Teaching History (is Old News)

by You_Light_The_Sky

Summary

In which Tom is the DADA professor at Hogwarts, secretly recruiting followers for his future army, and Harry is the worst Divination professor ever, accidentally messing up Tom’s plans.

Chinese Translation Available here: http://wxy1202.lofter.com/post/1d924822_e01bea4
Vietnamese Translation Available here: https://emotionunderface.wordpress.com/2017/08/22/teaching-history-is-old-news-harry-potter-fanfic/

Notes

In this universe, Tom and Harry went to school together and a lot of things in the canon timeline don't apply. I'm kind of making this up as I go along but it's not too serious a fic. It's crack and slice of life. I hope you enjoy it! It's a drabble series so it's going to be a lot of chapters, but that means I can update more often.

Thanks to MayMarlow for encouraging my brand of crazy.
See the end of the work for more notes.
Tom fixes his smile in place while Dumbledore asks his next question.

“Why did you apply for the DADA position, Tom?”

A trivial question, meant to dissect Tom’s intentions, no doubt. But Tom is well practiced in pretending sentimentality. The old coot may suspect his lies, but he will never be able to prove it. Not without legilimency.

“Hogwarts,” Tom says carefully, remembering Saint Wool’s, “has always been like a home to me. I can think of no better place to return to for my career.” All those young minds, full of potential. If he can just make them grow into the powerful soldiers he needs, then… “I wish to teach and provide a nurturing environment for my students just as my professors did before me.”

He doesn’t bother adding like you did to Dumbledore. They both know it would be a lie and Tom would sooner snap his own wand then kiss up to his old professor.

“Hmm…” Dumbledore stretches back in his chair, his gaze fixed on Tom, “…You are very young for this position… perhaps more experience…”

“Professor Chang has been on your staff for two years and she is but a year older than I am. I also spent a year in Romania, doing an independent study on the dark creatures within the region under Master Kettleburn’s supervision. I included his recommendation in my portfolio.”

“True enough, true enough,” Dumbledore nods, popping yet another lemon candy into his mouth and sucking loudly.

Tom hates it.

Several moments pass, in which Tom thinks of seven different ways to curse Dumbledore, when finally, Dumbledore stands up and says, “Thank you for the interview, Tom. An owl will be sent for you if you’ve been hired.”

Tom almost pulls out his wand right there (something about Dumbledore always makes his thoughts irrational) but he only bows politely and walks out the door without so much a goodbye.

This formality with owls is nothing but an distraction. Tom knows that he’s the best candidate for this job, he even tracked down the other applicants to study their resumes and none were as impressive as his. If Professor Dippet were still headmaster, he would have hired Tom on the spot just as he hired Professor Merrythought but no, Dumbledore has to review Tom’s credentials again…

Dumbledore is going to reject his application, Tom knows it. The urge to maim something returns. How dare the old coot, when Tom is better, smarter, than any other wizard in England, when Tom can make other wizards and witches better too, if only—

He nearly trips over a body crouching over by the gargoyle statue.

“Potter?”

Indeed, Harry Potter groggily blinks up at Tom from the floor with his raggedy hair and startling green eyes. Tom notes that Potter dresses the same as ever, in the most atrocious, neon sweaters with horrible caricatures of cute little animals on them. Today’s animal sweater is a platypus covered in
yellow bowties.

“Oh,” Potter blinks, not bothering to get off from the floor, “S’that you, Riddle?”

“Get off from the floor, Potter.”

“Ah. Right.”

Potter stands up slowly and yawns, stretching out his hands. “Wow, s’weird seeing you here. Did Dumbledore also call you for an interview or something…?”

For a moment, Tom sees red. Of course, of course, Dumbledore would find an extra applicant, his star pupil to take the DADA position from Tom’s hands. Of course, Dumbledore would schedule Potter’s interview after Tom’s just to rub it in Tom’s face. Tom imagines it now—Potter securing the DADA position and it is unacceptable—

“Wow, chill there, Riddle, you look like you’re having an aneurysm—”

Tom fights back a glare and marches past Potter. Tonight he’ll prepare a curse on the DADA position until the job falls to the appropriate applicant. He wonders how long Potter will last as professor and what accident will befall Potter by the end of the school year. A troll attack? A memory charm?

“Hey Riddle, I’d watch out for llamas in your future!” Potter calls cheerfully.

Tom’s hand twitches. “I see you haven’t changed,” he murmurs.

“Thanks!”

“It wasn’t a complement,” Tom walks away.

Another silly prediction. Just like in school. Potter always made the strangest remarks, none of them true. *Marshmallows will fall from the sky tomorrow. Your tongue will turn into a snake.* Silly things that were probably pranks, considering Potter’s family history.

Tonight, he’ll cast the curse.

To Tom’s disbelief, an owl waits for him in his study with a letter. Stamped on the envelope, besides the Hogwarts seal, is a llama sticker.

He gets the job.

On his first day of work, Tom walks into Dumbledore’s office and sees Potter happily munching on brownies with the old coot. Tom nearly rubs his eyes for clarification but keeps his face blank and fixed in his practiced smile.

“My apologies, I didn’t know you had company, Professor. Shall I come back later?”

“Nonsense,” Dumbledore’s eyes twinkle annoyingly, “Harry here is your new colleague.”

…What.
Potter sits up, propping his legs on Dumbledore’s desk. Today’s sweater has a llama on it. A llama baking muffins. “Hey there, Riddle! Isn’t this cool? I’m the new Divination professor!”
“…I wasn’t informed of another opening at Hogwarts.”

Tom recalculates in his head. Where did the lack of information come from? He’ll have to update his informants, demand better quality of information in the future. What a waste of an opportunity. He could have placed one of his followers in the Divination position but now he has to deal with Potter and his mismatched socks on a daily basis—

“Professor Trelawney felt the spontaneous urge to explore her gifts in Greece with her wife. I hear they’ve started a lovely little business reading tarot cards to muggles. They’ve actually been quite successful and even designed their own cards! They were even kind enough to mail me a large stack to share with students!”

Dumbledore practically shoves the tiny card to Tom’s face unnecessarily.

“…Llamas.”

Sure enough, *Trelawney and Hestia’s Tarot Card service* is accompanied by a little drawing of a llama gazing into a crystal ball. Never mind that Tom is sure crystal balls have nothing to do with tarot reading, but the llama alone is completely random but being a creature commonly seen in Australia and South America, perhaps not altogether random. And now Tom regrets stepping into Dumbledore’s office because every trivial fact he knows about Australian and South American wildlife (magical and not) races through his mind.

Behind Dumbledore, Potter smirks and Tom narrows his eyes.

Potter wore that terrible llama sweater on purpose, Tom can feel it. If Tom were a gambler, he’d bet all his savings that Potter asked Dumbledore to put that llama sticker on his letter, and then, knowing that Tom would be hired, decided to wear that very same sweater *just to spite him*.

“I know how much you love them,” Potter nods, as if reading his mind (impossible, of course, given Tom’s perfect occlumency shields but something about Potter always makes Tom double check them.)

Tom scowls. “You’re mistaken. If anything, *you’re* the one with a llama obsession. I haven’t been hit by a muggle car because a *quote ‘llama spit in my eye’ end quote* yet.” (1)

“Ah, the good old days. That was one of my best death predictions. You never know, Riddle. I wouldn’t plan any trips to the petting zoo, that’s for sure. Or Australia. Or South America, either, now that I think about it.”

Tom glares.

“It could be worse! I told Neville he’d get mobbed to death by vampire walnuts once. They bite,”
Potter nods with an air of false wisdom that only looks more ridiculous when his bulky glasses nearly slip off his nose.

There is no such thing as vampire walnuts, Tom almost says. But when he thinks about it, animating inanimate objects like walnuts would be a form of alchemy. Theoretically, by using another life form as a conduit, perhaps souls could be transferred (similar to horcrux creation but with the added element of animation and personality). Adding the element of a magical creature (actually vampires may be considered a subclass of undead wizard, or merely infected wizard like the werewolf) could increase the likelihood of success meaning—

Stop. Stop. The maddening thing about interacting with Potter (in any environment) is that sometimes Tom will stop to ponder the plausibility of Potter’s remarks against his better judgement. Perhaps the saying about eccentricities and charm has some truth to it. In any case, the logical thing to do is ignore Potter for the rest of his career. Or get Potter fired. Tom wonders how suspicious the latter option would make Dumbledore.

“I’m sure they do,” Tom puts on his best smile, the one he uses to charm what he wants from strangers. Best to deal with Potter’s oddities with as much false charm as possible.

“I knew it!” Potter claps his hands together, beaming as if Tom has proven Merlin’s theory of vibrational magic theory when vampire walnuts are not even a real concept, did someone drop Potter on the head as a child,

“Can always count on you to back me up, Riddle. Brownie?”

While Tom tries to think of a way to refuse because of strongly suspected poison (Potter must have baked those brownies. Evidence: Dumbledore always eats sour sweets, never pastries. Also, burn marks on Potter’s hands are consistent with muggle ovens because Merlin knows Potter won’t take advantage of his magical knowledge) Dumbledore cuts in, clapping a hand on his shoulder (urgh).

He twinkles, “I’m very pleased that you two get along so well. It’s always touching to see deep friendships cultivate after graduation.”

Tom stiffens. Friendship? He narrows his eyes. Now he can see Dumbledore’s plans. Clearly, Trelawney’s impromptu retirement is part of Dumbledore’s plot to have an ‘old friend’ of Tom’s spy on him during his time as a teacher to prevent rumours of bias (rumours that would have risen if Tom was denied the DADA position). Any wizard or witch could see that Harry Potter is the least qualified being to be a Divination teacher. Obviously, Dumbledore interpreted his few interactions with Potter as some sort of misconstrued friendship and, assuming that Tom would be more amiable to someone his age, asked Potter to come as a spy.

“Riddle’s going to die a tragic death via car crash because of a llama, professor, I don’t think we can be friends,” Potter says casually and Tom amends his thought process.

No, Potter is too stupid to be a spy.

Dumbledore gives some speech about the honour of being a staff member for Hogwarts with random anecdotes of ‘fiddle foddle’ and ‘splurt’ for no good reason but intimidation tactics. Then he moves on to reviewing Tom and Potter’s responsibilities towards the safety of the students and other emergency conducts. Eventually, Dumbledore leads them both out for a tour (but really to show them to their offices.)

Potter oohs and aahs at every painting despite having been to Hogwarts for seven years before. He tries to offer Tom another brownie but Tom waves it away. Some wizarding poisons leave no
symptoms for days before taking effect. Luckily, Potter gets distracted, excitement springing to his features as he crows, “There’s the staircase you pushed me down once!”

Tom almost whips his head towards Dumbledore, ready to obliviate if necessary (but would that work on a wizard that powerful, Tom doesn’t have time to doubt, only prove that he’s stronger than Dumbledore, finally and—) but Dumbledore only chuckles softly.

“While I would have appreciated knowing the truth when that incident took place, I’m certain Tom has changed since then… Though if he ever attempts such a thing again, at this age, the consequences would be severe” Dumbledore smiles brightly.

There is no one else in the world that Tom knows who can convey such disdain through a kindly smile. It’s a skill that Tom covets, if only to exercise more power over others. Yet seeing Dumbledore master it though makes Tom want to walk around with an eternal frown on his face just to spite the bastard.

“Of course. I’m not a child anymore.”

“Oh, Tom, all my former students are young to me.”

In other words, Dumbledore thinks that Tom’s magic is at the level of a child, that Tom is immature and—

“Brownie?”

“No, I do not want a brownie, Potter!”

“Eh,” Potter shrugs, popping the disgusting pastry into his mouth, “you’re so bitter, Riddle. If you ate more sugar, you’d mellow out more.”

“That is not how biology works—”

Potter’s eyes go wide. “You read muggle research?”

“All knowledge is valuable—”

“Amazing!”

…And Tom needs to change the subject. Now.

“Our offices, Professor?”

Dumbledore, the buffoon, only stares back and forth between Tom and Potter with a pleased twinkle. If Dumbledore were a firework, he’d be sparkling by now.

“Unfortunately, the Divination office is under renovations from the Firenze incident, and since you two are so well acquainted, I thought you might share an office until the contractors come in.”

Tom wants to hex every living being in this school. This magic school. That should be able to repair itself because of magic. If there are actually contractors needed to repair the school, Tom will eat a pixie.

Never mind. Dumbledore clearly planned this. Harry Potter is definitely a spy.

“That’s cool with me. I’ll bake you some scones tomorrow, Riddle. There has to be some dessert you like!” Potter cheers, crumbs falling all over his robes and sweater.
Amended: Harry Potter is still too stupid to be a spy. No one can fake that kind of stupidity for nearly ten years.

Chapter End Notes

(1) Fun fact, my best friend in high school used to make ridiculous false death predictions just like this. She had a thing for llamas.
(2) And walnuts. Why vampire walnuts, specifically? I have no idea.
So the timeline for this odd little universe is basically 2016 because I’m too lazy to sort out my anachronisms and I really want Harry to reference all the internet slang to troll Tom. Thanks again for sticking with me and reviewing :)

“…What is this?”

Potter blinks at Tom from an atrocious couch shaped like a yellow rat with a lightning shaped tail. The couch even has strange red cheeks and a smiling face. The Potter sweater of the day features a naked mole rat dancing on a beach ball, shouting ‘revolution!’

“Did you mean my couch or the decorations?”

“…Both.”

“Well, this,” Potter beams as if he’s mastered every spell in wizarding history, “is a made-up muggle thing called a Pikachu! It’s so cool, it shoots out electricity when it gets angry. There’s even video games and a cartoon—you should watch it sometime—and those are my origami creations! Origami is like the art of—”

“I know what origami is but why are your paper cranes flying around my head?”

About a dozen pastel cranes flap around Tom’s hair. One even tries to nestle against his bangs before he stuns it with a wandless stupefy. Its paper corpse spirals to the ground before several other cranes rush to catch it.

“They like you!” Potter beams.

“…”

“…Aaand, I might have told them to guard you from future llama attacks. Wouldn’t want my coworker to die on the job. Think of the paperwork all the authorities would have to do.”

Tom’s grip tightens on his wand. “For the last time, I am not going to be die because of a llama—” once he makes his second horcrux, he’ll never die, “—that’s just a lie you made up for some inane reason. For attention or because you’re a compulsive liar.”

For a moment, Potter’s face twists into an expression that Tom still can’t understand. It reminds him of a moment in first year, of lashing out and pushing Potter down the stairs and watching blood flow down Potter’s face in a scar that has never faded…

But then the blue crane from before pokes Tom in the forehead and Potter laughs, the moment broken.

“I could make paper snakes instead, if you don’t like the birds.”

Tom scowls, “That’s not the point. This office is to be shared between both of us. Your paper things
are everywhere. Control them.”

“Eh, but your side of the room is so plain. You barely have anything but books.”

Not entirely true. Tom has a vast collection of magical artifacts locked within a magically expanded trunk. He’s also well aware of the power a handsome appearance has on those he interacts with so he keeps his wardrobe up to date with what seems the most aesthetically pleasing.

But looking at Potter’s side of the office, decorated in paper flowers and butterflies, animal shaped cushions and long curtains of annoying neon colours, Tom can see Potter’s point. Potter’s side of the office has a distinct personality with funny knick-knacks to put students at ease (not a bad strategy) while Tom’s side of the office is sparse, clean and tense (fear can be an effective motivator.)

Once more, Tom frowns at the difference between him and Potter. Both half-bloods. Both orphans. And yet Potter’s response to his position in society is to hoard useless items and play the fool while Tom strives for knowledge, power, and control of his own destiny.

“…I’ll buy a painting. Now shut up and let me focus on finishing my lesson plans.”

The idea has merit after all. Tom often forgets that normal people also hoard useless things to seem approachable (having never invited a person to his place of residence) and he will need students to trust him. He’ll need a painting that an ordinary DADA professor would have…

“Urgh, lesson plans. I’m going to sleep.” Potter curls up against his yellow-pikarat-couch.

“…You’ve finished yours?” How long has Potter been prepared for this job? The Potter-is-a-spy theory suddenly gains more merit.

“Oh, god, no. I’ll just wing it on the first day. It’s Divination, you know?”

Tom pauses in the middle of his writing.

“…Excuse me, but how did you get hired?”

“My devastating good looks.”

“…”

“Just kidding! I told you before, Riddle, I can see the future! Snape’s going to be very lucky in love this month, didn’t you know?”

(Urgh.) Tom recoils at that image, “Please refrain from making love predictions about our coworkers in the future.”

Why the general populace insists on obsessing over love and sexual acts eludes Tom.

Unexpectedly, Potter also grimaces. “Yeah… that might be for the best. It’s a very tragic love. Lots of warts. And tongue.”

“Potter!”

The sound of Potter’s laughter, accompanied by the flapping of the paper cranes in the air, grates at Tom’s nerves. If he doesn’t end up obliterating everyone in Hogwarts to cover up Potter’s murder in the next month, he will celebrate with a new book. For now, Tom should focus on the lesson plans and sending out letters to his followers…
The next morning Snape shows up at breakfast with a frog stuck to his face. Potter’s knowing smile makes Tom question the universe.
When Potter bursts through the doors of the Great Hall, five minutes before the first years’ arrival, Tom hisses, “Where have you been?!”

“Aw.” Leaves fall off from Potter’s hair. The ever present paper cranes follow him and circle around his head, poking the leaves off. The platypus sweater is also back. Tom hates that sweater. “Did you miss me?”

“No. You missed the staff meeting earlier. Dumbledore expressed his concerns.”

More specifically, Dumbledore had questioned Tom about Potter’s whereabouts with a stern expression. Probably thinking that Tom stabbed Potter and hid his body in the Forbidden Forest (frankly insulting. Tom is clever enough to leave no traces of the body if that were the case.) The old coot is always suspiciously protective of his favourite former pupil, usually jumping to conclusions when Tom happens to interact with Potter.

“Oh, shoot. I forgot to tell him that I decided to ride the train here.”

“…The train.”

“Yup.”

“…As in the Hogwarts Express.”

“That’s the one!”

The cranes flapping around Potter’s head nod in agreement.

“…Why.” Potter already lives at Hogwarts. Tom would know. He’s been trapped with this imbecile in the same office for two weeks. Fortunately, Potter let Tom have the bedroom upstairs, deciding that a hammock in the office would be more ‘comfy.’

“Well, it’s a great way to get to know the students! Plus, I told them all that I was a seventh year and they believed me! So young. So innocent. At least the first years are. The older students, I had to bribe with chocolate to keep their mouths shut.”

As if on cue, Tom hears the Weasley twins crow from the Gryffindor table, “Fancy seeing you there, Professor Harrykins!”

“That’s Potter to you, cretchins!” If Potter starts scheming with his former schoolmates, Tom will report him to McGonagall and hopefully get Potter fired. “Anyways, did you like the macaroons I made this morning? That’s where most of my chocolate went.”

Potter, on his eternal quest to drive Tom to murder, has baked a different pastry every morning (likely manipulating his influence over the Hogwarts house elves) in attempt to ‘sweeten Tom’s attitude.’ So far Tom has touched none of Potter’s concoctions.

“…I don’t like sweets.”

“Sure, sure… I’ll find something you like to eat, don’t worry, Riddle.”
Before Tom can reply, Potter takes the seat next to his (…as usual) just as the first years march into the hall.

Tom’s first impression of this batch of first years is… mild disgust. They’re… small. Very small. Some look around at the ceiling in awe while others shyly hold hands with their friends and twitch at every sound (much like Longbottom did during Tom’s first sorting. Come to think of it, Potter was there too. Potter was different back then. Quieter.)

“I’m kind of envious of them, actually,” Potter muses, “I’d love to see the Hogwarts again for the first time.”

Tom… doesn’t disagree. He may not feel things like sentimentality but Hogwarts has always felt stable. Constant. The thirst to learn, know more, at first sight of the castle, has never been the same.

When the first years reach the teacher’s table, several of them stop and point at Potter in horror and surprise. Potter only wiggles his eyebrows and winks back at them. The weakest of the first years start to tremble while others pale or scowl.

Potter snickers. “I told the scared ones that the hat will put them into Slytherin.”

Tom scoffs. As if those frightened children have the qualities to succeed in Slytherin. “Unnecessary, seeing as your predictions are always wrong.”

“No, no, watch!”

McGonagall starts to call out names. “Abbot, Hannah.”

“She’s a Ravenclaw,” Potter whispers.

“Hufflepuff,” the hat shouts.

Tom sighs.

“Creevy, Colin.”

“Oh, that’s the Slytherin!”

“Gryffindor!” the hat shouts.

“Potter, will you stop—”

“Dao, Soo-Lin.”

“She’s a Gryffindor.”

“Slytherin!” the hat shouts.

“None of your predictions come true!”

But Potter continues to whisper out predictions until Tom spots a pattern. For every student that Potter claims as Slytherin, the hat sorts them into Gryffindor and vice versa. The same holds true for the Ravenclaws Potter predicts, they get sorted into Hufflepuff, and vice versa again.

Tom narrows his eyes. Either Potter is an expert at reading people or he might be hiding true see—

“Oh and that’s a Hufflepuff!” Potter nods at Blaise Zambini.
The hat calls out, “Slytherin.”

—or not. Tom scowls at himself for being caught up in yet another paranoid thought loop over Potter of all people. He’s known Potter since first year. If Potter hasn’t shown any potential by now then he must be the idiot he seems. Occam’s razor. Tom should stop looking for conspiracies. No one in Hogwarts is on his level of intellect except perhaps Dumbledore.

Even so… Something about Potter…

“Welcome, welcome, to another year at Hogwarts!” Dumbledore gives his speech with the usual, trivial pleasantries. “As you may have noticed, we have two new additions to our staff. You may recognize them as former upper-year students but rest assured, I’m confident Professor Riddle and Professor Potter will provide you with the best education in Defense Against the Dark Arts and Divination, respectively.”

The great hall explodes into applause. The Weasley twins, accompanied by the latest Weasley (a girl, for once) wolf whistle and cheer out Potter’s name. The Slytherins clink their cups in respect towards Tom while some of the Ravenclaws and Hufflepuffs look at him with mixtures of calculation and awe.

“Speech! Speech!”

Dumbledore twinkles at them both, “I wouldn’t want to upset an eager audience. Boys? Would you like to say a few words?”

“Of course,” Tom says smoothly. This could be a great opportunity to appeal to the students, sow some seeds of trust.

He and Potter walk towards the podium.

“Greetings. As many of you may know, I am Tom Marvolo Riddle and I will be teaching DADA this year. With the growing tension from various factions around the world, a thorough background in defensive spells and their theoretical components is essential. I will teach you how to conquer all aspects of yourself and unlock your deepest potential in magic. If you stay steadfast, you should have no problems passing my course. Thank you.”

Tom bows his head, pleased with the loud applause he receives. His former reputation among the students as head boy and a whispered leader-to-be should give him more authority than the other teachers. His speech was also vague enough to entice curious individuals that might look for—

“Wow, that was a fancy speech. Mine’s not going to be nearly as important. Or cool,” Potter says, prompting scattered chuckles among the students. “Honestly, I teach Divination. It’s kind of useful. Kind of not. But free pastries in my classes on Mondays,” several cheers break out, “and, oh! I’ll be sharing my office with Professor Riddle here until repairs on the Divination office are done, so don’t be afraid to drop in any time before six o’clock! I promise I won’t bite!”

Tom fights back a scowl.

“Aaand before I forget… I must warn you. I see a forecast of flamingoes on the horizon.”

At this point, most of the younger students blink in confusion.

Potter nods seriously. “They attack at night, you see. They crave young flesh.”

“Um…” a young first year pipes up, with a trembling hand, “Professor, flamingos are herbivores…”
Actually, Tom thinks, flamingos are omnivores. Their diet consists of fish, bugs and—damn it, Potter!

“Not this kind,” Potter continues, “they’ve been experimented on and will come to Hogwarts later to gather up strength from their prey, before rising up against the ones who wronged them. I would sleep with a jar of pickled eggplants until October; that should protect you, ah, and—”

“Forgive me,” Tom cuts in, pulling Potter away from the podium, “Professor Potter is feeling ill. He’s delusional—”

“—Remember my office hours are open until 6’o clock in the evening! Professor Riddle will be happy to supply any defenseless students with their own pickled eggplants!”

“Shut up, Potter,” he hisses, dragging Potter to their seats, since a wandless silencing spell would be stepping out of decorum and Dumbledore is watching.

“What? I’m getting you more fans!”

“Shut up and eat a treacle tart.”

That does the trick. At least the ridiculous image of Potter shoving treacle tarts in his mouth is enough to convince the students that their Divination professor is an idiot. Dumbledore unhelpfully shrugs while Snape glowers at them both because Snape is an irrational bastard.

“Oh my god, my favourite!” Potter moans indignantly.

Tom knows. Potter used to hoard those things in his book-bag before Transfiguration class.

“Someday, I’ll steal Dippy’s recipe for these!”

“Please don’t.” Knowing Potter, he’ll try to force-feed them to Tom just because they’re Potter’s favourite food.

“Fine. More for me. See if I be generous again. You’ll have to find eggplants to give to the students on your own.”

“There are no eggplants, Potter.”

The students sitting near him and Potter giggle. Tom glares at them too. Rather than cower in fear, they giggle louder.

When Tom takes over Wizarding Britain, he will ban eggplants and treacle tarts. And giggling.

Potter only smiles at him in that annoying way, as if he sees Tom’s every thought.

“So do you want to know the address of a good eggplant supplier because you’ll need it when the flamingoes come—”

“Go to sleep, Potter.”

“But really, you’ll need—”

Tom shoots a silencio downstairs.

Ah, sweet silence.
AN: So like, some characters will be Harry and Tom’s students instead of fellow adults. Because why not. Yolo. Thanks for all the wonderful feedback :)
Instead of a peaceful morning, Tom wakes to an owl attempting to peck him to death.

Immediately, Tom tries a wordless stupefy but the owl spins out of the way and flies into Potter’s arms.

“Hedwig!” Potter beams, dressed in obnoxiously yellow polka dot pyjamas, “You’re back!”

The demon owl that Tom recalls from first year, trailing behind Potter as obsessively as his growing army of paper cranes, coos in response.

“If you could train your owl not to attack me on sight, I might consider not transfiguring it into a bookmark. Also, when did you cancel out my silencing spell?” Tom’s wandless charms usually last over twenty four hours before fading away. He’s never met anyone who cancelled it out before.

“Oh, you missed last night. Hit the couch instead of me. So I just pretended to sleep!”

There has never been anyone that Tom has wanted to strangle more. He isn’t surprised that Potter dodged his spell. Potter was like this when they were younger too, always able to dodge Malfoy’s attacks in the corridor. Reflexes from being an exceptional Quidditch player and duelist, no doubt. But he is irritated that Potter stayed quiet about it until now.

“You could have said something,” Tom regrets saying immediately. If anything, he should be impressed that Potter has some sliver of self-preservation.

“I know how much you like your beauty rest.”

Never mind. No self-preservation at all.

Potter’s owl hoots irritably, raising up a package tied to her leg.

“Good girl, Hedwig! You brought my supplies!”

Knowing Potter, these supplies could range from anything as random as another shipment of pom-poms or another lumpy sweater. However, when Potter simply unwraps textbooks on meditation and reading dreams, Tom finds himself oddly disappointed. Then irritated. He’s been cohabiting with Potter for too long if he’s come to accept Potter’s oddities as normal.

“Oh, awesome,” Potter de-shrinks another package, “the pickled eggplants are in! Here you go, Riddle!”

He levitates over a dozen jars of pickled vegetables over Tom’s pillow.

“Out,” he snaps, vanishing the jars to Potter’s couch downstairs. “Just—get. Out!”

“Does that mean I didn’t buy enough?”

“We have classes to teach today, get out!”
When Tom comes downstairs to their office, Potter’s hammock is already put away and Potter busies himself with cleaning his owl’s feathers.

“Don’t forget your bag. It’s on the desk,” Potter calls out.

“I won’t,” Tom snaps. Unlike some people, Tom doesn’t forget things. “I hope you won’t be letting that owl stay in here. There’s an owlery for a reason.”

If Tom has to deal with feathers, dead mice, and bird waste on top of Potter’s origami and insulting sweaters, he will kill that owl. He remembers how often that owl would swoop in on him and peck his bag during Charms back in third year (Flitwick was too fond of owls to ban the thing from the classroom, unlike the other professors.) Potter has never been able to control that thing. If anything, Potter listens to the owl’s orders instead of the other way around.

“She’ll be visiting from time to time, but don’t worry, she won’t sleep here. She’s sweet on this Hogwarts barn owl, aren’t you, girl?”

…Too much information.

“By the way, Riddle, I haven’t seen your snake around lately. Do you still have her?”

“Of course I do. Nagini is merely wandering around the school.” Specifically, Nagini will be his eyes, gathering information. There’s no harm in telling Potter. Most familiars are given free reign around Hogwarts provided they don’t interrupt classes or attack students. Hence why Potter’s Owl was allowed to follow him around during their school days. An uncommon (and annoying) choice for a familiar.

“Ooooo, I should bake her some snacks.”

“Don’t. I would rather avoid poison.”

“I would never try to poison such a gorgeous creature! I love snakes! Nagini has the most polished green scales—”

Merlin, Tom forgot how fond Nagini and Potter are of each other. Nagini hasn’t stopped by his office since orientation. Back in school, Nagini would always whine that Tom should dote on her as Potter does, feed her more, pet her more, pay attention more. He refuses to go through that again.

[I would stay away from Nagini from now on,] Tom hisses in Parseltongue. A useful trick for controlling his followers and getting strangers to back away. Even the bravest of witches and wizards look at him warily after hearing him speak.

“Oh!” Potter’s face lights up, “Are you asking her to come by and say hello?”

Tom stiffens.

“It’s so cool how you can talk to your snakes, Riddle. I wish I could talk to Hedwig. Actually maybe not. She’s probably lecture me for all the shit I pull, but still, talking to snakes—”

Tom turns away. “I’m going to breakfast.”

“Oh, wait for me! Bye Hedwig!”

Tom doesn’t wait. But he doesn’t speed up as he usually does either.

He forgot that Potter liked his Parseltongue. He forgot a lot of things about Potter in the last two
years.

It won’t do to be this careless.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks again for all the wonderful feedback! It truly means a lot :D

I will be taking a break this weekend but regular updates will resume on Monday. Next update should feature first day of classes and all the Harry-ness you can think of.
“I do hope that it won’t be a mistake,” Dumbledore says just as Tom and Potter step into the Great Hall, “hiring someone so young as our DADA professor.”

Silently, Tom clenches his fists.

Dumbledore’s passive aggressive comments never fail to irk him. The fact that Dumbledore could fire Tom at any moment… makes Tom feel weak. Someday, Tom will be the one with power over everyone. Someday, no one will control his actions and Tom will—

Potter elbows Tom in the stomach.

Just as Tom snarls back, Potter grins blindingly at Dumbledore. “Yeah, you’ll probably regret hiring me, Albus,” he says, making Dumbledore’s eyes go wide, “but Riddle’s going to be an amazing professor. Just watch.”

Is this what the saying ‘swallowed a lemon’ feels like? Tom hates it.

Dumbledore’s eyes dim. “Harry,” he says in that ridiculously gentle way every time Potter is involved, “you mustn’t—”

“Oh look,” Potter says brightly, “I think I see Cho. She owes me a match. See you, Riddle, Albus. Don’t worry, there won’t be any flamingoes today!”

He prances off towards Chang and McGonagall with that infuriating smile and Tom stares at the space where Potter stood in annoyance.

“Well,” Dumbledore gives a false smile to Tom, “if Harry insists there’s nothing to worry about then I’m sure your first day will go splendidly, Tom.”

The urge to punch Dumbledore, rather than curse him, is all too real. Tom only just manages to force out a nod instead of a sneer before storming off to the breakfast table.

Potter’s words felt like a prediction. A mocking one. Tom knows how Potter’s predictions turn out. Lies, all of them. Probably a prank thought up with Dumbledore while both of them had tea in Hogsmeade. And yet the look in Potter’s eyes, like the way Potter looked at him once, so many Christmases ago…

No. That’s in the past. Potter is merely egging Tom with an underhanded insult. Everything Potter says is nonsense or a lie. By complimenting Tom, Potter’s insinuating that Tom will fail.

Tom will show Dumbledore and Potter just how superior of a teacher he can be.
I do not want to be stuck in a room full of human babes if I am not allowed to eat one," Nagini complains.

I do not wish to be in the same school as Albus Dumbledore either but we both won’t get what we want," Tom scowls, "I need you to make a memorable impression on these students. My reputation will depend on it."

He needs to stand out among the staff, as a teacher and a wizard. Prove that, despite his age, he belongs here. Most of his followers are his former classmates and their pureblood parents. He had to word his agenda carefully back in fifth year, appealing to their prejudices by speaking of ‘cleansing’ the Wizarding World of impure blood, but really, Tom had needed to secure their loyalty. If he has to adopt their tedious and petty rhetoric over blood politics, then he will use it. Otherwise, he could care less about blood. Power is what truly shapes society, not blood. Muggles just happen to be the powerless.

But students are different. Young. Impressionable. His words will no longer be limited to Slytherins and elite purebloods. He will have to be careful, appeal to their desires in order to lead them to his side. But subtly. His teachings on the Dark Arts can wait until he’s gained some trust. But first, he needs to show these students that he is unique, different, special. He needs to break apart their own prejudices about magic.

The twinkly one said something, didn’t he?" Nagini hisses.

He said nothing," Tom snaps.

Of course, he did! You have wrinkles in your forehead skin. It’s disgusting. Why humans did not evolve to wear scales instead of skin eludes me… You only ever wrinkle like that when you talk to the twinkly one. Or my Green-Eyes.

Stop calling Potter that."

But it’s true. He has the most lovely green eyes, like a true snake. Why did you not convince him to stay in the House of Snakes like you? He’s wasted as a Lion. Then he could have fed me more sugar mice and—"

Tom ignores her. As grating as Nagini can be, she’s very perceptive. Tom can still hear Dumbledore’s words from this morning now.

This is merely an introductory lesson with the first years. After the first twenty minutes, you may wander off and visit Potter if you wish."

You mean, spy on him?"

Yes. Exactly."

Hmmm, more snacks! Very well. I don’t see why you don’t court him the serpent way or the human way but more affection for me, yesss."

Tom doesn’t even bother responding to that comment anymore. Many complexities of human nature are often lost in translation to Nagini.

I could always court him in your place, if you like? Do you think Green Eyes would prefer an offering of mice or birds?"

Birds," Tom says, picturing the horror on Potter’s face if he ever saw a dead feathered corpse. Potter
has always obsessed over birds like his demon owl and this flamingo nonsense. If Tom didn’t know any better, he would accuse Potter of being part bird. Though Tom does recall an incident with a hippogriff in third year… however he’d never classify a hippogriff into the bird family, it’s a magical creature that shares a lot of structural qualities with the avian family, particularly in the skeletal system and dietary—

Tom scowls. He blames his in-depth knowledge of magical and muggle creatures on Potions class and Potter. Idiot Potter who probably plans on sabotaging Tom’s lessons on purpose…

Speaking of that…

For the fifth time, Tom checks his cages for any spells that might teleport flamingoes or throw eggplants at his students. He inspects his bag for anything that Potter might have contaminated with his presence.

Nothing. Of course there’s nothing. But the look on Potter’s face when he told Dumbledore that Tom would be amazing… the lie… Tom dumps out all of his quills and paperwork on the desk again, checks, and checks, and—

[ I smell the human babes approaching! ]

He vanishes the contents of his bag to his office. The lesson plan is memorized and he can always summon more quills if he needs them. For now, Tom has to make a good impression. Tom has to teach.

The children come bustling into his classroom, twittering and twitching about nonsense. Some of them look up at Tom in admiration, apprehension or reluctant awe.

As Tom surveys the mix of green and red ties, he plasters on his most charming smile.

“Welcome, first-years, to Defense Against the Dark Arts. I won’t go over introductions. You know who I am from the welcome feast and I will know who you are by the end of the week. Now, who can tell me the purpose of this class?”

A few hands go up. Tom nods to the closest one, a girl he recalls as Ginerva Weasley.

“To protect ourselves?”

“From what?”

Ginerva Weasley frowns. “Well. From dark creatures, I suppose… And magical attacks.”

“But what can be defined as dark?”

“…Dangerous things. Things that want to hurt you.”

Tom’s smile widens. “A good answer but not entirely correct, Ms. Weasley. Certainly, we should protect ourselves for anything that would inflict harm… but in the magical world, often, discerning what will be dangerous to us can be difficult. Can you think of why?”

Zabini, the not-Hufflepuff, raises his hand. “Some dark beings use glamours to appear non-threatening. You might be lured away by a friendly conversation only to be stabbed in the back.”

“Precisely,” Tom answers, noting the way Ginerva Weasley frowns at Zabini. “Nothing in life is entirely good or evil. There is only power and intent. Sometimes the most dangerous attacks come
from an unassuming guise…”

Tom snaps his fingers, watching every child’s face melt in awe at his wandless magic when several cages appear. The children stare in confusion at the animals present in each cage, a snake in one cage and a rabbit in the other. Next to his lovely snake, the rabbit seems tiny, fragile and insignificant.

[I don’t like metal bars. They taste boring. And I can’t swallow them.] Nagini complains. [Are we done yet? Can I visit Green Eyes? There are so many human babes here, surely you can spare one for me?]

Ignoring her, Tom continues, “Which of these creatures would you call dark and which ones would you trust?”

Some scattered laughter and wide-eyed looks echo around the room. He hears someone mutter anxiously, ‘is this a test’? and resists the urge to smirk.

“Oh, I’d trust the rabbit any day! Aw, he looks so precious,” another Gryffindor, Lavender Brown, coos. “Do you take him out for walks, Professor?”

Ginerva Weasley looks at Brown with mild disgust but other Gryffindors nod in agreement. Tom even sees some Slytherins looking at the rabbit fondly while other Slytherins and a few Gryffindors pay more attention to Nagini, eyeing her carefully. A good start, but not quite there yet.

Zabini looks conflicted. “I suppose I would trust the rabbit… As far as I know, that snake is a magical breed of python… Highly poisonous…”

“Five points to Slytherin for the very educated guess.” Tom nods, he’s not surprised that Zabini can recognize Nagini’s species, not if the rumours about Zabini’s mother are true. “Why don’t we test your hypothesis?”

The students blink owlishly back at him. Honestly.

“I’m going to connect the two cages together and then I will walk into the joined cage by myself”—many students start twittering in panic—“and we will see which creature attacks first.”

“Professor, don’t do it! What if your face gets hurt?!?”

“Oh for Merlin’s sake, Lavender, he’s a DADA Professor, he knows what he’s doing!” Ginerva Weasley hisses back.

Tom only smiles and walks into the now-joined cages.

At first nothing happens. Good. The hush before the first act is always key in gaining an audience’s attention. Tom waits, with his back to the class, listening to their breathing, listening to the rabbit shuffle to his right and Nagini slithering on his left.

The rabbit leaps for his throat, its body shifting into an eerie wisp like the moon, eyes piercing red.

Tom flicks a stupefy at it just in time and the rabbit shrieks in pain, revealing its long shark-like teeth. Several students gasp in surprise. The rabbit thrashes forward, trying to bite at Tom but he only gestures towards Nagini and she slowly slithers towards the rabbit, swallowing it whole.

“Good girl,” he whispers in English, patting her head.

[Can I go now? That dream-rodent is giving me indigestion and I want Green-Eyes to pet the pain}
Normally he would roll his eyes, but Tom only nods and vanishes her into the corridor near Potter’s classroom. Then he looks back at his class, smirking at the various shades of green he sees on their faces.

“That,” he gestures at the spot where the rabbit used to be, “was a creature known as the *lapin revê*, or the ‘dream rabbit.’ It feeds from the jugular, on human blood if possible, or on your thoughts. It’s a highly dangerous creature that you will only find in the subzero temperatures in the Arctic or Antarctica. Most who encounter it don’t live to tell the tale, hence the limited information we have on it in textbooks. It might as well be an urban legend, but of course, I decided to study it for my BOILS and was lucky enough to find a few specimens to show you today.

“The *lapin revê* is just one example of a seemingly harmless looking creature with arguably dark origins. From our perspective, such a creature must be dark because it kills humans but from its perspective, we are prey. Can you imagine what would happen if we could tame these creatures? Study them further? What we could learn?

“Your first instinct might be to recoil and claim that its impossible. But you saw my familiar, Nagini, the lovely snake in the cage earlier. As Mr. Zabini said, she’s a highly poisonous breed of python. If she had been bred in the wild, certainly she wouldn’t hesitate to attack me but I have raised her from egg until maturity and she obeys me.

“The key to Defense Against the Dark Arts is to remember that anything could be considered dangerous, depending on the circumstances, and know spells to defend against *anything*. But also know when you can manipulate dangerous elements to your advantage.” Tom pauses, taking in the awed silence. “Any questions?”

Every hand shoots into the air.

Tom hides a smile. One step at a time.

By lunch, every first and fourth year in Gryffindor and Slytherin is gossiping about Tom’s classes. As it should be. If this pattern keeps up, Tom will gain every student’s trust by December and then he can start slowly introducing dark magic into the curriculum. Nothing blatant or obvious. But small hints. Change takes time and Tom will have all the time in the world once he’s made enough horcruxes.

“You’re… smiling.”

Immediately, Tom scowls. He’d forgotten that somehow he and Potter have been delegated spots next to each other at the teacher’s table. “No, I’m not.”

“But you were. Earlier, I mean. And it was a real smile. Not one of your fake ones,” Potter adds quietly.

Momentarily thrown by this odd moment of insight, Tom refocuses his attention on the annoying paper birds flying around Potter’s head. Today, he spots some folded paper flamingos among them.

“None of my smiles are *fake*, thank you,” Tom lies sweetly, “but if they *had* become genuine, perhaps it’s because I didn’t walk into my classroom to find my materials transfigured into flamingoes by a certain meddler.”
“What?!” Potter puts a hand over his hideous sweater, “Why, I would never. What makes you think I would even—”

“So the frog on Snape’s face a few weeks ago wasn’t your doing? Or the mass hysteria you’ve caused among the first years yesterday?”

Potter stares at him, the green in his eyes oddly bright. “I know you don’t think much of me, Riddle, but I am a professional. I would never interfere in a fellow teacher’s classroom. That’s just not cool. Though if there were hints of you emotionally or physically abusing your students, that would be a different story, but I’m sure you’d never do that.”

This idiot dares to…?

“Are you insinuating something about my classroom practices? Do you forget that I am a professional as well?”

“No, of course not,” Potter replies brightly. “Just making sure you understand my position, you see.”

Tom narrows his eyes, bottles up all the insults he could shout and smiles instead. “Of course.”

They both know this smile is fake.

0

Tom stalks down the corridor, resisting the urge to blow apart the nearby statues and suits of armor. Harry Potter is mocking him. Him and Albus Dumbledore. They want him gone.

From that false prophecy that ‘Tom will be an amazing teacher’ (because everything Potter predicts is false and Potter is clearly playing a mind game and implying that Tom will fail because Potter is here to ruin him) to the insinuation that Tom would torture his students to do his bidding. Insulting. Tom is clever enough to manipulate these young minds to his side without the use of force. He’s not an idiot. He sat through Snape’s classes once before after all.

“I’m going to kill him,” Tom mutters, thinking of Potter’s corpse nailed to a wall, ignoring the lurch in his stomach. “One day, I’m going to kill him.”

“I should hope not,” a voice says behind him, “because then I would lose someone like a son to me and you would not be able to step out of Hogwarts’ doors.”

Tom stiffens. Damn it, of all the people to hear him plotting murder…!

Albus Dumbledore only hums at him.

“I wasn’t going to hire you, Tom,” Dumbledore interrupts.

Tom almost snarls but keeps his emotions chained down with his default smile. “Oh? What changed your mind?”

“Harry did.”

Tom… doesn’t say anything in response.

Dumbledore twinkles brighter than a police siren, “He has an alarming amount of faith in you, despite your… homicidal… sense of humour. I do pray it’s not undeserved.”

He walks away without waiting for Tom’s reply.
Tom ends up blasting the nearest suit of armor into a wall anyways. He feels no closer to solving the puzzle of Harry Potter.
“Come along then,” the man who calls himself Albus Dumbledore holds out his hand and Tom wishes he could hex him. But no, Tom is an eleven-year old orphan who apparently isn’t allowed to shop in Diagon Alley unsupervised, so as much as he detests it, he takes the old man’s hand.

Together they walk out of the Knight Bus (horrid mode of transportation, Tom swore that Dumbledore was hiding a laugh when Tom’s body almost rammed into a mattress) and onto a street marked as Private Drive. Tom stares at the rows of cloned, boring, white houses.

“This isn’t Diagon Alley,” Tom accuses. “Sir,” he adds quickly, remembering the façade he needs to play now.

“Excellent observational skills, Tom,” Dumbledore pats his head, making Tom grimace and squirm don’t touch me, don’t touch me.

Dumbledore only hums a little, adjusting the crooked and outrageously sparkly hat on his head before tugging Tom along.

“We’re here to pick up one of your future schoolmates. While he does have guardians that could escort him, if they chose, they’re rather…” Dumbledore grimaces for the first time that Tom has known him. “Well, it’s best not said. In any case, I do hope you two will become good friends. It’s more enjoyable to shop together.”

Tom almost scoffs at Dumbledore’s attempts to make him socialize, as if Tom needs fixing. He doesn’t need ‘friends’—a fake concept designed to use others, make them feel less insignificant in the world. No, he doesn’t need them at all. But he would hardly turn down the chance to meet another magical child before Hogwarts begins.

Will this boy be like him? Will this boy be able to talk to snakes too? To make others do his bidding? How advanced are other magical children compared to Tom and how long will it take for Tom to prove that he’s better than them too? How long will it take for Tom to stand out?

“Ah, here we are,” Dumbledore stops before a house with the number 4 nailed against the door. The lawn and flowers are too healthy, too well-cut. Chances are high that this other magical boy will be spoiled, loud and demanding.

But the skinny little boy sitting with his knees against his chest, on the front steps, shatters that thought.

“…Harry?” Dumbledore says.

The boy, Harry (honestly, who names their child Harry, it’s almost as plain as Tom), almost trips as he stands up. Though if Tom had clothes as baggy and worn as Harry’s, he might trip too. Harry
looks as if the slightest touch might break him. Everything seems to dwarf Harry, even Tom.

When Tom looks from Harry to the pristine Number 4 Privet Drive, he has a hard time believing that Harry comes from the same house. Are Harry’s guardians as stingy as the orphanage? Tom wonders if Harry is the type to start crying over every grievance against him, like Amy.

“Where are your aunt and uncle?” Dumbledore asks, and for once something dangerous lurks in his twinkly eyes.

“Um. Inside, sir. They, uh, have to get ready for a work party…” Harry’s eyes dart back and forth between the door and Dumbledore, likely hopeful that they will leave without confronting his guardians.

Dumbledore’s mouth forms a thin line. “I will have to have a word with them…”

“No, please, Professor, they’re, um, really busy. And I’d hate to keep you.”

Dumbledore’s face softens. “It’s really no trouble, Harry, but if you insist, I will escort you and Tom to Diagon Alley right away. The conversation with your guardians can wait later.”

“Oh. Great,” Harry tenses, looking anxiously at the door again.

“This is Tom Riddle, by the way. He’ll be accompanying us as well. He’s also beginning Hogwarts this year… I hope you two will find something in common.”

Harry’s face becomes hopeful but shy. “Um. Hello! I’m Harry!”

He stretches out his hand.

Tom only frowns. “And your last name?”

“Well, uh…. You can just call me ‘Harry’, I don’t mind—”

“I do. I’m not calling you Harry and you’re certainly not going to call me Tom.”

“Oh.” Harry’s face falls. “It’s Potter.”

Hm. Not much better than Harry.

“Don’t mind Tom,” Dumbledore cuts in, when Tom doesn’t take Harry’s hand. “He doesn’t seem very fond of commonly known names. There are thousands of Toms in Great Britain alone, you know.”

This meddling old fool! Tom hopes that Dumbledore trips and gets hit by a bus. Preferably the Knight Buss, just for retribution.

But Dumbledore only winks, prompting a startled giggle from Potter… which is probably better than fat ugly Amy-like tears so Tom tolerates it.

“May I take your hand, good sir Potter?” Dumbledore dips down in a ridiculous bow, as if to a great Lord, prompting more giggles. Ugh.

“Ah, um, yes, thank you, Professor,” Potter hesitates at first but slowly takes Dumbledore’s hand, paling a bit. Probably because of how cold that man’s hands are.

“Alright. Hold on tight, you two. I don’t see any muggles around, so I will be doing something
called apparition! It’s rather like teleportation—have you ever watched the quaint show about Stars and a man named Scotty?” Potter only looks bewildered while Tom scowls. “No? Well then, you’re in for a surprise!”

Before Tom can question Dumbledore further, everything seems to crinkle up and flush away, all the colours and scenery and Tom feels like he’s being squeezed, thrown violently through a tiny crack within space and time, all surfaces pressing against him, pushing him forward and forward until—

Crack!

Tom wobbles down and nearly crashes against brown floorboards. Wait. What happened to the irritatingly perfect lawn and porch?

He looks up at the hand holding him up. Dumbledore stands serenely, helping Potter up. Potter, unlike Tom, seems to have fallen out of Dumbledore’s grip and bruised his elbows. Potter’s ugly glasses stand crooked against his nose and Potter seems more like a lost woodland fairy trapped in rags than a boy.

“Here we are, the Leaky Cauldron. When you venture out into Diagon Alley in the future, at the appropriate age and with appropriate guardians, of course, you will have to enter through the Leaky Cauldron.”

“Amazing!” Potter jumps up. It’s as if a switch has flicked on, transforming him from a quiet, easily forgettable thing to the embodiment of delight. Tom isn’t sure which is more annoying. “We, we really teleported! I mean, uh, apparated! Can every wizard do this, Professor? Will Tom, I mean Riddle, and I get to do that too?! Or is it just for special wizards??”

Dumbledore chuckles. “The legal age to get an apparition license is seventeen in Magical Britain. But in other countries, such as Thailand or Singapore, magical children as young as thirteen learn to apparate as well. Most wizards and witches can apparate if they have a good instructor. But even if they never learn, there’s no shame in that. There are other methods of travel after all like flying. Apparition is just more convenient.”

“Flying?!” Potter looks like he’s going to faint from excitement. Tom half hopes that he does, if only to shut him up. “Like on brooms? Or… or motorcycles?” Potter stops, as if he’s said too much, and his shoulders slump back down. “Um, not that motorcycles can fly, sir.”

“I don’t see why not,” Dumbledore says gently. “But you would have to get permission from the Ministry of Magic before casting any spells on muggle objects. Any other questions?”

“Oh. Um,” Potter fiddles with his hands. “I… maybe later…”

“Of course! But if you are curious about anything during our trip, please feel free to ask! That includes you as well, Tom.”

Tom only smiles tightly.

Dumbledore leads them through the dirty looking pub, greeting different oddly dressed people (Tom doesn’t see the practical appeal of robes. Are they not difficult to maneuver in when you have to run away from enemies? Then again, if all wizards can apparate like Dumbledore, perhaps physical prowess is not important in this culture.) Potter keeps staring with wide eyes at every floating lantern, every tea cup that floats towards the sink. Simple parlor tricks, really, nothing to marvel over.

But then Dumbledore brings them to a brick wall. Just… a brick wall.
“Are you ready, boys?” Dumbledore grins, letting go of Tom’s hand (finally).

Potter and Tom blink at him and Dumbledore taps the bricks with his wand in a pattern. Incredibly, the bricks shuffle apart, one by one, as if a hand is pulling them away in midair, and there, beyond the once-wall, is Diagon Alley.

There are no words. Tom sees colours everywhere. Wizards and witches walking around with different coloured robes, having packages floating behind them. Some stores advertise sweets that Tom has never seen before, seven feet high. Some shopkeepers shout bargains into the street, ‘gold cauldrons for 20 galleons, one-time deal!’ and there are creatures peeking through windows, things Tom has never seen before.

He wants to know it all.

Beside him, Potter’s jaw is wide open, and for once, Tom doesn’t feel annoyed by the plebian gesture.

Dumbledore takes them to the bank first, gathering gold from the goblins for Tom and Potter. The bank is an impressive site, with architecture that reminds Tom of the Roman Era. He wonders if wizards had any influence on that culture.

Potter whispers something to Dumbledore in the meantime and Dumbledore beams, before turning back to discussion to the goblins. Strange, how wizards and witches would leave their gold with goblins. What do goblins gain in return for such business? Tom hopes he’ll have enough money left to buy a secondhand book on the subject.

Dumbledore leaves Tom and Potter in the lobby, under a goblin named Griphook’s supervision, to get their gold. The orphanage trust fund must be a guarded secret for Hogwarts staff eyes only.

“Um,” Potter speaks up, “are all wizarding banks run by goblins, Mr. Griphook?”

Tom stiffens. Of course! He should have tried asking the source first! He’s so used to finding knowledge on his own, since he’s surrounded by idiots all day. He listens in carefully to the conversation.

Griphook smirks. “Obviously. There are no better hands for gold.”

“Wow! You guys must be really good at guarding people’s stuff! I’ve never been to a bank before, but I really like this one,” Potter rambles, before stopping himself and looking back down at his feet.

Griphook blinks at him, before bowing down. “I’m honoured that Gringrotts had made such a memorable impression on you, young wizard.”

Potter smiles shyly and Tom finds himself annoyed again.

“How long have goblins been charged with guarding wizarding gold?” he asks semi-politely.

“Well,” Griphook explains, “you runts should understand the atrocities committed during the goblin wars, but you didn’t hear it from me… Wizards don’t ever teach the real stuff, so I’ll tell you what I know and you can come back to hear more if you’re smart…”

They spend the rest of their wait-time, listening to Griphook’s account of the goblin wars and this time, when Potter smiles shyly at Tom, he doesn’t feel annoyance.
Dumbledore comes back with two heavy bags of gold. Tom takes his quickly and feels surprised by the large amount. Surely the Hogwarts orphanage fund doesn’t have this much on hand for forgettable children with no families…

“We have a generous sponsor this year,” Dumbledore grins at Tom’s unspoken question, “he would not take ‘no’ for an answer.”

Potter waves happily to Griphook before running towards them and together they walk to the wand shop. This time, Dumbledore doesn’t take their hands, but Potter holds onto the edge of Dumbledore’s cloak anyways like a frightened bird.

Once, Potter even trips, colliding into Tom and Tom almost snaps at him except Potter turns so pale, Tom wonders if his skin could be made of snow.

“S-s-sorry,” Potter jumps away, leeching onto Dumbledore’s hand. “I didn’t mean… I mean… you just… s-snakes…”

…What.

“O-oh no, n-never mind, I just, um, you should watch out for birds! Yeah! I’lljustshutupnow…”

Tom narrows his eyes as Potter convinces Dumbledore to keep moving. Odd. How very odd.

Ollivander makes Tom reconsider his notions of ‘odd.’ If wizards act anything like Ollivander or Dumbledore, then Potter is boring in comparison.

The wandmaker keeps muttering about Tom being a tricky customer, about the ounces of sunshine and rain in him (Tom highly doubts that’s a legitimate way of measuring magic and if it is, how is Ollivander capable of measuring it? Does he use a special vision of some kind?) Apparently Tom is more lightning bottled up with rain and minimal doses of sunshine, whatever that means. Ollivander also won’t stop grabbing Tom’s arm and yanking it forward to do measurements. It’s insufferable.

The pile of boxes keeps growing larger and by the fortieth wand, Tom starts to grit his teeth. Why aren’t any of the wands choosing him? Don’t they know how adept he is at magic already? Is he better than these wands, is that it?

Dumbledore, ignorant old fool, is just reading a magazine about knitting and whistling ‘London bridge is falling down’, damn him.

“Don’t worry,” Potter says so quietly that Tom wonders if he’s hearing things, “you’ll get a wand.”

I don’t need your pity, Tom almost snaps, but he remembers the role he’s supposed to play in front of Dumbledore so he just gives a jerky nod instead.

Ollivander starts rocking back and forth on his heels in excitement. “Oh, I haven’t had such a difficult customer in ages! Hmmm, I wonder,” Ollivander looks from Dumbledore to Tom to Potter, “sometimes fate has a way of giving the answer right in front of us… let’s see… where’s that new phoenix feather wand…?”

Dumbledore looks up from his magazine just as Ollivander shoves the wand in Tom’s hands and for the first time, Tom feels something missing click in place around him, all over the air. The connection
he had earlier with magic feels stronger now, as if he’s been living his life hearing muffled noises only for clear words to be discernable for the rest of his life.

“Excellent! Should have known any feather from Fawkes would go to a tricky customer. I expect you’ll do great things with that Yew wand, I’ve never had a combination like that before, Mr. Riddle!”

Tom, mind racing from the magic in the air. He clutches his wand possessively.

“Now, for you, Mr…?”

“Um, just Harry, please.”

Ollivander glances at Potter’s face. “…Yes, I suppose it would be painful to be reminded of your father… Oh, don’t be surprised, you look just like him, except the eyes. You have your mother’s eyes. Let’s find you a wand, shall we?”

Tom tunes out while Potter goes through the same process, though he notices that Potter’s pile of boxes grows to be just as tall as Tom’s was. Eventually, Ollivander smacks himself in the head and cries, “Wait! Fate has the answer right in front of me! You, Mr. Harry-thunder-and-sunshine, have the brother wand to Mr. Riddle’s!”

Dumbledore and Tom go still just as Potter takes the holly-and-phoenix-feather wand.

“Oh, wonderful, just wonderful! Fate has plans for you three. Did you know that Dumbledore’s familiar is a phoenix? The very same phoenix who donated the feathers that you two share! Very rare. He refused to give more than two. I can’t wait to see what magic you two will do with your wands. Good day, good day!”

0

The rest of the day passes with Tom staring contemplatively at Potter. Brother wands. Tom has no idea what that means but he’s going to find out as soon as he has access to a library. But for now, he’ll have to play it safe and be (god forbid) nice to the other boy.

Easier said than done. Potter sticks close to Dumbledore’s side and Tom can’t help but think that Dumbledore’s playing favourites with the way he keeps indulging Potter’s questions. But around Tom, Potter is quiet, shy. Odd.

Tom is pleasantly surprised when he’s able to afford all his materials without going second-hand, with plenty of money to spare. He’ll save it for next year’s shopping trip. There’s no telling how much the fund will have next year but at least he’ll be able to afford decent robes and blend in more easily at Hogwarts.

“I’ll be waiting here,” Dumbledore waves them off into Madam Malkin’s direction. He pulls out a long yellow and purple scarf and starts crocheting.

“Well then, shall we go?” Tom smiles falsely at Potter.

Potter hesitates but follows after.

Madam Malkin is less irritating than Ollivander but talks to them as if they are babes. Tom wants to scowl, we’re eleven not two, but he continues to use his ‘sweet’ smile and hopes that the measuring will end soon. Why Madam Malkin can’t shut up and do her job quietly escapes Tom. She could take a leaf out of Potter’s book and just stand there silently.
There’s another boy standing next to them both, looking bored and snide with his polished blond hair. The boy stands as if the world should concede to him and Tom already wants to throw him off his pedestal.

“Hogwarts too?” the boy demands rather than asks when Madam Malkin goes off to get the robes.

“Of course. And you?”

“Obviously. Hogwarts is the best school in magical Britain. My father wanted me to go to Durmstrang but mother insisted that I go to Hogwarts. It’s only appropriate. My family’s been in Slytherin for generations. What house do you think you’ll be in?”

“…Only the best,” Tom says carefully.

Potter, of course, says nothing.

“As long as it’s the right house. Do you even know what the right house is?” the boy narrows his eyes, looking at them both with growing disgust. “…I’ve never seen you two around before… What did you say your names were?”

“We didn’t.” Tom grits his teeth.

“Well, my name’s Draco. Draco Malfoy,” the boy preens, clearly expecting some sort of recognition. A test then. One that Tom has no interest in playing.

But before Tom can answer, Potter says, “Oh.”

Malfoy scowls. “What’s wrong?”

“Well, I was expecting someone… taller… as the Malfoy son.”

Malfoy’s ears turn pink. “I’ll have you know that I’m the tallest eleven-year old that’s ever been in the Malfoy family—”

“Fascinating,” Potter says in the same deadpan voice, “your family must really care about their height. Maybe a height complex…?”

“You—”

“Your robes are ready!” Madam Malkin walks in. “Oh. Are you boys alright?”

Malfoy opens his mouth, closes it, then opens it again before grabbing his robes and storming off.

“What a rude little boy,” Madam Malkin clucks. “Took your robes too! Hang on, I’ll fetch you some new ones… when I see Lucius Malfoy I’ll bill him triple the price…!”

“…How do you know his family?” Tom demands. Are Potter’s Aunt and Uncle considered proper witches and wizards too? Is Number 4 Private Drive clever camouflage for a wizarding dwelling?

“Oh. Uh. I have no idea who the Malfoys are. I just… improvised,” Potter stares down at his shoes again.

“…Improvised.”

“Well, I mean, he seemed very full of himself, like we were supposed to know who he was, and I figured with all the wizard gold and goblins and banks, there’s probably a weird royalty thing going
on with magical people, right? So Malfoy was just showing off and I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have said anything.”

“No… no, it was… clever.”

Tom watches Potter smile and he thinks maybe they have something in common after all.

They’re both excellent liars when they want to be.

When it’s time to leave, Dumbledore offers a hand to both of them for apparition, Potter takes Dumbledore’s hand first and then offers his own hand to Tom.

“Since you don’t like Dumbledore,” Potter whispers.

Tom doesn’t like touching anyone, but if Potter was observant enough to notice, maybe Tom should start observing him in return.

After all, they have brother wands, don’t they?
These chapters keep getting longer... and more plotty. What happened? This was supposed to be a crack series... I blame Tom...

See the end of the chapter for more notes

[So?] Tom demands when Nagini comes slithering back into the classroom. [What did you find out about Potter? What are his plans?]

[Pet me.] Nagini demands first.

Tom only glares at her, and then, only because demanding the respect he rightfully deserves would take too long, obliges.

[He’s getting the human babes to construct a giant nest made of pastries. Um. A castle, I believe.]

Tom stops petting her. Nagini bristles.

[A... castle... made of... pastries.]

[Hmmm, yes... he compared it to a gingerbread house...? Why would humans make pastries out of ginger? How disgusting—hey, where are you going?! Come back and give me pets!]

Nagini slithers after him and for once, Tom doesn’t care to disillusion her. Let the students see Nagini’s great form, a taste of Tom’s power. They will need to be acclimatized to her presence sooner or later just as the First Years have.

More importantly, Tom rushes up the stairs to the old North Tower, he needs to confirm Nagini’s outrageous claim straight away. Potter can’t be this stupid, surely—

He rams into a brown wall and splutters backwards, crumbs flying from his robes. Immediately, Tom blanches, wishing he could wipe the taste of sugar and cinnamon off his tongue.

“Oh, look class, it’s Professor Riddle! He must have heard about our awesome project. Come in, Tom, come in, you must try out the pink frosting on the doors, it’s fantastic!”

The giant biscuit-made-thing is not fantastic at all. Indeed, the structure seems made of pastry. This… gingerbread. Each wall stretches up to the ceiling, nearly touching the stone arches with its oversaturated rose frosting roof tiles. Every manner of muggle sweet from jelly beans to smarties seems to be plastered against the cookie walls like brick. There are even Every Flavour Beans and Chocolate Frogs hopping inside the gingerbread castle, through the peppermint laced windows.

Tom wants to vomit at the sight of it.

[So many human babes... they smell delicious... Oh, a rat!] Nagini slithers past the trails of whipped cream to swallow a rat dangling from Potter’s hands.

Urgh. All those germs.
Potter’s jumper seems to mock him too. Today’s jumper has a snake eating waffles on it. A snake with a bowtie. Tom wants to find whoever knits these atrocious things for Potter and get rid of their fingers.

“I refuse.”

“Gasp, my heart,” Potter flails dramatically. “Class, whatever shall I do?! Your DADA professor has just rejected me because our castle got crumbs in his perfect, perfect hair!”

Potter’s Fourth Year students only snigger, likely taking advantage of such a negligent teacher so they can slack off and think of asinine things all period.

“That’s enough, Potter. This thing is not an appropriate use of class time—”

“Of course, it’s appropriate! Do you know how many students actually know how to bake?! Zero! It’s an atrocity!”

“—you should take your class back—”

“Everyone should know how to make a cheesecake!”

“Um, Professor, I thought we were making a gingerbread house…”

“There are cakes made of cheese?!”

“—because this is Divination, not Muggle Culinary Arts—”

“Whoa, watch out!” one of the students shouts as one of the walls flails over.

Before Tom can react, he’s hit by walls of gingerbread, frosting and chocolate.

“You need to fire him,” Tom hisses when Dumbledore comes. Knowing the old twit, Dumbledore has probably decided to preserve his memory of Tom covered in globs of chocolate sauce and frosting in a pensieve for blackmail.

“I don’t see why,” Dumbledore vanishes the mess with a flick of his wand. Tom hates how Potter makes Tom lose all reason. “The baking did no physical harm and the students enjoy the activity.”

“Baking isn’t Divination! What do sweets have to do with telling the future?! ”

“You’d be surprised. Perhaps you should try more sweets, Tom. I can see you’re rather upset from the mess but Harry meant no harm…”

“He’s not teaching!”

Dumbledore only sighs. “Now Tom, it’s not very professional to lash out about your colleagues like this. If you have an issue with Harry, please discuss it with him first before bringing it up with me.”

Tom wishes his glare could smite someone on the spot. He refuses to discuss anything with Potter and he’ll prove it.

That night, Potter tries to apologize for the ‘gingerbread incident’ by offering Tom another jar of
Tom shuts the door in his face.

He spends the next few days pretending Potter doesn’t exist, throwing out all of Potter’s offerings of sweets, throwing up silencing charms so he doesn’t have to deal with Potter’s annoying existence. But the most annoying thing about Harry Potter is how he intervenes in Tom’s classes without being truly there.

No, Tom hasn’t had any disruptions in classes due to Potter (the Weasley Twins are a separate factor entirely) but his students talk excitedly about Potter’s predictions. Silly little horoscopes that are vague enough to be true for anyone: you feel alone sometimes in the world (who doesn’t?!, you felt tired this week (again, who hasn’t?!), you’ll eat something delicious on Friday (the house elves always make extra effort in meals on Fridays.) Sometimes the students will speak of Potter’s pastries and how these pastries melt on the tongue or Potter’s newest antics like making everyone spin in circles and recite a fairy tale to the class.

Just what is this idiot teaching them?! How is Potter still a nuisance after all the effort Tom has put into ignoring him?!

It’s only been four days since the school year started and Tom has seen sixth years walk into his DADA class wearing glittery, feather boa-scarves and gold mascara. Fifth years keep pausing in the hallway to bow to Professor McGonagall and call her ‘supreme jedi master’ because apparently she controls the fate of the galaxy (it doesn’t help that McGonagall only smirks and tells them to go to class.) Fourth years stand up to do jumping jacks every hour, on the hour, while Third Years insist they have to balance plates on their head to get an O in Potter’s class and how does that make sense.

Thank Merlin, Divination is an elective and that Potter can’t corrupt First or Second years. But with Potter’s rising popularity, it’s likely that enrollment for Divination next year will skyrocket.

Tom cannot let that happen.

He listens in on a conversation between Snape and Dumbledore, waiting for the topic of Potter to come up.

“…fire that brat this instant! If I see another wad of glitter leak into my potions lab again—!”

“Ah, but Severus, correct me if I’m wrong but the first procedure of Potions is to cast a cleaning charm on all students before class until they can cast it themselves, is it not?”

Snape growls, looking very sour indeed.

“I’m sorry, Headmaster, Snape, I couldn’t help but overhear and add my own concerns… I’m unsure if Potter is actually adhering to the Divination curriculum and I worry that students in his class aren’t learning what they need to…”

“Tom, Severus,” Dumbledore shakes his head, “while Harry’s teaching methods may seem eccentric, I’m confident that there is a purpose to his pedagogical approach. It’s only been one week, much too early to judge the results of his teachings. Give it time. If you still feel worried, I invite you to sit in on one of Harry’s classes. I’m sure he wouldn’t mind. Lemon drop?”

Snape looks as if he wants to take a lemon drop and spit it back in Dumbledore’s face but only refrains out of respect.
Tom, only barely holding in his restraint, says bluntly, “I don’t like sweets.”

Fine. If Dumbledore won’t act then Tom will. He’ll find concrete evidence that Potter’s an incompetent teacher and get rid of him for good.

[Nagini,] he hisses during his free period, [show me how you enter into Potter’s classroom undetected.]

Her body jerks in surprise. [Master, are you planning on accompanying me today?]

[Yes,] Tom hisses as he lets the change come over him. Being an Animagus is like constructing a skin of magical intent around his body, shaping it smaller, smaller, more reptile and scales instead of human skin and breaths. He feels the magic wrap around him, shifting him into a more compact shape, trying to lure his mind into matching that shape too but no, Tom keeps his mind human.

When he opens his eyes, he’s eye level with Nagini and they both admire his new serpentine form.

Nagini curls up around him in excitement. [You will love it, Master, Green-Eyes gives out the tastiest rodents for us to eat.]

Hating how his snake body coils in agreement, Tom hisses, [I am going to observe and gather evidence of his improper teaching so I can chase him away from Hogwarts, not to be a glutton.]

[Your human life must be very sad and disappointing if you don’t indulge in food. I do not see why gaining weight must always be a negative trait for you humans.]

Tom only rolls his eyes and slithers after her.

She leads them through the pipes and Tom glowers in disgust. They move through the school undetected until Nagini eagerly nudges Tom forwards to a covered hole in the wall and Tom hears Potter lecturing. Carefully, Tom peeks out and has a good view of rows of students with their backs turned to him and Potter standing near the front.

The students are all standing one on leg, arms stretched up above their heads, and muttering, ‘I’m a tree’ repeatedly under their breaths.


[Don’t go biting him, Master! That may be mating protocol for humans but not for snakes.]

[For the last time, I do not want to mate with Potter, that is ridiculous—]

“Professor!” A muggleborn he remembers as Hermione Granger raises her hand. To Tom’s disgust, she has palm leaves tied to her wrists, much like the other students. “Excuse me! Professor!”

“Hm?” Potter looks up from his rainbow-stitched hammock and book. The ever-present paper cranes nest in his hair and seem to be snoring against his fluffy stingray sweater. “Oh, yes, Ms. Granger, what do you need?”

“When are we going to learn anything about real Divination?”

Some groans echo in the class from Third-years who clearly don’t want to learn. But other Gryffindors like Parvarti and Brown’s older sister nod in agreement, likely filled with sentimental stereotypes of the mysterious wizarding fortune teller. Tom, on the other hand, is just glad that a
student has finally asked the important questions.

“But you are learning real Divination!” Potter grins. From above, his annoying owl familiar Hedwig hoots.

“Then why don’t any of our lessons match the content in Unfogging the Future? I looked it up in the library the other day and real seers are more focused on looking at tea leaves or interpreting dreams. All we’ve done lately is balance plates on our heads and then imitate trees!”

“Smart,” Potter nods in agreement. “Five points to Gryffindor for taking initiative to research more about your subject.” Granger blushes but looks pleased. “Buuuut, I have to happily disagree. There is no real form of Divination.”

The classroom explores into shouts of outrage, confusion and cheer. Tom, on the other hand, wonders if this will be enough to get Potter fired for good.

Quickly, Potter summons a whistle and blows it. The shrill note makes Nagini and Tom cringe and hiss indignantly but does the job of silencing the class instantly.

“Alright, alright, I see you’re all excited, but let me explain… Divination…”

A rare somber look crosses Potter’s face and for some reason, Tom remembers a younger Potter, standing out in the middle of a storm, utterly blank.

“It’s a tricky subject. Some people have the true sight. They’re the true seers. They can’t control what they see or when, but it’s usually about the future. Or potential futures. They’re rare. But most magical people… Well, they don’t have a shred of True Sight in them. True seers are born, not made. And yet most people will try anything—tea leaves, crystal balls, pendulums—for even a glimpse of the future. So why teach Divination?”

The class stares back in silence.

Potter only grins, the face of the idiot returning so quickly that Tom finds himself reaching out for the somber Potter instead. “Don’t be shy, there are no wrong answers.”

A twitchy Hufflepuff, Hakar Ababi, shakily raises his hand while Granger puzzles over the question.

“Yes, Mr. Ababi?” Potter says kindly.

“Um,” Ababi flails with his palm leave hands, “so we just… know it?”

“Good start. I can see why you’d think that!” Potter nods, standing up to walk around the room. His paper cranes doze off in the middle of the air, nearly crashing into Hedwig who hoots irritably. “The British Wizarding School System has been designed to value shoving as much knowledge into our brains as possible without really telling us the real-world application or relating it to Wizarding, heck, even muggle history. We’ve stopped asking why we learn things, we just recite and memorize. Let’s try to think of why. Let’s try to think deeply about Divination.”

“Oh!” Another Hufflepuff, Lifen Wang, nearly falls out of her tree pose, “Maybe to find ways people take advantage of Divination? And try to stop it?”

“Excellent! Five points to Hufflepuff for you, Ms. Wang, and another five for you, Mr. Ababi, for earlier. Do you know how many magical people get swindled for their gold by fake seers? It’s important to learn the common forms of Divination so we can recognize what ‘true’ Divination might look like, so we can be critical thinkers. How else can we think about Divination? Keep your tree
poses up, breathe and think like a tree!”

Tentatively, Ronald Weasley raises his hand. “Er… My dad works at the Ministry and he sees a lot of coworkers obsessed with their horoscopes or going to Fortuna’s to try and learn their fortune. Some blokes go bankrupt ‘cause they have to ‘change their future’ or something like that.”

Potter’s grin grows wider. “There you go! A real-world example! Five points to Gryffindor! Yes, there are a lot of fate-turning pubs like Fortuna’s where magical people go to find their future and then try to change it. Those facilities work a lot like muggle casinos, presenting fortunes like games that can be easily changed with a bit of money. Learning about Divination helps us think about how harmful it can be to be obsessed with the future. Critical thinking. How does what we’re doing in class right now, help with learning divination?”

The students look at each other in confusion but with an encouraging nod from Potter, they start discussing possible answers.

“Maybe this is training to make us true seers!” Thomas claims.

“Don’t be silly, Dean, Professor Potter said that seers can’t be made,” Granger cuts in.

“Well maybe we’re learning balance or something. Like, in our minds,” Thomas says, “so we can think more critically, yeah?”

“Great thought process there, Mr. Thomas. Yes, exercises like envisioning yourself as a tree or balancing a plate on your head, focus your thoughts on one task… They clear your mind so you can’t be easily swayed and you know yourself better. In fact, these exercises are a good way of strengthening your mind if you ever want to learn mind arts like Occulmency. Five points to Gryffindor.”

“Oh! Like muggle meditation!” Granger brightens. “You’re teaching us to manage ourselves better mentally and emotionally! To handle stress!”

“Ugh, what’s the use of that?” Zacharias Smith sneers. “Meditation is boring! Pointless! Ow!” Smith shakes his palm leaf hands at a flock of unhappy pink cranes.

Potter just stands there and shakes his head. “Don’t judge the method before seeing the results, good sir. My cranes can be kind of cranky if you’re rude in my class, remember? Besides, do you know how many magical people crumple under the pressure of the worsening economy and responsibilities of adulthood? So far, about one fifth! And those are only the brave few who have spoken up! Who knows how many keep silent about it?”

Even Smith has to blink, taking in this new information. From what Tom knows about the Smith family, some of the older generation have a history of breaking down in public and then isolating themselves away from the Wizarding community for decades after.

“We go to school to learn spells, magic, theory,” Potter walks through the rows of palm-tree-students with every pair of eyes fixed on him, “to improve our magical knowledge. But what about our mental knowledge? Emotional? Who teaches us how to live?”

No one, Tom thinks bitterly. We are thrust into a world unwillingly and never told the rules. We survive. We rule. We conquer. Or we die. That’s it.

“We do,” Potter answers, practically bouncing in each step. “We teach ourselves and we teach each other by our lives. But it sure would be useful if we had a class on how to live. How to manage the tough times.”
“What, so baking is supposed to help us?” Smith sneers again with his nasally voice. Tom has an urge to bite him.

“Well, why not? It might not be for you. But I’m told it’s very therapeutic for those who love cooking. And maybe it’s not your thing, fine, but now you can bake something! Go impress your friends, woo some future lovers.”

“But what about telling the future? Making prophecies and all that rubbish? We still have to do that for our OWLs!”

Ronald Weasley looks ready to punch Smith in the face for his outbursts and even Tom feels impatient, wanting to hear more of Potter’s justifications, but Potter only smiles. “No worries. We’ll learn about Crystal balls and dream interpretations eventually… just not in the conventional way you might be thinking. Besides,” Potter suddenly looks directly at the hole where Nagini and Tom are hiding, “like I said, we shouldn’t obsess too much about the future… Prophecies can be self-fulfilling things. Sometimes, it’s best not to know.”

Tom doesn’t shrink back. He’s a snake now, an ordinary snake coming to visit for snacks like Nagini. Potter couldn’t possibly know—

“But…! But that defeats the entire purpose of studying Divination for the OWL! Why shouldn’t we know?!”

Potter only smiles. “Alright then, if you’d like to know your future, Zacharias Edmund Smith of Hufflepuff House, I will tell you that one of your greatest fears will fall unexpectedly into your lap at an inconvenient moment and you will not react well.”

Smith pales but shakes his head. “Those bloodthirsty flamingoes haven’t shown up yet, why should I be afraid of this prediction?”

Potter looks confused for a moment before he laughs. “Oh. Right. The flamingoes. Well,” he sits back in his hammock again, “give it time.”

Before anyone can respond, the bell rings, signaling the end of class. Everyone scurries to put their books away, still looking at Potter with half-confusion, half-awe or, (like Smith) half-distaste.

[Finally, class is done! Time to get my snack.] Nagini pushes Tom out of the crack in the wall so they can slither down a wooden column.

[I’m not going. I need to teach next period—]

[But my snacks!]

“Whoa, Ron, watch where you’re going,” Thomas shouts just as the fifth Weasley child trips into him, knocking the curtains over.

[Master, watch out!]

The curtains smack Tom and Nagini off the column and they go flying through the air. Tom hisses the various ways he wants to maim the Weasley and Thomas just as he and Nagini land on something soft.

A whimper echoes above them. Tom and Nagini blink up, staring into the nasally Zacharias Smith’s eyes.
[Noisy human babe. If only my Master would let me eat you.] Nagini sighs forlornly.

Smith’s eyes bulge as he turns an ugly shade of purple and throws Nagini and Tom away in mid-air.

“SSSSNAKE! GETitOFFmE, getitOFFmEEeee!” He runs away screaming, knocking many of his classmates over.

[Stupid, stupid, stupid—] Tom hisses just as he sees the ground.

“I got you!” Warm hands catch him and Nagini mere seconds away from severe injury and Tom instinctively huddles closer to the heat source. “Thank Merlin you’re both okay! Oh, do you have a new friend, Nagini?”

[Green eyes!] Nagini eagerly wraps herself around Harry’s shoulders, looking more like she’ll squeeze him to death rather than hug him. [I never want to see that noisy babe again. We should go far away so you can keep feeding and petting me forever.]

“What a handsome snake,” Potter peers down at Tom while Tom does his best to act like a snake instead of a wizard. Hiss hiss. “Hang on, I have a few mice for you too… But really, try not to visit me through the walls. You could fall again! And Hedwig might decide you make a tasty snack.”

On cue, the demon owl flaps her wings hungrily.

Nagini and Tom hiss back at her.

“But what a strange coincidence,” Potter says serenely. “Who knew Smith was so afraid of snakes? You’d think they were his greatest fear or something.”

Tom stiffens. Narrows his eyes. Reviews the class in his head.

[Yes,] he hisses. [One might believe that you had True Sight for a moment…]

Potter, of course, shows no signs of understanding. Only sends both snakes off with their bellies full of mice and warm, ridiculously rainbow-coloured snake-sweaters (“Sneaters!” Potter exclaimed eagerly) and Tom’s mind racing with possibilities.

He needs to remember every prediction Potter ever made. Immediately.

Chapter End Notes

A guide to age in this AU:

Third Year students: Ron, Hermione, Seamus, Dean, Pavarti, Hakar Ababi, Lifen Wang, Maeve Brown

First Year Students: Blaise, Ginny, Hannah, Colin, Lavender, Soo Lin Dao

Adults: Minerva, Draco, Cho, Cedric, Charlie and Bill Weasley, Rubeus, Myrtle, Neville, Luna

AN: I had to make up reasons why learning Divination is somewhat valid in the wizarding world…
Every memory of Potter that Tom tries to put into the pensieve comes out blurry and faded, as if Potter was never there at all.

His most recent memories, of course, appear as clear as a new Muggle motion picture… But the ones from his school days… Tom can barely remember them at all. Frustrating, how even magic has its limits. Memories are best taken fresh, as soon as possible, before they’re stored into a pensieve. Otherwise, those memories can be faded and corrupted by time. Some memories, such as traumas or significant moments, will remain clear no matter what.

Tom wants to yell at his past self for not creating a pensieve back then. He would try to extract memories from Nagini but animal memories are another category entirely.

[ Fine, if I cannot recall every prediction Potter has made, then I will nudge him to tell new ones and analyze what happens next. ]

Nagini hisses in alarm. Silently, she looks at the long roll of parchment that lists every ‘prophecy’ that Potter has ever foretold, ridiculous or not, from the beginning of the summer, and then at the floating pages of possible interpretations for llamas and flamingos. Tom has already taken the etymology of each word and broken down their meanings from past language trees and cultural connotations of each animal in different countries.

For instance, llamas and llama parts were placed in burial sites by the Moche people. Even in the later Inca empire, llamas were considered creatures of burden… especially for the dead. Llamas carried everything—cargo, people, the dead. If these creatures are related to Tom’s death, perhaps they’re a metaphor for Tom’s aspiration to avoid death?

And flamingos! In Egyptian culture, maybe wizards considered these birds to be a representation of the sun god Ra. These animals were always cared for and preserved. Even in Peru, these birds were sacred animals—also preserved and found in many works of art. Some of the myths that Tom has found describe the flamingo as a savior animal because of the way it can bend its neck. He even notes the stories about men who could turn into flamingos and had extraordinary abilities… these are likely references to ancient animagi… Perhaps the flamingo prediction refers to animagi who have been experimented on or it’s a warning of what happens if people turn again their savior…? But Tom can’t think of anyone he would consider a savior in current Wizarding culture…

Nagini frowns.

She looks contemplative for once. But after a while, she only sighs and curls up around Potter’s atrocious Pikachu-shaped beanie coach. [ If you only asked him, you could save all this trouble. Humans always make things more complicated than they really are. ]

Just for that, Nagini won’t be getting any sugar mice for dessert.
“I made lemon cranberry scones today! Would you like some?” Potter presses the tray in Tom’s direction first, as always.

“…Thank you,” Tom says stiffly, taking one.

All of their coworkers suddenly stop and stare at Tom as if he’s just announced the end of the world will begin with an invasion of piñatas.

But Tom keep smiling as if nothing strange has happened at all. Potter, irritatingly enough, doesn’t seem to register the silence. Instead, his face lights up and his eyes sparkle in such an alarming way (like lightning, and Tom nearly glances at the scar again) that Tom wonders if Dumbledore’s twinkly eyes are a learned trait rather than hereditary.

“Well…?!” Potter leans in. “Go on, try it!”

Tom’s smile turns brittle. “…Of course.”

He eyes the pastry carefully. It’s pale. Flakey. Probably loaded with more sugar than necessary, he wouldn’t be surprised if Potter added two more cups of sugar, just to be contrary. But slowly, he takes a polite bite out of it.

Immediately, he wants to vomit.

Sweet. Too sweet. No, Potter didn’t put too much sugar; logically, Tom knows this is a normal ratio of sugar for a scone but it’s despicable. The overwhelming amount of sugar, no matter what quantity, makes Tom sick to the stomach.

“It’s delicious,” Tom says with the perfect amount of cordiality.

Potter’s face goes utterly blank. “…You don’t like it.”

Tom’s heart hammers. Show me you’re a seer, his mind roars. “Don’t be silly. Of course, I do.”

But Potter doesn’t seem to be looking at him anymore. Instead, his gaze seems transfixed somewhere else as if there are whole other worlds contained in the reflection of his spoon. Tom never particularly cared to notice before but Potter’s gaze often seems focused elsewhere, even when he talks to people like Dumbledore or Chang. As if the present doesn’t truly matter.

“In fact,” Tom grits his teeth, “scones might quickly become my favourite food.”

“Hm?” Potter blinks up at him. “Oh! Um. That’s… great, Riddle. But you don’t have to force yourself.” His grin suddenly returns like a blaring siren that won’t shut up even after shutting the door. “I’ll make you something you absolutely want to eat, I promise!”

Potter rushes out before Tom can decipher if his last statement is a prophecy or not.

“Ah, Potter, I was wondering if I could talk to you about lesson plans,” Tom musters up his most charming smile in the corridor.

Unexpectedly, Potter doesn’t even react. Instead he seems to weave through the crowd of students while balancing an outrageously tall pile of cookbooks in his hands. Tom even spots some encyclopedias on dragons and South American birds. Again, his gaze seems far off…
Infuriating.

“Potter, if I could just have a moment—”

“…have to figure out a good ratio of red to gold…” Potter mutters, ducking into a bathroom stall.
The bell rings. Class again. Tom is ready to blast that bell charm into nothingness.

“Potter, I wanted to talk…!”

Once more, Potter nearly walks into a wall before changing directions and dragging his sled of art supplies around the corner.

“Damn Potter,” Tom mutters.

“You really must be patient with him, Tom, he often has his head in the clouds,” Dumbledore says from behind.

_How_ Dumbledore seems to appear when Tom least needs it still alludes him.

“He’s quite difficult to get a hold of when he’s working on his projects.”

“Nonsense,” Tom scowls, no longer bothering to hold his façade. “Potter always finds time to—” _annoy_, “—converse with me when we’re together for meals or in the office.”

“Ah, but I imagine this is the first time you’ve sought _him_ out instead of the other way around.”

Tom doesn’t respond.

“Amazing how we can get so caught up in our own lives that we forget that others have their own stories to live as well. I would use this opportunity to learn more about Harry as an equal, Professor Riddle. You’d be surprised how many layers human beings have once you get to know them.”

“I _know_ Potter,” he snaps, “I know that he’s infuriating to the brim, that he sleeps with a stuffed dog, that he tries to have tea parties with his blasted owl every Sunday, that he never wears matching socks. I know almost every one of his annoying sweaters, including the one with dancing zombie flamingos, and I’m convinced he probably buys a new sweater every week just to annoy me. I _know_ him.”

Dumbledore suddenly looks pleased. And a bit worried.

“I am _not_ obsessed with Potter,” Tom hisses.

“I never said that,” Dumbledore says lightly.

“I merely know him better than you do. I would _know_ if he had _layers_ .”

“Alright.”

“And I’m not _seeking_ him out.”

“Sure.”
“In fact, I’m going back to my class and I’m going to plan the next unit on curses for the fourth years.”

“Tooled loo then.”

Tom clenches and unclenches his fists. He thinks of the mask he puts on for his followers, the one that made him Head Boy. Dispel all emotions. Be distant but proud.

“Good day,” he says pleasantly and almost believes it.

This obsession with Potter has to stop. If Potter won’t show any signs of being a seer willingly than Tom will have one of his followers monitor him instead. Tom has greater things to worry about like recruiting more followers and spreading his influence. He hasn’t taught a session on the dark arts to his followers in months… Perhaps another meeting in Hogsmeade this weekend will be necessary…

Quite suddenly, he finds himself bumping into Potter, making Potter’s collection of red and gold yarn fly all over the corridor.

“Oh Merlin! So sorry, Tom! I wasn’t paying attention, here, let me get that,” Potter tries to brush the threads of yarn from Tom’s hair, not even aware of how he himself looks like a ridiculous spaghetti monster.

“Stop that,” Tom snaps, wandlessly vanishing the yarn away to their office. Let Potter deal with the mess later. “You’re a wizard, aren’t you? Use your magic!”

“Someone woke up in a mood…”

“You’re insufferable,” Tom says because how dare Potter assume that Tom is as human, as emotionally ruled, as the rest of humanity. How dare Potter assume that Tom woke up this way, when everything is Potter’s fault in the first place! “I’m leaving,” he walks away. He doesn’t need Potter or his seer powers. His plans will move smoothly without the power of prophecy…

But…

“Are you going to Hogsmeade this weekend?”

Tom stills. “What did you say?”

Potter shrugs. For the first time, Tom notices the smudge of make-up on Potter’s face, hiding dark bags under his eyes.

“Hogsmeade. You’re going right?” and Tom’s mind roars, yes, see? He knows your plans to meet with your followers, he knows, he knows —

“…Yes.”

“I… I wouldn’t if I were you.”

Tom can feel his blood roaring in his ears. “…Why not?”

“Well,” Potter shifts on his feet, “you might have a deadly encounter with llamas after all.”

Tom sees red (perhaps from the leftover scarlet yarn on his hair) and he hisses, “No one cares about your inane, false lies, Potter, so spare me your little stories! I am not, and I never will be, in danger because of an overgrown llama.”
The scar on Potter’s head has never looked so damning before. “Tom—”

“Don’t talk to me. You are a spoiled brat, who has wasted his potential on stupidity and I am done with you.”

That night, Tom transfigures the DADA classroom into a makeshift bedroom and moves his things. For days, he and Potter don’t speak.
Platform nine and three-quarters feels just as crowded as King’s cross. The most striking difference between the two train stations is the great red train sitting a few meters in front of him. Families bustle back and forth in tearful (and pathetic) displays of emotion. Wizards and witches seem to prefer bright coloured robes. Owls also seem quite popular, a logical trend when one considers the usefulness of owls.

Tom pushes his trolley past them all.

0

He takes the compartment furthest in the back of the train to avoid the riff-raff. He isn’t here to socialize but to study wizarding culture until he understands how to use it for his own. Tom’s practically a foreigner, knowing nothing about the intricacies of this society’s politics. He’ll wait and observe the power structure first before he can take advantage of it. How powerful are his classmates? Will Tom be average among them? No, impossible, he—

“O-oh! T— I mean, Riddle! It’s good to see you,” Potter pokes his head through the door. Like the last time they met, Potter’s clothes dwarf him and look as plain as dirt on the street.

“Are you wearing that to the Sorting?”

Potter ducks his head down, fiddling with his frayed sleeves. “Well. No. I was hoping to change into my robes on the train. Um. Is it okay if I sit with you? Everywhere else is full and well, you can say no if you want, I just thought—”

“Fine.” It will be an opportunity to study the person who holds his brother wand. Tom takes Potter’s trunk.

“Really?” Potter brightens. “Awesome! I mean, great!”

Tom frowns. How can anyone smile so wide like that?

“Just don’t make unnecessary noise. We don’t need to attract that noisy Malfoy back.”

Potter snorts. and for a moment, Tom pictures the other orphans at Saint Wools and how they used to laugh at him until he made them stop. But Potter looks at Tom with such warmth that Tom almost forgets what it felt like.

“We can always chase him out again.”

Before Tom really realizes it, he smirks back.
True to his word, Potter stays quiet after he sees Tom pull out his copy of *Hogwarts a History* to read. Potter even digs out his own potions textbook and begins to read from the middle of the text. Unlike the orphans back at Saint Wools, Potter keeps this withdrawn behavior up for at least an hour before Tom decides to start gathering information.

“What do you think of our curriculum so far?”

Potter lights up. “Charms looks amazing! So does transfiguration, but we just transform—wait, I mean *transfigure*—small things first, I guess. That makes sense, since we’re just starting out, but imagine being able to conjure up clothes out of forks or food out of toothpicks!”

“Transfiguration does look useful, but I agree. It appears the curriculum will start off too simple. What about potions?”

Potter’s book nearly falls from his hands. “I’m… not sure yet.”

Interesting. “Why not?”

“Well,” Potter looks down at his shoes, “I have a bad feeling about it. Like, no matter how much I try to read ahead,” Potter’s fingers tighten on the page, “I won’t be able to do well in that class.”

Tom can’t tell if this is a humble mask Potter wants to construct or a genuine fear. He presses for further information. “Surely you have your family to owl for advice?”

Potter grimaces, wrapping the book close to his chest. “My parents died when I was a baby and my aunt and uncle don’t really like magic. They’re, well, muggle, you know.”

“Oh,” Tom tries to sound sympathetic, unused to the tone. He’s never tried to be *nice* before. At the orphanage, the other children avoid and fear him. With Dumbledore, Tom only has to feign good manners. But Potter could be more.

Both liars. Both orphans. Both alone. They even *look* somewhat similar, if Potter didn’t have green eyes or wear glasses they could be twins almost. His mirror image.

Something in him hungers at the thought.

“You’re like me,” he says, thinking of someone who might understand the truth of the world.

Potter stares back in wonder.

The door to their compartment slides open before Potter can reply and in darts another boy, sweating nervously, practically sobbing his eyes out.

“H-h-have y-you s-s-seen a t-t-toad?!” the boy flails his arms about, “P-p-please! H-h-his n-name is T-trevor and h-he’s *this* s-small and h-h-he was a gift f-from my u-uncle, oh p-please h-help!”

“There’s no toad here,” Tom says, hoping the nuisance will leave soon so he can go back to the previous conversation.

Unfortunately, the boy starts to bawl, turning into a larger teary mess. “T-this i-is the l-l-last c-compartment! I-if h-he’s n-not h-here then, t-then…!”

Urgh. Tom wonders if he should push the boy out or use his magic but he still needs to tread carefully about who he keeps company with. He’s still not sure what mask to play at the school. The
fearful tyrant works well at the orphanage so he can be alone but in an entirely new environment, Tom will have to adjust…

Potter suddenly stands up. “Please don’t cry! I’m sure you just missed him by the front of the train. I can help you look again, if you want?”

The boy and Tom pause. In an instant, the boy starts bawling again.

Potter looks at Tom in bewilderment. This is your problem, Tom glares back.

“Uh… please stop…! Oh, I knew I shouldn’t have said anything… Hey, um, it’s going to be okay?”

“Y-you,” sob, “a-are so nice! I just, n-no o-one e-else wanted to help and, and—”

“Sorry,” Potter looks at Tom. “This will only take a few moments. His toad should be nearby… Do you want to come help us look?”

Why, Tom wants to demand but… he can see Potter’s point. He and Potter are still at a disadvantage. They don’t know who they need to win over to gain influence in their school yet. This trainwreck of a boy might be someone important and Tom could always have the boy repay him with a favour…

“Fine.”

This time, when the boy sobs again, Tom glares him into silence.

“So, uh, I’m Harry. This is Riddle. what’s your name?”

“Neville.” The boy blows his nose, “Neville Longbottom.”

An unfortunate surname for an unfortunate being. The surnames ‘Potter’ and ‘Riddle’ seem extravagant in comparison.

They search through the rest of the train, narrowly avoiding a confrontation with Malfoy and his tagalongs. Tom gains a few more tidbits about his acquaintance, and more importantly, about the owner of his brother wand.

First, the wizarding world appears to have a systemic government and culture based on blood status. Strange notion but Tom doesn’t pretend to understand why humans care about such things. Second, purebloods seem to benefit from the most wealth. Third, Potter seems quite close-lipped about his family.

How curious.

“He’s gone! Forever! Gran’s gonna kill me! I’ll be cast into the street!” Longbottom moans when they arrive at their stop.

At this point, all Potter can do is tentatively pat Longbottom’s shoulder. “Maybe we can look just one more time—”

“And miss the sorting?” Tom yanks Potter away. “The toad’s gone for good. Just buy a new one.”
Longbottom definitely has the money for it.

“Oh merlin, the sorting,” Longbottom covers his face. “I’ll probably end up in Hufflepuff. Just dump me out the window and leave me to rot.”

“Hey, don’t say that! You’ll find your toad, I know it! Let’s get some fresh air,” Potter tugs Longbottom out, ignoring Tom’s clenched grip. “Why don’t you tell us about this Hufflepuff thing. What exactly is it? Do we have to study it too?”

“What?” Longbottom blinks. “No, it’s a house!”

“The house representing the hardworking and loyal, to be exact,” Tom adds, remembering the passage dedicated to houses in his extra reading. “Hogwarts students are sorted into four different dormitories, or ‘houses’ based on character traits. Hufflepuff for loyalty, Gryffindor for bravery, Ravenclaw for intelligence, and Slytherin for ambition.”

“But… doesn’t everyone have those traits…? People change so much too…” Potter frowns at the wall, “what if they’re not ambitious all the time? Not brave?”

“The magic they use to sort students is likely very sophisticated. Perhaps a branch of Divination is involved. I have to do more research on the subject.” Tom could only buy three extra books with his funding after all.

Longbottom only droops lower. “I’m doomed.”

“Hufflepuff doesn’t seem bad. Loyalty is a pretty good trait to have…”

“Easier for people to use you,” Tom points out.

Potter frowns. “Still… having a place to belong…”

“I would rather make that place.”

Potter pauses, his gaze suddenly very direct with Tom’s. Someday, Tom wants to write notes on how to read the emotions in Potter’s eyes. Other human beings are easy. Predictable. Potter feels like a language Tom knew once in a dream, but woke up forgetting.

“You’d probably do well in any house, Riddle. I hope… well—”

“Toad! Anyone lose a toad?” an older student with an alarmingly bright smile calls out.

“Trevor!” Longbottom looks ready to kiss the older student. “Thank you so much!”

“No problem! Just keep a closer eye on him next time. He was sitting in the conductor’s seat near the front… Anyways, are you first years? I can lead you to the lake, that’s where all the first years go after the train ride. It’s tradition.”

The student, Cedric Diggory, leads them to the lake as planned and sends them off with a smile. “Hope to see you in Hufflepuff,” he calls out, ruffling Potter’s hair.

“Not likely,” Tom murmurs. Brave, intelligent, and ambitious certainly apply to Tom but loyalty and that sickening sweetness that Diggory exudes do not.

Tom scowls for the rest of the boat ride across the lake, hating the cold, hating the wet. Billy
Stubbs’s snide jeers echo in his ears and Tom pushes them away. Beside him, Potter looks absolutely miserable, shivering and curling in on himself, looking smaller than ever.

“We’re almost there,” Tom finds himself saying.

Potter nods weakly but otherwise doesn’t respond. Longbottom glances at them both in confusion while their fourth passenger, a girl named Myrtle, won’t stop babbling about meeting all the ghosts at the school. If she says another word, Tom might push her off the boat.

Without warning, Potter’s shoulder brushes against Tom’s and he hears, “Look.”

Hogwarts looms in the distance, lit up against the night sky. Tom can practically feel the air thrumming in excitement, the closer they sail towards the castle. It looks like an illustration from one of Amy’s fairy tales but dressed in power and energy Tom would never have imagined.

This will be his place. He’ll make it so.

Hogwarts was made for him. Every room thrums with different spells. The great hall opens up to the night sky, spelled with complicated charmwork that Tom can’t wait to dissect and try to recreate for himself in his room back the orphanage. He’ll figure out a way to bypass the underage restriction eventually. While the candles don’t provide effective lighting to the hall, Tom appreciates the aesthetic. This hall is meant to impress, to intimidate students with magic. Someday, Tom will do that too.

Beside him, Potter hasn’t said a word. Myrtle won’t stop pointing up at the ghosts and wondering if they’ll give her an autograph. She clings onto Longbottom, unaware of how faint the boy looks with each step into the hall.

The ceremony apparently involves putting on a hat. Tom frowns at the idea of some strange thing digging in his mind. It must be safe if they do this with every student, but still, his thoughts are his own.

“Hufflepuff!” the hat calls after five minutes of sitting on Longbottom’s head. The boy bursts into tears and has to be escorted down the steps. Tom wants to roll his eyes. Longbottom’s reputation won’t recover from that shameless display.

Myrtle Mason gets sorted into Ravenclaw and she nearly tackles the female ghost sitting at that table. Finally, though, Potter gets called. The hall becomes oddly subdued.

“…See you, Tom,” he says quietly, like it’s goodbye.

Tom frowns. “It’s Riddle. Be sure to save me a seat when you’re sorted.”

Potter gives a shaky nod and walks quietly up the steps, his feet echoing throughout the hall. For the first time, Tom wonders if the surname ‘Potter’ carries more significance to the wizarding world than he thought. He sees one of the teachers, the one with greasy hair, glower furiously at little Potter while the others look sad or nostalgic. As if they’re watching another man.

Tom will have to ask Potter about it later.

Potter’s sorting takes the longest out of all the first years. Thirteen minutes.

Finally, the hat says a barely audible, “…Gryffindor…” and the hall claps politely.
Hm. The house of the brave. Not bad. *Hogwarts A History* had plenty of examples of fine witches and wizards who came from that house. Red isn’t Tom’s colour and he knows it will clash with Potter’s eyes but he’ll get used to it.

“Riddle, Tom,” the headmaster, Dippet, calls.

He walks up the steps, facing the rows of students below, and nods down at Potter. The hat falls over Tom’s eyes like the coming of night.

*[Well, well, well,*] the hat says, delighted, *[this will be an easy sorting. Thank merlin, I don’t do well with the complicated cases.]*

*[Get on with it,*] Tom’s rude thoughts flow out unchecked.

*[Touchy child, aren’t you? Extremely clever. You’ll do great things, your ambition will change the world. Better be in…]*

“SLYTHERIN!” the hat roars and Tom feels something in him fall.

The windows in the great hall crack.
Surprise!!! Bet you weren't expecting a double update ;D

“Um, Professor Riddle? I have a question about—”

“Check over your syllabus, the answers are there. If that doesn’t answer your question, then reread
the textbook. We’re moving on,” Tom vanishes the boggart away. “Next week, we’ll be working
with banshees. Do the readings beforehand. Class dismissed.”

“But—” the Ravenclaw Third-Year, Thanh Tran, says.

“Ms. Tran, reread the textbook, I won’t be available for office hours this weekend. You’re a
Ravenclaw, ask some of the older students in your house. Good day.”

Tran rushes out in near-tears.

“Well that wasn’t very nice.”

“Potter, I can run my own classroom, you—” Tom turns around. “Oh. Chang. Did you need
something?”

Cho Chang, the Flying instructor, raises her hands in defense. “Sorry for not being Harry, I guess?”

Tom turns back to his desk and begins rearranging his books into his bag.

“Uh… are you alright?” Chang asks.

“Did you need something?”

“Well, Cedric’s coming to Hogsmeade for drinks. Harry and I are going to meet him at the Hog’s
Head. We were wondering if you want to join us, since we all went to school around the same time
and all.”

“…Potter put you up to this, didn’t he?”

“Yeah, pretty much,” Chang admits. She and Diggory never socialized with Tom back then, too
occupied with each other and apparently adopting Potter. They were (and still are) disgusting with
their PDA.

“Then no.”

Chang sighs. “I tried. And for the record, this strange fight going on between you and Potter is
driving the school into chaos. Go talk to him or I’ll lock you both in a closet, don’t think I won’t just
because you’re Mr. Perfect.”

“We’re not fighting. I merely found another office, that’s all.”

Chang grimaces. “Look, it’s none of my business, but this is Harry. He’s your friend. He says some
strange things sometimes but his heart’s in the right place. If he upset you in any way then—”

“You’re wrong.” Tom steps out of the classroom. “He’s not my friend.”

Potter isn’t anything.

For the past few days, Tom has seen students either glaring at him or nodding in solidarity. Many students, like the Weasleys, seem to be on ‘Team Potter’, insisting that Tom has wronged Potter somehow. Other students, like Greengrass and (to Tom’s annoyance) Smith, say that Potter must have gone too far with his rambunctious behavior.

Apparently Tom has been ‘snippy’ and ‘controlling’ in his teaching lately while Potter keeps playing sad music like, ‘All by Myself’ and ‘Rainy Blues’ in every class.

“He cried onto his knitting! Tears of blood!” some students insist.

“Professor Riddle looks ready to stab the next person who says Potter’s name.”

“Well it’s Potter’s fault, he shouldn’t be teaching!”

“Riddle wouldn’t know a good teacher from a bad one, he’s all about the textbook and perfectionism!”

That fight ended with several heads of neon purple hair and one student transfigured into a rubber duck. Madame Pomphrey scowls whenever she sees one of those ‘Team Potter’ versus ‘Team Riddle’ badges. Tom even sees ‘Team Tomarry’ buttons from a rare group of students and contemplates confiscating them for incorrect spelling. Are they signs meant to express allegiance to both parties…?

In any case, Tom refuses to talk to Potter, even if the student body seems oddly invested in their working relationship.

A few members of his group are already present when Tom walks into The Three Broomsticks. “Dolohov,” he nods, “Avery. Carrow. Lestrange.”

“Please, my lord, call me Bella,” Lestrange flutters her eyes.

Tom forces a polite smile. “Of course, Bella.”

The look of adoration he receives is a small price to pay for her loyalty. But he avoids her touch. “Have we ordered drinks?”

“A few butterbeers, some vodka,” Dolohov grins. “Haven’t ordered anything for you yet, m’Lord.”

“Perhaps later,” Tom dislikes the way alcohol affects his cognitive functions. “Tell me how things are with recruitment.”

Dolohov shrugs, downing his vodka in one gulp. “Werewolves are weary of your terms but willing to work with us if you show them that you have power to back up your claims.”

“Reasonable,” Tom nods. “Tell them that I will give them a sign by December. For now, we’ll give them supplies to help with their living conditions. What of the giants?”
“Barbarians. All of them,” Carrow shivers. “Don’t make me talk to them again, my Lord. They nearly took my arm! My arm!”

Tom sighs. “Did you approach them with the exact instructions that I asked you to do?”

“Um. Well.”

“…I’ll ask Crouch to take over your assignment,” out of all his followers, Crouch is the most devout, the most competent. Shame he couldn’t come to this meeting because of Ministry duties.

“Please don’t demote me!”

Carrow’s skill set will be useful when Tom needs an inside eye at the Ministry and considering his sister’s power, Tom shouldn’t be too harsh on Carrow… yet.

“One more chance, Carrow, otherwise I will find another to do your job. Don’t forget what I did to Crabbe.”

Carrow pales, “Of course, my Lord, you’re so merciful…”

Obviously Tom is superior to them all but he wishes they would stop using the same vocabulary when they address him. Hearing the words ‘merciful,’ and ‘yes my lord,’ ‘you’re so amazing and powerful, my lord,’ has become tiresome. Dull.

“Stop bowing your head. You’re being too conspicuous.”

“Yes, Carrow, stop burdening our lord,” Bellatrix sneers.

“Avery?” Tom interrupts, ready to hear what’s next on his agenda.

“I talked to Lord Malfoy. Lucius, of course, is eager to join our cause. His sons Abraxus and Draco though…”

“Noted. I will draft another letter for them.”

“Lady Zambini doesn’t want to hear anything from you. She said she’s not interested in men who haven’t gained true power yet.”

“That blind—”

“Enough Bellatrix,” Tom snaps. “It’s understandable. I still need to spread my influence where I can… Recruitment in Hogwarts hasn’t started yet. Dumbledore is still wary of me.”

“Those children would have to be idiots not to follow you,” Bellatrix croons.

“In any case, I called you all here to give you new assignments. We need to spread our group’s message where we can before we begin our movement. Dolohov, you—”

“Whoa there!” Something crashes into Tom, tipping the table over with a splatter.

“My drink…!” Dolohov mourns, having ordered another round.

“What’s the meaning of this! Apologize to my L—to Riddle, right now!” Bellatrix pulls out her wand.

“Put that away, we can talk through this,” a woman with red hair, Molly Weasley scowls.
“Has anyone seen a lost flying car?!” her husband wanders in, nearly walking into a pole. “Oh hello! Uh, tough day?"

“None of your business, Weasel! Now, you, half-breed, apologize or speak to my stunner!”

“Calm your hair down!” the interloper holds up his large hands. “I meant no harm, uh, Riddle?!” The giant, no, half-giant, blinks in alarm. “Oh Merlin! I’m very very sorry, Riddle. I was in a rush to get a drink and some food for me animals, I’ve got a big shipment of creatures to bring in for Kettleburn’s class and—"

“Hagrid,” Tom stands up calmly. “I see you kept that animal hoarding hobby of yours. What is it? More acromantulas?"

Immediately, Hagrid’s face turns boiling red. “Now listen here, Riddle, Aragog meant no harm and you know it! He wouldn’t hurt nobody, he just wanted to live but you—"

“Wild creatures like that don’t have feelings. They feed. They breathe. They die. Simple as that. If Aragog had ended up attacking your friend…"

“H-he wouldn’t have h-hurt Harry…"

Seeing Hagrid tremble, Tom scoffs. If it were up to him, people like Hagrid wouldn’t be allowed to have wands let alone be in a magical school.

“Um. I’m awfully confused. What do giant magical spiders have to do with my car?"

“Oh, Arthur, they’re not talking about your blasted car! Hagrid here knocked over their table and—"

“Acromantula?!” another patron, the excitable minister of dark artifacts, squeaks. “Where?! When?! How?!"

“What is going on in my bar?! Who kicked over my table?!" Rosmerta walks in from the kitchen.

“Let me stun him, my Lord,” Bellatrix murmurs, “it will be quick and we can leave.”

“Bellatrix,” Tom’s going to get a migraine, “I told you ‘no’."

“Can I get another drink?” Dolohov mutters to Carrow.

“Maybe we should go…"

“Oh no, you don’t,” Rosmerta storms over, “Who’s going to pay for my damages?!"

“Merlin, just use a reparo charm, there, all better—"

“That’s not the issue here, Avery!” Rosmerta pushes past Tom.

“That’s it!” Bellatrix shrieks, and before Tom can stop her, she tugs Rosmerta by the wrist and fires a stunner.

“I’m out,” Dolohov snatches the nearest pint and apparates away. Coward.

“I knew we shouldn’t have brought her,” Carrow moans as Rosmerta and Bellatrix start firing spells back and forth, smashing tables and mugs alike.

“Good Merlin, duck, Arthur, duck!” Molly Weasley pulls her husband down.
“Me animals!” Hagrid cries, running out the door to the outrageously large caravan parked outside.

“Leave, now,” Tom hisses to Avery and Carrow, “We’ll regroup later.”

The two apparate straight away, leaving Tom to duck and crawl out of the pub to the street. If Hogwarts wasn’t apparition-proof, Tom would vanish too. He scowls at the waste of time. He’ll have to contact Crouch and demand he make Hagrid disappear into Azkaban where he belongs…

“Now, calm down, Lulu, girl, don’t make any sudden movements,” he hears when he gets outside. “What?! No, don’t bite, stop, stop!”

Headlights flash up above them and to Tom’s horror, a giant blue Angela Ford car swoops down, honking as loudly as a gaggle of geese and crashes into Hagrid’s caravan of animals.

Damn Arthur Weasley, Tom thinks as he summons up shields to protect him from the stampede of frantic nifflers and fire camels. The car roars loudly in a combination of honks and growls. Trust that idiotic Arthur Weasley to create an artificially intelligent car and set it loose on the masses.

“Don’t touch my Lulu!” Hagrid jumps on the front of the car, only to be thrown through the windows of Zonkos Joke Shop.

Tom narrows his eyes, a blasting hex on the tip of his tongue when suddenly—

A llama, an actual llama, with a sparkly orange bowtie reading *Lulu*, jumps from the broken caravan and jumps over Tom’s shield charm, landing on his head.

Tom topples over, feels his bones crack, feels the damned llama trotting away as his wands lands away in the dirt.

No, Tom thinks, no, no, no, no. This can’t be happening. This can’t be.

But it is. The Ford Angela lets out a loud engine roar, turning up its speed, rushing towards him.

What did Potter say before?

(*Riddle’s going to die a tragic death via car crash because of a llama, professor, I don’t think we can be friends.*)

The headlights fill all of Tom’s vision until he sees nothing but a stabbing, all encompassing light. He thinks of the world he will never rule. He thinks of the books he’ll never read, all the knowledge he’ll never know.

Lord Voldemort dead before he can even be born.

“No!” Tom yells, clawing at the ground, trying to force his body to *move*, damn it, he’s not ordinary, he’s not *human*, he can’t die, he has a horcrux, but, but, but—

“*Bombarda!*” Tom hears someone roar and suddenly, Tom’s pushed to the side, a warmth curled all over him and Tom sees brilliant, lightning-green eyes.

“Are you alright?!”

Tom’s jaw drops. “Potter—”

“Are you alright?!” those hands cling tighter, those tears fall faster.
Tears have always made humans weak, that’s what Tom thought. But here, crying furiously for him, Potter looks absolutely ethereal.

“…You’re a seer,” Tom says instead.

Potter goes very still.

“This whole time, you were a seer.”
Thank you so much for the wonderful feedback! I like to write this when I'm feeling silly, and this week I've been pumped up for this fic.

Potter drops his hands immediately and stands up. “Nope. You didn’t see anything. There was no future seeing here. Nope. Okay, you’re alive, the rampaging car is blown up, and I’m going to go back to my office to knit cute little hats for my students, goodbye.”

Tom grabs Potter’s sleeve and fixes him in place.

“Will you really leave a helpless victim here with broken bones?”

Potter looks away. “You’re hardly helpless.”

Tom wants those eyes back on him. “Your prediction says otherwise.”

“Of for—” Potter scowls, an alien expression on his usual face, “nowhere did I say that you would be helpless! Now let me go, I’ve got tests to grade.”

“You don’t assign tests.”

“How would you know? You moved out!”

“I listen to student chatter. Quite useful.”

“You must be fine. How you’re still so eloquent with all that pain, I have no idea.”

“Liar, you knew this would happen.”

Potter turns back to the distance. “Oh look! It’s a healer! Well, I’ll leave you in better hands than mine now—”

He tugs his sleeve away.

The loss of contact makes Tom think of a smaller Potter flinching away from everything after the Incident, walking away from Tom. No. His younger self was blind to Potter’s potential use. Never again. Tom grabs Potter, mutters the first wandless spell he can think of and—

Potter yelps.

“Seriously, Riddle?! You put a sticking charm between our hands?!” Potter waves their intertwined hands in the air, “Are you five?!”

Considering Potter regularly watches children’s cartoons, eats sugary cereal, and is currently wearing a sweater of a bear named Pooh, Tom would argue that Potter is the five year old.

“You’re not leaving until I get confirmation—”
“I’m not a seer—”

“A truthful one—”

“Just the truth that you want—”

“And you give me a prophecy.”

Potter gapes at him.

“Oh my god. Tom. Riddle. Whatever name you prefer. I can’t just tell prophecies. It doesn’t work like that!”

“So you admit you’re a seer.”

“I. What. You. Urgh!” Potter’s hair flies in disarray. It’s oddly refreshing to see him this frustrated. “No, I don’t! This is just an oddly specific coincidence”

Tom narrows his eyes. “I don’t believe in coincidence.”

Potter opens his mouth. Closes it. Opens it again. Closes it. Then takes a deep breath.

“Undo the sticking charm.”

“No.”

“Riddle, I swear—”

“Undo it yourself then.”

“We both know that your magic’s more powerful,” but the words feel empty, now, to Tom.

“Do we?”

Slowly, Potter looks at their stuck hands in contemplation.

“...No. I suppose we don’t,” he admits and Tom wants to bask in triumph. This is the Potter he wants to see, this is the Potter who will give him an answer, finally—

“Is that my car?!” Arthur Weasley shouts, running frantically to the metal heap burning happily in the middle of the road. “Bessie! Who did this to you?!"

Crowds of students and visitors begin to gather around the wreckage. A few begin gesturing wildly to the nifflers chasing witches out of a clothing store and to the crazed llama terrorizing Zonko’s. Hagrid, unfortunately, has not been trampled yet and seems to be trying to tame the beast again. But other residents and students begin to point at Tom and Potter, gasping in panic at their positions.

“Professor! What happened?! Should I call a healer?!” Granger asks.

Aurors begin appearing before Potter or Tom can reply. The aurors immediately begin rounding up the animals and interviewing witnesses. They drag Bellatrix and Madame Rosmerta out of the pub, growling about pressing charges for public disturbance.

“I know nothing,” Potter says quickly, upon spotting the head auror at the scene, Regulus Black. “Well then, Mr. Granger, I should get going…”
Regulus Black moves through the crowd, likely watching for suspicious behavior, when his eyes meet Tom’s with disinterest. Slowly, Regulus Black turns his head and realizes just who Tom is holding on to.

His face twists. “Riddle, what are you doing to my godson.”

Godson. Tom files that information away in his head. Strange for Regulus Black to adopt that title when it belongs to Sirius Black…

“OkayloveyoubyeRegulus,” Potter waves both hands, apparating away.

“Wait!” Tom grasps at the air, alone with a silently fuming Regulus Black and confused Granger.

Only later, after being interrogated by Black (“Put your filthy purist hands on my godson again and they will never find your body.” A weak threat, as if Tom would be interested in such things) and patched up by Madame Pomphrey, Tom starts to laugh.

Potter broke out of that sticking charm completely wandless.

“Tom!” Potter practically squeaks when Tom walks into his office. “Um, what are you doing here?”

Walking past him to the atrocious pikachu beanie-chair, Tom deshrinks the suitcase from his pocket and begins emptying it. “I’m moving back in. My name is still engraved on the door outside after all.”

Indeed, true. Dumbledore found an obnoxiously sparkly plaque reading Professors Potter & Riddle with little heart engravings surrounding it. (Unbeknownst to Tom, this is how the Tomarry trend emerged.)

Potter’s jaw drops. His paper cranes tweet worriedly into his ear. “But… you hate sharing your space.”

“I won’t be. I’ll take the bedroom back upstairs, unless you foresee a problem with this future arrangement.”

Potter and all his little cranes back away. “Did you just… try to pun?”

Tom pauses. “You make ridiculously silly prophecies every day and clever word play bother you?”

“So cringeworthy,” Potter wobbles on his feet, deciding to be unnecessarily dramatic, “I can’t even… I need to sit down…”

“Surely you foresaw this.”

Potter groans, deciding to sit right on the middle of the floor. “I’m too tired for this. Just… do me a favour and read a Divination textbook, Tom. Please. For both my sanity and yours.”

“Divination is useless if I have a real seer as my roommate.”

“Nooooooooooo…” Potter buries his face against the carpet. “Just no, Riddle, no…”

This is the moment Nagini slithers in, and hisses, [What did you do to my Green Eyes?! He looks broken!]
Tom smirks. *I’m getting confirmation.*

If Nagini were a cat, she’d bristle. *This is not asking. I told you to ask him.*

As usual, Tom ignores her.

*Fine! Don’t answer me! I refuse to help when Green Eyes rejects you! I’ll run away and live in his suitcase!*

Angrily, Nagini curls up next to Potter and tries to comfort him with promises of revenge that Potter would never understand.

At breakfast, each table becomes a sea of Team Tomarry badges. Even Dumbledore has one, pinned to his beard.

“We’ve resolved our differences,” Tom grits out, if only to get rid of the terribly spelled names.

“That’s a lie,” Potter deadpans, robotically eating his cocoa puffs.

“Yes, I know,” Dumbledore hums, even after Potter shoots him a betrayed look. “Hence the badge.”

Tom frowns. Is the term Tomarry a play on both his and Potter’s names? A desire to see them in an amicable working relationship again?

Chang snorts behind him. “You don’t want to know, Riddle.”

Tom feels a stab of annoyance that he shapes into a pleasant smile. “Is this matter worth investigating, Potter?”

“I will say nothing, and keep enjoying my cereal. Mmm. Sugar,” Potter stuffs his face.

Fine. Tom will get Potter to say another prophecy. It only takes time.

“Ah, I see that the United States of America has officially sworn in a buffoon for their president, I wonder what will happen to the economy and population—”

Potter blanches. “Ugh. Don’t talk to me about that man. He’s terrible. He’s going to do terrible things and we can’t even stop him because we’re British and the muggle British government is just as terrible.”

“Is that a prophecy?”

Potter throws his pillow at him.

“It’s called political opinion! O-pin-ion!”

Doesn’t stop Tom from writing it down.

“One day Snape’s going to self-combust because of all the bitter hatred inside him,” Potter jokes to Chang when they walk down the corridor.
“Will that be from magical causes or random accident?”

“Wha—Tom, stop writing that down, it was a joke, not everything I say is the future!”

By Monday, Potter has stress-baked so much that their shared office might flood from the stacks of biscuits and macaroons.

“You need to stop,” Potter points his iced whisk at Tom when he vanishes them all.

“Your pastries will be safe in the kitchens—”

“No, not the vanishing. You do that. I meant, this whole… ‘are you a seer’ thing! I’m not a seer. You can’t prove it.”

Tom narrows his eyes.

Watch me, he thinks.

When his Gryffindor and Hufflepuff fifth years walk into his Wednesday DADA classroom, some of them have to walk out and recheck the plaque on the door.

“Er… this is DADA, right?” one student asks tentatively.

“Indeed, Ms. Johnson. Take your seat.”

“No offense, Professor, but why are there murky glass jars on all of our desks?” Katie Bell asks.

“Pickled eggplants,” Tom replies. “Just in case Professor Potter’s prophecy from earlier comes true. I would shrink and carry them with you at all times.”

The class goes silent.

“No—”

“Way—” the Weasley twins chorus.

“I can’t—”

“—Believe—”

“—this is happening!”

Angelina Johnson, grinning from ear to ear, leans back in her chair and says, “See? It’s canon, bitches.”

“Riddle!” Potter yanks him into an empty classroom. “Why are you giving everyone pickled eggplants?!”

“Well,” Tom feigns innocence, “you did make that prophecy about flesh eating flamingos, I thought —”
“No, damn it, I just made that up to mess with you!”

“So you create false prophecies to hide your true seer capabilities—”

Potter flinches. “Riddle stop. I’m not a seer. I made it up.”

Tom doesn’t understand. “That doesn’t make sense. The llama—”

“Was an accident!”

“But it came true! It means something, all of it; you have to be a seer, that’s the only logical explanation—”

“Why does everything have to make sense?! Follow some greater meaning?! Sometimes,” Potter steps forward, eyes wild and direct and burning, “things happen! They just do, even if we can’t understand them… and all we can do is get up and decide what to do next.”

Tom shakes his head. “No.” He can’t believe that. He’s meant to be the greatest wizard who ever lived. He can feel it. But if he could find out who his enemies are before they appear, he could rise up so easily, so quickly…

Death wouldn’t be a problem.

“You control your own destiny, Tom,” Potter’s voice brings him back down to reality. “Stop looking for futures that don’t exist yet.”

Not when Tom knows there are ways to destroy horcruxes, not when there are still things Tom can’t control like sortings and stubborn, stubborn chance. The dark lord Voldemort killed because of a random llama escape. That’s what his legacy would have become if Potter had not interfered.

Tom clenches his fists.

“Not everything can be controlled.”

“Not everything is meant to be,” Potter counters. “You didn’t die, after all.”

Tom feels his throat go dry. “Are you admitting to it then? That it was a real prophecy?”

Seconds pass. Quietly, Potter deflates, looking worn as ragged cloth trampled in mud. He refuses to look at Tom.

“…It’s like I said to you before, prophecies can be self-fulfilling things. Sometimes, it’s best not to know.”
Sorry for the late update everyone! I was busy with student teaching, and then I got distracted by YOI and KHR. This chapter was a bit difficult for me to write since I normally use this story as stress relief to make me laugh but this is a more serious chapter, just to warn you all :)  

Dumbledore takes the hat off Tom’s head just as students start to cry out in shock.

“Not to worry everyone,” Dumbledore says calmly, “Just a minor influx of magic that happens once every hundred years. One *reparo* spell,” he waves his wand, enveloping all the glass shards back together, whole, “and we’ll be right as rain.”

“Influx of magic?!” Longbottom looks ready to drop dead at any moment. Around him several other first years begin to shout too.

So much for calming the masses. Tom glares at the smirking hat, at Dumbledore, at everyone gossiping down below in futile panic. They all point at Tom and whisper about unnatural magic (like the orphanage), they all stare at him in awe or fear.

“Rookwood, Adams,” Dumbledore tries to move on with the sorting, despite the growing whispers. No one will shut up. Whispers climbing on top of whispers and not a soul with the thought to think and stay silent, not a soul but Potter.

Potter is like an unnoticeable breed of plant, being strangled by the louder weeds surrounding him. Tom can barely see Potter’s face, only the top of his head hidden behind taller shoulders of older students.

Tom stares at him regardless, his mirror, trying to will Potter to stare back. But Potter doesn’t. Tom resists the urge to lash out with magic. Aren’t mirror images supposed to be one and the same? Shouldn’t they stare back at their originals? They have to. It’s the law of reflection, one that Potter is continuously ignoring. *Look at me*, Tom thinks, *show me that you’re special too.*

And yet, Potter refuses. No, Potter doesn’t even acknowledge Tom’s existence. His little head is bowed down, transfixed on the cutlery, as if it holds greater magic than Tom could ever possess.

Dumbledore gently taps Tom’s shoulder and that’s when Tom moves off the stool.

Fine. Tom grits his teeth and smooths out his expression. He descends down the steps, head held high, gaze fixed above them all. He’s better than this. All of it.

Very quickly, Tom establishes himself as the top student of all four houses. He smiles at the right people, charms all his professors (Dumbledore doesn’t count), and has his housemates listening to his every beck and call. Even if the rest of the student populace glances at him in worry or fear from the sorting incident, Tom quickly charms them over with his act. It’s an interesting role to play, very different from the quiet menacing dictator he plays at the orphanage, but even with all the attention
he receives from the student body, his mirror refuses to look back.

Harry Potter, despite core similarities, seems to be his opposite. His grades are average. Tom heard that Potter made a cauldron explode in potions (though he suspects Longbottom to be the culprit there.) His spells are erratic, either too powerful or too weak. He doesn’t seem particularly skilled in any subject and he’s too quiet, only hanging around Longbottom when they share classes or listening to the older students in Gryffindor.

He doesn’t actively seek Tom out, he doesn’t sing Tom’s praises like everyone else. He shows the same level of courtesy to Tom as he does to everyone else. As if Tom is just as average as the rest of the student body here.

At that thought, the quill in Tom’s hand snaps and burns up into tiny pieces of ash.

Potter’s the one who’s average, the one who fails to live up to his full potential as Tom’s mirror image, not Tom. And for that, Tom will not forgive him. Tom will not disgrace himself to be the one who seeks Potter out first.

For a long time, they barely acknowledge each other, pretending to be strangers, becoming strangers. Tom almost forgets that he felt something like a connection to this quiet Gryffindor boy.

Almost.

But on Halloween, Tom runs into Potter by the top of the staircase. If he were superstitious, he would call Potter his ghost instead of his mirror image, but Tom has only ever believed in himself as a greater power.

“Hello Tom,” Potter whispers, ruining Tom’s plan to ignore his existence as Potter has ignored his. Tom only nods. For some reason, he doesn’t move downstairs. He finds himself lingering by Potter. Waiting. His gaze lingers on Potter’s face, on the baggy eyes and thinner form.

“You should be at the feast,” Tom says without thinking.

“So should you.”

Tom doesn’t reply to that. They stand in silence for a minute longer, staring at each other as if they could be mirror images, only opposite. Tom’s tie is green while Potter’s is red. Potter wears glasses, Tom does not. Potter looks ready to fall over while Tom has gained a healthier weight over the past two months.

“…I am not fond of this holiday.” Too noisy. Too sweet. Tom would rather read up on Samhain rituals and wizarding culture instead of this bastardization of the day of souls.

Potter’s lips twitch up. “Another thing we have in common.”

Tom only shrugs. Another reason to curse that hat for putting Potter in another house. Another reason to detest Potter for not seeking Tom out.

“My parents died today, when I was just a year old,” Potter whispers, staring straight ahead at the suits of armor lining the walls.
The sudden topic makes Tom go still. Is Potter opening up to him? Seeking comfort? For some reason, Tom feels triumphant, as if he’s somehow won a complex game against his mirror.

“I watched them die,” Potter continues, his gaze transfixed on another time, elsewhere, “I shouldn’t remember… but I do. Sometimes, I hear my mother screaming at him to let me go…”

Tom grabs that information hungrily. “Who…?”

Potter’s gaze flickers to Tom and back to the armor. “I don’t know sometimes, even though I saw it all.”

Well, Tom thinks, Potter was one year old.

“Have you asked anyone? Surely there was an investigation…”

But Potter doesn’t reply.

This situation requires delicacy, a comforting tone. Tom should play the kind friend, the pillar of comfort, but all he wants to do is hiss look at me, to drag Potter back to the present.

“It won’t matter. The details won’t make sense to me. I’ll get them confused with the others. Halloween almost makes me so confused…” Potter frowns, rubbing at his forehead. “You… Are you really here, right now, Tom? Are you real?”

Tom frowns, wondering if Potter is ill. Perhaps he should coax the boy into the hospital wing… possibly Potter ate something contaminated early this morning.

“I am just as real as you are. If you want, you can take my hand.” Tom will lead him to Madam Pomphrey.

“Oh… but you’re here with me…” Potter mumbles as Tom tugs him towards the first step on the staircase, “when you should hate me… You must be so upset that I’m avoiding you. But it’s hard to look at you. You remind me of my parents…”

Tom stops. “How do I remind you of your parents?” Are he and Harry actually related? Was Tom abandoned while the Potter’s extended family only kept Harry? Kept the more human mirror?

“You’re still Tom Riddle, no matter what time you’re in, aren’t you?” Potter looks at the paintings above them, his gaze blank and elsewhere. Tom wants to shake him.

He almost does when—

“How does Potter know that? Tom tries to move Potter’s head towards him, but that gaze keeps looking elsewhere…”

“Do you steal trophies from the other children, Tom?”

“What? That’s ridiculous! Tom would never be that obvious with his revenge on Billy. “Potter—”

“Do you think of killing them in their sleep?”

“Stop it—”

“When you walk these halls, do you have dreams of everyone submitting to you and fearing your
name?"

“I said *stop it!*"

Tom pushes him. Then regrets it as he watches his mirror image fall backwards with a twisted smile on his face, watches his mirror twist his body forwards, as if to embrace the fall.

“*STOP IT!*"

Tom’s magic tries to catch him, tries to stall the damage, but Potter’s forehead still manages to hit the edge of the railing in a startling crack, and then there’s blood, blood, blood, bleeding over blank green eyes…

“Potter!” Tom goes to him, tries to stop the bleeding, only to get red stains over his robes. “*Harry!*” He can’t think, can’t help but think of seeing Potter fall with a smile as if Tom had punched his own mirror and laughed over the cracked shards.

He needs to think, needs to find—

Tom gathers Potter up in his arms, rushes to the hospital wing, ignores Madam Pomphrey’s bewildered gasp.

“Help him,” Tom orders, in a tone he will one day use on his future followers. “Get rid of the blood.”

*But Tom,* a voice like Potter’s seems to echo in his head, *red is your colour.*
Tom stares at Potter for several moments, trying to process the implications of what he heard. The last time Tom heard Potter mention that prophecies can be self-fulfilling, he had been posing as a snake…

“You know that I am an animagus.”

“It was pretty obvious. You have the same eyes as a snake. Besides, you didn’t try to bite me,” Potter shrugs. “Most snakes would be pretty hostile to be caught by a human. Except Nagini, she’s a cutie.”

Tom isn’t sure if he wants to throttle Potter first or tie him down to demand more answers. No witch or wizard could just guess someone is an animagus because they have the same eyes. It’s preposterous! Potter is a seer, end of story.

“You made me wear a sneater.”

Potter’s face brightens. “Rainbow spots suit you!”

“You cradled me in your arms and then cooed about how adorable I would look in a purple top hat.”

“But you’re so good looking as a snake!”

Instead of cursing Potter as he so dearly wishes, Tom points at him and hisses, “I know what you’re trying to do! You’re attempting to distract me with this pretense of idiocy so I won’t question you about your Sight, but I know you, damn what Dumbledore says, I know you better than I know myself. I will make you tell me the truth, Potter, if it’s the last thing I do!”

Then, not because Tom is petty, but to weaken Potter’s resolve, he conjures up some pickled eggplants and levitates them into Potter’s face.

Unfortunately, when Tom wakes up to discover his bed has turned into a literal giant marshmallow that has stickily melted into his skin and pyjamas, the eggplant attack became (what Potter interprets as) an invitation to a prank war.

Tom narrows his eyes. While normally he wouldn’t partake in such activities (he has a reputation to maintain), he needs to make Potter crack.

But first, he burns the monstrous marshmallow bed and cleans up his appearance. Let the trash burn where it belongs.
At lunch, Potter bursts through the doors, wearing a white-button down shirt and tie (to the horror of many students, who have started panicking about the apocalypse.)

“Tom!” Potter yells, waving several cut-up sweaters in the air. They look like ruined flags advertising yet another muggle zombie apocalypse movie. “Did you do this?!”

“Oh my,” Tom practices his best sincere expression. “Are those claw marks? Are you certain that your familiar didn’t decide to ruin your… unique… wardrobe?” He stares at how well-fitted the button-down shirt is. “You should dress this way more often. You actually look presentable.”

“That’s not the point! This is my life’s work! Do you know how many hours I spend knitting these?!” Ah, so Potter is the one Tom has to murder for creating these colourful monstrosities. If only Tom knew a way to murder someone twice and bring them back to life again. He doesn’t want to imagine someone like Potter with a horcrux. “I was going to sell them on Etsy—”

“No one would buy them,” Tom mutters.

“I would!” Flitwick says unhelpfully.

“—and now I have to start all over again! _Hours of work_! I can’t even use _reparo_ on them because of this damn anti-reparo ward on them, which I _know_ you did, only you’re smart enough to cast wards this strong! What is wrong with you?!”

“I had no part in this.”

Potter narrows his eyes. “You want a prophecy, Tom? I’ll give _prophecies_.”

He stomps away, a trail of burned yarn following him. Tom allows himself to smile. Neither of them notice the Weasley twins giving each other mischievous grins as an idea occurs to them… After all, if their beloved (and not so beloved) professors are involved in prank wars, why can’t they…?

When Tom goes to his afternoon class, he notices a terribly drawn poster on his door. _Professor Riddle’s future_, is written at the bottom of the poster, while the center features a horrific looking snake-like man with blood red eyes and death-white skin. Tom scoffs at Potter’s trivial creativity and tears the poster down.

Only to find another poster underneath, this time of a llama dancing on a marshmallow.

Tom narrows his eyes and burns that poster.

Another poster (this one of the snake-man fighting an army of flamingoes) appears instead.

His students, all waiting behind him to get into the classroom, start to murmur to each other in worry.

“Um, Professor?” the student Tom recalls being named Thanh Tran says, “Why do you keep burning that dueling club poster? Does it have the wrong date on it?”

Tom screams internally in rage. “Yes,” Tom grits his teeth, leaving the snakeman-and-flamingoes poster in place, “I will have to discuss this… _dueling club_ with Professor Potter later at the staff meeting tonight. Come in, we’ll be learning about cutting hexes today.”

Tran nods nervously, ducking close to her friends, but Tom ignores her.
How dare Potter make a fool of him, charming that poster so only Tom can see the insulting results!

“How dare Potter make a fool of him, charming that poster so only Tom can see the insulting results!”

“Potter,” Tom seethes, dumping the latest poster in front of him. “What is this.”

“Hm?” Potter looks up from his knitting frenzy, bags under his eyes. Tom wonders if he even bothered teaching his class today or made them pretend to be trees again as an excuse to keep knitting. The reborn llama sweater judgingly stares at Tom. “Oh. That. It’s your future.”

Tom twitches. “Didn’t you mention that the flamingoes were a false prophecy?”

Potter gasps scandalously. “Did I say that? I meant that they’re real. Because that’s what you want, right? Real prophecies so you can be paranoid for the rest of your life and keep looking over your shoulder for anything pink until you accidentally curse a poor civilian who just wanted to wear pink because it’s their favourite colour.”

Tom narrows his eyes. “That was oddly specific.”

Potter smiles angelically. “You go bald too.”

“I do not—!”

“What a lovely impressionist painting!” Flitwick nods when he sees the atrocious snakeman-and-flamingoes poster.

Tom crumples it up and throws it into Potter’s bag, much to Flitwick’s dismay.

“Shall we begin our staff meeting?” Dumbledore twinkles at the head of the table, likely fully aware of what he’s interrupting.

Tom frowns, taking his seat next to Potter and kicking away the stray pieces of yarn on his portion of the table, while Flitwick sits next to him. The rest of the staff settle in and look expectedly at Dumbledore for the meeting’s agenda.

“As usual,” Dumbledore claps his hands together, “we’ll use the first half hour to address any concerns you have about our students. Are there any students you’ve noticed struggling, that may need extra assistance?”

Surprisingly, Potter raises his hand. “One of the transfer students, Thanh Tran, seems to be having trouble adjusting to the culture here. She speaks very fluent English, but I think she has trouble with the advanced material and she’s too shy to ask for help. Do you think we could assign her a tutor to help her with her English?”

Tom stares at Potter in bewilderment. It never occurred to Tom that Tran might have difficulties with the written material, she seemed well-adjusted in public… Perhaps this is another sign of Potter’s Sight?

“Yes,” McGonagall nods, “I noticed this as well. I was just about to bring it up.”

Sprout, Flitwick, and Chang nod in agreement.

Tom fights back a frown. How could he not notice what his colleagues have? He’s supposed to be the Dark Lord, to be a better teacher than those muggles ones that scorned him for his ‘smart mouth.’ If a traitor ever sneaks into his ranks, how will he spot the damn mole if he’s blind without
legitimacy?

He feels Potter nudge him. “Don’t feel bad,” he whispers, as one of his paper cranes settles on Tom’s shoulder, “you were preoccupied at the time, and you haven’t seen the Third Year Ravenclaws that often yet.”

Tom looks away but he doesn’t brush off the little crane. Preoccupied he may have been, with the meeting at Hogsmeade, but he will not make the same mistake twice. He will be more aware of his student’s struggles.

“If Ms. Tran passed her English proficiency test when her family immigrated here then I see no reason why we should give her special treatment. She performs as average as the rest of her house in potions, I have not seen a difference in her skill compared to the rest of the uneducated juveniles,” Snape sneers.

For a moment, Tom doesn’t see Snape. He sees every muggle teacher he ever had at that blasted orphanage, sees how they accused him of cheating because he knew all the answers he could possibly read from their tiny library. He sees every time he was limited by money and status, unable to grow from the muggle education system, unable to thrive.

Education should cultivate, should coax each student to their greatest potential and towards the best possible path. Snape isn’t a cultivator. No, Tom remembers how Snape stamped away any of Potter and Longbottom’s potential for potions. Snape is a weed.

“Is it really fair to treat all of our students ‘the same’ when they may come from different backgrounds, and thus, have different disadvantages?” Tom says all too calmly before Potter or McGonagall have a chance to argue. “As educators, should we not make sure that our classes have the same basic background knowledge so they can truly benefit from our lessons? Wouldn’t that be truly making every student ‘equal’?

“I, for one, would rather teach a class that is willing to learn because they know the basics, rather than wasting my time teaching something they cannot understand because they haven’t been given the chance to yet. We will never truly know our students’ full potential if we limit them from the beginning, don’t you agree, Severus?”

He holds Snape’s gaze and smirks when Snape’s face twists in loathing.

Dumbledore’s claps interrupt the argument. “Well said, Tom, well said. I have to say, I wasn’t expecting such a passionate rebuttal, but I agree. We will find a tutor from Ravenclaw for Ms. Tran and assign them to her right away. Filius, will you give me a list of suitable candidates?”

“Oh, yes, Albus! Right away!” Flitwick starts scribbling into a notebook.

Snape doesn’t stop glaring but Tom doesn’t give him the satisfaction of continuing their staring-match. He leans back in his seat instead and glances over at Potter’s work. Only to catch Potter’s wide eyes.

“What is it,” Tom hisses.

“Nothing, nothing,” Potter starts to smile. “I’m just impressed, that’s all. That was really cool of you.”

Resentment begins to pool in Tom’s stomach. “Contrary to whatever you believe of me,” he hisses, “I do care for my students’ growth.”
“I know,” Potter says warmly, “you’ve always been a good teacher. I’ve always believed in that.”

Tom… doesn’t know what to say to that face. His followers have looked at him with awe and fear, the respect given to their superiors. Classmates have always looked at him in admiration. But Potter’s eyes, right now, they’re… they’re fond. He doesn’t look like an idiot, for once, he looks more like a teacher and a…

At that moment, Tom remembers why he’s avoided Potter for so long. He turns attention back to the meeting, feeling like someone who has looked too closely at the sun.

“…Oh! One last item before we retire… remember that we have a social happening tomorrow in the Great Hall at seven in the evening. It’s our annual Founders Celebration.”

Several of the teachers (specifically Madam Hooch and Chang) groan.

“Do we have to go, Albus? I can’t stand another year of standing around entertaining politicians and pretending that I agree with their opinions. Let’s do a—what do muggles do to raise funds in America? Oh yes—a bake sale instead!” Hooch insists.

“Unfortunately, our school’s budget greatly depends on the generosity of our sponsors… even the less agreeable ones. I trust you all have research to impress them. And you never know, this year’s celebration may be more entertaining than the last!”

“I hope there’s vodka,” Hooch tugs Chang towards the doors. “Lots of vodka.”

“There, there,” Chang pats her back.

Tom, unlike the others, is looking forward to this opportunity to make connections. Besides, he has a year’s worth of research on magical creatures and artifacts from his time abroad to talk about. He’s also interested to know what his fellow colleague’s areas of research will be. Speaking of colleagues…

“Are you going to set up a booth for palm reading then?” he asks Potter.

“Nah. I might hand out muffins. They’ll turn different colours based on people’s emotions. Mood muffins.”

“That is the worst idea I have ever heard,” Tom grimaces, wondering who in their right minds would each a substance that could change from green to purple. Then again, the wizarding world is unfortunately filled with wastes of innovation. How Potter can throw away his potential on such things baffles Tom… “About that poster—”

“Getting along well, I see!” Dumbledore pops up in between them. Urgh.

“No,” Potter frowns at his yarn.

“Yes,” Tom kicks away the bag with the crumpled poster. Merlin knows what Dumbledore would see instead of the snakeman-and-flamingoes image.

“Excellent news,” Dumbledore beams, ignoring Potter’s reply for once. “Then your plans to run the dueling club together will still proceed?”

“What.” Potter’s knitting needles clatter to the floor, nearly hitting several panicked paper cranes.
“The dueling club! I was informed by many excited students that you two would be running it together next week!”

“Oh really…” Potter glares at Tom.

“Well, you did advertise the date on that lovely poster you created,” Tom keeps his face blank.

“Wonderful! I look forward to the first meeting! I’ll be there to cheer you two on!” Dumbledore skips away.

“Aren’t you pleased we’ll be spending more time together, partner, because of your brilliant idea.” Potter throws the poster back at Tom’s face.

When they return to their office together, Tom spots Tran walking by herself in the corridor. “Ms. Tran,” Tom calls out, seeing her jump in surprise.

She looks at him fearfully.

“I must apologize for the abrupt way I treated you last week. I hope you can forgive me. If you still require help on the material in class, my office is typically open after dinner for two hours. If those times don’t fit into your schedule, we can arrange another appointment.”

Tran’s eyes widen before she starts bowing her head frantically. “Oh you don’t have to make a fuss about me, Professor, I’ll reread the textbook—”

“I insist,” Tom says firmly.

Slowly, Tran nods. “Um. Alright. Can I come in the day after tomorrow?”

“Just let me know the hour.”

After that conversation, Tom turns around to see Potter looking at him fondly again. He starts to wonder if all the times he obsessed over Potter being Dumbledore’s spy, Potter had been looking at him like… like that.

“I was merely correcting my mistake.”

“It was sweet,” Potter nods happily.

“I am not sweet.”

Potter laughs, and his laughter gives Tom the same symptoms as that strange fond smile. “You are! When you want to be. I like you best when you’re being a teacher. You’re not so insufferable then.”

Tom scowls, trying to chase away the strange feeling in his stomach. “You’d be less insufferable if you acted and dressed as professionally as you did at the meeting!”

Potter just looks at him in surprise again, that shade of green as piercing as death. “Yeah,” he admits, to Tom’s disbelief, “maybe I would be… but then the world would get too loud.”

He enters their office without giving Tom a chance to say a word.
A Duel

Chapter Notes

This chapter is so fluffy, I got cavities. Thanks for the wonderful feedback as always, I love you guys!

“We should create a lesson plan for our first Dueling Club meeting,” Tom dumps a roll of parchment on Potter’s hammock, making Potter fall on the floor. After Potter’s cryptic statements yesterday evening, Tom wants to limit the time spent with him this weekend. He’ll return to convincing Potter to reveal his secrets on Monday.

“Oh my god, a little warning, please?!” Potter scowls up at him with lopsided glasses and tousled hair. Even the paper cranes seem agitated, as they circle around Potter’s head in worry and some of them cheep at Tom in annoyance.

“The meeting is this Tuesday evening. We need to prepare.”

“Why not wing it?”

Tom quickly throws a quill at him.

“Ouch! Okay, okay, I’ll get to work. Just a moment,” Potter scowls, as Hedwig flies over and picks the quill from his tangled curls. The paper cranes fly up to sit on the quill, as if to prevent Tom from taking it. “What do we need to discuss? Or write down?”

“Have you never made a lesson plan before?”

“Well… not really.”

Tom stares, thinking of the countless hours he has put into planning and revising his own lessons so that they’re perfect and suitable for each class’s learning level. He had to create unique variations of lessons for different classes with different dynamics. If he didn’t, the classroom would be chaos. And yet here is Potter, laziness embodied, saying he’s never worked on lesson plans before. Tom wants to drop a building on him.

Potter shrugs. “I just pick three big ideas I want my classes to really know by the end of the year, and I let my lessons revolve around gradually understanding those big ideas. Sure, they learn specific skills like meditation or palm reading, but in the end I want them to get more out of Divination than just ‘Hey I know how to flub my way through a fake horoscope.’ So lessons are really fluid and spontaneous. Kind of like life, I guess. I just adjust them as I need to when I teach.”

“But what about assessment? Creating specific activities to help them focus in class?”

“Well, assessments and activities can change depending on my class’s mood, right? Sometimes they’re feeling too overworked from other essays so I get them to meditate or play monopoly. Other times, when they’re feeling more energetic, I try to throw in some of the deeper stuff. Like how would you convince a skeptic that your divination is legitimate while getting what you want.”

He almost dumps his parchment on Potter this time but he stops, remembering how Potter smiled at
him yesterday. For a moment, Tom considers the possibility that Potter is a fraud after all, using these very tricks on Tom. But Tom has spent the few months believing Potter to be Dumbledore’s spy when Potter can be annoyingly… genuine. Potter may be unconventional as a teacher, but he gets the job done. Tom may not agree with Potter’s methods but they have a certain… charm to them.

“Earth to Tom,” Potter starts waving his hand in front of his face. How can a person be so pale? It’s unhealthy, and are those bags under Potter’s eyes again…?

“What is it,” he steps back.

“Are you alright? Not feeling peakish, are you? Or maybe tiring in our prank war?” Potter grins. Then pauses. “This isn’t a prank, is it?”

“No,” Tom snaps to all four questions.

“Oh, then you must be feeling a bit intimidated by my teaching style. Don’t worry about it! You’re still a great teacher, you’re much more organized than I am. Sometimes I can’t remember what grades I’m supposed to give out, but you’ve got them categorized and filed and everything!” Potter nods vigorously. Normally he would look like an oversized turtle in his oversized sweaters, but dressed in that shirt and slacks, he actually seems intelligent.

And yet Tom can’t help but remember all the times Potter chased after missing papers stolen from his familiar Hedwig, as a way to get more owl treats. It wouldn’t be the first time Potter had to chase his familiar through the corridors to rescue a letter from his godfather or study notes.

His lips curl up. “Then I suppose I will take care of organizing club member names and sign-up sheets. You can…” Tom thinks back to the Divination lesson he observed long ago. His memories of Potter’s magical abilities back when they were in school are as hazy as anything else Potter-related before fifth year. “How proficient are you at dueling currently?”

Potter’s grin grows into a smirk. “Want a demonstration?”

“As in a practice duel?”

“Yup! We can use the room of requirement!”

A practice duel would be an excellent way to gauge Potter’s skills and to coax Potter into revealing any other hidden talents he may have. “Very well, we can start now.”

[Wait, wait!] Nagini slithers down the stairs. [I want to come too! I can be referee!]

Hedwig hoots in annoyance.

[Oh shut up, stupid pigeon. I can count much better than you can.]

That would be debatable. Nagini may be an intelligent magical breed of python but she still cannot master numbers larger than ten.

Hedwig scoffs, ruffling her feathers as if to shoo Nagini away.

[One day I will eat you and claim my rightful place by Green Eyes’ side, and then you will never insult me again, you feathered fiend. I am sure that your flesh is delicious indeed!] Nagini opens her mouth in a frightening gaze.

“Nagini!” Harry skips over, hugging her tightly, ignoring how Hedwig and the cranes try to pull him
away by the hair. “Did you want to come watch? You can keep score along with Hedwig, right?”

“I doubt your familiar will be much use in refereeing our match,” Tom cuts in, wanting to avoid another cooing session between Potter and their familiars. The owl and Nagini can be insufferable under Potter’s attention.

“Nonsense! Hedwig’s a smart girl, aren’t you?”

The owl puffs up her chest and agrees with a loud hoot.

“Then it’s settled. We should get going before the Weasley twins decide to boobytrap our door with rose petals and cupids.”

“Fine….” Tom stops. “Did you say *rose petals*?!”

The twins do, in fact, try to spell the door to start singing an annoying tune of *Can You Feel The Love Tonight* which Tom ends as soon as he steps out of his office. He makes sure to burn the roses and banish the cupids to a crisp and assigns the twins detention. Why the twins would pick such an ugly theme escapes Tom, but he’ll interrogate them on Friday…

(Unfortunately, Tom does not account for the conspiratorial grins the twins give each other behind his back, no, the prank has barely begun…)

“Can you stop *humming* that infernal song?” Tom grits his teeth, when he and Potter arrive at the Room of Requirement.

“But it’s a masterpiece!” Potter nods with Hedwig nestled on his head. “You should really listen to some Disney, Tom, I think a lot of the villain solos would suit you. *Those Poor Unfortunate Souls,*” he croons.

“Enough,” he detests music. Could never understand it though Potter seems to have a knack for it, his voice isn’t atrocious. Potter *did* join Flitwick’s small choir back in sixth year. “We’re here to duel, remember?”

“Got it, scoreboard please?” Potter asks the ceiling. Instantly, the room of requirement creates a low enough keyboard that an owl and a snake can write on. With a grin, Potter places some chalk in Hedwig’s claws and another piece in Nagini’s mouth. “Don’t eat it, okay?”

[Don’t worry, my Green Eyes, this writing stick tastes disgusting anyways.]

Hedwig huffs.

[I just know, alright?! I did not accidentally eat an entire box of these dusty things last month!]

That incident is the only reason Tom has banned chalk from their office. Nagini glares at him, as if daring him to admit that.

“So glad you two are working together to help us,” Potter pets both their heads, making both familiars glare at the other. “Alright! Time to show you my skills!”

Potter walks to the other side of the dueling arena, wand ready.

[Begin!] Nagini hisses, at the same time that Hedwig makes a stern hoot. Potter takes the owl’s hoot as a sign to start as he bows. Tom follows with his own bow and then they move.
Potter whips across the room like a hawk swooping in for its prey, the transformation so startling that Tom has no time to think. Potter aims for the offensive, firing consecutive disarming charms at Tom from different angles. Tom barely has time to form a shield around himself when Potter vaults overhead, as if he’s been a trained acrobat all his life, and manages to hit a red spark on Tom’s back as soon as he lands.

[One point for Green Eyes!] Nagini nearly swallows the chalk, as she scrapes the first point on the board. Hedwig hoots in approval.

Tom lashes out with a silent leg-locking curse, following with more bombardment hexes when Potter dodges each one as nimbly as ever.

“You’re fast,” Tom mutters, casting a few cutting hexes to see if Potter can dodge them while distracted by conversation.

Unfazed, though a little winded, Potter shrugs as he spins and ducks past each hex. “I’m out of practice.”

Tom jumps away from a shower of explosive bird-shaped tongues of fire, smirking when he sees how similar they are to the paper cranes. He throws up a great wave of *agumenti* which he transfigures into a light acid but Potter creates a whirlwind, blowing it back in Tom’s direction.

He vanishes the acid, deciding to transfigure a few stone giants to keep Potter busy. Then he rushes past the stone giants and begins shooting showers of red sparks, determined to hit Potter at least once.

Potter ducks and slides past the stone giants by dashing in between their legs and blasting them back at Tom. But this time, Tom decides to defend with a rather offensive wall of fire, driving the wall forwards towards Potter’s back.

“Nope,” Potter flips backwards, transfiguring the floor into damp sand and raising the sand up to smother the flames. “Not looking to be scorched today. Get enough of that when I bake.”

“Use a healing charm. The ones for burns are quite simple,” Tom throws a whip of lightning towards him.

Potter responds by changing the sand into a wall of rubber. “Not so great at healing spells. Can’t be as flawless as you, Riddle.”

“And yet your spells so far have been highly creative,” Tom cuts through the rubber.

“I did pay *some* attention to DADA and Transfigurations,” Potter uses a few more stunners.

“Yet your OWLs and NEWTs were average, if I remember correctly…” Cutting hex. Bombarda. Shield charm.

“I’ve always performed best in practice rather than theory.” Dodge, duck, roll.

“You always were rather flexible,” Tom throws another shower of red sparks before Potter can recover from dodging.

Hedwig gives an angry flap.

[One point for my master! I bet they’ll tie.] Hedwig bats her wings aggressively.
“Oi, pay attention, Riddle!” Potter hits Tom with an agamenti charm instead of a red spark.

Making a note to ban dessert from Nagini for a week, Tom responds with the most powerful (non-dark) spells he can think of.

Potter’s grin is elated and excited all at once, the kind of excitement that transforms Potter into a whole other person. Someone present, instead of adrift in a gaze lost far away. Tom finds himself reaching for it, sending spark after spark…

The scoreboard reads 3 to 3, and still, Tom and Potter are easily matched. They both collapse against the floor at the same time, ignoring the startled hisses and hoots of their familiars.

“If you… tag me with a spark… at this very moment… Potter… I will kill you,” Tom huffs between breaths, trying to recall the last time he felt this tired from a duel.

“As if… I would… cheat like that… I respect… you too much… to be satisfied… with a cheap win…” Potter half-laughes, half-gasps.

Tom wishes Potter would stop being so brutally honest.

“A tie then,” he changes the topic.

Potter’s laugh is answer enough.

Are you both dead? Can we stop keeping score? I feel ready to eat this pigeon.

Hedwig attempts to claw Nagini’s eyes out.

Do you want to die, bird?!

“Should we stop them?” Potter mumbles, looking content to lay on the floor forever.

“No… Let the best familiar win…” Tom could care less about their petty arguments.

“But they’re both awesome!”

Tom rolls his eyes, turning his head to look at Potter’s flushed face. “Your love for animals will never make sense to me.”

Says the person who buys Nagini’s favourite snacks every week,” Potter’s eyes brighten at the thought.

“If I didn’t, she would nag me until death. You’re lucky you don’t understand her, you wouldn’t find her nearly as charming then.”

Potter’s smile, if possible, widens. “Everyone has their charms. Even you.”

Tom swallows away the hot feeling in his chest. “Why don’t you use wandless spells more often?” Why do you play the idiot.

The silence (save for Nagini and Hedwig’s scuffle) feels as suffocating as drowning in the ocean. Tom almost stands up, ready to walk away from impatience, when Potter speaks.
“…I actually came to Hogwarts to apply for the DADA position, you know.”

Tom’s breath catches in his throat. “Then why did you—”

“Recommend you instead? Well…” Potter’s smile feels brittle, “…I wouldn’t be good at it. Not like you.”

Pause.

“You must be joking. Your skills are comparable to that of an auror’s, you can perform wandless spells, your intuition and creativity are beyond the average wizard’s!” And you can keep up with me.

“Oh,” Potter’s cheeks turn pink. “Thank you. But… just because I’m good at DADA, doesn’t mean I can teach it. The more advanced stuff in sixth and seventh year is pretty, like you said, intuitive to me… but I don’t know how to explain it and make it simpler to understand for other sixteen year olds and seventeen year olds. It just comes to me naturally. I’m not always good at words, not for spellcasting theory. Not for the real stuff. But divination? Emotions? I’m better at that.”

Tom stares at Potter, at the gap between them. They’re lying so close together that their fingers could touch, and yet Tom has never felt the staggering distance from Potter before. He’s heard other classmates confess their own failings but never cared for them. And yet, with Potter, Tom can’t help but feel indignant, angry, and—

“So that’s why you applied for Divination professor? You weren’t asked to by Dumbledore? You gave up and settled?”

“Well I wanted to spend time with you, Mr. Berk!” Potter turns away. “Excuse me for thinking we could be friends or something. You make it bloody hard to deal with you.”

This sensation, like having a dozen cheering charms shoved into his throat, along with the urge to vomit, keeps intruding inside Tom.

“…Friends?”

“Yeah! You know? Like we used to be, back before fifth year.”

That never happened. Potter had been annoying, always following Tom around and bombarding him with that irritating familiar. They’ve never been friends.

“I don’t remember anything like that.”

Potters face falls. “Oh. Sorry… maybe… Maybe I’m remembering it wrong… I thought I had it right this time…” His gaze becomes distant again.

Making a note to get one of his followers to steal Potter’s medical records, Tom snaps, “I’ll show you how I teach them. The sixth and seventh years. Sit in on my classes. It should fit into your timetable, or we’ll ask Dumbledore for a timeturner request form.”

Potter’s eyes return to him. “Wait… what?”

“I won’t say it twice. And this doesn’t make us friends. I will uncover your secrets eventually. I just don’t like seeing wasted potential.”

If Potter blinks any faster, he’ll lose an eye. “…Then what does that make us?”

“Amicable roommates.”
His fingers brush against Potter’s, as he sits up.

“…Alright then,” Potter stares up at him, not quite grinning and not quite frowning either. “I’m sure you’ll do your best.”

Tom glares down at him. “What does that mean.”

“Well, I’m always amicable to you. So good luck. I’m starting to think you’re just naturally bitter, with an occasional sweetness. Like dark chocolate.”

“You—”

The insult dies just as Nagini and Hedwig crash down between them, in a chalk cloud of bloody scales and feathers.

“Oh my god, Hedwig stop pecking at Nagini’s eyes and Nagini stop strangling her!” Potter dives in. Tom lets himself smile then.
Summer courses for teacher's college have started up so updates won't be as frequent. However, I would like to get to a certain chapter count before the fic's one year anniversary so cross your fingers for me!! I hope you enjoy this chapter and thank you SO much for all the support, love you guys!!

“I hate ties,” Potter groans just as Tom comes downstairs. Tom himself is dressed in his best dress robes, black with a silver-blue trim and tie. First impressions are key to winning over potential new allies. Unlike Tom though, Potter still isn’t properly dressed, surrounded instead, by a collection of atrocious patterned ties. He’s never seen so many neon colours and polka dots in one sitting. Some of Potter’s ties have beluga whales or dancing penguins on them.

“I thought I burned all of your unwearable clothing.”

“Ha!” Potter points dramatically. “The culprit confesses to the crime!”

“I call it a liberation.”

“Dress it up how you like, sweater killer.”

“And you say you hate puns.”

Potter turns pale. “Oh no. Oh no, I made a pun. A dad joke. I’m getting old! I’m not current anymore. Say it isn’t true, I’m only nineteen, soon I’ll be eighty and wither and die—”

“You won’t die anytime soon, because I’ll bring you to life and kill you myself if you do,” Tom snaps, yanking the neon yellow tie away from Potter’s hands. “Wizards have a lifespan longer than the average muggle, if anything, you will be living until you are one hundred and fifty and continuing to twitter your false prophecies to your future students if you haven’t been fired by then.”

“Oh? So you don’t think I’m a seer anymore?”

“I do. But I sense you enjoy leading people on. What was the term that I learned today? Trolling?”

Tom smirks at Potter’s baffled expression. “Yes, I believe this term fits what you do very well. Now hold still.”

“I can’t believe you know internet lingo. Who taught you?! Was it the twins? No, wait, someone muggle… Dean Thomas? Ababi?! And what are you doing with that tie, I hate that one. It’s too green! I feel like it’s a purple day actually…” Somehow Potter manages to stay as still as a statue while Tom secures the tie around his neck.

“This celebration is a great opportunity to secure more sponsors—” connections for his cause, “for our careers. I won’t have you making a fool of yourself in front of anyone of significant importance, especially when I eventually prove that you’re a true seer—” Tom ignores Potter’s groan, “—and this tie matches the only suitable dress robes you own.”

And those eyes.
“There,” Tom steps back. He’s rather surprised at how well these dress robes highlight Potter’s best features. They don’t seem to be Potter’s typical style (muggle, oversized, neon coloured, animal-themed) but more aristocratic. Tom suddenly has an urge to throw a sweater, any sweater, and throw it back on Potter’s head so that he’ll look like himself again. “…You almost look like a proper wizard.”

Potter huffs, turning away. “I’m beginning to think you just like dressing me up.”

“Please,” Tom scoffs, “you wouldn’t need help dressing up if you knew what proper fashion looks like.”

“I don’t hear a denial there,” Potter sings as he walks out the door, paper cranes following to nestle back in his hair. Hedwig glowers at Tom, as if to say, I’m watching you, before following too. Tom doesn’t bother telling Potter not to bring his familiars. Potter never listens.

“Just be on your best behavior,” Tom grits out, not willing to have the evening ruined because of another whimsical whim of Potter’s.

“Whatever you say, dear.”

Tom decides to ignore that and keep walking.

The great hall has been transformed with long Hogwarts banners and crystal ornaments. It resembles something more like a Yule Ball in a pureblood home than an eccentric castle haunted by stranger ghosts. Tom barely recognizes it, only the enchantment on the ceiling (to make the night sky visible) hints at the Great Hall’s former appearance.

Already, wealthy sponsors have arrived, holding wine glasses as they speak with different professors about their research. Tom spots Lucius Malfoy eyeing the muggle studies professor with disdain and the Minister of Magic, Fudge, nodding with confusion at Flitwick’s enthusiastic rant about the future of mago-tech charms. A few visitors from other countries appear to be speaking with Dumbledore and even Snape seems to be in deep discussion with someone about the next step to improving the Wolfsbane potion.

“Oh no, I see Regulus. Uh…” Potter tries to duck behind Tom. “Pretend I don’t exist!”

“That’s rather difficult to do,” Tom mutters, smiling politely, but standing still nonetheless. As expected, Black notices them both nonetheless (perhaps because of the particular loathing he seems to have for Tom) and storms over with a frosty smile.

“Harry, Riddle,” Black nods at them both. “I wasn’t expecting you both to arrive together…”

“We share an office,” Tom says bluntly, “therefore it’s not unlikely we would leave for this gathering at the same time.”

With the exception of Bellatrix, the Black family have yet to won over by Tom’s cause (a fact he has long stopped worrying about, the Blacks are more trouble than they’re worth. Exhibit A: Regulus Black’s irrational hostilities when anyone so much as stands near his kin. Exhibit B: Sirius Black’s near-homicidal urges to literally curse people who touched his godson). He can always arrange for Regulus and Sirius Black’s deaths so that Bellatrix will become the house head instead. No need to bother with the pretense of polite conversation.

“An office, really? I was under the impression that Hogwarts has hundreds of empty classrooms that
a professor could *happily camp out* in if there are no available offices,” Regulus Black’s smile grows sharper and sharper.

“The school doesn’t like us sleeping in its classrooms, don’t you remember me telling me you, Uncle Reg?” Potter, to Tom’s horror, bats his eyes at Black, somehow gaining all the persuasive powers of a dying kitten.


“Oh look! Cream-puffed shrimp, I think I’m going to go eat one. Or three. Or twelve. *Bye,*” Potter scurries over to a floating tray of snacks.

“Potter,” Tom frowns, not wanting to be subject to another interrogation from the likes of Black.

But for once, Black doesn’t seem to care about threatening Tom, as he marches after Potter, saying loudly, “Harry, we have to talk about this. What would Sirius say? Have you even *visited* him lately—”

Potter stops abruptly, nearly knocking over the tray. A pained look that makes Tom clench his fists from how unsettling it is. “Of course I have. He’s *Sirius,* do you think—”

Whatever Black thinks, Tom doesn’t hear it for Bellatrix interrupts, beaming widely at Tom with her arms open. “My L—I mean, *Riddle!* How wonderful it is to see you!”

Regulus Black, like a predator sensing someone intruding at the edges of his territory (otherwise known as anyone categorized as a threat to one Harry Potter or Sirius Black) immediately steps in front of Tom, the frigid smile somehow a hundred times more glacial at the sight of his cousin.

“Bella. What a pleasant surprise. I didn’t know that you were still running around in these circles.”

Translation: *I didn’t know you weren’t bankrupt yet.*

Disturbing enough (and proving herself to be a true Black), Bellatrix returns the frigid smile several degrees colder. “My darling, cute little *Reggy,* still following your dear brother’s footsteps after he failed to live up to the family name?”

Translation: *Still a blood traitor?*

“I think I see Professor McGonagall calling us, please excuse us,” Tom bows slightly, lightly pushing Potter on the back so that they’re concealed by the crowd. Hopefully the cordial setting will curb any *explosive* outbursts from the latest Black family drama.

“Ah, wait, I didn’t say hi to that lady yet—”

No. Absolutely not. Tom refuses to have Potter and Bellatrix’s first meeting happen at this event. Anything could happen, with murder high on the list. While Regulus and Sirius Black may have prevented them from meeting out of fear for their godson/kin, Tom merely wants a peaceful and productive evening.

“I think I see treacle tart floating by Professor McGonagall.”

“What, where?”

Potter happily goes where directed.

McGonagall appears to be deep in conversation with Amelia Bones about the possibilities and ethical
implications of using transfiguration to solve muggle hunger problems. Dull, but Tom participates in their conversation briefly to further his status in Madam Bones’s eyes. Potter, irritatingly enough, leaves as soon as he gets his tart. Tom will have to keep an eye on him to keep him out of trouble…

“My Lord,” Crouch stands beside him, offering a glass of champagne. He bows with the same reverence that all his followers do, only his actions have always been the most pronounced. “I pray your time at Hogwarts has given you good health.”

“…It has,” Tom nods. The ring on his finger, his Horcrux, guarantees his physical and mental health. Productivity, on the other hand… Tom frowns. “I’ve created a positive rapport with the students. I believe by December, when they trust me, I will begin slowly recruiting a few at a time to our cause.”

Crouch’s gaze shines with a disturbing fervor, one that Bellatrix often shares. “As expected of you, my Lord. I myself have found many colleagues who are amiable to your charisma. They would be willing to meet you over the Yule holidays to discuss sponsorship…”

“Excellent,” triumph sings through Tom’s veins. One steps closer to changing the wizarding world… “Carrow has made more progress with the giants,” though it took a lot of tedious whining, “and Avery and Dolohov have given me good news as well. We will have another meeting this weekend to discuss how we will move forward.”

“I will inform my contacts.”

“And…” Tom pauses. Crouch is the only one he would consider giving this information to at this stage. While Crouch may be as feverishly devoted as Bellatrix can be, he is contraditorily the most competent and levelheaded.

Crouch notes the pause, and leans in. “Yes, my Lord?”

“…If you find anyone in the Department of Mysteries, who knows more about seers, I would like to contact them.”

Crouch nods. If he’s curious about Tom’s sudden interest in divination, he doesn’t question it. Tom doesn’t doubt that Bellatrix and Crouch believe that their Lord is above superstition, above prophecies and the laws of magic. But even Tom knows that he’s just a man (a man with a horcrux). Even Tom knows that death can’t be so easily evaded.

If Potter is the seer he so dearly desires, he could avoid Death forever. He can be better than human.

Somehow Tom finds himself in deep discussion with the minister of magic and a few travelling Potions Masters about his latest findings on dark creatures in Romania. But he keeps an eye out for Potter, watching him from the corner of his eye for any trouble.

Surprisingly, Potter seems well-behaved. But perhaps Tom should stop being so surprised around Potter and expect the unexpected. Potter seems to have charmed most of the party into believing he is reforming Divination into a new wave study of meditation and self-actualization without giving any hints of false prophecies (or true ones.) He also does a good job of avoiding Regulus Black (though Bellatrix has distracted that man all evening. They seem to have engaged into a debate about manners, a debate that truly has nothing to do with manners). Yet while Potter certainly participates in conversation with these sponsors he never seeks them out, never seems to put his full attention on their words, his gaze looking far beyond them…
Until someone claps a hand on Potter’s shoulder and he looks at them with clarity, a sparkle in his eyes that Tom has never really seen before—

“Neville! Cedric!” Potter jumps up to embrace them. “Ahh, it’s been so long! How are you doing? How’s the ministry job treating you, Ced? Oh, and the travelling! Neville, tell me you got me a pet turtle from Australia, pleaseee!”

Tom frowns, the urge to portkey Potter away strong in his mind. He forgot how affectionate Potter began to be around Longbottom, Diggory, and Chang as he grew older. Potter’s friendship with Chang has toned down, since they’re colleagues at work, but with Diggory and Longbottom…

Longbottom looks too comfortable with Potter hanging off his neck.

“Riddle? You were saying about the magical properties of the Lapin Reve…?” a Potions Master, someone important from Austria, says.

“Of course. I lost my train of thought. Forgive me, gentlemen,” Tom invites his most convincing smile, “As I was saying, the venom from the Lapin Reve could have numerous uses in the future of the Potion Arts…”

He doesn’t grit his teeth at the sound of Potter’s laughter.

Long into the discussion, one of the Potions Masters suddenly brightens and shouts, “Rubeus! Come here! This Riddle bloke seems as knowledgeable about magical creatures as you are! Why don’t you two compare notes?”

Hagrid, red from too much wine, no doubt, pales when he sees him.

Tom only bows his head slightly. “We’ve met.”

“Wonderful!” the Potions Master, a Mr. Kwan, claps, unaware of the tension. “Perhaps you should collaborate on a project together, I would love to see what kind of ingredients you two can extract from beings as deadly as the Lapin Reve.”

“Hm,” Tom doesn’t comment. As if he will subject himself into working willingly with a careless handler like Rubeus Hagrid.

Hagrid appears to be thinking the same thing but says a hopeful, “The Lapin Reve?” when another voice interrupts.

“Is this going to be a joint thing? Can I help to? Charlie Weasley. Dragonologist and dragon handler from the Romania devision, by the way,” a redhead cuts in.

Urgh, Tom inwardly frowns. He forgot about this Weasley. There are too many of them. He recalls Charlie Weasley spending quite a bit of time with Potter in first year before he graduated.

“Perhaps,” Tom tries to think of a way to decline when Kwan nods.

“Perfect! It’s decided! I will await your findings at the next Potions Conference in August! Let me set up a contract…”

“Great!” Charlie Weasley claps his hands over Tom and Hagrid’s shoulders. “I can’t wait to get to know more of little Harry’s friends!”
Tom narrows his eyes. *Potter.*

“I don’t get to see him often but this will give me an excuse to come visit him and the family. I think mum will be pleased. So what’s your background like, Riddle? I’ve collaborated with Hagrid before but you’re pretty new to the field, aren’t you? What’s your specialization?”

*The dark and unknown. Soul magic. Legilimency. Becoming a Dark Lord.*

“Young Dark Lord,” Tom says drily.

“Oh! Okay, that’s different. But cool, we don’t get a lot of cross-disciplinary work happening in the Magical Creatures field. Why did you—”

“Ah, I see Malfoy. Excuse me, I promised I would give him a very important letter,” Tom steps away, resisting the urge to wipe his shoulder.

“Oh but—”

“Riddle’s a bit busy, Charlie. Why don’t we get some firewhiskey and you tell me about those Hungarian Horntails, gorgeous creatures…”

At least Hagrid knows how to read a social situation.

Tom steps towards Lucius, bowing his head in greeting.

“Lord Riddle,” Lucius says, refusing to call Tom by his new name or his old one.

“Lucius,” he nods. “Are your sons present as well?”

“Yes. They’re mingling. I’ve convinced them to consider your offer. Abraxus seems in favour but Draco will need more… concrete evidence of your power.”

Tom appreciates the blunt warning. Lucius is never one to play pureblood games with those more powerful.

“I could go convince him right now. Where is he?”

Lucius sighs. “I believe to seek out Potter.”

Tom’s fingers twitch. “Pardon?”

“Agreed,” Lucius scoffs. “I don’t understand his obsession with a half—I mean, an incompetent wizard—either but Draco has always been the odd one compared to Abraxus.”

“Excuse me,” Tom steps back.

“But Lord Riddle, about that book—”

Tom rushes past, spots Draco Malfoy’s blond hair in the crowd…

Potter’s cheeks look flushed. His ears are crimson and he keeps staggering over and righting himself up, batting Draco Malfoy’s hands away from his waist.

“…Told you to go away… You’re going to turn into a ferret, I can’t be with you…”

“Potter, *no,* Harry—stop making ridiculous excuses! I can provide you with protection, financial
security. Just one date and—"

“I’m sorry but I think I should escort my colleague back to his room. He tends to get very sick when he drinks,” Tom lies, stepping in between both and placing his hand back on Potter’s back.

Draco Malfoy sneers. “Riddle. I can take him there myself, you—”

“—Am his roommate. Now, if you’ll excuse us,” Tom smiles brightly.

He drags Potter away from Draco Malfoy’s glare.

“Everything is spinning… it’s too much…” Potter murmurs from Tom’s shoulder.

“Maybe you shouldn’t have drank so much,” Tom snaps.

“M’didn’t drink… There was a funny colour when I volunteered to try a potion… I don’t think I was allowed to do that… Potion Master Inez didn’t look happy… She gave me an anti… antibiotic? Antidote! That’s the word! Said I should drink it every two hours…”

Tom almost drops Potter right there.

“You drank an experimental potion without permission from the Potions Master?! Why?!”

“I have… I have no idea… I just… Voices are too loud. Everything… It looked like… It looked like poison…”

“Why would you think it’s a good idea to ingest something you think is poison?!”

“Thought they’d kill someone… there’s a murder afoot! Always murder….”

Nothing Potter says makes any sense. This moron needs a keeper, Tom doesn’t understand how he’s alive if his actions are so reckless, so intent on suicidal idiocy… Perhaps Regulus and Sirius Black’s actions have not been so unwarranted after all…

“No one’s trying to murder you.”

“You have. You will. No, no, that’s not right… not this you… But you think it. I know you do. It… It hurts, Tom…” Potter’s voice falters, so quiet and shaken, the way it was in Third Year…

“…I don’t want to kill you…” Tom says slowly. Though he has thought of it. Many times. But never with true killing intent.

Potter’s lip trembles. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” Tom scowls. “I need a seer, don’t I?”

“What if I’m not one?”

Tom stops. He could ask Potter right now. Potter’s vulnerable. Confused. Tom could coerce Potter into admitting anything. His strange problems with Sirius Black, some sort of blackmail… and use it against him.

Potter would be powerless.

But…
Seeing those wide eyes, threaded with *Avada Kedevra* green, with memories of a grassy field by the lake, Tom only says, “Then you’re not.”

The air feels charged. Tense. Strange. As if Tom is walking along a great precipice, a moment rooted in time. One misstep, and he’ll be sent hurtling into a path he cannot turn back from. He carries Potter through the door to their office, places him down on the hammock. Potter seems so small, unimportant, as he nestles against his blankets… and yet Tom has never wanted to keep someone’s attention on him like this before.

Just one question. Just one insidious fact, and he could keep Potter by his side, could dismantle all of his secrets except—

(A moment – Potter, half-exhausted and laughing, and no one has ever smiled like that at Tom Riddle like that before—“…As if… I would… cheat like that… I respect… you too much… to be satisfied… with a cheap win…”—would Potter look at him like this if he knew who Lord Voldemort is?)

Lord Voldemort leaves.

The gathering is not yet over, and he has followers to recruit.

Voldemort wakes to Potter sitting cross-legged on his bed, frowning. Even the cranes seem subdued, all quiet and still in his hair like faded corpses. Hedwig appears to be nowhere in sight, perhaps arguing with Nagini elsewhere.

“What is it?” he snaps. “It’s,” he checks the clock, “three o’clock in the morning. Go back to sleep.”

“You had a chance to ask me an important question.”

Voldemort doesn’t move. He didn’t think Potter would be coherent enough to remember. He decides not to answer. “About the dueling club? We can wait till tomorrow. Now go to bed.”

“Why didn’t you?”

“Potter—”

“Why didn’t you?” he repeats, solemn and quiet, looking very much like the boy on the train he met in first year.

“…I respect you too much…” the words slip out, unbidden, “…to win with such a cheap tactic.”

Those eyes are like a Medusa’s, it could turn a wizard to stone. They seem to search, dig deep, and then, impossibly—

Potter cracks a weary smile.

“Okay then. I don’t think I can avoid this. You win, Tom.”

Wait, what—

“I am a seer.”

Tom jolts up, thoughts frantic and racing, all the possibilities—he knew Potter was special, he *knew it*—
“But not the kind you think.”
Potter is too still, like a corpse. Too small and skinny.

“…It won’t heal…” Madam Pomphrey starts to shake.

“What do you mean it won’t heal!?” Tom, after several minutes of pacing back and forth, demands.

“I mean that none of my spells are working, not even this balm! He keeps bleeding!” Her wand swishes and flicks but still, red runs down Potter’s forehead. “And his medical records are just—” Her eyes dart to Tom, as if remembering his presence, “Never mind.”

“What is it? Does he have hemophilia?” Those hours of pouring over textbook definitions of diseases and conditions in the old library still remain clear in his mind. “I read that there’s a potion to fix that. Go get one!”

“Nonsense. I did a diagnostic spell, Potter doesn’t have that kind of condition! Did you notice any signs of dark curses? Hexes? How did he fall?”

A push. A fall. Splattered red on stairs—

“I just found him like this, I don’t know!” Tom snaps. He acted like a child. He should have had better self control, he should have used his magic to catch Potter or even—

“Breathe, Riddle. I apologize. I shouldn’t have taken out my temper on you. I’m just… I need to fix this,” Madam Pomphrey points her wand to the cabinet, levitating several vials towards the bed. “This is a delicate situation. I need you to fetch Dumbledore for me. As Potter’s head of house and magical guardian, he should be notified.”

Dumbledore, Tom grits his teeth. “I won’t leave.”

“Mr. Riddle,” Madam Pomphrey seethes, while trying to sort out all the vials, “this is not a request. This is an order. Fetch Professor Dumbledore at once, or so help me—”

“Not to worry, Poppy,” Dumbledore appears just behind them, as if he was there the whole time.

“Albus! When did you?!”

“I came as soon as I heard whispers that Mr. Riddle was carrying Harry to the hospital wing! How is he? What happened?”

“Albus!” Madam Pomphrey looks ready to lecture him for startling them both (suspicious, how quickly Dumbledore came, yet if he can help Potter…), but shakes her head and points at Potter’s head. “That scar, it won’t heal. None of my spells or potions are working. My diagnostics have
shown no sign of curses or hexes. I need your expertise. Do you think this is the work of dark magic?”

Immediately, Dumbledore casts a few wandless spells that cast golden hues around Potter’s body but vanish in an instant.

“No traces of any magic that I’m familiar with… What did you say happened to Harry?”

“I’m not sure, Mr. Riddle found him like this at the bottom of the stairs…”

“Oh really?” Dumbledore turns sharply towards him. “Which staircase was this, Tom?”

“The one near the entrance hall,” he snaps, avoiding Dumbledore’s gaze. He just wants that scar to go away, just wants it to stop bleeding.

“I’m going to call some of my contacts from St. Mungo’s. Albus, press some gauze against Mr. Potter’s head. And Mr. Riddle, go back to your dorms, there’s nothing more you can do for him now.”

“No,” Tom takes the gauze out of Dumbledore’s reach and sits down by Potter. “I’ll stay,” he says, pressing the cloth against Potter’s forehead, glaring at the red to retreat.

“You…! Fine. But you need to apply firm pressure on the wound! Now where’s the floo…?”

Tom ignores Dumbledore’s hard gaze, ignores how the old man decides to sit on the other side of Potter. Tom just needs to be there with Potter wakes, that’s all. How else will he get the answers he needs?

Several healers climb out of the fireplace and begin crowding around the bed, arguing with each other and trying different ‘safe’ spells. Some of them begin whispering about contacting Unspeakables or healers from overseas when Dumbledore taps Tom on the shoulder and tells him grimly to return to his dorm. “I won’t,” Tom remembers saying, pressing the gauze down harder. He has to be here when Potter’s scar heals…

The rest of the evening passes by in a blur. At some point, Tom thinks Dumbledore had to step out to discuss matters with the healers and he heard a few snippets about ‘the muggle guardians won’t give permission, this is ridiculous—’ and a bitter rage rose in Tom that moment. Potter’s relatives were refusing him treatment…?

At some point in the night, Tom drifts off, keeping an iron grip on the Potter’s bandages.

His dreams of Potter walking away from him, leaving crimson footsteps in the sand.

He jolts awake just as he crashes down against the floor.

Potter is screaming, clawing at the bandages slipping from his head. The gauze falls down like thick white tears settling around his neck, as if to strangle him later.

“Harry!” Dumbledore shouts, rushing over and holding him back against the pillows.

“No, no, no,” Potter tries to claw out of Dumbledore’s hold. “You’re not real. You’re dead. You’re all supposed to be dead. Or…” Potter freezes. “It hasn’t happened yet? But then…” He looks at
Tom. “Why are you here? You had… you’re going to have snake eyes… such red eyes…”

“What in the world are you talking about?” Tom growls, standing back up and resisting the urge to hex something.

Potter freezes. Looking in horror at a potted cactus. “No, no, no, you’re… you’re going to get killed by a llama. A llama that likes to eat cacti…”

“Stop speaking nonsense and lie back down. Your bandages are falling—”

“Don’t!” Potter slaps his hand away but the damage is done.

Tom sees the gleaming scar, as bright as the lightning bolt it resembles, staring right back at him. His mirror image, cracked, no longer perfect.
“…A seer is a seer. What else could you be?”

Potter looks at Tom with the type of exasperation Tom usually directs towards him.

“You… are really slow, aren’t you?”

Tom shoves his pillow at Potter’s face. “I am one of the brightest minds of our generation, the top of our graduating class. I am anything but slow!”

“Then you’re stubborn! You have this fixed view and stereotype of Divination and you refuse any suggestion that it might be a little bit different! Last time I checked, I was the one that took Trelawney’s class when we were in school, not you!”

“. . .I took it in third year before I dropped it for something more useful…” If Trelawney had made one more prediction about Potter dying by the end of the year one more time, Tom might have blown a crystal ball in her face. He had wanted to learn more about fate not hear about an impossibility.

“That doesn’t count. Trelawney wasn’t the best teacher. But still, maybe you should listen to my explanation first before you start brainstorming the next step to your dark and evil plans to conquer the world.”

Tom’s breath stops.

“Yes, that’s right, I know you’re probably recruiting followers for your Death Eater thing. It’s part of the seer thing. I wasn’t sure if you were really calling them Death Eaters in this timeline, but Merlin, you are! Did you really have to name them that? What about something more constructive like, Dark Magic Dabblers or something cute like Snake Pals? No one sane is going to want to join an organization where the members are called Death Eaters, it just screams tragedy—”

“Potter!” Tom snaps, resisting the urge to defend the name (as someone who has conquered death, of course Death Eaters is the most appropriate name!) “Just… explain already.”

Potter blinks at him. “Oh. Right. What am I explaining again?”

“Your seer abilities!”

“Oh. Oh yes, well. Like I said, I’m not your typical seer.”

“And…”

Potter nods solemnly, crossing his arms, head bowed down. “I’m… an adorable one.”

Seconds pass in silence.
Tom explodes, “You woke me up for THIS?! Are you, or ARE YOU NOT, a bloody seer?!”

He’s about to launch himself at Potter and perhaps tie up him for interrogation, when Potter says, “I’ve seen some timelines where you create seven horcruxes and lose your sanity. I’ve seen others where you never live past the age sixteen, murdered by the very professors you tried to deceive. In some timelines, you get everything you ever wanted but the price is too high. You’re no longer you. You might as well be a mindless killing machine. In those timelines, I don’t believe there is a single thread of Tom Riddle left in you.”

Cold settles into Tom’s chest at these terrible futures. And then excitement, because he can avoid these fates now that he has Potter by his side, he can—

“I used to be the type of seer that could see this world’s future alone. But, well, ever since you pushed me down the stairs… I just…” Potter looks away, his scar brighter than ever, “I see everything. All these possibilities in different worlds, different timelines… I can’t get it to stop. I can’t control it. So I can’t help you. Not the way you want me to.”

“…Wait,” Tom processes through the new information, “you can see possibilities.”


“Then, you can technically see how other versions of myself have failed…”

“Yeah… you probably don’t want to hear about that…”

“That is excellent.”

“…Did you listen to anything I said?”

“No, this… opens up everything!” Tom leaps out of bed and begins pacing back and forth. “Tell me every possible version of myself you have seen! I need to know every detail! Where they failed, I will succeed!”

“Tom,” Potter says firmly, “sit back down. I’m not going to tell you that.”

“Why?! I hear everything. I hear you choosing to kill your father. I hear you deciding not to kill the prostitute you met last year. In another echo, you kill her. And more and more branches. Impossible, silly, stupid branches. Did you know there’s a universe where you’re a parrot? Somehow you’re still
a manipulative bastard, a brilliant manipulative bastard. I used to think you were a ghost, not really there. You must have thought I was obnoxious. But I can’t help it. I have to blurt these things out. Cassandra’s curse. My dad’s curse…”

Tom wishes there was a language, some sort of instruction manual, for dealing with tears. When his followers cry, he ignores them. When the bullies at the orphanage cried, paying for their dues, he only laughed at them. But Potter’s tears feel like deeper cracks against glass, too sharp to touch.

“…Then why didn’t you tell anyone you were a seer sooner?”

Potter’s smile feels jagged and brittle. “I have. It hasn’t helped. Cassandra’s curse. A seer might tell people their fortunes, doesn’t mean they’ll believe them. I just blurt out the wrong universe’s fortune.”

Tom curls up his fists. “I believe you.”

Potter looks at him strangely, like someone jolted out of a deep gaze. “Yes… yes, you do… You always seem to… For better or for worse… we always have some impact on each other’s lives…”

The echoes of mirror images, brother wands, come ringing back in Tom’s mind.

“All the more reason for you to help me. Try, just for me. Who can say which of your predictions will be truly useful for my future?”

Potter frowns. “I don’t think there’s any point in that. I say a lot of nonsense. Sometimes I go along with it just for fun.”

A true troll indeed. “I can decide for myself whether there is a point.”

“Hmm…” Potter looks far away again. It occurs to Tom that every time Potter has dozed off or seemed vacant, he may have been haunted by visions of another life, another Tom Riddle. Is that Tom Riddle a failure? Or a Riddle more impressive than the one in front of him.

“Stop that,” Tom snaps, “Look at me!”

Potter blinks in surprise. “Right. You want… What is it you do you want again?”

“Come to one of my meetings. See what my cause is like and see for yourself how useful you can be to my cause.”

A snicker sneaks out from Potter’s lips and then full-blown laughter. Potter smiles as he always does. “There’s no way I’m going to a Death Eater club meeting. Nope. You just need me for my shiny new powers. I promise that if you make me go, I’ll try my hardest to be super annoying. Maybe even give your followers a sugar high.”

Tom doesn’t comment. He’ll let Potter believe that he can avoid this for now. There’s still something Tom needs to ask, unable to get Potter’s tears out of his mind…

“…Why did you decide to tell me this? Why now?”

That far-away look in Potter’s eyes, he hates it.

“I told you, didn’t I? This you seems trustworthy. Maybe. And even if you’re not, well… I’m tired.”

Potter slips out of the room and, somehow, Tom feels as if he’s lost something very important. Something more.
Sorry this took a while, thank you for waiting! I've been busy with presentations all week! I was hoping to update this on the 1-year anniversary of this fic... oh well. We're basically halfway through the story! I'm so excited! I feel like this story will be 35 - 40 chapters in total. Today's chapter is a bit funny but a bit angsty... changes are coming...

Immediately, Tom sends words to all his contacts that they’ll be having a meeting tonight, at the old Riddle Mansion. He’ll floo out immediately, once he has Potter in tow. He needs to start courting Potter to his side, and what better way than a display of Tom’s power and reach?

Lounging on his lap, Nagini sighs. [This is a terrible way to court a mate, Master. Green Eyes cares little about the puny creatures you subjugate. He already knows you are powerful. He does not care. You should pay more attention to his likes. I would get him some mice.]

[You are the only one who wants mice.]

[Only to eat. Perhaps Potter would like to replace that feather trash-bag of a familiar with a nice juicy mouse.]

Tom narrows his eyes. [You would want to eat either way. And to have Potter to yourself.]

[I know what I want and I go for it. Unlike some humans I know.]

Before Tom can try to shove some sense into Nagini’s head, he hears someone calling from the floo. “Hello? Harry? Is Riddle around? Hagrid and I have to talk to him… Hello?”

Tom steps downstairs, with Nagini trailing behind him. “Ah. Weasley.” Indeed, Charlie Weasley’s head seems to be sticking out of the floo. While Tom may not like muggles, he can appreciate some of their more practical inventions such as phones. He doesn’t understand why the wizarding world insists on installing such a nosy floo network for communication. “If you’re looking for my roommate, he’s likely doing yoga with the third-years… or singing lullabies to the giant squid.”

“Sorry, did you say the giant squid?”

“I don’t pretend to understand his life choices.”

Charlie Weasley shakes his head in disbelief. “That’s Harry alright. An odd duck as usual.” Says the man who works with Dragons for a living, Tom thinks. “As much as I’d like to catch up with him, I was actually trying to reach you.”

“Ah,” Tom recalls the unfortunate project Potions Master Kwan forced him into. “I see. Did you and Hagrid wish to organize a research meeting?”

“Yeah! That’s be great! Is next Saturday okay?”
“…That would be fine, as long as the meeting doesn’t go too long.” Tom hopes to convince Potter into doing weekly practice duels on Saturdays. For their club meetings, of course. Nothing more.

“Great! Hagrid will owl you some of the samples and findings we’ve gathered over the past few years. Just be warned, Hagrid has some sort of wailing skelehawk that he uses to deliver letters. I’d throw up wards against petrification. Cast one on Harry too, yeah?”

Before Tom can hiss about the idiocy of owning such dangerous pets, Charlie Weasley’s head vanishes from the fire.

[Urgh, skelehawks. They’re too crunchy to eat. All those bones that refuse to digest properly! Maybe we can throw the owl at it.]

[If it’s anything like Hagrid’s darling acromantula, I will blast it to dust.]

“Are you alright, Harry? You look pale…” Chang remarks at dinner. She even decided to sit next to him, instead of by Hooch, just to rub his back.

“He’s fine, Chang.” Tom waves her off. “He’s merely fatigued from the gathering last night. He didn’t sleep well.”

“You certainly look… better than usual, considering how handsome you usually look,” Chang frowns at Tom.

“Careful there, Chang,” Hooch winks from across the table, “or Riddle will think you’re considering leaving Diggory to chase after him!”

“No way,” both Potter and Chang say in horror.

Tom resists the urge to scowl as he always does when people suggest he start looking for a romantic partner. “As… charming… as Chang is, she isn’t my type.” That excuse usually works.

“Really?” Chang leans in, interested rather than repelled. “Then what is your type, Riddle? Inquiring minds want to know.”

“Cho,” Potter tries to nudge her, “you can’t just ask that!”

“Oh hush, Harry. Every person in Hogwarts wants to know. Except you apparently.”

Tom narrows his eyes. “This is all very unprofessional.”

“There!” Potter beams. “See? Riddle doesn’t feel things like that. He’s not interested.”

Tom frowns. The hole left by the thing he felt he lost, after that conversation with Potter yesterday, twists from the absence…

“Fine. I respect that. But what about you, Harry? I’ve yet to see you go on a date with any of the lovely people I try to set you up with.”

Potter twitches. “They’re not my type.”

“So mysterious!” Chang flicks his nose. “Then who is?” Tom listens as well. The information could prove useful in keeping Potter around for his cause.
“…Someone who doesn’t think I’m crazy,” Potter whispers, studying his oversaturated sugar-induced teacup a bit too intently. “Someone kind.”

Everyone at the staff table stops talking, just to gawk at Potter in expressions ranging from horror to deep pity. Even Snape looks disturbed.

“Harry, let me hug you!” Chang cries while Flitwick, Hooch, and Dumbledore start throwing out suggestions for blind dates.

“I know a lovely witch from India,” Flitwick twittering so excitedly, he nearly falls off his stool. “She’s a Charms Master just like your mother was—”

“What about a girl who likes quidditch? I got some contacts from the Harpies!” Hooch shoves Flitwick back.

“I did meet a very nice vampire who seemed interested in speaking with you yesterday night but was too shy to. I could give you his floo address,” Dumbledore nods. “He was a big fan of golf.”

“Guys, guys stop. I’m not interested! And seriously, Albus? Dating a vampire? No! I swear, the next date I try to go on, that man will suffer a horrible and violent encounter with confetti and sprinkles! And it won’t be my fault either.”

The rest of dinner tastes sour as Tom listens to Chang hugging Potter and claiming him as ‘too precious for this world.’ Every bite seems to feed the hole twisting inside him.

“Potter,” Tom intercepts him after dinner. “I thought we could go to the pub together and discuss the Dueling Club.”

“Didn’t we just do that yester—”

“I’ll pay for the next six months of yarn you need to buy.”

“Deal.”

Note to self, Tom thinks, Harry Potter truly is easily swayed by promises of free yarn or sweets.

“So where are we heading? Hogsmeade? Diagon Alley? Starbucks?”

“Starbucks isn’t a pub.”

“How would you know? I bet you’ve never set foot in one!”

Tom scowls.

“Gasp! You really haven’t! That’s a travesty! You have to try a green tea latte! Or a molten chocolate mocha!”

“Those sound like sugary death traps.”

“But they’re good sugary death traps! Though expensive.”

Tom leads them to the staff room’s chimney, big enough to fit at least five people at once. At Potter’s pale look, Tom pulls him along by the arm. “I’ll announce our destination, Potter. We wouldn’t want to end up in the middle of the Sahara desert because you mispronounced something,” he says,
remembering how unfortunate Potter tends to be with floo.

“Ah. Well… Thank you.” The quiet statement, such a stark contrast to Potter’s usual silly banter, makes Tom’s grip tighter.

“Riddle manor,” he says, floo powder up in the air, hovering over Potter’s surprised face.

For a seer, Potter has terrible self-preservation instincts.

Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley exchange shocked glances in the hallway.

“Did Professor Riddle just… ask Professor Potter out on a date…?”

“…Tell me that you didn’t take me to your dead father’s house, a house that you probably murdered him in, judging from so so many different and bombarding visions I had during sixth year—and long after that—because you just had to visit him.”

Tom doesn’t understand why Potter seems so upset. The manor is secluded and large enough for all his followers to gather for a private meeting. He even hired a house elf to keep everything in working order. “You already knew this though.”

“That’s not the point! For all I know, I could have been assuming an alternate you did something that ‘this’ you hasn’t! I’m a seer, not a powerful and terrifying, omnipotent, all-knowing glow cloud!”

So Potter has trouble distinguishing what visions are his reality or not… Tom wonders if any mind healing arts might be able to curb that side effect. He’ll have to pull in some favors to get the books he wants on the subject.

“Surely you must have known that I was going to take you to this meeting.”

Potter glares and points at himself. “Seer. Not. All-knowing. I thought you were actually going to take me out for a… Oh never mind! I’m leaving. Where’s the floo powder?”

“Wait!” Tom grabs his hand and finds himself struck by that direct gaze. It occurs to him that Potter may not be able to control what happens in this reality, but he’s witnessed countless possibilities in others. What is the scope of visions he’s seen? Perhaps Potter has seen this meeting already, in another universe’s dream. Perhaps Potter knows exactly what Tom will say next. Was he expecting another outcome? Another Tom Riddle’s choice? Does he find the one standing in front of him lacking? The excitement Tom felt about Potter’s abilities dies down… Is Tom Riddle so predictable, that Potter will dismiss him without a chance to convince Potter of his own unique worth?

No. Tom refuses.

“Stay. Please. Just… observe and see what the meeting is like in… ‘this’ reality. Perhaps I will surprise you.”

“No way.”

“I will… wear one of your sweaters at the dueling club meeting on Tuesday.”

Potter blinks up at him, half-startled and exhausted. Tom wants to vanish away those baggy circles.
“…You. In a sweater.”

Tom doesn’t frown. “…Yes.”

“…I make no promises to not to interrupt or cause general chaos at this… little death eating club. But I’ll stay. For now.”

“That’s all I ask.” Tom lets go of Potter’s hand.

Unfortunately, the meeting does not go well.

“My Lord,” Crouch bows to him as soon as Tom and Potter enter the sitting room.

Tom can feel Potter’s unimpressed stare. “Crouch,” he nods, “may I introduce my colleague, Harry Potter?”

“Ah yes,” Crouch barely blinks. “You mentioned him quite often when we were in school.”

Tom fights the urge to scowl. He did no such thing.

Potter, however, gains a spring to his step. “Oh really? I didn’t hear him speak of you at all. I wish he had. Uncle Reg has a lot of things to say about you, Mr. Crouch. You’re, uh, really thorough in your work, aren’t you?”

Crouch’s smile thins. “Perhaps he was speaking of my father. I’m afraid that I’m not familiar with Lord Black. We don’t run in the same circles at the ministry.”

The intricacies of the Crouch family are always interesting for Tom to manipulate. While Bartimus Crouch Junior is a rather private individual, Tom easily found out his secrets using legilimency. He wonders how much Potter knows about this version of Crouch Junior…


Unsurprisingly, Potter digs out a container of freshly baked biscuits from his little bag. Every biscuit seems to be in the shape of a smiling snake with a white chocolate top hat.

Tom fights back the urge to twitch at Potter’s informalities and the cartoonish sweets.

Crouch, however, only pauses and glances at Tom before nodding. “I would love to try one of your infamous creations, thank you.” Carefully, he takes the biscuit and tries a bite. Unexpectedly, his eyes widen. “This is… quite good. Far superior to my house elf’s cooking…”

“Aww, shucks. Great to know that someone in this death club has a sweet tooth. Maybe there’s still some hope for you yet!”

Tom does not glare. He remains absolutely composed.

“So what do you usually do at these meetings? Practice maniacal laughter? Compare notes on who can make the best team logo? Sew matching uniforms? Try and come up with a motto?”

Crouch’s eyes light up with a disturbing light. “Actually, I’ve compiled a list of different Latin phrases that may be persuasive in convincing young people to join our cause! What do you think of pariter ad inimicos nostros?”
Potter nearly chokes on his biscuit. “Our enemies to dust?”

“Yes! A powerful statement, don’t you agree?”

Potter only gapes, startled laughter hanging in the air.

“Excellent!” Crouch takes another biscuit, “I will put you down for another vote then…”

“What? No, I’m not—”

“Let me introduce you to my other followers,” Tom quickly guides Potter over to Dolohov instead.

“What are you doing near our Lord, little blood traitor scum?”

Unfortunately, Bellatrix storms in the way.

"Ah." Potter blinks before his smile eerily widens like a muggle clown’s. His arms open wide as he practically prances over to her. "Dear Auntie Bellatrix!"

Bellatrix ducks the incoming hug, hissing, “Don’t you touch me!”

“Ah. Right. You don’t like hugs yet. Or you won’t ever? Wait, which one was it?”

“The first one,” Tom hisses quickly. While his followers aren’t likely to connect Potter’s eccentric behavior to that of a seer’s, Tom would rather keep that secret between himself and Potter.

“Right!” Potter nods. “No hugging! Hugs are bad, they’ll get me stabbed!”

Before Tom can pull Potter away, a huge, gaudy bouquet of eerie smiling sunflowers materializes in Potter’s hands. Each sunflower’s smile looks sewn on sloppily, accompanied with giant googly eyes that look in all directions.

Bellatrix blanches away when Potter bows towards her. “For you, as an apology for my rudeness! Flowers that will pretend to be friendly for you! Since you seem like the stabbing kind of aunt instead of the friendly kind.”

With a splutter, Bellatrix yanks the bouquet away. “I am not. Your. Aunt!”

“Then stop calling Uncle Reg and Sirius blood traitors. Auntie.”

“Listen, you brat—”

“Harry is here as my guest. I’m showing him around so please give him a good impression of our cause, Bellatrix,” Tom interjects, putting his arm back on Potter’s shoulder.

Bellatrix’s smile thins. She moves closer to Tom. “But my Lord, the way he was raised—”

“Oi, I was raised fabulously, with a healthy love for animals and sweets! You were raised—”

“Dolohov, may you entertain Potter for a moment? I need to speak with Bellatrix in private…”

Dolohov looks ready to jump out of window rather than interfere with the conflict, but relaxes somewhat when Potter offers him some biscuits. Tom would be convinced that Potter casts some sort of alluring charm on those things if he hadn’t tried them himself. The populace seems genuinely fond of overly-saturated pastries of sugar. He will never understand it.
“I won’t accept his presence here, I won’t,” Bellatrix hisses. “There’s one reason I’ve never met him before and that’s because dear little Reggy doesn’t want me corrupting his little godson. That—”

“I am certain, that under certain circumstances and time, Potter can be persuaded towards our way of thinking.”

Bellatrix frowns in thought, for once. Good.

“Think of Regulus Black’s face when he sees how much influence you have over his godson then.”

Bellatrix’s smile, in that moment, feels like the one she wears when she tortures people.

“Dear, darling little Harry,” Bellatrix wraps her arms around him, tucking his head under her chin.

“Um?!” Potter drops his biscuits.

“Come, come, you must sit by me during the meeting. We have so much to catch up on. I have nineteen birthdays to buy presents for! Would you like your very own guillotine?”

“I… no? Just no? Did you just braid those sunflowers in your hair?!”

Bellatrix hums. “They’re charming.” She jabs the stem of another flower behind Potter’s ear, painfully. “There! We match! Now tell Auntie all your little secrets!”

Potter turns around, glaring at Tom. “I blame you.”

“Fair enough,” Tom agrees. Now he won’t have to worry about Potter apparating away or Bellatrix clinging to his arm.

“I swear if you don’t start this meeting soon, I will start transfiguring people into ducks. Purple ducks. Cursed to glow in the moonlight and never belong among other ducks. Every time they try to quack, they will sound like pigs instead. It is a curse worse than death.”

Tom stares at Potter’s solemn face, at the ridiculous googly-eyed sunflower in his hair, and back at Bellatrix humming on Potter’s arm.

He can see the family resemblance now.

“We’ve made great progress so far in our efforts. Carrow has formed a positive rapport with the giants, while Avery and Dolohov have established more ties with future contacts as well. Crouch informs me that there are many in the ministry who are willing to sponsor and support our cause.”

Those gathered at the table nod in complete rapture. Tom feels like a court king at a table, ordering his future army. That image distracts him from how annoying it is to have his followers simpering at his every word.

“Uh, question? What exactly is your cause?”

Tom twitches at Potter raising his hand, as if he’s an excitable First Year. “You should already be aware of it, Harry.”

“No, Tom, I’m really not,” comes the too cheerful reply, “I think you’re forgetting our earlier
conversations about my memory problems.”

“I merely assumed that this would be the one constant in all those memory problems.”

“Not really, you’d be surprised at how out of character you can be in those problems.”

The death eaters, unhelpfully, look back and forth at the exchange, as if watching a very interesting Quidditch match.

“Our cause is to spread the Dark Arts throughout the world and put our Lord on the throne as leader of this magical revolution!” Crouch bursts out. “I thought you knew when you voted for our statement!”

“So Dark Arts. Hooray,” Potter says monotonously. “Is that all?”

“Of course not!” Bellatrix pats his head aggressively.

Tom stands up to silence her, “Bella—”

“—We’ll be eradicating all those filthy mudbloods from the world too. Magic will be great again!”

The room falls into an icy silence.

“I see.” Potter’s smile looks cracked, as rigid as the sewn lips on sunflowers. “Excuse me. I think my owl just texted me.”

Avery frowns, whispering to Dolohov, “Can owls text?”

Dolohov stares back blankly. “What’s a text? Like a book?”

“Harry—”

“Oh, and before I forget,” Potter whips out his wand, the incantation rushing out silently in the air.

A room full of purple ducks, instead of death eaters, oink and flap at Tom in helpless flocks.

“Potter!” Tom gives chase.

But Potter doesn’t slow down. He’s inches from the fireplace, when Tom jumps in front of him.

“Get out of my way.”

“No,” Tom growls, “you promised you would stay.”

“I didn’t say for how long, now get out of my way!”

“Transfigure my Death Eaters back!”

“No. You’re the genius. You do it!”

“You and I both know that you just performed completely original yet highly advanced level transfiguration, wordless, on humans, and it worked. You’re the inventor of the spell, you have to reverse it.”

“How about no. They make cute pets now. They can’t swim though, so keep them away from water.”
“Potter—”

“So it’s Potter again, is it? When you just called me Harry a few moments ago? Do you even remember the last time you called me Harry? Do you even remember how close we used to be in school?”

“We were never close. You’re mixing up timelines, getting it confused with your memory problems—”

“Then what do you even want me here for, if not my ‘helpful’ input and my crap ‘seer’ abilities?! You know I will never be in favour of executing muggles, you know it, and yet you made me come here anyways. I thought you were different.”

Tom steps closer, glaring down at Potter’s nose, “I am different from the rest of the Tom Riddles you’ve seen—”

Potter’s nose is inches from his. “Are you really? Then tell me, Riddle, why did you bring me here?”

“Your abilities—”

“—Are shit—”

“Your magic—”

“—Is a threat to you.”

“You’re not!”

“How do you know that—”

“Because I want you to be my equal!” Tom roars.

The silence that follows feels impossible. Tom stares at Harry—no, Potter—in horror. But the longer the words linger in the air, the more Tom realizes that they are true. From the first day they met till now, Tom has always waited for any evidence, anything, that proves Potter is the same as him. His equal. Just as powerful, just as special. It can’t be anyone else. Potter is the one with the brother wand, the one who looks like him, the one who’s…

“…I can’t be that for you,” Potter says quietly.

Tom blinks at him, startled. “What.”

“I’m not like that… that perfect version of an ‘equal’ that you have in your head. I’m not like that. I’m just…” he looks so small, so meek, “just Harry.”

Anger roars in Tom’s ears. “You’re not just—”

“Then what am I to you? Right now?”

Tom doesn’t have the words.

“There.” Potter’s smile falls away. “See? You don’t really know me. You’re too busy looking for yourself.”

Harry sidesteps away and vanishes into the floo.
Chapter End Notes

A picture I drew for the 1 year anniversary of the fic. Thank you everyone!!

Fanart [here](#)
Sorry for the long absence. A lot of family drama, anxiety, depression, teacher's college stuff all bundled together for an eventual half-year for me. Thank you so much for all the supportive comments in the past year. Honestly every comment gave me a reason to smile for that week. But without further ado... a chapter!

Immediately, Dumbledore moves past Tom and raises shaking hands up to Potter's head, only to stop, as if fearful that blood will lash out and burn as viciously as lightning would. Below, Potter tenses, waiting for some unnamed threat, before closing his eyes.

“...This can't be... I'm so sorry, Harry, this shouldn't be happening...!”

Potter scrunches his eyes, as if that will lock his eyes forever into his skull. “...I don't understand... are you a good Dumbledore or a bad one? I can't... I can't see it...”

Dumbledore drops his hand, eyes suspiciously wet. “Poppy!” his voice edges against a wobble, “We need to go to St. Mungo's immediately, I fear that Harry's health is being drained by this scar—it's not right, I feel something...!”

Madame Pomphrey doesn't waste time, rushing forward with floo powder and pushing Dumbledore forward with Potter. Floo powder flies up in the air like a dark fog, hiding them both. Potter doesn't even blink, staring bewildered at his surroundings, at Tom, before he's pushed into the fire and vanished elsewhere.

Tom stares at those flames and refuses to tremble.

By the end of the day, all of Hogwarts knows that Potter was sent to St. Mungo's, accompanied by Professor Dumbledore. Rumours spread easily, as infectious as the plague. 'Potter's leg got cut off by a troll, Potter was bitten by a werewolf, Potter suffered an allergic reaction after eating the new Halloween pastries, Potter is dying of a rare and terrible disease with only two days to live.'

The person who distastefully declares that rumour (Malfoy) gets punched in the face by a tearful Longbottom not long after.

“You don't just joke about people’s lives like that, you tosser!” Longbottom had uncharacteristically roared, before launching himself at Malfoy’s neck. The fight resulted in broken noses, bruises, and some creative curses that resulted in immediate hair loss. Impressive, for Longbottom.

Tom, however, continues his routine as usual. Potter’s condition has no bearing on his life, his work, the way he interacts with others. Only Longbottom and Myrtle Warren know that Potter and Tom interacted before Hogwarts but they don’t dare approach Tom, not after Tom glared harshly at Longbottom for asking about Potter.

As if they need to ask.
Potter will be fine. It’s only natural, as Tom’s mirror, that Potter will survive.

For a whole week, Dumbledore’s seat at the table is empty. Tom does not stab his fork into his dinner harder than usual.

He does not dream of red stairs bombarded with flashes of green.

Professor Dippet calls Tom into his office. Questions race through Tom’s thoughts. No one can prove that he pushed Potter. They can’t know. Though Tom just read a minor blurb in his DADA text about the existence of the Mind Arts and frustratingly the text did not expand on what the Mind Arts entail. Does this mean Wizards can invade the mind? What if they know? No, Tom is perfect. They won’t know but—

When he sees Potter, looking faded by a ghost, shrinking behind Dumbledore, in Dippet’s office, he thinks, he’s back. And then, an impulsive stupid thought, that little shit better have kept his mouth shut.

“Mr. Riddle,” Dippet nods, strutting about like a proud peacock. “Excellent, excellent, just in time. Now, I’ve been hearing very promising things about you, young man, very promising indeed. Model student. Always kind to others. Yes, you’ll be perfect.”

Dumbledore’s lips purse together. “If I may, Armando, perhaps a student from Harry’s house would be a more suitable—”

“Nonsense, Albus! The boys are already acquainted from a common background and I’m confident Mr. Riddle would keep up with his studies. If we assign Mr. Potter to the Longbottom boy, I fear we’d be digging Mr. Longbottom’s grave come exam time! No, I would like Mr. Riddle to watch over and reacquaint Mr. Potter with the school. Surely, Mr. Potter can take care of himself when he’s in the Gryffindor Dormitories?”

“Well…”

“I’m sorry, Professors,” Tom decides to interrupt, “but what exactly am I meant to be doing?” Why would Potter need to reacquaint himself with the school…?

At this, Dippet immediately goes quiet and glances at Dumbledore. The other professor looks older than ever.

“Since the… accident,” Dumbledore stares at Tom for a moment too long, “Harry has had problems… remembering things.”

…I’m afraid it is,” Dumbledore continues. Tom didn’t realize he’d said that out loud. “The healers are unsure of what happened but have stated that Harry may return to school, provided he return to St. Mungo’s every weekend for a checkup. In the meantime, they suggested that Harry be assigned a student guide to keep him company during school and reacquaint him with his classmates…. Keep him safe.”

Tom’s mouth feels too dry. “I see.” Potter remains hidden behind Dumbledore’s robes, as if trying to vanish on the spot or become one with the curtains. Unacceptable. “Of course, I shall accept.” This
can’t be true.

“Excellent,” Dippet claps his hands, “then—”

“No, don’t come near me!” Potter suddenly shrieks, falling backwards and landing against a propped up mirror.

Dumbledore’s face twists into a sickening sadness as he moves towards him, “Harry—”

“Don’t touch me, you manipulating fake-you… you! I bet you want to leave me with monsters as a baby so I’ll grow attached to you when I’m eleven!”

Any other time, Tom would relish at the look of confusion on Dumbledore’s face. But not today.

“Harry, it’s me. Albus Dumbledore. And I promise, I won’t let anyone hurt you.”

But Potter shakes his head, “You want me to go with a Snake-face. I can’t go with him. He’s all red inside and he’ll attack us with green spiders.”

Dippet, standing uncomfortably by his desk, laughs nervously. “Not to worry, young Riddle, Mr. Potter is merely… relapsing.”

Tom stares at him incredulously. Relapsing? Really?! How unintelligent do they think Tom is?

After a few awkward moments of watching Dumbledore baby Potter with soft words, Dippet tries to cut in. “Now, now, Mr. Potter. It’s time to move along and let Mr. Riddle take care of you, hm?”

Potter shivers, “No. I won’t go with the Snake-face.”

Dippet’s eye twitches. “Really, we do not speak to our classmates so disrespectfully.”

“He’s not a classmate. He’s almost a hundred years old and he likes to run cults in his spare time.”

“Mr. Potter—”

“…What do you care?” Potter’s voice suddenly sounds too quiet, too lacking. “You’re a minor character, aren’t you?”

For a moment, no one in the office moves.

Then, Dippet’s face turns flaming red, “How dare you! The nerve! Detention, Mr. Potter! After your return from your appointment next Saturday!”

“Now, now, Armando, surely you can see that Harry is stressed—”

“You’re coddling the boy too much, Albus! A few days back in school and he’ll be normal again now—”

“Harry James Potter is fine just the way he is!”

“Are you arguing with your superior, Albus?!”

…Rather than watching his professors continue to make fools out of themselves, Tom steps towards Potter. Tom’s reflection in the mirror behind Potter looks menacing and Tom immediately puts on his most pleasant smile.
“Well, then, shall we go?”

Potter buries his face against his knees. Tom can see the scar peeking out behind unruly hair.

(“I never liked your birthday presents!” Dippet roars in the background.)

“I spent a good five thousand galleons on those matching cufflinks!”

“Potter,” Tom grits his teeth, keeping his smile in place. “We should stop disturbing the professors. I’m sure you’re quiet shaken. Come along…”

“…st…p….th….t..” comes the mumble.

Tom’s eye begins to twitch. “I’m sorry, what?”

“I said, stop acting so nice.”

“Don’t be silly,” Tom smiles wider, trying to resist the urge to storm away. “You’ve been through quite a shock, of course, I will treat you this way.”

Slowly, Potter lifts his head. Those bright green eyes from before look distant and dull. “A horrible idea will eat your brain. You’re snake-faced.”

Tom narrows his eyes. “I’m Slytherin, yes, I’m pleased you remember…”

“Did you decide to eat a Basilisk?”

“…No, but—”

“They’ll make your toes into rainbows. Then your teeth will fall out. Snakes don’t have teeth. Wait. Do they? How many?”

“Just shut up, why don’t you!” Tom hisses.

Potter stares at him, wide-eyed and dull dull dull how dare he be dull when—

He smiles. Small and… relieved?

“There. That’s you.”

Then he walks out of Dippet’s office.

Frozen for a moment, Tom angrily stalks after him, ignoring Dippet’s burning wigs and Dumbledore’s sudden shade of neon orange.

“Potter, wait!”

The idiot has the nerve to walk faster.

“Stop right there, you imbecile!”

Potter pauses. “Oh,” he says, wary and curious. “You’re still here.”

Tom wants to explode. “I’m still…? Of course, I’m still here! I’m supposed to be watching you! Didn’t you hear a word that Professor Dippet said?” At Potter’s unnerving blank stare, Tom shakes
his head. “Never mind.” He glares down at Potter, wondering if this madness seems feigned or real. It’s too lively to be real. Too unnerving.

His practiced smile comes back in place. “Shall I go through what you’ve missed in the past week?”

Potter just stares at the wall.

“….Well?”

“…You should just be the real Tom Riddle. You’re better like that,” Potter mutters, deciding to walk along the broken cracks on the floors.

“…I don’t know what you mean.”

“You’ll be less like a Snake-face then.”

Tom almost scowls. “You…!” He does not let his hands shake. He does not look into Potter’s eyes. “Is your magic is still stable? Are you truly in better health?”

Potter only laughs like a rusted stringed instrument.

He does not dream of dots of green, nor bloody lightning bolts dripping from his hands. His steps shatter the glass underneath.

“You’re going to die a terrible death,” he hears Potter frantically telling that Myrtle Warren girl from Ravenclaw, “because of a toilet! You need to stay away from bathrooms!”

“Oh shut your trap, Potter!” Olive Hornby steps in when Warren starts bursting out in tears. “No one believes your nonsense. Do us all a favour and stop speaking!” she snarls self-righteously like the hypocrite she is. After all, Hornby often torments Warren with jabs and barbs about her weight and glasses.

Potter just stares at her, perplexed. “I don’t remember you… Did you turn into a rabbit? Are you late?”

The bell for class rings before Hornby can explode. She and Warren rush towards the bathroom, against Potter’s warnings. Only Tom remains to watch Potter carefully.

Potter jumps when Tom approaches. “Riddle? You aren’t supposed to be here…”

“Yes, I know. I should be in Transfiguration. Like you. But Professor Dippet did assign me to look after you,” Tom says as neutrally as possible.

“Oh.” Potter looks ready to ask if Professor Dumbledore should be headmaster instead. He seems to be mixing up the identities of some of the teachers lately. If that scar is the source of some sort of magical concussion, Tom will hex someone…

“Well? Come along. I don’t like to repeat myself,” Tom drags Potter from staring intently at a suit of armor.

He had tried putting on a façade of patience when Potter first returned, but found that wasted time. Potter will shrink away from him and go disturbingly quiet, or worst, Potter will blabber on and on
about the stars and how the world will be overrun with a butterfly plague unless Tom makes him get to class. So Tom drops the appearance of decorum and openly scowls and jabs at Potter to move now. If Potter tells anyone about Tom’s true personality, Tom doubts anyone will believe him in this state. Besides, Potter and him are the sam—(blood on the stairs and Potter’s vacant stare—)

“I don’t want to go to Transfigurations! A troll is just going to interrupt the class!”

Tom grits his teeth. “A troll is not going to interrupt the class. Stop your lucid daydreams, they’re not real.”

Potter narrows his eyes. “Try saying that when you wake up with a snake face one day.”

Again, with the snake face accusation. Tom would call Potter prejudiced towards Slytherins if he hadn’t seen him speaking amiably with Astoria Greengrass. At least snake is better than ferret. The only positive from this situation is seeing Draco Malfoy’s humiliated face whenever Potter calls the Malfoy a ferret.

Tom does not yell. He does not. He is a composed, superior being, with a shattered mirror-half called Harry Potter. The stairs incident caused all this. If it weren’t for that incident, weren’t for Potter’s strange mutterings, Tom would have…

“You don’t have to keep doing this,” Potter says quietly. “I can get to class on my own. I don’t mind being late.”

Tom scowls, his grip tightening around Potter’s. “It’s my job. I’m not one to slack off on my responsibilities.”

Potter stops in mid-step.

“What is it now?” Tom demands when Potter refuses to budge from his grip.

Potter stares at him strangely. It feels as if it’s the first time Potter has truly looked at him in years. “You… you’re really here.”

“…Yes. I am. I should really be in class. As should you.”

Slowly, Potter starts to smile. “You’re very different from the Toms I know.”

Tom scowls. Unsurprised. “It’s a common name. Likely for common people. Of course, I’m not like them. They’re fools. All of them.”

Potter’s grin becomes disturbingly bright.

“Stop that.”

Potter keeps grinning. “Stop what?”

Tom resists the urge to point. “That. That… smile. You don’t mean it. So stop.”

“Oh.” The grin drops, as sudden as a lightning strike. Tom almost wants to throw the grin back on but he knows this Potter more. The quieter one. “…I didn’t think you noticed that sort of thing.”

“I notice everything,” Tom doesn’t sneer. He’s a genius. Of course, he notices everything.

Potter’s stare turns vacant again. “I don’t think you can notice everything…”
“I do,” Tom snaps, making Potter turn to him. “Especially if it’s about you. We’re the same, after all,” he admits. Denying this connection is what caused the stairs incident. They are the same. Both liars, both orphans, half-bloods, and yet…

The scar is especially bright when Potter looks at him. “Liar.”

Tom almost snarls back except he stops at Potter’s peculiar smile. It’s… something Tom can’t describe. Can’t quite categorize.

“If we were the same, that would be very boring. We’d have no foil. No story. No, Tom, I like you better this way. We should be different. I want to be different.”

Tom… doesn’t want to look at that expression on Potter’s face anymore.

“Shut up and pick up your pace. We’re late enough as it is.”

“But isn’t a giant spider going to come disrupt our class today?”

“Potter, no.” Tom turns back to drag Potter forward by the robes.

“Urgh. You’re no fun,” Potter sticks his tongue out, looking very much like a scrunched up monkey.

Tom’s lips quirk forward. “Well,” he admits, “I would pay a galleon to see Dumbledore get attacked by a spider.”

“Oh, not that’s just mean!” Potter pouts, “I can see you smirking!”

“No one will believe you.”

“Mean!”

Tom smiles to himself.

During that Transfiguration class, Dumbledore stares at Tom and Potter intensely while they work on the day’s spell together. Tom redirects Potter’s strange comments back to their work, nodding in approval whenever Potter creates a perfect goblet from the rats they’ve been assigned.

There, Tom thinks. Potter can be highly skilled when he applies himself. In a few weeks, this memory quirk will fix itself and my mirror will be back.

“Watch out for the pixies!” he hears Potter cry out randomly again. At this point, every first year student will become numb to the cry of ‘pixies’, ‘pixies’, from Potter’s mouth.

“I must say I’m pleasantly surprised, Tom,” Dumbledore says quietly.

Tom twitches. The awful orange colour from Dippet’s curse still shines on Dumbledore’s nose.

Before Tom can retort, Dumbledore places a hand on his shoulder and… nods.

“You ground him.”

Tom freezes.

“…I just hope you don’t think you can cure him.”
Tom storms out of the Hogwarts floo, flames rushing out like parting stormy waves, followed by a string of floating purple ducks that look like they’re clinging to the remnants of a crashing muggle plane. Students leap out of the way as Tom barrels past them, eyes intent on one retreating back.

“Potter!” he snarls. And no, that’s not the right name, the right address, anymore. Not for him. “Harry!”

His name tastes like the killing curse. Bright. Brilliant. A flash. Gone. Why did he waste so many years sneering ‘Potter’ when ‘Harry’ feels right? What was it that looney Trelawney once said? Yes… ‘you cannot know someone until you truly name them.’

Again, students start to whisper excitedly like a chorus of snakes. Tom pays them no mind as he pushes them out of his way, ignoring the agitated quacks behind him. Some ducks nearly spiral into armor, their feathers raining in Tom’s sight—

Finally, Tom snatches Harry’s hand from the crowd.

“Stop it,” Harry says coolly, back still turned to him.

“Never.” The words slip out. Unbidden.

“Let. Go.”

“I don’t want to,” Tom says foolishly. But no, how is it foolish to hold on to what is his? How is it foolish to stop denying what Harry Potter is? Harry is powerful, an expert duelist, excellent with serpents, fitting to stand by Voldemort’s side. “You always walk away, you don’t truly look at me.” After all, how often has Harry seen other Dark Lords in Tom’s eyes? “I won’t let go until you listen.”

Harry whirls around and jabs his finger at Tom’s chest. “Listen?! Listen?! Have you paid any attention to what I’ve told you this weekend?! I listen all the bloody time! You wouldn’t believe the shite I hear. And you… oh you… I listen far too much to you. No, Tom Riddle, I think you should be the one to really listen for once! I have no obligation to stay here just because you tell me to. I’m leaving.”

He rips his fingers away from Tom’s hold, leaving Tom’s hand cold, and storms off.

“Harry…!”

“Perhaps, Professor Riddle…” Of all people, Dumbledore appears to investigate the situation. Why does the universe keep throwing the old fool his way?! “You should move your domestic dispute away from prying eyes.

“What eyes—” Tom stops, finally processing the huge crowd of curious students gathered in the corridor. “Get back to your dorms, you little—”

“Professor Riddle.” Dumbledore coughs too loudly. “Would you like to walk with me back to your office? Professor Potter seemed to be heading there.”
Tom glares at the last of the scurrying students who are jumping to the nearest exits. “…Fine.”

“…Well then,” Dumbledore begins, after a tense minute flies by, “what did you do to upset young Harry?”

“I made him upset?! He—” Tom stops and glowers. “He’s not upset. It’s just a minor misunderstanding.”

“Hmm… I’m sure.”

“Harry is stubborn. He doesn’t listen to anything I say!”

“Sounds familiar.”

“Can’t he see that I’m showing him a better way to live?”

“…I’m sure you believe you are correct.”

Tom scowls at him. “I’m not in the wrong.”

“You never seem to be.”

“Because I never am.”

Dumbledore shrugs.

With narrowed eyes, Tom hisses, “Harry will see things my way.”

“Then by all means,” Dumbledore gestures to the door, “go see him.”

True enough, they’ve already arrived at Harry and Tom’s joint office. Tom stares at that door, at the plaque, for a few burning seconds before storming through the door, slamming it behind him.

“Harry,” Tom wonders what face he should put on. The charmer? The contrite? No, this isn’t Tom’s fault. It’s Harry’s somehow, for not understanding who Tom is. Not seeing himself in Tom as Tom sees himself in Harry…

Tom doesn’t bother with fake faces.

“Harry,” Tom begins, ignoring the ducks now waddling upside down from his hover charm, “I admit I deceived you but my intentions were—”

Nagini hisses despondently on the empty floor. [Green Eyes has left usssss,] she wails as much as any snake can wail.

[What.]

[I said—]

[I know what you said!] The main office is bare, stripped of all eccentric paper cranes, of all colour. No bean bag chairs, no swishy hammock, no drawer with edges of colourful wool peeking out. No ridiculous Harry Potter smiles or mischievous eyes. Just emptiness. Nothing. [Where is he?! Why did he go?!]
Rolling over as much as any giant snake can, Nagini hisses, *[He said he needs a break from you. To think. He said he might not come back for a while. What did you SAY, Master!? Did you offer him rotting mice?! I told you to always bring FRESH mice! The fresher the better! Probably live, in Green Eyes’ case!]*

*[I’m going to fetch him, Nagini, stay put,]* Tom scowls, intent on pulling Hogwarts apart if he has to.

*[He went through the fire-thing. He’s not in Hogwarts.]*

*[He has to teach tomorrow!]*

*[Then he’ll come back in the morning. Unlike you, he seems genuinely fond of those human babes. Does he view them as his own snakes? I might have to kill the competition.]*

Tom rushes out, shutting the door to Nagini’s delusional ramblings. Sure enough, Dumbledore still remains standing by the door, humming to himself.

“Where is he?” Tom demands.

“I assume in your office,” Dumbledore says patiently, as if to a child.

“He’s not there! He flooed out! Where does Longbottom live? Diggory?” Tom snarls. Those are the only two that Harry would turn to. The only two that can claim to know Harry better. Soon that won’t be the case.

“I’m afraid I can’t tell you that right now, Tom. You don’t appear to be in the best mood…”

“I don’t care about that, I need to see him!”

“Now, Tom, I know you’re normally a bit reckless when it comes to Harry, but—”

“I’m not reckless.”

Dumbledore just sighs forlornly. “Is this your first major fight as friends?”

*Friends*, what a simple word for what Harry is to Tom. Dumbledore could never hope to understand them.

“I see myself in him,” Tom says instead.

For several maddening seconds, Dumbledore merely stares at him.

“…Of course you do. Similarities can be one of the many things that draw people together in friendship. But sometimes differences between other individuals draw them together too. Harry always tells me how fond he is of your professionalism, your ingenuity, and your ambition.”

“I…” For some reason, Tom feels heat rushing to his face, “I had no idea.” But of course, Harry would say that. Everyone says that. But it feels different now, coming from Harry. Somehow… Tom has come to… value… what Harry says. If Harry has always thought of Tom this highly, then Tom’s deceptions must have felt disrespectful, an insult even…

“How…” Tom hates to give Dumbledore more information to use against him, but Dumbledore’s regard for Harry will be more useful, “do you regain favour with someone who’s angry with you?”

Dumbledore beams so warmly that Tom wants to put a bag over the old man’s head. “Well, you gave them space to calm down first. Respect their distance for a reasonable amount of time, and then
approach them for a discussion. Explain how remorseful you are and apologize. Hope they accept the apology.”

Tom frowns. “I’m not remorseful. I merely… regret omitting certain information.”

“…I believe that is one of the definitions that mean ‘remorseful.’”

Tom glowers. The floating ducks behind him quack unhelpfully from behind.

“Surely, you have better advice on this subject?”

“Well, you do supposedly know everything about Harry. I’m sure it won’t be too difficult for you to figure out, Tom.”

This infuriating old man and his infuriating sarcasm will die someday.

“…Stay. Still.” Tom hisses at the purple duck that keeps trying to nestle on his head instead of his desk. If this duck is Bellatrix, he will throw her into a pond.

[Why can’t I just eat them. They look tasty. Maybe poisonous. But I’m sure I could still eat them,] Nagini muses, still claiming the empty floor that Harry left behind.

At this rate, Tom might let her. [I told you, they’re my followers. I still need them.] Probably.

The spell cast on his Death Eaters seems to be a combination of human transfiguration, a colour dye charm, confundus, and a fourth element Tom can’t figure out yet. Once he figures out the fourth element of magic, he might be able to reverse the transformation…

“QUACK!” the duck on his head blares into his ears.

Tom slams his hands on the table. “Enough!”

He immediately freezes them all into a stasis spell and shoves them into his desk. A few purple feathers fly out and Tom swats them away.

[I’ll do this later, after I talk to Harry. Don’t eat them, Nagini.]

[Urgh… fine…]

That night, Tom finds himself tossing and turning. He can’t hear the sound of Harry rustling around downstairs, or the hammock swaying. No bustling as Harry tries to secretly cook a new concoction for Tom to reject. Nothing but Tom’s own breathing, Nagini sulking where Harry used to be.

Was Hogwarts always this quiet?

“Whoa there, Professor Riddle looks really tired,” a few students whisper.

“What? Why? I thought he finally took Professor Potter out on a date! He should be glowing! More handsome than ever!”
“Didn’t you hear their fight in the corridor last night? Professor Potter looked like he might burst into tears!”

“No way!”

“Yes, way! Professor Riddle must have really screw—oh hi Professor Riddle, don’t you look so handsome today?! Ahahaha… oh look, I see Ginny!” Lavender Brown scampers off towards the Gryffindor table. The other girls behind her follow suit.

Tom glowers at the rest of the students peeking at him from their tables. They all quickly return their attention to breakfast.

“Professor Chang,” Tom says, when he takes his seat at the table, “I was wondering if Harry paid a visit to your… significant other… last night.”

“Why do you ask?” Chang smirks infuriatingly. “I heard from a little bird that you two went on a date—”

“It was merely a drink—” Well, a meeting with the order that will rule the world one day.

“—so he should have been with you. Did he run off? Scared he decided to change his mind and date me and Cedric?”

“What.”

“We are very fond of him.”

“You have each other, stay away from him.”

Chang just beams. And refuses to answer the question.

Respect their distance for a reasonable amount of time, Dumbledore’s voice echoes.

Fine. Just for today.

The day seems to pass by sluggishly. Tom keeps glancing at the clock on the wall, counting down the seconds till the next meal. Again, Harry isn’t there…

“He took the day off,” Dumbledore shrugs, when Tom demands an explanation at dinner.

By evening, every student knows to avoid Professor Riddle if he comes anywhere near. Their handsome and polite professor seems irritable, eager to snap at any imperfection, overly sarcastic, and dismissive…

Tom ignores them all when he returns to his office, pacing back and forth, ignoring how much louder his footsteps echo now. Irritating. When Harry was here, Tom didn’t have to think about how big this room was. It was filled with useless trivial things like knitted cup warmers, magazines on gardening, the latest attempted pastries. Tom can still smell the lingering sugar and cinnamon now…

Harry’s being unreasonable. Once Tom has the opportunity to talk to him, all will be well. Tom will
feel—

Will feel…?

“Oh,” Tom stops, feeling very much like a fool.

*I miss him.*

Chapter End Notes

AN: This was literally my only chapter note for this chapter --> Tom realizing he doesn’t know shit about harry and he really wants to. How do u friendship. Monday being unbearable without harry ahahahahahahahaahahahahahahahahahahahah……ha
For one year, after graduation, Tom travelled to as many countries as he could. He spent most of his time in Albania, diving into the Dark Arts, pushing the limits of magic. He wrote notes on as many magical creatures he could study, he mastered and reworked many dark curses.

Every spell he learnt was something he could rub in Dumbledore’s face when he returned for an interview. Too young? Too inexperienced to teach right out of Hogwarts? Tom would show him. He would show everyone who had ever wronged him that he is a superior being, better than everyone who ever doubted him...

But Tom always felt something missing. Incomplete.

For a long time, Tom thought that this feeling was his need to prove himself, to become the best applicant for the soon-to-be-opened DADA position. He thought this feeling was the need to fulfill his ambition as Dark Lord. After all, Tom didn’t need attachments. Any personal attachments were weakness.

And yet, Tom wants Harry to be his equal.

And yet, Tom misses Harry.

All those Death eater meetings pretending he didn’t want to curse every one of his followers, all those days cooped up with a dark arts text, all those days wanting to strangle the sycophants who only ever praised him to gain a higher social class, and Tom never recognized the emptiness within himself.

The lack.

0

[…Nagini,] Tom asks, because there is no one else to ask. Perhaps this is why other humans value ‘confidantes.’ Tom, being superior to everyone, has never needed one before. [What do snakes do to regain favour with each other? To… apologize?]

[…What?] Nagini lifts her head up from the corner of gloom. Apparently, she can still smell Harry’s scent lingering in the floors. [Why would we apologize to one another? I would destroy any rival snakes who cross me.]

Tom pushes aside his lesson plans for next month. [Never mind, I forgot that you’re a mere animal.]

Nagini hisses loudly. [A mere ANIMAL who treats Green Eyes better than YOU. If you wish to court him, then feed him well, and destroy all rivals.]

[I am NOT courting—Never mind. You wouldn’t understand.]
A few seconds pass before Nagini says, *[This… ‘apologizing’ thing… it will return Green Eyes to our nest?]*

*[Yes.,] Tom says, though his inner Dumbledore says no.*

*[Give him an offering of dead flowers. Red like the colour of blood. That should be similar to offering him what you’ve hunted.]*

Sometimes, Tom wants to move to another universe filled with other competent beings like himself. No divination plaguing his equals, no annoying snakes who clearly don’t understand his greatness. *[For the last time, Harry is not a snake. He will NOT appreciate a dead rat or—]*

*[But humans give each other dead flowers all the time to show remorse, correct? I heard it in one of the ‘romance’ books Green Eyes gave me.]*

Tom doesn’t know whether to scowl or laugh. *[You… read romance novels?]*

*[Yes. Green Eyes likes to read them to me so I can understand humans better. They make me more hungry.]*

Many questions come to mind such as, how Nagini is able to read English in the first place. But, being Lord Voldemort’s familiar, perhaps that should be expected. *[…Never mind, I don’t want to know.]*

There must be some effective way to gain someone’s forgiveness! If computers worked in Hogwarts, Tom would browse through the internet (one of five of the only useful things muggles have invented). He can’t imagine the humiliation and ridicule he might receive if he asked one of his co-workers… however…

Tom begins to smile. Perhaps to reach his ever-absurd Harry, he needs to use some absurd methods himself…

0

Crowds of students gather in front of the bulletin board in front of the great hall, whispering to each other about the strange new notice. Normally, professors post club times, choir tryouts, lists of useful texts for extracurricular hobbies like Wizard chess or cooking. Some students use the bulletin board to find study partners or organize weekend friendly game nights.

Today, however, a new notice reads: *List the best ways to apologize to someone important. The person to write the best method will win 50 Galleons. AFTER the method has been successfully implemented.*

“Whoa, that’s good money! Could use more investments for our future endeavors,” Fred or George remarks. “Put down *do all your chores* or something, that’s what we do for mum!”

“Nah,” George or Fred shakes his head, “we usually sweettalk her. Put that down too!”

By lunchtime, Tom secretly collects the results and crosses off the obvious methods like ‘just apologize clearly’ (useless) or ‘wait till they’re not angry anymore’ (he *needs* to see Harry again. Lord Voldemort doesn’t *wait.*)

So far, bribery seems the best method—chocolate or flowers ([*I told you,*] Nagini gloats) being the most popular. Some students suggested serenading; the song selections provided are either modern
trash sung by the Weird sisters or from muggle musicals that used to play on reruns in the orphanage. Tom scraps those immediately. After hearing Harry hum those very same songs while baking, Tom doubts his own singing could create the same soothing effect.

Bribery, it seems, may be the best method. But what to get for Harry Potter? What would he appreciate? Not money or new clothes…

“Man, that poor bastard who put that notice up this morning must be so desperate,” Chang remarks, taking a big bite out of her apple.

“Or socially inept,” Snape sneers, trying to cut up his meat. “Imagine the stupidity! Posting up potential vulnerabilities…”

“Any idea on who did it?” Hooch pipes in, handing McGonagall another fork. “Can’t be a student, with that writing style.”

“You never know. Might be a prank the Weasleys are setting up, or a dramatic exercise from the Theater Club,” Chang says.

“We have a theater club?!”

“Yes, Rolanda. And we have a chess club and cooking club too! Not everything is about Quidditch!”

“Gasp,” Hooch pretends to be wounded, “how dare the former Ravenclaw seeker say such a thing?”

“Still… I do find myself curious…” McGonagall surprisingly joins in. “They must a desperate or private person to seek help like this. How does one go through life without having to apologize at least once?”

“Speak for yourself,” Snape sneers once more.

“Then,” Tom smoothly interjects, “if you are so above it all, Severus, how would you create the perfect apology?”

Snape’s face goes dark. “There is no such thing as a proper apology. No matter what, the wronged party will always hold some resentment towards you from it. All you can do is move on or devote yourself to undoing that wrong until fate sees fit.”

Everyone at the table drops their cutlery in shock.

“Wow,” Chang remarks, “that is dark as hell, what in the world happened to you?!”

Snape merely stands up and leaves.

“…Does anyone else think we should start teaching a mandatory social skills class to staff and students? Anyone?”

The whole table, but Tom, raises their hands.

Tom finds himself distracted by Snape’s words for the rest of the day. Are apologies truly worthless? Will Harry never speak to him again? Always staring at Tom with an accusing look in his eye, never acknowledging him…

His quill snaps and the ink bottle besides him shatters, spilling all over his desk.
“Merlin, Professor, are you alright?!” Granger says.

Tom stares down at the ink, the stains that would be permanent if not for magic.

“Class is dismissed. You may use this free period however you wish, though I advise you use it for homework. I’m needed elsewhere…”

He has the perfect bribe to assemble.

His confused class stares after him as he storms out.

“…He’s definitely the bloke who posted that note this morning,” Ron Weasley tells the others.

“…Should we send anonymous letters with gift ideas for Professor Potter?”

“Oh yes. Put down dancing hamsters, more yarn, and baking supplies on the list. Oh, and owl treats.”

First, Tom conjures the finest quality yarn he can, in every bright colour. Smooth and silky, nothing itchy or prone to fuzz like Harry’s cheap materials. He bundles them up with ribbon and places them in a huge woven basket. Then Tom finds genuine origami paper, the kind that folds easily, and is soothing to touch. He picks random patterns from each stack of paper—polka dots, rainbow fans and more. Then, Tom goes hunting for warm blankets. The hammock Harry sleeps in always seems impractical and cold.

“What else…” Tom murmurs, thinking of other hobbies Harry enjoys. Maybe a few sweets? He conjures up a few orders of chocolate frogs and treacle tarts as well. Also more of those obnoxious neon socks Harry is so fond of.

A few death-eater-ducks waddle about and attempt to chew on the gift. Tom wandlessly turns them temporarily to stone to prevent any accidents.

He’s thinking of adding some owl treats when suddenly someone knocks on the door.

Tom ignores it. The ‘do not disturb’ sign should deter any visitors.

The ignorant person knocks again, louder.

Scowling, Tom opens the door, ready to berate any student or teacher come to see him at seven in the evening, when all words clog up in his throat.

There, standing in his doorway, is Harry.

All of Tom’s speeches about equals, all the arguments he has in favour of the death eaters, every flattery he knows, seems to vanish under an invisibility cloak. All Tom can concentrate on is the heavy bags under Harry’s eyes, as if some muggle punched him in both eyes, and the plain clothing he has on. Every Harry’s hair seems messier than usual, more dull and drained. He looks like he’s fading.

“Have you been sleeping at all?!” Tom blurts out.

Harry glares. “Yes,” he lies. “I sleep great lately. Now, are we going to dueling club or not?”

Tom blinks at him. “…Dueling club…?”
“It’s tonight, remember? I would have sent another sick note, but I didn’t want to miss the first session. I am supposed to be running it with you.”

Still processing the fact that he actually **forgot** one of his responsibilities, Tom doesn’t move.

“Urgh,” Harry sighs, a hand to his temple. “Listen, I get that you’re angry at me, but now’s not the time—”

“**Angry** at you?” Tom snaps out of his daze.

“Yes, angry—”

“You’re the one who’s angry at **me**! I’ve been waiting, giving you **space**, trying to think of ways to show remorse, and you think I’m **angry**?!”

Harry’s frown falters. He looks lost, like the day he found out he had family other than the Dursleys. “I… Aren’t you though?”

Tom’s fingers curl up together. “Yes, I’m angry, but not at you!” At himself, at the situation, at how blind he’s been. “I’m more frustrated than angry.” Anger feels different. Anger is the desire to hurt and maim, to make others suffer. While Tom has felt inklings of those urges for Harry, it’s nothing compared to the **lack** and the desire to be near him.

“I don’t…” Harry steps back, “I don’t understand… you should be angry at me. Why wouldn’t you be angry with me? Every Tom Riddle is so **so** bloody angry all the time…”

“Well, I’m not **like** those Tom Riddles,” he hisses. “I actually **miss** you—”

Harry’s eyes look oddly intense. “You do?”

“No!” Tom denies, but it’s too late. “I merely… tolerate you more than I do others.”

“Oh. I see.” Harry’s expression abruptly closes off. “Then it’s a good thing we’re both taking care of the same club. Which we’re running late for. Right now. You should get changed.”

Mentally, Tom curses himself for losing track of all the apology plans in his head. He steps back in his office, hunting for better looking robes, when Harry gives a quiet gasp.

Tom turns around, and to his horror, Harry has found the unfinished, overflowing gift basket… and is reading the card. The card Tom hasn’t figured out how to write yet, but merely says I’m sorry.

**Don’t touch that,** Tom almost shouts, almost curses. But Harry’s voice, softer than a dying whisper, makes Tom feel cold.

“Is this… for me?”

They stare at each other, like wobbly reflections in a pool, distorted by ripples. Tom wants to say something, reply, anything, but words might shatter the strange precipice they seem to be standing on. There is something deeper in the air, that Tom doesn’t understand, doesn’t want to embrace, but won’t turn away either.

To say ‘yes’ would be to admit weakness, vulnerability, a disgusting mortal nature that Tom has wanted to throw away since he made his first horcrux. And yet, to say ‘no’ feels like leaving his **lack** a gaping wound forever…

Harry’s gaze begins to falter, to stare off into the distance at **other** futures, **other** Toms. Harry knows
the twisted and flawed faces of so many versions of Tom, yet he’s always smiled at this Tom, always reached out to him.

“Yes,” the words come out, like an overflowing dam. “It’s not done yet, but yes.”

“Oh…” Harry says quietly, and Tom sees the Harry he grew up with, the Harry he works with now, as the same person. “I… I didn’t think you’d ever… Wow. Thank you.”

Tom refuses to admit how his throat clogs up. “Do you forgive me?”

Harry’s fingers tighten against the basket. “I need… time. Lots of time. I don’t know if I can trust you. But… I want to.”

“But you’re supposed to forgive me now. I gave you a gift!”

“Do you even understand why you’re apologizing for?”

When Tom doesn’t answer, Harry only nods.

“That’s why I need time. And so do you. Think about it some more, Riddle. I’ll see you at dueling club.”

Tom resists the urge to pull Harry back towards him.
A bit of a longer chapter for you guys today. This chapter features the scene I've been wanting to write since I first started this story. Guess which one it is! :) Thanks again for everything!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Wait,” Tom says irrationally, “did you forget what I owe you?”

Harry pauses.

“Since when do you owe me anything?” he says, sounding concerned and flabbergasted.

“I promised to wear one of your atrocious sweaters, did I not?” Tom continues.

Harry’s jaw drops. “You mean… you’re actually going to keep your promise?”

Tom scowls. “Do you think that I have no honour?”

“No, just, I mean, I didn’t expect—”

Every bit of Tom’s self-preservation screams that he’ll never be caught dead in such neon colours and yet, Tom feels the irrational need to keep surprising Harry, to keep Harry from looking so bland and dull.

“Give me your most atrocious sweater, Harry. I keep my word.”

Several seconds pass. Tom feels the urge to transfigure the strangest sweater he can think of, if Harry won’t give him one, before Harry’s face bursts into delighted laughter. His laughs are so startling that Tom nearly forgets his anger. Instead, Tom feels the faint outline of a barely remembered scene… the delighted laughter feels like the long-lost threads of an old tune or lullaby…

“Oh Tom,” Harry grins, “I have so many ideas for you.”

Never mind. Tom should have been content with the gift basket apology.

“Where in the world are Professors Potter and Riddle?” Hermione scowls. “It’s been twenty minutes! I could have been half-way finished with our Potions assignment by now!”

“Hermione, no offense, but I’m pretty sure you can finish that essay later tonight with your eyes closed. You need to relax a bit more, you’ll be fine,” Ron tries to cheer her up.

“But it’s not fine, precious minutes of my life are ticking away! If Professor Riddle lost track of the time because of some strange hunt for the perfect apology, I swear—”

“Oh precious, sweet Hermione,” Fred wanders over.
“So naïve,” George joins in.

“Do you—”

“—really—”

“—think that—”

“—Riddle would be the one to—”

“—miss an appointment or—”

“—our Professor Harrykins—”

“—instead?”

They both lean against each other with matching Cheshire grins.

“W-well,” Hermione falters, “Professor Potter’s been ill since Monday…”

“You mean, Sunday, when Riddle took Harrykins on a mysterious date which blew up in his face,” George says. “Would kill to know what he did to our Harry.”

Fred only cackles ominously.

“You don’t think they’re really dating, do you? I mean, Professor Riddle seems cool and all but sometimes he gets a really creepy look on his face when he looks at Professor Potter. Don’t think that’s love,” Ron points out.

“Oh Ron,” George pats his head.

“Don’t you know?” Fred winks.

“That’s the—”

“—look of—”

“—Someone who—”

“—Wants to—”

“Monopolize him,” they both say at once.

Ron snorts. “Well, until I see Professor Riddle and Professor Potter acting friendly on both sides, I won’t believe it.”

At that moment, the doors open and the very professors they discussed rush in. Professor Potter looks like he hasn’t slept in weeks, about to collapse at any moment, but his familiar smile remains a comfort even if it seems a bit forced. Professor Riddle, however, is the one who makes everyone’s jaws drop.

With a scowl (which Ron honestly believes is Riddle’s true default setting, not the eerily perfect smile he has on all the time), Professor Riddle seems to be wearing a fitted yellow sweater. The yellow yarn seems mixed with bits of silver thread, making the sweater gleam in the firelight. Even worse, the design in the center of the sweater features some dancing bananas, arm in arm, doing the can-can. Ron can’t see it from here, but he bets that the writing at the bottom of the sweater says,
let’s go bananas! The worst thing is that Professor Riddle still looks as elegant and dignified as always, even wearing such a thing.

The room is so quiet, Ron can barely hear any breathing.

“Hello everyone!” Professor Potter says as enthusiastically as possible. “Such a great turnout tonight! I’ve missed seeing you all! Sorry I’ve been away. I’m kind of worn down lately. But no worries, I’ll be back to teach tomorrow morning. Anyways, let’s get started. Riddle, do you have any introductory speeches you want to say?”

Professor Riddle huffs and sends that creepy look towards Professor Potter again. Somehow, that look seems creepier than usual, as if Professor Riddle has *realized* how creepy that stare is and embraced it.

Ron does not shiver at all, nope.

“So,” George remarks, “do we have to give Professor Riddle the shovel talk?”

Hermione blanches. “The what-now?”

“Well, they *must* be sleeping together by now,” Fred nods.

George glares darkly and smiles.

“Shovel talk, it is,” he says to Ron and Hermione’s horror.

Act like a leader and no one will question you. Tom channels the aura of a commanding dark lord as he orders various students to fix their dueling stances. He gives no mercy (to an extent) when he and Harry perform their dueling demonstration. When Tom hears a few snickers over his sweater, he glares those students into terrified silence.

Smugly, Tom turns to Harry, ready to snidely comment that the students still respect him, no matter what he wears, when he notices Harry’s distracted gaze.

Even now, when Tom acquiesces to Harry’s requests, Harry sees another Riddle instead.

Unknowingly, Tom’s fists curl together.

Suddenly, before Tom can comment, a stray slicing hex flies through the air, headed towards Harry’s torso, and Tom sees a horrified Ron Weasley yell, “Professor Potter, watch out!”

But Harry doesn’t hear. Harry’s lost in whatever visions, in whatever realities, plague him, and Tom thinks *NO*!

He yanks Harry behind him, summons up a wandless shield charm and blasts the slicing hex into the ceiling. The force of the backlashed hex makes the ceiling rumble, makes the torches shiver in fear, and immediately, the room bursts into panicked cacophony.

“Professor Potter, are you alright?”

“What was that?! Can shield charms really *do* that?!”

“The power that Professor Riddle had…”
“Why’d you have to be so clumsy, Ron?!”

“Oh my god, is he hurt?!”

“ENOUGH!” Tom roars, if only to hide the way Harry’s hands tremble. “Mr. Weasley—”

“Which one?” Fred and George pipe up.

“Ronald Weasley,” Tom corrects.

“Oh no,” Ron moans, “it’s never good when they use your full name.”

“Detention. This Friday, after your brothers are done their session with me. No tardiness, or I double
the detention. The rest of you? Never fire a spell you don’t mean to hit. Now, out. We’ll continue
next Tuesday.”

“But Professor—”

Tom narrows his eyes at all of them and seethes, “Out.”

No one questions his orders after that.

Once the room clears out, Tom whirls around and puts his hands on Harry’s shoulders. “Are you
hurt? Did anything hit you?”

“I’m fine,” Harry brushes him away, though he looks anything but fine. The bags under his eyes
seem more pronounced. He looks as if he saw his worst nightmare come true. “Just… distracted.”

“Let me check you over—”

“No, I told you, I’m fine!”

“You are not fine. What is happening to you?” Tom demands. “This is about more than our
disagreement.”

Harry glares at him, suddenly more present. “What do you care? If anything, you should be ecstatic
at the idea of me in pain. You always have been.”

Tom stills, the words like a petrifying charm holding him in place. His mind swirls with
contradictions—the immediate urge to deny such claims, and the evidence against it building inside
him.

With a huff, Harry pulls back. “That’s what I thought.”

And once more, Harry walks away from Tom Riddle.

[Is Green Eyes returning to us at last?] Nagini eagerly asks when Tom returns. The line of purple
death-eater-ducks, suddenly following her every action like ducklings, oink and quack at once.

[Do I want Harry near me because I enjoy seeing him in pain?] Tom demands instead.

[What?] If possible, Nagini would scrunch up her nose. [What kind of stupid garbage have the
humans been feeding you this time?]
Tom doesn’t answer. Instead, he pulls up another roll of parchment and immediately starts writing down every instance where he wanted Harry to suffer. Seeing as the list might continue indefinitely if Tom recalls every annoyance Harry has ever performed, he summarizes similar incidences and tallies them. The number of instances reach well over a thousand… all these murderous thoughts towards the one he wants to be his equal…

Disgust thrums through Tom, for the first time, towards himself. Has he ever tried to know Harry? Has he ever tried to build a bond with him through ‘amicable’ methods?

[…Master, do you seriously believe that you would hurt Green-Eyes?] Nagini groans.

Tom glowers at her and points to the list. [The evidence suggests that—]

[Never mind any murderous thoughts you might feel, that’s normal! If you and your mate didn’t annoy each other at least once, I would doubt your existence! Have you ever ACTED upon these urges? Have any of your actions ever been to harm? How have you acted when others threatened your mate?]

[He’s not my…]

Tom stops.

True enough, if anyone else ever dared annoy him to this extent, Tom would have plotted the proper revenge and ruined their life. But Harry, all these years with him, and Tom has never done so. If anything, he’s grown… more than tolerant towards Harry. Didn’t he come to this conclusion before? That Harry makes his life less dull? That Harry is a necessity? All those incidences when Tom was snide to Draco Malfoy, when Tom tried to sabotage Professor Trelawney when she made death predictions against Harry, when Tom dragged Harry to the library so he’d spend less time with Diggory, Longbottom, and Chang, when Tom tried to destroy Hagrid for threatening Harry with those acromantulas… Seeing Harry so worn during dueling club and wanting to hide him from prying eyes…

This terrible, creeping feeling, that’s latched onto his very soul, that refuses to leave…!

[I… care about him…] Tom stares down at his chest, as if to glare at his soul, as if to accuse it of betrayal.

Nagini sighs and turns to the purple ducks. [And they say humans are the most intelligent creatures on the planet. You ducks might be better off as ducks.]

Tom stands up. [This can’t be happening.]

[…But it is?]

[I can’t care about him.]

At those words, Nagini looks up at the ceiling imploringly.

[Sweet Snake Goddess, help me.] Nagini sighs. [Alright, I’ll ask. Why not?]

What a stupid question. Isn’t it obvious? [It’s weakness! He’ll find a way to control me! Caring is a way to exploit others!]

Nagini stays quiet. Even the ducks don’t give a quack or oink.
Well? Aren’t you going to say something?

Why should I] Nagini hisses, [when you’ve already decided that the risks outweigh the benefits? You’re too afraid to see what you’d lose instead of what you’d gain.]

Tom clenches his fists. [Of course, I know what I would gain.] An equal, someone who understands him, someone who acknowledges who he truly is. Not the face he wears for others, but the all facets of him.

Then why aren’t you chasing it?

Tom doesn’t answer. They both know why.

::

The realization that Tom not only views Harry as an equal but also cares about him, has Tom internally seething at himself for days after. How can he be so blind and unaware of his own feelings? How can he leave himself so vulnerable? He should avoid Harry, cut off this weakness, and focus on returning his death eaters to normal.

And yet every time he passes Harry in the corridor or sees him during meals, Tom’s ridiculous heart beats faster. He finds himself wanting to demand that Harry eat more, sleep more… He wants to hide Harry from Chang, from Malfoy, for anyone who will take his attention. He’s even kept the stupid banana-yellow sweater and kept it in his room for safekeeping. He’s even kept the annoying advice letters that still keep coming in the owl post for him about apologizing. These feelings that he buried under resentment and annoyance refuse to go away now that he’s acknowledged them.

It’s not love, it can’t be. Tom refuses to let it become love. But he cares, when he thought he’d never be capable. He’s being so weak.

Pushing Harry away is not an option but neither is letting this feeling fester. So Tom will keep a polite distance and continue to be polite until Harry talks to him again.

He’s in control.

::

By Friday evening, Tom waits impatiently for the Weasley twins to show up for their detention. He made sure to lock every purple death-eater duck upstairs with Nagini, threatening to let her eat them all if they try to escape. He doubts they understand, but regardless.

Fifteen minutes pass and still, the twins are no where to be seen. Tom scowls, ready to hunt them down and drag them to his office when he hears a bloodcurdling scream.

Tom’s blood runs cold. Before he can think, he rushes out, wand ready.

The scream continues, and Tom shouts, “Harry!” only to see that very person running away from a swarm of… moths?

For a moment, Tom stares in disbelief as these fluttery creatures swarm about Harry, as if to devour him. But they do nothing, only try to touch him with their little feet, making Harry shriek, “Get them off, get them off!” Tom almost wants to scoff at the silly fear, but then Harry locks eyes with his, and Tom sees the deep fear there.

Tom acts without thinking. He waves his wand, vanishing as many moths as possible, all while
marching towards Harry. Some of the moths burn from the intensity of Tom’s spells, but he doesn’t care. There’s an irrational need to be close, to use some kind of magic (anything) to wipe away the dread on Harry’s face.

Nearly all the moths are gone when Tom reaches him. He stretches out his hand towards Harry and suddenly—

“Got—” a voice sings.

“You…” The other voice finishes.

Two pairs of hands push Tom and Harry together and before Tom knows it, they’re both trapped in a confined space in the dark, with little room to move. Tom’s arms are around Harry’s, like a cage, and he stares down at Harry’s shocked gaze, at how close those eyes are, before he pushes back and shouts, “WEASLEYS!”

Muffled laughter answers him from the other side.

“Sorry Professors!”

“But you’ve been pranked!”

“Can’t leave the closet now—”

“—Until you work things out—”

“—And help us work out the kinks—”

“—Of our world-bending closet!”

What in the…? Tom is going to murder those twins. As soon as he takes over the world, they will be first to die.

He whispers a few spells. Blasting hex. The unlocking spell. Anything that might open the doors. But nothing. This closet, one that hadn’t been in the hall before, seems built against such tampering.

“Detention for the rest of the year,” Tom seethes.

“Hmmm… sorry!” One twin sings.

“It’s so worth it,” the other says.

“Shouldn’t have hurt our Professor Harrykins!” they both chorus. Their laughter seems to move farther and farther away…

“Don’t you dare leave! Let us out this instant or I’ll…!” The tremors behind Tom make him stop.

“Harry…?”

He slowly turns around and sees Harry with his knees curled up on the floor. Even as dark as the Weasley’s closet is, those green eyes seem to glow even when lost in thought. Then Harry hides his face against his knees and, for once, Tom has no idea how to proceed.

In all his years at the orphanage and Hogwarts, Tom has never had to comfort anyone. At the orphanage, Tom had the privilege of ignoring or causing anyone’s tears. Their pain was retribution. But at Hogwarts, Tom always acts pleasant to everyone, yet politely distant. No one would dare come crying to him…
To Tom’s horror, he hears sniffling. “Stop that,” he snaps, the urge to maim whoever caused this rising.

A watery chuckle answers him. “M’sorry. Can’t exactly do that.”

“Yes, you can! Just… concentrate, and you’ll stop…” Tom gestures towards the damp tear stains, “that!”

Harry finally raises his head and looks directly at Tom, his green eyes like distorted stained glass that’s been cracked and glued back together. Tom feels a strange pang at the sight. “Doesn’t work like that, Riddle.”

“Well, I wouldn’t know! I’ve never cried in my life!”

“You must have cried at least, once, when you were a baby at least.”

“Fine. I’ve never remembered crying in my life. Is that better?”

Another water chuckle rings out. “Much.”

Tom hates how his shoulders relax at the sight of that smile.

“Are you… feeling better?” That’s what people are supposed to say, correct? A pointless question, when Tom sees those tears still coming down Harry’s face. Mere words can’t change those away. Should Tom pat his shoulder? He’s seen students do that after crushing examination results. He quickly taps Harry’s shoulder quickly, as if burned.

A snort escapes Harry’s lips.

Tom scowls. “What? I’m comforting you.”

Something… soft and strange eases into Harry’s face. “Yeah… you are, aren’t you? Thank you, Tom. I feel… grounded, when you’re here.”

A burning sensation crawls its way up to Tom’s throat, as if he’s swallowed fire and joy all at once. “As long as you stop that, it’s fine.”

Harry laughs, his laughter as soothing as his singing, and it occurs to Tom that he’s never heard this from Harry before. Genuine laughter. Not forced or practiced.

“It’s called ‘crying’, Tom, and it’s normal for humans to do it when they’re sad or frustrated.”

“Are you?” Tom asks.

Harry blinks at him. “Am I what…?”

“Sad or frustrated.”

The look Harry gives him is indecipherable, like a dead language that recently surfaced from an ancient dig. Tom could study human expressions all his life and never be able to replicate the same look. There’s pain there, sadness, maybe even anger. But the pain bothers Tom the most. It shouldn’t be there. He wants to blot it out. Forever.

“You don’t have to tell me,” Tom says, not if it makes Harry’s expression worse. Tom can figure out the cause for himself later, deduce who the culprits are. Eliminate them. No need to make Harry… cry… again.
And yet, Harry whispers, “No. I… I think I want to. You… You’re different, right? You’re not like the other Tom Riddles? You’re you?”

That lost way of speaking, Tom hasn’t heard it since they were young… since the incident… it’s all so vague, Tom can barely recall the words…

“No, no, it’s you. It has to be. I know it. Tom, I just never know when I’m actually talking to you. I see so many different versions of you, my head hurts. It’s been nearly a week, and I’m slipping again. Twisting round and round, walking in different visions of different worlds. I see so many different Harry Potters, different Tom Riddles, with terrible fates, and I can never stop them. No one listens, no one believes, it’s just me…!”

Tom’s eyes widen. He… he doesn’t—

“You’re my Tom Riddle, right? Everything’s quieter around you. I just need…!”

“Enough!” Tom snaps because he can’t stand hearing Harry like this, so lost and confused, so far from himself. No. For the first time in his life, Tom wraps his arms around another human being, and he covers Harry’s ears. “You don’t need to listen to them anymore. Just listen to me. My heartbeat. I’m the Tom Riddle you should be seeing right now,” the only one, “I’m here.”

He presses Harry closer against him, silently dares Harry to protest.

But Harry doesn’t. He just… sags into Tom’s embrace and lets himself breathe.

Tom tangles his fingers tighter against Harry’s head. He doesn’t care about Harry. Not really. He’s merely protecting his investment in his future equal. That’s all.

He doesn’t care…

When Harry’s breaths calm down and the sniffling stops, Tom breaks the silence and demands, “Why were you running from those moths? They’re harmless.”

Harry puts on his annoying smile. “Have you seen moths up close?! They’re freaky little monsters with wings that want to suck your blood and crawl down your throat!”

Tom doesn’t budge at the silly answer. “The real reason, if you please.”

The smile drops. “You don’t want to know.”

“I believe I do.”

With a shrug, Harry murmurs, “The cupboard that the Dursleys made me sleep in used to be infested with moths. They somehow scared me, even when I made friends with the spiders. It’s silly, I know.”

Tom thinks of his own childhood, how Dennis tried to drown Tom in the ocean once, and then Tom made him pay. How vast oceans of water make his skin crawl even now that he knows how to swim…

“Perhaps not as silly as you think.”

Harry freezes, like a startled rabbit, before he stands up abruptly and says loudly, “Let’s figure out how to get out of here! Knowing Fred and George, there’s probably some sort of mechanism or
game we have to use. Let’s see… *lumos!*

Light brightens the closest, and on the walls, Tom sees a strange level and dial. The dial looks like several rotating circles, spinning around each other with different numbers running across each circle.

“Huh,” says Harry. “Maybe we should push the lever? I don’t see anything else.”

Tom frowns. If the Weasley Twins are involved, then this lever may dye their bodies entirely purple or make them sprout feathers. Still, he’d rather leave and then reexamine this encounter with Harry in detail later…

With a nod from Harry, Tom pulls the lever.

Instantly, the door opens.

But they don’t see Hogwarts beyond the doors. No, instead they see a giant flock of flamingoes outside. Flamingoes with beaks stained with blood.

Tom stares at the flamingoes, then back at the lever, then back at Harry.

He glares. “Did you have anything to do with—”

“Look, I’m as lost as you are, and I’m a *seer,*” Harry blanches. “I’m just surprised you can see what I see.”

The flamingoes look straight at them, their eyes menacing and bloodthirsty.

“Oh my god,” Harry gapes, “I think we’re in another universe. I think this closest *travels through different universes.*”

“Harry. No.” Tom says, wishing he could return to his room and plot dark evil plans, like a normal dark lord.

The flamingoes all let out a hungry cry, revealing strange sharp teeth (absolutely anatomically incorrect for avian species, definitely *not* of their universe) before charging towards the closest.

“Close the door, *close it!*” Harry hollers.

“I can’t!” Tom roars back.

He pulls the lever again. The doors slam shut and the dial begins to rotate in a frenzy.

“What the hell was that?!” Tom demands.

“Maybe it was a hologram projection or an illusion, I mean, *interdimensional travel* isn’t possible yet. Right? We didn’t actually touch the flamingoes, so they weren’t really there. Yeah!” Harry nods to himself. “Pull the lever again, maybe we’ll be back in Hogwarts now, the twins will reveal it’s all a joke.”

Right. That seems more logical. This is all an illusion. Not real.

Another pull of the lever, and the door opens.

Tom and Harry walk out into a strange jungle that is definitely not Hogwarts.

“Well shit,” says Harry. “We are *not* in our universe anymore.”
Chapter End Notes

Next chapter... the short interdimensional travels of Tom and Harry

End Notes

If you ever have any HP prompts for me, feel free to send me an ask on tumblr

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!