would go back. If the blasted brat had been taken by the Dark Lord, he may be the boy’s only hope.

“Go back to bed, Severus,” Albus said after a moment of silence. “There is nothing we can do tonight. I will go in the morning personally to check on Harry. I promise that you shall be the first to know of my findings.”

Severus nodded reluctantly and returned to his chambers. Knowing that he would need his sleep should the Dark Lord call, Severus returned to his bed and swallowed a sleeping potion that he had designed specifically so that it would be nullified by the burning of the Dark Mark, ensuring that he couldn’t sleep through a summons. He’d only made that mistake once in his youth, but the lesson had been one he would never forget.

The summons came in the morning. Severus had had time to shower, dress, and eat breakfast, and was on the point of heading to his lab to burn time until Albus returned with news when he felt the Mark flare to life. It wasn’t nearly as painful as it had been when it had been restored last night. It felt like a general summons, neither particularly painful nor with any real emotion behind it.

Taking a deep breath, Severus drew up his occlumency barriers to keep himself calm, then scribbled a code word on a scrap of parchment and placed it inside an ornate snuff box with a twin in Albus’ office. He retrieved his robes and mask from a hidden cubby in the wall and placed them inside his typical brewing robe before stepping into the floo. Moments later, he was in his rundown family house. After quickly donning his robes and mask, he pressed his wand into the Mark on his arm and disapparated.

He appeared in a grand receiving hall and let the Mark lead him down a corridor lined in obscured portraits and into an ornate ballroom which had obviously been repurposed as a throne room. Severus barely managed to avoid stuttering his step when he comprehended the fact that there were two thrones on the raised dais at the end of the hall rather than one. On one throne sat Lord Voldemort, looking innumerably younger and healthier than Severus had ever seen him, but still obviously the same man. He looked to be around thirty now, despite the fact he should be more than twice that. Of course, his real body had been turned to dust a decade ago, so Severus supposed the body was probably the age he had chosen for it to be.

On the second throne, situated an arm’s length from Lord Voldemort, was a second man. He appeared to be in his early twenties, though Severus wasn’t sure if it was smart to assume appearances were accurate in this case. He was as handsome as Lord Voldemort, though his eyes were a stunning aquamarine, a sharp contrast to the Dark Lord’s burning ruby. He had long black hair and the features of a pureblood, though Severus couldn’t determine any familial resemblance.

Severus stepped close to Lord Voldemort’s throne and fell to his knees, leaning forward to bring the hem of the Dark Lord’s ornate black robe to his lips before shuffling back and rising to take his place...
in the circle. A glance toward the unknown man showed him rolling his bright blue eyes at the
display of obeisance.

Severus glanced around the circle as it began to fill up. He saw Lucius, Macnair, Nott, Rowle…
Most of the Inner Circle that wasn’t in Azkaban had turned up. In fact that… He frowned. That
was Barty Crouch Jr., he was certain of it. That was interesting, considering that the man had
supposedly died in Azkaban nine years ago… Karkarov was missing, but that wasn’t surprising.
After all the names that man had given to stay out of Azkaban – and Inner Circle members… He
was unlikely to survive coming back. He was unlikely to survive at all, really, now that Voldemort
was back.

Lord Voldemort apparently came to the same conclusion about the attendance before he rose from
his throne after the last Death Eater to arrive, Avery, had kissed his robe and taken his place in the
circle.

“Welcome, my Death Eaters,” Voldemort said quietly as he paced slowly around the circle,
inspecting his troops. “Ten years… ten long years it has been. And yet you all answer my call as
though it was yesterday. Such prompt appearances! We are still united under the Dark Mark then.
Or are we?”

Severus was keeping most of his attention focused on the Dark Lord, who may or may not decide to
Crucio them all at any moment, but he couldn’t help casting periodic glances at the unknown figure
on the second throne. It is because of that that Severus was fairly certain he’d caught a stifled yawn
as Lord Voldemort went on.

“How is it that I have so many faithful followers…” Voldemort said softly, “yet it was none of you
who found me? It was none of you who brought me back. How can I have so many **loyal** Death
Eaters, yet it was a stranger who came for me?”

Many cautious eyes cut toward the figure on the second throne now, and the handsome young man
gave them a small smirk.

“Yes,” Voldemort nodded. “You have guessed correctly. It was Lord Peverell who found me. It
was Lord Peverell who built for me this body and worked the ritual to anchor my soul within it. It is
Lord Peverell who now sits at my side and it is Lord Peverell whom you shall honor second only to
myself,” he hissed out threateningly.

“My Lord,” Lucius breathed cautiously. “We crave to know… We beg you to tell us… how you
have achieved this… this miracle… how you managed to return to us…”

Voldemort smiled slightly at the simpering pureblood lord. “Ah, what a story it is, Lucius. It begins,
of course, with Harry Potter,” he said the name, surprisingly, without spite. “You know, of course,
that they called him my downfall. You all know that on the night I lost my powers and my body, I
tried to kill him. His mother sacrificed her life to save him. I admit… I had not expected it. I had
never guessed…” he trailed off thoughtfully. “It was an ancient necromantic ritual, I’m afraid. Lily
Potter used herself as the sacrifice that powered the ritual. When I took her life, I made it impossible
for me to take his.” He shook his head slowly and gave a slightly dramatic sigh.

“I miscalculated, my friends. I had not thought a Light witch – a muggleborn at that – capable of
such magic. My curse was deflected by the ritual protection and it rebounded upon myself. Aaah…
pain beyond pain, my friends. Nothing could have prepared me for it. I was torn from my body. I
was less than spirit, less than the meanest ghost… but still, I was alive. What I was, even I do not
know. I, who have gone further than anybody along the path that leads to immortality. You know
my goal. To conquer death. And now, I was tested, and it appeared that one or more of my
experiments had worked… for I had not been killed, though the curse should have done it. Nevertheless, I was powerless as the weakest creature alive, and without the means to help myself… for I had no body, and every spell that might have helped me required the use of a wand…

“I remember only forcing myself, sleeplessly, endlessly, second by second, to exist… I settled in a faraway place, in a forest, and I waited… Surely, one of my faithful Death Eaters would try to find me… one of them would come and perform the magic I could not, to restore me to a body. But I waited in vain.”

A shudder ran around the circle. Severus resisted the urge with his occlumency shields, though he too felt the trepidation. However calm he appeared, Lord Voldemort was furious with them. There was no telling if they would all survive the night. Voldemort went on about possessing animals, then, “A week ago, a young man I did not know found me. A wizard – young, foolish, and gullible wandered across my path in the forest I had made my home. Oh, he seemed the very chance I had been dreaming of… for he was a teacher at Dumbledore’s school. He was easy to bend to my will, but I had been with him but a single day when…” he turned to look at the young man who remained seated.

Severus suspected that the foolish young wizard in question had been Quirrell. He was late in returning from his holiday and had sent no word.

“Hadrian Peverell found us. He’d sought me out with the intent to aid me. Unlike the foolish young teacher, however, Lord Peverell was not gullible nor weak. His power is second only to my own. It is with that power and his unsurpassed talent in necromancy that he fashioned for me this body. The powers of necromancy and a key ingredient he was able to provide.

“Young Harry Potter,” he smiled a chilling smile and Severus suppressed a shiver. So Albus’ worst fears were confirmed. They did have the boy.

“The Boy-Who-Lived,” Voldemort said ironically. “His blood was the key. The boy is powerful, do not doubt,” Severus tried not to sag in relief at the present tense, “but he is merely a boy, unique only for the Dark Magic imbued in him by his mother’s ritual. And it was very Dark and is very much a part of him now, I assure you. The boy and I share a connection wrought the night I tried to kill him. A connection that allows me to draw power directly from him. I cannot kill him, this is true, but I can no longer imagine why I may wish such a thing.

“No… Harry Potter is no threat to me, I assure you. The boy was raised by muggles, knowing nothing of the wizarding world. He did not know that he was famous. He did not know that his parents gave their lives for him or that I was the one to take those lives. The muggles to whom he had been consigned were vile beasts who starved, neglected, and debased the child to the point that he was quite pleased by his kidnapping. Indeed, he is very happily living in this very manor, and he shall remain so.” His eyes chilled as he looked around the gathering. “Harry Potter is useful to me. He is not to be harmed. Need I make myself any clearer?”

A chorus of hastily uttered variations of “no, my lord” circled the gathering and Voldemort allowed the silence to linger a long moment before he went on.

“Things will happen a bit differently now,” Lord Voldemort said at last, his tone quiet and reflective once more. “We are going to focus our efforts against the muggles. I know, the mudbloods are a stain upon our world – hardly better than muggles themselves and using their Magic-given gifts without showing the least respect for Magic herself…” he shook his head regretfully. “That attitude must change, but the mudbloods need not be wiped out for this change to happen. It is the muggles we must face. The muggles who destroy our world through their technology,” he spat the word like a curse, “who bleed dry the planet with their ever-growing numbers.
“It is the muggles we will fight. It is the muggles we will destroy.”

There was another long moment of silence during which Severus fretted over this apparent change in goals. He glanced at Lord Peverell, wondering if he was the cause of the change, but the man’s face gave away nothing of his thoughts. Severus could not imagine how the Dark Lord thought to defeat all the muggles. Even at the height of his power, Voldemort’s ranks had not numbered above five hundred. Even with magic, how could they possibly hope to take on five billion muggles? Or even the fifty-seven million people in Great Britain, for that matter. It was madness. He would expose them to the muggles and Severus seriously doubted their ability to win that war, even if all the magical beings were to band together, which was unlikely.

“Severus, Lucius, remain behind. Everyone else, you are dismissed. You will be contacted with your assignments,” Voldemort’s voice drew Severus’ full attention once more.

Only his occlumency kept him calm and impassive as the rest of the Inner Circle filed out of the room. Private meetings with the Dark Lord were usually safer, honestly. The man loved for punishments to be in full view of as many of his followers as possible. Private meetings were usually used to report and get assignments but that didn’t mean that he wouldn’t be crucio’d if the Dark Lord was displeased with him. He’d have much rather been on his way back to Hogwarts to report his findings, but he waited patiently.

“Lucius,” Voldemort said when it was only the four of them left. “I left an item in your possession. I’m certain that you still have it.”

“Of course, my Lord. It is perfectly safe,” Lucius assured him hurriedly.

“Wonderful. Go and fetch it for me immediately.”

Lucius all but tripped over himself to bow hastily and take his leave without delay. Once they were down to three, Voldemort turned his full attention to Severus. He stepped forward and removed his mask gently.

“Severus, of course, is my spy,” Voldemort said without taking his eyes from Severus. The spy did not dare look away from Voldemort’s red gaze, but he did note with his peripherals that Lord Peverell had finally left his throne.

“Severus Snape, the Potions Master.”

Severus resisted a flinch at hearing the other man speak for the first time. His voice was pleasantly deep and rich. It was lightly accented, but it wasn’t an accent Severus could name. Rather it was the sort of accent acquired by someone who spent many years traveling, a unique combination of accents.

“The youngest to ever achieve a mastery,” Peverell went on thoughtfully as he came to stop at Voldemort’s side, nearly close enough to touch. Severus was slightly impressed by the man’s ability to stand so close to the Dark Lord without any apparent unease.

“Yes, my Severus is very impressive,” Voldemort murmured appreciatively. “But are you still mine, Severus?”

“Of course, my Lord. I live only to serve you,” Severus vowed.

Though the Dark Lord nodded slightly in response to the statement, Peverell lifted a decidedly doubtful eyebrow.
Severus resisted the urge to gulp. It appeared that Peverell was intelligent and not as eager to believe the ego-stroking platitudes that the Dark Lord loved. Great…

“We shall see, Severus. We shall see…” Voldemort said quietly. “Ten years you’ve spent with the old man. Ten long years. Just how close have you become?”

“Only as close as my vows to you would allow, my Lord,” Severus promised. “He trusts me. I will be able to bring you a great deal of information, my Lord.” He kept himself impassive as he watched the Dark Lord consider his words and finger his wand.

“What do you think, Lord Peverell?” Voldemort asked curiously.

The young lord shook his head, “He’s too close to Dumbledore. Besides, his talents are wasted in that school, trying to teach a precise and delicate art to the legions of hormonal ingrates who couldn’t begin to comprehend the honor they should feel to have such an instructor. We have other means of monitoring the old man. I suggest we keep him here where he can dedicate his time to research when he’s not brewing for us.”

Severus couldn’t help but blink at the young man when he said “we”. No one spoke like that to the Dark Lord. Everything was for him because he was their lord and they his property.

Voldemort didn’t seem at all bothered by it though. He merely nodded thoughtfully, “You have a point, I suppose. Very well. Severus, tender your resignation immediately. You have tonight to pack. I want you back here in time for breakfast tomorrow. Eight o’clock. Do not be late.”

“As you will, my Lord,” Severus bowed, keeping himself impassive even as he cursed his fate behind the safety of his occlumency shields. Though it sounded ideal at first glance – being allowed to spend all this time on research and brewing was a dream come true – he could not imagine that living in the same manor as the Dark Lord would be in any way comfortable. He was sure that he would also find it much more difficult to report anything to Albus. On the positive side, of course, he’d be able to remain close to Potter and maybe get a chance to rescue the boy who was evidently living here in blissful ignorance of with whom it was he was living.

“You are dismissed, Severus,” Voldemort said, offering back the mask he had taken.

Severus accepted it with a small bow and then turned and made haste from the room.

Just as he was preparing to disapparate, Lucius appeared in the receiving hall. He was clutching a thin black book to his chest and offered Severus only a single terse nod before sweeping past him.

Severus wasted no further time in disapparating. Once he’d returned to Spinner’s End, he grabbed a pinch of floo powder and returned to his quarters at Hogwarts, from which he directly called the headmaster’s office.

"Severus, you’re back,” Albus said before Severus could speak. “Come through at once.”

Severus did as he was bid and gratefully accepted the offered chair.

“Harry vanished from his home the night of the twenty-seventh,” Albus said gravely. “Have you learned anything?”

Severus nodded grimly, “The Dark Lord claims to have him, though I could not confirm it. He…” Severus shook his head slowly. “Albus, he said that Potter was abused so badly that he gladly accepted the invitation to leave. He said that the boy stays with him willingly, having known nothing of the wizarding world – that he doesn’t know the Dark Lord killed his parents.”
Albus slumped in his chair as though a tremendous weight had just been lain on his shoulders. “It is very possible that he knew nothing of our world,” he admitted grimly. “His aunt and uncle do not approve of our world and may have kept it from him entirely. He… I knew that it would be difficult for him there, but I cannot believe that he was abused,” he said, mostly to himself, it seemed.

Severus clenched his jaw. “Albus… You told me he was safe,” he growled furiously. “His aunt… Please tell me you don’t mean Petunia Evans…”

“Dursley, now. She married.”

Severus lurched out of his chair and prowled across the room. “Albus… How could you?! Petunia didn’t just disapprove of our world! She *hated* everything about it! I find it *entirely* too easy to believe that she did exactly what the Dark Lord claimed! She…” He was so furious he literally could not think of what to say. He wasn’t sure that had *ever* happened to him before.

Albus sighed heavily, “Severus, she is his only family left. He is all that she has of her sister—”

“Are you mad?!” Severus demanded. “Petunia *tormented* Lily, despite Lily’s refusal to hate her in return. She did everything in her power to make Lily’s life hell every summer and you put an innocent child in her charge? Lily’s innocent child? The boy for whom she gave her life?”

“Now, Severus, I understand that you did not get on with Petunia, and that she and Lily had their difficulties, but Harry is her *family*—”

“You *are* mad,” Severus declared firmly. “You have no concept of reality! My father was my family, Albus, and that never stopped him from beating and belittling me. It didn’t stop him from beating my mother to death! How *dare* you subject the boy to that! How was that your choice to make?!” he verily hissed in his fury.

Albus’ eyes finally hardened at the accusations. “I did what I had to do, Severus. I knew it would not be easy for him, but it was the only way to protect him. There was nowhere else he would have been safer, and now it seems he was not even safe there.”

Severus shook his head and turned away. He couldn’t look at the old man right now and he did not agree with that logic. There was no reasoning that could make it acceptable to knowingly put a child into an abusive home. He did recognize an argument that he could not win, however. Albus was utterly convinced that he was right and would only become angrier if Severus continued to press it. The damage was done at this point, anyway.

“Did you learn anything else?”

Severus nodded and used his occlumency to calm himself enough to continue his report.

“He claims that he was found initially by a young, foolish, gullible wizard – that is how he described him. He said that he was a professor here.”

Albus eyes clouded, “Quirinus?”

“I believe so,” Severus nodded. “He did not say what happened to him, but I consider it unlikely that he is still alive.”

Albus nodded solemnly.

“He said that he has a connection with Potter, Albus,” Severus went on after a brief moment. “That it was used in his resurrection. He claims that he can draw on Potter’s power through their
connection. He has commanded that no one is to touch Potter, and I believe he means to keep the boy in his manor.”

“Do you know where the manor is?” Albus asked without much hope.

Severus shook his head, “Everything identifying was obscured.” He hesitated, then continued, “He wasn’t alone, Albus. He… He said that the day after the professor found him, another man found him. A young wizard named Lord Hadrian Peverell.”

“Peverell?” Albus asked sharply.

Severus nodded, wondering what the name meant to his employer. “The young man was there. Albus. He wasn’t dressed as a Death Eater. He was dressed as a lord and seated on a throne directly next to the Dark Lord. He said that Peverell’s power was second only to his own and that Peverell had earned his place at his side – that Peverell was to be obeyed second only to him. He’s probably in his early twenties if his appearance is any indication.”

“I’ve never heard of a Hadrian Peverell,” Albus said thoughtfully.

“I will provide you a copy of the memory if you wish,” Severus offered.

Albus nodded. “I’d like to hear it in your words, first.”

“Peverell said nothing through the entire meeting, though I saw him roll his eyes when I kissed the Dark Lord’s robes, as though he found it a… an exasperating display. After dismissing everyone else, the Dark Lord kept myself and Lucius behind. He ordered Lucius to retrieve an item that he had kept for him. What seemed to be a thin black book as Lucius was carrying it when he returned.”

Albus nodded. “And what did he wish of you?”

“He seemed primarily concerned with whether or not he could still trust me. He feared that I had grown too close to you.”

“And you convinced him?” Albus assumed, reasonably as Severus was still alive and unharmed.

Severus shook his head, “I may have, had Peverell not been there. The Dark Lord… he asked Peverell’s opinion on the matter,” he sneered distastefully.

Albus frowned in concern. “What happened, my boy?”

Severus resisted the urge to roll his eyes at the affection that he’d never been able to get the man to stop using. “Peverell suggested that I resign and take up residence at the manor they are using so that I might always be on hand to brew their potions and to spend the rest of my time on research and development. He said that they had other methods of monitoring you, Albus,” he said gravely. He gave that a moment to have the proper impact, then continued, “The Dark Lord agreed with Peverell and has commanded me to resign tonight, pack my things, and be back at the manor by eight in the morning. I have no notion of when or even if they may allow me to leave again.”

Albus brow drew down in concern. “Severus… This choice is yours alone.”

Severus waved that off irritably, “Don’t be absurd, Albus. Of course, I will go. I would be useless here and Potter is at the manor. My residing there may be the only way to recover the boy.”

Albus nodded thoughtfully. “I will view the memory now,” he offered, rising to retrieve his pensieve.
Severus waited until he had placed it on the desk, then transferred a copy of the memory and sat back to wait. Albus would not need a guide after all Severus had already told him and he had no particular desire to relive the experience.

When the man reemerged, his looked deeply pensive. “Peverell seemed to be a fan of yours,” he mentioned first.

Severus nodded his agreement. It would have been impossible not to notice the way the man had participated in the meeting only when it directly impacted him or the way he’d gone out of his way to mention Severus’ qualifications. He’d even said the children should consider it an honor to learn from him. Severus wasn’t entirely sure what to make of that, but he was inclined to suspect it may be that the man was trying to get close to him to better understand his allegiances.

“It concerns me that Tom is changing his priorities after all these years. I can only imagine that Peverell is the cause.”

“Or his experience as a wraith these last ten years has impacted him,” Severus pointed out because he couldn’t quite imagine how it could not have, either being a wraith, what he experienced during that time, or the sting of realizing none of his followers were even seeking him.

Albus tipped his head slightly in concession. “I want to know more about Peverell. I will use all the avenues available to me to search for anything regarding his history. His accent is… unusual.”

“My thoughts as well,” Severus agreed. “I suspect he’s spent much of his life traveling.”

Albus nodded. “I will leave you to pack, Severus. Do not attempt to contact me until you are certain that you can do so without detection.”

“And what of Potter?”

Albus frowned heavily and shook his head, “There is nothing to be done at the moment. He is safe there. Tom’s misinformation can be corrected later, if necessary. Speak to the boy if you can. Learn what you may about him and try to gain his trust. Do not attempt to extract him unless you believe his life to be in immediate danger. If you do, you know that you cannot risk going back.”

“I am aware,” Severus frowned.

“Very well. Good luck, Severus.”

The spy just nodded briskly before returning to his quarters via the floo. He looked around the room with a frown. He’d lived in these rooms more than ten years now. It was the only residence he’d kept as an adult. Well, besides Spinner’s End, but that place was the setting of his childhood and not any place he’d wish to live. The only reason he’d retained it all these years was because the neighborhood was so run down it would be almost impossible to sell. He hadn’t had a lot of money the first couple of years after Hogwarts so he’d put up with the place, and then he’d been here teaching and it hadn’t seemed worth it to find another place to live when his quarters were perfectly serviceable all year round. He only returned to Spinner’s End a week every summer to handle any necessary maintenance. The house may be almost worthless, but that didn’t mean he wanted to allow it to end up condemned.

With a shake of his head for his own maudlin thoughts, Severus drew his wand and set about packing up everything that he wouldn’t need tonight or in the morning and shrinking it down to pack in his trunk, which would itself be shrunk for transport.

By the time he’d finished packing, Severus was just in time to eat dinner. He savored a glass of wine
in front of the fire when he was done eating and took the time to update his will, which he’d drop at Gringotts before returning to the Dark Lord’s manor. He’d accumulated a comfortable living from the potions he’d managed to create and improve over the last ten years. It wasn’t nearly what it could have been had he been able to dedicate himself entirely to research, but he wouldn’t have accomplished much without a patron, anyway. He just couldn’t afford the ingredients necessary to complete the experiments inherent to creating new potions.

He pushed down a tremor of excitement at the thought that the Dark Lord may actually provide him with the means to do his research. It was thinking like that that had landed him with that awful mark on his arm in the first place. It wasn’t worth it, he reminded himself. Innocent people were going to die and he was going to be complicit in that because his potions would be used. Any fame he did manage to glean would be forever tainted by his association with the Dark Lord. Any fortune he may make would belong to the Dark Lord, just as he himself belonged to the man.

Suitably depressed, Severus decided to go to bed early. A swig of his particular sleeping potion was enough to suspend his concerns for one night.
Severus arrived at the Dark Lord’s manor ten minutes early, his possessions shrunken and tucked into his pockets. A house elf greeted him immediately, bowing deeply.

“Greetings, Master Snape, sir. I is being Rina. Rina is being Master Snape’s personal elf while Master Snape is staying in the manor. If Master sir wishes to follow, Rina will be showing Master sir to the breakfast room, sir.”

Severus gave a brief nod and gestured for her to lead the way. The manor was impressive, Severus had to admit as he followed the elf. It seemed to be in the same class as Malfoy Manor, though obviously very different in style. As before, certain things were obscured, including all of the portraits and their labels. The crest on the house elf’s neat and pressed uniform was obscured as well, which led Severus to believe the identity of the manor was under some kind of concealment charm.

The breakfast room was very attractive, with the same high ceilings present in every other part of the manor he’d seen and the entire south wall lined with floor to ceiling windows that brightened the room despite the cloud cover outside. There was a table with seating for just eight, which was heavy with a multitude of breakfast foods. He could take in no more than that as his eyes fell on the lone occupant of the table and Severus quickly fell to his knees and dropped a deep bow, which he held.

“Rise, Severus,” the Dark Lord intoned quietly.

Severus rose to his knees and took a second to assess the Dark Lord’s expression before rising the rest of the way to his feet.

“Outside of formal meetings, that sort of display will not be necessary while we share living space, Severus,” the Dark Lord surprised him by saying. “Join me,” he gestured toward the table. “Lord Peverell should be joining us shortly.”

“Thank you, my Lord,” Severus said quietly, taking the offered seat to his lord’s left.

After only a minute of uncomfortable – for Severus – silence, Lord Peverell breezed into the room. Severus could not contain a blink when he got a look at the young lord dressed in a very fine muggle business suit. It was black with a navy undershirt and a tie that matched his eyes. A discreet glance proved that Lord Voldemort seemed perplexed by the attire as well, though he didn’t mention it.

“And how is Potter this morning?” was what the Dark Lord inquired of the apparently younger man.

“Still rather under the weather, I’m afraid,” Peverell answered smoothly as he took his seat across from Severus. “Nothing that some rest, food, and nutrient potions won’t cure.” He turned his attention to Severus then and smiled warmly. “Good morning, Severus. How are you this morning?”


The Dark Lord frowned at him and Severus contained a wince, but Peverell didn’t seem at all bothered by the question.

“I’m afraid he wasn’t terribly well when I found him. Those muggles with whom he was abandoned were a vile lot.” He said “muggles” the way some people might say “leper”, with an almost wince, like the mere idea of them disturbed him on some base level. “He was starved regularly and
constantly denied anything resembling a balanced diet. When I found him, he was suffering from an
infection and not strong enough to fight it. The ritual took a bit more out of him, but he is resting
now and well on his way to recovery. With the right potions, I believe he will likely reach his full
physical potential.”

“I see,” Severus nodded, serving himself as Peverell and Voldemort had begun serving their own
plates now. “Is there a list of potions I may brew for him?”

Peverell nodded and cleared his mouth before responding verbally, “Yes. I started Davayan’s
Nutrient Base last night, so that should be ready in…” He lifted his free hand and Severus contained
a flinch at the silent, wandless *tempus*. It wasn’t a particularly difficult wandless spell, but Peverell
didn’t pause to concentrate or even seem to be paying much attention to the magic he had just done.
“One hour, twenty-three minutes,” he concluded after a glance at the time, which then vanished.

“What are your plans for the day, Hadrian?” Voldemort inquired, preventing Severus from
responding. The Dark Lord gave a significant look at Peverell’s attire.

“Ah,” Peverell smirked and Severus had to look away before his body reacted to that particular
expression. He focused on his food instead. “I’ll be touring muggle military bases today. I need to
familiarize myself with the technology we’ll need to counter.”

“I shall look forward to that report,” Voldemort hummed thoughtfully.

“Will you be ready for that ritual tonight?” Peverell asked curiously after several minutes of eating in
silence.

Voldemort grimaced slightly, “If you can retrieve the last pieces, then yes.” He hesitated a moment,
then hissed something in parseltongue.

To Severus’ complete surprise, Peverell just lifted one eyebrow and hissed right back in the same
language. Voldemort, he noted, did not seem at all surprised. For the next couple of minutes,
Severus was subjected to what he was pretty sure was an argument between the Dark Lord and what
Severus was beginning to realize was more of his partner than his second in command. He couldn’t
understand the words, but the expressions of their faces were clear enough that he didn’t doubt it was
an argument. Nor did he doubt that Peverell had won.

“I apologize,” Peverell smiled that warm smile at Severus again when Voldemort abruptly stood and
stalked out of the room. “I’m afraid parseltongue arguments are one thing to which you will have to
grow accustomed while you live here.”

“It is not an imposition, Lord Peverell,” Severus assured him.

Peverell nodded briefly and glanced at Severus’ mostly empty plate. “Well, if you’re finished, I will
show you to your rooms and your laboratory.”

“Of course,” Severus nodded. He’d mostly lost his appetite during that argument anyway.

“Excellent,” the young lord smiled.

Severus stood and followed the other man from the room.

“You’re in Potter Manor, by the way,” was the first thing he said, and Severus blinked as the
obscuration lifted, allowing him to see the portraits on the walls and anything else that was distinct to
the manor. “Young Harry was kind enough to grant us its use until Castle Peverell can be properly
restored. It will be the work of perhaps half a year, I’m afraid.”
Only Severus’ occlumency kept him from snorting at the fact that Harry Potter was being held captive by the Dark Lord in his own sodding manor house – and with the boy’s permission, no less. Not that it was his fault he’d latched onto what were probably the first people to treat him with kindness. Severus very much doubted he would ever forgive Albus for sending Potter into an abusive home.

“Would it be possible to see Potter?” Severus asked with all evident casualness. “I should be able to tailor the potions directly to his needs if I can assess his condition personally.”

Peverell was silent for a moment – thoughtful. “Briefly,” he finally nodded. “Non-invasive scans only. He is resting and I want him to remain that way.”

Severus bowed his head in agreement. He desperately wanted real proof that the boy was here and that he was relatively well.

Peverell turned down another corridor and led them to the third floor. He paused at the end of a corridor and reached out to touch the ward with his fingertips rather than a wandtip. Severus saw an incredibly complex schema flare to life. It was indistinct to his eyes, a common security precaution to ensure that only the one manipulating the wards was able to see it properly, but he could nevertheless see that it was comprised of a great many interlocking, unique layers.

“I’ve granted you provisionary access to enter the family wing while I accompany you. You will not wish to try it without my presence,” he warned.

Severus dipped his head in understanding.

“Harry’s quarters are in this wing, as are mine and Lord Voldemort’s,” Peverell offered as he led the way down to a door about halfway down. “No touching,” he reminded.

Severus nodded and followed Peverell into the room. It was a typically affluent bedchamber, but Severus didn’t pay that much attention, focusing instead on the large canopy bed. Tucked into the near side was a small boy, curled up on his side facing them and sound asleep. He had a messy mop of black hair and a scar in the shape of a lightning bolt on his forehead. His face bore a passing resemblance to James Potter, but it wasn’t terribly strong. He could see Lily almost as clearly there.

The sound of Peverell quietly clearing his throat snapped Severus out of his daze and he quickly drew his wand and cast a series of diagnostic charms that would help him to fine tune the nutrient potions to Potter’s needs. Well, Peverell hadn’t been kidding about the malnutrition. It was severe and long-term. His body fat was dangerously low for a child of his age – nearly non-existent, in fact. His bones and organs all showed the strain of trying to develop without the necessary nutrients.

Frowning at the boy that he had failed so terribly, Severus put away his wand and nodded to Peverell that he was done.

The young lord led him back out of the family wing and down to the second floor bedrooms. The suite of rooms he was shown was nowhere near as grand as the room Potter inhabited, but then this was the boy’s property. Severus assumed that he was housed in the guest wing. Still, the rooms were nicer than his rooms at Hogwarts. It was decorated in neutral tones, neither dark nor particularly light, but he didn’t find it objectionable. Not that he’d have objected anyway, given the identity of his hosts.

“You can feel free to modify the décor to your liking if you wish,” Peverell confided once Severus had had a chance to look around briefly. “This will be your home for some time and you should feel comfortable here. Your laboratory is directly below this suite. I took the liberty of adding a private
access for you,” he nodded toward a door off the sitting room that Severus hadn’t yet explored.

At the indication, he opened the door to find a small room containing nothing more than a single spiral staircase leading down. He led the way into a similar room below, with only a single door, which opened into an absolutely mouthwatering laboratory. It was very clear that no expense had been spared. The worktables were obsidian. The walls were imbued with subtle runic warding arrays that would prevent any potion disasters from leaving the lab. The wide range of cauldrons along the far all verily glittered, pewter, quartz, copper, brass, silver, gold, platinum, vanadium, even…

He could not have stopped himself from crossing the room to inspect what looked like… Yes, it was. A diamond cauldron. Merlin. He had never had access to a diamond cauldron before. Not at Hogwarts, not even the Potions Guild had diamond cauldrons available for use. They were… prohibitively expensive despite the fact that they were the epitome of non-reactive brewing. He could… The things he could experiment with having such a cauldron at his disposal…

His mental gibbering was interrupted when Lord Peverell came to stand at his side, leaning casually against the sturdy shelf lined with cauldrons. “I’m going to be very frank with you, Severus, because I really do have a very busy day ahead of me and I need to be going,” he said calmly, but Severus mentally tensed nonetheless, placing the diamond cauldron back on the shelf and turning to face Peverell directly.

“I don’t trust you,” Peverell said bluntly and Severus mentally tensed. “I like you,” he clarified, “but I don’t trust you. Not only are you uncomfortably close to Dumbledore, you were also a childhood friend of Lily Potter nee Evans.”

Severus checked the urge to swallow.

“You asked Lord Voldemort to spare her life and he did not. He is not greatly suspicious of you,” Peverell smirked slightly. “But I think that’s because he has something of a blind spot where you are concerned. A poor halfblood with a shitty childhood, a brilliant mind, and a substantial magical core… You remind him of himself. I think, in his way, he sees you almost as a son. Not that, I suspect, that would stop him from killing you if he considered it particularly prudent,” he admitted judiciously, “but he doesn’t want to believe that you could be a traitor.”

Peverell smiled in a way that was entirely too friendly for the words leaving his mouth. “I like you as well, Severus,” he assured. “I find your mind absolutely infatuating, your poise admirable, and your temperament diverting.” Severus got the slightly uneasy feeling that Peverell was threatening him and flirting with him in the same breath and he cursed his body for trying to respond to the latter. Peverell’s power was at least as alluring as his fit body and handsome face, and Severus couldn’t help but find the unspoken offer appealing despite the fact that he doubted it would come without strings attached.

“I also recognize the threat you present,” Peverell continued after a momentary pause. “You could do us a great deal of damage if you are not loyal to us. Do not bother with meaningless platitudes,” he interrupted when Severus opened his mouth. “They mean nothing to me. Honestly, Severus, I wouldn’t even blame you if you’d turned on Lord Voldemort at the end of his last rise. The man had overplayed his hand in his search for immortality. Some of the rituals he used had damaged him. He was losing his mind – though I wouldn’t mention that to him. He gets testy about it,” he smirked, then sobered.

“I have corrected the damage to his mind. He is sane once more and I have directed him away from our own people. The muggles must be opposed, Severus. They must. They are a plague upon this world. They are killing her with their numbers and their technology, and the problem will only grow
worse with time. Within the next century we *will* be exposed, and there *will* be war between us. A war we would be unlikely to win. I recognize this fact. What I wish to do is to act now, before their technology becomes an even greater danger, their numbers even higher. I wish to control the onset of our war. I wish to dictate the terms, to ensure our victory.”

Severus permitted himself a single swallow as he studied the other man who spoke with such certainty about the future. “You say you don’t trust me,” he said cautiously. “Then why tell me this?”

Peverell smiled that gorgeous smile again, then. “Because, Severus, I don’t believe that you are loyal to the man who murdered your friend and tried to kill her son. That fact hasn’t stopped me from hoping that I may yet earn your loyalty. I am not a sadist, Severus. I take no pleasure in harming anyone. I hate muggles, yes. That is true. I hate them for their arrogance and I hate them for what they would do to us, given the chance. This war I am planning is inevitable. I am merely plotting the first strike so that it will favor us. I seek to minimize magical deaths.

“I do not even have any intention to rule anything when it is all over. I am actually a scholar at heart. When the majority of danger has passed – when the muggles face the Magi on equal footing – I shall withdraw to research and invent and write in peace. I will ensure by then that Lord Voldemort is a capable ruler.”

There was a moment of silence in which Severus wondered if the man’s ultimate aspirations could really be so similar to Severus’ own or if he had said that only because he’d assumed Severus would feel similarly. He didn’t dare speculate at this point.

A sudden, bright smile lit Peverell’s face once more, brushing away the wistfulness that had settled on him as he spoke of his ultimate goals. “Something to think about,” he dismissed. “Anyway. As I said, I do not yet trust you. For that reason, there are a few rules by which you will abide until I am convinced that you can be trusted. One, you may not leave the estate. If, for some reason, you feel the need, you may speak to me. If I believe your reason valid, I will probably accompany you.

“Rule two. You may not send any communications out of the estate, this includes owl, floo, vanishing cabinet charms, protean charmed objects, patronus messaging and any other form of communication you can imagine. I promise you, I have warded against it and I will know if you attempt it. Three, you may not be alone with Harry at any time. If you feel the need to see him, you will speak to Lord Voldemort or myself about supervising the visit.

“If you require anything from outside the manor that can be purchased, Rina should be able to acquire it for you. Your budget for potions ingredients is quite high, but if you exceed it, Rina will speak with myself or Lord Voldemort. If you have a good reason for the expense, it will most likely be granted. The store room is through that door,” he gestured across the room. “It is very well stocked, and I do understand that potions experiments are very expensive. I am extremely curious as to what your mind may conjure if you are not restrained by expense or facilities, so I have done my best to ensure that it will not be.”

Severus nodded neutrally though the restrictions made him want to groan and the promise of a large budget made him want to grin. “I understand, Lord Peverell.”

“Good,” Peverell said warmly, pushing off the shelf with his shoulders and stepping forward until he was nearly chest-to-chest with Severus. Peverell was around two centimeters shorter than him, he noticed as he looked down slightly into the bright blue eyes but did not step back. “I would really hate to have to kill you, Severus,” the man said with quiet sincerity.
The Next Day

Vinny smiled a little to himself as he floated in the massive tub. He was still trying to process everything that had happened to him since Lord Peverell had found him. He’d felt sicker than he’d ever been in his life. He’d been certain that he was dying. After two years of surviving on the streets of London, he’d been dying. He didn’t know for sure what was wrong with him, but he had his suspicions. That last John had been too rough. It hadn’t hurt like normal. It had been so much worse, and the wrong feeling had lasted long after. There’d been more blood than usual – a lot more.

He figured something inside him must have torn and gotten infected. He’d had infections before, but nothing like that. When Lord Peverell had first crouched at his side, he’d thought it was Death himself.

He hadn’t really believed him when the man had offered to make him better and take him away to a world of magic and riches. He hadn’t had anything to lose though, so he’d agreed. He’d been beyond shocked when he’d woken up feeling better in a massive bed in some kind of palace or something. Then Lord Peverell had come with Lord Voldemort and they’d shown him magic, and it was real. They’d made him take a magical oath. He got to live like a prince and learn magic in exchange for pretending to be some Harry Potter kid, who was apparently some kind of wizard kid celebrity.

It was still hard to believe that it was all real. That he could have so much in exchange for so little. He’d spent the last two years selling his body to nasty old men for barely enough money to keep him alive. Now he was told that he just had to change his identity and learn magic.

It was mad, but he wasn’t going to tell them that.

He’d figured out that these so-called Lords were criminals. Good guys didn’t do stuff like this, really, and he didn’t want to imagine what happened to the Harry Potter kid they’d made him into.

Not wanting to be late for breakfast, he climbed out of the pool that they called a tub and wrapped a towel around himself as he moved to the mirror. He still found it odd, looking in the mirror and seeing someone else’s face, but it had been a small price to pay. At least the kid wasn’t ugly. The magic that they’d done to him had made him really tired and some of it had been uncomfortable, but it hadn’t hurt. Lord Peverell had used his magic to change Vinny’s whole body, but especially his face. He said the changes were permanent. Kind of like plastic surgery, Vinny figured.

He had black hair now. It was shaggy and refused to lie down right no matter what he did. His eyes were a crazy bright green. It didn’t seem real to him, but then he’d never seen anyone with eyes as bright blue as Lord Peverell’s or bright red like Lord Voldemort’s, so he figured it must be a wizard thing. He didn’t much care for the ugly black glasses. He’d never needed glasses before, but the Potter kid did, so… Apparently, these were the kid’s own glasses, which made Vinny really not want to know why he didn’t need them anymore. He put them on anyway. Lord Peverell had promised that they would fix his eyes again soon, but someone needed to see him like this first.

He got dressed in the clothes they gave him. Robes, they called them, and they looked kind of like what Lord Voldemort and Lord Peverell wore, so he figured he wouldn’t look as stupid in them as he felt.

He rubbed at the bright new scar on his forehead. They’d taken away some of Vinny’s scars, but given him a few new ones. Most of them didn’t bother him, but the one on his forehead had been
itching ever since they put it there. He wasn’t entirely sure what was different about it, except that Lord Voldemort had done something to that scar that had taken a long time and made his head feel so hot that he was drenching his hair in sweat by the time it was done and Lord Voldemort actually looked tired out.

Lord Peverell had promised to explain more to him soon, but for now he didn’t know too much about what was going on. He just knew the story they’d given him and literally put right in his head with some of their magic. He didn’t have to work to remember any of it because it was kind of like he’d always known it. Things about Harry Potter’s life. Where he’d lived, his relatives, the way they’d treated him. Some of the details were really specific and made him convinced that they’d actually gotten the answers from Potter himself.

Shaking off the thoughts, he pushed away his worries for the boy he was replacing. It didn’t matter how much he might feel sorry for that kid. He was much more concerned for himself. His life was looking to be so, so much better now. From what he’d seen when they’d been doing their magic to change his body, he didn’t think either of the Lords liked young boys, so he figured they wouldn’t be expecting him to do that. At least not until he was older, and he’d deal with that when it happened if he had to. He’d heard that it didn’t hurt nearly as much when you got older, so maybe it wouldn’t be too bad if they wanted it. For now, they gave him medicine and clean clothes and an awesome bunch of rooms and they’d promised plenty of good food and everything.

He couldn’t wait.

“Harry.”

He turned toward the voice that had just entered his room and found Lord Peverell looking at him with a small, pleased smile. Probably proud of the job he did making him look like Potter.

He needed to remember that he was Potter now, he reminded himself. Vinny died in that alley, Peverell had told him. From now on, he was Harry James Potter.

“Time for breakfast, my Lord?” he asked hopefully. He was rather hungry.

“It is,” Peverell smiled at him kindly and Vinny – Harry – still couldn’t detect any lust in his eyes. He was so glad the lord had found him and not some other kid to be Harry.

Harry, or Hadrian, as he called himself now, led his little doppelganger to the breakfast room, where he found Severus already seated. The potions master rose immediately upon seeing them enter and Hadrian didn’t miss the way those dark eyes were much more interested in the boy than in him.

“Severus,” he introduced with a smile as they neared the table, “meet Harry Potter. Harry, this is Severus Snape. He works for Lord Voldemort and myself, and he’ll be staying with us. You may call him Master Snape, and you will be respectful to him at all times, is that understood?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry responded obediently.

Hadrian nodded, satisfied with the child’s willingness to obey. He had faith in the boy. He remembered enough of his own childhood to know that he’d have done almost anything to be delivered into a nice home with even a single adult who seemed to care about him. Young Vinny’s life had been considerably worse than Hadrian’s had ever been and the child did not expect much of them. Between the vows the boy had given and the way Hadrian intended to ensure the boy was treated, he was certain undying loyalty would be the result given some time.
“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Potter,” Severus said cautiously.

“You too, Master Snape,” Harry returned with a small smile as he took his seat next to Hadrian, across the table from Severus. He was watching the potions master cautiously, but he didn’t look overly concerned.

“You may both eat,” Hadrian said mildly as he began filling his own plate. “Lord Voldemort will not be joining us this morning. The ritual last night was rather draining for him, I’m afraid, so he’ll be having a lie in.”

“Is he sick?” Harry frowned with clear concern.

“No,” Hadrian smiled at him. “He just used a great deal of his magic last night and it made him very tired.”

“So he’ll be okay?”

“Right as rain after he’s had some rest.”

They ate in silence for a bit after that, except when Hadrian had to remind Harry more than once to eat more slowly or he’d make himself sick. “No one will take the food from you, child. You have my word that you shall never want for healthy food while you are under my care,” he said gravely. He’d never forgotten what it felt like to starve and be helpless to do anything about it. He’d never subject a child to such a thing.

“Sorry, my Lord,” Harry said when he’d managed to clear his mouth.

“You have not displeased me,” Hadrian assured him. “I merely expect you to listen to what I say and do your best to abide my words. I do not expect you to be perfect.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry murmured.

“Good,” Hadrian smiled warmly at him, pretending not to notice the intense way in which Severus was monitoring their conversation while he ate. “Now, I imagine that you have some questions about the magical world. You may ask them, if you wish. I cannot guarantee that I will answer them all, but I promise that I will do my very best to answer honestly all those I do.”

Harry nodded and chewed thoughtfully for a moment before asking, “Um, you said that I was some kind of celebrity or something. How come?”

Hadrian made a mental note to add diction to Harry’s upcoming studies. He hadn’t the time or patience to correct the child’s every blunder. He then gave a moment of thought to how he was going to explain this. “Before you were born,” Hadrian began, “there was a prophecy made.” He fought the urge to laugh at the way Severus had stilled and tensed. No doubt that man had expected them to lie to the boy. Even if he had been the real Harry Potter, Hadrian would not have lied to him. Lies eventually come out and breed resentment.

“Do you know what a prophecy is, Harry?”

Harry nodded, “It’s like telling the future, right?”

“It is, indeed,” Hadrian smiled. “Unfortunately, they tend to be very vague and it is often impossible to be certain of their meaning until the prediction has come to pass. Well, this prophecy said that a child would be born that would have the power to defeat the Dark Lord. We suspect that is Lord Voldemort and that the child was you.”
Harry’s eyes grew very wide and he paled a little bit.

“It said that you would have a power the Dark Lord did not know, and that one of you would die when you met. It said that he would mark you as his equal.” He reached out to lightly brush a finger over the scar on his forehead. “It came true almost ten years ago.

“Lord Voldemort was… not well at the time. He’d hurt himself accidentally and it damaged his mind. He became very paranoid, and when he heard about the prophecy, he became obsessed with destroying you before you could destroy him. Foolishly, he tracked down your house one night and went to kill you. When he tried, though, he found that your mother had used a ritual. A very Dark magic ritual, to protect you. When he tried to kill you, the spell he cast bounced back and hit him. You lived, and he died that night.”

“But he’s alive,” Harry said quietly, looking confused and a little worried.

“Yes, he is. He’d used magic to make himself immortal, so that even if his body dies, he lives and can get another body. It took him ten years, but I helped him to get back into his rightful body. After that night, when you lived even when you should have died, they called you the Boy-Who-Lived and you became very famous for defeating Lord Voldemort.”

Harry frowned at him, “But you said my mother did it. I was just a baby.”

Hadrian nodded, “Yes. You will learn soon enough that many people are idiots,” he said wryly. “They didn’t understand how you lived. They were just very happy that Lord Voldemort was gone. They wanted someone to celebrate for that, and you were convenient, I’m afraid.”

They ate in silence for a few minutes before Harry spoke again. “So Lord Voldemort killed my parents, then?” he asked neutrally.

Hadrian nodded grimly, “He did, Harry, but he was not in his right mind at the time, and your parents were not innocent victims. They were soldiers who fought against him for several years.”

Harry nodded slowly and went back to his food for a while. “Why was everyone so happy when they thought Lord Voldemort died?” he asked curiously. “Is it because he was crazy?”

“That is part of it,” Hadrian acknowledged. “You will learn more about this when you begin your studies, but I will explain a little now. Lord Voldemort is an extremely powerful wizard, like myself. When he was a child, he saw many things wrong with the way the wizarding world was run. He saw how dangerous the muggles would be to us if they ever discovered us. He decided that he wanted to try to make the world better. He is very, very smart and he believed that he could run the world better than the people who were doing it. The problem was that no one would listen to him — or, I should say there were not enough people willing to listen to him.

“It gets pretty complicated, and it’s too much for me to explain over breakfast, but basically he started a war to try to do what he wanted to do. When he hurt himself and started to lose his mind, he lost track of his goals, but he didn’t forget that he was leading a war. He started hurting people without a good reason and everyone became very, very afraid of him. So afraid that they still fear to even speak his name and call him He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named or even You-Know-Who. Most others call him simply, the Dark Lord.”

“You call him Lord Voldemort,” Harry observed.

“I am not afraid of him,” Hadrian winked at the child.

There was another moment of silence before Harry tentatively ventured, “That prophecy… That’s
“It’s over,” Hadrian promised. “I believe that it was fulfilled on the night when his body was destroyed in his attempt to kill you, but even if it was not, the vows you took when we brought you here will ensure that you could not harm him even if you wished it.”

Harry nibbled his lip for a moment before cautiously inquiring, “He won’t hurt me either, though?”

“So long as you do as you have promised and mind your manners, no. If he harms you, child, I shall know, and I shall make certain that it is a mistake he does not make twice.”

Severus’ fork clanged a little louder than normal against his plate, but he otherwise gave no indication that he was even listening.

Harry took a breath and nodded with determination. “Yes, my Lord.”

“Good lad,” Hadrian smiled. “Are you finished eating?”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry nodded quickly.

“Excellent. Come with me, child. I have a few books for you to look over today. They’ll give you a basic idea of the wizarding world.”

“Will you be here?” he asked hopefully.

“Alas, no,” Hadrian said with true regret. He’d have loved to spend a few months relaxing and helping the boy to acclimate to his new world, but it was not to be. “I’m afraid I have a very great deal of work to do. This morning, I have to go and secure some tutors for you. I also have to hire a regular healer for you.”

“But you healed me before,” Harry frowned.

“I am a competent healer, Harry, but I honestly don’t know everything a real healer does. I’ve never formally studied it. There is also the fact that I am a very busy man and cannot always be here when you may need me. You can still talk to me if you have any concerns for your health or anything else, but I think it would be best to have a healer on call.”

“Yes, my Lord,” Harry said quietly.

“I also need to hire a tailor to make you a proper wardrobe and a stylist to do something with that rat’s nest masquerading as your hair.”

Harry frowned at that comment, no doubt indignant that he was being teased about the hair that Hadrian had given him. He just winked at the boy.

“And when I’m done with all of that,” Hadrian sighed excessively, “I then have to spy on more muggles.” Harry looked curious about that, but Hadrian held up a finger to silence him when Severus turned to leave the room. “Severus,” he called, stopping him.

The man turned back to him, his face open and brow lifted politely.

Hadrian almost smirked at the excessive politeness from a man to which it did not come naturally. He stepped closer to him as he said, “Harry’s potions will be ready by this evening, yes?”

“Yes, my Lord Peverell,” Severus affirmed.
“Excellent. Thank you, Severus. Could you also start a batch of veritaserum, please?”

Severus actually blinked once at the word “please”, but he dipped his head in assent, “Of course, my Lord.”

“I do appreciate it,” Hadrian assured him, reaching out to grip the man’s bicep briefly. The touch ended up lingering a bit when he found more beneath the sleeve than he’d expected. He did not recall ever finding Severus Snape attractive when he was a child, but he’d been a narrow-minded twit back then, as well. With his much greater experience now, Hadrian could safely say that Severus had a rare sort of beauty about him that many shallow fools would overlook. Hadrian had seen enough flimsy, generic beauty in his time to know better.

What else he knew of Severus’ character from his past experience just made the superficial attraction ten times stronger. Severus was intelligent and powerful and loyal and so very brave.

Forcing the thoughts away, Hadrian released the potions master’s arm and gave him a warm smile before turning his focus back to the boy who was watching the two of them with curiosity and too much cunning. The damn kid was smart. No doubt about that.

“You’re spying on the muggles?” Harry asked curiously as they left the breakfast room.

“Indeed,” Hadrian smiled. “Espionage and research are the most important facets of any war.”

“Are you at war with someone?” the boy asked with the innocence of one who did not truly understand war.

“We are,” Hadrian assured him. “Our enemies merely do not know it yet.”
Chapter 4

6 August

Hadrian hummed quietly to himself as he stepped into the main office of the Department of Magical Transportation. It was time he lent some legitimacy to his name, hence the apparation license he’d just acquired. He’d filled out the rest of the necessary paperwork this morning. Happily, the magical world yet had virtually no means for monitoring magical people living in the muggle world and thus it wasn’t at all impossible for a British wizard to show up without any prior documentation at his age. It wasn’t common, certainly, but he’d simply explained that he’d traveled a lot in his youth and thus missed his Hogwarts letter. He was independently educated, but he’d signed up for the next OWL and NEWT tests. Sadly, he’d just missed them, so he’d have to wait until January before they were given again. Not that he really needed the tests, but it would give him more of that legitimacy that he was looking for.

He was done with the Ministry for today, thankfully. He did so hate red tape. It was the reason he’d chosen to avoid any official titles in his later life, preferring to work as a consultant instead. Government work just wasn’t worth the headache.

He turned toward the lifts only to frown when he spotted Albus Dumbledore chatting lightly with some perky witch who’d probably recently graduated.

Containing his annoyance, Hadrian set off for the lift, completely unsurprised when Dumbledore just happened to finish his conversation at just the right time to end up standing next to him as they waited for the lift to arrive.

“Hello,” Albus said brightly, turning to twinkle at him. “I thought I knew most of Wizarding Britain by this point,” he laughed deprecatingly, “but I’m not familiar with you, young man.”

Yeah, because it was so likely that Albus just happened to have business at the Department of Magical Transportation today while Hadrian had his apparation test. No doubt this was all a huge coincidence…

“My name is Albus Dumbledore, and you are…?”

Hadrian turned a bland smile on the old man, “Oh, I’m aware of who you are, Mr. Dumbledore. A man can’t eat a Chocolate Frog in this country without stumbling over your face. My name is Hadrian. Hadrian Peverell.”

Dumbledore’s brow rose almost as though the name came as a surprise. “Peverell? Truly? I grew up near Esmerelda Peverell, a very old lady who used to ply me with biscuits when I scraped my knee,” he reminisced fondly. “I had thought she was the last of the line.”

“Oh, obviously not,” Hadrian replied with a thin smile.

There was a moment of silence in which Dumbledore clearly waited for more and Hadrian studiously pretended not to notice that.

The lift dinged as it arrived and two unremarkable Ministry employees stepped passed them. Hadrian entered the lift first and selected the button for the Atrium. Dumbledore joined him and didn’t push any buttons.

“I take it you did not attend Hogwarts?” Dumbledore said next.
“I didn’t,” Hadrian confirmed. “Honestly, I’m not impressed by the school. I’ve looked into the average NEWT scores coming out of there and they are embarrassingly below the ICW averages consistently, every single year.”

“Well, it’s not as bad as all that,” Dumbledore muttered, sounding about as taken aback and insulted as Hadrian could imagine him ever being.

“Not in every subject,” Hadrian admitted. “Muggle Studies and History of Magic, however, are pathetically abysmal. Of course, what need could anyone have to know their history or to have the capability to function in the muggle world? Your Potions class has had not a quarter as many NEWT applicants as the other European schools this last decade, though, admittedly, those who did complete the NEWTs tended to score incredibly highly. I honestly don’t even know what to say about your Defense Against the Dark Arts class, though I suspect the students may be absorbing more misinformation about the subject than anything else in the class. But that’s okay. Why would that be an important life skill?” he chuckled brightly. “I hesitate to even mention the rather substantial list of classes that you don’t offer at all. Tell me, is Hogwarts’ budget really so strained that the school can’t even afford to offer more than half as many classes as the leading European academies?”

It was extremely satisfying to glance at the old man and see real anger on his normally so genial face. He rallied, however, just as the lift doors opened to let them out into the Atrium. “I don’t think you’re very familiar with what it takes to run a school, Mr. Peverell.”

“It’s Lord Peverell,” Hadrian corrected perfectly amiably, “and you could be right. Maybe I don’t know. Of course, given how far Hogwarts has fallen in the last fifty years, I think it’s entirely possible that you don’t have any idea either. Or perhaps you merely have too many responsibilities in other areas to give the school your full attention. Something to consider addressing for the next Wizengamot session, perhaps.” Then, before Dumbledore could say anything in his defense, Hadrian went on briskly, “Well, this has been an engaging chat, Mr. Dumbledore, but I’m afraid I really must be going. Things to do, people to see…”

The last thing he saw as he disapparated was Dumbledore looking rather constipated.

He was laughing hard when he landed in the Potter Manor reception room.

10 August

Severus slowed his steps warily as he heard raised voices coming from the dining room. He pulled his magic in to himself as tightly as he could manage and barely dared to breathe heavily as he recognized the Dark Lord’s angry voice.

“How dare you! The mudblood will die if it is my will that he should die-“

“You forget yourself!” Another voice interrupted and Severus felt a stirring of fear as he realized that it belonged to Peverell. He’d never heard that voice less than slightly disapproving. At least, not in English. Peverell managed to sound just as terrifying as the Dark Lord, now. “You would do well to recall, Tom, that I returned you to life and I can take it away just as easily.”

An involuntary shudder raced down Severus’ spine as Peverell spoke to the Dark Lord with utter contempt – a tone that Severus himself had used on Hufflepuffs who wet themselves in his classroom while he was explaining to them exactly how stupid they were.
“Do not forget our deal, Hadrian,” the Dark Lord bit out, though Severus was chilled to recognize the restraint in his voice. As though the Dark Lord truly did fear Peverell.

“I have not forgotten, but it seems that you have a distressingly selective memory. Yes, I agreed to give you life, to ensure your life is sustained, and to assist you in decimating the muggle population. You in turn swore to obey, Tom. Killing the ‘mudblood’ will serve no purpose but to assuage your bruised ego. It will hurt our cause, and therefore I am forbidding it. Show me that you can manage to obey me, Tom, or so help me, I will find another figurehead for this war. You may be my best option, but you are not the only one.”

Severus felt all his blood trying to fall into his feet and he quickly and silently reversed his steps, hurrying back toward his room. He had an inkling that the Dark Lord may soon be storming out of the room and he very much did not wish either of them to know he’d heard that.

Back in his laboratory, Severus leaned heavily against the closed door and tried to process what he had just heard. His mind did not want to accept it.

He was wrong, he realized. Peverell was not the Dark Lord’s partner. He was the Dark Lord’s master.

The sheer enormity of that fact was somewhat dwarfed by how incredibly impressed Severus was that Peverell was leading this war from the shadows. Pretending to be a trusted second when all the decisions were, in fact, his own.

The Dark Lord had sworn to obey Peverell. Obey. Much as Severus had once sworn to obey Lord Voldemort.

With an extreme effort, he pulled in a sharp breath and forced his tumultuous thoughts back behind solid barriers. If he didn’t get moving, he was going to be late for breakfast. As much as he would love to miss it today – to avoid everyone and stew on what he’d learned – he knew that he could not. The only reason Severus could miss a meal was because a potion was in a critical stage. At the moment, he did not dare to try his luck lying to Peverell. Anyone who could maneuver the Dark Lord into sworn servitude was someone against whom Severus did not wish to test his skills. Not yet, at least. Not for this.

He’d wait until it truly counted to try something as possibly suicidal as that.

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Hadrian listened to Harry describing the magical theory that he’d been learning from his tutor, keeping his face politely attentive even though he wanted to frown. He knew that he shouldn’t be surprised by the quality of the instruction. Understanding of magical theory had evolved a lot in a thousand years, meaning that the current teachings were “right” as far as anyone but him could know. That didn’t mean that it was easy to listen to the child spewing “facts” that were naïve to his own ears and sometimes blatantly wrong. They may as well be teaching the child that the world was flat and the sun revolved around it.

His eyes flicked up as Severus entered the room and he lifted a finger to silence the child while he focused on the man. He knew that Severus had overheard his argument with Tom that morning. Tom hadn’t sensed him, Hadrian was certain. Severus had done an admirable job of masking himself. Of course, he had no way to conceal the fact that he was a living sentient being, which is what Hadrian sensed.
He noticed that Severus was more tense than usual – which was saying something, really – and that his eyes were slightly more intent. Other than that, he was concealing his thoughts as well as always.

“Good morning, Severus,” he greeted with a warm smile.

“Good morning, my Lord,” Severus returned neutrally as he took his seat across from Hadrian and Harry.

“Lord Voldemort will not be joining us this morning,” he said without explanation. He had no desire to speak what Severus would, of course, know to be a lie. He didn’t much care for lying in general, really, though he did admit that it sometimes had its place. He tried very hard to avoid lying to people that he hoped to one day consider friends. Though it had been a very long time since he’d bothered with real friends, he couldn’t help but think that he’d like to. In this case.

Severus just nodded in response to the statement and hesitated only until Hadrian began filling his plate before following his lead.

Hadrian permitted himself a sigh then, as they all selected their food. “Now, Harry…” he hesitated, then grimaced and decided, “I’m going to have to make some time to speak with your magical theory tutor. I’m certain that you learned the lessons perfectly as he taught them,” he assured as Harry had tensed badly. “It is with him that my displeasure resides. What he has been teaching you is not… Well, it is the commonly accepted ‘correct’ material. That doesn’t change the fact that it is wrong.

“Divine Mother, I’m going to need more time,” he frowned. He hadn’t expected this, but it was going against some essential part of his being to allow Harry to learn magic incorrectly. Obviously this was not something that he could change for every child immediately. He could change it for Harry though. The boy was powerful and he was intelligent and he had a will to succeed that was honestly impressive. He could be truly great, and it offended Hadrian on some base level to impede that potential at all.

“Okay,” he decided, perhaps hastily, but he was still Gryffindor enough to know that he’d made some of his best decisions in haste. Some of his worst as well, without doubt, but he was what he was. “I’m firing your magical theory tutor. From now on, I’ll be teaching you personally.”

And where Harry’s face was fallen at the news that he would lose his tutor, it lit up like the sunrise when Hadrian offered to teach him. “We’ll begin on Monday. I’ll need the weekend to set up the classroom.”

“Is there anything that I can read to get started?” Harry asked hopefully.

Hadrian smiled at the child. He’d always loved enthusiastic pupils. “Alas, there is not. For now, my instructions are for you to forget everything you’ve learned about the ‘Laws’ of Magic. If there is one thing I’ve learned in my long life, it is that magic abides by no laws. There are guidelines that may help us to wield it, but there are no absolutes.”

There was a moment of silence before Harry innocently noted, “You don’t look that old.”

Hadrian paused, fork halfway to his mouth, and quickly ran through his mind again what he had said. “…in my long life…” He’d said that. Mother, that was one secret he’d never before had to keep. He’d been a globally household name for most of his life. Everyone just knew that he was immortal and really freaking old. He realized he’d have to watch himself more closely for such things.

After only a second’s pause, he resumed eating and used the time it took to chew and swallow to
consider his response. “Looks can be deceiving, child,” he said with a small smile. “Lord Voldemort shall be sixty-five this year. He does not look so old, does he?”

Harry’s eyes widened and he shook his head. “Are you that old?”

Hadrian really could not resist a chuckle at the childish awe. “Older,” he admitted after a momentary hesitation. “But don’t tell anyone, all right? It is always best to keep people guessing.” And his eyes flitted up to meet Severus’ dark ones as he said that, his meaning clear.

The potions master dipped his head slightly in understanding.

“Heverus, I have need of your expertise this afternoon if you have the time,” he addressed, dropping the subject of his age.

Severus’ shoulders tightened slightly as he swallowed and nodded. “Of course, my Lord. I am at your service.”

Hadrian smiled faintly and pushed away inappropriate thoughts relating to Severus servicing him. “I am delighted, of course, but I would not have your work suffer due to my timing. I can be flexible, if necessary.”

Something flashed through Severus’ eyes too quickly for Hadrian to read it clearly though he suspected it may have been lust in response to the slightly suggestive emphasis he’d placed on the word “flexible”. “The veritaserum will need to be tended at two-thirty and I have an experiment that will need to be seen to between eight and nine this evening, my Lord. Beyond that, I am at your disposal.”

Hadrian couldn’t tell if he’d meant that last bit to be suggestive or not, but dismissed it for the moment. He actually did want Severus’ help with more than his libido. “Excellent,” he declared with a warm smile though he toned down the flirting, not wanting the man to feel pressured. “I cannot be certain of the time I shall return this afternoon, but it should be between three and six. I’ll notify you of when you’re needed.”

Severus dipped his head in understanding and agreement as he removed the napkin from his lap and placed it on his empty plate. “If you require nothing else at the moment, my Lord, I will return to my potions.”

“As you will, Severus,” Hadrian dismissed politely, then turned his attention to the boy sitting silently at his side, his far too astute eyes watching them speculatively. “Now, Harry, I need to go fire your tutor and then I’ll be out of the manor for most of the day. You have suddenly found yourself with a free day.” He smirked as Harry blinked and looked slightly unnerved. The child likely had no notion of what to do with a day of freedom when he didn’t have to worry about simply surviving. “Why don’t you ask one of the house-elves to show you some magical games?”

Harry looked wary of the idea and Hadrian’s lips twitched with amusement.

“Consider it an assignment,” he decided, decently certain the boy would balk at spending a day frivolously. He was too used to having to work for everything he got in life and the opulence of the manor had not changed that. The new arrangement had merely shifted his necessities. He was freely given food and shelter, but things were expected of him in exchange. Harry looked uncertain now, but attentive.

“You will be meeting other magical children soon,” Hadrian explained. “The children of those who serve the Dark Lord. You will be expected to impress them as they will be important people in the
future. Your ability to play their games may be important, so you will learn the games well.”

Harry straightened with determination as he was given an objective. “I’ll learn them all,” he promised.

“See that you do,” Hadrian smirked, then added, “though you are permitted to enjoy yourself in the process.”

Harry blinked in surprise, then smiled shyly and nodded just slightly.

“Excellent. Off with you then,” Hadrian nodded toward the door as he rose from the table himself. He watched the boy scamper out of the room, making a note to teach the boy that it wasn’t seemly to scamper anywhere – at least not in mixed company. Once the boy was gone, Hadrian turned his attention to the day ahead of him and tried not to groan. Sweet Magic, it wasn’t as though he hadn’t had enough to be getting on with today.

He made his way to his study to floo Harry’s now former tutor, silently cursing himself a fool for adding the teaching of children to his already swollen agenda.

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Severus stiffened as the door to his lab opened. The ward it had come with ensured that only three people had access to the lab, Severus and his two lords. He wasn’t sure if he should feel relieved when Peverell stepped into the room with his typical warm smile.

“Can I help you with anything, my Lord?” he asked tensely. “I was just about to tend the veritaserum…”

“No, no, I remember well what you told me this morning,” Peverell assured him. “I returned a little sooner than I thought I would, so I figured I’d just come and wait until you were done. I do appreciate watching a master at work, so it’s no imposition.”

Severus swallowed discretely and nodded his understanding. “As you wish, my Lord. It should take me about ten minutes, and then I am all yours.” Nervous as he was by Peverell’s sudden appearance in his lab, he hadn’t quite realized the connotations of his declaration until he watched a decidedly predatory grin spread across his Lord’s face.

“Keep talking like that, Severus, and I shan’t accomplish any of what I’d planned for the rest of the day,” the man purred at him.

Severus felt his cheeks warm and hastily focused on his occlumency to prevent any further embarrassment. He considered a few responses, but somehow they all seemed either impertinent or likely to be construed as further flirting, so he decided that discretion was the better part of valor and kept his silence as he continued gathering what he would need for the veritaserum.

Peverell did not seem to mind his failure to respond as he hopped lightly up onto the adjacent workstation where he could watch easily without hovering about in the way.

Severus was grateful that he’d brewed this potion enough times to need little thought about it because having a man like Peverell watching him so intently was making it impossible to focus. His feelings about Lord Peverell were so mixed it was dizzying. The man was terrifying and awe inspiring and brilliant and devious and gorgeous. He was kind to Potter, yet ruthless enough to keep the Dark Lord in line. He flirted relentlessly with Severus yet also treated him with respect – more respect than Severus even deserved as a sworn servant.
The flirting, perhaps more than anything, was throwing Severus for a loop. Of course, Peverell didn’t flirt with the Dark Lord, but other than that, Severus had no way to know if the man was prone to flirting in general or if he was special in that regard. A lifetime of experience cautioned him against ever assuming that anyone would consider him “special” in that way, which led him to assume that if Peverell did mean anything by it, he had ulterior motives. Unfortunately, that very prudent logic did nothing to prevent his body from trying to respond to the suggestion in Peverell’s words. The man was incredibly appealing in all manner of ways and the very fact that Severus did not often receive such attention had made him increasingly susceptible.

A significant part of him wanted to let himself be taken in by the man and just enjoy it while it lasted.

Prudently, he was not presently on speaking terms with that particular part of himself, so he was holding out reasonably well for now.

Though the time seemed to drag on interminably with Peverell staring at him, he did eventually finish what needed to be done at this stage, allowing him to reduce the heat beneath the cauldron once more and give it another sixteen and one quarter hours to simmer before he’d have to add the next ingredient.

“How beautifully done, Severus, of course,” Peverell congratulated as he slid down from the work surface.

“Thank you, my Lord,” Severus nodded neutrally. “Judging by the base you brewed for the boy’s nutrient potions, I would say you are an accomplished brewer yourself.”

Peverell immediately shrugged off the praise. “I do well enough. My skill is derived from a great many years of experience rather than an inherent talent like yours.”

Severus nodded his acknowledgement of that and followed Peverell out of the lab as his mind turned over that interesting fact that he hadn’t yet had much chance to examine. Peverell had admitted to being older than the Dark Lord. Possibly significantly older. How many people said things like “in my long life” if they weren’t talking about a great many decades? It was something Severus could imagine Albus saying. In fact, he was pretty sure he had heard the old man say something along those lines a few times.

Severus was gratified to know that his initial mistrust of the man’s physical age had been correct. Peverell just didn’t act like a twenty-year-old. He had confidence and patience and he seemed so unflappable. He wondered just how old Peverell may be, but he wondered even more just how it was possible that the man looked so young. The Dark Lord had said he was a necromancer. Severus had heard a rumor of a necromantic ritual that could allow someone to claim a recently deceased body as his own. Perhaps that is what he’d done. Perhaps he’d even done it more than once. He could be centuries’ old for all Severus knew.

On the second floor of the manor, Peverell led the way into a largish room near the library. With his years of experience, it took Severus only a second to recognize that it was a classroom – probably designed for the primary education of the manor’s children. He recalled that Peverell had promised Potter to tutor him in magical theory and he wondered what it could have to do with him.

Severus nearly stumbled when Peverell gave a vague wave of one hand and simultaneously conjured a pair of comfortable armchairs and a low table between them. They were a very nice matching set in mahogany and sable. Severus had felt the rise of magic necessary to pull off such wandless magic and Peverell hadn’t even seemed to notice that he’d just done something so incredibly close to impossible. There was a stirring low in his gut and he wasn’t sure if it was terror or arousal or some very inappropriate combination of the two.
“Have a seat, Severus,” Peverell said absently as he slid into one of the chairs and flicked his wrist to summon a roll of parchment from the desk.

Severus sat down slowly, vaguely wondering if Peverell even bothered to carry a wand as he’d yet to see the man use one.

“As you are aware,” Peverell began, “I promised Harry that I would teach him magical theory. After some thought, I’ve decided to include a few of the Death Eaters’ children as well – they’ll need something to combat the drivel they try to teach at Hogwarts,” he said disdainfully. “The problem, of course, is that I simply do not have the time in the day to do everything I need to do. I considered a time-turner, of course, but I honestly find them more annoying than they are worth most of the time. With that in mind, I’ve come up with an alternative that should please everyone. Some of this is a little complex, but see what you can make of it,” he encouraged as he passed over the parchment.

Severus wondered if he should feel insulted as he accepted it and sat back to study it. The man had insinuated that he may have a hard time understanding it, after all, and Severus had been creating his own spells since he was fifteen.

While he read, Peverell got up and moved around the room where it looked like he was working on runic sequences that were carved inconspicuously into the walls, floor, and ceiling.

As Severus read on, he decided that Peverell was not underestimating Severus’ intelligence. If anything, Severus should probably be flattered that the man assumed he’d be able to understand any of it. He’d never seen magical theory so complex in his life. It was Arithmancy and Ancient Runes – both Elder Futhark and Ancient Greek hieroglyphs – and it incorporated elements of Charms, Transfigurations, and Potions all working together to make it function.

After nearly an hour and reading and rereading the parchment, Severus was relatively certain that he understood what it all meant. “My Lord…” he said cautiously, causing the man to hum inquisitively from where he was working on a rune sequence, “You created this?”

“Yes,” the man replied simply. “I devised most of it years ago, honestly, but I’ve adjusted it a bit here to make the experience gentler. If I’ve done it correctly, even the children should not feel the dilation. I’m curious as to your thoughts about the potion, in particular,” he admitted, finishing up what he was doing and returning to take the seat opposite Severus.

Glancing at the part of the parchment that detailed the potion, Severus nodded pensively, “It looks sound,” he admitted. “The blood of a magical virgin, willingly given would help to ease any discomfort, but the quantity could prove problematic. Will you be utilizing Potter for that?”

Peverell grimaced and leaned back in his chair with a tired sigh. “No. Unfortunately, Harry has not fit such criteria in several years.”

Severus stilled in horror. “They didn’t… Those muggles…”

“No, they wouldn’t have touched the boy like that,” Peverell said with a mild sneer. “Others had no such problem of course, and they were willing to pay.”

For a long moment, Severus could only think of how very much he wanted to beat Albus to death with his good intentions. He finally managed to wrestle his rage and disgust back under control and met Peverell’s knowing eyes. “Forgive me, my Lord,” he said stiffly. “I hadn’t realized the abuse was of that nature.”

“Nothing to forgive, Severus,” Peverell said mildly. “Honestly, I’d have been much more disturbed
had you taken the news with all grace.”

Severus nodded once and Peverell allowed a moment of silence before bringing the conversation back to the temporal dilation ward that Peverell was building around the classroom.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

This chapter is really short, but I've been stuck with this much on my computer for a really long time, so I decided to just post it. Not to say that I won't continue this story, because I do intend to do so. But, for now, there's this. Enjoy.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Lord Voldemort sat on the floor in the middle of his bedchamber. One of the few spaces of floor that remained clear after he'd gotten done letting out his frustration with Peverell. He’d spent the last couple of hours pacing the room and tearing it apart with violent discharges of magic as he plotted scheme after scheme that would end in Peverell’s death and Voldemort’s freedom.

Of course, they all had one massive problem. Peverell – fucking Potter – couldn’t die. And he was over a thousand years old. A thousand years into the future no less. He knew magicks that had not even been discovered yet. He’d fought in dozens of wars. Voldemort had dueled him more than once thus far and he could honestly say that the man was beyond him. Considerably beyond him. He hated that fact – he really did – but he was also a Slytherin. Self-preservation was always the ultimate ambition. Peverell had found him at his lowest point and he’d offered him a choice. Do as you’re told and I’ll make sure you’re ruling the world, or defy me and I’ll destroy you utterly. What the fuck was he supposed to say to that? Once he was up and moving in his own body, he attacked Peverell, naturally. The apparently younger man had laughed as he made Voldemort’s best attempts to kill him look pathetic, and then scolded him like a disobedient child.

The man was infuriating.

…and so annoyingly impressive.

As much as he would love to devote himself totally to finding a way to destroy Peverell… he did not want to die. He’d come too close to it last time. He understood all too well that his life now rested on Peverell’s whim. It galled something fierce, but his mind was clearer than it had been in decades and he was no longer a foolish child too convinced of his own superiority. He may be superior to virtually everyone else, but he knew that Peverell was the exception.

No, for now there was nothing that he could do about Peverell – which is why he’d destroyed his personal chambers rather than attacking the man again. So long as he abided his end of their bargain, Peverell was bound to do the same. So that is what he would do. He was protected by that magically binding agreement until such time as the war was won in his favor and he was ruling the world – or Britain, at least. That would take half a dozen years at the very inside. That gave him plenty of time to search for a way to protect himself against Peverell’s whims.

He had been forbidden to try making any more horcruxes. Indeed, Peverell had threatened that splitting his soul again would probably kill him given the way his life was presently being preserved. From what he knew of the magic involved, he suspected the threat was truth. If there were two paths to immortality, however, there were surely more. He would find a way to guard himself against the
annoying Master of Death.

Albus paced slowly across the length of his office over and over again, one hand repetitively stroking his beard while the other gripped his wand tightly. His mind was far from all of this as he struggled to anticipate Tom’s next moves with his new, young right hand. Peverell.

Severus… Severus had made his choice, he reminded himself despite the constant feeling of guilt. He’d heard nothing from Severus in two weeks. He had no way of knowing if the young man even still lived. Some part of him knew that the decent thing would have been to at least try to talk Severus out of putting himself in so much danger, but the thought had never even truly crossed his mind. He needed Severus to continue spying, especially with Harry in Tom’s clutches, helpless and completely ignorant that he was living with the monster that had orphaned him.

Harry. The poor boy. Albus had wronged him more than any other. He’d known that the Dursleys would not be kind to him. There were many reasons to leave the boy there. He would be safe. He would be outside the wizarding world and able to grow up without the ingrained prejudices inherent to their world. He would be able to grow up far from the fame. Grow up without acquiring a sense of entitlement in response to the way the populace fawned over him. He knew the Dursleys would not treat him well. The boy would be humble and meek – not arrogant and brazen as his father. He could not risk Harry Potter turning out like James Potter. He couldn’t.

So many reasons…

He’d truly never imagined that it could be so bad as Tom suggested. He suspected that Tom had told the truth as he’d had no terribly compelling reason to lie on that account, but it still was difficult to credit. He knew what Severus would say about his naivety, but they were family. Blood! They shouldn’t…

But they had. Harry had suffered terribly and Albus knew that it was his fault. The guilt was only heightened by the fact that he knew he would not choose differently even if he had the choice to make all over again. Oh, he’d take more precautions for security, that was certain. There was very little he could imagine damaging his plans more severely than for Harry to end up brainwashed by Tom. Except maybe if the boy was killed. Brainwashing could be corrected, after all, given enough time and effort – potions and mind healers.

He didn’t want Harry to have suffered so much, but there truly had been no better option for him.

Now Harry was in Tom’s hands, Severus was beyond his reach for the foreseeable future, and Tom had taken on a charismatic young protégé who seemed capable of influencing him in a way no one ever had.

Honestly, Albus was relieved that Tom’s focus had turned away from the muggleborns. Albus hated to think of the muggles suffering. They deserved it no more than the muggleborns. But they could afford the losses much more readily. The muggles were so many, even a few thousand would hardly be notable in the grand scheme of things. And yes, he knew that it was unkind to think such a thing, but he had learned long ago that it just wasn’t possible to save everyone. People would be killed no matter what he did. He could only try to mitigate the damage and play the long game.

For the Greater Good.

As much as it pained him, Harry and Severus would both likely end up being among those sacrifices. He could only hope that they would survive long enough to positively impact the war so that others could live in the peace they were denied.
He couldn’t have loved Severus more if the lad was his own son. His only consolation as he continued to play Severus as an expendable pawn was that Albus himself would likely end up sacrificed for the cause eventually as well. He was no more immune from the responsibility than anyone else. But not soon. It couldn’t be soon. He had far too much left to do to ensure the Light would triumph far beyond his lifetime.

Severus settled into an open space along the rear wall of Lord Peverell’s classroom between Lucius and Thaddeus Nott. Peverell had invited a number of the Death Eaters’ children to attend his lessons with Potter – those who would be starting school in two weeks’ time. Draco, Theodore Nott, Pansy Parkinson, Tracey Davis, and Hannah Abbott. He had invited all of their parents to attend as well if they wished. The Parkinsons had declined on the grounds that they had a prior engagement. Claudius Davis was currently in Spain seducing the future late Lady Davis – some bookish, barely of-age muggleborn chit if he held true to form. Suryne Abbott was on assignment. Severus had learned all of that over breakfast when Lord Peverell had briefed he and Potter on what to expect today. Only Lucius and Tadd had chosen to attend the lesson with their children, to get an idea of what Lord Peverell wished to teach them. And to get a better grasp on Lord Peverell himself, undoubtedly.

Six individual desks filled out the center of the room, one child settled in each with parchment and quill ready to take notes. The distance between the children made it impossible for them to whisper to each other surreptitiously and all of them seemed to be feeling a little too intimidated to speak openly, so the room was silent as they waited for Lord Peverell to arrive. The loudest sound was the ticking of a pendulum clock recessed into the wall at the front of the room between two open stretches of wall.

Peverell strode into the room right on time, looking absolutely edible in form-fitted robes of dark chocolate and caramel, his long hair tied back at his neck. He paused to close the door and the second that it latched, the omnipresent ticking of the clock ceased. Severus, having been involved in part of the process of preparing the room, knew that Peverell had deliberately set the clock outside the time dilation, ensuring that it represented the passage of time outside the room and ensured them that it was functioning properly.

“Good morning, class,” he greeted neutrally as he paced to the front of the room. “As you may have been informed, you are here to learn magical theory.” He reached the front of the room and turned back to face his students. “The reason I’ve decided to teach this to you personally is that the Hogwarts curriculum is severely lacking in this respect. Though Hogwarts is lacking in many respects, this one is not actually their fault. I have brought you here to teach you of what I have learned about magic that the rest of the world has not yet recognized.”

There was some shifting and looking around as the students absorbed that statement with a measure of doubt and excitement both. Lucius looked curious and intrigued and Tadd was unconsciously leaning forward a bit.

Lord Peverell ignored the adults in the back and focused on the children, leading the lesson so smoothly that Severus wondered if he had real teaching experience in his past.

“I know that none of you have actually started a formal magical education as of yet, but I’m curious if any of you can tell me one of the Laws of Magic?”

“Draco,” he nodded to the blond boy when he proudly raised his hand.

“You cannot conjure food nor transfigure a non-food item into food,” Severus’ godson answered proudly.
“Very good,” Peverell nodded. “Anyone else?”

“You can’t conjure or transfigure money,” Hannah, a tiny thing with blond pigtails, shyly offered when called on.

“Or precious metals or gems,” Pansy added with a pompous look at Hannah.

“Conjuration and transfiguration are impermanent,” Theo provided when prompted.

“Moving backward in time is impossible beyond twenty-four hours, and even then one cannot change what one knows for certain has already happened,” Tracey supplied.

Only Potter did not offer any Laws, but he’d barely had any magical theory training before Peverell had fired his tutor.

Peverell smiled rather widely at Tracey’s answer, but didn’t comment on any of them until they had run out of things to say. Then the enigmatic lord conjured an apple and took a big bite out of it, ignoring the gasps that elicited from the children. While he continued eating the apple with one hand, he absently continued conjuring with the other hand. All wandlessly, of course.

Severus’ breath caught at the palpable magic in the room and he noticed Lucius stiffen and Tadd lick his lips.

“Gold, silver, platinum,” Peverell said between bites, placing the small, conjured cube of the precious metal, one in front of each child as he went. “Sapphire, ruby, diamond. They are real and permanent. You can each keep the one I’ve given you and ask your parents to verify the authenticity.” He then leaned against the desk at the front of the room and finished his apple while the children examined their gifts and wrapped their heads around what he’d just demonstrated.

Finally, he casually vanished the apple core and stood to face his class directly again.

“I want all of you to remember this demonstration as you begin Hogwarts and listen to your teachers lecture you on the ‘Laws’ of magic. The simple fact of the matter is that Magic abides no laws. With the proper power, the right focus, the correct arithmancy, enough runes, and sufficient dedication, anything is possible. This is the most important lesson in magic that you shall ever learn. There are guidelines that can help you to manipulate magic, particularly as you are learning the basics, but if you allow yourself to believe something to be impossible, you will set the limit yourself.

“Magic is far more vast and wonderful than the human race has yet grasped.

“Now, I will be holding these lessons twice each week until you leave for Hogwarts. Harry, of course, will be remaining here. Hogwarts simply is not safe for him while Dumbledore is there. For the rest of you, I will be continuing these lessons bi-weekly through post during the school term. You will receive a written lesson and assignment via owl twice each month and you will send them back to me. These lessons shall take precedence over your school work. If you’ve time to complete one or the other, you will complete the assignments for me. If you fail to complete any of them, I will expect a very good explanation as to why. Lacking that, I’m certain your parents and I can come up with a suitable punishment.” He leveled a flat, warning look at the children who all shrank back and/or visibly gulped when his eyes touched on them.

“Now, you will take notes while I lecture on some basic magical theory. Be certain that your notes are detailed because they will be your study aid. There is no textbook for this. Some of the theory I teach you may be familiar to you. Much of it will not.”

Severus listened intently to Peverell’s lecture, Tadd and Lucius no less attentive at his side. Parts of
the principles he taught were similar to the theory Severus had learned in school and since, but much of it would be considered simply wrong by any expert he had ever read or consulted. Had he not known what he did about Peverell, and had he not seen the impossible conjurations for himself, he’d have questioned the veracity of it.

Chapter End Notes

I have very little planned for the future plot of this story, which is the main reason it stalled, so if you all have any ideas for where you’d like to see it go, let me know. I don't promise to use anything suggested, but your ideas may jumpstart mine. Worth a try, right?

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