Summary

This is Harry Potter and the Cursed Child as a novel. From the perspective of Albus Severus Potter and sometimes Scorpius Malfoy. Dialogue and directions the same (except for one scene ahem). With added novel-ish character stuff.

Notes

This story belongs to JK Rowling. Many of the directions I imagine belong to Jack Thorne. I have used the exact dialogue from the Special Rehearsal Edition Script and many of the stage directions. Nothing in the Harry Potter universe belongs to me, I just love it!

Many people have expressed that they would have preferred to read the story as a novel rather than a play, so I have taken the script and tried to make it into a more easily-readable story. I think the Harry Potter books work so well because they choose to use the perspective of one character, so I have chosen Albus as our POV character, and sometimes Scorpius. (Edit: Actually forget that, I've used a load of perspectives. As I went on I had to change this so expect the adults to get some perspective stuff too.)

I have not changed any of the events in the story, but I have elaborated on them, and I have added a few moments which do not appear in the play that I thought would help tie the story together. Some of this is my stuff and some of it builds on the play.

Again: this story belongs to JK! It is her words coming from the mouths of the characters and her plot I am writing around! I am simply bulking it up a bit and shifting the perspective.

I have not seen the play so I have written this based purely on the script.
Also please bear in mind that this is my interpretation of the story. I have changed a fair bit and obviously delved into character motivations which are purely from my perspective. This is no substitute for the actual play.

I also wanted to say that as an LGBT fan I wanted some representation. I love love love JK’s work but I wish we could see some more LGBT characters. This fanfic is heading towards an Albus and Scorpius romantic relationship. Consider yourself warned. I saw potential there and I ran with it.

This is 100% not official. I am a gal with the script who wants LGBT representation.

Thanks so much for reading and if you enjoyed please do leave a comment, because it would feel great to know that someone liked this!

Lots of love!

(My twitter is @ClaudiaBoleyn if you wanted to say hi)

xxx
Act One: Scenes One, Two, and Three

Albus had always felt different.

He wasn’t exactly sure why this was, and for a long time he thought it was normal. No matter where he was and who he was with he never quite fitted in.

It wasn’t that he was lonely. He had an annoying older brother, a pretty spoiled little sister, a super-brainy/super-stubborn cousin/best friend, and a ton of other cousins and relations. His house was never quiet and there was always someone visiting.

Uncle Percy would stop by to bore them all and bring Molly, Lucy, and long-suffering Aunty Audrey with him. Then there was Uncle George who was probably the only person who had more jokes under his belt than Uncle Ron. There was Aunty Angelina who talked endlessly to his mother about Quidditch until everyone was bored out of their minds. Then there were Fred and Roxy who took after their mother and made up the most stylish, overall well-presented portion of the family. That crown would have gone to Uncle Bill, Aunt Fleur, Victoire, Dominique, and Louis, who the family generally agreed were too good-looking for their own good, but for some reason they liked to wear second hand clothes and his cousins would always be wearing tooth-necklaces or other such bohemian oddities which made them look quirkyly scruffy. Uncle Bill himself looked like an ageing rockstar. His dad and Uncle Ron seemed to think he looked cool. Albus saw his uncle’s long ponytail and cringed. And then there was Uncle Charlie, who was generally regarded as a bit odd. He had a thing about dragons and would talk about them at any opportunity. He was often out of the country but was guaranteed to send postcards from wherever he was and occasionally he returned with some new scar or other which he showed off with pride. James enjoyed his outrageous stories. Lily found them scary. Albus thought they were probably made up.

Then there were his grandparents. Grandma was the bossiest, fussiest little woman Albus had ever known and she was always ready to tell someone off… but she also gave the best hugs, made the best food, and was always there in a crisis. Whenever his mother or father was feeling a little down about something, you could guarantee Grandma and Grandad would turn up in their funny little car and Grandma would commandeer the kitchen, make cups of tea, and give out advice until everyone had pulled themselves together.

Grandad was a special favourite of Albus. He was very tall and very thin, and always tinkering away with some weird outdated muggle item which no muggles even used anymore, but he was fairly quiet and made Albus feel calm. Sometimes they would sit together watching the television and occasionally Grandad would comment on something or other. While everyone else regarded Albus as slightly difficult and secretive, Grandad didn’t appear to mind.

The truth was, Albus had little to complain about. His life should have been perfect. He knew that everyone his age envied him his famous mother and even more famous father. Albus wanted for nothing. He never went hungry, he was always clothed, and he didn’t think he’d ever been mistreated by his parents in his life.

And yet something was wrong. Very wrong.

Albus was starting to discover as the years went on, much to his horror, that he found it harder to smile than his siblings. Where they would sit at the dinner table and laugh, James throwing his head back, Lily giggling, Albus would find it an effort to join in.
Why was it he was so very miserable? It was a question he asked himself fairly often.

It was a question he overheard his father asking his mother on a regular basis.

“What is wrong with Al?” his father would ask, when his parents thought they were alone in the kitchen, and Albus was crouched nosily on the stairs trying his best to overhear their own take on the situation.

“There’s nothing ‘wrong’ with him,” his mother would say with a sigh. “This is just Al. It’s the way he is. It doesn’t mean there’s anything wrong.”

“But James never…”

“He isn’t James, Harry.”

A pause.

“No, I know he’s not. But even Lily… I get her. She makes sense. I know what she’s thinking. But with Al… I just… everything’s different.”

“You need to try a little harder,” his mother would advise often. “Get to know him.”

“That’s the problem,” his father once responded, dammingly.

Albus never quite forgave him.

He never let his parents know about the conversations he overheard. He didn’t like to let them know he cared enough to listen. Also, he hated the idea of being seen as nosy, or worse, that he cared what people thought of him.

His father already thought he was a pretty poor excuse for a son, apparently. He didn’t want to disappoint him further by coming across as pathetic enough to beg for his father’s love. If his father couldn’t be bothered to understand him, then he wasn’t going to plead. He would simply have to accept that fact and learn to live with it.

The worst part about being the black sheep of the Potter family, was that nobody ever acknowledged that simple truth. That Albus Potter simply didn’t fit in.

Everyone skirted around it. It was the constant elephant in the room. Nobody was ever supposed to comment when instead of coming down to greet guests who came to visit like his brother and sister, Albus remained shut away in his bedroom. Everyone seemed conveniently distracted whenever Harry had to show physical affection to his kids, even though it was excruciating to watch James get an enthusiastic high-five, Lily a big hug, and then Albus an awkward sort of half wave or on bad days even a short nod.

Eventually, Lily stopped commenting on Albus being in a ‘bad mood’. The bad mood was too constant, too long. It simply became Al. If ever Albus did laugh or make a joke with his father, it was an exceptional occurrence. What Ginny and Harry had suspected and hoped might just be an early teenage phase seemed destined to become something far more permanent.

There were no two ways about it. Their son was a troubled boy.

While they agonised over ways to reconnect with their son, Albus thought deeply about his situation. Most of all, he thought about his father.
“It must be so great to have a famous dad!” everyone said. He heard it time and time again, over and over until it made him feel cross.

Every single time Albus gave his usual twitch of the mouth which could have been a smile or a grimace. Nobody even seemed to notice that it was a baring of teeth and nothing more. That hurt.

Was it great to have a famous father? Albus came to the conclusion he didn’t much care about that part. It was an annoyance, that was true. It was yet another piece of his father stolen away from him that belonged to the public. But if he was honest with himself the part that troubled him most was that his own father didn’t seem to like him.

He could have dealt with the fame if his dad didn’t look at him warily, like he was some sort of bomb about to go off. If perhaps his father could once, just once, say “I love you, Al,” and mean it.

Was Harry Potter a good father? Albus supposed he was to a certain degree. James and Lily were turning out all right, so he didn’t think it was entirely fair to call him useless.

With Lily, Harry was perfect. Anyone could see he was the doting dad, lifting her up on his shoulders, buying her constant little gifts of sweets or hair clips which he would produce from his pocket like a magic trick when he thought Ginny wasn’t looking, letting her chatter to him about anything and everything as they sat on the sofa of an evening, Lily with her pink-socked feet resting comfortably in her father’s lap.

The adoration was clearly mutual. Lily never minded when people remarked to her:

“It must be so great to have a famous dad!”

She had many responses to this, and never had to force the same old expression for fear of seeming rude. The question would delight her. Her eyes would light up and she would declare, absolutely sincerely:

“Yeah, my dad’s the best.”

When it came to discipline Harry never seemed able to scold his beloved daughter. One pout of her lips and the slightest sign of tears and he would melt. It fell to their mother to tell Lily off whenever she did wrong, and even then Lily could count on being able to sidle silently up to her father a little bit later and receive a consoling hug.

With James, things were different again. His and Harry’s relationship wasn’t perfect. But Albus thought it was what a father and son SHOULD be. Sometimes they were best mates. Other times they got on each other’s nerves. When James did wrong (like the time he thought it was a good idea to try and fly the car inspired by the latest story Uncle Ron had told him about when he and their father were in their second year of Hogwarts) Harry would not hesitate to lose his temper. When Harry shouted, it was always at James.

And yet James would always accept his punishment with little to no resentment in a way Albus simply couldn’t understand. An hour later he and his father were on the best of terms again.

Once, Albus had asked James why he wasn’t angry about being shouted at.

James had shrugged in that infuriatingly carefree way of his and said: “To be fair, I was pushing it a bit.”

It drove Albus up the wall.
Harry often compared James to Uncle Ron. Albus wasn't sure this was exactly the compliment it was intended as, since he regarded his ginger uncle as something of a (well-meaning) idiot, but coming from his father it was clear this was the highest of praise.

When his father and Uncle Ron got together, James was always able to join in their chatter, enjoying the laughs and the banter, entirely accepted and included as a member of the group. Uncle Ron would ruffle his hair and say “This is a true Weasley right here.” Every one of them would laugh.

As for Albus himself… well, it was complicated.

He got on with his mother better than his father. That was for certain. She was better at reading his moods and he felt that often she noticed more than she let on. Some days, when he was feeling a little out of sorts, instead of asking him hundreds of questions, she would slide him a bowl of cereal and start telling him funny stories about her Quidditch days.

While Lily was easily the spoiled baby of the family, and James the one who always got himself into trouble, his mother treated him as something of an equal. Well, not exactly. He still got told off from time to time and had to do his chores, but he got the distinct sense that his mother understood him not just as her son but as a person. That meant something to Albus, somehow.

When it came to his relationship with his dad, Albus wasn’t particularly sure where it had gone wrong. He’d been a shy little boy, which he supposed his dad had found hard to deal with. James had been so outgoing and reckless. Lily had loved being the centre of attention. Only he, Albus, used to dread going out with his parents and being followed about by people wanting to stop and talk to his father. The thought of being told over and over again how much he looked like his father made him feel queasy.

It was easy for James who was tall and lanky and despite having the Potter shock of dark hair gave off general vibes of complete and utter averageness. There was nothing special about him. He was just a friendly, confident, often annoying person who always had a rubbish joke at the ready (passed on by Uncle Ron) and didn’t seem to think all that much about anything more than what was happening at the present moment.

When strangers looked at the three children of the Potters, it was always he, Albus, who was singled out as special. Albus hated it. He wanted nothing more than to sink into the ground in these moments. It made him feel, somehow, like he had something to prove. Worse, that they wanted him to be like his father.

‘I’m not him’ Albus would think to himself furiously. ‘I’m nothing like him.’

But nobody seemed to care.

He was Harry Potter in miniature. Harry Potter the second. Harry Potter come again.

All he wanted to be was Albus. Albus Severus Potter who thought about everything too much and wanted to be normal. Not ordinary, though. He and his cousin Rose, who were probably the brightest of his generation of the family (according to them), had agreed that being ordinary was not the thing to be. But normal? That would have suited Albus just fine.

Because of his father Albus could not be ‘normal.’ Without meaning to his dad had robbed him of every teenager’s right: the chance to be invisible. And worst of all his father seemed to expect him to be grateful for this fact!
All he would ever go on about when Albus gave his usual grimace to an interested stranger, or made it clear he had no interest whatsoever in hearing for the one hundredth time about some rule his father and Uncle Ron had broken while they were in school, was how lucky he was. How he, Harry, had been an orphan. How he’d lived in hand-me-down clothes and never had birthday presents. How his aunt and uncle had been cruel and how he would have done anything, anything, to have had a family.

When his father said things like this it only made Albus more resentful. Partly because it was true and despite everything it made Albus feel more than a little guilty. But also because it made it crystal clear that his father did not and could not understand him. It was a lonely feeling.

When it was finally time to go to Hogwarts, after the years of waiting, Albus wasn’t sure he particularly wanted to go.

James was loving every second of it. In his first year he had sent photographs and letters and the family also received frequent owls from Professor McGonagall detailing his latest list of misdemeanours. His mother would tut when they received these letters, but his father always grinned, like it was something to be proud of. Like being a reckless idiot who didn’t want to learn and was only interested in practical jokes was a good thing.

Albus loved his big brother dearly, but honestly? He was a bit of an idiot. And if that was what it took to make his father proud then Albus was not willing to go there.

The nightmare was that he might end up in Slytherin.

Rose had been quick to reassure him that this was a ridiculous fear to have.

“You’re Harry Potter’s son,” she had declared, like this was the most obvious thing in the world. “Don’t roll your eyes, Al. It’s just probability. If your dad and James both got into Gryffindor, I bet you anything you will too. Besides, there’s nothing Slytherin-y about you.”

The way she said ‘Slytherin-y’ with that slightly odd emphasis and the turn up of her nose only made Albus more anxious.

Uncle Ron didn’t like Slytherin that much. He mentioned it in jokes all the time. Aunt Hermione would often jump in to reassure the group he meant no such thing and they weren’t to listen to him. Sometimes she could go off on a lecture about unity and kindness and compassion that would last for more than ten minutes.

But Albus was observant and even though she spoke of these things and seemed genuinely very keen that neither her children, nieces, or nephews should absorb her husband’s foolishness, he noticed that she almost gave that same look Rose did when she said the word Slytherin. Aunt Hermione didn’t screw up her nose. She gave a little smile which didn’t meet her eyes as if to compensate for having nothing much positive to say. That was all Albus needed to know.

Of course there were still all sorts of rumours flying around about Slytherin House. Nowadays everyone was supposed to be tolerant like Aunt Hermione, but a surprisingly few amount of people seemed willing to move on. Sometimes it wasn’t that people said nasty things about Slytherin that made it apparent. More the great reputations of the other Houses compared to silence when it came to Slytherin.

His dad and Uncle Ron would talk about Gryffindor with such great pride, and of course it had
been Dumbledore’s House, so everyone knew it was a pretty big deal. The fact that Harry Potter had been a Gryffindor had upped its glamour somewhat and given it that extra bit of heroic zeal.

Aunt Hermione (who seemed certain that Rose would end up in either Gryffindor or Ravenclaw) made sure she spoke often about Ravenclaw House so that Rose would not feel disappointed if that was where she ended up. It was a house for creative thinkers and those who loved to learn. Nothing wrong with that at all, Aunt Hermione would say. Luna was a Ravenclaw and look how she turned out.

(That last part was never entirely reassuring to Rose.)

Hufflepuff was regarded as the ‘good’ House. Everyone spoke about it with an almost patronising affection. If you ended up in Hufflepuff you were a good sort. They were known for their kindness and willingness to work hard. Neville (aka Professor Longbottom) spoke often in Hufflepuff’s defence, having almost been sorted into the House himself, and declared that some of his favourite students were from Hufflepuff House. Teddy Lupin, family friend and Albus’s almost-cousin, had been in Hufflepuff when he was at Hogwarts, but everyone said it was because of his mum rather than anything else.

Some people might have been embarrassed to be sorted into Hufflepuff, but not Albus. At least in Hufflepuff he might get to spend time with Neville and he didn’t think he would mind the bit about hard work.

During the war, when Hogwarts was under fire, it was well known that most of the Slytherins evacuated and got to safety rather than stand and fight. They slithered off like the snakes that they were, some said. They didn’t want to die, said some others. Albus privately thought it was quite wrong to have left, but also, deep down, he felt that he understood. You weren’t supposed to say or think that sort of thing, especially not if you were Harry Potter’s son. But it was true. Albus wasn’t sure he would have stayed either. He wouldn’t have wanted to die. He imagined he would have been scared.

+++ 

James had been a royal pain in the backside all morning. He was an abnormally annoying big brother to have on normal days, let alone on Albus’s first day at Hogwarts.

He seemed to find it amusing to remind Albus that he could end up in Slytherin over and over again. As if he didn’t already know. As if he hadn’t lost sleep over that very fact for weeks.

The journey to the station had been completed in nervous silence. Well, from Albus at least. Lily had been excited to be coming along on the family outing and was full of her usual eager questions, pointing and giggling.

His mother had been supremely supportive. She sat in the front seat of their car talking calmly to her husband and occasionally telling James off when he went too far with his banter.

She had been shy when she was little, so she understood. Albus took great comfort in that fact. That vivacious and totally sorted Ginny Potter had once been a small child hiding behind her father’s legs gave Albus hope that one day soon he could make the same transformation and become… well… someone.

His father had seemed a little more quiet than usual, but he was making up for it by occasionally bursting out with ‘good father sound bites’, as Albus called them. They were the words he imagined an ideal father would say on an occasion such as this. They didn’t quite feel real.
Albus was dreading having to be surrounded by witches and wizards. The whole Potter family in one place? Eyes would bulge out of heads. People would entirely forget about manners. Fingers would be pointed. Whispers would become way too loud.

And when they saw who it was being brought to the platform?

Albus could hardly bear to think about it.

They picked up two trolleys at King’s Cross and loaded their cases onto them, cages rattling as they pushed through the crowds.

Lily had been hoisted up onto her father’s shoulders, lest she become lost in the surging crowds. Albus found himself wishing he was still small enough to be carried, to be lifted above it all, to sit on his father’s shoulders and be at peace.

But those days were long gone. He was old enough for Hogwarts now. Which meant he had to try and gather up some courage from somewhere and learn to look out for himself.

“You’ll write to me, won’t you?” Albus asked his mother, looking up nervously.

As usual, she was wearing a reassuring smile.

“Every day if you want us to.”

As appealing as the thought was, Albus shook his head. He didn’t want to look like a baby. He’d probably get teased for something like that, and there was no way he’d be able to write back that often.

“No,” he decided firmly. “Not every day. James says most people only get letters from home about once a month. I don’t want to…”

His father raised an eyebrow.

“We wrote to your brother three times a week last year,” he said, causing James to shoot his father an almost comically betrayed look.

“What? James!”

Albus looked accusingly up at his big brother.

James seemed to have gone conveniently mute and become extremely interested in one of the wonky wheels on his trolley.

“Yes. You may not want to believe everything he tells you about Hogwarts. He likes a laugh, your brother,” said his mother with a wry smile.

Sensing a telling-off was not on the cards, James raised his head and grinned guiltily at his mother. Harry shook his head with fond amusement. It seemed he was off the hook, as always.

Albus looked at his dad, and then his mum. He knew how this worked. He knew what he was supposed to do. But now it had come to it… his legs were shaking.

“All you have to do is walk straight at the wall between platforms nine and ten,” his mother told him gently.

“I’m so excited!” Lily exclaimed from her position atop her father’s shoulders. Remembering her
presence, Harry lifted his daughter back down to the ground. She pouted a little at having to rejoin
the rest of humanity on the grubby station floor. If Lily Potter could have had one wish, it would
have been to fly.

The wall was now before them. The brick wall which looked entirely solid. The brick wall which
did not look like the sort of thing you wanted to collide with.

“Don’t stop and don’t be scared you’ll crash into it,” his father said, seemingly reading his mind.
“That’s very important. Best do it at a run if you’re nervous.”

Did it notice that he was?

Well, that wouldn’t do. Albus took a deep breath and tried to look more confident than he felt. He
thought of his cousin, Rose, who would have told him to stop being such a wimp and get on with
it. The Rose in his mind was right, as usual.

“I’m ready,” Albus said, nodding.

His father and Lily joined his trolley, Lily leaning up to touch the handle. His mother gave him a
pat on the back and then went to join James and his trolley, who didn’t look overly thrilled at being
supervised.

It was time.

Every Potter ran hard at the barrier. Albus closed his eyes at the last moment. He felt his father’s
encouraging hand on his back. They disappeared, together.

+++ 

The platform was as expected. Albus barely remembered any of what happened between the
moment the Potter family arrived on the platform and the seemingly hours later when the family
were finally left in relative peace.

Everyone had wanted to shake Harry’s hand. Genuinely, everyone.

Albus was so nervous his brain didn’t seem to be working correctly anyway. He zoned out for
much of this hand-shaking and smalltalk. When he thought back to this time later, he could conjure
up a blur of anxiety and people. He could just about remember Lily twirling and basking in the
attention, and James high-fiving friends and getting told off by his mother.

He did, however, recall the mortifying moment towards the end in which he had given into the
pressure and confronted his dad about his greatest fear.

“Dad… Do you think - what if I am - what if I’m put in Slytherin?”

The moment the words left his mouth he wished them back again.

His father was reassuring, of course. What else had Albus expected? Harry Potter, beacon of hope
and tolerance and the new generation, was hardly going to tell him he’d be disowned if he ended up
in the wrong House.

Instead he decided to go for The Story. The one that was always told (and Albus found fairly
excruciating) whenever he was thought by his parents to be feeling a little insecure.

He knew where his names came from. It wasn’t like he needed to be told all over again about
Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape. He couldn’t escape the weight of them if he tried. While James and Lily had been given the names of Harry’s beloved, heroic parents, he, Albus, had been left with a pair of teachers.

Yes, a pair of pretty exceptional teachers. And heroes too.

But they weren’t family. And from what Uncle Ron said, Severus Snape had been a fairly unpleasant person.

Even if he had been a war hero, Severus Snape was never spoken about with any particular affection. He was the only Slytherin Albus ever heard anything good about from his family, and even then, there was the coldness, the distant begrudging respect.

When his father revealed that the Sorting Hat would sometimes let you choose your own House, Albus could have sworn with relief. He thought it was pretty late in the game to be revealing that little piece of information, but that was Dad for you. He never had been great at reassurances.

It was settled then. When the time came he would choose Gryffindor. Simple. Just the same as his family before him.

But even then, as he reassured himself with that comforting thought, something within Albus felt the perverse need to rebel. Part of him wanted to be different. Part of him wanted… more?

Albus hugged both of his parents before boarding the train. With his mother this was easy, if a little embarrassing in public. With his father, it was both preceded and followed by a great deal of shifty awkwardness. He didn’t cling on for as long as he could have. He didn’t like to hug his father so tightly. Not because he didn’t want to, but because he was scared his father would break the hug first and he’d be pushed away.

+++ Thank Dumbledore for Rose. Without his cousin, Albus would have been utterly overwhelmed as they stepped on board the Hogwarts Express.

As usual she was brisk and businesslike. She had all of her mother’s ability and all of her father’s easy optimism. The world simply fell into place for Rose Granger-Weasley.

Already she had some strategy planned. Albus hadn’t really been listening to all of it, but it was something about getting in with the right people, making the right impression, starting as they meant to go on.

The legendary trolley witch approached the pair laden with sweets and chocolate and pastries. Immediately Albus’s eyes went to the Chocolate Frogs. They were, in Albus’s opinion, one of life’s great culinary delicacies.

“Al!” Rose had interrupted him with a long-suffering sigh. (Only Rose could manage to know when you were thinking and feel the need to intervene). “We need to concentrate.”

“Concentrate on what?”

“On who we choose to be friends with. My mum and dad met your dad on their first Hogwarts Express you know…”

Of course Albus already knew this, but he didn’t point that out. Rose had a habit of telling people things that were pretty obvious, but it seemed rude to say so.
Personally, Albus found the whole idea ludicrous. It wasn’t like you could plan friendships like
that. They just happened. You liked someone, that someone liked you back. Easy peasy. You were
friends and that was the end of it.

“So we need to choose now who to be friends with for life? That’s quite scary.”

Everyone will want to be friends with us. We’ve got the pick of anyone we want.”

Albus supposed that was true, but he wasn’t sure he liked the idea of people wanting to be his
friend just because of who his father was.

By now the trolley witch and the chance of Chocolate Frogs had long gone. Now all that was left
before the cousins was a set of compartment doors. It was fairly daunting, having to pick one.

“So how do we decide which compartment to go in?” Albus asked doubtfully.

Rose, bright as always, attempted to tame her bushy pigtails, and then nodded her head. She was
ready. In action mode.

“We rate them all and then we make a decision,” she declared, like it was simply the next step in
the equation.

Albus took a deep breath, attempting to be as confident as his cousin, and picked out a
compartment.

‘Here goes’ he thought as he stepped forward to open the first compartment door. ‘Please be
someone nice…’

+++ The boy in the compartment looked nice.

That was the first word that came into Albus’s head when he saw Scorpius Malfoy. He looked
nice, approachable, thoughtful, and a little bit odd. He was sitting alone and trying his best to seem
like he didn’t mind. He was surrounded by sweets. He seemed exactly like Albus’s sort of person.

Without thinking, Albus shot him a smile.

Immediately the lonely blond boy returned the gesture. He returned it with nothing but pure honest
relief. Albus knew then and there that he liked this boy. He felt relieved too, not that he let it show
on his face. Perhaps this would be easier than he’d thought?

“Hi,” Albus found himself saying with a sort of half wave which he hoped made him seem
approachable, friendly, and just the tiniest bit cool. “Is this compartment…”

The boy seemed so overjoyed to have company that he couldn’t get his words out fast enough.

“It’s free. It’s just me.”

The boy’s voice was fairly posh. There was a hint of self-deprecation in it, and yet not even a touch
of sarcasm.

“Great,” said Albus, feeling a new awkwardness settle over the two… three of them. Rose was
there too. How had he forgotten? Now he noticed her, he could feel her distaste coming off her in
waves. She had that in common with her mother, that uncanny ability to radiate her emotions so
everyone in the room knew exactly how she was feeling.

For a brief moment he felt cross with his cousin for what he saw as her rudeness. Here was a perfectly nice boy, who smiled, and had sweets, and she was turning her nose up at him!

“So might we just - come in - for a bit - if that’s okay?” Albus continued, feeling awkward now.

The boy was quick to put him at ease.

“That’s okay,” he said swiftly, even shifting over ever so slightly on his seat, not that he needed to with all the space in the carriage with him. The gesture seemed to rile Rose. “Hi.”

Sensing it was time for introductions or else they would go on like this forever, Albus gave a short nod of his head.

“Allus. Al,” he explained. He almost added Potter and then thought better of it. He never knew whether or not he ought to mention his last name. He didn’t want people to think he was trying to draw attention to it, that he thought he was better than everyone else.

Something in the boy’s eager expression and attentive posture made Albus pause.

“I’m - my name is Al…,” he amended swiftly. Al was who he was at home. Al was Harry Potter’s son. He didn’t want this boy to know him as Al.

“Hi Scorpius,” the other boy said, before immediately grimacing and starting again. Albus got the impression he was fairly used to making mistakes and simply forcing himself onward again. “I mean, I’m Scorpius. You’re Albus. I’m Scorpius.”

Albus found that he wanted to laugh at how badly Scorpius had messed up his intro, not in a cruel way, but with… fondness? It made him feel so much better about his own shaky start.

Scorpius, unaware of how good an impression he was making on Albus, turned to Rose, politely not ignoring her as Albus accidentally had. He smiled hopefully at her, reminding Albus once again that his cousin was watching these proceedings with a rather haughty air about her.

“And you must be…”

Rose was growing colder by the minute. Albus was very aware that his fiercely intelligent, no-nonsense cousin would not be at all impressed by this mess of an introduction. She liked things done properly or not at all.

“Rose,” she said in a distant sort of voice.

Albus felt his stomach twinge with embarrassment and pity as Scorpius ploughed on, apparently not noticing Rose’s attitude.

“Hi Rose,” he said brightly. “Would you like some of my Fizzing Whizzbees?”

“I’ve just had breakfast, thanks,” Rose remarked coolly.

Just leave it there, mate… Albus found himself thinking, willing the boy to give up so he wouldn’t have to face the stony wrath of his most stubborn family member. You won’t get anywhere with her when she’s like this…

But Scorpius seemed determined to dig himself into an even deeper hole.
“I’ve also got some Shock-o-Choc, Pepper Imps and some Jelly Slugs,” Scorpius announced generously, gesturing vaguely about him at the mass of goodies he had acquired. How was it, Albus wondered, that Scorpius could make that impressive haul seem so, well... pathetic?

“Mum’s idea,” the blond boy continued. And then horrifyingly, a second too quickly for Albus to make some sort of gesture to save Scorpius this moment of utter mortification, the boy cleared his throat and began to sing.

“Sweets they always help you make friends!”

Albus was not aware of the look of empathetic embarrassment that had crossed his features until a pair of blue-grey eyes met his own, read his expression in an instant, and the singing stopped.

“Stupid idea probably,” Scorpius mumbled, looking down and then visibly (and quite heartbreakingly) pulling himself back together again and raising his head.

It was too much for Albus. His dad might have called him selfish, but there came a point when you just had to take a deep breath, wade in, and rescue someone from complete and utter no-going-back embarrassment.

“I’ll have some…,” he said, stepping forwards. “Mum doesn’t let me have sweets. Which one would you start with?”

Albus pointedly ignored the none too subtle shove he received from his cousin.

Once again, Scorpius looked almost overwhelmed with relief. Albus could tell that he felt more comfortable chatting to him than to Rose because he would start to speak very fast, eager to get his thoughts out. This made Albus feel fairly triumphant.

“Easy. I’ve always regarded the Pepper Imp as the king of the confectionary bag. They’re peppermint sweets that make you smoke at the ears.”

Albus had, in fact, had Pepper Imps before, but he felt it would be easier not to say so.

“Brilliant, then that’s what I’ll—“

Rose interrupted him once again with another shove. This time it was impossible to ignore and so instead of trying to gloss over his cousin’s actions (which Scorpius could now very easily see), Albus rolled his eyes and dealt with Rose in the best way he could.

“Rose, will you please stop hitting me?” he deadpanned.

“I’m not hitting you,” Rose lied, seemingly realising that admitting that she had been might hurt Scorpius’s feelings.

“You are hitting me, and it hurts,” Albus argued, refusing to let her get away with it this time. At home, Rose was used to getting her own way. She was by far the smartest of the cousins and Uncle Ron doted on her. It was about time someone refused to back down where Rose was involved, Albus thought.

He was about to add a little more to that, feeling more confident somehow with Scorpius sitting across the carriage, but then he noticed Scorpius’s face. It had fallen quite suddenly. This was a boy who showed every little feeling he had in his expression. Right now he looked frankly devastated, and it devastated Albus.
“She’s hitting you because of me,” Scorpius announced. He swallowed hard and tried his best not to look upset.

“What?” Albus asked, frowning.

But Scorpius cut in swiftly. He did not seem offended by Rose’s rude behaviour, which struck Albus as odd. He looked like he had entirely accepted it.

“Listen, I know who you are, so it’s probably only fair you know who I am,” he said quietly.

Albus thought that was a strange thing to say.

“What do you mean you know who I am?”

“You’re Albus Potter. She’s Rose Granger-Weasley. And I am Scorpius Malfoy. My parents are Astoria and Draco Malfoy. Our parents - they didn’t get on.”

Before Albus could ask what on earth that had to do with anything, Rose spoke up, quick as anything.

“That’s putting it mildly. Your mum and dad are Death Eaters!”

Albus’s eyes widened.

“Dad was,” Scorpius agreed, swallowing again and looking a mixture of affronted and ashamed. “But Mum wasn’t.”

Rose looked away but Scorpius wouldn’t drop the subject.

“I know what the rumour is, and it’s a lie.”

Feeling once again out of his depth and like he’d very much like to know what was going on, Albus looked from his cousin, who seemed so uncomfortable she couldn’t quite decide on how to stand, to Scorpius, whose eyes caught his own with a hopeful form of desperation.

“What - is the rumour?” Albus asked the carriage in general, hoping it wouldn’t make him sound stupid.

It was Scorpius who spoke up, and almost immediately.

“The rumour is that my parents couldn’t have children. That my father and my grandfather were so desperate for a powerful heir to prevent the end of the Malfoy line, that they.. that they used a Time-Turner to send my mother back-“

“To send her back where?” Albus asked, frowning.

“The rumour is,” Rose explained, putting a hand on Albus’s shoulder, strangely gentle now, “that he’s Voldemort’s son, Albus.”

The carriage fell immediately silent. Rose seemed embarrassed and perhaps a little guilty for bringing the subject up. Scorpius looked both saddened and defensive in his well-mannered way. Albus simply gawped unattractively from Rose to Scorpius, trying to take that outlandish little bit of information in.

“It’s probably rubbish,” Rose said in her guilty voice. “I mean… look, you’ve got a nose.”
It was a poor attempt at humour but Albus would take anything at this point. Scorpius gave a laugh that seemed pathetically grateful, seemingly forgetting that it was Rose who had brought the whole thing up in the first place.

Once again Scorpius seemed to brighten. The immediacy of this change left Albus reeling.

“And it’s just like my father’s!” Scorpius declared with a smile. “I’ve got his nose, his hair, and his name. Not that that’s a great thing either. I mean - father-son issues, I have them. But, on the whole, I’d rather be a Malfoy than, you know, the son of the Dark Lord.”

Albus looked at Scorpius just then, and Scorpius looked right back. Something passed between them. Albus could not name exactly what it was. Perhaps it was understanding? Perhaps a mutual struggle? Whatever it was, it made Albus quite certain that he had made a good choice in entering his compartment.

Rose also seemed to notice the look and she quite clearly disapproved of it. She would, Albus thought, perhaps a little unfairly. For all of Aunt Hermione’s lectures on tolerance, Rose could be a real snob.

“Yes, well, we probably should sit somewhere else,” Rose said pleasantly, as though this conversation had been nice but it was not something she intended to repeat anytime soon. “Come on, Albus.”

But Albus did not want to go. Yes, Rose was his cousin, and actually, probably his best friend. But he was tired of being around his family. As much as he loved Rose, almost more like a sister than a cousin, he knew that it was now or never. He didn’t want to be a Potter anymore. He didn’t want everyone to see them together and talk about their parents. He wanted to be Albus. Just Albus. His own person.

“No,” he said, after some thought. “I’m okay. You go on…”

“Albus, I won’t wait,” Rose declared, tapping her foot on the ground.

Usually this would have prompted Albus to follow her. It was simply the way they worked. But there was Scorpius all alone in the large carriage, surrounded by sweets…

“And I wouldn’t expect you to,” Albus said easily, somehow finding the right words. “But I’m staying here.”

Rose looked at him for a second in complete shock. This disobedience from her favourite cousin and best friend was entirely new.

“Fine!” she declared, not quite stomping her feet as she left, but it was a close thing. In a moment she was gone, leaving them in utter silence.

Both boys watched the compartment door close and then Albus let out a long breath.

Scorpius turned to look at Albus with disbelief. Albus glanced back and gave a half nod which tried to tell him they did not have to speak about what had just happened. That he didn’t need gratitude. It was just… the right thing to do. It was no big deal.

Scorpius apparently did not get the message.

“Thank you,” he said sincerely, his voice very quiet.
Albus felt simultaneously overwhelmed by his own sense of heroism, and embarrassed that such a small thing should matter so much to him. The way Scorpius was looking at him made him feel ten feet tall. He felt like a good person. Like somehow he had stopped an injustice from happening. But after a moment the old Albus kicked back in. At home they never talked about their feelings. His dad laughed it off if ever he was upset or emotional. He didn’t think he had ever heard his mum and dad talk about anything to do with feelings. Not while he was around anyway.

He felt the sudden urge to make a joke himself, to lighten the mood.

“No. No. I didn’t stay - for you- I stayed for your sweets,” Albus found himself saying. He was proud to have thought of it so quickly.

“She’s quite fierce,” Scorpius remarked, not needing to use Rose’s name to let Albus know who he was referring to.

Albus gave a sort of shrug. He didn’t want to be disloyal to his cousin, but it was an undeniable fact that she was incredibly stubborn when she wanted to be. She could win any argument against anyone - except perhaps Aunt Hermione.

“Yes,” Albus admitted. “Sorry.”

“No,” Scorpius said. “I like it. Do you prefer Albus or Al?”

For the first time Scorpius grinned, displaying his perfectly white teeth. Albus was not sure why he noticed them so very distinctly, but he did. He popped two sweets into his mouth cheerfully. Albus noticed he chewed with his mouth closed, unlike his brother James who would spray you across the table when he was talking.

Albus thought on the question. It didn’t take him long to decide. Ever since entering the compartment, he realised he hadn’t been Al. Al would have followed Rose out with an apologetic shrug. But Albus? Albus was the sort of guy who thought for himself.

“Albus,” he said with certainty.

Smoke began to rush out of Scorpius’s ears in two almighty puffs of white. He’d been eating the Pepper Imps then.

He gave a somewhat goofy grin to Albus and shouted, over the sound of the smoke:

“THANK YOU FOR STAYING FOR MY SWEETS, ALBUS!”

Albus couldn’t help it. He burst out laughing.

“Wow.” He found himself saying. Wow.

+++
The Sorting was more intimidating than Albus cared to admit. It was only made a little better by the fact Scorpius was visibly trembling beside him and kept muttering that ‘everything will be fine with some nice deep breaths and whatever you do, Scorpius, do not panic because you will embarrass yourself’.

He knew Professor McGonagall already, since she often visited his house or came over for one of their massive family dinners, but he kept his head down and didn’t meet her eyes. He didn’t want the other kids to think he was a suck up. Besides, she could be scary at the best of times. He’d even seen her dare to tell off Uncle Ron once or twice.

Albus had expected that without Rose beside him this whole ordeal would be more than a little confusing, but Scorpius stepped up to the plate, providing a quiet running commentary about anything and everything. He knew who all the teachers were, the names of the ghosts, even the names of some of the other students.

Lily would love the floating candles when she started, Albus thought to himself, watching them levitate with awe. It wasn’t so much the fact they were defying gravity, but the full effect of all those beautiful lights illuminating the Great Hall. It made for a dazzling view.

Scorpius had given a little ‘oooooh!’ when he’d spotted them, and then proceeded to explain where the custom had come from. According to him, there were more than four thousand up there.

Something Albus especially appreciated was the way the ceiling was enchanted to look like the sky. It made him feel less nervous, like he could reach out and touch the stars if he wanted.

For the first part of his introduction to Hogwarts, which had included a traditional journey across the lake, a stern talking to from an elderly professor about manners and how to behave, and of course, being herded into corridor which would lead them into the Great Hall, Albus had managed to deal with his nerves and blend in pretty well with the other students.

Lots of them were so nervous themselves that they hardly noticed they had Harry Potter’s son among them. There had been one conversation Albus had overheard as he and Scorpius had stepped off the train, in which his father’s name was mentioned, but thankfully it ended quickly and he wasn’t spotted.

But Albus was no fool. He couldn’t keep his head down forever and he knew that his time as just an ordinary student was coming to an end, even though it had only just begun. The moment they were lead into the Great Hall and McGonagall read his name out in front of everyone his nightmare would begin. He would cease to be himself. He would be ‘Harry Potter’s son’.
Scorpius seemed just as worried about being recognised.

“We’re not exactly inconspicuous, we Malfoys,” he had explained to Albus with an apologetic smile, gesturing at his blond hair and face in general. Scorpius had a fairly pointed chin, but Albus thought it suited him. He supposed he was fairly distinctive-looking, but to be fair, it was in a good way.

Scorpius feared judgement based on his family’s reputation. Albus could understand that perfectly. It couldn’t be easy, he reckoned, having that sort of a shadow hanging over your family name. Scorpius so far seemed like one of the most least likely future Dark Wizards Albus had ever met, but people would always be watching him, waiting, ready to judge him for even the slightest wrong move.

Albus wondered if that was why Scorpius was quite so bright and friendly. Perhaps he’d had to be that way? Perhaps anything else would have meant trouble?

People began to notice him just before the large wooden doors were opened. The first years were supposed to be standing in neat lines, but had instead formed into nervous little clusters, whispering together and trying to make early friends.

He supposed he and Scorpius, with their white blond and jet black hair, standing silently and unobtrusively together, stood out like a sore thumb. And as soon as one person had realised who he was, all the others flocked over to catch a glimpse of him.

“Here we go,” Albus muttered to Scorpius out of the corner of his mouth.

“Well,” Scorpius replied just as quietly, already waving jauntily at the fairly large amount of children staring at him. “It had to happen sooner or later.”

Albus found his familiar go-to smile/grimace came out to play until his cheeks hurt from the expression. It was hard to know what to say to the exclamations of excitement at seeing him. It would have been okay if the other first years had spoken to him the way Scorpius did, but instead they looked at him like he was an animal in a zoo. Personally, Albus thought it was pretty rude.

“Well, you’re going to be popular!” Scorpius declared brightly, trying his best to cheer him up when he noticed Albus’s smile wasn’t meeting his eyes.

“Maybe,” Albus agreed with a shrug. If this was popular, he wasn’t sure he wanted it after all.

Poor Scorpius hadn’t received such a positive reception. As he was standing next to Albus, he too had been the subject of muttering and scrutiny.

“That’s the Malfoy boy,” one pretty little girl named Polly Chapman told her friends knowledgeably. “I wouldn’t get too close if I were you. Have you heard what they say about him?”

Albus noticed that Scorpius was hurt, but he never stopped smiling hopefully, as though he believed a smile alone might change their minds.

It wouldn’t, Albus thought bitterly. People didn’t work like that.

Rose basked in the attention. She introduced herself loudly as Albus’s cousin, and said her surname about a million times. Unlike Albus, she was good at making conversation and had already amassed a gaggle of adoring students, eager to listen to her talk. She had always had that knack of being a leader.
Scorpius watched her talk with fascination, as though wanting to learn the secret of being popular and charismatic without really needing to try.

There was no secret, Albus knew. He’d spent his life trying to work out the formula. Some people were liked and some people weren’t. It was luck. Some people had it, and others, well, others were different or slightly odd or just gave off that ‘pick on me!’ vibe. Scorpius was one of those unfortunate people. Albus knew he, personally, was probably right on the border and could go either way. His name could give him a huge head start, but it probably wasn’t enough.

Perhaps if he went along with the others, he could make it to the popular side of things. He could be liked. Not by a lot of people, but maybe he would fit in?

But that simply wasn’t Albus. He wasn’t going to change who he was for anyone.

+++ 

When it came to the Sorting itself, Rose was predictably placed in Gryffindor. She did not look relieved, but smiled with content, as though something she fully believed in already had been confirmed. If she had been nervous, she didn’t show it.

Albus watched as his cousin was cheered all the way to the mass of Gryffindor students ready to pat her on the back and congratulate her.

After a few more students it was Scorpius’s turn. He jumped when his name was called, and gave Albus a nervous little smile before making his way to the front. Albus had his fingers crossed for Gryffindor, even though he knew it was absurd. Scorpius was a Malfoy, so he’d end up in Slytherin, like his family always did. Somehow Albus felt a sense of loss when the hat called out:

“SLYTHERIN”

People said that Houses mixed much more now, but looking around the Great Hall it didn’t seem that way.

Scorpius gave a nod followed by a ridiculous little grin and then wandered towards the mass of cheering students wearing green ties and whooping.

“Well, that makes sense,” said Polly Chapman from beside him. Albus frowned. It did make sense, he supposed, but something about her delivery was off. Groups were starting to form already. Allegiances were being formed and enemies identified. It struck Albus as a pretty hostile environment to be thrown into. He hoped that Scorpius wouldn’t take it to heart, the way some of the bolder Gryffindors glared over.

“Albus Potter,” read out Professor McGonagall, and after a short moment in which he pulled himself together, Albus walked to the front of the hall.

All eyes were on him as the hat was placed on his head. Albus frowned. It did make sense, but this, at least, was something he was more than used to. At least it was for some other reason than his famous father.

After ten full seconds of silence from the hat, Albus began to panic.

It seemed to have been too long, or was that just in his mind? Were the other students shifting, confused? He was certain that they were. What was the problem? Please he begged, knowing the
hat would hear him. *Don’t drag this out. Dad’s going to hear about this. Trust me to cause an issue. Why can’t anything just go right for me? I’m cursed…*

The hat laughed, and Albus grimaced.

Feeling vulnerable now, and desperate to be Sorted, even if he ended up in Hufflepuff, Albus scanned the hall for a friendly face.

Rose was staring at him from her table of Gryffindor students, her brows furrowed, clearly perplexed.

He looked for James and found him a few students down from Rose. He was gawping up at him and scratching his head. The boys around him were whispering something. James was looking worried.

Desperate now for this ordeal to end, to be released from this whispering, scrutinising hall, Albus spotted Scorpius at the Slytherin table. He was easy to spot with his shock of blond hair and encouraging expression. Albus thought he saw Scorpius offer him a subtle thumbs up, but he couldn’t be sure because at that exact moment, the hat laughed again, and then suddenly spoke out loud.

“**SLYHERIN!”**

Albus froze.

“Slytherin?” Polly repeated loudly, apparently voicing the thoughts of the majority of the students in the room. She was silenced by a warning look from Professor McGonagall, but the damage was done.

Albus felt momentarily like he was going to be sick.

“Whoah!” exclaimed Craig, a boy with almost dazzling shiny shoes and perfectly combed hair, smacking a hand to his forehead. “A Potter? In Slytherin!”

From under the hat Albus looked out at the hall, unsure. Was this all some massive practical joke? Was James behind it? That would be just like him. Surely that was the case?

But Professor McGonagall was gesturing for him to go to the Slytherin table. She seemed to want him to hurry up.

Not able to look at Rose, Albus turned to Scorpius, who was beaming delightedly at him.

“You can stand next to me!” he shouted out in his posh voice. Several people laughed at him, but he didn’t seem to care.

Albus was simply glad of the instruction. He was too dazed to think for himself at that moment.

“Right. Yes,” he agreed, utterly discombobulated but trying to style it out.

He shuffled off so that the next student could be Sorted, but as he went he could hear the voices of the kids behind him. The Gryffindor table was clearly expressing their sense of loss at this injustice. There had been several low groans and now they were attempting to console themselves with the shattering idea that Albus hadn’t really been all that special to begin with. It was crushing.

“I suppose his hair isn’t that similar,” remarked Yann Fredericks.
“Albus?” Rose said. “But this is wrong, Albus. This is not how it’s supposed to be…”

You don’t say... Albus thought bitterly.

The Slytherins parted for their new House member, some patting him on the back, others mumbling congratulations. Only Scorpius continued to beam, utterly thrilled by the outcome of the Sorting.

When Albus reached him he gave him a joyous pat on the arm and scooted over to make room.

“Well, there’s a first time for everything!” Scorpius said, brightly. “I can’t wait to see the dormitories!”

+++ 

The Slytherin common room was fairly deep underground. As Albus descended the winding stone steps he could feel a sinking sensation in his stomach that had nothing to do with being so far under the castle.

Occasionally there would be a portrait hung on a stone wall and the inhabitants were oddly encouraging. Albus had been expecting the Slytherin portraits to be intimidating, but they looked like perfectly ordinary people, just from the past. Several young women in medieval attire complete with large pointed hats followed the first years all the way down the stairs to the door of the common room.

Albus was sure one of them had given him a consoling nod.

Because of the location under the lake, Albus had expected the Slytherin common room to be murky and damp, but when the doors were opened (with a password from a prefect) the first years caught their first glimpse of an actually very comfortable-looking, very warm space.

“Oh, this is nice,” Scorpius said, nodding his head with approval.

Albus had to agree.

The ceiling was fairly low, and from it hung various green lamps which gave the room an odd, atmospheric glow. At the very end of the room was a large, elaborate fireplace, in which a fire was roaring. Albus could see an unclaimed leather sofa near the fire that had his name on it. He could imagine himself stretching out on that of an evening.

The Slytherin prefect gave a quick reading of the rules. It was the usual, mundane stuff about which activities were allowed in the common room and which weren’t, rules about keeping control of your pets, and advisory bedtimes.

Honestly, it didn’t seem like they were anticipating an influx of evil young witches and wizards at all.

“Last thing,” said the prefect, who was standing before the small group of first years. “Don’t ever be ashamed of your House. Because you can bet the Gryffindors aren’t ashamed of theirs and they won’t hesitate to let you know it.”

Several of the first years laughed. Albus found himself laughing too before realising that this was it. This was how it happened. It started with little jokes, just a bit of fun. But by this time tomorrow there would be a divide. It was inevitable.
After their quick tour, the first years were sent to their dormitories to unpack and get comfortable. The boys and girls were asked to separate and split into groups of four. Albus and Scorpius stuck close together and ended up with another pair of boys who didn’t seem all that thrilled with their new roommates.

Albus supposed having the Slytherin Potter and Voldemort’s rumoured son sharing a room with you wasn’t exactly a treat.

Their particular room was peculiar. Since the rooms were slightly under the castle, and partly under the lake, the window at the end of the room displayed murky, shifting water. It felt like being on the lower levels of a boat, only without the motion.

“This is cosy!” Scorpius exclaimed, looking about the room with approval.

Albus raised an eyebrow, wondering how this massive room full of four poster beds could possibly be called ‘cosy’ by anyone.

“Oh look! The beds are like the ones we have at home…”

“You have beds like these at your place?” Albus asked, as he and Scorpius claimed the two beds nearest the window.


That did ring a bell.

“Isn’t that the place with the peacocks?” Albus asked.

“Not anymore. We used to. They were wonderful. But then after… well, we couldn’t really look after them anymore so…”

Scorpius’s face had fallen suddenly. Albus made a mental note not to bring up his home again. He wondered if he was homesick.

“It’s… greener than I expected,” Albus admitted, flopping down on his bed. Scorpius sat down beside him.

“I suppose you were expecting red.”

Albus didn’t answer.

“Well, if it’s any consolation, I’m glad you’re in Slytherin. My father always says you have to make the best of any situation. You have to make it work for you. So you will. And it’s exciting for the Slytherins to have a Potter at last, I bet.”

“They didn’t seem that excited to me,” Albus said glumly. If anything, they seemed shocked. Some even looked like they didn’t want him there. It hadn’t been the warmest of welcomes.

“Cheer up, Albus,” Scorpius said kindly. “I still have a ton of sweets left over, and I’m actually rather good at Exploding Snap. I was thinking we could play until we got tired? It always tends to help me when I’ve had a tough day.”

Albus found a smile from somewhere.

“Exploding Snap sounds good.”
“Fantastic,” Scorpius declared, and it sounded like he meant it, too.

+++ 

Albus’s second humiliation came the very next day when it was time for the Gryffindor and Slytherin first years to have an introductory flying lesson.

He’d been dreading it since breakfast, knowing there was no way he could live up to his father’s legacy, certain he was going to make a fool of himself. He’d managed one piece of toast and even that made him feel ill.

Scorpius was equally apprehensive.

“I’m really not much good at flying,” he had admitted as they sat down to breakfast. “I have flown, of course, but I’m quite clumsy as it is, so put me in the air on a broom and it could be a catastrophe!”

Once changed into their robes, the boys went to line up with the rest of the first years. Madam Hooch emerged into the cool September day looking more windswept than any human had a right to be. Immediately it became apparent she was not a teacher to be messed with.

“Well, what are you all waiting for?” she demanded, sounding more like a military general than a professor. “Everyone stand by a broomstick. Come on. Hurry up.”

They all rushed into positions beside their brooms. Scorpius’s teeth were chattering.

“Stick your hands up over your broom and say, ‘Up!’”

The first years obeyed.

Immediately Rose’s broomstick flew obediently into her hand. Next to her, Yann’s broom followed suit.

After their initial exclamations of joy, the pair of them shared a nod of respect. Madam Hooch made a vague noise which expressed her own approval.

Albus felt a shot of jealousy claim him. Rose would write home to Uncle Ron and be able to tell him that she had made him proud. Knowing Uncle Ron, he’d brag about it for weeks, how his daughter was one of the best in her year at flying. No doubt it would get back to his own father sooner or later, and someone would have to break it to the famously talented Seeker Harry Potter, that his own son had disgraced him.

“Come on now, I’ve no time for shirkers. Say ‘UP’, ‘UP’ like you mean it!” commanded Madam Hooch.

With the obvious exceptions of Rose and Yann (who Albus thought looked rather too pleased with themselves) the rest of the class repeated their instruction.

“UP!”

Brooms began to rise. Students gasped with excitement as they finally managed to complete their task. On his right, Scorpius’s broom sailed up into the air and landed in his hand.

“Yes!” Scorpius exclaimed, almost dizzy with glee. He turned to Albus, ready to share in a moment of triumph, only to see his friend staring determinedly at the ground where his broom still
Albus could not believe his luck. Of all the students in that class, he was the only one unable to make his broom rise. It was a joke. Once again, Albus found himself wondering if he was cursed.

“Up,” Albus commanded, trying to remain calm and not turn bright red in front of the assembled Gryffindor and Slytherin students. Perhaps he had yelled it too loudly the first time? Maybe brooms were stubborn? Perhaps if he acted like it was no big deal the broom would cooperate?

“UP,” he tried again, refusing to look up. He didn’t want to see Rose’s concerned expression, or even Scorpius’s encouraging smile. He could do this. He could.

“UP!” Albus shouted. But the broom did not move. Not even a millimetre.

Albus stared at it with disbelieving desperation. The rest of the class began to giggle.

“Oh Merlin’s beard, how humiliating!” came the voice of Polly Chapman, a pretty girl who seemed lacking in tact. “He really isn’t like his father at all is he?”

As if he needed to be reminded, Albus thought bitterly.

“Albus Potter, the Slytherin Squib!” declared Karl Jenkins nastily.

A fair amount of people laughed at that remark. Albus wanted to sink into the ground. Never in his worst nightmares had his first day at Hogwarts been this bad. Despite expecting the worst, his Hogwarts experience was somehow surpassing even his own pessimistic expectations.

At last Madam Hooch took pity on him and cleared her throat.

“Okay. Children. Time to fly.”

+++
Act One: Scene Four Part Two

Chapter Notes

This chapter is pretty much all mine. It's a filler which should take us up to the next platform scene. In a play, the jump probably works excellently. In a novel, I thought we could do with a bit more info.

I hope you enjoy and please do comment if you do!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++ At the end of Albus’s first year, he had lost all hope of making a success of Hogwarts. He was a laughing stock, the punchline of every joke. Even the nicer kids pitied him, and that was even worse than being picked on all the time.

Scorpius was what Albus liked to think of as a happy pill in human form, and honestly, he was pretty much the only reason Albus hadn’t packed his things and run away from Hogwarts altogether.

“Ah well, there’s always tomorrow,” Scorpius would remark after a particularly difficult day of their first term, having neatly put his clothes away (Albus simply left his where he took them off) and brushed his teeth for exactly two minutes (which was apparently why they were so white).

He was so optimistic that it almost rubbed off on Albus. Until the next morning when they woke up, washed, dressed, went down to breakfast and found themselves the subject of some new chant or prank or rumour.

“I’m sure they’ll stop soon,” Scorpius assured his best friend. “When they get to know us better. I mean, I hope I’m nothing like, you know, Voldemort, and as for you, well, you’re lovely, aren’t you?”

“Lovely and Slytherin,” Albus said, having to laugh. At this point it was that or cry.

“We just have to stick at it,” Scorpius declared with his own brand of determined optimism. “This can’t go on forever.”

“It’s not forever I’m concerned about,” Albus muttered. “If they could give it up before I snap and curse everyone, that would be great.”

+++ After a second term of bullying, even Scorpius found himself slightly worn down.

“I really hadn’t imagined Hogwarts would be like this,” he admitted to Albus, taking a break from his studying to ponder his situation. He was sitting on his bed contemplatively while Albus sat on his own bed examining the new set of Chocolate Frog cards Uncle Ron had sent him on the sly
It just so happened that the last Chocolate Frog he had opened came with an oh-so-heroic and extremely dignified picture of his father on it, although Albus noticed his dad kept trying to duck out of the frame whenever he saw an opportunity. He would have thrown the card away, but he decided he’d keep it and give it to Lily instead. She’d appreciate it at least, and even he wasn’t quite callous enough to throw his father’s likeness into the nearest bin.

“Well, for one, the food is very good.”

“True,” Albus admitted. It was undeniable that the food was amazing, although Albus did have to say that his Grandma made a fantastic dinner of roast chicken, mashed potatoes and peas which challenged even Hogwarts’ superior standards.

“And then there’s the library,” Scorpius remembered, thinking lovingly of all those wonderful old books. He couldn’t wait to be old enough to be let loose in the restricted section.

“False.”

“True for me,” Scorpius amended.

“True for you,” Albus agreed.

“And you know, I’m really quite enjoying History of Magic.”

Albus rolled onto his back and stretched out with a yawn. His head was dipping slightly off the edge of his bed and so he raised a fond eyebrow at Scorpius from upside down.

“That is because you are a big fat geek.”

That point could not possibly be argued. Scorpius agreed that he was indeed a geek. He was quite proud of it, really, especially the way Albus said it, with that distinct trace of awe.

“And, well, at least we have each other. It’s good to have a friend.”

Albus had been preparing something sarcastic to say but stopped himself. He lifted his head and rolled himself onto his front so he could watch Scorpius properly.

“I think I’d probably struggle if it was just me,” Scorpius continued honestly, looking down at his own intertwined fingers.
“You’d be all right.”

“I would have been a mess,” Scorpius corrected his friend. “Can you imagine me, here, alone? I’m just not the sort of person people like very much, I’ve realised.”

“Well, the people who don’t like you probably aren’t that bright, to be honest,” Albus said firmly. “So it’s not much of a loss.”

He had hoped that might be enough to return Scorpius to his usual cheery self. He checked to see if Scorpius would smile at him in his familiar bright way. Albus was disappointed to see that he didn’t.

“You could probably be more popular, you know,” Scorpius said frankly.

So he had noticed, Albus realised with an inner grimace. He’d hoped that Scorpius might somehow miss the fact that he, as Voldemort’s supposed son, was slightly more unpopular than Albus, who was simply the disappointing Potter. So far Albus had acted as though they were equally detested by their peers. It hadn’t struck him that Scorpius, sunny, well-meaning Scorpius, might have noticed that he was the most unpopular boy in the year.

“I don’t think so,” Albus lied.

“Well, I know that your cousin and her friends would definitely talk to you more if you weren’t always with me.”

Sometimes Albus wished Scorpius would stop being so damn honest. It was seriously inconvenient.

“That’s their problem,” Albus said swiftly. “I’m not going to ditch you.”

And he meant it too. To Albus, loyalty was everything.

“Good, that’s good. That is, actually… quite a relief.”

Albus couldn’t help but roll off his bed and make his way over to Scorpius, who was sitting neatly on his own four poster with a book now abandoned in his lap. He sat down on Scorpius’s bed, and Scorpius shifted back a little to make room.

“And you know that our lot would probably like you a lot more if you weren’t besties with a Potter?”

By ‘our lot’ Albus meant the Slytherins.

“People can’t help who they like,” Scorpius said quietly.

“No,” Albus agreed, patting his friend on the arm in what he hoped was a comforting and supportive manner. “I suppose they can’t.”

+++ 

And so Albus and Scorpius had decided to be two losers together. After the initial resistance and the denial, came acceptance. They were never going to be popular. Their very friendship alienated their potential peer groups. And yet they weren’t willing to go their separate ways.

Better to be bullied together, they both thought, than liked apart.
Albus would have been lying if he said it didn’t get to him. Some days he just felt low. Like no matter what he did he was useless.

The worst days were those in which the Slytherins had lessons with the Gryffindors. Not only did he have to face the disapproval of the Gryffindors, who believed he had betrayed them in some way by being Sorted into Slytherin, but he had to come face to face with Rose.

In all honesty there had been a great many opportunities for the cousins to make up. They’d never fallen out to begin with. After the Sorting, they’d become more and more distant, both assuming the other was deliberately choosing to avoid them. Rose was the most stubborn person Albus knew, and he would stoop to any level to meet her. They hadn’t spoken as friends for months.

Did Albus want to give Rose a hug whenever he saw her? Yes. But would he make the first move and attempt reconciliation? No. The fear of being rejected in his moment of vulnerability would have been too much.

In his letters home he acted as though everything was fine. He often cut them deliberately short, pretending he was busy with homework. Sometimes he wanted to write about Scorpius and their conversations, silly jokes they had together, their thoughts on the school in general, but Albus was very aware that his father might not be too pleased to discover he’d palled up with the son of Draco Malfoy.

Scorpius and Albus had discussed the relationship between their fathers at length, trying to piece the puzzle together. Neither one would say a bad word about the other. Nor would they say a warm one. All they revealed was begrudging respect, which Albus and Scorpius took to mean they weren’t really over their old issues.

Albus thought it was ridiculous, seeing as they were adults now, grown men. He felt angry at his father for holding onto his resentments. For making things harder with Scorpius. The only relief was that Scorpius, although loyal to his father, was a pretty fair-minded individual who did not seem to care one jot what Draco Malfoy might think about his hanging about with a Potter.

“Actually,” Scorpius had said once, surprising Albus. “I think he’d be quite impressed.”

When the school year ended Albus felt both relieved and bereft at once. On the one hand he had done it. He’d survived a whole year of utter humiliation. On the other, he was now facing the summer without his best friend and closest confidante.

“Give my love to your mum,” Albus had said on the platform, patting Scorpius on the arm.

Scorpius had simply looked grateful that Albus had remembered.

“I will. Say hi to everyone for me?”

“I will,” Albus agreed.

“Even Rose?” Scorpius managed to tease, despite his feelings of sadness that a lonely summer stretched out before him.

“I will attempt it,” Albus conceded with a grin. “But if I get a punch on the nose, I will absolutely one hundred percent blame you.”

“Deal.”

And then Draco Malfoy had appeared looking sterner and more serious than Albus had ever seen
him. He looked utterly exhausted. Scorpius gave him a little wave and then rushed off to his father’s side obediently.

“Someone should tell him the ponytail really isn’t working for him,” said James (who had appeared from nowhere at that very moment) as Albus watched Draco and Scorpius walk away.

Albus felt a strange need to defend Mr Malfoy. Even if he had been a Death Eater once.

“I’ve tried telling you your jokes aren’t funny, and you never listen.”

“Touche little bro,” James conceded. “Ready for the summer hols?”

“Stuck in a house with you?” Albus deadpanned, rolling his eyes. “Can’t wait.”

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

Comments feed my happiness. Make this writer happy. (I write faster when I am happy).

Apologies for the blackmail! Enjoy!!!

xxx
Act One: Scene Four Part Three

Chapter Notes

Okay so there may actually end up being four parts to Scene Four. I'm trying to split the parts of the script in a way that works as a novel and so this is basically Albus's second year at Hogwarts.

The only bits I have cut are the conversation between Draco and Harry (because this is from Albus's perspective and he's not there at that point), and the tiniest bit of Professor McGonagall's actual speech about Rose.

I hope you don't mind me not putting in the 'grown ups' stuff, but in the actual books obviously we don't keep flicking back to see what the adults are doing, they sort of appear and disappear in Harry's life and we learn about them through his perspective.

Enjoy!

(And comment please!)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

+++  

The journey to Platform Nine and Three Quarters had been excruciating, with his mother trying to make conversation, James being a pain as usual, and his father trying to act like everything was fine when it clearly wasn’t.

Someone, and Albus was not sure who, had snitched on him. Because somehow his parents were well aware that at Hogwarts he was a complete and utter loser. The very fact they knew this embarrassed him. He suspected Rose may have been the culprit, but he couldn’t be sure. Too many of the professors were friends with his parents, and even James might have taken it upon himself to break the bad news in a surge of what he probably regarded as big-brotherly heroism.

Had Lily been there that morning things would have been a little easier since his father would have been distracted by her, but today she was spending a day with Grandma and Grandad (Grandma was knitting her a special fairy sweater), so Albus had to walk up to the platform with his mother and father trailing him, since James had already spotted some of his many friends.

James didn't know how lucky he was, Albus thought bitterly. Being able to simply spot numerous familiar faces and blunder over, to be greeted with smiles and general friendliness. Had Albus unexpectedly come across any students from his year (apart from Scorpius), he would have been given the cold shoulder at best.

Seemingly noticing the very same thing, that James was so clearly popular and well-liked, and Albus was, well, not, Harry placed a guiding hand on his son's shoulder like he had on his first day. Unknown to Albus it was meant as a gesture of solidarity, to try and express that he knew what that was like, to be treated like you were nothing, and to show anyone who might be watching that Harry Potter absolutely was not ashamed of his son.
But Albus misunderstood. He interpreted the gesture as one of pity and shrugged it off hastily. If his father was hurt by that he didn’t comment on it.

Unspoken in the air between them was the fact that his parents knew he was getting a hard time from the other kids at school. They knew, and he knew they knew. But nobody wanted to bring it up.

Even James, usually so keen to tease his younger brother, left the subject well alone, which was a sign of how seriously the family was taking the situation. That in itself was mortifying.

The only consolation Albus could think of was that soon he could see Scorpius again, who at the moment seemed to be the only person capable of fully understanding him. Scorpius wouldn’t pity or patronise him. He’d be a real friend. A real friend was what Albus desperately needed right about now.

Albus stood forward on the platform, hoping to catch a glimpse of his best friend and edging subtly away from his parents, who he hoped would be distracted by the numerous witches and wizards come to catch a moment with the famous Harry Potter and famed former Quidditch star and now sports editor Ginny Potter. He doubted it would help his school situation if the other kids saw him flanked by his successful mother and father, like he couldn’t even turn up at a bloody train station by himself.

The sooner he could find Scorpius and they could get away from all this, the better. Albus knew Scorpius had issues with his dad too, so he’d be grateful for the chance to get on the train and find a compartment where for a few hours at least they could chill out, eat chocolate, and be generally at peace with the world.

It was at this point that Albus became aware his dad was still trailing him.

Frowning, he turned to his father, who gave him a slightly awkward smile. The last thing Albus wanted was to be standing at the front of the platform with none other than Harry Potter. If there was ever a time for comparisons, this was it, and Albus was not willing to let that happen.

“Dad, can you just…” Albus mumbled, embarrassed at having to even say such a thing out loud. Why couldn’t his dad just get the message? Surely he knew that a second year student wouldn’t want their father following them about?

“Can I just what?” his dad asked.

Albus took a deep breath and steeled himself to be honest.

“I’m just asking you Dad if you’ll - if you’ll just stand a little away from me.”

He knew it was cruel the moment he’d said it, and yet it was the truth.

Surprisingly, his father smiled. He seemed to find the comment amusing. For a moment, Albus hoped wildly that his father understood, that everything would be okay.

“Second-years don’t like to be seen with their dads, is that it?” Harry asked, attempting the banter that he used when talking to James.

The effect was spoiled somewhat by the overly attentive wizard beginning to circle the pair of them, clearly wanting to get a glimpse of the famous Harry Potter, and perhaps his Slytherin failure of a son.
“No,” Albus explained quietly. “It’s just - you’re you and - and I’m me and -“

But once again his father misunderstood. He thought he was just shy of the crowds, like he had been as a child.

“It’s just people looking okay? People look. And they’re looking at me, not you.”

The strange circling wizard with apparently no social skills took that moment to hand Harry something to sign, which Albus noticed his father did instinctively, barely looking at what it was he was signing, or pausing to think. Then, quite rudely in Albus’s opinion, the man walked off again.

“At Harry Potter and his disappointing son,” Albus mumbled.

That caught his father’s attention. He looked up, surprised.

“What does that mean?” he asked, frowning.

“At Harry Potter and his Slytherin son,” Albus said, looking his father dead in the eyes and daring him to deny it.

For a second there was something like recognition in his father’s eyes. It wasn’t pity and it wasn’t anger. It wasn’t even the usual confusion. It was sadness.

And then James rushed past with his school bag, deliberately barging Albus as he went.

“Slythering Slytherin, stop with your dithering, time to get on to the train!” he half sang, half chanted.

Albus was so used to this that he didn’t even sigh.

“Unnecessary, James,” Harry said sternly, but James was already long gone.

“See you at Christmas, Dad!” James yelled over his shoulder, before disappearing cheerfully into his group of friends.

Albus shouldn’t have been jealous of his big brother, because honestly he was nothing special and actually pretty annoying at times, but he was. He really was.

“Al-“ his father began, in his ‘understanding’ voice. It made Albus’s skin crawl. He felt a pep talk was coming on and he didn’t want it.

“My name is Albus,” he found himself saying coldly. “Not Al.”

“Are the other kids being unkind? Is that it?” his father asked, concern all over his features.

“Maybe if you tried making a few more friends - without Hermione and Ron I wouldn’t have survived Hogwarts. I wouldn’t have survived at all.”

Albus only just stopped himself from rolling his eyes.

“But I don’t need a Ron and Hermione,” he said firmly, trying to draw up some courage from somewhere. “I’ve… I’ve got a friend, Scorpius, and I know you don’t like him but… he’s all I need.”

Very conscious that it had come out in a rush and that even to his own ears he sounded pathetic, Albus stopped there.
“Look, as long as you’re happy, that’s all that matters to me…”

“You didn’t need to bring me to the station, Dad,” Albus declared crushingly, cutting his father off. And instead of looking up at his father’s wounded face, he picked up his case, swallowed, and walked away as fast as he could.

He didn’t look back to see if his father would follow him. He couldn’t bear to see Harry Potter’s disappointment. He couldn’t bear to see his father’s sadness.

Thank goodness he found Rose, ready and waiting with her case, looking ready and raring to go as always. Even if things were difficult between them now, they were still cousins. Rose had his back. In order to save his pride she had agreed to act like everything was fine in front of the grown-ups. If they barely spoke once they reached Hogwarts then that was another story altogether.

It wasn’t friendship, but it was better than nothing, and it was as good as Albus was going to get.

“As soon as the train leaves, you don’t have to talk to me,” Albus said, refusing to be pitied. He’d far rather Rose disappear off to her Gryffindor friends than remain with him out of sympathy.

“I know,” Rose agreed, brisk and businesslike. “We just need to keep up the pretence in front of the grown-ups.”

Albus nodded. He respected his cousin’s loyalty, even if he found there wasn’t much else he liked about her at the moment.

Right on cue Scorpius came rushing out of the crowd dragging a massive case behind him and beaming like he’d just won the lottery.

Seeing the pair of cousins together he only grinned more broadly.

“Hi Rose!” he said hopefully.

“Bye Albus,” Rose declared, her duty done now that the odd blond Malfoy boy had emerged and Albus wouldn’t be alone any longer. She made a point of not speaking to him. His parents had been Death Eaters after all, and that she simply couldn’t forgive.

The Death Eaters and all that supported them were Rose Granger-Weasley's enemies. Her mother may have been the most fantastic, successful, and really rather heroic witch of her age, but Rose still noticed how she tried not to wince when someone called her a 'mudblood'. She noticed every time an old-fashioned witch or wizard saw her parents together and turned up their nose, like they’d witnessed something foul, instead of the two people who (along with Hugo) made up Rose's whole world. Scorpius Malfoy might have held the same views as his father, or he might not have, but Rose wasn't willing to take that chance. Never would she betray her beautiful, brilliant mother in such a way. Hermione Granger may have spoken constantly about tolerance and forgiveness, but Rose was not so quick to forget a slight aimed at her mother. She was loyal to her core.

Rather haughtily, she gave Albus a nod and then strolled off.

“She’s melting,” Scorpius remarked hopefully as they watched her go.

Albus gave him a shove.

+++ 

Crushingly, Albus was forced to watch Rose be accepted as Chaser on the Gryffindor Quidditch
team early on in the first term. Rumour had it that she’d blown everyone else at the Quidditch trials out of the water.

He wasn’t surprised by her achievement, and actually, deep down, he felt a tiny bit proud, but it still stung to see Rose excelling at pretty much everything while he was struggling not to have Dungbombs thrown in his general direction whenever the professors weren’t looking.

It was clear that everyone adored her, apart from a few of the Slytherins, and even they held a begrudging sort of respect for his talented and charismatic cousin. If ever someone insulted her she would fire an even wittier, even fiercer insult right back. She, unlike Albus, was the sort of person it was impossible to bully, and so nobody tried.

Professor McGonagall stood at the front of the Great Hall, reading out the new Gryffindor Quidditch line-up, and looking almost sickeningly proud. It was ridiculous for her to act like Gryffindor were special or somehow hers. If House unity was so important, then it would be nice, Albus thought, for Professor McGonagall to look as pleased for the Slytherins as she did for her own House. Of course that never happened.

When Professor McGonagall finished her speech (which Albus noticed was very biased indeed), the hall erupted in cheers and whoops.

Even Scorpius seemed to be celebrating.

“Are you clapping her too?” Albus asked moodily. “We hate Quidditch and she’s playing for another House.”

“She’s your cousin, Albus,” Scorpius answered fairly, still smiling and clapping his hands like an excitable seal.

Albus often wished he had Scorpius’s capacity for impartiality. Instead, he was a huge sulker with a talent for resentfulness and taking things personally.

“Do you think she’d clap for me?” Albus demanded.

But Scorpius was barely listening.

“I think she’s brilliant,” was all he said, and as Albus watched the adoration in his friend’s eyes he felt his stomach turn over with something ugly and supremely unpleasant.

+++ 

Potions class was a disaster. The classes were becoming even harder now they were second years, and Albus was finding it tough to keep up. Worst of all Polly Chapman and Karl Jenkins had the desk right behind him and Scorpius, and that meant being tormented for much of the lesson.

“Albus Potter,” Polly declared. “An irrelevance. Even the portraits turn the other way when he comes up the stairs.”

Albus hunched over his potion and tried to ignore her.

“And now we add - is it horn of Bicorn?” he asked Scorpius.

“Leave him and Voldemort’s child to it, I say,” said Karl Jenkins.

Albus saw Scorpius wince and felt the momentary urge to do something horrifically stupid and
heroic, like tipping the contents of their cauldron all over Karl’s head. But he pulled himself together, took a deep breath, and took a look at their instructions once again, determined to continue their task.

“With just a little salamander blood…”

The moment the blood entered the cauldron a loud bang made several people shout and smoke erupted into Albus and Scorpius’s faces.

“Okay,” Scorpius said, optimistically ignoring the fact his blond hair was now sporting some fetching black lowlights and fighting back a cough. “What’s the counter ingredient? What do we need to change?”

Albus took a look at his friend and then at the class of students who were staring over at them and giggling. He felt about the size of an ant at that moment. He wanted nothing more than to disappear.

*What did they need to change?* Scorpius had asked him.

It was a question he asked himself every day.

“Everything,” he muttered, reaching for a cloth to help mop up the mess they’d made.

+++ 

Over that next year at Hogwarts Albus grew taller, his eyes became a shade darker, and his face took on the sallow, rather unhealthy look of a permanently unhappy person.

He was still small for his age, like his father and mother had been, but he’d all but lost his childishness. Perhaps it had happened a little too quickly, but there was no going back now. The naivety and optimism of early youth had gone (and Albus had been a cynical boy to begin with). He was in limbo now, no longer a child and not quite a teenager.

Albus was a reasonably good looking boy, no matter how much he tried to hide it. He wouldn’t accept that he had the capacity to look perfectly pleasant, though. In fact, true to his perverse nature, Albus did his utmost to resist becoming a handsome young man.

Scorpius, who Albus had always regarded as being the better looking of the pair, remained how he had always been, gracious, clumsy, sunny, and kind. He had been destined for good looks from the start, what with his beautiful, delicate mother, and striking father. Albus would have resented him for it, how easily he could probably have fit in with the Polly Chapmans of the world if he wanted, but he loved him too much for that.

One positive to be taken from his second year was that Albus had discovered he wasn’t entirely useless when it came to his studies, which was something. He was doing just fine at Herbology (possibly because Professor Longbottom, who Albus knew as Neville, gave him the confidence to keep trying even when things went horribly wrong), and surprisingly he was finding History of Magic fairly fascinating, but that was probably only because he had Scorpius to reword the boring lectures for him once they were back in the Slytherin common room.

The way Scorpius spoke about history was a form of magic in itself. He was so passionate, so enthusiastic, that Albus would become swept up in it all before he’d even realised he was paying attention. By the time the next History of Magic lesson rolled around, he would have a pretty solid knowledge on some ancient witch or wizard, enough to make sure he kept up, and enough to make sure he could hold his own in a conversation with Scorpius when his best friend was feeling like a
good old chat.

When it finally came to exams Albus was confident that he’d pass at least two of his subjects, which was better than none.

People expected him to be better at magic in general than he was. Somehow they had this idea that because he was Harry Potter’s son, he’d be able to create the perfect Patronus long before the lesson had even been taught, that he’d be able to transfigure anything, that he’d be able to duell anyone and win.

This was deeply unfair because Albus knew for a fact that his father had been pretty rubbish at that sort of thing to begin with. To be fair on his dad, Harry owned up to that quite freely. But the other kids didn’t know that, and there was nothing Albus could do to change it.

+++ 

Towards the end of the year, Scorpius had received some fairly worrying owls from his father.

“It’s nothing, really,” he had assured Albus, forcing a smile. “You know how things are. Mum gets bad, but she gets better again.”

If Albus could have carried some of that pain for Scorpius then he would have done. He couldn’t imagine what it must be like to have a mother that was so often unwell. Albus’s own mother was incredibly fit and active. Ginny Potter was the sort of woman who could organise her entire family, write her sports column, and then go out for an evening run without seeming the least bit tired or overwhelmed. Often she would go out for the afternoon with Aunt Angelina, and the pair of them would brush up on their Quidditch skills, mostly to keep fit, although Albus heard his mother was still stunningly good.

It was wrong that Scorpius should have this on his plate as well as everything else. Albus honestly couldn’t think of a person more deserving of happiness than Scorpius Malfoy. It seemed like a sick joke that instead of the laughter and success he should be experiencing, he was sitting up at night worrying about his mother and fretting about the newest rumours surrounding the pair of them.

On the train journey back to platform nine and three quarters, Albus wanted to say something. He wasn’t sure quite what, but he needed Scorpius to know that he was there.

If only he was better at words, he thought desperately. That was one thing he would openly admit he had inherited from his father. His complete and utter inability to say the right thing at the right time.

Scorpius sat by the window, watching the world whiz by. Albus sat beside him, watching Scorpius.

“It’ll do you good, probably, having a break,” he said clumsily.


Albus felt a sudden overwhelming surge of affection for Scorpius.

“Yeah, I’m pretty tired as well,” he agreed. If Scorpius didn’t want him to acknowledge how sad he looked and how desperately, desperately in need of a hug, then Albus would ignore both of those things.
They sat in companionable silence for the rest of the journey.

+++ 

Albus saw Draco Malfoy on the platform, just the same as last year. For a moment he didn’t recognise him. He looked years older. Scorpius seemed to notice too.

The boys said their usual goodbyes, Scorpius gave his usual wave, and then hurried off to meet his father.

Even though Albus could see his mother in the distance, he stayed where he was and watched the two Malfoys walk away. Unusually, Draco Malfoy placed a hand on Scorpius’s shoulder, and seemed to lean ever so slightly towards his son, as though he couldn’t bear the distance between them, like he couldn't stand to let him go.

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed!

Comments give me life!

xxx
Chapter Notes

This is the last portion of Scene Four! I had to add so much to this scene in general because it's all about time changing and Albus growing up so that's why I've written it in four chapters.

As always I've used the exact dialogue from the script.

Enjoy (and please please please comment because it makes me so happy!) xxx

Albus had had a most unsatisfying summer. For one, Scorpius had barely written to him. Every day he waited for an owl from his friend, and most days he was left disappointed.

“Love letter didn’t come?” James would tease him, strolling into the kitchen with toast in his mouth.

He meant no harm by it, and in another life Albus would have smiled and fired an insult right back, but this was not another life and so instead Albus shot his brother a glare.

Sometimes he wished he didn’t react the way he did to things. If only he were more forgiving like Scorpius, if only he could learn to leave his grudges in the past. He knew he could be happier that way, and yet the thought of letting everything go and starting again filled him with dread. He was Albus Potter. He was a loser. He was a disappointment to his family and an out and out terrible son.

There was safety in that identity, somehow.

Albus decided to stay at home when the rest of the family went to Diagon Alley for Lily’s new Hogwarts things. Even though he would very much have liked to have a look around, something told him that to accompany his family on their mundane, domestic day out would have been letting himself down in some way. It would have been giving in. It would have meant playing the part he was supposed to, of the second Potter son, tagging along and joining in the banter. It would have meant betraying himself.

When Harry had been his age, about to start his third year at Hogwarts, he had already faced Voldemort twice, not to mention defeated a Basilisk and saved the life of his future wife. In comparison Albus felt like a failure. So far his biggest achievement was not running away from the hell-on-Earth otherwise known as Hogwarts.

Lily was more bouncy than ever, flitting in and out of rooms, chattering about the year ahead of her, asking their mother and father over and over again to tell her stories of their first years at Hogwarts. He had to admit, it was nice to see her so happy. The way Lily could express herself with zero self-consciousness was really quite amazing. The family thought this probably had something to do with Luna’s influence on their daughter.

Because Albus had refused to participate in the family excitement that summer, a worrying
closeness had started to grow between James and Lily. It was his own fault, he knew, and yet it made him feel left out and lonely.

They were proper siblings. They wound each other up, they played pranks, they had that complete and utter devotion that brothers and sisters developed, even though they covered it up by declaring each other the most annoying person on the planet.

Albus had begun to feel like an outsider in his own home.

Ginny Potter was desperately worried about her youngest son. She knew what it was like, to feel left out. Being the youngest Weasley sibling and the only girl, she had had to fight for her place in the family dynamic. And unlike Albus, she’d had the added help of being the youngest, which meant her brothers naturally all felt the need to protect her.

She could see Albus slipping into depression and it hurt her.

His father, Harry, also had this tendency. If the situation wasn’t so grave, Ginny would have laughed at how similar the two were. The root of their problems, she believed, was that they were simply too alike.

She had spoken to her husband many times about ways in which he could help Albus feel included again. He was really quite useless at translating the huge amount of emotion and empathy he felt for people into actually helpful words and actions which showed he cared.

“Surely the third year will be better?” Harry had said, as they lay in bed together, Ginny skim reading her latest column.

“It’s Hogsmeade year, isn’t it?” Harry continued. “He’ll enjoy that, won’t he?”

Ginny didn’t want to answer that one directly.

“Have you signed his permission form?” she asked instead.

Harry nodded.

“I even got a spare.”

Ginny smiled sadly at that. Harry had never quite got over the injustice of being denied his first trip due to the lack of parent or guardian available to sign his permission form.

“James loved it,” said Harry. “He couldn’t stop talking about Honeydukes, do you remember? It was his version of heaven.”

Ginny put down her paper and sighed.

“Just remember, Albus isn’t James,” she said quietly.

Harry nodded.

+++  

His father still insisted on acting like nothing was wrong, and so Albus insisted on being as stubborn and uncooperative as possible. Somehow his dad imagined he could still turn this situation around, after two years of misery. The only other person that stupidly optimistic was Scorpius, and Albus only forgave him it because it was sort of endearing coming from him.
The pair stood on the platform having arrived far earlier at King’s Cross than most due to Ginny’s insistence that Lily wasn’t late on her very first day. Albus was hardly going to complain about that. The earlier they got to the station, the quicker he could find Scorpius, get on board, and ignore just about everyone and everything else.

“Third year,” Harry said, unnecessarily. “Big year. Here is your permission form for Hogsmeade.”

He produced it like it was supposed to be some special treat, like he was supposed to be grateful for his father’s name on a poxy bit of parchment.

“I hate Hogsmeade,” Albus lied, taking the form.

“How can you hate a place you haven’t actually visited yet?”

That comment made so much sense that it made Albus angry.

“Because I know it will be full of Hogwarts students,” he answered with a shrug. To show he wasn’t going to change his mind, no matter what his father said, Albus screwed the permission form up in his hand until it was a crumpled ball. It didn’t make him feel much better.

His father seemed unwilling to give up. Albus saw him take a deep breath and try again.

“Just give it a go - come on - this is your chance to go nuts in Honeydukes without your mum knowing - no Albus, don’t you dare…”

But it was too late. Albus had produced his wand quick as a flash and pointed it at the crumpled paper ball.

“Incendio!”

The ball of paper burst into flames and ascended across the platform, coming to a stop on the tarmac and being trod into the ground like an old crisp packet.

“Of all the stupid things!” his father raged, brows furrowed with shock and surprise.

Albus felt the strangest urge to laugh.

“The ironic thing is,” he admitted. “I didn’t expect it to work. I’m terrible at that spell.”

“So what would you like me to do?” Albus demanded, crossing his arms over his chest and shooting his father a look of absolute and utter almost hysterical defiance. “Magic myself popular? Conjure myself into a new House? Transfigure myself into a better student? Just cast a spell, Dad, and change me into what you want me to be, okay? It’ll work better for both of us.”

Horrified to discover his eyes were starting to burn, Albus shook his head and decided to do what he always did, run from the situation.

His father was staring at him like he was some form of alien, like he couldn’t understand where
their conversation had gone so wrong.

“Got to go,” Albus announced, voice a touch higher than usual. “Train to catch. Friend to find.”

With that, he grabbed his case all but ran to the other end of the platform where Scorpius usually waited.

More people had arrived since he and his father’s little chat. Straining his neck, Albus just about made out Scorpius’s blond hair a few metres away. Unless he’d been the victim of a shrinking spell over the holidays, it looked like his best friend was sitting on the platform floor, back against the wall.

“Scorpius!” he yelled delightedly as he managed to fight his way through the mass of parents standing about and chatting on the platform. The relief of seeing just that familiar hair overwhelmed him. He was almost able to push aside the thoughts of his father.

When he reached his friend he saw that Scorpius was sitting on his case, feet on the ground, knees slightly bent, arms cradled around them. He seemed smaller somehow, and it had nothing to do with the fact he was sitting down.

Albus had been about to give his usual half wave, but something was wrong. Scorpius seemed numb to the world. The platform was busy and smelly and noisy, and yet Scorpius looked like a boy who was sitting in silence. Usually, Scorpius would have spotted him a mile off and beamed at him. He wasn’t used to such an unenthusiastic reception. It worried him a little.

“Scorpius…” he repeated, with more concern. He almost wanted to wave a hand in front of his friend’s face to release him from his stupor. “Are you okay?”

Scorpius said nothing. It was unusual for Scorpius to greet him with silence instead of a bright ‘hello!’ He frowned as he tried his best to read his friend’s eyes.

Albus thought furiously, considering every last little thing that could possibly be bothering Scorpius. If someone had started up with the ‘Voldemort’s son’ thing again then Albus was going to lose his temper. But then again, Scorpius was pretty good at dealing with that by now, and it had never upset him like this before.

Was it his father? It was true, the boys didn’t often talk about either one of their fathers, knowing it to be a sore spot for the pair of them, but Draco Malfoy clearly loved his son, and there was no way he would have left his son sitting alone on the platform like this. He would have got him to his feet and placed a hand on his shoulder. Which meant Draco probably hadn't turned up to drop his son off at all...

There was only one possible explanation.

“Your mum?” Albus asked, immediately deducing the source of the upset. His eyes widened slightly when he realised he’d guessed right first time. He’d hoped for Scorpius’s sake that he’d been wrong. “It got worse?”

Scorpius swallowed and took a moment before somehow forming a sentence.

“It’s got the worst it can possibly get.”

Albus felt like he’d been punched in the stomach. For a moment he couldn’t breathe. He felt dizzy with the horror of what his best friend was telling him.
He shoved his case down next to Scorpius, ignoring the people around them, and plonked himself down on it.

“I thought you’d send an owl…”

“I couldn’t work out what to say,” Scorpius admitted, his voice sounding quite horribly small and brave. Worst of all it still sounded ever so slightly bright in a rather forced way, like he didn’t want to trouble anyone with his misery.

What could he possibly say that would console his friend? There was nothing. There were no words in the English language that would be able to solve this.

And so he settled for doing what he always did around Scorpius. He decided to be honest.

“And now I don’t know what to say,” he mumbled, hoping that Scorpius would understand that he would have done just about anything to make this better, but that he wasn’t good with words, or with emotions, and that he didn’t want to make things worse.

“Say nothing,” Scorpius said, a little sharply.

Albus nodded. He didn’t take offence at that tone because he understood. He knew the shame of being pitied, the embarrassment of it.

“Is there anything…” Albus offered, gesturing vaguely with his hands.

Scorpius turned his head to look at Albus then. His eyes were large and pleading. Albus thought he looked like he hadn’t slept much in days.

“Come to the funeral,” Scorpius half asked, half commanded.

Albus swallowed. This was a big ask. It was massive. He wasn’t even sure he’d be welcome at a Malfoy funeral. But the answer came easily, because Scorpius wanted him there and he would never let his best friend down.

“Of course.”

“And be my good friend.”

Albus nodded. He paused for a moment, considered, and then reached out his hand to pat Scorpius lightly on the knee.

Some second years nearby laughed, but Albus found he didn’t care.

+++  

When it came to Lily’s Sorting, Albus had pretty much lost hope of having another Slytherin Potter in the family. To start with Lily was a textbook Gryffindor. She was brave, she was excitable, she was adventurous, and she spoke her mind. With Lily life was very simple. She liked what she liked and if anyone else didn’t like that then it didn’t matter.

Albus envied her that.

The Sorting Hat had composed another irritating song for the occasion:

“Are you afraid of what you’ll hear?  
Afraid I’ll speak the name you fear?
Not Slytherin! Not Gryffindor!
Not Hufflepuff! Not Ravenclaw!
Don’t worry, child, I know my job,
You’ll learn to laugh if first you’ll sob.”

Albus found the whole thing patronising and couldn’t understand why the hat received such wild applause. It had all year to think of about six lines of poetry, which didn’t seem all that clever to him.

When Lily was called up to the front she went with an excitable skip. Almost the moment the hat was placed on her head, she was Sorted.

“Lily Potter: GRYFFINDOR!”

Lily was overjoyed to be joining her brother James, her cousin Rose, and to follow in the footsteps of her parents, especially the father that she idolised.

“Great,” Albus mumbled, knowing he was being determinedly miserable at this point and not caring.

“Did you really think she’d come to us?” Scorpius asked him. “Potters don’t belong in Slytherin.”

Coming from anyone else it would have been an insult, but from Scorpius it was simply an observation. He was repeating what he, Albus, had so often said. Perhaps he was a little less tactful since the passing of his mother, but Albus forgave him because he was in pain.

“This one does,” Albus said glumly.

The Sorting ended and the feast began. Amidst the loud chatter and bustling about, the joyous celebration of first years and their friends, a small group of students made their way to the Slytherin table apparently with the sole aim of tormenting Albus with his sister's House. A surprising amount were Gryffindors. His father and Uncle Ron had never been too keen to discuss that side of the red House. That potential to be really, truly nasty, somehow thinking it was okay because they were in a group, or because they thought the person in question was bad enough to deserve it. No prizes for guessing why.

Albus closed his eyes and made up his mind not to rise to their bait. He was a Slytherin, and although that meant most people thought he was sly, manipulative, selfish, and greedy, most of all it meant he couldn’t afford to let anyone know how much the bullying got to him.

And he couldn’t cause a scene. Not now. Not when Scorpius was feeling so low.

Instead Albus gritted his teeth and prepared for the onslaught of cruel words and hurtful 'jokes'.

I didn’t choose, you know that? Albus thought furiously, as he remained determinedly calm for Scorpius. I didn’t choose to be his son.

+++
(And say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn) xxx
Act One: Scene Four Part Five

Chapter Notes

This chapter is all mine. We don't get to see the boys' third year in the script so I tried to fill in a gap. I hope it carries us nicely through to the holidays before their fourth year!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The start of their third year was a miserable one. Following Astoria Malfoy's funeral, which had taken place on the very first weekend at Hogwarts, Scorpius had spent a great deal of his free time in silence, staring at nothing, chewing his fingernails and looking lost.

Albus had never been to a funeral before, and a part of him had worried about attending a Malfoy gathering. After all, he’d not had much to do with Draco Malfoy before, and he was sure his dad wouldn’t like it. But for Scorpius, he made sure he got permission. It was his mother who sent him up some appropriate clothing and a very kind letter, which asked him to give Scorpius her love.

Albus couldn’t help but notice that there was no word from his father.

When it came to that awful Sunday morning (during which Scorpius had been uncharacteristically quiet), Albus and Scorpius were allowed to use Professor McGonagall’s fireplace to travel to Wiltshire. The boys arrived in a nearby wizarding building, which from the outside looked like a youth centre, and were led by an official dressed in black to the neighbouring church graveyard in which an impressive white marble tomb had been constructed, some distance away from the other, far less elaborate graves nearby, framed (or it could be said obscured) by yew trees.

As Scorpius saw the large white monument, he gasped, but recovered himself quickly. Albus placed a hand on his back and hoped that it helped.

Draco Malfoy was already waiting beside the tomb, looking impressive in a dark, formal outfit and holding a cane in one hand. When he saw his son he gave a curt nod but his expression did not change. His eyes were deeply shadowed and his face was almost unnaturally pale. Albus was shocked, for a moment, to see Draco Malfoy looking like he’d aged another couple of years since the last time he’d seen him at the station, which had only been about two months ago.

Scorpius went to stand beside his father and Albus hung back with two other guests, both women of around his mother’s age, who Albus assumed had been Astoria’s friends. Aside from the official, only one other person was present. A proud-looking woman stood a noticeable distance away from everyone else, a deep purple hat atop her dark hair. Albus knew that must have been Scorpius’s Aunt Daphne. She was the only member of the Greengrass family who hadn’t cut ties with Astoria after she married Draco Malfoy. According to Scorpius she had visited Malfoy Manor once or twice when he was young, but following a disagreement had not shown her face there again.

Albus was still looking around, waiting for others to arrive, when the ceremony began. Startled, he wondered if the official had made a mistake, but Draco Malfoy did not move a muscle or say a single thing to stop him. Albus had imagined a Malfoy funeral to be a grand social occasion, but this was simply seven people standing in a graveyard in the September rain. It was strangely
There was something awfully depressing about a funeral with so few mourners. Albus wondered if this was why Scorpius had asked him to come in the first place. Had he feared nobody would turn up to remember his beloved mother?

The ceremony was almost shockingly quick. A few words were said by the Ministry official, a poem had been read, and then Astoria Malfoy’s coffin had been levitated into the large white marble tomb, which opened with ease.

A single photograph of Astoria Malfoy was leaned against the tomb in a simple and yet tasteful frame. Albus stared at the woman he had never met and tried to see Scorpius in her. She had dark hair which was styled elaborately, showing a slender neck on which she wore a silver necklace with green jewels, a thin face, which did not make her look ill, but perhaps rather more angular than she ought to have been, and kind blue eyes. Although her chin was raised proudly, her smile was almost shy.

Scorpius didn’t smile like that. When Scorpius was happy he beamed without the slightest hesitation. But the kind eyes were the same, and Albus supposed the fact she was smiling at all meant they had something in common, because he had yet to see Draco Malfoy smile once. Looking at him in that cold, grey, graveyard, clutching his cane so hard it looked on the brink of snapping, Albus wondered if he even could.

Draco pulled out his wand and made an elegant motion with it, creating a wreath of flowers which settled atop the now sealed tomb. He repeated the gesture, but this time gave the wreath he created to Scorpius, who held it to his chest for a moment, eyes closed, like a child making a birthday wish. When he placed his own wreath down, Scorpius took great care in positioning it, and then gave it one last touch before stepping away again.

Soon after, Daphne Greengrass strolled forward (at which Scorpius looked up hopefully), and created her own bunch of flowers. She did not acknowledge her nephew, or her brother-in-law (and ex-peer), before turning on her heel and walking away again.

Scorpius visibly drooped at the snub. Draco’s nostrils flared but he did not say a word. He did, however, place a hand on his son’s shoulder.

Albus made sure to glare at Daphne Greengrass as she passed him. She didn’t notice.

Albus took once again to looking at the photograph of Scorpius’s mother, which was somehow easier than listening to Astoria’s friends talking in hushed voices and exchanging comforting words. Perhaps it was in Albus’s imagination, but those women did not seem to be interacting with Draco Malfoy either. Were they really ignoring him at his own wife’s funeral? That seemed unbelievably harsh, no matter what he’d done in his youth.

Among the grieving mourners, Albus couldn’t help but feel like an intruder, like some awful voyeur, here to witness the Malfoy family’s grief. What if Draco Malfoy thought he was in attendance as some form of spy?

No, Albus told himself firmly, he wasn't intruding. He was there for Scorpius. Astoria would have understood. He might not have met her face to face, but Albus did know that Scorpius adored his mother. That occasionally she made up songs, she believed sweets could help a person make friends, and that she had suffered a long and sometimes painful illness while remaining optimistic throughout. Albus was quite certain that she would have approved of anything which helped her son in some way. (Even if he was being fairly useless about it at that moment.)
Perhaps he hadn’t asked about her enough? Now Albus came to think of it, he’d never even found out where the Greengrass family curse had come from, let alone how it manifested. All he’d checked, upon finding out Astoria was ill, was that Scorpius was one hundred percent safe from it (as confirmed by various Healers hired by Draco Malfoy over the years), and then left it at that.

It had been too difficult to obtain any further details, mostly because Scorpius didn’t like to dwell on the ‘bad things’. He had inherited his mother’s determination to be positive no matter what life threw at him. Which was why Albus had never realised quite how ill Astoria was until the news of her death, and likely why Scorpius had never even mentioned that death was a potential outcome of her long battle.

“She gets worse and then she gets better,” was what Scorpius would say, over and over again, as though reassuring himself. “There are bad times, but she gets through them. And then there are good times again.”

Albus wondered how it felt, for an optimist like Scorpius, to realise that for Astoria Malfoy, the good times would not return. He watched as Scorpius stood beside his father, tears streaming silently down his cheeks. It was wrong to see Scorpius cry like that. It made Albus feel nauseous.

As Draco Malfoy shook the official’s hand, and the other guests took the opportunity to pay their respects, Albus wandered over to Scorpius, not sure quite what to say, just wanting him to know he wasn’t alone.

Scorpius was sniffling, his eyes fixed on the photograph of his mother. Albus shifted as close as possible and stood beside his best friend, so they could study Astoria together, shoulder to shoulder. To Albus’s relief, he felt Scorpius, very slightly, lean against him.

Perhaps he wasn't so useless after all.

+++ 

In the days following the funeral, Albus did his best to keep Scorpius distracted. He suggested Exploding Snap when they sat together in the common room, accompanied him on trips to the library (even though these were deadly dull), and made sure to talk enough for the both of them. True, these talks often involved his father, but he hoped that it was better than silence.

Often, as soon as his homework was done, Scorpius would declare himself tired and go to the dormitory. Albus went loyally with him, and watched helplessly as Scorpius curled up on his bed, hugging himself tight. Sometimes Albus would sit on the end of Scorpius’s bed while he slept, just thinking. Others, he did his homework just across from his best friend, while sitting on his own bunk. It felt important to be near, just in case. 

After those first few awful weeks, Scorpius slowly returned to normal. He began eating properly again, enjoying time spent in the library, and seemed to regain his stubborn optimism bit by bit. It was only in the evenings that Albus saw the way Scorpius would continue to hug himself before he went to bed, with that same awful lost look on his face. Albus didn’t like to bring it up. If it had been him, he knew he wouldn’t have wanted it mentioned. To Albus, there was nothing so awful as being pitied.

+++ 

As third years, the boys were allowed to choose two elective subjects to study along with their compulsory classes. Albus was keen on Care of Magical Creatures, since it was impossible to have a little sister like Lily, (who inspired by books sent to her by her godmother Luna often attempted
to sneak creatures into the Potter family home), and not pick something up. Besides, he’d heard it was one of the easiest subjects to pass. Scorpius favoured Study of Ancient Runes, which sounded, to Albus, hideously like hard work.

They decided on taking both, as a sort of compromise, so that they wouldn’t need to be separated. Albus wasn’t keen on walking into a lesson alone, and Scorpius seemed equally as hesitant to wander the school by himself. He seemed to be finding the usual insults and bullying a little more difficult to bear since the passing of his mother.

Care of Magical Creatures meant coming face to face with Hagrid, a man that Albus had been avoiding like the plague since his first year. After several excruciating visits to his house (or rather, hut) on the edge of the Hogwarts grounds, Albus had done his best to avoid this friend of his father’s.

On their very first in-school meeting, Hagrid had almost instantly irritated Albus by declaring:

“Yer a Slytherin? Musta made a mistake! A Potter in Slytherin? Tha’s not right is it!”

He’d also ventured an opinion on Scorpius which Albus had never quite forgiven him for:

“Looks like his dad, tha’ one. Yeh wanna be careful of him, Al.”

Albus had made excuse after excuse to avoid visiting the half-giant’s house for tea, until eventually, he seemed to get the message. Albus couldn’t help but feel relieved. James clearly adored Hagrid because he visited him often, usually with several friends in tow, but Albus found him hard work, not to mention that it was unpleasant to be offered such inedible food in what was a fairly dirty excuse for a house. If that made him a snob then Albus didn’t care. He certainly wasn’t going to be breaking his teeth on Hagrid’s cooking when he could be spending the time in the Great Hall with Scorpius.

Their first Care of Magical Creatures lesson with Hagrid had involved Albus carefully ducking away from the man whenever he looked like he was about to wander over for a conversation, and pretending to be interested in the flobberworms they were supposed to be studying that term. Scorpius had been so very sad at that time that Albus had barely left his side, and when Hagrid asked him to come to the front to demonstrate something, Albus had been so accidentally rude (and Hagrid so hurt) that he hadn’t been asked again.

Once Hagrid finally got the idea that this was a Potter who didn’t see him as a family friend, the lessons became easier, although Albus couldn’t help but feel guilty sometimes. He consoled himself with the fact Rubeus Hagrid continued to look on Scorpius with suspicion. Hagrid wasn’t cruel to Scorpius, but he wasn’t particularly covert when it came to keeping a special eye on him. It was obvious he expected Scorpius to cause trouble in his classes, and poor Scorpius noticed.

As for Study of Ancient Runes, Albus didn’t understand the majority of what he was being taught. Apparently it all meant something to Scorpius, however, and it seemed to interest him enough to stop him thinking of his mother, which was something.

That Christmas, Albus chose not to go home and spend the time with his family. Draco Malfoy was apparently still in the depths of grief, and Scorpius was to spend the holidays at Hogwarts, so as to save his father the trouble of organising anything.

Albus didn’t care that James, Lily, his mother, and his father would be spending the holiday together. He ignored the letter from his father asking him to reconsider and come home. After all, it didn’t feel right to explain the truth. It would have meant letting on that Draco Malfoy was
suffering, and Albus felt too loyal to Scorpius’s father for that. (After all, he was no spy). Instead he mentioned nothing about Scorpius staying at Hogwarts and declared he simply ‘fancied a change’.

During his third year, Albus did not once visit Hogsmeade, although to his dismay his father sent yet another signed permission form to Professor McGonagall. That only made him more determined to turn down the strangely generous offer. To have gone to Hogsmeade after what happened on the platform would have felt like giving in, and Albus was not willing to do that. Even if it meant he missed out.

Scorpius only went the once, and decided, after being so very badly treated by fellow students, that he didn’t feel like going again for a while.

“Dad’s taken me before, anyway,” Scorpius said, consoling himself as he attempted to clean the nasty names off his bag. “And since you don’t like going, we can spend the time together instead.”

+++ The rest of the year went by in a rush of work and bullying. There were some pleasant moments, however, usually snatched during brief interludes when the dormitory was free, or when the weather was particularly good and they could walk in the grounds. Scorpius liked to read up by the lake, underneath the beech tree, and Albus didn’t mind settling beside him, watching the way the sun shone on the water.

If occasionally other students would spot them and start trouble, Scorpius would determinedly not look up from his books. Albus, however, wished the ground would swallow him up.

“Look, there’s the Slytherin Potter and Voldemort’s kid!”

“Probably trying to figure out how to make their own Dark Marks.”

“Hey, Potter! Boyfriend given you piece of his soul yet?”

“Who wants to see what Malfoy looks like upside down?”

The moment Albus heard anything which even remotely hinted that they were about to be jinxed or made a fool of in some way, he would drag a protesting Scorpius to his feet and get him out of harm’s way. Scorpius might have believed in standing his ground, but Albus felt it was far more sensible to not be seen at all. He certainly wasn’t going to be jinxed if he could help it.

+++ At the end of their third year, Scorpius seemed hesitant to get off the Hogwarts Express. For a moment, the two boys sat in their compartment, as the other students rushed out onto the platform to greet their families.

“You nervous?” Albus asked.

Scorpius swallowed. He had his pale fingers clasped together on his lap and kept chewing his lower lip.

“My dad… I hope he’s…”

“He will be,” Albus assured his best friend. “He’s owled you tons of times since… you know.”
“It’s going to be strange at home without…”

“I know,” said Albus, quietly.

“Well, I shouldn’t keep him waiting,” said Scorpius, pulling himself together. He picked up his case and straightened his Muggle clothes, peering out of the window. “Come on. I can see your mum out there already.”

Albus got to his feet as well. He could see James on the platform, standing beside his mother. It looked like he was being told off. Lily was hugging several of her first year friends nearby.

“You will be all right, won’t you?” Albus asked, pausing by the door.

“Of course I will,” Scorpius responded quickly. “And we’ll owl. All the time. I promise that I’ll… I’ll keep in touch.”

“Even if you don’t know what to say?”

“I can remind you about your Runes homework,” Scorpius said brightly. “Because when we come back here on the train I have no intention of waiting while you do it.”

“I hate Runes,” Albus declared, opening the compartment door.

“And I love them,” Scorpius countered, smiling as Albus held the door for him. “Oh, look out. Your James is in trouble. Do you think your mum knows about the Electric Shock Shake incident?”

“If she doesn’t I’ll keep it for later,” Albus said, eyebrow raised conspiratorially. “I might need a bit of leverage.”

As the boys stepped out onto the platform, Ginny spotted her son and gave a wave. Albus looked embarrassed at the gesture.

Ginny smiled at Scorpius Malfoy, but he appeared to have caught sight of his father, because he gave a little jump, patted Albus on the arm a few times, said something very quietly, and then scurried off, pulling his case behind him.

“Is he all right?” Ginny asked her youngest son as Albus made his reluctant way over to his family. “Did you want to ask him to-“

“He’s fine, Mum,” Albus said stubbornly.

“Finally,” declared James, giving his little brother a push. “What were you doing on there?”

“Hurry up you lot,” Ginny interrupted sternly, giving James a silencing look. “Your dad’s making cottage pie.”

“Yes!” Lily exclaimed, as James took her case for her. “I love Dad’s cottage pie!”

Albus gave his mother a grateful nod and together the Potter family made their way towards the barrier.

Chapter End Notes
Okay so in terms of Astoria's funeral, a few notes. The reason it is so lacking in mourners is that a) the Malfoy family went into what was basically seclusion during the later years of her life, b) her family have cut her off except from her sister who dislikes Draco, c) Draco would not want to publicise the event for fear of reprisals from those that hate him, d) I get the impression he is a very private man, so it's kind of a big deal he let Scorpius take Albus.

I wanted to mention Hagrid because I gather he is still at the school at this point. I just don't think Albus has much to do with him, hence why he's not in the play at all. I hope I explained a little of why I think Albus stays away.

Comments make me very happy! I hope that this added scene helps tie the previous chapter and this one together!

xxx
Harry was exhausted. The summer holidays certainly hadn't been much of a holiday as far as he was concerned. In fact, over the past few weeks he'd been busier than ever.

He had been called away from a much anticipated family day out in which he, Ginny, and the kids had planned on spending some quality time together before the return to Hogwarts, in order to chase up a new lead on pure-blood supremacist Theodore Nott.

It had been fairly unexpected. A whisper passed on to a wizard Harry used as a contact, which suddenly gained a great deal of weight when combined with the latest gossip from Hampshire, which in turn gave Harry that very distinct and inarguable gut feeling that something sinister was about to happen.

Ginny had been brilliant as always. Often, Harry wondered how she never seemed on the verge of exploding with stress the way he did. She reassured him that she and the kids would go off on their shopping trip as planned, and that with luck he'd be back in time for dinner. If not, she'd treat the kids to a takeaway.

With Ginny there were never tears before a dangerous operation. There was no begging him not to go, because as had always been the case, she understood entirely that sometimes you had to act, and that she had married an Auror, who was now the head of his department. Just as Harry had supported Ginny through her Quidditch years, working his training around looking after James so she could continue to play a full and final season for the Harpies, Ginny was a constant support to him now his workload had increased. She knew exactly how to say goodbye in such a casual and cheerful way that Harry didn't even have to entertain the notion that he might not return, at least not until he was far from home.

James and Lily understood as soon as they were told about the Ministry business, although Lily had looked disappointed at not getting her day out with her father. James had wished his dad luck and promised not to play up for his mother. Albus, however had simply raised his eyebrows as though he wasn’t at all surprised and wandered off into the kitchen without even saying goodbye.

“Hormones,” Ginny had mouthed, upon seeing her husband’s hurt face. Harry wasn’t sure that after years and years of this treatment, hormones could be the used as an excuse for much longer.

As Harry had put on his coat and headed for the door he had seen Albus watching him from the kitchen doorway. His expression was one of distinct betrayal.

“I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Harry had told his youngest son, who looked rather startled to have
been seen at all. Albus hadn’t said a single word in return, only shrugged his shoulders and wandered back into the kitchen like he didn’t care.

It hadn’t been a great start to his operation, and on reaching Hampshire, the day had only got worse.

When Harry and his Aurors turned up at Theodore Nott’s residence, the thin, stringy man Harry remembered from his Hogwarts days was waiting. All chances of a simple raid went right out of the window the moment Nott Stunned several of Harry’s best Aurors right there on his elaborate driveway, and sent out a Killing Curse which had very nearly killed one of Harry’s youngest recruits.

Clearly he was hiding something, and looked willing to die in the attempt. Harry felt a surge of hope that this meant his sources were correct, that Theodore Nott had been amassing illegal Dark artefacts. If they could take him in and destroy his collection, Harry had a suspicion that those men and women that still fought in the name of Voldemort would find themselves at a loss. Theodore Nott had to be working as their distributor. It was the only explanation that made sense.

Not able to have the deaths of any of his team on his conscience, Harry had entered the Nott Manor alone, a back-up plan already discussed in case he should fall. Within Theodore Nott’s grand old house, Harry had come face to face with his former peer in what looked like a drawing room. The ensuing duel was ruthless, and left much of the lavish room in ruins. Harry had at one point been forced to dive behind an antique piano to avoid the Cruciatus Curse.

Nott was not the best dueller Harry had ever been forced to fight, but the man was aiming to kill, which made him an unpredictable opponent. It had taken every ounce of Harry’s skill to finally restrain him, and to Harry’s pride he had managed it without injuring Nott beyond the usual cuts and bruises. It gave Harry satisfaction to know that the man would go to trial and likely end up in Azkaban like his father before him. It felt like justice.

After sending word to his Aurors, the Manor house had been searched top to bottom. Theodore Nott’s storage room had been discovered behind a bookcase in the library, and within it were so many sinister-looking items that Harry wasn’t sure what to approach first.

Together, he and his team carefully assessed the room, made note of what was inside, and sent for backup who could then safely collect the items. It was only as Harry was checking the wall panels for more hidden artefacts that one panel had swung open at his touch. There, in a locked box (which it had taken Harry and three of his best Aurors to open), was exactly what Harry had been looking for: a gleaming gold Time-Turner.

Harry’s horror at the discovery was mingled with satisfaction. His hunch had been correct. And it looked like he and his Aurors had got there just in time. The idea of a member of the Nott family, supporters of Dark Magic for generations, in possession of a Time-Turner, was a hideous one.

Only this Time-Turner looked different to how Harry thought it should. He’d seen a Time-Turner before, and used one when he was in his third year of Hogwarts, but since then he’d researched them as part of his Auror training. This Time-Turner was in a slightly different shape to anything he had seen before, almost as though it was hand-crafted. But how could the Notts have created such a thing? And if this was a new model, made outside of Ministry guidelines, then how did it work? Instead of the rings indicating years that Harry was used to, was a single ring and what appeared to be a button, like one that might be found on the side of a watch. It seemed curiously unfinished…

Harry had wanted to try it right away, to see just how much danger he, and the rest of the
wizarding world had been in, but his fellow Aurors (reminding him of Ministry regulations) managed to persuade him out of it.

Reluctantly, Harry had seen sense and resolved to take the Time-Turner directly to the Minister. He was certain that Hermione Granger would be beyond interested in what he’d uncovered, and truth be told, he was eager to bring it to her, just to prove that his previous suspicions about the Nott family had been well-founded after all. Hermione’s caution could rile him like nothing else, and as much as he admired her, he couldn’t help but feel pride in the outcome of what she would no doubt have called a ‘foolhardy’ decision.

Nott had been taken away, tightly bound, shouting the usual verbal abuse at Harry, directed at the Ministry, him personally, and even his family. Harry was too accustomed to this by now to lose his cool. He even managed a grim smile in Nott’s direction, just because he knew it would torment the man while in custody.

It was only after Harry had contacted Ginny to inform her that he was safe, that Harry became aware he was injured. His hands were badly grazed, and he had at some point acquired a painful cut on his cheek. Perhaps when the large drawing room mirror had shattered? He used Episkey to clear up the worst of the damage as he watched Theodore Nott driven away in a Ministry car, followed by six of his Aurors.

Harry didn’t allow himself to become disheartened by what seemed to be an endless series of raids. This one, at least, had proved fruitful. And yet despite his victory, it was hard to feel reassured when yet another supporter of Voldemort had been unearthed, all these years after his defeat.

Hermione told him time and time again that they shouldn’t become demoralised. The majority of the Sacred Twenty-Eight had now reformed, or were at least making an effort to reintegrate into society. Without these wealthy families funding the rest of the Voldemort supporters, any practitioners of the Dark Arts would find themselves at a loss.

Harry was less optimistic. He couldn’t help but feel that this was only the beginning.

Pro-Voldemort sentiment still existed, of course it did, it always had. Only now it was starting to be forced out into the open. Never, as a young man, had Harry imagined that he would still be fighting Voldemort at the age of forty. He wondered, now, if he would ever live to see the end of that one man’s influence.

On the way back to the Ministry, Time-Turner safely stowed in his coat pocket, Harry’s thoughts strayed to his family. He wondered how Ginny was dealing with James, Lily, and a probably now fairly unsociable and bad-tempered Albus. It had been hard enough work getting Albus to agree to spend a day with his family to start with. Harry hoped his sudden disappearance hadn’t caused Albus to sulk again.

Harry couldn’t help but feel irritated by his son’s reluctance to join in with the family. After all, he’d spent most of his own childhood and teenage years longing for such a privilege. Albus was infuriatingly ungrateful. Perhaps it was the stress of the previous few hours, but Harry found himself losing patience with Albus. How long, Harry wondered, would he have to keep trying? And for how long would his youngest son continue to reject him? Was he truly that bad a father?

Harry shook himself out of it as he reached his office. The door was already open, which was unusual. Harry rushed in, wand held out before him.

Hermione Granger was sitting behind his desk and sorting through the numerous papers amassed on top of it. Immediately, Harry lowered his wand with a sigh.
“How did it go?” Hermione asked, not at all embarrassed to be found rifling through Harry’s papers.

Harry was so relieved to see a friendly face that he couldn’t bring himself to snap at her.

“It was true,” he admitted, chest still heaving.

“Theodore Nott?” Hermione asked, looking up from her task with concern.

“In custody,” said Harry, with some pride.

Hermione nodded her head, pleased with this result.

“And the Time-Turner itself?”

Harry reached into his robes and pulled out the strange golden device. In the light of his office it gleamed alluringly.

Hermione got to her feet, fascinated.

“Is it genuine?” she asked. “Does it work? It’s not just an Hour-Reversal Turner - it goes back further?”

“We don’t know anything yet,” Harry admitted. “I wanted to try it there and then but wiser heads prevailed.”

Hermione nodded, approving of that cautious approach.

“Well,” she said, with satisfaction. “Now we have it.”

Harry handed it over. Hermione took the Time-Turner with great interest. She, too, appeared absorbed by the button on the side of the device.

“And you’re sure you want to keep it?” Harry asked.

Hermione sighed and looked up at Harry.

“I don’t think we’ve a choice. Look at it. It’s entirely different to the Time-Turner I had.”

“Apparently wizardry has moved on since we were kids,” Harry remarked, dryly.

Hermione nodded and then noticed the state of Harry’s face.

“You’re bleeding,” she pointed out with concern.

Harry checked his face in a small mirror on the side. The cut didn’t look too deep, but he noticed that his face looked dreadful. Every time he saw himself Harry was sure he had new frown lines. It was a source of constant confusion to him that he was married to a witch as stunning and talented as Ginny, who was still so very vivacious, even now. As he stared at his reflection he was reminded heavily of Remus Lupin.

With a sigh, Harry dabbed at his cut with the edge of his robes.

“Don’t worry,” Hermione said, a smile in her voice. “It’ll go with the scar.”

Harry couldn’t help but grin tiredly at that.
“What are you doing in my office, Hermione?” Harry asked, turning back to her.

“I was anxious to hear about Theodore Nott,” Hermione revealed. Her face took on a slightly guilty look. “And - I thought I’d check whether you’d kept your promise and were on top of your paperwork.”

It was Harry’s turn to look guilty.

“Ah. Turns out I’m not.”

“No,” Hermione said, looking stern. “You’re not. Harry, how can you get any work done in this chaos?”

It wasn’t Harry’s idea of chaos. In fact, it had been much worse than this a few days ago. He’d already had a major clear up and worked through a lot of the old papers.

With a wave of his wand, the papers and books arranged themselves into neat piles.

“No longer chaotic,” Harry said, hoping to avoid a lecture.

“But still ignored,” Hermione sighed, disapproval obvious in her tone. “You know there’s some interesting stuff here… there are mountain trolls riding graphorns through Hungary, there are giants with winged tattoos on their backs walking through the Greek Seas, and the werewolves have gone entirely underground-”

Harry was more than a bit peeved that he’d just risked his life on a mission and all Hermione seemed to care about was paperwork.

“Great,” he declared. “Let’s get out there. I’ll get the team together-”

“Harry, I get it,” said Hermione with great maturity. “Paperwork’s boring…”

A very audacious idea struck Harry. He looked over at Hermione hopefully.

“But for you,” he pointed out.

But Hermione shook her head firmly.

“I’m busy enough with my own,” she declared. “These are people and beasts that fought alongside Voldemort in the great wizarding wars. These are allies of darkness. This - combined with what we have just unearthed at Theodore Nott’s - could mean something. But if the Head of Magical Law Enforcement isn’t reading his files-”

“But I don’t need to read it,” Harry argued. “I’m out there, hearing about it. Theodore Nott - it was me who heard the rumours about the Time-Turner and me who acted upon it.”

Harry could feel his temper rising.

“You really don’t need to tell me off,” he added.

Hermione looked over at Harry with a frown. Harry was by far her best Auror, and easily her closest friend (aside from Ron). But that meant it could be very difficult to exercise authority over him, authority that she, as Minister, really did need to assert sometimes…

“Do you fancy a toffee?” Hermione offered, smiling. “Don’t tell Ron.”
Harry raised an eyebrow.

“You’re changing the subject.”

“I truly am,” Hermione agreed. “Toffee?”

“Can’t,” Harry answered, rather sulkily. “We’re off sugar at the moment.”

Harry seemed to realise how childish he had just sounded and looked sheepishly over at Hermione once again.

“You know, you can get addicted to that stuff?” he said.

“What can I say? My parents were dentists, I was bound to rebel at some point,” said Hermione, taking a toffee from her pocket and unwrapping it. She threw one to Harry, who caught it with ease. “Forty is leaving it a little late, but…”

She paused, knowing that Harry would not appreciate the distraction technique.

“You’ve just done a brilliant thing,” Hermione said, sighing. “You’re certainly not being told off - I just need you to look at your paperwork every now and again, that’s all. Consider this a gentle - nudge - from the Minister for Magic.”

Harry popped his toffee into his mouth and nodded. Hermione looked very pleased by his agreement. She visibly relaxed. Harry did too.


Harry wasn’t quite sure how to answer that. He didn’t have a clue how Albus was because his youngest son never wanted to talk to him. It was a rarity to see him out of his bedroom at all. The only times he ever seemed to emerge were for dinner, or clutching a carefully sealed letter which he then sent furtively off to Wiltshire with the family owl.

“It seems I’m as good at fatherhood as I am at paperwork,” Harry said with a shrug. “How’s Rose? How’s Hugo?”

Hermione smiled.

“You know, Ron says he thinks I see more of my secretary Ethel than him. Do you think there’s a point where we made a choice - parent of the year - or Ministry official of the year?”

Harry was convinced Hermione was simply trying to make him feel better, because he knew for a fact that Rose and Hugo regarded their mother with utter respect and adoration (if slight fear when it came to receiving exam results).

“Go on,” said Hermione indulgently. “Go home to your family, Harry. The Hogwarts Express is about to depart for another year - enjoy the time you’ve got left - and then come back here with a fresh head and get these files read.”

That sounded like a very sensible idea. Then again, since Hermione had suggested it, how could it have been anything else?

“You really think this could all mean something?” Harry asked, gesturing at the Time-Turner.

“It could do,” Hermione admitted. “But if it does, we’ll find a way to fight it, Harry. We always have.”
She popped another toffee into her mouth, placed the Time-Turner inside of her own cloak, and then gave a small, comforting smile as she left the office.

Harry stood for a moment in silence, thinking over his evening. Another raid successfully completed, another potential danger in custody. There was no way Theodore Nott, even with his family wealth, could escape sentence. Harry had more than enough leads to put him in Azkaban once and for all.

But someone else would take his place. They always did.

It seemed that the threat of Dark magic never would quite disappear.

He was reminded, suddenly, of a saying from old Mad-Eye Moody:

*Constant vigilance!*

Truer words, Harry thought, had never been spoken.

Harry packed his bag and set off for home.

Chapter End Notes

I thought we should see a bit of what Harry is dealing with, because in the script we don't really get that. I know he makes some bad decisions and says some thoughtless things in the play, but I still don't find Harry out of character. I just think he's probably under major stress, and as we know, Harry doesn't deal well with that. Add a mini-him to the picture (at his OOTP best) and it's bound to end in disaster!

Hope you enjoyed!

Leave me a comment if you did!

xxx
The Potter household was, tonight, fairly peaceful, but Albus couldn’t sleep.

It was always far easier to get some rest when he was at Hogwarts than when he was at home. Yes, most days there were filled with mockery and ridicule, but in the evenings when he could escape to the Slytherin common room with Scorpius, things were actually all right. Even the dormitory, which they shared with two other Slytherins, was a fairly pleasant place to be at night, when the moonlight shone through the lake window and everything was bathed in green.

Sleeping surrounded by your own sort of people was something Albus enjoyed. Even if his dormmates weren’t exactly his friends (and actually made a point of not talking to him unless they could help it), he knew that if push came to shove they’d have his back. Slytherins stuck together like that. And when it came to Scorpius, well, it was just nice to have your best friend sleeping across the room, knowing that if you needed them, they were right there.

Was it strange that he felt more alone in a house full of his family than anywhere else?

At home, Albus often felt like an outsider, peering in at his relations, half wanting to be like them so he could join in, half knowing that would be a betrayal of who he was and wanting to steer clear. For the past two months he’d just about managed to find some sort of space for himself in the Potter family dynamic, mostly by keeping out of the way and only really talking to his mum or his sister, but it wasn’t enough. Albus still ended up going to bed every night feeling detached from everyone, and worst of all, feeling like nobody except for his mum really seemed to notice.

To add insult to injury, his father had barely been around over the past few days, even though he, James, and Lily would be returning to Hogwarts in two days time.

He said he had work issues to deal with, that things at the office were hectic, but Albus knew the truth. He was selfish. He didn’t care. He thought that his stupid Auror work was more important than his own family.

It should have suited Albus just fine, having his dad disappear so often, looking grim, but it felt too close to rejection to be entirely comfortable. Albus wondered why Lily and James never seemed to resent him for it. To them, he was still some sort of super-dad that could do no wrong. Sometimes, Albus felt like the only person who could see Harry Potter for who he truly was. Everyone else seemed determined to treat him like he was still a hero, all because of what had happened with Voldemort when he was younger. Well, Albus could think for himself, and he believed respect had
to be earned. Respecting his mother was easy, because she respected him right back. But his dad still looked at him like he was a bomb that was about to go off at any second. He couldn't have made it any more obvious that he couldn't like him if he tried.

Albus had been mulling over these familiar thoughts (and planning his next letter to Scorpius, which seemed likely to end up as a furious list of his father's shortcomings), when he heard the doorbell ring. He sat up in bed, frowning. It was fairly late for visitors, wasn't it?

Nobody else upstairs seemed to stir. James continued to snore from the bedroom next to his.

His father was in the kitchen already. Albus had heard him come in an hour ago. He'd made himself some dinner (Albus had heard him moving plates) and then gone very quiet for a while. Maybe, thought Albus, the visitor was planned? Maybe someone from the Ministry?

The bell did not sound again, but instead it was replaced with the sound of frantic knocking on the front door. Did that mean his father had unplugged the bell?

Growing more curious by the second, Albus moved out of bed quietly, heading for his door so that he could hear better. Who was his father trying to ignore?

The sound of padding feet was followed by that of the front door opening. A man who was not his father was grumbling, the words indistinct. His father seemed to be attempting to pacify him. His words were too quiet to make out, but his dad was definitely using his 'reasonable' voice.

"I expected nothing better of you," came the rasping voice of an old man. "I should have known-"

Albus raised his eyebrows. His father was muttering again, clearly trying to get the man to lower his voice.

"Will you make an old man wait in the cold, is that it? Because I will. I will wait here until you deign to let me in."

"Look," tried his father, but he was interrupted.

"You leave me no choice. I will wait, Harry Potter. And I will call the Prophet so they know why I am here."

This sounded big. If the guy was threatening to get the Prophet involved then that was blackmail, wasn't it? The thought of someone blackmailing his dad made Albus feel desperately uncomfortable, but then Albus remembered that to blackmail someone you had to know something about them, something bad.

What did this old man know? What had his father done?

"I know this is hard to hear, but I can't do anything for you."

There was more hushed talking, then, and a moment later, much to Albus's surprise, he heard the front door open, and there was the strange noise of what sounded like wheels moving slowly down the hallway and towards the kitchen. Was the old man in a wheelchair?

Only when Albus had heard the wheels move onto the kitchen floor, accompanied by the sound of his father's footsteps, did he move stealthily from his bedroom door to the top of the stairs.

The second-to-top stair was a favourite of Albus's. A childhood habit of his, on sleepless nights, had been to sit there and listen to his parents chatting when they thought their children were in bed.
True, it was pretty sly and Slytherin-esque of him, but it helped him feel closer to them, somehow. It was during this activity that Albus had compiled his irrefutable proof that his father preferred Lily and James to him. There had been a bitter, triumphant sort of pride in overhearing his dad unguardedly talk about his beloved daughter and oldest son, only to pause when it came to him. His mum always stuck up for him (very loyally, in Albus's opinion), but it still wasn't nice to have your mum trying to persuade your dad that you were an okay sort of person deep down (and your dad still not sounding entirely convinced).

“Amos,” his father said, in a tired voice which echoed slightly in the kitchen. “I understand, I really do - but I’m only just home and -“

That was a lie. Albus knew that for a fact. He'd heard him come in a long hour ago. Part of Albus wanted to yell down the stairs and tell the old man - this Amos - the truth. Another part would never have done so. Albus wasn't quite sure, just then, where his loyalty was supposed to fall. It was an uncomfortable feeling.

“I’ve tried to make appointments at the Ministry. They say ‘Ah, Mr Diggory, we have an appointment for you, let’s see, in two months.’ I wait. Very patiently.”

“- and coming to my house in the middle of the night…” Harry continued. “Just when my kids are just getting ready for their new year at school - it’s not right.”

But the old man was not to be silenced.

“Two months pass, I receive an owl, ‘Mr Diggory, I’m awfully sorry, but Mr Potter has been called away on urgent business, we’re going to have to shift things around a little, are you available for an appointment in, let’s see, two months’ time.’ And then it repeats again, and again. You’re shutting me out.”

“Of course I’m not. It’s just, I’m afraid, as Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement I’m responsible-“

“There’s plenty you’re responsible for,” the old man - Mr Amos Diggory - said sharply.

Was it wrong of Albus to feel a little triumphant at that? He held his breath, desperate to hear what it was his father had done.

“Sorry?” his father said, in that infuriating way Albus recognised, where he wasn’t really sorry it all.

“My son, Cedric. You do remember Cedric, don’t you?”

“Yes, I remember your son. His loss-“

“Voldemort wanted you!” Mr Diggory exclaimed. “Not my son! You told me yourself, the words he said were ‘kill the spare’. The spare. My son, my beautiful son, was a spare.”

Cedric Diggory? This was about Cedric Diggory?

Albus knew a fair bit about him. Everyone did. He had a memorial bench at Hogwarts, and people still regarded him as one of the greatest Hufflepuffs who ever lived. He'd died years back at the end of the last Triwizard Tournament, joining the long list of Voldemort's victims. Albus hadn't known this Cedric boy had a father. He'd never had cause to consider such a thing before. And yet here he was. In the Potter kitchen. Still going on about his son all these years later. There was something tragic (and maybe just a touch beautiful) about that.
“Mr Diggory,” Harry said, using a voice of forced calm. Albus had heard that one many times before. It was his last resort before losing his temper. “As you know, I sympathise with your efforts to memorialise Cedric but -“

“A memorial?! I am not interested in a memorial - not any more! I am an old man - an old, dying man - and I am here to ask you - beg you - to help me get him back.”

There was a pause then. Albus felt so sorry for this poor grieving old man that it made him feel a little ill.

“Get him back?” Harry asked, astonished. “Amos, that’s not possible.”

“The Ministry has a Time-Turner does it not?”

Once again Albus held his breath.

“The Time-Turners were all destroyed,” said Harry, firmly.

“The reason I’m here with such urgency is I’ve just heard a rumour - a strong rumour - that the Ministry seized an illegal Time-Turner from Theodore Nott and has kept it. For investigation. Let me use that Time-Turner. Let me have my son back.”

There was another long, deadly pause. Albus knew what his father would say. Even if he willed him to say something entirely different. Determined not to miss a single word, Albus shifted dangerously closer.

“Amos, playing with time? You know we can’t do that.”

“How many people have died for the Boy Who Lived? I’m asking you to save one of them.”

“Whatever you’ve heard - the Theodore Nott story is a fiction, Amos. I’m sorry.”

Albus would have believed his father, too, seeing as everyone knew you couldn’t get a Time-Turner these days, and Albus imagined it would be big news if someone found one, but his father was using his guilty voice. It was enough to plant the seed of doubt in Albus. Maybe there was a chance that the old man was right...

“Hello,” came an unfamiliar voice from the bottom of the stairs. Albus jumped a mile and only just managed to stop himself from swearing so loudly he gave away his location.

The voice belonged to a twenty something year old woman with a strangely determined expression. She was rather pretty with a pale face and silver-blond hair, the very tips of which were dyed daringly blue. To be honest, Albus was a little overwhelmed to find himself with a sudden companion as he sat there in his pyjamas, least of all one like this.

“Oh. Sorry,” the woman said. “Didn’t mean to startle. I used to be a big stair-listener myself. Sitting there. Waiting for someone to say something the tiniest bit interesting.”

“Who are you?” Albus asked bluntly, still a little thrown. “Because this is sort of my house and…”

“I’m a thief of course! I’m about to steal everything you own,” the woman declared, enjoying herself immensely, putting on a little performance. “Give me your gold, your wand, and your Chocolate Frogs!”

Despite her quirky delivery, there was a fierceness to her. For a moment, she struck Albus as ever
so slightly intimidating (perhaps that was something to do with how pretty she was?), but then she melted into a warm smile and Albus felt instantly at ease.

“Either that,” she continued. “Or I’m Delphini Diggory.”

She ascended the stairs and stuck out a friendly hand.

“Delphi. I look after him - Amos - well, I try. And you are?”

Usually Albus would have hesitated. He wasn’t a huge fan of small talk or conversations with people he didn’t know. He had no interest in making new friends, felt the majority of people wouldn’t possibly be able to ‘get him’, and honestly, was convinced he’d end up making a fool of himself even if he tried.

But Delphini - Delphi, seemed different.

Her voice was fairly posh. She seemed a little awkward. Perhaps a bit of a geek.

Albus decided he liked her.

With actually liking somebody on a first meeting, (instead of deeming them unworthy of his time or, more commonly, having them turn up their nose at him), being a rarity, Albus decided to throw caution to the winds and introduce himself.

“Albus,” he said, reaching out to shake Delphi’s hand and trying to seem assertive, like he did this all the time. The moment he took her slender hand, he realised he’d probably been a bit limp with his approach compared to her own firm grip. Delphi gave a sunny little laugh as though she didn't mind at all that the handshake had been tentative. Albus allowed himself to feel relieved.

“Of course! Albus Potter! So Harry is your dad? That’s a bit wow isn’t it?”

“Not really,” Albus admitted, feeling a bit deflated already. There was nothing wow about being Harry Potter’s son. And in his opinion, there was nothing particularly wow about Harry Potter himself.

“Ah,” said Delphi, seeming to understand in an instant. “Have I just put my foot in it? It’s what they used to say about me at school. Delphini Diggory - there isn’t a hole she couldn’t dig herself into.”

It struck Albus as indefensibly cruel to pick on Delphini. She was a bit odd, yes. But odd didn’t mean bad. Sometimes, being a bit odd could be amazing.

“They do all sorts with my name too,” he found himself admitting. He knew that Delphi wouldn’t think he was trying to gain her pity. She would understand.

Delphi looked at Albus carefully, right in the eyes. It was strangely intimate, that look. Like somehow, she could truly see him.

And then Amos called up the stairs.

“Delphi!”

The young woman gave a sigh and then made to depart. For a moment she hesitated, just long enough to smile at Albus.

“We don’t choose who we’re related to,” she said quietly, but with an air of wisdom. “Amos isn’t
just my patient, he’s my uncle, it’s part of the reason I took the job at Upper Flagley. But that’s made it difficult. It’s tough to live with people stuck in the past, isn’t it?”

Yes, Albus thought. Yes it most certainly was.

“Delphi!” Amos shouted again.

Albus didn’t want her to go. He wanted to have a conversation, a proper conversation. Without Scorpius around he'd been stuck with James's awful banter and his father's ill-judged sarcasm for weeks. Delphi seemed like someone he could trust. She was that tiny bit different from other people, and Albus liked that about a person.

“Upper Flagley?” he asked.

“St Oswald’s Home for Old Witches and Wizards. Come see us some time,” Delphi offered. “If you like.”

Albus had a feeling he would like that very much.

“DELPHI!”

Delphi rolled her eyes good-naturedly and then made her way down the stairs, tripping a little and turning to grin at Albus, finding her own clumsiness amusing.

Then she disappeared back into the kitchen where Amos and Harry were waiting.

“Yes, Uncle?” Albus heard her ask politely.

“Meet the once-great Harry Potter, now a stone-cold Ministry man. I will leave you in peace, sir. If peace is the right word for it. Delphi, my chair…”

That was way below the belt, and Albus felt the sudden urge to defend his father… but then he thought again. No. This old man was grieving, and his father had gone out of his way to avoid having to meet with him. How long would it have taken? How much effort would it have been to have one measly little meeting?

Typical of his father, Albus thought. He was selfish. He was careless. He was really pretty useless. He could stand and sign autographs for people in the street but he couldn’t go out of his way to help an elderly man in need.

“Yes, Uncle,” said Delphi dutifully. Albus imagined this must have been a pretty uncomfortable situation for her. Old Amos seemed a difficult sort of person, and it sounded from the way he ordered her about that she was basically his servant.

Albus liked her. He liked her strange quirkiness. He liked her open, friendly nature.

He especially liked that she hadn’t given him up.

As Albus heard the noise of Amos’s wheelchair being wheeled over the laminate kitchen flooring, he shuffled back up a few stairs so he was hidden by the darkness of the landing. He watched as Amos was pushed carefully down the hall by Delphi, and the pair exited the house.

Albus could just about make out the shape of his father, leaning in the kitchen doorway, staring at the front door and looking forlorn.

When his father showed no sign of moving from his spot, Albus decided it was time he went back
to his room. Being caught would have been embarrassing, and besides, Amos Diggory and Delphi had left him with a lot of thinking to do.

Chapter End Notes

Please comment if you enjoyed!

xxx
Act One: Scene Seven

Chapter Notes

All dialogue from the script! I tried to follow the directions as faithfully as possible too!

Please comment if you enjoy!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Albus sat on his bed, gazing thoughtfully at the wall. Outside his bedroom was chaos. It was the night before the yearly journey to Platform Nine and Three Quarters, and the day he would begin his fourth year at Hogwarts. For all the times he’d wished himself away from the Potter house over the previous two months, he found wasn’t particularly looking forward to it.

James was making a lot of fuss. He was cursing at something, which meant either Lily had borrowed something of his, or he’d been on the receiving end of a practical joke.

“James,” came the voice of his mother. “Please, ignore your hair, and tidy that damn room…”

“How can I ignore it? It’s pink! I’m going to have to use my Invisibility Cloak!”

James passed Albus’s door in his boxer shorts, sporting bright pink hair and looking distressed. On any other day Albus might have laughed.

His mother swiftly followed, heading in the direction of James’s bedroom. She was striding with her usual no-nonsense preparing-for-the-first-day-of-term attitude, her red hair pinned back, her expression one of forced calm. Ginny Potter refused to be ruffled by her three disobedient and supremely testing children. If she could deal with the editor of the Prophet in a bad mood, she could deal with anything.

“That’s not why your dad gave you that cloak!”

“Who’s seen my Potions book?” asked Lily from somewhere in the hallway.

“Lily Potter, don’t think you’re wearing those to school tomorrow…”

Lily appeared at Albus’s door wearing a pair of bubblegum pink fairy wings which fluttered realistically. With her pale skin, red hair, and small stature, she looked like some form of magical creature.

“I love them,” she declared lovingly, entirely ignoring her mother. “They’re fluttery.”

None of this made any impact whatsoever on Albus. Doom was approaching in the shape of the Hogwarts Express and he was determined to dwell in misery until the fateful boarding. His fourth year would undoubtedly be as bad as his third. Possibly worse. The only mercy was that with each year that passed he was getting ever closer to the time he could finally leave Hogwarts and never return.
His fairly satisfying self indulgent sorrow was only disturbed by the sight of his father, lurking awkwardly outside of his bedroom door. Please don't come in... Albus inwardly pleaded. But it was no use. His father had a determined and yet stressed-out look about him which could only mean one thing. They were about to have a heart-to-heart.

The sooner this was over with, the better. And so Albus didn't make a fuss when his father wandered into his bedroom looking shifty, and he politely didn't raise an eyebrow at the intrusion.

He looked up at his father, trying to appear nonchalant. It wasn’t often his father initiated a conversation, least of all in his bedroom. Usually any words exchanged by them happened on neutral territory like the kitchen or the living room. Albus's room was his only private space in the Potter household. To have his father invade it like this meant this was going to be serious. And most probably agonising.

Albus spotted his mother loitering in the doorway. He was glad of her presence. It made things just that little bit less awkward.

“Just delivering a pre-Hogwarts gift,” his father said in a forced-casual voice. “Gifts. Ron’s sent this…”

His father held up a bottle of bubbling pink liquid. Albus had to make an effort not to grimace. He and Scorpius disapproved heavily of that particular item. It seemed wrong on a major level to trick someone into falling in love with you. They both agreed they would never touch such a thing, even if their love lives were pretty dire. It was against their principles.

“Okay, a love potion. Okay.”

“I think it’s a joke about - I don’t know what,” Harry said, ruffling his own hair awkwardly. “Lily’s got farting gnomes, James got a comb that’s made his hair turn a shade of pink. Ron - well, Ron’s Ron, you know?”

Albus did know.

“I also-“ his father continued, trying valiantly to continue despite the fact his son was refusing to cooperate and have a two-way conversation. “… this is from me…”

He revealed a small blanket. From the doorway, Ginny looked from the blanket, to Albus, to her husband, and then to Albus again. She seemed to decide this conversation was going well - or at least as well as any conversation between her husband and son could go, because she quietly disappeared out into the hall.

Albus glanced at the blanket critically. Was he supposed to be grateful? And what was this? Why was he being given a gift? If it was some sort of peace-offering then it was too little, too late. He wasn’t going to be bought with presents.

“An old blanket?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

His father fixed his glasses on his nose and took a deep breath, steeling himself for what Albus imagined was a planned speech.

“I thought a lot about what to give you this year. James - well, James has been going on about the Invisibility Cloak since time itself, and Lily - I knew she’d love wings - but you. You’re fourteen years old now, Albus, and I wanted to give you something which - meant something. This - is the last thing I had from my mum. The only thing. I was given to the Dursleys wrapped in it. I thought it had gone forever and then - when your Great Aunt Petunia died, hidden amongst her possessions
surprisingly, Dudley found this - and he kindly sent it on to me, and ever since then - well, any
time I’ve wanted luck I’ve found it and just tried to hold it and I wondered if you...

“Wanted to hold it too?” Albus cut in scathingly. He wasn’t about to feel sorry for his father. In
fact, he felt that he had been all but ambushed. Unless he was nice in return, he was the one in the
wrong. He wasn’t ready to be manipulated by anybody.

“Okay. Done,” he continued. “Let’s hope it brings me luck. I certainly need it.”

Albus reached out and touched the blanket. It was a tatty old thing, and if he was honest, it didn’t
fill him with optimism.

“But you should keep it,” he finished.

His father should have left it there, but as always, he was determined to keep on digging until they
were both stuck in a hole. Albus wanted nothing more than for his father to leave his room so he
could double check he had everything in his case and make sure he’d remembered to pack the new
singing quill he’d bought at Diagon Alley. It was a sort-of joke present for Scorpius.

“I think,” his father ploughed on, still not getting the hint. “I believe Petunia wanted me to have it,
that’s why she kept it and now I want you to have it from me. I didn’t really know my mother - but
I think she’d have wanted you to have it too. And maybe I could come find you - and it - on
Hallows’ Eve. I’d like to be with it on the night they died - and that could be good for the two of
us…”

Albus couldn’t bear it. Perhaps if this had been a natural, organic conversation, it would have been
okay. But he got the horrendous impression that his father had been preparing this for weeks. That
his mother had probably advised him on what exactly to say. It made Albus want to bolt from the
room.

“Listen,” Albus said awkwardly. “I’ve got a lot of packing to do, and you undoubtedly have
Ministry work coming out of your ears so…”

“Albus, I want you to have the blanket.”

It was the last straw. Albus felt himself snap a second too late to stop himself.

“And do what with it?” he asked. “Fairy wings make sense, Dad. Invisibility Cloaks, they also
make sense - but this - really?”

His father looked heartbroken. Albus refused to feel sorry for him.

“Do you want a hand?” Harry tried yet again. “Packing. I always loved packing. It meant I was
leaving Privet Drive and going back to Hogwarts. Which was… well, I know you don’t love it
but…”

“For you, it’s the greatest place on earth,” Albus burst out in frustration. “I know. The poor orphan,
bullied by his Uncle and Aunt Dursley-”

“Albus, please - can we just-“

“Traumatised by his cousin Dudley,” Albus steamrollered on, relentless in his attack. “Saved by
Hogwarts. I know it all, Dad. Blah, blah, blah.”

Finally he seemed to be getting a reaction. He could see his father was becoming uncomfortable.
He knew the satisfaction this gave him was wrong, but it didn’t change it.

“I’m not going to rise to your bait, Albus Potter,” his father declared in his best stern voice. It wasn’t all that convincing.

“The poor orphan who went on to save us all - so may I say - on behalf of wizarding kind, how grateful we are for your heroism. Should we bow now or will a courtesy do?”

“Albus, please - you know, I’ve never wanted gratitude.”

Albus wanted to stop now, he really did. But he found that he couldn’t. The spite was pouring out of him, all that anger finally bursting forth.

“But right now I’m overflowing with it - it must be the kind gift of this mouldy blanket that did it…”

His father looked momentarily stunned, like he’d been struck.

“Mouldy blanket?” he repeated quietly.

His father’s poor, wounded face only made Albus angrier.

“What did you think would happen? We’d hug. I’d tell you I always loved you. What? What?!”

And with that, Harry Potter finally lost his temper.

“You know what?” he said loudly. “I’m done with being responsible for your unhappiness. At least you’ve got a dad. Because I didn’t, okay?”

Albus let out a scoff.

“And you think that was unlucky? I don’t.”

“You wish me dead?” Harry asked, stunned to his core by the callousness of his son’s words. He hadn’t realised that Albus’s hatred ran so deep. How had he not noticed? He felt like a fool for thinking this was just one of those usual father-son issues that would clear up in a few years time. He had known it was bad but for the first time he found himself wondering if this was it. Unrepairable.

“No!” Albus exclaimed quickly. “I just wish you weren’t my dad.”

Harry could take this onslaught no longer. He had tried, hadn’t he? All those nights spent questioning himself and his parenting skills. All those coffees with Molly where she reassured him that boys could be that way and that Ron himself had been something of a sulker, not to mention Bill and how distant he had been in his teens. All those conversations in bed with Ginny, asking her advice, trying to figure out what it was he was getting wrong. The observing of other fathers like Mr Weasley and even Ron now, trying to emulate those who seemed to get on well with their sons, since he, Harry, had never experienced a father of his own.

What else could he do? He had put himself on the line for Albus time and time again. He had swallowed his pride over and over, made the first move, put up with his son’s sarcasm and disobedience, and all because he wanted desperately to be a good dad.

If Harry were to look into the Mirror of Erised he would see his family, complete with a smiling Albus standing beside him and not looking like he was repulsed by his very presence.
“Well, there are times I wish you weren’t my son,” Harry declared cutiously, before he’d even thought about the words.

But there they were. Said. At last.

A hideous weight lifted from Harry’s shoulders.

And then another replaced it. One made up of horror, and shame, and complete and utter guilt.

Albus looked up at his father and nodded. He seemed just as satisfied by his father’s comment as he was hurt. Somehow, he felt triumphant. That he had finally uncovered the truth. The truth he’d known was lurking in his father for most of his life.

His father looked utterly mortified to have let himself down. He was going to backtrack, Albus knew that much. But it was too late.

“No, I didn’t mean that…” his father said quickly.

Albus felt that he was floating. His body no longer seemed like his own.

“Yes,” he countered quietly. “Yes, you did.”

His father was ruffling his hair again. He looked shifty now, shuffling from foot to foot. *If only all those adoring fans could see him now*, Albus thought.

“Albus,” Harry tried again. ‘You just know how to get under my skin…”

“You meant it, Dad. And, honestly, I don’t blame you.”

Albus could feel the upset starting to kick in. He wished he was able to hold back tears, but sometimes there was nothing that could be done to stop them. Albus wasn’t much of a cryer, but when he did give into the urge, it came on unexpectedly and took him over like a curse.

“You should probably leave me alone now,” he said in monotone. Just needing his father to leave before he broke down. He wanted to be alone. He wanted his mother. He wanted to talk to Scorpius…

“Albus, please…”

Knowing his father would not leave the room, Albus realised he would have to be the one to get out of there. With unexpected fury, he picked up the blanket he’d been gifted and threw it as hard as he could. It didn’t go far, he’d never had particularly good aim, but it managed to collide with the love potion from Uncle Ron. The pink liquid spilled all over his father’s beloved blanket and his bed, producing a puff of sweet-smelling smoke.

It was almost laughable. Albus felt the perverse desire to chuckle at how incredibly badly his day had gone so far.

“No luck or love for me, then,” he said, not sure whether he was about to start laughing or crying.

Before either happened, he propelled himself off his bed and ran past his father, out of the room, just needing to get away.

“Albus. Albus… please…” his father called after him, but Albus didn’t stop running and he refused to respond.
Chapter End Notes

Comments give me life and spur me on!

xxx
Act One: Scenes Eight and Nine

Chapter Notes

Dialogue is all from the play! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

BOOM.

Uncle Vernon, Aunt Petunia, and Dudley were cowering behind a bed. Harry could see Uncle Vernon’s small piggy eyes glinting madly over the top of the mattress.

“Mum, I don’t like this,” declared Dudley in a wavering voice.

Aunt Petunia put an arm around her son.

“I knew we made a mistake in coming here. Vernon. Vernon. There’s nowhere we can hide. Not even a lighthouse is far enough away!”

Another loud boom made the whole room shake.

“Hold on. Hold on,” ordered Uncle Vernon, clearly fiddling with something behind the bed, which made an odd metallic clicking sound. Aunt Petunia looked at her husband with terror. “Whatever it is, it’s not coming in here.”

“We’re cursed!” Aunt Petunia screeched. “He’s cursed us! The boy has cursed us!”

Harry flinched. He hadn’t cursed anyone. He hadn’t done anything wrong. It wasn’t his fault someone kept sending him letters. He’d never asked for them.

Aunt Petunia turned to him and Harry became aware, quite suddenly, that he was eleven years old. Only just. He was wearing clothes that were far too big for him, a baggy shirt which had once belonged to Dudley, and a pair of jeans which were only held up by one of Uncle Vernon’s discarded belts (to which new holes had been added).

It was his birthday. He was in a shack on the top of a rock, surrounded by the icy sea. Harry could smell the damp.

“This is all your fault!” Aunt Petunia exclaimed, pointing a thin finger at him. “Get back in your hole.”

Harry was about to argue when Uncle Vernon made a (rather deranged) exclamation of success and then suddenly brandished a rifle, pointing it over the top of the bed. It was aimed right at Harry.

He flinched back, afraid, but Uncle Vernon raised the rifle higher. He was aiming at the door.

“Whoever’s there I should warn you - I’m armed,” Uncle Vernon shouted.

Harry did not know if it was safer to try and hide behind the bed with his cousin, aunt, and uncle,
or if his best chance was to move towards the stranger at the door.

With a massive smash, the front door fell off its hinges, smashing down onto the ground. Dudley made a noise of terror and Aunt Petunia ducked behind the bed, dragging her son down with her.

A giant of a man came striding into the room. He had a wild, tangled beard, shaggy hair, and eyes that glinted like black beetles. Harry simply stared up at him, rooted to the spot.

“Couldn’t make us a cup o’ tea, could yeh?” the giant asked. “It’s not been an easy journey.”

Dudley poked his head up from behind the bed.


“Stand back,” commanded Uncle Vernon, getting heroically to his feet. “Stand back. Behind me, Petunia. Behind me, Dudley. I’ll soon see this scarramanger off.”

With Uncle Vernon looking quite as crazed as he did, Harry preferred to remain close to the giant.

“Scarrawhat?” the giant asked, chuckling and not seeming the least bit afraid. He reached out and yanked the gun from Uncle Vernon’s fingers. Uncle Vernon made a noise like a mouse being trodden on.

“Haven’t seen one of these for a while,” the giant said, tying the gun into a knot with ease. “Oops-a-daisy.”

Dudley cowered behind his mother.

But the giant did not seem interested in hurting anybody. He looked up, spotting Harry. Harry swallowed hard.

“Harry Potter,” the giant said, beetle eyes glinting.

“Hello,” Harry said, uncertainly.

The giant broke into a smile and his whole face lit up. Harry was no longer afraid.

“Las’ time I saw yeh, yeh was only a baby. Yeh look a lot like yer dad, but yeh’ve got yer mum’s eyes.”

“You knew my parents?” Harry asked, astounded.

“Where’s me manners?” the giant said, shaking his head. “A very happy birthday to yeh. Got summit fear yeh here - I mighta sat on it at some point, but it’ll taste all right.”

The gun that had been in his hands seemed to have disappeared, for now the giant was reaching into his coat pocket. He pulled out a slightly squashed chocolate cake.

Harry moved a few steps forward to get a closer look. In green icing were the clumsily written words ‘Happy Birthday Harry’.

Harry meant to say thank you, but the words that came out instead were: “Who are you?”

The giant chuckled.

“True, I haven’t introduced meself. Rubeus Hagrid, Keeper of the Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts.”
Harry looked around and saw that the Dursleys were now back behind the bed, peering anxiously over the top.

“What about that tea then, eh?” Hagrid said. “I’d not say no ter summat stronger if yeh’ve got it, mind.”

“Howe’er?” Harry asked.

“Hogwarts,” said Hagrid easily. “Yeh’ll know all about Hogwarts, o’ course.”

Harry grimaced.

“Er - no,” he admitted, feeling embarrassed. “Sorry.”

Hagrid looked shocked. His eyes widened and he turned once again to the Dursleys with disbelief.

“Howe’er?” barked Hagrid, as the Dursleys disappeared entirely from sight. “It’s them as should be sorry! I knew yeh weren’t gettin’ yer letters but I never thought yeh wouldn’t even know abou’ Hogwarts, fer cryin’ out loud! Did yeh never wonder where yer parents learnt it all?”

“Learnt what?” Harry asked.

Hagrid turned menacingly towards Uncle Vernon, who chose that exact moment to poke his head back up again. He looked like he wished he hadn’t.

“So you mean ter tell me, that this boy - this boy! - knows nothin’ abou’ - about ANYTHING?” Hagrid roared.

“I forbid you to tell the boy anything more!” Uncle Vernon declared, standing up on shaking legs.

Harry stared up at Hagrid, wide-eyed, desperate to hear more. Hagrid turned away from Uncle Vernon with disgust.

“Harry - yer a wizard - yeh changed everything,” Hagrid said. “Yer the most famous wizard in the whole world.”

A hundred thoughts swam through Harry’s head. Outside the wind howled as the storm grew fiercer. Waves crashed against the rocks. It had become very chilly.

Shivering now, Harry reached down to where a mouldy old blanket lay on the ground before him. It wasn’t much, but it would have to do. When he placed it around his shoulders, it only made him colder.

A dreadful hissing sounded, a familiar whisper, like a breath being exhaled.

Harry looked up but Hagrid and the Dursleys were gone. He stood alone in darkness, vulnerable and afraid…

A cold voice spoke.

Haaarry Pottttter…

+++ 

Harry woke, breathing heavily.
A sudden, searing pain in his scar made Harry grit his teeth to hold back a shout. His hand shot up to cradle his aching head, desperate not to wake Ginny.

_You’re still dreaming_, Harry told himself firmly. _Your scar isn’t hurting. It can’t be hurting._

To his right, Ginny stirred, turning over and peering groggily at him through messy red hair.

“Harry…”

“It’s fine,” Harry said quickly, trying to smile. He wasn’t sure it was all that convincing. “Go back to sleep.”

Ginny sighed and then sat up, leaning back against the headboard. She reached tiredly for her wand.

“Lumos.”

The bedroom filled with light. Harry looked up at his wife and then forced himself up into a sitting position as well. It was no use lying to her once she’d seen his face. Ginny knew him better than anyone.

“A nightmare?” Ginny asked.

“Yes,” Harry admitted.

“About what?”

Harry frowned, considering this. Already the dream was starting to slip away. He remembered his aunt and uncle, and Hagrid, and then that voice…

“The Dursleys,” said Harry, forcing calm. “Well it started there - then it became something else.”

Ginny looked across at her husband, taking in the way his sweaty hair was stuck to his forehead, how his bright green eyes avoided her own. Such nightmares were not uncommon when it came to Harry. As a matter of fact they weren’t uncommon for anyone who had fought in the Battle of Hogwarts, or lived through the Second Wizarding War.

Ginny found she could keep the horrors at bay with her writing, with mid-afternoon runs, by eating healthily. Keeping busy was her strategy. But Harry’s nightmares would come and go depending on his stress levels. Ginny had almost anticipated them returning at a time like this, after Amos Diggory, that business at the Ministry, and, of course, the Albus situation.

“Do you want a Sleeping Draught?” Ginny offered, already reaching towards the bedside cabinet.

Harry shook his head swiftly.

“No. I’ll be fine. Go back to sleep.”

“You don’t seem fine,” said Ginny, frowning.

Harry said nothing.

He always did this. It was a constant source of vexation to Ginny. Harry bottled everything up until it got too much. It was a rather similar (and unsuccessful) coping mechanism to their youngest son in times of stress.
“It can’t have been easy - with Amos Diggory,” Ginny ventured, sitting back against the headboard and getting comfortable.

“The anger I can cope with,” Harry admitted after a long moment of hesitation. “The fact he’s right is harder. Amos lost his son because of me-“

“That doesn’t seem particularly fair on yourself,” Ginny pointed out.

“- and there’s nothing I can say - nothing I can say to anyone - unless its the wrong thing of course.”

Ginny seemed to know exactly who he was referring to then. She raised a weary eyebrow. With her husband and her youngest son it was always the same. When together they argued, and when apart they seemed to grieve their lack of connection. There was deep love there, somewhere. But a disastrous lack of communication and clash of personalities always seemed to prevail.

“So that’s what’s upsetting you?” Ginny asked, more softly now.

Harry did not answer. He looked away guiltily.

“The night before Hogwarts is never a good night if you don’t want to go,” Ginny said.

Often, Harry could forget that Albus did not feel he was escaping to a sanctuary, rather that he was being forced into yet another place in which he did not fit in. She had tried to get Harry to understand that from Albus’s perspective, but to Harry, who had only ever thought of the first of September with delight, Ginny didn’t seem to be making much progress.

“Giving Albus the blanket. It was a nice try,” Ginny added, reaching out to touch her husband’s arm.

“It went pretty badly wrong from there,” Harry admitted. “I said some things Ginny…”

“I heard,” Ginny agreed, with a significant look. She had, after all, been witness to Albus storming from his bedroom following his father’s visit.

Albus had shut himself in the bathroom for some time after the argument, and emerged looking like he’d been crying. The fact he was so fierce when spotted told Ginny that her son needed a bit of support. She had heard much of the story from a determinedly (and unconvincingly) blasé Albus, who recited his father’s words on the upstairs hall, arms crossed over his chest, like proof that his worst fears had been realised. There was a triumph in his discovery somewhere, Ginny noticed.

Ginny had tried to console her son, but when Albus was pretending detachment, it was no good offering comfort. Albus had shut himself off entirely and disappeared to bed, declaring rather darkly that: “I always knew anyway, Mum. It’s not some huge surprise.”

But it was no good his pretending that he didn’t care, because Ginny could read Albus better than possibly anyone else in the family. Her son was crushed, there were no two ways about it. And her husband was the culprit. It was an uncomfortable truth to carry.

“And you’re still talking to me?” Harry asked.

“Because I know that when the time is right you’ll say sorry,” said Ginny, with a sigh. “That you didn’t mean it. That what you said concealed - other things. You can be honest with him, Harry… that’s all he needs.”
“I just wish he was more like James or Lily,” Harry blurted out, ruffling his own hair.

Even Ginny winced at that.

“Yeah, maybe don’t be that honest,” she said, dryly.

“No,” Harry said swiftly, sitting up straighter, realising he’d just put his foot in it again. How was it that was happening so often these days? “I wouldn’t change a thing about him… but I can understand them and…”

“Albus is different,” Ginny agreed, with pride in her voice. “And isn't that a good thing?”

Harry nodded, not altogether convincingly.

“And he can tell - you know - when you’re putting on your Harry Potter front. He wants to see the real you.”

Harry almost scoffed at that. The real him? If Albus was disappointed with what he was seeing already, then letting his guard down wasn’t going to improve things. He was trying his best as it was. And having a father who still woke in the night, haunted by the war, who slept with his wand underneath his pillow, who needed a Sleeping Draught to get him through, who… didn’t know how to be a dad, well, somehow he sensed that wasn’t going to cut it.

“‘The truth is a beautiful and terrible thing, and should therefore be treated with great caution,’” Harry said, quietly.

Ginny looked over, surprised to hear him say something so profound. Harry found a weak grin in return.

“Dumbledore,” he explained.

Ginny nodded, although she raised an eyebrow again.

“A strange thing to say to a child,” she remarked with slight disapproval.

“Not when you believe that child will have to die to save the world,” Harry said, shrugging his shoulders.

From nowhere the pain in his scar returned. Harry gasped and had to grip the sheets so as not to clutch his forehead again. His head felt like it was about to explode. It took everything he had not to shout out for a second time.

“Harry?” Ginny asked warily. “What’s wrong?”

“Fine,” Harry muttered, still grimacing. “I’m fine. I hear you. I’ll try to be-“

“Does your scar hurt?” Ginny asked, bluntly.

“No,” Harry lied, and in that moment the pain stopped. Harry had forgotten the relief of all those years without a single twinge. It felt alarmingly good not to feel like your skull was about to combust. “No. I’m fine. Now, Nox that and let’s get some sleep.”

His wife did not look convinced. Ginny refused to raise her wand. She looked her husband over and knew instantly that he was lying to her.

“Harry, how long has it been since your scar hurt?” Ginny demanded.
Harry glanced at his wife’s brown eyes and then swallowed, unable to hold her gaze.

“Twenty-two years.”

Chapter End Notes

I know the dialogue is not the same as in The Philosopher's Stone, but it's a dream sequence so I think that's okay.

The more I write adult Harry the more I understand adult Harry. I know he's making mistakes but the man is under stress. And Albus, as much as I adore him, is a fairly difficult person.

Please leave me a comment!

xxx
Act One: Scene Ten

Chapter Notes

The chapters are going to take a little longer to post very soon since they are starting to get complicated! But I will still go as fast as I possibly can!

Please do leave a review if you enjoy this!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Albus was starting to become used to the annual start-of-year Hogwarts Express journey. Being a fourth year made things ever so slightly more bearable since having endured this three times already lifted him an unspoken rung higher up the school hierarchy, but he still didn't want to be caught walking through the compartments. Some of the second years were surprisingly precocious and the third years were even worse. The third year Gryffindors had a habit of chanting unpleasant little ditties whenever he or Scorpius were anywhere in the vicinity. Albus was not in the mood to deal with the mouthy little gits that morning. He already had too much on his mind.

He was on his way to his and Scorpius’s usual compartment and determined not to catch anyone's attention in the meantime.

Considering he’d been walking at a considerable pace purely to avoid having to talk to anyone, it was a surprise to find Rose at his side, seemingly out of nowhere. This could only be a planned meeting. There was no way his cousin would casually stroll over and say hello, at least not in a public place where others could see her doing it.

For her, this was risky. The Hogwarts Express was full of students. Anyone could spot her talking to possibly the biggest loser in the school. Her glowing reputation was at stake.

“Albus, I’ve been looking for you…” she panted.

Albus stopped walking sharply, causing Rose to almost topple over.

“Me?” he asked, raising a suspicious eyebrow. “Why?”

Rose wasn’t quite sure how to phrase what she had to say.

“Albus,” she began. “It’s the start of the fourth year, and so the start of a new year for us. I want to be friends again.”

Albus was not convinced. If this was a trick or a trap of some sort, he wasn’t going to fall for it.

“We never were friends.”

Rose looked wounded by that, and it gave Albus just a little bit of satisfaction.

“That’s harsh! You were my best friend when I was six!”
That was true. At six years old he and Rose had been all but inseparable. They had planned to be friends for life. But they had been young and naive and hadn’t accounted for the horrors of school society and peer pressure to come.

“That was a long time ago,” Albus said firmly.

He made to walk away, keen to get to Scorpius and leave his disloyal cousin behind. Talking to Rose had majorly stressed him out, mostly because deep down it hurt. Having her being nice again after all this time felt wrong. He wouldn’t allow himself to hope that things could return to the way they were. Albus Severus Potter was nowhere near that lucky.

But Rose was not a girl who liked to be walked away from. Just like the old days, she grabbed Albus by his robes and all but dragged him into an empty compartment.

Albus allowed himself to be manhandled for the simple reason that this was Rose and as much as it hurt to admit it, they were family, and, well, he loved her. Still.

“Have you heard the rumours?” Rose demanded, her brown eyes wide. “Big Ministry raid a few days ago. Your dad apparently was incredibly brave.”

Albus failed to see how this was news. His father was always doing something brave. Or in other words: reckless and stupid.

“How do you always know about these things and I don’t?”

“Apparently he - the wizard they raided - Theodore Nott I think - had all sorts of artefacts that broke all sorts of laws including - and this has got them all gooey - an illegal Time-Turner. And quite a superior one at that.”

Albus raised his eyebrows, the pieces starting to fall into place. In the back of his mind he could hear the voice of poor Amos Diggory, pleading for his son’s life. He heard his father’s denial. He felt sick.

“A Time-Turner? My dad found a Time-Turner?”

“Sh!” hissed Rose, putting a finger to her lips. “Yes! I know. Great, right?”

It should have been great. It should have meant Amos Diggory could get his son back. It meant his father could be a hero, a true hero… but Albus knew the real Harry Potter, the version the world never got to see, and he was far too selfish to put himself out like that. Instead he had chosen to disappoint a dying old man. All Rose’s information did was confirm what Albus had already suspected. That his father was a coward.

“You’re sure?” Albus demanded.

“Entirely,” Rose agreed with a nod.

Her posture had changed slightly. It was less defensive. She was acting… almost as though they were friends.

Somehow she seemed to think that this exchange had bonded them, that they shared something now. Albus may have secretly longed for such a moment, but he was far too stubborn to simply allow Rose back into his life after all this time, after one measly conversation. He resented her. He felt he had been betrayed in some way, and trust was important to a boy like Albus Potter. After all, without loyalty, what was there?
There was only one person Albus trusted completely. Only one person he felt he could tell the whole story. Only one person he wanted to include in this mess, simply because he couldn’t bear it alone.

“Now I have to find Scorpius,” he said with a forced finality. His message was clear: leave me alone. You’re not forgiven.

But he had underestimated how stubborn Rose could be when she put her mind to it. Unwilling to be walked away from, Rose raced after him. She was a girl who would not be shaken off by anyone.

“Albus!” she exclaimed, determined to say her piece.

Albus turned decisively. If she was following him down the train then she really was on a mission.

“Who’s told you that you have to talk to me?” he demanded suspiciously.

Rose once again looked wrong-footed by that. She bit her lower lip, a tell-tale sign of Granger-Weasley guilt.

“Okay,” she admitted. “Maybe your mum owled my dad - but only because she’s worried about you. And I just think -“

Albus wasn’t angry at his mum for writing to Uncle Ron. He loved his mother dearly, and he knew she meant well, but it was deeply humiliating all the same.

“Leave me alone, Rose,” Albus sighed. He knew Rose would continue to follow him, but that didn’t mean he had to talk to her. Eventually she’d get the message, surely?

Determined that she realise that he, Albus, had moved on, and that she couldn’t simply come crawling back and expect a warm reception, he raised his head and continued his swift walk.

He found Scorpius sitting in his usual compartment looking out of the window contemplatively. He was smiling at something he’d seen outside. Albus entered first, and was surprised to find himself followed by Rose. She really was determined, then. He was certain she’d have diverted by now. Usually she’d steer clear of he and Scorpius like they had the plague.

“Albus!” Scorpius declared, sounding excited to see him as always. Then he spotted Rose and his expression changed. Albus did not like that one bit.

“Oh, hello Rose!” Scorpius said brightly. “What do you smell of?”

Rose turned to Albus incredulously, but her cousin refused to react. He was breathtakingly loyal to the Malfoy boy.

“What do I smell of?” Rose repeated, like she couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“No,” Scorpius said hurriedly, waving his hands about as if to physically wipe his previous words away. “I meant it as a nice thing. You smell like a mixture of fresh flowers and fresh - bread…”

Usually Albus would have stepped in to save Scorpius from embarrassment, but he didn’t feel particularly inclined to help smooth over the relationship between Scorpius and his cousin. It wasn’t any of Rose’s business that one of Scorpius’s favourite ever smells was of fresh bread because it reminded him of happy days spent in the kitchen baking with his mother as a little boy.
“Albus, I’m here, okay? If you need me,” Rose said, making to leave already.

Poor Scorpius looked utterly mortified by his choice of words. But unlike most people, he was unable to shut up and insisted on trying to rectify the situation.

“I mean, nice bread, good bread, bread… what’s wrong with bread?”

As usual, poor Scorpius worked as the perfect deterrent to Albus’s cousin and for once, Albus had been able to use this to his advantage.

Rose exited the compartment shaking her head. Albus distinctly heard her mutter: “What’s wrong with bread!” as she went.

Well Albus, for one, was pleased to see the back of his cousin. Even if Scorpius looked disappointed.

“I’ve been looking for you everywhere…” he explained, closing the compartment door firmly behind his cousin so he and his best friend could be alone.

“And now you’ve found me, Tada!” Scorpius said brightly. Already he had picked himself up and dusted himself off, disappointment seemingly long forgotten. “I was hardly hiding. You know I like to… get on early. Stops people staring. Shouting. Writing ‘son of Voldemort’ on my trunk. That one never gets old. She really doesn’t like me, does she?”

Scorpius gave Albus one of his brave little smiles, like he was trying his best to find the horrible situation amusing, even if the joke was at his expense.

Albus couldn’t help himself. He strolled right over and hugged his friend fiercely. He found that he didn’t want to let go, and to his surprise Scorpius seemed unwilling to break the hug either.

“Oh, Scorpius said over his shoulder, “Hello. Um. Have we hugged before? Do we hug?”

Realising that to keep on clutching at Scorpius like that would probably be a bit weird, Albus reluctantly let go. He felt awkward now, having to look Scorpius in the face. He supposed that was a pretty impulsive thing to have done.

“Just a slightly weird twenty-four hours,” Albus found himself saying with a gesture which meant: it’s complicated. He felt an overwhelming need to explain himself. Like perhaps that hug should have been accompanied by some words he couldn't find.

“What’s happened in them?” Scorpius asked, fidgeting uncertainty melting into instant frowning concern.

As tempting as it was to blurt everything out in a rush, safe in the knowledge that whatever was confided would go no further, once Albus had started he knew he wouldn't be able to stop. Scorpius was too good a listener, too attentive an audience, and urgency was key. Outside of the train a whistle sounded, high and sharp. Which meant that for once, the Dad-troubles and maybe something else would have to wait.

“I’ll explain later. We have to get off this train.”

A second whistle sounded in answer to the first as though in confirmation. Just as Albus went to take a step, the carriage rumbled, and the floor gave a gentle sort of lurch which meant the train was now in motion. The journey had begun.
Just my luck, Albus thought furiously.

“Too late,” Scorpius said with an apologetic expression. “The train is moving. Hogwarts ahoy!”

“Then we have to get off a moving train.”

Scorpius was very glad to see the Trolley Witch approaching at that moment because he was pretty certain his best friend had gone completely mad. He had a determination in his eyes which could only mean trouble.

“Anything from the trolley dears?” the Trolley Witch called into the compartment.

Albus ignored her. To Scorpius’s horror his best friend opened a window with relative ease and looked very ready to climb out.

“A moving magical train,” Scorpius pointed out, hoping to bring Albus back to his senses.

“Pumpkin Pasty? Cauldron Cake?” the Trolley Witch continued from outside.

Something had to be done. Albus had clearly lost it. Reasoning with him had failed and now it was time to go to Plan B, only to be used in the most exceptional of circumstances. The full name card was coming out to play.

“Albus Severus Potter, get that strange look out of your eye,” Scorpius commanded.

“First question,” said Albus, spinning on the spot and surprising Scorpius with his sudden change of tone. “What do you know about the Triwizard Tournament?”

Now this was better. Thank goodness. Scorpius felt himself relax. There were few things that made him happier than history quizzes. It seemed he was more commanding than he thought!

“Ooooh, a quiz! Three schools pick three champions to compete in three tasks for one Cup. What’s that got to do with anything?”

Albus, even in his most reckless mood, had to pause to comment on the huge nerd that was Scorpius Malfoy.

“You really are an enormous geek, you know that?”

“Ya-huh,” Scorpius agreed proudly.

“Second question. Why has the Triwizard Tournament not been run in over twenty years?”

Well that was easy. Scorpius had read all about that fateful Tournament hundreds of times.

“The last competition included your dad and a boy called Cedric Diggory - they decided to win together but the Cup was a Portkey - and they were transported to Voldemort. Cedric was killed. They cancelled the competition immediately after.”

“Good,” praised Albus, making Scorpius beam with pride. “Third question. Did Cedric need to be killed? Easy question, easy answer: No. The words Voldemort said were ‘kill the spare’. The spare. He only died because he was with my father and my father couldn’t save him - we can. A mistake has been made and we’re going to right it. We’re going to use a Time-Turner. We’re going to bring him back.”

Ah, and there was the glint in Albus’s eyes again. Scorpius did not like the direction in which this
was going.

“Albus, for obvious reasons, I’m not a fan of Time-Turners…”

“When Amos Diggory asked for the Time-Turner my father denied they even existed. He lied to an old man who just wanted his son back - who just loved his son. And he did it because he didn’t care… because he doesn’t care. Everyone talks about all the brave things Dad did. But he made some mistakes too. Some big mistakes, in fact. I want to set one of those mistakes right. I want us to save Cedric.”

Scorpius may or may not have been gawping with horror at Albus, who absolutely definitely one hundred percent had lost his mind.

“Okay, whatever was holding your brain together seems to have snapped.”

“I’m going to do this, Scorpius. I need to do this. And you know as well as I do, I’ll entirely mess it up if you don’t come with me. Come on.”

With a grin Albus climbed easily out of the window and then disappeared up and out of sight. He made it look effortless. Scorpius doubted it was.

Scorpius hesitated for a moment. What Albus had just done was dangerous, reckless, and undeniably stupid. Every fibre of his being was telling him to simply let his best friend make a fool of himself and remain where he was. His father would be horrified to think that his son and heir, Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy, was even considering climbing onto the roof of a moving train.

But this was Albus and Scorpius would have followed him anywhere.

With a grimace, Scorpius poked his head out of the window, examined the side of the train, found a rail which he could use as leverage, and (hoping desperately he wouldn’t fall to his demise) hoisted himself up.

Chapter End Notes

Reviews make me a happy soul.

Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn

xxx
Act One: Scene Eleven

Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy!

Leave a comment if you do!

(Also, poor Scorpius, oh my lord what has the child got himself into?)

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The roof of the Hogwarts Express was a supremely un-glamourous and windy place. Scorpius had to narrow his eyes to stop them from watering.

Albus did not look surprised to see Scorpius clambering gracelessly onto the roof after him. He was acting like this was something they did every day.

“Okay,” Scorpius said, having to raise his voice to be heard over the whistle of the wind. “Now we’re on the roof of a train, it’s fast, it’s scary, this has been great, I feel like I’ve learnt a lot about me, something about you, but-“

Albus cut him off, all of a sudden a master strategist.

“As I calculate it we should be approaching the viaduct soon and then it’ll be a short hike to St Oswald’s Home for Old Witches and Wizards…”


St Oswald’s? The viaduct? A short hike?

Albus had gone mad. Completely mad.

The ‘plan’ made no sense whatsoever.

And how on earth was he supposed to hike without his proper walking shoes?

“Look,” Scorpius managed to say, trying his best to keep his balance on the unsteady surface. “I’m as excited as you are to be a rebel for the first time in my life - yay - train roof - fun - but now - oh…”

Scorpius had just seen something he really wished he hadn’t seen.

But Albus still hadn’t seen it.

“The water will be an extremely useful backup if our Cushioning Charm doesn’t work,” Albus continued, seemingly thrilled with his own plan.

Had Scorpius not seen the very disturbing thing that he had, he may well have mentioned that he couldn’t actually swim…

“You want a snack for the journey?” Albus asked, like that was a perfectly reasonable request for him to have made from the roof of the Hogwarts Express.

“No. Albus. The Trolley Witch is coming towards us.”

“No,” Albus said, shaking his head. “She can’t be. We’re on top of the train…”

Really wishing he didn’t have to be the one to break the bad news, Scorpius reached out a shaking arm and pointed in the direction behind Albus from which the Trolley Witch was making her nonchalant approach.

“How the Trolley Witch had managed to reach the roof at her old age was one question that sprung to Scorpius’s mind. Another was how she had managed to bring her fully laden trolley with her…


Albus let out a breath of mild horror: “Oh…”

How the Trolley Witch had managed to reach the roof at her old age was one question that sprung to Scorpius’s mind. Another was how she had managed to bring her fully laden trolley with her…

“People don’t know much about me,” the old woman said, still steadily approaching. “They buy my Cauldron Cakes - but they never notice me. I don’t remember the last time someone asked my name.”

Since Scorpius had gone even more deathly pale than usual, it fell to Albus to attempt to talk their way out of this. Yes, he was creeped out by the old lady. And Scorpius looking like he was going to vomit was a huge problem, because a vomiting Scorpius would be no help whatsoever on their quest for justice. But nothing, nothing was going to stop him from carrying out his plan. Not even some demon ghost woman with a stack of Pumpkin Pasties and the creepiest steady walk you could imagine.

“What is your name?” Albus asked, hoping the polite question would help somehow.

“I’ve forgotten. All I can tell you is that when the Hogwarts Express came to be - Ottaline Gambol herself offered me this job…”

Gaining confidence from Albus’s own boldness, Scorpius frowned.

“That’s - a hundred and ninety years. You’ve been doing this job for a hundred and ninety years?”

The Trolley Witch nodded her head eerily. This day was becoming more and more like a nightmare by the second.

“These hands have made over six million Pumpkin Pasties. I’ve got quite good at them. But what people haven’t noticed about my Pumpkin Pasties is how easily they transform into something else…”

With a gnarled, wrinkled hand, the trolley witch picked up a Pumpkin Pasty, stretched back a surprisingly strong-looking arm, and threw it like a grenade in the boys’ general direction. It exploded loudly, and Scorpius jumped with a little exclamation of fright.

“And you won’t believe what I can do with my Chocolate Frogs. Never. Never. Have I let anyone off this train before they reached their destination. Some have tried - Sirius Black and his cronies, Fred and George Weasley. ALL HAVE FAILED. BECAUSE THIS TRAIN - IT DOESN’T LIKE
The old woman’s hands transfigured into sharp spikes which looked very dangerous indeed. Most sinister of all was the smile which followed.

“So please retake your seats for the remainder of the journey,” she finished calmly.

Albus got up from his crouching position and took a careful yet slightly wobbly step back. Scorpius grabbed him nervously by the sleeve. Albus wasn’t sure if he was being grabbed to make sure he didn’t topple from the roof of the train, or if Scorpius was simply scared to be left alone.

“You were right, Scorpius,” Albus admitted, as the boys attempted to shuffle slowly backwards, somehow managing to do so as one, neither wanting to take their eyes off the advancing Trolley Witch. “This train is magical.”

“At this precise moment in time, I take no pleasure in being right,” Scorpius admitted.

The Trolley Witch continued to advance. Something had to be done, because before too long they would end up shuffling right the way to the end of the train, and then what?

“But I was also right - about the viaduct,” Albus continued. He squinted at the ground rushing past the train. “That’s water down there. Time to try the Cushioning Charm.”

“Albus,” Scorpius said nervously. “This is a bad idea…”

“Is it?”

Albus hesitated for a moment. Yes, if the charm failed or he mistimed his jump he could be looking at a very long and unpleasant stay in the hospital wing. Or worse, St Mungo’s…

But on the other hand, the Trolley Witch was still steadily approaching and Scorpius was beside him. There was no way he was going to look like a coward in front of him. The time for hesitation had passed.

Harry Potter would never have given up now. Oh no, he would have stuck to his plan no matter what.

“But too late now,” Albus declared with a wild tinge of hysteria to his voice.

_Oh no…_ Scorpius inwardly panicked. _He’s really going to do this_...

“Three. Two. One…”

Albus raised his wand, bent his knees ready for lift-off, jumped and incanted:

“Molliare!”

Scorpius, who had only just let go of Albus’s sleeve in time, peered doubtfully into the darkness which had swallowed his friend. This was not good. This was very not good indeed.

“Albus… Albus…”

He looked down desperately after his friend, hoping that somehow, like a scene from a film, he would see Albus’s grinning face as he hung from a ledge. But there was no sign of him. At best his Cushioning Charm had worked. At worst, he was taking a long swim…
Scorpius looked at the approaching Trolley Witch, her hair wild, her spikes particularly spikey.

Albus had still not explained the plan, if there even was one. Any normal person would have got right back into the train, apologised profusely to the Trolley Witch for any inconvenience caused, and then called someone in a position of authority to go and collect Albus to prevent him from getting into some serious trouble.

His father had always despaired that he was a follower and not a leader. It was one of the many disappointments that Scorpius believed he had brought to Draco Malfoy’s life. Constant lectures about the importance of making one’s own decisions and never accepting second best had been one of the most common themes in Draco Malfoy’s parenting routine.

And yet here Scorpius was, utterly at a loss as to what he was on the roof of a train for (other than the fact his best friend had some odd notion about bringing a dead Triwizard competitor back to life) and now being pursued by the most frightening woman Scorpius had ever come across. And all because he seemed drawn to Albus Potter like a magnet.

Could he possibly turn back now? Could he still make this all okay? Could he avoid being expelled and perhaps avoid the wrath of his father?

It was a possibility.

But Albus was probably waiting for him wherever it was he had managed to land. No doubt he was counting on his best friend to follow him.

*I’ll entirely mess it up if you don’t come with me…*

There was only one choice Scorpius Malfoy could make.

“Well, as fun as you clearly look,” he managed to shout out, over the noise of the speeding train. “I have to go after my friend.”

Oh, his father was going to *kill* him if he ever found out about this...

Scorpius pinched his nose, wondered what on earth he’d done in his relatively short life to deserve a friend like Albus Potter, and jumped.

“Molliare!”

Chapter End Notes

Reviews make me smile.

Lots of love!

(And find me on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn) xxx
Act One: Scene Eleven and a Half

Chapter Notes

This one is pretty much all mine. I felt we needed a filler to get us from the train roof to our next destination.

I really hope you enjoy it!

If you do then please please please comment because comments make my day!

xxx

The Cushioning Charm had worked. Scorpius knew this because when he landed he was not a) doggy-paddling for his life or b) dead.

His surprisingly pleasant and soft landing had been heralded by the sound of Albus whistling and whooping from a short distance away. As Scorpius got carefully to his feet, Albus (who had been running along beside the path of the train waiting to see when his best friend would find the courage to jump), finished his sprint and greeted Scorpius with an enthusiastic pat on the back.

“Did she try throwing another Pasty grenade?” was the first question to leave Albus’s mouth.

“I could have drowned!” Scorpius exclaimed, glancing doubtfully at the mass of dark water only a few metres to his left.

“I wouldn’t have let you drown,” Albus reassured him easily, still acting disconcertingly like this was just another average day. “Besides, I thought you’d be able to swim. All those holidays…”

“My father wasn’t exactly the type to give me one-on-one swimming lessons,” Scorpius admitted.

“You’re okay, though?”

Scorpius wanted to be angry at Albus, he really did… but it was so hard when his best friend was grinning at him and enquiring after his general wellbeing.

“Yes,” he found himself saying, his familiar optimistic tone returning. “And - wow - I’ve never managed a Cushioning Charm before! Can you believe that?”

Albus grinned once again and patted Scorpius on the arm fondly.

“Right, so according to my research, St Oswald’s should be about three miles from here…”

“Three miles!”

“Not far at all.” Albus continued confidently. He had the overwhelming urge to grab Scorpius’s hand to pull him along and hurry him up a bit, but he decided against it.

“And how do you know which direction to go in? We’re in the middle of nowhere…"
“Easy, I asked some Muggles.”

“You did what?!”

“They were hiking. You know the sort. Rain macs. Proper walking boots. Sticks. Really serious about their walking. They told me that to get to St Oswald’s you have to go—” Albus pointed to his right. “In that direction. Almost a straight line. Simple. Although they did not have a high opinion of the place. Something about a mysteriously long waiting list?”

Scorpius looked doubtfully in the direction Albus had pointed in. The walk did not look like it would be a relaxing one. To start with they had to clamber up and out of the gorge, and it looked like there were hills that needed scaling…

No, Scorpius told himself. He would not become a pessimist. A bit of mud was nothing. If he wanted to have an adventure then surely this was the perfect opportunity? Every hero had a struggle to overcome, and besides, his dad was always telling him he should go outside more…

Scorpius made a conscious decision to be cheerful, and then broke into a smile.

“So… as excited as I am about all… this. Would you mind explaining what you have planned in a bit more detail? Because you lost me a bit there on the train.”

The boys began to walk, Albus leading the way with the fearless confidence of a person doing a good and selfless deed.

“Okay, simple version?” Albus asked.

Scorpius nodded, arms crossed over his chest as a defence against the cold, wishing that he’d remembered to bring his coat.

“Cedric Diggory died at the last Triwizard Tournament.”

“Yes.”

“But he didn’t have to. He was ‘the spare.’ Voldemort never wanted to kill him. He only wanted my dad.”

“O-kay…”

“So we’re going to use a Time-Turner (which the Ministry do have only my dad lied about it to Amos) to go back in time and stop Cedric from winning the tournament, which means Voldemort can’t kill him.”

Scorpius frowned, trying to fill in the many blanks Albus had missed. A great many questions came to mind and it took a moment to sort them into order of importance.

“Why?” Scorpius asked, deciding it was the most pressing matter. “Why are we going back in time, which - by the way - I am quite sure isn’t actually legal - to save Cedric Diggory of all people?”

Albus stopped walking and took a deep breath. Scorpius stopped as well, waiting.

“Because my dad should have saved him. My dad messed up and because of him, a man is dead who shouldn’t be, and his dad… he’s an old man who just wants his son. And it’s… it’s just… not fair.”

Scorpius wanted to point out that many things in life weren’t fair. He wanted to point out that Harry
Potter hadn’t ‘messed up’ as Albus put it. In fact, the history books (at least the unbiased ones) seemed to think he’d been incredibly brave and able for a boy of his age.

He wanted to point out that if there was an illegal Time-Turner floating about somewhere, he would have chosen to use it to have a few more precious moments with his mother…

The very thought of his mother was what finally won him over.

+++  

Scorpius missed Astoria every day. He felt her absence as acutely as someone might feel a missing and very vital internal organ. Throughout his life his mother had been a gentle and comforting influence on his otherwise stern and really rather stressful upbringing. After a lecture from his father, it was his mother who would come knocking at his bedroom door with a large mug of hot chocolate and marshmallows, wearing a kind smile and a comforting expression.

If she’d had to hold the mug with two hands, too weak to lift the item with one, Scorpius was determined not to notice.

Amos Diggory, according to Albus, had loved his son. Scorpius had read the history books and knew that Cedric was an only child. The bond between an only child and their parents was sometimes unbearably strong. Scorpius knew that all too well.

The relationship he had with his father, his one remaining parent, although fraught with difficulty and misunderstandings, was unbreakable. He knew this because despite ending up as the weak, weedy, nerdy, absolutely-definitely-not-Malfoy-material offspring of Draco Malfoy, his father still had not given up on him.

Scorpius suspected (wrongly) that this was because of the influence of his mother.

But if he and his father could have that unshakeable bond, almost a duty to each other, despite their differences, then Scorpius could not imagine how Amos Diggory must have felt to lose his successful, athletic, handsome (and Cedric was really really handsome if the photos in his books weren't complete flukes), and entirely un-disappointing son.

He knew that Amos had never even got to say goodbye. That was the most painful part, to Scorpius.

When his mother had died, at least he had known it was coming. He had hoped it wouldn’t happen, of course. He had longed to find some spell, some way to keep her safe, to keep her healthy. But in the back of his mind the knowledge that his mother might not live to see him leave Hogwarts had always loomed large.

Despite knowing that one day he would be called into her sick-room to say his goodbye, when it finally came to it, all of Scorpius’s heartfelt speeches seemed to disappear.

It had all happened very fast. His mother had been weak, he’d known that much. So when she retired to bed early the previous day he hadn’t worried any more than usual. It had been good she’d even been sitting in the parlour with his father, a blanket over her to fight off the chill. (The curse seemed to leave her constantly cold.) Scorpius went to bed feeling surprisingly positive about the world in general. He had a letter to Albus all planned out in his head, and he had an idea that the next day he might see if his father would let him get his mother into her special wheelchair (for when her legs were weak) and walk her around the grounds so they could look at the flowers together and have one of their little chats. If his mother felt too unwell to talk then that didn’t
mature. Scorpius was good at chattering to himself. He knew how to be sunny and bright and make people feel comfortable, even when they were weak, and ill, and cold.

But when Scorpius awoke the next morning it had been with the unusual sight of his father sitting in the large ornate chair beside his bed, head in his hands.

The news that his mother had taken a turn for the worst in the night was not altogether surprising. The nights were often the most difficult times for Astoria, so much so that she and Scorpius’s father now slept in separate bedrooms, just so he wouldn’t accidentally disturb her precious sleep. There was a general rule in the Malfoy household that after dinner the house was to be quiet and calm. The elaborate dinners of his grandfather’s day, full of laughter and music and alcohol, were a thing of the past.

“I was going to wake you,” his father said quietly, when he noticed that his son was peering at him with concerned, sleepy eyes. “But you looked so…”

His father trailed off, unable to finish the sentiment.

“Is it Mum?” Scorpius asked immediately.

Draco nodded and found it took exceptional self control not to break down in that moment. But in front of his son he never would. He couldn’t. Because Scorpius had to be strong. The world was a harsh one and full of influences trying to pull a young person this way and that. Hadn’t Draco fallen prey to it himself? Hadn’t his own father in his time? Astoria may have been the one with the family curse, but Draco often wondered if his own family was equally damned. Destined to follow others, driven by a fierce loyalty instead of common sense which left them ripe for indoctrination.

Lucius Malfoy had thought he was paving his way in the world on his own terms, and Draco had believed it too. He would have followed his father anywhere. He’d idolised him, as a boy. Lucius had been everything Draco had dreamed of becoming. And in his way he’d been a good father. Hadn’t he always told Draco he was the most important person in his world? Hadn’t he assured him that everything he did, every choice he made, was for the family line, the family name, the gift he would one day leave his beloved only son?

And yet that single-minded devotion (and yes it was devotion, no matter what anyone thought of Lucius Malfoy these days), that need to intervene whenever anything or anyone made Draco’s life even the slightest bit uncomfortable, had left Draco as the one thing he’d always despised. A follower. A follower who was in so deep he thought he was a leader.

His son needed to have a will of steel in order to make good of himself, where Draco, to his shame, had failed. It was why Draco constantly attempted to instil the importance of independence in his son. It was why he was so very hard on him.

He tried to express his love with gifts of books which were added to the family library, with a comfy new reading chair which he placed by the fire, on which was an elaborately monogrammed pillow: SM.

He tried to express his love by never raising his voice, never shouting, never using fear to bring his son to heel as his father had sometimes done to him. Instead, if ever his son would rile him, Draco would take himself away, compose himself, and summon Scorpius to him later for a calm, dignified lecture.

Draco did not want his son to fear him.
And yet his son did. Or at least, he feared disappointing him, which was almost as bad.

Yes, he had grown into a boy with a keen intellect and a thirst for knowledge. On that count Draco was relieved. This son of his would be no one’s lackey.

And yes, Scorpius practically glowed with the inherent kindness that had so drawn Draco to Astoria.

But somehow, despite everything, despite Draco’s very best efforts, his son had become, well… soft.

Vulnerable. Sensitive. The sort of boy that could be wounded by a harsh word.

He hid it well, like every Malfoy, but unlike he and his father, Scorpius would wilt the moment he thought he was alone. The smile would fade, the sunny nature hidden behind a dark cloud.

In his quest to bring up the first Malfoy who might actually bring true glory to the family name (not the sort of glory won by following another), Draco appeared to have created a boy too kind, too empathetic, too hesitant to actually succeed in the world.

It drove Draco to despair.

“You can have breakfast later,” Draco said calmly. “First you’ll want to wash and dress.”

“Are we taking her to another Healer?” Scorpius asked, sitting upright in his expensive striped pyjamas and rubbing the sleep from his eyes, eager to show his father that he was obeying, rushing to do as he commanded.

He was used to unexpected journeys to Healers, traveling to strange little witches and wizards who claimed to have a cure for the curse, going with his father to collect potions and herbs which were rumoured to have healing properties.

Years ago, Draco would have scoffed at such ridiculous trinkets. Healing necklaces, stones with life-extending properties, runes which could bring about good luck and good health, and yet as the years went by Malfoy Manor had become full of these items. Items Draco looked upon with disgust and resentful desperation. He only stopped short of using Dark Magic. Astoria wouldn’t hear of him ever setting foot in the venues of his childhood again, and Draco didn’t think he had the courage to show his face in those places again, now, after everything.

“No, Scorpius. We’re not taking your mother to another Healer,” he confirmed slowly.

“Then we can get one to come to us?” Scorpius suggested. “I can stay out of the way if he or she is… you know…”

But his father, slowly, terribly, shook his head.

“No? But…”

“Your mother will want to see you,” his father managed to say in a fairly good impersonation of his usual steady voice. “Please don’t keep her waiting.”

“Dad, is she… is she…?”

“I expect you to be strong for your mother.”

“I…” Scorpius didn’t know what to say. He could feel the world crumbling from beneath his feet.
It was too soon. He hadn’t told his mother everything about Albus yet, or about how good he was getting at Potions, or about the hilarious joke he’d made a few weeks ago at which even some of the Gryffindor students had laughed…

“Please, Scorpius,” Draco had said, unable to take the questioning. He would never have dared to continue to press his own father like this. When Lucius Malfoy gave a command it was instantly followed or there were consequences. “As quickly as you can. And remember to comb your hair.”

With that his father stood up, reached out to place a hand on his son’s shoulder, and then disappeared from the room.

+++ 

Without his precious goodbye Scorpius would never have coped. He would never have managed to get out of bed the next morning. Without it… well, the pain might have gone on forever.

If his mother had died with no warning Scorpius knew he would never have got over the shock. He felt, in that moment, that he understood Amos Diggory completely. And he loved Albus for trying to understand as well.

+++ 

“And… you’re sure you want to do this?” Scorpius clarified. “Because there’s still time to catch the train. Well, actually, no, there probably isn’t. But we could get to Hogwarts some other way. We could still go back.”

“I’m sure I want us to do this,” Albus answered simply.

“And you’re absolutely one hundred percent sure this will work?”

Albus broke into a grin. He could be really very persuasive when he wanted to be.

“I’m one hundred percent sure our chances of making this work will improve if you’re with me.”

How was Scorpius supposed to resist that?

Albus reached out a hand to help Scorpius clamber up a particularly unsteady part of the gorge.

“You know, my dad will kill me if he finds out we’ve done this,” Scorpius remarked.

“So will mine,” Albus agreed cheerfully. “Double grave?”

Scorpius pushed aside the thoughts of the ancient Malfoy family plot, and the new one his father had had made for Astoria. The tomb was made of white marble and carved with roses. His mother’s name was written quite beautifully on one side, the space beside it empty, where his father’s name would one day be engraved.

“Absolutely,” Scorpius agreed.

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment! I read them all and get very excited when I get a notification!
For Harry, the first day of September was not going well. His morning had consisted of James and Lily catapulting cereal at each other across the breakfast table while their mother was busy packing the car, (Harry did not feel in the mood to intervene), sorting through the Ministry documents he had at home so that he seemed prepared for the Extraordinary General Meeting Hermione had insisted on calling later, somehow persuading Lily’s cat to get into her carrier box ready for the journey (why had they ever agreed to buy her a cat and an owl?), trying to locate his spare pair of glasses (which he was sure he’d put on his bedside table the night before), and finally (and most stressful of all), trying to find a moment to talk to Albus.

Harry was glad he had chosen to give the Invisibility Cloak to James, as the older sibling, rather than Albus, because even with no magical help whatsoever, Albus was exceptionally talented at slipping out of situations he didn’t want to be in. Harry had only caught sight of his sullen, dark-haired son a couple of times, once in the kitchen grabbing toast (and then presumably disappearing to his bedroom with it), on his way to the bathroom, and then again carrying his things to the car.

Never had he known a person more skilled at being evasive. If he ever put his mind to it, Harry thought Albus could make one hell of an Auror. He had the stealth part down to a tee.

In the car journey to King’s Cross Albus had remained determinedly silent. He sat beside his sister and looked out of the window, a strange, unreadable glint in his green eyes. When he’d spotted his father looking at him in the wing mirror, Albus had turned his head so he didn’t see Harry’s attempt at a conciliatory smile.

Albus had not spoken to Harry once on the platform. Before even James or Lily had had the chance to rush off to their friends, Albus accepted a half-hug from his mother and then picked up his case, apparently determined to be the first to leave the scene.

“Albus, please will you just-“ Harry tried, but Albus did not even look at him. He disappeared into the haze of thick, white steam pouring from the Hogwarts Express, leaving his father heartbroken in his wake.

Harry knew he wouldn’t see his son again until Christmas, and maybe not even then, if Albus decided to stay at Hogwarts again. It was an unpleasant thought.

As he and Ginny left the platform (having said more comfortable goodbyes to James and Lily and watched the scarlet train set off), Ginny patted his arm.

“I think that’s Draco,” Ginny said in an undertone, nodding her head to their left.
Harry took a quick glance. Sure enough, Draco Malfoy was standing on the platform, dressed in his best, holding what looked like a cane.

“Great,” Harry muttered sarcastically.

Ginny shot her husband a reproving look.

“This must be the first time since Astoria,” Ginny said, and Harry suddenly understood.

A part of him wished Draco Malfoy well, another, more selfish part, hoped that Draco Malfoy once again out and about and wearing his ridiculously posh clothing did not mean he was planning to turn up at the Extraordinary General Meeting later. It was going to be hard enough as it was to bring up the subject of Voldemort and the recent resurgence of Dark Magic in front of a room full of the wizarding community, without Draco Malfoy getting twitchy and defensive, no doubt saying his piece.

+++ 

Once at the Ministry, Ginny went off to wait with Ron while Harry and Hermione had a last-minute chat in the side-room.

Hermione was wearing a smart jacket and skirt, and seemed especially nervous. She kept checking her papers and then nodding to herself. Harry, who was equally daunted (public speaking really didn’t suit him), loosened his tie a little.

“Now, what’s important is that we remain calm,” Hermione said firmly. “We can’t start a panic.”

“I know,” Harry agreed. “Keep it matter-of-fact. Don’t give out more info than we need to.”

“And we absolutely mustn’t be drawn into making assumptions, Harry.”

“What do you think I’m going to do, Hermione? Drag the dodgy ones up on the stage and interrogate them?”

Hermione allowed herself the smallest of smiles.

“Well, no,” she admitted. “But you know how the Prophet love to run with anything you say.”

“You mean they like to take what I say, distort it a few hundred times, and then print it in their news section?”

“I’m afraid that’s the nature of the beast,” Hermione said sadly. “We are the Ministry, Harry. This is all part of the job. And if we bear the brunt of the ignorance then so be it. What matters is that we’re honest and conscientious. Public opinion can be fickle.”

Honest and conscientious. That made Harry feel slightly uncomfortable. It was the honest part that got him. He knew he had to tell Hermione about his scar, but he’d been putting it off for as long as he could. There was something embarrassing about talking about it, something which made him feel worryingly like the histrionic caricature he’d been painted as for much of his youth.

But Ginny told him over and over again that he couldn’t control what others thought of him. They could call him an attention-seeker all they wanted, but that didn’t change the fact he’d been right about his assertions as a teenager. If the reputation still lingered then it was through no fault of his own.
“Er, Hermione,” Harry ventured, looking down at the carpet.

“Yes, Harry?”

“Look, this might be nothing but last night… well, I woke up and my scar was sort of - hurting.”

Hermione’s look of pure dismay was enough to make Harry wish he’d never told her.

“I might have dreamt it,” Harry added, quickly.

“Why didn’t you say anything?” Hermione demanded. “Oh, Harry…”

“Because it might be nothing,” said Harry, putting his hands in his pockets. “It was once. Or twice. Just twice. And I got back to sleep afterwards.”

“We’re going to have to bring this up,” Hermione declared, looking concerned.

“Bring this up where?” Harry asked, stomach churning.

“In the meeting, Harry.”

“No way,” Harry said, shaking his head. “I’m not having them think I’m some sort of-“

“For heaven’s sake, you’re Head of Law Enforcement!” Hermione exclaimed. “This may be important! Your scar shouldn’t be hurting. There’s no logical way that it could have-”

“Like I said, it was late and-“

“-unless it’s linked to Voldemort,” Hermione finished powerfully.

“It doesn’t confirm anything,” Harry said quickly. “We can’t treat this like evidence. We’re on high-alert already.”

Hermione frowned and looked down at her papers. The recent resurgence in pro-Voldemort support added to this new development from Harry made her wish Ron was at her side. It was a frightening set of circumstances which she very much hoped were purely coincidental.

“Doesn’t it all add up?” Hermione said. “The theory that some trace of him is still here?”

“If that’s the case then those with Dark Marks will be able to tell us,” Harry answered, sitting down on a desk grimly.

“I don’t like this, Harry. I really don’t.”

Harry took a deep breath.

“Look, I’d really appreciate it if we could keep this between us just until-“

“That’s impossible, Harry,” said Hermione apologetically. “I’m not just your friend. I’m the Minister for Magic. I have a duty. And so do you.”

“I don’t want them thinking I’m after attention. You know how people take it…”

“I do know that and I understand,” said Hermione. “But I think we ought to be transparent about this. Haven’t we already agreed to do better than those who came before us? Even if that makes us unpopular?”
“Yes,” Harry agreed reluctantly.

“And you forget how times have changed. They respect you, Harry. They’re saying Law Enforcement’s never been so effective. And I have to agree. Your team is terrific, and you lead them excellently. Without you the Ministry wouldn’t be half as successful as it is. People know that. Think of all the good you’ve done. I’m sure half of the population of Azkaban is there thanks to you - and all taken in unharmed. It’s truly fantastic.”

Harry took a sudden interest in his right shoe, face reddening.

“I… thanks,” he muttered.

“So we’re going to be honest in there, Harry. We’re going to do our jobs. It’s for the best.”

Harry knew there was no use in arguing. He raised his head wearily.

“You know, it’s pretty hard not to panic when we’re thinking some part of him might be back,” Harry admitted.

“I know,” Hermione agreed. “But like I said, we’re the Ministry now. It’s up to us to panic in private. Ready?”

Harry nodded.

Together, Harry and Hermione entered the Grand Meeting Room. It was a fairly good turn-out, all things considered. Most of the seats in the first five rows were full, and a couple of people stood by the doors at the back of the room.

Hermione and Harry stepped up onto the stage. Hermione took the central spot, and Harry stood to her right.

From his raised position, Harry spotted Ginny and Ron immediately in the second row, their red hair standing out from the rest of the crowd. Ginny mouthed the word: ‘scar?’ at Harry, and Harry nodded his head in answer. Ginny looked relieved that he’d plucked up the courage to tell Hermione.

And then Harry saw another familiar, although not nearly as friendly face a short distance from his wife and best friend. Draco Malfoy was in attendance in the third row, looking frustrated by the wait, one eyebrow raised. Harry decided it was best not to meet his eyes.

“Order. Order,” Hermione declared. “Do I have to conjure silence?”

Taking out her wand was enough to cause the room to fall obediently silent, all eager to hear what the Minister for Magic had to say.

“Good,” said Hermione, sounding pleased. “Welcome to this Extraordinary General Meeting. I’m so pleased so many of you could make it. The wizarding world has been living in peace now for many years. It’s twenty-two years since we defeated Voldemort at the Battle of Hogwarts and I’m delighted to say there is a new generation being brought up having known only the slightest conflict. Until now. Harry?”

Harry stepped forward, clearing his throat.

“Voldemort’s allies have been showing movement for a few months now,” he explained. “We’ve followed trolls making their way across Europe, giants starting to cross the seas, and the
werewolves - well, I’m distressed to say we lost sight of them some weeks ago.”

A few witches and wizards tutted at that. Harry felt sure that Draco Malfoy had been one of them.

“We don’t know where they’re going or who encouraged them to move,” Harry continued. “But we are aware they are moving - and we are concerned what it might mean. So we’re asking - if anyone has seen anything. Felt anything? If you could raise a wand, we will hear everyone speak.”

Only one person raised their wand. Harry looked gratefully at Professor McGonagall, who was sitting in the first row. It was good of her to have made it at all, considering her Hogwarts students would be arriving that evening.

“Professor McGonagall - thank you.”

“It did look like the Potions stores had been interfered with when we returned from summer break,” said Minerva. “But not a huge amount of ingredients were missing, some Boomslang skin and lacewing flies, nothing on the Restricted Register. We put it down to Peeves.”

“Thank you, Professor,” said Hermione, frowning with thought. “We shall investigate.”

She and Harry both looked around the room again, but nobody else seemed to want to speak. From the crowd, Ron gave a sympathetic shrug.

“Nobody else?” Hermione asked. “Fine, and - gravest of all - and this hasn’t been the case since Voldemort - Harry’s scar is hurting again.”

Harry felt his face flush with embarrassment, but he refused to lower his head. He wished Hermione had made it sound slightly more impressive and substantial than that.

“Voldemort is dead,” came a posh, drawling voice from the crowd. “Voldemort is gone.”

“Yes, Draco, Voldemort is dead,” Hermione agreed, correctly identifying the source of the comments before she had even spotted him. “But these things all lead us to think that there is a possibility that Voldemort - or some trace of Voldemort - might be back.”

Now that got a reaction. The room filled with muted whispers. Harry waited for them to die down before asking anything else.

“Now, this is difficult but we have to ask it to rule it out,” Harry said, determinedly not looking at the third row. “Those of you with a Dark Mark… have you felt anything? Even a twinge?”

The whole room of wizards appeared to turn to Draco Malfoy, who, to his credit, did not acknowledge them and kept his pointed chin high. He was not the only wizard with Death Eater connections in the room, but with his rather distinctive look and status, he was the first that sprang to mind for most.

“Back to being prejudiced against those with a Dark Mark are we, Potter?” Draco snarled, looking furious.

Hermione shook her head swiftly.

“No, Draco,” she said, trying to smooth the situation over for the grieving widower. “Harry is simply trying to-“

“You know what this is about?” Draco said loudly, now definitely addressing the room at large.
“Harry just wants his face back in the newspapers again. We’ve had rumours of Voldemort coming back from the Daily Prophet once a year every year-“

Harry had been biting his tongue, but his growing rage was getting the better of him.

“None of those rumours came from me!” he exclaimed.

“Really?” Draco scoffed, turning to look at several of the witches and wizards surrounding him.

“Doesn’t your wife edit the Daily Prophet?”

Ginny, who was sitting in the row in front of Draco, shot to her feet.

“The sports pages!” she pointed out, as Ron stood up beside her.

Hermione, sensing an argument, stepped forward again.

“Draco,” she tried. "Harry brought this matter to the attention of the Ministry… and I, as Minister for Magic-“

“A vote you only won because you are his friend,” Draco declared, damningly.

Ron appeared to lunge towards the row behind him and Ginny only just managed to hold him back.

“How do you want a smack in the mouth?” he demanded, fists clenched.

Draco looked Ron up and down coolly, as though he thought him most uncivilised. Hermione shook her head at Ron, and reluctantly, he settled back into his seat, his face almost as red as his hair.

“Face it,” Draco continued, more boldly than even Harry was used to. “His celebrity impacts upon you all. And how better to get everyone whispering the Potter name again than with ‘my scar is hurting, my scar is hurting’.”

Ginny was keeping a close watch on Ron, who looked about ready to jump to his feet again. Professor McGonagall tutted at Draco Malfoy, but did not speak against him. Nobody quite seemed prepared to cross swords with a man who had lost his wife and only just returned to public life.

“And do you know what this all means?” Draco continued with furious disgust. “That the gossipmongers once again have an opportunity to defame my son with these ridiculous rumours about his parentage.”

“Draco,” Harry said with forced calm. “No one is saying this has anything to do with Scorpius…”

Simply hearing his son’s name coming from Harry’s mouth appeared enough to rile Draco Malfoy almost beyond reason.

“Well, I, for one, think this meeting is a sham,” Draco declared, rather impressively. “And I’m leaving.”

Draco stalked down his aisle and then turned with a dramatic sweep of his cloak, heading for the exit.

There was a moment of silence, and then suddenly, others got to their feet also, starting to follow him. A considerable group of the assembled witches and wizards began to disperse. Harry watched them go with disappointment and infuriation. Hermione, however, seemed immensely distressed by this (all too predictable) outcome.
“No,” she called out. “That’s not the way… come back. We need a strategy.”

But it was too late. It was clear the meeting was over.

“Make sure to let us know if you hear anything,” Harry said, rather lamely, to the remaining crowd. “And we’ll update you as soon as we can.”

It wasn’t much use. Nobody was listening.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I'm not going to spoil the plot for anyone who is reading this without knowing what's coming next, but the dialogue where Hermione just discards a very important piece of info at that meeting is so cringeworthy to me. Hermione Jean Granger would never do that.

Anyway, hope you enjoy! I love writing more of Harry's perspective. He's my favourite character in the whole HP universe. I mean obviously I love Albus and Scorpius a lot, but HP is forever my fave.

Please do leave me a comment if you enjoyed this! They make my life!

xxx
Act One: Scenes Thirteen and Fourteen

Chapter Notes

This one is mostly script-based but I've stuck in a bit of my own dialogue.

The scene is actually really short (to read) so I've beefed it out a bit.

Hope you enjoy!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

St Oswald’s Home for Old Witches and Wizards was just as wonderful and terrifying as Albus had suspected.

From the outside, it looked like a perfectly normal, perfectly respectable building. Like any old people’s home you might see on the street. If you looked into any of the windows, you could see little old men and women sitting serenely in comfy floral armchairs, several dozing happily, a couple dribbling over their hot, hearty dinners.

At first it had been a slightly depressing picture of old age...

“And you’re sure he’ll be here?” Scorpius asked Albus a little nervously, wiping his muddy shoes on the pavement. They’d survived the 'three mile' (which had actually turned out to be about five miles complete with hills and rocks and general unpleasantness) hike without being stopped or giving up, so that was something. Scorpius didn't think he'd ever seen Albus so determined. His usually pessimistic friend hadn't complained once during the journey. He seemed invigorated by his own sense of heroism.

“Yes,” Albus said with confidence. “Delphi said so. She said visit anytime. Anyway, I doubt he gets out much.”

Scorpius peered as politely as possible into the front window of the building.

“Is he in there?” he asked, wondering why none of the elderly residents looked particularly alarmed, cross, or even interested that two teenage boys were staring in at them.

Albus, who was not nearly so subtle, pressed his nose against the glass and made a sort of shield above his eyebrows with his hands so he could see through the window better without the reflection of the light getting in the way.

He had a vague idea of what Amos Diggory looked like, but he didn’t want to admit to Scorpius that he wasn’t entirely sure he could pick him out of a crowd…

“No. Must be in his room,” Albus answered, wiping the mark he’d made on the glass with his sleeve.
“And what if he doesn’t want to see you?”

“Why wouldn’t he?” Albus asked, looking surprised by the question.

Scorpius could think of a great many reasons why Amos Diggory might not be pleased to see Harry Potter’s son. But there was no use for negativity now. They were right outside and as his father always told him, you should never waste time. If you were going to do something then you simply worked hard until the job was done.

Together, the boys walked towards the front doors. There was a small keypad and speaker beside the entrance, and a button which Albus assumed was meant to announce their arrival.

With a here we go glance at Scorpius, Albus pressed down on the buzzer and leaned in towards the speaker.

“Hello, St Oswald’s,” came an upbeat woman’s voice.

“Er, hi,” Albus answered in what he hoped was a jaunty and totally not suspicious voice. “We’re here to see Amos Diggory. Family friends, you know?”

There was a short pause in which Albus hoped very much that security wasn’t being called, but then the buzzer made a dull noise and the front doors clicked open.

So far, so good, thought Albus.

He led an anxious (but also rather excited) looking Scorpius through the front doors and into the entrance hall.

The two boys were greeted at the reception area by a smiling woman at a desk.

“You’re here to see Amos?” she asked them in friendly tones.

Albus swallowed.

“Yeah, like I said, we’re family friends.”

The woman glanced at the two boys, who both looked very sweet (albeit windswept). It was lovely, she thought, that Amos had some visitors. Delphi had said she was expecting Amos to have a special visit soon, but part of her had assumed Delphi was just being optimistic as per usual. Amos Diggory was, after all, not an easy man to be around. He pushed a great many of his friends away.

“Well, he’ll be so glad to see you,” the woman said kindly. “Those doors there. He should be about. Have a hunt.”

I'm not actually one hundred percent sure I know what he looks like somehow did not strike Albus as a sensible comment to make, not to mention he didn't want Scorpius to think he'd messed up, and so he kept the thought to himself.

Albus nodded and Scorpius gave a polite smile. They had just turned to follow her directions, when the woman called out again.

“Wait just a minute!”

The boys exchanged a look of horror. They were done for, surely? The woman had noticed their age and was going to ask why they weren’t at school. Or she had remembered, suddenly, that
Amos Diggory had no family friends left…

If they’d been discovered then there was only one thing for it. A plan had been discussed at length on the hike over, and it involved two stages. The first stage consisted mostly of Scorpius being charming, delightful, and apologetic. And if that failed, Albus was going to attempt to argue their way out of trouble.

Albus turned with what he hoped was a perfectly neutral expression.

“What am I like, eh? Sorry boys, you need to sign the visitor’s book. I’m always forgetting about that! Head like a sieve, me!”

The friendly woman pointed her wand at an open book on her desk.

Scorpius took it upon himself to save the day. He wandered over to the desk again with his friendly smile, took the offered pen, and then wrote a pair of entirely plausible, generic names that absolutely were not theirs in the book. He finished signing with a faux-confident flourish and handed the pen back with another smile.

It had never struck Albus quite how charming Scorpius could be when he put his mind to it. The woman at the desk clearly thought he was a delightful young man.

She even gave a little wave (which Scorpius returned) as they walked down the corridor towards the living room doors.

“Here goes,” Albus muttered to Scorpius, who gave him a nervous little smile in return. He pushed on the large wooden double doors and took a deep breath.

+++ 

It was chaos. It was magic.

Albus wasn’t sure what he’d been expecting the inside of St Oswald’s to look like, but it certainly wasn’t this. Zimmer frames had been conjured to life, knitting wool enchanted into magnificent shapes, and most notably, a group of male nurses were currently being made to dance the tango.

Clearly the serene view from the building’s windows had been a magical creation, because this was beyond strange. Albus supposed had a Muggle caught sight of the actual goings on within St Oswald’s they might well have had a heart attack.

“Oh, wow,” Scorpius breathed out. Albus quite agreed.

The boys entered the room rather tentatively. The walls were painted a calming minty green and covered in paintings of dogs and cats, several of which moved about, although most were asleep. The carpet was one of those foul deep red and brown patterned monstrosities which had probably been chosen to hide any unpleasant stains…

Albus had to admit, he felt a little scared. This was amazing and totally not what he’d expected but also… well, it was madness. He really seriously hoped that the male nurses still dancing across the room with blank, peaceful eyes were okay with being the evening’s entertainment…

Scorpius was intimidated too, and excited. But also he felt just the tiniest bit queasy. He didn’t think it had anything to do with the long hike on an empty stomach either.

Seeing the nurses, the medication, the equipment, all so familiar… it gave him a swooping
sensation in his stomach. A wheelchair stood folded up in the corner. One old man’s hands were shaking as he tried to drink his tea…

Don’t be ridiculous, Scorpius, he told himself firmly. It’s been over a year.

Albus, meanwhile, having unsuccessfully scanned the vicinity for a man that could have been Amos, (nobody looked quite grumpy enough), had identified the group of least batty looking old people in the room, and was trying to attract their attention. It struck him that he hadn’t told the woman at the door to let Delphi know he was coming. He hoped she’d think to give her a call.

“Um… excuse me…” he tried.

It was no good. Although Albus was certain he had been heard, nobody bothered to respond to him.

Scorpius forced himself from his memories, sensing that Albus needed his help.

“Excuse me,” Scorpius said politely, using his well-mannered-young-man charm and hoping that someone would turn and acknowledge the pair of them.

But still there was no response. The radio in the corner was too loud, and Scorpius suspected more than a few of these elderly people were probably a little deaf.

“EXCUSE ME!” Albus bellowed.

Scorpius turned to Albus with a shrug.

“Oh, so this place is wild,’ he commented. It was his polite way of saying: this place is crazy and the people are crazy and we are probably crazy for being here.

“We’re looking for Amos Diggory,” Albus said loudly, hoping that someone, be it a dancing male nurse or one of the inhabitants might actually bother to respond.

At last an old woman sitting in a large green armchair, who had previously been enchanting a pair of knitting needles before her to knit an absurdly long (and absurdly ugly) green and orange scarf, turned her head.

One by one the others fell silent, or turned their heads. An elderly man relaxing on a red leather sofa actually turned onto his side to better see what was going on. The only sound that remained was that of the radio where an ancient song by Celestina Warbeck (a favourite of Albus’s grandma) was playing.

It was disconcerting how the nurses continued to dance, despite the fact nobody was watching them.

“And what’you boys want with that miserable old sod?” the knitting woman asked.

They were all watching Albus and Scorpius with unnerving intensity. Albus shifted uncomfortably, and Scorpius tried a small, hopeful, utterly unthreatening smile which nobody in the room returned.

Until that point Scorpius had imagined pretty much all old people to be cute, wizened, and friendly. It came as something of a surprise that they could be so, well… rude. As rude as everyone else.

At that moment, the wooden entrance doors opened and a familiar woman walked confidently into
the room. She beamed at Albus.

She had silver blond hair tipped with blue. She walked like someone who was extremely comfortable in her surroundings. She was actually rather pretty.

Scorpius noticed that Albus looked fairly pleased to see her.

“Albus?” exclaimed Delphi.

Albus puffed out his chest with pride at the obvious delight in her welcome. The old men and women who had been staring with intense dislike at the two ‘intruders’ instantly relaxed. If they were friends of Delphi, then they weren’t going to be made to dance the tango. Not today, anyway.

“Albus! You came? How wonderful! Come and say hello to Amos!”

With a look of: I told you so, Albus strolled confidently up to Delphi and Scorpius was left to scurry along in his wake.

“We’re not actually supposed to be here,” Albus told Delphi confidentially as she led them up a flight of stairs and down a twisting corridor with doors at regular intervals on either side.

“Ah, playing truant are we?” she asked, still grinning, like she and Albus were in on some private joke. “No worries, my lips are zipped. I wanted to run away from school tons of times. I wish I’d been brave enough to do it!”

Scorpius did not need to look at Albus to see his pride at the compliment.

“We wouldn’t usually have… you know,” Scorpius put in, upping his pace to keep up with Delphi and Albus. “Obviously education is important…but… well, some things are more important than that, aren’t they?”

Delphi turned back to glance over her shoulder at Scorpius. She had one of those gazes that could look you up and down in a second and have the measure of you.

“Oh?” she asked Scorpius. “And what things are those?”

She winked at him and Scorpius had the sudden feeling he didn’t like her very much.

“Oh, you know,” Albus cut in, wanting the attention back. “Justice, the truth. Sometimes you just have to do what’s right, don’t you?”

Delphi took one more look at Scorpius, blinked a couple of times, and then returned her gaze to Albus.

“I totally agree!” she said with enthusiasm. “It’s so good of you to come!”

She didn’t even know why they were there yet, so Scorpius thought it was odd that she was so very pleased about their arrival. Or correction, she was pleased at Albus’s arrival. He, Scorpius, didn’t seem to have made a particularly favourable impression on the pretty young woman.

Delphi paused outside of a door on the right, and put a finger to her lips to indicate they ought to keep their voices down.

“So what is it you wanted to say to Amos?” she asked.

Scorpius frowned. How did she know they had anything to say to him at all?
“I’d rather tell him directly,” Albus responded. Scorpius noticed he was using his grown-up voice. It was far deeper than usual. “If that’s okay. I mean, it’s quite… important.”

Delphi nodded her head like she entirely understood. Like she thought Albus was an incredibly noble person for being so discreet and honourable.

“Oh, I understand. It’s just, if you were to tell me first, I could explain it to him beforehand. It might be better coming from me. I am family after all.”

Albus looked uncertain. He turned to Scorpius to see what he thought.

“I think that’s probably a good idea,” Scorpius agreed. He knew (from experience) that important, potentially emotional news was far better coming from a family member or a person you loved.

“Oh,” Albus agreed. “But it’s… well, it’s sort of a big deal.”

Delphi widened her eyes and put on her best listening face.

+++ 

After hearing the entirety of the plan and not commenting much on it, other than to make several shocked and admiring facial expressions, Delphi had disappeared into the little room in order to prepare her uncle for the news.

The boys were left standing outside in the corridor, Albus trying to listen in on the conversation, and Scorpius thinking hard.

“This feels strange, doesn’t it?” Scorpius commented eventually.

Albus moved away from the door and turned to his friend. He hadn’t been able to hear a thing anyway. It seemed that the rooms had charms on the doors to stop people from overhearing any private conversations. James had tried one of those on his bedroom door once and when their mother had found out, he’d been in a lot of trouble.

“Being out of school?”

Scorpius nodded.

“Do you think they’ll have noticed we’re gone yet?”

Albus shook his head with feeling.

“Scorpius, who even notices our existence when we are there? They’re not going to realise we’re missing for ages yet.”

Scorpius supposed he had a point. Licking his lips, he prepared his next question.

“So, this Delphi,” he said casually. “What do you think?”

“What d’you mean?” Albus asked, frowning.

Scorpius was unwilling to elaborate.

“She’s very… helpful, isn’t she?” he managed to say.

“Well, yes, of course she is. Some people are just like that. You know, friendly.”
Scorpius hadn’t found Delphi to be particularly friendly, at least not to him.

“Can you imagine having your hair that colour?” Scorpius asked. “I mean, blue! Just at the ends! It’s a little… wild, isn’t it?”

“It looks good, though,” Albus said.

Scorpius went quiet and thought hard.

He was interrupted (thankfully) by Delphi opening the door and poking her head out with a smile.

“Amos is ready to see you now,” she told the boys brightly. She even gave Albus a little thumbs up.

With a nervous glance at each other, Albus and Scorpius entered.

+++ Amos’s room was a fairly cheerful place. The walls had been painted an optimistic lemon and a vase of fresh flowers sat on the windowsill.

On his bedside table was a frame in which was a photo of Delphi, her eyes wide and mouth open as she laughed, the sunlight falling on her skin and making her glow. The Delphi in the photograph seemed trapped in an endless loop of joy as she laughed at whatever the photographer had said, covered her eyes with mirth, and then threw back her head and laughed again. Next to it was another frame in which a handsome young man with light brown hair and grey eyes smiled almost shyly out of the frame. He hardly moved at all, only blinked every so often and glanced in the direction of his father with a concerned expression.

There was a radio in one corner, and the room smelled clean and fragrant.

All in all, the room was a fairly pleasant, happy environment.

The only thing in the room which ruined the uplifting effect was Amos himself.

As the boys were led in, the old man stared at them with deep irritation. He had the sort of face that may once have been handsome and even kind, but had soured with grief. He seemed the sort of man that would endure no teasing whatsoever, that might snap at a single word. It was hard to believe he and Delphi were even distantly related.

Albus had the horrible sensation that he was intruding, but it was too late to turn back now. The old man was waiting, and no matter how hostile the reception, he was doing a good thing, wasn’t he? it was the right thing to do.

Amos was sitting propped up in his hospital bed. The cushions behind him looked freshly plumped, and despite his stern expression, Amos Diggory looked like a man that was being well looked after.

Just visible behind the two portraits on the bedside table were numerous potions that Albus assumed were there to ease the old man’s pain. A crossword puzzle was laying discarded on the sheets, along with a quill which somehow was not leaking ink all over the white linen.

Delphi went to stand unobtrusively in the corner with a soft, indulgent look at her uncle. Clearly she didn’t want to intrude and was leaving them to it.
“So let me get this straight,” the old man began, with a voice so hoarse that Albus wished he would cough. “You overhear a conversation - a conversation which was not meant for you to overhear - and you decide - without prompting - in fact, without leave - to interfere, and interfere hard, in someone else’s business.”

Well, at least there was no danger of Amos Diggory skirting around the point…

Albus decided his best bet was to be as honest and straightforward as possible. With an encouraging nod from Scorpius, he stepped forward.

“My father lied to you - I know he did - they do have a Time-Turner.”

“Of course they do. You can move along now.”

Albus had not been expecting a response like that. That was supposed to be his big reveal! His moment of glory! His gesture of kindness in contrast to the selfish distance of his father.

He looked to Delphi, wondering if she had given the game away, but she shook her head at him with wide eyes.

Trying to recover himself, Albus took another breath.

“What? No. We’re here to help.”

Scorpius nodded kindly at Amos.

Amos took one long look from the nervous blond Malfoy lad to the shifty looking Potter boy with the dark messy hair and decided he didn’t like them. Boys of around their age never agreed with Amos Diggory. They brought back too many unpleasant memories of fourteen year old Cedric who had been so kind, so polite, so very, very full of life, his whole future ahead of him…

“Help?” the old man repeated. “What use could a pair of undersized teenagers be for me?”

Albus thought the ‘undersized’ part was a bit harsh. Yes, he was probably a bit short for his age, but bringing that up was way below the belt.

“My father proved you don’t have to be grown up to change the wizarding world,” he declared, trying to sound more confident than he felt.

But the old man was sharp and pulling no punches.

“So I should allow you to get involved because you’re a Potter? Relying on your famous name are you?”

“No!” Albus exclaimed, horrified at the idea.

“A Potter who is in Slytherin House? Yes, I’ve read about you - and who brings a Malfoy with him to visit me - a Malfoy who may be a Voldemort? Who’s to say you’re not involved in Dark Magic?”

That was so deeply unfair that Albus couldn’t think of an adequate response. He’d never imagined offering to help someone could be so difficult.

“But-“

Amos turned his head stiffly, clearly attempting to end the conversation.
“Your information was obvious but the confirmation is useful. Your father did lie. Now leave. The pair of you. And stop wasting my time.”

Albus was at a loss. He turned to Scorpius who was pressing his lips together with embarrassment. He’d gone a little red in the face, too. If this had been any other situation Albus would have given old Amos Diggory a piece of his mind for bringing up the Voldemort rumour in front of Scorpius.

But as it was, he had a job to do, a right to wrong, and he was going to do it.

“No,” he said, with real strength in his voice.

Amos raised an eyebrow and Albus drew power from that tiny gesture. It meant the old man was listening.

“You need to listen to me, you said it yourself - how much blood is on my father’s hands. Let me help you change that. Let me help correct one of his mistakes. Trust me.”

“Did you not hear me, boy!!” Amos shouted in response. “I see no reason to trust you. So go. Now! Before I make you leave…”

Amos raised his wand in his wrinkled hand. His arm might have been shaking, but he was aiming directly at Albus’s face and looked pretty determined.

Albus looked at the wand and deflated. He could have cried. How could someone turn down an offer like that? There he was, offering to go against his own father to do what was right, and instead of thanks he’d been crushed. He’d risked potential expulsion for Amos and this was all the thanks he got? It wasn’t fair. Nothing was.

“Come on, mate,” Scorpius said quietly, placing a gentle hand on Albus’s arm. “If there’s one thing we’re good at, it’s knowing where we’re not wanted.”

Albus was reluctant to leave, but Scorpius was all too aware that this old man was not messing about. He used the hand on Albus’s arm to pull him back slightly, urging him to drop this and leave with him. If he was honest, Scorpius had a bad feeling about this whole venture. What had previously filled him with excitement now struck him as an adventure too big, too real, too, well… messy for them to handle.

With a sigh of disappointment, Albus turned. Scorpius allowed himself to breathe again as he started to lead his best friend away. Crisis averted.

“I can think of one reason why you should trust them, Uncle,” said Delphi suddenly.

The boys stopped walking. Scorpius had forgotten she was even in the room.

“They’re the only ones volunteering to help. They’re prepared to bravely put themselves at risk to return your son to your side. In fact, I’m pretty sure they put themselves at risk even getting here…”

Albus was the first to turn back around. With a grimace, Scorpius followed suit.

“This is Cedric we’re talking about…” Amos said to his niece, sounding unsure.

“And - didn’t you say yourself - having someone inside Hogwarts might be a massive advantage?”

The young woman leaned down to kiss the top of her uncle’s head, and the old man seemed to
soften. He seemed more vulnerable suddenly, more human. He looked up at his niece, who was smiling encouragingly, and then turned once again to Albus and Scorpius.

Delphi’s words in their defence seemed to have swayed him.

“Why?” he asked Albus. “Why do you want to put yourself at risk? What’s in it for you?”

Albus felt relief flooding his veins. If it hadn’t been for Delphi this whole plan would have been a disaster and they’d have gained nothing from their moment of rebellion.

“I know what it is to be the spare. Your son didn’t deserve to be killed, Mr Diggory. We can help you get him back.”

Amos blinked a couple of times, and then to Albus’s horror, tears appeared in the old man’s tiny eyes.

“My son - my son was the best thing that ever happened to me - and you’re right it was an injustice - a gross injustice - if you’re serious…”

“We’re deadly serious,” Albus confirmed.

Amos took a breath.

“This is going to be dangerous,” he warned Albus, who he saw as ever so slightly more trustworthy than the Malfoy boy.

“We know.”

“Do we?” Scorpius asked. Everyone ignored him.

“Delphi - perhaps if you were prepared to accompany them?” Amos suggested, glancing hopefully at his niece.

“If that would make you happy, Uncle,” Delphi agreed.

The young woman smiled warmly at Albus, and feeling hugely relieved, Albus smiled right back.

“You do understand even getting the Time-Turner will risk your lives.”

Albus did understand that. He knew what he was getting himself into and he was ready for it. It was the right thing to do. Sometimes sacrifices had to be made.

“We’re ready to put our lives at risk,” he promised solemnly.

“Are we?” Scorpius asked again.

Albus gave him a look and he fell silent.

The old man sat back in his bed. It was obvious that the movement caused him pain. He surveyed these two young men, these children, that were his only hope now. A Malfoy and a Potter. How had his life ever come to this?

He turned his head (with some discomfort) to glance at the photograph of his beloved son. Cedric smiled blandly back at him. Amos would have given anything to hear his voice again.

“I hope you have it in you,” Amos Diggory said gravely.
Chapter End Notes

Scorpius is a sweet jealous little child. Bless his soul.

(Comments make my life. I read them all. I squeal when I get a notification!)

XXX
Harry was giving the finishing touches to dinner. After a hectic day at the Ministry (and today had been beyond hectic), it soothed him to get back to his kitchen and cook. Ginny couldn’t understand why he didn’t use the shortcuts that most wizards did when cooking, but Harry found there was a relaxation in the methodical chopping of vegetables and the grating of cheese. When he could apparently get nothing else right, at least Harry Potter could cook a good meal.

It was probably one of the only useful life skills he’d learned growing up with the Dursleys.

Hermione, Ron, and Ginny sat at the Potters’ kitchen table. Ron and Ginny had been arguing lightly about the Chudley Cannons’ chances in the Quidditch league for the past twenty minutes while Hermione pored over tomorrow’s edition of the Prophet (obtained by Ginny), worrying herself over the scaremongering she could already see scattered in almost every article.

Harry brought his homemade lasagne to the table in a casserole dish. Ron immediately abandoned his conversation, mouth watering.

“I love lasagna,” Ron declared. “Gin, remember when Mum used to make it?”

“In that massive old dish,” Ginny agreed. “It was hideous. Flowers all over it.”

“Ginormous, it was. Harry, this is amazing - how you cook without magic. I mean, Mum can cook, and I mean really cook, but she never did it all by hand.”

Harry went warm with pride. It was still puzzling to him, after cooking for the Dursleys so many times and being told he was useless, that he had something of a talent for it. But lots of things caused this same almost disbeliefing surprise in Harry. All these years later, he was still battling to force the demeaning, belittling words of the Dursleys out of his subconscious.

“It’s fairly relaxing,” Harry admitted, as he took a seat. “Helps me unwind, you know?”

“I am a very lucky woman,” Ginny declared with a teasing smile. “He cooks, he cleans, he fights crime, and he’s handsome too…”

“Get a room, you two,” Ron said, helping himself. “Mate, honestly, this looks even better than your cottage pie, and your cottage pie is legendary.”

Hermione was still looking distracted, and so Ron helped her to a sizeable portion of lasagna and even put a piece of garlic bread on her plate. He reached out to rub his wife’s back gently, bringing her back to the present. Almost immediately Hermione remembered her manners and gave Harry a
“This looks lovely, Harry. Thank you,” said Hermione, as she tucked in. “But we really do need to figure out how best to deal with this. We have a situation on our hands and I’m not sure how we contain it.”

Harry wasn’t keen on discussing work over dinner, but he was resigned to it by now. He supposed Hermione didn’t have the luxury of separating her work and home life. With the whole of the Ministry relying on her, she never really stopped.

“Well, I say we start by making sure Draco Malfoy keeps his mouth shut,” Ron said darkly as he shovelled lasagna into his mouth. “Who invited him anyway?”

“He had a right to be there, Ron,” Hermione said sternly.

“Nobody wanted him there, though,” Ron pointed out with brutal honesty. “Look, the Ministry’s changed. Nobody wants to lick his shoes for being a Malfoy. His name’s not going to get him anywhere, not now they don’t take bribes. What’s the point of him even turning up? He’s never got anything good to say. I liked it better when he stayed in his bloody Manor.”

Ginny narrowed her eyes at her brother reproachfully.

“At least he got out of the house,” Ginny said. “He was at the platform this morning to see Scorpius off.”

“Imagine having him turn up to see you off, cane and all. I wouldn’t be able to jump on the Hogwarts Express fast enough,” Ron remarked.

“I feel sorry for him, I really do,” Hermione said with a sigh. “But I’ve told him again and again - no one in the Ministry is saying anything about Scorpius. The rumours aren’t coming from us.”

“I wrote to him,” admitted Ginny. “After he lost Astoria - to ask if there’s anything we could do. I thought maybe - as he was such a good friend to Albus - maybe Scorpius might want to stay over part of the Christmas break or…”

Both Harry and Ron looked so obviously appalled by this idea that Ginny abandoned it.

“My owl came back with a letter containing one simple sentence: ‘Tell your husband to refute these allegations about my son once and for all.’”

“The bloody cheek of it-“ Ron declared.

“He’s obsessed,” Hermione agreed sadly, shaking her head.

“He’s a mess,” said Ginny. “A grieving mess.”

Harry sighed. He felt sorry for Draco too, of course he did. But he couldn’t help but wonder if Ron had the right idea. After all, the Extraordinary General Meeting had only fallen apart after Draco opened his mouth. He’d single-handedly managed to wreck something Hermione had taken time and effort to arrange, and now they were no further forward, not to mention that he’d been publicly humiliated over his scar, just like the old days.

Grieving or not, Harry couldn’t find it in his heart to feel sympathy for Draco Malfoy right then. Not when the Prophet would be full of stories about his own assumed melodramatics tomorrow.
“And I’m sorry for his loss,” Ron said with a shrug, speaking Harry’s thoughts aloud. “But when he accuses Hermione of… well…”

Ron glanced over at Harry, who still looked pale and troubled. That wouldn’t do. Ron was determined to cheer him up. If he couldn’t do that, then what sort of a best friend was he anyway?

“Oi, droopy drawers,” Ron said, throwing a napkin across the table at Harry. “Like I say to her all the time, it could be nothing.”

“Her?” Hermione repeated, eyebrows raised.

“The trolls could be going to a party, the giants to a wedding, you could be getting bad dreams because you’re worried about Albus, and your scar could be hurting because you’re getting old.”

“Getting old?” Harry said, but he grinned. “Thanks, mate.”

Immensely relieved by Harry’s smile, Ron continued.

“Honestly, every time I sit down now I make an ‘ooof’ noise,” Ron said. “An ‘ooof’. And my feet - the trouble I’m having with my feet - I could write songs about the pain my feet give me - maybe your scar is like that?”

“You talk a lot of rubbish,” Ginny declared, rolling her eyes. But she, too, seemed rather more cheerful.

“I consider it my speciality,” Ron agreed. “That and my range of Skiving Snackboxes. And my love for all of you. Even Skinny Ginny.”

“Before you start, it’s not a diet, it’s called eating healthily,” Ginny retorted. “Maybe if you tried it you wouldn’t make an ‘ooof’ noise every time you sat down? And call me Skinny Ginny again and I will tell Mum.”

“You wouldn’t,” Ron said.

“Do you want to try me?”

Harry had been watching the exchange with amusement, but Hermione still looked contemplative.

“If some part of Voldemort survived, in whatever form, we need to be prepared,” Hermione said frowning. “And I’m scared.”

Ginny, Ron, and Harry all looked over at Hermione, rather startled by that last, honest declaration.

“I’m scared too,” Ginny agreed kindly, reaching out to pat Hermione on the arm.

“Nothing scares me,” declared Ron. “Apart from Mum.”

“I mean it, Harry,” Hermione continued. “I will not be Cornelius Fudge on this one. I will not stick my head in the sand. And I don’t care how unpopular that makes me with Draco Malfoy.”

“You never really were one for popularity were you?” Ron said, a teasing look on his face, apparently still determined to lighten the tone of the evening.

Hermione went to give her husband a nudge, but Ron scooted out of the way.

“Missed.”
Ginny raised an eyebrow, didn’t avert her eyes from Hermione, and elbowed her brother (rather gently) in the ribs.

“Hit,” Ron announced, pretending to double over. Harry managed a laugh at that. “A very solid hit. Guess the new diet’s giving you extra strength, Gin-“

As Ginny went to retaliate, an owl flew suddenly into the room through the kitchen window. It swooped in low and dropped a letter on Harry’s plate.

“Bit late for an owl, isn’t it?” Hermione asked, frowning curiously (and rather nosily) at the letter.

Wiping the remnants of lasagna from the envelope, Harry pulled out the letter, eyes widening with surprise at the address on the parchment.

“It’s from Professor McGonagall,” Harry revealed.

Ron waited (with some pride) to hear what new prank James had carried out this time.

“What does it say?” Ginny asked, putting down her fork.

Harry’s face dropped, and even Ron stopped smiling.

“Ginny, it’s Albus,” Harry breathed out, green eyes still scanning the page with dismay. “Albus and Scorpius. They never made it to school. They’re missing!”

Chapter End Notes

I added some dialogue at the start and changed a few tiny bits but mostly this is script dialogue. I wrote out the hitting because I really hate that trope where women can just hit men and it's supposed to be funny (because it really isn't). Instead I replaced it with nudges, which I hope works better.

I know this scene is kind of slow but it's in the script so I've included it. I hope my added dialogue gives it a tiny bit more life but I do totally see that this one is a filler. Anyway, I wanted this novelisation to be more complete so that's why it's here.

Please leave me a comment if you enjoyed!

xxx
The plan was simple. (At least, according to Albus and Delphi.) The three of them were going to use Polyjuice Potion to transform themselves into Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Harry Potter. They were then going to infiltrate the Ministry, find the recovered Time-Turner and use it to travel back about twenty years and save the life of Cedric Diggory.

All things considered…. it was ridiculous. Scorpius could not believe they were even contemplating the idea, let alone preparing to carry it out.

To begin with, Scorpius had pointed out that Polyjuice Potion needed at least one month to complete. Any less than that and the three of them could be damaged beyond repair.

But surprise surprise, Delphi had some ready-made Polyjuice Potion which she was generously surrendering to their cause, right there in the medication storage section of St Oswald’s.

Albus thought Delphi was a genius for having thought so far ahead.

Scorpius was less convinced.

“I mean... that’s very clever of you,” Scorpius had remarked. “But how did you know we’d-“

Delphi cut him off in an instant.

“He’s my uncle,” Delphi said with a shrug. “I’d do anything for him. And he’s dying.”

“So you were going to use the Polyjuice Potion?” Scorpius clarified.

“I was keeping my options open,” Delphi said, repeating the gesture.

That little surprise had been such a welcome one that Scorpius was determined not to wonder if this was all too good to be true.

But the second shock came when Albus had reached into his pocket moments afterwards and pulled out a tiny clear plastic bag.
It took Scorpius a moment to realise that in that bag, he could see a fingernail clipping, and a dark brown, curly hair. He almost jumped back with disgust.

“Albus - why on earth do you have those?” Scorpius exclaimed, staring at the little plastic bag with mild horror.

“Delphi isn’t the only one who can plan ahead,” Albus had said with a grin. “I knew getting into the Ministry might be hard, so I thought these would come in handy. I hadn’t counted on Delphi making the Potion already, though. I thought we’d have to start from scratch!”

What was wrong with these people? Was everyone planning months ahead and Scorpius simply hadn’t gotten the memo? Should he have been privately brewing some Felix Felicis for the past six months, just on the off chance he might get some use out of it?

Delphi and Albus had exchanged a high five and then Delphi had taken the bag and sounded more excited about seeing a half bitten fingernail than any human had a right to be.

“So, we have,” she announced, like a gameshow host. “One curly hair, from the head of none other than…”

“Aunt Hermione,” Albus confirmed. And then realising his phrasing hadn’t been particularly impressive he added: “The Minister for Magic.”

Well, this was almost definitely illegal. Scorpius wondered if he was going to end up in Azkaban at the age of fourteen. Yes, that was probably a little young, but being involved in a plot to transform someone into the Minister for Magic using Polyjuice Potion seemed like the type of crime that was so very incredibly awful they wouldn’t care what age you were.

“One charmingly bitten fingernail of…”

“Ron Weasley,” Albus revealed. “I thought since they’re married, it wouldn’t look weird if he was hanging about at the Ministry.”

Scorpius crossed his fingers and prayed hard to the forces that be that should they draw straws over who got to be who, he didn’t end up having to swallow someone’s discarded, already partly chewed fingernail.

Delphi peered at the straight dark hair at the bottom of the bag.

“And so this must belong to…”

“Harry Potter. Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Aka, my dad.”

There had been a definite hint of pride in Albus’s voice just then. Scorpius wondered if Albus even realised that.

“Hm, that’s fitting,” Delphi said, looking solemn.

After the final touches had been added to the potion by Delphi and they had changed into some more appropriate attire (selected from the St Oswald's laundry room), they decided on where they would go next.

Delphi had a few ideas in mind, (she had quite an excellent knowledge of London), and before they knew it they were sitting in a Whitehall cellar (following a swift and dizzying travel through a fireplace in St Oswald's basement) getting ready to partake in the most dangerous activity of their
It was a gloomy, filthy, really quite dismal place to begin such a massive adventure and Scorpius had been hoping for somewhere a little more comfortable, but since Albus had seated himself confidently on a large barrel of beer (not reeling at all from spinning through the Floo Network), Scorpius hopped onto the barrel beside him.

Delphi checked the three bottles she had brought with her, nodded to herself, and handed the first to Scorpius. Scorpius couldn’t help but feel that he was being tested.

He made an effort not to look too nervous as he accepted the bottle.

“So we just take it?” Scorpius asked, squinting doubtfully at the golden potion. He tried to convince himself it was a positive, uplifting colour. In reality, it reminded him a little of rust.

He supposed he should be thankful that the potion with one of Harry Potter’s dark hairs in at least smelled pleasant enough, even if the consistency was strange. The idea of consuming the hair of Albus’s father was weird enough without thinking about what was to come.

Of course he had ended up being the one chosen to play the part of Harry. Albus had been adamant he wasn’t going near the potion, and Delphi said she would prefer to have a go at being Hermione Granger. After all, it wasn’t every day one got to experience the power of being the Minister for Magic.

The bottle of potion Delphi handed Albus was a hearty orange colour and didn’t glimmer in the slightest. It looked a little like tomato soup. Warm and hearty and okay for a starter accompanied by a few bread rolls but absolutely not okay for something you wanted to drink.

This was the Polyjuice Potion that was supposed to turn Albus into his uncle Ron. Rather horrendously (in Scorpius’s opinion) Albus had declared that swallowing a fingernail was ‘no big deal’. There hadn’t been much of a choice, anyhow. A hair had been too risky, seeing as according to Albus, half his family had that exact shade of hair and it would have been too easy to pick up the wrong person’s by mistake.

“Scorpius,” Albus declared, in an alien, almost condescending voice. "Do I really need to explain to you - uber geek and Potions expert - what Polyjuice does? Thanks to Delphi’s brilliant preparation work, we are going to take this potion and be transformed, and thus disguised we will be able to enter the Ministry of Magic.”

Scorpius knew exactly what Polyjuice did, and Albus knew he knew. It was obvious Albus was simply trying to show off in front of Delphi and come across as the more able of the pair. It hurt a little. He did, however, notice the fact he’d been dubbed a ‘Potions expert’, which he supposed was nice.

Scorpius’s actual concerns were of a far less logistical nature.

“Okay, two points,” Scorpius said, taking a breath. “One: is it painful?”

“Very,” Delphi confirmed cheerfully. “As I understand it.”

“Thank you. Good to know. Second point - do either of you know what Polyjuice tastes of? Because I’ve heard it tastes of fish and if it does I will just vomit it back up. Fish doesn’t agree with me. Never has. Never will.”

“Consider us warned,” Delphi said, raising an eyebrow at Albus. She toasted him (ignoring
Scorpius), and knocked back her own potion in one. It was a deep purple shade and didn’t seem to be any trouble to drink because Delphi didn’t even wince.

Scorpius couldn’t decide if she was brave or just plain stupid. Albus was staring at her with obvious admiration. Well, Scorpius could hardly chicken out now, could he? Not after Delphi had been so incredibly impressive.

“It doesn’t taste of fish,” Delphi informed them. Scorpius’s eyes were as wide as saucers as Delphi’s skin began to bubble and stretch. Her pale skin became darker in shade, her silver blond hair turning shorter, brown and bushy.

“Actually, it tastes quite pleasant, yum!” Delphi said, in a voice becoming higher than her own. “It is painful but…”

She interrupted herself with a loud burp.

“Take it back,” she announced. “There is a - slight -“

Delphi burped once again as her body finished transforming. Everything had changed, including her posture. Even her expression seemed to alter.

“Slight - overpowering - fishy residue,” she finished in Hermione Granger’s voice.

No sign of Delphi remained. Standing before them, right there in that cellar, was the Minister for Magic, grimacing slightly and smacking her lips.

“Oh, that’s - wow!” Albus exclaimed, staring at his ‘aunt’ in awe.

“Double wow!” Scorpius agreed. For a moment, his nerves and misgivings had been overtaken by complete and utter fascination. He’d never seen a potion so fantastic! He was desperate to learn how to make one himself, just to see if he could.

“This really doesn’t feel how I - I even sound like her!” exclaimed Delphi. “Triple wow!”

Albus got up from his beer barrel with a bit of a swagger.

“Right,” he announced. “Me next.”

Scorpius was not going to be the last one to give it a go. He wanted to show Albus that he wasn’t a complete coward. He wanted to impress him. He wanted them to experience this together.

“No,” he said, getting to his feet as well and ignoring the way his knees shook. “No way, Jose. If we’re doing this, we’re doing it together.”

He picked up Harry Potter’s spare pair of glasses (which Albus had been storing in his other pocket) and put them on his nose, smiling at Albus. With a short nod to show he was ready, he raised his potion bottle. Albus did the same.

“Three,” said Albus.

Scorpius decided it was best not to think about the pain that was coming his way.

“Two.”

He also decided it was probably a good idea not to think about the taste either…
The best thing to think about, Scorpius decided, was how much this all meant to Albus.

Albus lifted his potion to his lips and Scorpius did the same. Scorpius swallowed the liquid before he had chance to change his mind.

The effect was almost instant. Scorpius felt his insides begin to writhe. He felt like he had the flu. Was he going to vomit? He seriously hoped not. Not when Delphi had managed to down hers without destroying her shoes…

The nausea passed as quickly as it came and was replaced by heat. It began as warmth and then became an intense burning sensation which spread through his whole body.

“No, that’s good,” Scorpius heard Albus say from some distance away.

It made him want to grin, hearing Albus’s voice. Either he was ignoring the pain or he was being sarcastic.

“That’s less good,” his best friend continued in a deeper voice.

Scorpius decided to keep his eyes shut for the rest of it. He didn’t want to see his own skin stretch and bubble. He became aware that he was moving up, that he was growing taller, which was a dizzying feeling, and that his thin frame was growing bigger and broader.

When the worst of it seemed to be over, Scorpius dared to open his eyes. He found Ron Weasley staring right back at him with a mixture of shock, fascination, and repulsion.

He didn’t need to see himself to know what he looked like. He was Harry Potter. There were few wizards alive who couldn’t conjure up a picture of him in their minds.

And… oh Dumbledore… he was Albus’s dad!

Apparently this confusing and sort of appalling thought had also reached Albus’s mind, because Ron, no, Albus, said:

“This is going to be slightly weird, isn’t it?”

In that moment Scorpius knew everything was going to be okay. This could be fun! An adventure! They hadn’t keeled over and died after one sip! They’d done it! Well, they’d started it, and that was the main thing. There was no question of them not going through with it now. As his father said, there was no use in a job half done.

Looking like another person was a surprisingly liberating experience. Scorpius could very well imagine how people managed to commit the most awful crimes while using Polyjuice Potion. It wasn’t quite anonymity, but there was a freedom from direct responsibility, from consequences.

If he wanted to, he thought wildly, he could… he could… strip off his clothes and run down the street naked!

He wouldn’t, of course, because he had no right, and it would be weird, and besides, this was Albus’s dad. But he still could have. And that was the exciting part.

Also, he knew it must mean Albus trusted him an awful lot, because he knew he wouldn’t be happy with many people using Polyjuice Potion to look like his own father, even if it was for a
good cause. Come to think of it, he couldn't imagine finding a single one of his father's blond hairs in the spotless Malfoy household, and he would never have dared to wander up behind him and snip away at his father's ponytail...

He checked Albus’s expression to see that he was still okay with all this. It was hard to tell now his face had been replaced with that of Ron Weasley, but he seemed to be enjoying himself. He was feeling just as exhilarated as Scorpius.

He felt silly, he felt wild. Scorpius couldn’t remember a time he’d felt so… free.

At home, he had to be on his best behaviour. Malfoy Manor was a home of worries and whispers. There’d never been any time to truly let go.

He didn’t think he’d felt as happy as this since his mother was alive.

“Go to your room!” Scorpius commanded, in a deliberately overdramatic impersonation of Harry Potter. He put his hands on his hips, spotted Albus’s expression, saw his best friend smile with Ron Weasley’s lips, and amped it up even further. “Go straight to your room! You’ve been an incredibly awful and bad son!”

Albus almost doubled over with mirth. Never had he thought the sight of his father calling him a bad son would fill him with such joy.

“Scorpius…” he managed to choke out through his laughter. He noticed he’d taken on the loud guffaw of his uncle.

Scorpius tossed his cloak dramatically over his shoulder.

“It was your idea - I be him and you be Ron! I just want to have a little fun before I…”

Scorpius suddenly burped and almost jumped out of his skin with surprise.

Albus almost burst out laughing again at the horrified look on his friend’s face and the way his hand shot embarrassedly to his mouth. Never in all his years of knowing him had Albus heard Scorpius do anything so impolite.

“Okay,” his friend commented. “So that’s utterly horrible.”

Albus beamed and then patted his stomach, noticing that it wasn’t nearly as flat as he was used to. It felt odd, carrying the extra weight.

“You know, he hides it well, but Uncle Ron’s got a bit of a gut growing,” he remarked, turning a bit on the spot to display it to its full advantage.

Delphi watched the two boys with disbelief. They seemed to have completely forgotten her presence and the point of this exercise. She was struck suddenly with how very young they were.

“We should go - don’t you think?” she prompted.

Albus immediately cleared his throat, keen not to look childish in front of her. Scorpius was slower to obey. He gave another delighted little twirl before nodding his head and mentally preparing himself for what was to come.

Delphi couldn’t help but wonder if these boys were actually mature enough to pull this off, or if they’d give the game away in ten seconds flat. But there was no going back now. They were going
to do this, and they were going to do it now.

She led the way up the stone steps and out of the cellar, the boys following her out onto the street.

Albus was trying his best to appear cool, calm, and in control. Scorpius watched his friend with interest. Even looking like Ron Weasley, the Albus mannerisms were slipping through. The walk, the specific way he swung his arms, the way he tried to seem like he didn’t care what people thought of him (but obviously did).

Even if Scorpius hadn’t been in on this plan, he felt certain he would have been able to identify his friend in an instant.

Delphi led the boys to the nearest telephone box. It was a bit of a squeeze, all three of them in there, especially now they were three fully grown adults. Albus had to bow his head a little, and Scorpius inched a little closer to Albus than he would have usually, not wanting to overcrowd Delphi since they were pretty much strangers and it would have felt discourteous.

Delphi dialled the number on the keypad calmly and almost instantly the box began to speak.


Scorpius couldn’t help but grin at Albus as the box gave a sudden jolt and then began to sink slowly into the pavement. He would have grabbed his arm but Delphi’s presence somehow made the idea seem silly.

*This may well be the most ridiculous thing I have ever done*, thought Scorpius, as the pavement rose above them.

But *wow* did it feel good.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make my life!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act One: Scene Eighteen

Chapter Notes

This one was complicated for obvious reasons! I hope I made it as clear as possible!

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed this!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The journey to the first floor had been surprisingly easy. Scorpius had been all but certain they’d be caught out by security almost the moment they entered the Ministry, but to his delight, nobody seemed to suspect a thing.

Being Harry Potter was actually rather wonderful. People stopped what they were doing to look at him as he passed. Yes, some of them were quite impolite about it, but the majority smiled and waved and greeted him. One thing was for sure, he wasn’t just your average Ministry worker. He was someone.

Albus had noticed the unusual reception ‘his father’ had received upon entering the Ministry, and he hated to admit that perhaps, just perhaps it might have been just a little bit more awkward being Harry Potter than he’d ever realised.

He could tell that Scorpius was relishing the attention, but once the novelty wore off it must have been a pain. Was his father stared at like this when he went to the loo? When he went to grab a coffee in his break? Didn’t he ever feel like telling them to stop staring and mind their own business?

Albus decided to leave that train of thought behind. He wasn’t about to start feeling sympathy for his father. Not now.

He’d been to the Ministry plenty of times, and so the thick luxurious purple carpets and gleaming mahogany doors of Level One weren’t much of a surprise. If Albus was honest, had his father not been a high ranking Ministry official, he probably would have adored the place. But his contrary nature meant that any place connected to his father was somewhere Albus instinctively disliked.

As for Scorpius, he was quite overwhelmed by the interior of the Ministry. His father had been there plenty of times, but as much as he’d begged and pleaded, Draco seemed to think it safer that Scorpius remained at home. There were a great many witches and wizards who still despised the Malfoy family, after all, and he refused to bring his young son to a place where he might be at risk, even if the only risk was hurt feelings.

For Scorpius it had been an effort not to gasp excitedly when he, Delphi, and Albus had emerged in the Atrium. Never had Scorpius imaged that a place so beautiful could exist beneath the streets of London. Coming from a rather lavish home himself, Scorpius was not often overwhelmed by architecture, but the splendid reception hall with its highly polished, dark wood floor and majestic peacock blue ceiling covered in shifting golden symbols was enough to fill him with wonder.
Delphi and Albus seemed utterly unaffected by the beauty surrounding them. Both walked with the purpose of two people on a mission. Scorpius knew they were acting their parts, but they didn’t even bother to look up as they made their way across the Atrium and to Level One. It stunned him that Albus could fail to appreciate something so beautiful.

Scorpius wished he’d been at the Ministry under different circumstances. Some of the levels sounded fascinating and he longed to visit them all. As it was, he knew they needed to be as quick as possible.

Actually, Scorpius took that wish back. Perhaps he wouldn’t like to visit the Courtrooms down on Level Ten. His grandfather had once faced trial there and subsequently been sent to Azkaban. That was one Malfoy tradition he was keen to avoid.

Delphi led the way to Level One with fierce determination. For someone who seemed so quirky and clumsy, it was astonishing how well she managed to act the part of a powerful, confident, utterly fearless woman. But Scorpius had to admit that when he’d seen himself reflected in one of the gleaming fireplaces in the Atrium, he too had found it that bit easier to imagine himself as Harry Potter.

Of the three he thought he probably had the hardest job. Delphi was playing the Minister, and everybody had either met or seen her. Hermione Granger was so instinctively careful with what she said and did that it would be hard for Delphi to go far wrong unless she started jumping about and swearing.

Albus was simply playing his uncle, which must have been easy, surely? Scorpius had a small family, (that seemed to become terrifyingly smaller every time he blinked) but he knew the mannerisms of his father, and even his late mother off by heart. If necessary he could have emulated the abrupt, grandiose (and yet oddly uneasy) turn of his father's head. He could have attempted to walk with his hands held together in front of him, eyes ever so slightly downcast, expression mild, gentle (and yet undeniably proud), just like his late mother.

As for Scorpius, well, Harry Potter was a tough one. Everyone knew his face and his name, but he mostly kept himself to himself. He worked at the Ministry as an official, and as an Auror, but his mannerisms were something of a mystery. Every time the papers snapped a picture of him, he would shuffle out of the frame. It was something his father had commented on often over the breakfast table with a rather cruel smirk as he raised an eyebrow at the front page (often accompanied by a comment like: Typical Potter, pretending he doesn't love the limelight).

For the most part Scorpius decided to act as indistinctly as possible and not look anyone in the eye, but every so often, when he felt a bit brave, he added just a hint of Albus to the mix. He found that worked rather well.

As they reached the corridor which (according to the signs) contained the Minister for Magic’s office, Delphi slowed her pace and the boys followed suit. She frowned, like a thief trying to crack a safe, licked her lips, and then pointed silently a little further down the corridor.

Together, they walked as casually as possible to the door of the Minister for Magic’s office.

“And you’re sure it’s in there?” Scorpius asked nervously, peering back down the corridor behind them to check they weren’t being watched.

At that very moment a guard walked past. All three of them immediately attempted to play their roles a little over-enthusiastically, desperate not to be discovered at this late stage.
Albus relaxed his body language and tried to look casual, like the husband of the Minister for Magic would look outside his wife’s office. Scorpius noticed he placed one hand casually on his hip and even leaned against the wall, looking utterly at ease with the world, like he was about to crack a joke at any moment.

Delphi raised her head with great dignity and changed her stance into something ladylike and yet steely. Her hands went lightly to her sides.

Scorpius realised a little too late that he was a much worse actor than his two companions. Thinking quickly of Albus’s descriptions of his father, he decided to cross his arms and frown a bit.

“Yes Minister,” he found himself saying, hoping the guard would believe she had stumbled upon an utterly dull and unimportant conversation between Harry Potter and the Minister for Magic. “I definitely think this is a matter for the Ministry to ponder at length.”

Did Harry Potter talk like that? Albus’s expression hinted that he probably didn’t.

But the guard didn’t seem to be paying attention.

“Yes Minister,” she said politely, nodding at Delphi, and then Scorpius, and then Albus, in that order. Delphi decided it was best to simply nod back.

“Let’s ponder it together,” she said, responding to Scorpius.

The guard, seemingly satisfied, walked on until she was out of sight. Delphi, Albus, and Scorpius gave a collective sigh of relief.

“It was my uncle’s idea to use the Veritaserum,” Delphi revealed quietly. “We slipped it into a visiting Ministry official’s drink. He told us that the Time-Turner had been kept and even told us where - the office of the Minister for Magic herself.”

Delphi pointed at the office in front of them. She looked just about ready to reach for the handle when a sudden noise made them all freeze.

“Harry… we should talk about it…” came a familiar voice from down the corridor.

“There’s nothing to talk about,” responded another.

Albus and Delphi looked utterly panicked. Scorpius found he could hardly breathe.

“Oh no,” Delphi all but groaned.

“Hermione,” Albus confirmed grimly. “And Dad.”

Somehow Scorpius had convinced himself that despite the horrified faces of his two companions, everything was going to be okay. He often found that having a positive attitude was a huge help in life.

But there was no escaping the fact that of all the people in the world, the two they would have least wanted to be coming down that corridor towards them at that moment, were.

Scorpius’s second instinct (after his initial thoughts of smiling until it all blew over), was to hide. He wasn’t sure quite what would happen if Hermione Granger and Harry Potter came face to face with themselves, but he everyone knew that the Minister for Magic was a rather fantastic witch, and Harry Potter was a formidable Auror. He didn’t like to imagine the spells they would be
subjected to if detected.

“Okay,” Scorpius said quickly, trying to be helpful. “Hiding places.”

Albus simply gawped at him.

“No hiding places,” Scorpius amended, looking around them and feeling immensely disappointed that no magical broom cupboard had appeared to save him in his hour of need. “Anyone know any Invisibility Charms?”

Apparently he wasn’t being as helpful as he hoped, because Delphi ignored him.

“Do we go - in her office?” she asked Albus.

“She’ll be coming to her office,” Albus pointed out lowly.

Delphi looked once again down the corridor and seemed to make a decision. Her face became suddenly determined. She struck Scorpius as the sort of woman who never gave up and never conceded defeat.

“There’s nowhere else,” she said simply.

Delphi tried the door. The handle would not turn. Frustrated now, she tried again with more aggression. Still nothing.

Hermione and Harry were getting ever closer. Scorpius could hear their footsteps approaching. He noticed, distinctly, despite the nauseating horror of the situation, that Harry Potter walked with a familiar rhythm to his step. It was almost identical to Albus’s.

“If you don’t talk to me or Ginny about it…” Hermione continued in rather condescending tones.

It was too much for Scorpius. Something had to be done or he was going to do something ridiculous like grab Albus and attempt to run past them down the corridor or, in all honesty, wet his pants with fear.

“Stand back,” he commanded, pulling out his wand. Delphi and Albus obeyed. He pointed it at the office door. “Alohomora!”

The door swung open and Scorpius grinned with delight. Some luck at last!

“Albus,” he continued, quite enjoying taking charge of proceedings. “Block her. It has to be you.”

“What is there to say?” Harry said from somewhere closer than was comfortable.

“Me. Why?” Albus demanded, looking like he’d very much like to run into the office and hide with them.

For the first time Delphi shot Scorpius a look of respect, as though she believed they were on a level. She rolled her eyes at Albus in exasperation.

“Well, it can’t be either of us can it? We are them!”

“What you said was obviously wrong,” Hermione declared in firm but fair tones. “But - there are more factors at play here than-“

Albus looked like he was about to have a nervous breakdown.
“But I can’t!… I can’t…” he exclaimed, but it was too late now. Hermione and Harry’s shadows were now visible on the wall. In a few seconds they would be discovered if Albus didn’t pull himself together.

Scorpius was not going to let this be a disaster when they’d come so far. He gave Albus a reassuring nod and then dashed into the office. Delphi followed him, and so did Albus… until Delphi gave Albus a hard shove out into the corridor and slammed the door behind him.

+++  

Albus felt like he was about to be sick. Right in front of him were his father and closest aunt. Most cringeworthy of all was that they appeared to be having a conversation about him.

“Hermione,” said his father, pulling the face he always did when Aunt Hermione was giving out her personal opinion on what someone ought to do without their asking for it. “I’m grateful for your concern but there’s no need…”

Hermione looked up, noticed Albus standing there, seemed a little surprised, and then gave a fond if somewhat confused smile.

“Ron?”

Well, this was it. There was no going back now. It was either play Uncle Ron to perfection, or give the entire game away and be grounded for life as well as possibly getting expelled.

Albus tried to replicate his uncle’s body language and hoped he didn’t just come across like a caricature.

“Surprise!!!” he said lamely, trying to give that guilty sort of grin that Uncle Ron did whenever he’d done something Aunt Hermione might disapprove of.

It seemed to have worked because Aunt Hermione raised her eyebrows with fond bemusement.

“What are you doing here?” she asked.

Oh Dumbledore, what would Uncle Ron be doing lurking around Aunt Hermione’s office…

“Does a man need an excuse to see his wife?” Albus asked, forcing a smile.

Hermione still didn’t look one hundred percent convinced, so Albus did all he could think of in the moment.

He leaned in and kissed Hermione firmly.

I am going to wizard Hell, Albus thought, trying his absolute best to stay in character and not give away his utter mortification.

“I should go…” his father mumbled, looking deeply uncomfortable at having witnessed the kiss.

Now you know how I feel when you and Mum start snogging in the kitchen, Albus thought with satisfaction.

He pulled away from the kiss (trying his best not to look horrified) and gave another one of his Uncle Ron’s pleased, adoring expressions.

“Harry,” Aunt Hermione said with finality. “My point is whatever Draco says - the things you say
to Albus - I don’t think it’ll do any of us any good for you to dwell on it…”

Great, just great. Now he was the topic of conversation and he was expected to stand there like a vaguely concerned but probably pretty bored uncle.

Albus wondered briefly what Draco had been saying. He wanted to ask to make sure he wasn’t giving Scorpius a bad time, but then he remembered Ron probably wouldn’t care about that.

Could he leave it there?

Of course not. He was Albus Potter. And no matter how dodgy it might look, he needed to hear what his father had to say about the situation when he was alone with his closest friends.

“Oh, you’re talking about how Harry said sometimes he wished I-“

Albus could have kicked himself at his mistake.

“Albus,” he corrected himself swiftly, “How he wished Albus weren’t his son.”

“Ron!” Aunt Hermione exclaimed, utterly scandalised by her husband’s lack of tact.

Well, now he knew he was doing something right, because this was exactly how his aunt and uncle acted when they came round for family dinners.

“Better out than in, that’s what I say…” Albus continued.

“He’ll know,” Aunt Hermione told his father reassuringly. “We all say stuff we don’t mean. He knows that.”

Well that was utter rubbish because Albus knew for a fact his father had meant it when he’d said he sometimes wished he wasn’t his son.

“But what if sometimes we say stuff we do mean… what then?” Albus asked, refusing to let the subject be dropped.

Aunt Hermione shot him an incredulous look.

“Ron, now’s not the time, honestly.”

Albus thought it was the perfect time. He was fed up of the adults in his life lying to him. Was it so hard to admit the truth? If his father could only admit that he, Albus, was his least favourite child, Albus could have tried to deal with it, maybe even moved on. As it was he was stuck in this emotional purgatory, and all because his father was a coward.

But he had a job to do and Hermione looked like she was eager to hurry off down the corridor. It wouldn’t help anyone if he kept her talking.

“Oh course it isn’t,” he said cheerfully. “Bye, bye darling.”

To Albus’s relief, Hermione gave him one last suspicious look and then passed him.

But instead of walking away and out of the danger zone, she paused, as though she had forgotten something, and then diverted towards her office where Albus knew Scorpius and Delphi were hiding.

Oh no, oh no, oh no…
Desperate now, Albus rushed after her, finding he could move at quite a pace with Uncle Ron’s long limbs. Before deciding on what exactly he was going to say to stop her from opening her office door, he darted in front of the door and physically blocked Hermione from reaching the handle.

Aunt Hermione rolled her eyes and moved a step to one side. Albus swung his hips to the left to block her once again. She moved a step to the other and Albus did the same.

“Why are you blocking the entrance to my office?” Aunt Hermione asked simply.

Albus tried to pull his best innocent face.

“I’m not. Blocking. Anything,” he declared as he blocked her once again.

“You are,” Aunt Hermione pointed out. “Let me into my room, Ron.”

His aunt hadn’t yet lost her temper, but Albus had seen what happened when Ron wound her up and he did not want to be on the receiving end of her righteous, dignified fury. He thought wildly of what he could possibly say next and was pretty horrified by what came to mind…

“Let’s have another baby,” he blurted out, and immediately wished he hadn’t.

Clearly Aunt Hermione thought Uncle Ron was teasing her because all she did was try to dodge past him again with an incredulous: “What?”

“If not another baby, a holiday,” Albus declared, elaborating wildly as he went. “I want a baby or a holiday and I’m going to insist on it. Shall we talk about it later, honey?”

Thank goodness his aunt was too busy trying to get past him to notice the pet name which Albus was almost one hundred percent sure he’d never heard Uncle Ron use in his life.

Why was his Aunt Hermione so stubborn? Anyone else would have walked away from that door, but not her. There was only one thing for it. A repeat of his previous mortification.

He leaned in for another kiss and inwardly apologised to Uncle Ron, Rose, and Hermione herself as his aunt seemed to relent and kiss him back.

When they broke apart, Aunt Hermione’s cheeks were slightly pink and she was smiling in a way that made Albus feel really very uncomfortable.

“If there’s another stink pellet in there then Merlin won’t help you,” she said fondly. “Fine. We’re due to update the Muggles anyway.”

Never before had Albus been more relieved to get rid of his aunt.

It was only when she took a step back that he remembered his father was still in the corridor with them. As expected, he had shuffled uncomfortably into the corner, trying to look as invisible as humanly possible. His father always got shifty when kissing happened.

Aunt Hermione gave him a smile, and his father gave an awkward excuse for a wave, then the pair walked back off down the corridor in the direction they’d come from.

Albus was pretty certain he was going to need a memory erasing charm when all this was over, because in the past few minutes he’d done and said a number of things he seriously wished he could forget.
Hearing his heartbeat in his ears, Albus turned to the office door and went to open it…

“A baby - OR - a holiday?” came Aunt Hermione’s voice once again. Albus turned around swiftly. His aunt had returned alone. To be honest, he couldn’t blame his father for not wanting to return with her this time. “Some days you are really are off the scale, you know that?”

Albus forced a grin.

“It’s why you married me, isn’t it? My puckish sense of fun.”

Aunt Hermione rolled her eyes affectionately and disappeared down the corridor once again.

Albus could have cried with relief. More confidently this time, he turned and began to open the door. He just caught sight of Scorpius’s (well, his father’s) face looking horrified and gesturing behind him before he got the message and slammed the door shut again.

Aunt Hermione was back. Again.

“I can taste fish,” she remarked. “I told you to stay away from those fish finger sandwiches.”

“Right you are,” Albus agreed.

Aunt Hermione smiled once again, and then walked away, once looking back over her shoulder in what Albus really hoped wasn’t a seductive way.

This time after Aunt Hermione disappeared he waited a minute until the sounds of her footsteps had become so far away he could barely hear them.

Even then he dashed slightly down the corridor to check he truly was alone before returning to the office door and throwing it open with an almighty sigh of relief.

Chapter End Notes

Not going to lie, that was a tough one!

If you enjoyed this then please do leave a comment! They make me so happy and confident!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn ) xxx
Now safely in Hermione’s office, Albus felt his anxiety leave him to be replaced with a sense of triumph. Without him they would have failed their mission. He reckoned even his dad wouldn’t have been able to do a better job when he was a fourth year.

His legs weak with adrenaline, high on his success, Albus slumped, leaning back against the office door for support.

“This is all too weird,” he said.

Delphi was watching him with complete and utter respect in her eyes. Albus Potter had gone above and beyond the call of duty in order to make this plan a success. That was an attribute she shared and admired. She nodded her approval and Albus felt the need to stand up a bit straighter again.

“You were impressive,” she remarked. “Good blocking action.”

Scorpius looked positively over the moon. His own expression was one of awe and adoration. He was shifting about in his excitement, which was usually very endearing to witness, although spoiled somewhat this time by him looking like Harry Potter.

“I don’t know whether to high-five you or frown at you for kissing your aunt about five hundred times!” he exclaimed excitedly.

Not particularly keen on being reminded of that fact, Albus shrugged his shoulders.

“Ron’s an affectionate guy. I was trying to distract her, Scorpius. I did distract her.”

Scorpius was not at all put off by his matter-of-fact response.

“And then there’s what your dad said…” he began, but Delphi tutted, interrupting him,

“Boys… she will be back,” she reminded them sternly. “We don’t have long.”

“You heard that?” Albus asked Scorpius, not sure whether to be validated by the fact his friend had heard how massive a family issue this was, or embarrassed that Scorpius now knew the exact and humiliating words his father had used. When Albus had explained what had happened, he hadn’t been quite so brutal in his description.

Having Harry Potter wish you weren’t his son was both embarrassing and demoralising. But perhaps having Scorpius know about it might just have made the situation that slightest bit better?
He definitely felt lighter for it having come out.

Delphi was clearly becoming irritated by their conversation. She was looking about the room thoughtfully, like a woman on a mission.

“Where would Hermione hide a Time-Turner?” she muttered to herself. She peered around, lips parted in concentration, scanning first the piles of neatly stacked paperwork, the small framed photograph of a family of four, the odd plastic model of the human mouth which looked like it belonged in a dental office, and then her eyes fell on the bookcases along the back wall.

Some feeling deep within Delphi told her she had struck lucky.

“Search the bookcases,” she commanded the boys.

Rather unwilling now they had bigger things to discuss, Albus and Scorpius did as they were told, shuffling vaguely in that general direction, but remaining beside each other so they could continue their whispered conversation.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” Scorpius asked, looking greatly concerned.

Albus wasn’t sure what to say. He wasn’t entirely certain himself.

“My dad says I wish I weren’t his son,” Albus said, trying his best to make it sound like the words meant nothing. “Hardly a conversation starter is it?”

Scorpius was horrified. He didn’t know what to say. All this time his friend had been hurting and he’d kept it to himself. He wished he had known sooner because he honestly believed he could have made it better somehow. Perhaps he couldn’t have changed the situation, but Scorpius knew what it was to cheer up someone who was miserable. He had turned it into something of an art form over the past few years.

He was very good at looking after others, or so he was told. His mother had always claimed to love having him at her bedside. Even at her worst, when she slept for much of the day and her hands shook, she used to laugh at his stories. Sometimes when she was feeling too ill to talk, Scorpius had simply taken her hand and sat in the large antique armchair his father had placed beside her sickbed. Sometimes he read to her, others he even got on the bed and lay by her side on top of the covers. He did that fairly often towards the end, even though his father didn’t like it.

Scorpius enjoyed caring for people. It made him feel wanted. Needed. It was his biggest talent.

But this was Albus, and he wasn’t a particularly emotional person the way his mother had been. Albus covered up his feelings and got sulky and sarcastic when he was in a bad mood. He would definitely resent being too obviously consoled. He was altogether a pretty difficult person. Difficult and somehow wonderful.

Using what he knew of his best friend, Scorpius tried to find the best way to comfort him. He decided that sharing his own story, revealing a little of his own father-son issues, might help Albus feel like he understood, and hopefully he’d feel less alone.

“I know the - Voldemort thing isn’t - true - and - you know…” Scorpius began carefully. “But sometimes I think I can see my dad thinking: how did I produce this?”

“Still better than my dad,” Albus sighed. “I’m pretty sure he spends most of his time thinking: how can I give him back?”
Delphi sighed loudly as she glanced at the two boys, seemingly engrossed in the most personal and intimate of conversations. Was it really so hard to remain on task? Did boys really struggle to keep concentration for more than a few minutes at a time?

She took Scorpius by the arm and tried to physically drag him towards the bookcases to help her.

“Maybe if we could concentrate on the matter at hand?” she suggested, trying to keep her voice light and patient.

But despite her pulling him across the room, Scorpius remained focussed on his friend. Delphi could have screamed with frustration.

“My point is,” Scorpius said, swallowing. “There’s a reason - we’re friends, Albus - a reason we found each other…”

It was surprising to Scorpius how hard it could be to tell someone you cared about exactly what you thought of them, how much your words became jumbled in your mouth, how uncooperative your brain suddenly became.

“You know?” he continued, glancing tentatively at Albus. “And whatever this - adventure is about…”

Delphi had been just about to stroll over and bang their heads together, when Scorpius stopped talking, raised his head, and frowned.

“Have you seen the books on these shelves?” he asked, his tone changing in an instant. “These are some serious books here. Banned books. Cursed books.”

Albus couldn’t help but smile ruefully.

“How to distract Scorpius from difficult emotional issues. Take him to a library.”

Scorpius’s eyes bulged with fascination as he scanned the shelf.

“All the books from the Restricted Section and then some. *Magick Moste Evile, Fifteenth- Century Fiends, Sonnets of a Sorcerer* - that’s not even allowed at Hogwarts!”

Albus wandered up to Scorpius to stand at his side. He, too, examined the books, trying to be helpful.

“*Shadows and Spirits*,” he read out. “*The Nightshade Guide to Necromancy*.”

Even Delphi seemed taken by the range of titles on offer. She stood on the other side of Scorpius and gave a little sigh.

“They are quite something aren’t they…”

“The True History of Opal Fire,” Albus continued. “*The Imperious Curse and How to Abuse it*.”

“And lookee here,” Scorpius said eagerly. “Whoah. *My Eyes and how to See Past Them* by Sybill Trelawney. A book on divination. Hermione Granger hates divination. This is fascinating. This is a find…”

Compelled by curiosity, Scorpius reached out and pulled the thick, leather bound book from the shelf. The moment he did so it fell open and began to speak.
“The first is the fourth, a disappointing mark,  
You’ll find it in parked but not in park.”

Scorpius blinked at his find with wary fascination.


“The second is the less fair of those that walk on two legs,  
Grubby, hairy, disease of the egg.  
And the third is both a mountain to climb and a route to take.”

“It’s a riddle,” Albus said with some certainty (despite the fact Scorpius and Delphi had realised this some moments ago). “It’s giving us a riddle.”

“A turn in the city, a glide through a lake.”

Delphi turned to Scorpius accusingly, thinking he had triggered some alarm with his prying.

“What have you done?” she demanded, narrowing her eyes.

Scorpius put out his hands in a gesture that meant: ‘I have absolutely no idea, please do not be angry with me’.

“I, uh, I opened a book,” he said, chewing on his lower lip. “Something which has - in all my years on this planet - never been a particularly dangerous activity.”

As if to prove him wrong, suddenly several pairs of gnarled, sinister hands flew out of the books lined up on Hermione’s bookshelf. Their fingers were thin like twigs only the ends were sharpened into fearsome points.

Scorpius gave a little squeak of terror, grabbing for Albus’s sleeve as he did so, and Albus only just dodged one particularly determined pair of hands in time by taking an instinctual step back. They closed in the exact spot his throat had been mere seconds before.

Scorpius looked like he had found himself in a horror movie. Albus looked shocked but almost accepting of these recent events, as though they were merely the icing on the cake of his mess of a year thus far.

“What is that?” Albus demanded, as calmly as he could under the circumstances.

Delphi took a tentative step forward and dodged another set of hands. She didn’t look at all scared, if anything, she looked fascinated. As long as she stood far enough back, she realised, the hands couldn’t reach her. Only once a person got close enough to touch did they strike. Delphi expected that had they backed far enough away, the hands would have disappeared altogether.

“She’s weaponised it,” Delphi explained, with awe in her voice, creeping carefully forward. “She’s weaponised her library. This is where the Time-Turner will be. Solve the riddle and we’ll find it.”

Albus decided he had nothing to lose and tried his best to pretend this was just another perfectly average day. Not a day which involved creepy vicious book-hands trying to murder him.

“The first is in fourth,” he repeated thoughtfully. “You’ll find it in parked, not in park. Ed - De-“

The books did not seem to like his train of thought, because several more pairs of hands seemed to explode from the bookcase. One pair caught hold of Delphi’s shoulder, another latched onto her
hair, twisting and twining until she was well and truly stuck.

Valiantly, Delphi tried to ignore this fact.

Scorpius was absolutely terrified and stunned that any person could have those awful hands clutching at them and simply stand there without struggling. If it had been him he would have burst into tears, he was sure of it.

“The second is a disease of the egg,” Scorpius remembered, speaking as fast as he could. “The less fair of those that walk on two legs…”

Another pair of hands reached for Delphi’s throat, successfully.

“Men!” Delphi declared with some urgency. “De-men-tors. We need to find a book on Dementors…”

At that moment the book-hands gave a sudden tug and Delphi was pulled impossibly into the bookcase which opened up like a mouth and appeared to swallow her.

“Albus!” she shouted as she disappeared.

Scorpius really wished he’d thought to go to the loo before embarking on this journey.

“Delphi!” Albus yelled back. “What’s going on?”

“Concentrate, Albus,” Scorpius commanded, trying his very best to remain calm, which was admittedly difficult after witnessing a young woman being eaten by a bookcase and its book-hand cronies and knowing you might very well be next. “Do what she said. Find a book on Dementors and be very careful.”

Albus turned to look at Scorpius, nodded his head, and began to search. His father would have managed to get through this with no problems, Albus thought. Which meant he, Albus, could do the same. He skimmed the bookcase with his legs slightly bent, ready to jump back should more hands attempt to grab him or some other nightmare come to life.


The triumph was short lived. The moment Albus put his hand on the volume, the book flew open and swung dangerously at Scorpius, who with another gasp of terror dodged clumsily out of the way and fell hard against a bookcase.

He gave a little ‘ooof’ of pain and then the bookcase attempted to swallow him.

“I was born in a cage
But smashed it with rage
The Gaunt inside me
Riddled me free
Of that which would stop me to be”

“Voldemort,” Albus breathed, knowing in an instant that he was correct. For once in his life the endless stories from Uncle Ron had come in useful.

Scorpius was currently battling with the bookcase he had fallen against and whacking it with a book that he’d found on the floor. Albus was about to rush across the room and help him when Delphi fought her way out of her own bookcase and emerged looking like her usual self, the self
Albus had met on the stairs at his home. She looked incredibly fierce, her silver-blonde hair flying all over the place.

“Work faster!” she shouted, before being pulled back in again, screaming.

“Delphi!” Albus yelled, grabbing for her hand but missing. “Delphi!”

It was too late. Once again she had disappeared.

The sound of panting followed by some very forced deep breaths made him turn once again to see Scorpius sprawled on the ground looking dazed but very much okay.

“She’d become herself again,” Scorpius remarked. “Did you notice?”

Of course he’d noticed! How could anyone fail to notice anything about this whole, hellish situation? Albus was sure it would be etched into his brain for weeks.

Scorpius’s priorities were seriously mixed up sometimes.

“No!” Albus snapped, furious at everything in that moment. “Because I was more worried about her being eaten by a bookcase. Find. Something. Anything on him!”

By some miracle, the very next book Albus caught sight of looked promising.

“The Heir of Slytherin,” he read out. “Do you think?”

Without waiting for confirmation from Scorpius, Albus reached up and pulled the book from the shelf… only the book pulled back and in the blink of an eye Albus had been sucked into the bookcase as well.

This time, it was Scorpius’s turn to panic.

“Albus!” he shouted, scrambling to his feet. “Albus!”

Scorpius hated to admit it, but when it had been Delphi dragged away to who-knew-where, the situation had been pressing, but somehow less urgent than it was now that his best friend and number one person had been snatched out of thin air and eaten by what should have been an inanimate object.

There was only one option. He had to get Albus back.

And he wouldn’t manage that by standing there staring and shouting for someone who couldn’t hear him.

He had to stay calm and he had to think.


Stepping perilously closer to the book-hands, he scanned the shelves.

“Marvolo: The Truth,” he read out loud. Marvolo had been Voldemort’s middle name. He’d learned that when he was fairly young. “This must be…”

Scorpius reached for the book and pulled it open. This time, when the book swung away, Scorpius was ready. He ducked and avoided what might have been a horrible bash to the head. Left in the place of the book was a bright, splintering light. It was almost blinding.
A voice deeper than the others began to speak from the gap.

“I am the creature you have not seen
I am you. I am me. The echo unforeseen.
Sometimes in front, sometimes behind,
A constant companion, for we are entwined.”

And then, like a (rather graceless and cursing) miracle, Albus reemerged.

The Polyjuice Potion had worn off and he looked like himself again. A very stressed-out, very shocked, very urgent version of himself.

“Albus!” Scorpius exclaimed, charging bodily at his friend and grabbing hold of him by the waist. There was no way Scorpius was going to surrender him again.

But Albus was shaking his head and pushing him away.

“No!” he commanded, seemingly concerned that Scorpius too would be swallowed and then they’d (presumably) never be seen again. “Just - THIIIIIINK…”

The bookcase had become wise by this point and yanked Albus violently back into its depths.

Scorpius stood, stunned, on the spot. He knew it was down to him now. That he was Albus’s last hope. But he was notoriously useless under pressure. He made mistakes, he fell over his own feet…

“But I can’t…” he found himself saying.

A force inside him stopped him where he was. It wasn’t a voice and it wasn’t a feeling and it wasn’t quite a memory.

Yes you can, Scorpius. You can do anything if you set your mind to it, if you believe in yourself.

It sounded like his mother.

“An invisible echo,” Scorpius pondered out loud. “What is that? The only thing I’m good at is thinking and when I need to think - I can’t.”

Sensing weakness, the books which had previously been scattered across the office floor surrounded Scorpius. Together, impossibly, they formed a ring around the panicking young wizard and without any warning whatsoever, they pulled him inside them.

Scorpius vaguely recalled wishing several times that it was possible to be entirely consumed by a book, to be able to disappear into its world and lose yourself. This was definitely not what he’d had in mind.

Had the books swallowed him? Had he been shrunk and was now trapped between their pages? None of it made any sense. There was no logic and no solution. No way to think himself out of this.

Scorpius was utterly terrified. Never in his life had he been so trapped, so powerless…

No, that was a lie. He’d been powerless when his mother lay dying of the family curse. He’d been trapped within his own sense of loneliness. That was before Albus came along.

The Scorpius of a few years ago would have given up then. He would have closed his eyes and
started crying.

But Scorpius was a new person now. He’d endured the most painful thing anyone could and he’d still survived it. There had been times when he hadn’t even wanted to, but here he was, alive, with Albus.

Albus. Albus was counting on him at that very moment. He was potentially his only hope.

And Delphi too, of course. He supposed she needed rescuing as well.

The darkness was trying to smother him, to keep him down, to hold him back, but Scorpius would be restrained by darkness no longer. He pushed, he shoved, he writhed, he twisted, he kicked his feet. And somehow, with a final, massive advance, Scorpius Malfoy burst panting back out of the books and into the Minister for Magic’s office.

“No! You don’t!” Scorpius declared fiercely, smashing books aside. “Sybil Trelawney. No!!!”

He looked around, sunk but full of energy.

“This is all wrong. Albus? Can you hear me? All this for a frigging Time-Turner. Think, Scorpius. Think.”

The books tried to grab him once again, but Scorpius was ready. He kicked at one and karate chopped another. Oh, if only his father had seen that! He probably looked like an action hero…


The key to ending this nightmare was sitting on the top shelf. Of course it was. It couldn’t have been at nice comfortable arm height…

There was only one thing for it. He was going to have to climb.

Scorpius was bad at physical activities at the best of times. He became out of breath when he ran. He could barely stay on a broom (mostly because he got queasy when he looked down at how far away the ground was). Once, as a child, he had baffled and disappointed his father at once when he’d managed to somehow break his arm in two places while on a nice, leisurely countryside stroll.

Well, it wasn’t all that high up, Scorpius reassured himself. And he could use the shelves as ledges.

Yes, the bookcase was alive and there were many book-hands erupting from it at various intervals, trying to drag him to his demise… but at least if he died he would go surrounded by books. That was something, wasn’t it?

Okay, Scorpius. We are going to do this, he told himself firmly, taking the first tentative step. The bookcase lurched, trying to throw him off, and Scorpius realised that tentative simply wasn’t going to cut it.

Clinging on for dear life, Scorpius began to ascend.

As he did so the bookcase rose up at him, terrifyingly. The book-hands grabbed at him with every step. Several times Scorpius had to kick them away. He found he had a talent for kicking things rather forcefully and accurately. It was a skill he’d never really had to utilise before.

And there it was. Shadows and Spirits. Close enough to touch.
The bookcase wobbled dangerously, contorting impossibly, but Scorpius wasn’t going to give up now. He reached out and grabbed firmly at the volume. With a great yank Scorpius pulled it from the bookcase (almost toppling to his doom in the process) and suddenly, the noise and the chaos stopped.

Just like that.

“Is that…” Scorpius asked himself, praying that this nightmare was indeed at an end but afraid if he asked the question outright he would jinx it.

Suddenly there was a smashing sound and Albus and Delphi fell out of the shelves and down to the floor with two loud thumps.

“We beat it,” Scorpius found himself saying, hardly able to believe it. “We beat the library.”

Albus lay on the ground rubbing at his head and checking he hadn’t broken any bones. Once he was sure he wasn’t gravely injured, he pushed himself upright with a grunt and remembered Delphi who was also sprawled on the ground looking dazed but otherwise unharmed.

“Delphi are you…”

“Wow,” she breathed out, staring at the ceiling, looking quite frankly exhilarated (albeit disheveled), like she’d just been on an enjoyable rollercoaster. “Quite a ride.”

Albus looked up to where Scorpius was balanced, at the top of the bookcase. Had he seriously climbed all the way up? Scorpius Malfoy? Climbing some demon bookcase that was trying to kill him? Albus had to admit he was impressed.

His friend was clutching a book to his chest as he began the careful descent.

“Is that?” Albus asked, gawping with disbelief. “Scorpius? What’s inside that book?”

Delphi immediately sat up as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened to her in the past hour.

“I think we should find out, don’t you?” she prompted eagerly.

Perhaps before this whole ordeal, Scorpius might have felt compelled to hand the book over to Delphi, who was the unspoken leader of this expedition. But he had contributed to their success, and so with great dignity, he nodded at his companions and opened the book.

Inside, at the very centre of it, was a spinning Time-Turner.

Scorpius could have cried with relief.

“We’ve found the Time-Turner,” he breathed out, stunned. “I never thought we’d get this far.”

Albus, invigorated by their success, managed to pick himself up off the floor and fix his hair, which was, quite noticeably, an absolute mess.

“Mate,” he said, beaming. “Now we’ve got this, the next stop is saving Cedric. Our journey has only just begun!”

How was it, Scorpius wondered, that Albus could look so absolutely thrilled at the prospect of embarking on another incredibly dangerous and potentially lethal ‘adventure’? He’d been swallowed whole by a bookcase (twice), thrown down onto the floor of the Minister for Magic’s
office (which could have broken his bones), and had been forced to kiss his aunt on the mouth a fair few times. His best friend, Scorpius decided, was an incredibly bad influence.

An incredibly bad and incredibly exciting influence.

“Only just begun and it’s almost half-killed us,” Scorpius remarked. He glanced at Albus who was still grinning at him with pure delight. Delphi may have been looking equally as exhilarated, but Scorpius wasn’t paying much attention to her.

“Good,” Scorpius found himself saying. A positive mental attitude was the key, after all. He’d get nowhere being a misery guts. “This is going to be good!”

Chapter End Notes

ACT ONE IS COMPLETE!!!

I know this scene probably works excellently on stage and was really probably written for that reason, but I hope I managed to make it work in this format! I didn’t want to actually change it!

Please leave me a review if you liked this! I am writing this in every spare moment I have and you have no idea how nice it is to know that people are enjoying it!

Lots of love!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
The Forbidden Forest was not Scorpius’s sort of place. Mostly because it was forbidden. Also because it was dark, and scary, and probably full of creatures with horrible intentions.

It was also the location from which the next stage of their operation was to begin. Even if they were only standing on the edge of the forest, where they were (probably) quite safe, Scorpius couldn't help but peer tentatively into the wild darkness ahead and feel the urge to wander just that little bit closer to Albus.

He’d been warned by his father over and over again never to go there. There had been one story about a forced detention activity in the forest with the half-giant Hagrid, which had turned out so dangerous that his grandfather, Lucius, had written a formal complaint to Dumbledore.

“Under no circumstances do I expect you to step foot there,” his father had said firmly, during his pre-first year lecture.

At the time Scorpius had nodded obediently. After all, he’d never imagined he’d voluntarily choose to spend time in such a terrifying location.

But he’d also never imagined he’d make a friend like Albus Potter, or that having such a friend could make him feel so brave and wild and like he would do the strangest, craziest, most dangerous things, not only to impress him, but because it felt… good. It felt right. It felt amazing.

Looking back at the events of the evening, Scorpius was so overwhelmed that the fear and the panic he’d felt in the Minister for Magic’s office seemed a distant memory. At one point he knew he had been certain he was going to lose control of his bladder (or his mind). Probably that point had been around the time a bookcase had swallowed Albus whole. But fear passed surprisingly quickly. It simply faded helpfully to the back of Scorpius’s mind to become a tentative, slightly anxious, and yet optimistic exhilaration.

Without him, they would never have recovered the Time-Turner. Without him Albus and Delphi would probably have been lost forever to the demon bookcases from hell.

He wasn’t going to take all the credit, of course. Albus had been utterly fantastic with his distraction. Delphi had led the mission through the Ministry with fierce determination.

But he had contributed and contributed well. There was no way he’d been simply the annoying hanger-on. Scorpius felt ridiculously proud of himself. He wished for a moment that his father had
seen him battling those awful books, and then he remembered that his father was Draco Malfoy, and that he would probably never have quite recovered from the horror of seeing his only son and heir scaling an evil, hungry bookcase in an attempt to steal an illegal artefact from the Minister for Magic, and all to aid the son of Harry Potter in a quest that meant travelling perilously back in time and changing the world as he knew it.

When he thought about it like that, Scorpius began to feel anxious. And so he attempted to emulate Albus and the way he could so easily push aside those unhelpful little pangs of guilt.

His best friend was currently undergoing some last minute practice for the task ahead of them, under the mentorship of Delphi, who was standing a short distance away from Albus and acting a little bit like a teacher. Usually Albus would have resented any critique on his spell-work whatsoever, but Scorpius noticed Delphi had a gift of presenting any criticism with such a friendly, light air that Albus never even noticed she was correcting him. He was so eager to impress her that he didn’t make a single sarcastic remark in response to anything she said.

Scorpius thought Delphi would probably have made an excellent professor.

The only problem was that the pair of them were so busy practicing that somehow he, Scorpius, seemed to have fallen by the wayside a little.

He was quite used to that, of course, being left out. But never before had this happened when Albus was part of the equation. It was the first time he’d ever felt shunned around Albus, and it wasn’t a pleasant experience.

Albus hadn’t meant to ostracise him, Scorpius knew. Albus wasn’t a malicious person (at least not to Scorpius), and despite his reputation for sullenness and sarcasm, he was always an unfailingly good friend. Perhaps he might be a little selfish at times, and maybe occasionally, just occasionally, he forgot to put himself in other people’s shoes, but his loyalty had never faltered.

It just so happened that Delphi was pretty and bubbly and quirky and older, and very very good at reading Albus’s moods.

Scorpius would have found it easier to forgive her for stealing away his precious friend if she was just the tiniest bit more pleasant to him, but ever since she’d looked him up and down at St Oswald’s, she appeared to have judged him, and not at all favourably. Scorpius supposed this was probably to do with the fact he was a Malfoy. A niece of Amos Diggory was bound to hold resentment, and valiantly, Scorpius attempted to see things from her point of view.

Instead of being angry at the injustice of it all, Scorpius would deal with the situation in the best way he knew. By being polite, courteous, and proving to her that he was worthy of respect, just the same as Albus.

Scorpius watched as Albus and Delphi laughed at something Delphi had said. Delphi threw her head back, her lovely hair shining. Scorpius blinked at the picture of his best friend laughing with another person, and reminded himself that he was a nice, kind human being, and that he wouldn’t take a dislike to Delphi simply because she had excellent social skills and lovely hair. That would make him just as bad as her, wouldn’t it?

When Scorpius had embarked on this journey he’d done it for Albus. Yes, he’d wanted the adventure, and yes, being a rebel had always been a private ambition of his, but part of the reason he’d jumped off the roof of the Hogwarts Express (which had been a horrifying experience) was so that he and his best friend could share in this together. It was another memory, another opportunity to be silly and reckless and themselves, away from the prying eyes of the Hogwarts students and
staff.

If he’d known Delphi was going to feature so heavily in proceedings, Scorpius wasn’t so sure he’d have agreed to come…

No, that was nonsense. Scorpius realised that the moment he’d thought it. Because here he still was. Even though he’d had every opportunity to return to Hogwarts. Albus was his closest and only true friend and Scorpius would rather have been with him, here, on the edge of the Forbidden Forest, with the prospect of big trouble waiting when they returned to Hogwarts and their parents, real danger lurking at every turn, than sat in the Great Hall without Albus’s moody presence complaining about what fresh torment their fourth year would likely bring.

He still wished that Delphi would be a little less… sparkly, though.

And that Albus wasn’t so susceptible to praise.

Scorpius watched with silent interest (and slight jealousy) as Albus and Delphi began yet another reenactment of what Albus was to do when they travelled back to the last Triwizard Tournament.

It seemed almost too easy that a simple ‘Expelliarmus’ could change history, change the future. That simply robbing Cedric Diggory of his wand during the first task could potentially turn Amos Diggory into an entirely different person. Perhaps he would still be dying, still be ill, still be in pain, but he would have his beloved son at his side, and Scorpius imagined that would make all the difference in the world.

Perhaps, when they returned to the present, Amos Diggory would be able to smile? Perhaps he might laugh? Perhaps he would even have grandchildren to come and visit him in St Oswald’s? He might not even end up in St Oswald’s, and instead live with his adoring family.

Scorpius imagined grumpy old Amos Diggory as a doting grandfather, being presented with pictures drawn by his grandchildren, taken for family walks in his chair. Still a little cantankerous, but endearingly so.

It was a romantic prospect. Scorpius thought it was beautiful. He felt proud to be a part of it.

The Malfoy family had caused great harm in their long and complicated history. Even though Scorpius had been told by his parents over and over that he should be proud of his name, that the mistakes of his ancestors were none of his concern, that he was free of any blame, Scorpius didn’t entirely agree.

He wasn’t directly accountable, he knew that much. And he firmly believed that every person should be judged on their actions, not their parents or their name.

But with the weight of the Malfoy name came responsibility. A responsibility to advance the family. Even his father still believed in this.

And so Scorpius’s gift to the family would be the gift of repentance. If Scorpius ever had a son or a daughter of his own, he was determined that he should pass on a name that they could be proud of. Not one that they wished they could hide.

One day, he might be able to sit his children down and tell them all about his adventures, and for once in his life feel truly proud, not of what he had, but of what he had achieved.

If one Malfoy could play a part in bringing little more happiness to the world, even if nobody ever found out about it, Scorpius knew it had to count for something.
“Expelliarmus!” Albus shouted.

He was standing in his Ministry clothes (which were now far too big for him) and trying his best to look cool as Delphi tested his skills.

From a short distance away from Albus, Delphi stood poised like an action hero, brandishing her wand comically. Scorpius had to admit she wore her own Ministry robes well.

When her wand flew from her hand and travelled to Albus, Delphi gave a wide-eyed overdramatic expression of surprise, hands coming up to her mouth, playing the fool.

It was supposed to be amusing, and Albus laughed, but Scorpius thought it was a little silly. After all, they were about to do something really, seriously important. An old man was counting on them.

“You’re getting it now,” Delphi praised Albus, nodding her head with satisfaction. “You’re good at this.”

Albus was indeed good at it, but somehow Scorpius felt Delphi was being a little too over-complimentary for his liking…

Delphi took her wand back from Albus with a smile.

“You’re a positively disarming young man,” she declared in a mock-posh voice, striking another pose.

Scorpius felt immediately self-conscious. Somehow, even though the joke hadn’t been at his expense, it felt that way. He knew that he talked with a rather posh accent, and it wasn’t very nice to hear it ridiculed.

“Expelliarmus!” Albus yelled again, successfully disarming his ‘opponent’.

“And we have a winner,” Delphi declared, as she and Albus shared an enthusiastic high-five.

Albus seemed positively delighted with the praise, yet he was trying to shrug it off and appear modest.

“I’ve never been good at spells,” Albus admitted.

Scorpius watched the exchange with a critical eye. Somehow, Albus seemed to have forgotten his existence, and all because of this silly lesson, or whatever it was supposed to be.

In all honesty, seeing Albus talking to a girl was… odd.

A part of him, the friendly, generous, amiable part of him, liked it.

The other part, the rather more jealous, selfish and anxious part of him, absolutely definitely did not.

And that other part was currently doing its best to claw its way out of his chest and cause a scene. Scorpius swallowed the feeling down. He was Scorpius Malfoy and he had some dignity left.

“I was rubbish,” Delphi continued brightly, “And then something clicked. And it will for you too. Not that I’m a super witch or anything but I think you’re becoming quite some wizard, Albus Potter.”
Scorpius noticed that Delphi had chosen to use Albus’s full name.

“Then you should stick around,” Albus suggested eagerly. “Teach me more.”

“Of course I’m sticking around!” Delphi replied. “We’re friends, aren’t we?”

*Not best friends though,* Scorpius thought. *Because he already has one of those…*


“Great!” Delphi declared. “Wizzo!”

Scorpius could endure being left out no longer. He had the (frankly appalling) notion that he was allowing himself to be excluded, and that simply would not do.

His father had always taught him to fight for what he wanted in life. And right now, well, he wanted Albus to stop looking at Delphi like she was some awe-inspiring mystical creature, and remember that his best friend was right there with him, and had been right there with him since their very first day of Hogwarts, and that he *wasn’t going anywhere.*

Scorpius took a deep breath and stepped forward decisively.

“What’s wizzo?” he asked, trying to keep his voice light and fun like Albus and Delphi’s.

“Cracked the spell,” Albus told him, immediately including Scorpius. “I mean, it’s pretty basic, but I was - well, I cracked it.”

Scorpius was well aware of this fact, but he made sure to look utterly delighted at this ‘new’ information.

“And I’ve found our way through to the school!” Scorpius announced, over-enthusiastically. Really, the route he had planned was a fairly simple one, but Albus and Delphi didn’t have to know that. “Listen, are we sure this will work…”

“Yes!” said Delphi instantly. Albus nodded his head at her like she was some great mastermind. It was a little unfair, Scorpius thought, seeing as *he* was the one who’d got them out of the bookcase situation. He was the one who’d found the Time-Turner…

“It’s a brilliant plan,” agreed Albus. “The secret to not getting Cedric killed is to stop him winning the Triwizard Tournament. If he doesn’t win, he can’t be killed.”

As much as Scorpius wanted to believe this was a faultless, perfect plan, he couldn’t help but wonder if Albus and Delphi were a little overconfident in their abilities. A little bit of doubt never did anyone any harm. It worried Scorpius that his two companions were moving so fast. He always preferred to plan things out carefully, to make sure he had the best possible chance of success.

Jumping in without a second thought was just so… *Gryffindor.*

Already Delphi had silenced him when he'd brought up the simple rules regarding Time-Turners. Scorpius knew far more about the devices than he cared to, due to the unpleasant rumours circling his family, and he was absolutely certain that the safest amount of time a person could travel back was five hours. It was one turn per hour, and anything more could be hideously dangerous.

She seemed to have an answer for everything. In fact, she'd made him sound like something of a
killjoy for even broaching the subject. Obviously, she had declared, a Time-Turner COULD go further back if the user was willing to take a few risks. And OBVIOUSLY there were other ways of using the device for more dangerous long-distance (well, long time) travel. The Ministry official she had slipped some Veritaserum had confirmed that with the correct Charm, the Time-Turner could be linked with the user's own thought process, and therefore could transport them to any place in history they desired to go. According to Delphi all it took was guts and a bit of skill.

That realisation had been pretty damning for Scorpius, who had previously found much relief in the fact that a Time-Turner could only safely take a person back so far. He was glad this wasn't common knowledge, because if the other students realised this was a possibility, he was sure the rumours about his parentage would resurface with new vitriol.

“And I understand that but…” Scorpius tried tactfully, but Albus interrupted him.

“So we just need to mess up his chances supremely badly in task one,” Albus declared, like it was as simple as dodging a Dungbomb thrown by first years in their general direction (something Albus and Scorpius had grown very good at). “The first task is getting a golden egg from a dragon - how did Cedric distract the dragon…”

Delphi put her hand in the air like an eager child desperate to show off to her professor.

Albus grinned and pointed at her.

“Diggory?” Albus asked.

“By transfiguring the stone into a dog!” the young woman answered brightly.

“Well, a little Expelliarmus and he won’t be able to do that.”

Scorpius was not enjoying the Delphi-Albus double act. For starters, Albus was acting like a completely different person. His voice had changed slightly, his mannerisms were more pronounced, and he kept fixing his hair. It was disconcerting to see the famously stubborn and sullen Albus Potter trying to act casual and carefree, and all because of Delphi…

She was an appalling influence, Scorpius decided. She was encouraging Albus in all the wrong ways.

Scorpius’s father had warned him about such people. They always began with praise and compliments, and made you feel like you were better than everyone else. They pretended you were their equal and then they manipulated you into doing what they wanted. Then, before you knew it, they were in charge, without you even realising, and you ended up doing terrible, terrible things you would never before have dreamt of…

Delphi didn’t seem like a particularly nasty or dangerous person, but Scorpius was taking no chances. Not where Albus was concerned.

“Okay,” Scorpius said, cutting in. “Two points. First point: we’re certain the dragon won’t kill him?”

Delphi rolled her eyes really rather rudely, and gestured at Scorpius with her thumb for Albus’s benefit.

“It’s always two points with him, isn’t it?” she said. And although she had a smile on her face,
Scorpius felt embarrassed. “Of course it won’t. This is Hogwarts. They won’t let damage happen to any of the champions.”

Determined not to be ridiculed into silence, Scorpius continued.

“Okay, second point - more significant point - we’re going to travel back without any knowledge of whether we can travel back afterwards. Which is exciting. Maybe we should just - try going back an hour, say, first and then…”

Delphi gave him another condescending look. How was Albus not noticing this? Scorpius felt a little betrayed by the fact his best friend seemed so keen to look cool in front of Delphi that he was letting him be treated like, well, a bit of a gooseberry.

“I’m sorry, Scorpius, we’ve no time to waste. Waiting here this close to the school is just too dangerous - I’m sure they’ll be looking for you and…”

She didn’t even have to finish her sentence for Albus to declare, firmly: “She’s right.”

“Now,” said Delphi, suddenly businesslike. “You’re going to need to wear these-“

With an effortless flick of her wand Delphi summoned two brown paper bags. They came flying out of the Forbidden Forest at her command.

She gave the first to Albus with a smile, and handed the second to Scorpius rather more coolly.

Albus rummaged in his bag and looked up, confused, as he spotted the neatly folded blood-red robes.

“But these are Durmstrang robes?”

“My uncle’s idea,” Delphi agreed with a nod. Scorpius noticed she didn’t make Albus try to feel stupid for asking a question. “If you are in Hogwarts robes people will expect to know who you are. But there are two other schools competing at the Triwizard Tournament - and if you’re in Durmstrang robes - well, you can fade into the background, can’t you?”

Scorpius had to admit that made sense.

“Good thinking!” said Albus. “Hang on, where are your robes?”

Delphi batted her eyelashes and gave Albus another one of those awful smiles.

“Albus, I’m flattered, but I don’t think I can pretend to be a student, do you? I’ll just keep in the background and pretend to be a - ooh, maybe I could pretend to be a dragon tamer? You’re doing all the spell stuff anyway.”

Scorpius looked at Delphi, who was so sparky and determined, and then at Albus, who was fixing his hair again. Something had to be done. An intervention had to be staged.

This day had been rather illuminating for Scorpius in a great deal of ways. To start with, he’d realised that he could be pretty brave when he wanted to be. He’d also realised that he was a quick-thinker under pressure. But most interesting at all, was the realisation that he wasn’t quite as nice a person as he’d always assumed.

Scorpius took pride in being kind and gentle and well-mannered, but sometimes, well, sometimes you had to be just the tiniest bit sly to get your way…
“You shouldn’t come,” Scorpius declared decisively, looking straight at Delphi.

“What?” Delphi asked.

Her eyes dared him to continue.

But she was expecting him to explode with upset over being left out. She hadn’t realised that Scorpius had other ways of getting what he wanted.

“You’re right,” Scorpius said immediately, making even Delphi look a little surprised. “We don’t need you for the spell.”

Delphi blinked, thinking back on her previous words and realising that, damningly, in her attempt to enlarge the ego of Albus Potter, she had indeed declared herself useless.

“And if you can’t wear student robes,” Scorpius continued calmly. “You’re too big a risk. Sorry, Delphi, you shouldn’t come.”

“But I have to - he’s my cousin,” Delphi argued. “Albus?”

Scorpius gave Albus his very best ‘be sensible’ look. Albus looked from Delphi to Scorpius and gave a sigh of resignation.

“I think he’s right,” he admitted. Scorpius’s chest filled with pride. “I’m sorry.”

“What?” Delphi demanded, feeling the balance of power shift away from her. How had it happened so quickly? One moment ago she’d been the leader of the expedition, and now she had been turned into a spare part.

Oh, Scorpius Malfoy was clever.

“We won’t mess up,” Albus promised her solemnly.

Delphi gave Scorpius a look of slightly hostile knowing. Like she almost respected the way he’d just manipulated the situation to his advantage.

“But without me - you won’t be able to work the Time-Turner,” she tried.

Scorpius gave one of his usual little smiles, although his eyes didn’t gleam.

“You taught us how to use the Time-Turner,” he pointed out composedly.

Sensing she had lost this round, Delphi looked genuinely upset. Scorpius thought she seemed angry, but Albus seemed to think she seemed worried, disappointed not to be doing her bit.

“No,” she said firmly. “I won’t let you do this…”

But Albus was now in his gallant mode and quite enjoying it. Scorpius easily allowed Albus to believe that this decision was his own and that it had been made in order to protect Delphi from unnecessary danger.

“You told your uncle to trust us,” said Albus, sounding rational and a little accidentally-patronising, like some chivalrous romantic lead from a film. “Now it’s your turn. The school is close now. We should leave you here.”

For a short moment Scorpius noticed something like rage flash in Delphi’s eyes… but it passed in
an instant and with a deep breath she melted into a grateful albeit slightly apprehensive smile.

“Then go,” she said calmly, making it clear she was not being excluded and was instead giving them her blessing. “But - just know this… today you get to change history - to change time itself. But more than all that, today you get the chance to give an old man his son back.”

She smiled once again at Albus and placed her hands on his shoulders, leaning down to kiss him once on each cheek. She turned to Scorpius (who was readying himself for the same treatment) and gave him a cool nod.

Then she walked away into the woodland.

Albus stared after her, mouth gaping open.

“She didn’t kiss me,” Scorpius pointed out, like it was a casual observation. “Did you notice?”

Albus didn’t seem to care.

“Are you okay, Albus?” Scorpius asked, turning a critical eye on his friend. “You look a little pale. And red. Pale and red at the same time…”

Watching his friend in that moment, the blush of his cheeks, his sightly dazed expression, Scorpius felt the uncharacteristic and unfamiliar sensation of spite forming in his stomach…

“Let’s do this,” Albus said, suddenly snapping himself out of it, and looking (to Scorpius’s horror) really quite embarrassed.

Chapter End Notes

I hope this chapter contained evidence of why I think precious sweetheart Scorpius Malfoy ended up in Slytherin!

Comments make me happy!

(Say hi in twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The Durmstrang robes were actually pretty cool, Albus thought, as he and Scorpius changed swiftly into their disguises. They were blood red in colour, and cut in a stylish, masculine way, that made Albus want to march about - not to mention he was sure they made him look at least a few inches taller. Delphi had also equipped them both with a cape each, which was Scorpius’s favourite part of the ensemble. Despite himself, he seemed to have picked up some of his father’s taste for the dramatic. The Time-Turner around his neck only added to the effect.

They left their Ministry clothes in the brown bags and hid them behind some trees at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. By the time the bags were discovered, their mission would be complete and so it wouldn’t matter if someone happened to stumble across them.

“You know, these outfits are actually all right,” Albus remarked, as Scorpius began to lead him (slightly tentatively) around the edge of the forest to where he assured Albus there would be a route straight through and into the Hogwarts grounds. Albus had never heard of such a shortcut, but Scorpius was adamant that he’d read of such a thing, and aside from that fiasco in the Ministry of Magic, books had never failed him yet.

Scorpius turned to glance at Albus in his full Durmstrang uniform. He looked undeniably handsome and possibly just a touch older. Even better, he had returned to his usual posture and mannerisms now Delphi had disappeared off into the forest.

The red outfit admittedly added a touch of glamour to the pair of them, and even Scorpius felt slightly more trendy, but deep inside Scorpius felt a fierce loyalty to Hogwarts arise. He didn’t want to be too complimentary about the rival school, even if it was obvious that Durmstrang had a far superior uniform.

“Somehow, I don’t think that red’s my colour,” Scorpius admitted, giving a quick twirl.

“And I suppose you’d boil alive in these in the summer,” Albus added, fiddling with his matted wool cape. Already it felt far too warm and heavy for him. Although he supposed that had something to do with how nervous he was, not that he’d show it.

“It’s far colder in Scandinavia,” Scorpius explained knowledgeably as he picked his way through some brambles.

“I thought nobody knew where Durmstrang was?”
“Well, if you think about it,” Scorpius went on, “It’s got to be Norway or Sweden. Somewhere in the north. The majority of students there are from northern Europe, so it has to be. And by a lake because they travel with that very impressive ship of theirs.”

Albus helpfully held a large branch back so that Scorpius could hop over it.

“Don’t the students tell people where it is?” he asked. “Surely one must have slipped up?”

“No. There are laws over there that you definitely do not want to break. They make our Ministry legal system look like a very light, very affectionate slap on the wrist.”

“Well, what about visitors?” Albus asked.

”Visitors have to accept a Memory Charm so they can’t give the game away either. My father went there when he was a boy, just to have a look around. Although it wasn’t to my grandmother’s taste. They all had to sit down and have their memories wiped on the way out - which, although slightly sinister, was probably for the best.”

Albus admittedly didn’t know a great deal about the Durmstrang Institute, but it was an unavoidable fact that most people thought the place was slightly suspicious. There had never been even the slightest chance that he, James, or Lily would be sent there, and not only because Hogwarts was in a far more convenient location.

Why, thought Albus, would you bother wiping minds after doing a tour unless you had something to hide?

“I mean, that seems a bit dodgy to me,” Albus admitted.

“They’re not as bad as they were,” Scorpius explained fairly. “You know they take Muggle-borns now? That’s a good thing. There was a vote, although apparently it can still be slightly hostile place if you have Muggle parents…”

Scorpius had become unknowingly attached to a sweeping piece of ivy, and without a break in the conversation Albus reached out to free him.

“I guess progress can take time.”

Scorpius nodded.

“Sometimes I think that when you have a reputation like that - well - you just have to wait it out. Prove to people that they’ve got you wrong. And eventually… well, fingers crossed, people change their minds. And if they don’t… well, that’s their problem, isn’t it?”

Albus was pretty certain Scorpius was talking about far more than the Durmstrang Institute with that remark.

“Did your dad ever think about sending you there?” Albus asked curiously. He knew that Durmstrang still had a bit of a reputation for being lenient with Dark Magic, and despite his opinion of Draco Malfoy having improved considerably as time went on, he still wasn’t one hundred percent sure he would put it past him to try and enrol Scorpius there.

But Scorpius shook his head firmly.

“No, my father hated Hogwarts when he was there, but Durmstrang has… well, you know the reputation. He didn’t think it would be right to send me there. In case people got the wrong idea.
And it’s a long way from Wiltshire. Besides, I’ve wanted to go to Hogwarts for as long as I can remember.”

Scorpius gave a satisfied little noise as they rounded the corner, and Albus realised they’d reached their route.

The boys wandered towards a sizeable gap in the trees, a gap through which a glorious light was visible. From here, with the majesty of Hogwarts in sight, even the Forbidden Forest lost some of its menace. For a moment Albus and Scorpius stood together in silence, drinking in the sight of their part-time home in all its glory.

“And there it is…” Scorpius sighed, gazing up at the view with awe.

“Hogwarts. Never seen this view of it before,” said Albus, slightly less enthusiastically.

Scorpius turned to Albus with an excited beam. The light fell on his best friend’s determinedly unimpressed face giving him a sort of glow. It made Scorpius feel absurdly happy just to be there with him, looking up at one of the most beautiful things Scorpius had ever seen.

“Still get a tingle, don’t you?” Scorpius said. “When you see it?”

Albus forced himself to look up at the admittedly impressive sight of Hogwarts, a splendid mass of bulbous buildings and towers stretching right up into the sky. He wished he could find as much joy in the sight as Scorpius. For him, the top-notch architecture couldn’t quite trump the sense of doom that radiated from the castle.

He couldn’t quite banish the thought that within those ancient castle walls were hundreds and hundreds of students, most of which tried to make his life a living hell.

“From the moment I first heard of it, I was desperate to go,” Scorpius revealed, in his usual chatty way, not at all put off by Albus’s lack of enthusiasm. “I mean, Dad didn’t much like it there but even the way he described it… From the age of ten I’d check the Daily Prophet first thing every morning - certain some sort of tragedy would have befallen it - certain I wouldn’t get to go.”

Albus refused to admit that he had been very much the same. As a very little boy he’d been naive enough to see his father as something of a hero, and until that pleasant illusion had been shattered only a few years later by the reality that his father was a supremely flawed, supremely dysfunctional, overall non-heroic person, Albus too had been excited by the thought of going to a special magical school like his mum and dad and learning how to do spells, just like them.

Thinking back to that time shook him a little. It reminded him that he hadn’t always been at war with his father.

Things would have been easier if he had been.

“And then you got there and it turned out to be terrible after all,” Albus finished for him.

But Scorpius shook his head.

“Not for me,” Scorpius said.

Albus turned to his friend, shocked, and maybe even just a tiny bit disappointed.

“All I ever wanted to do was go to Hogwarts and have a mate to get up to mayhem with,” Scorpius admitted, a little apologetically. “Just like Harry Potter. And I got his son. How crazily fortunate is
that?"

For one horrifying moment, Albus felt like the air had been sucked from his lungs.

“But I’m nothing like my dad,” Albus insisted, needing Scorpius to understand that. How could they possibly be true friends if he, like everyone else, he could only see him as a bargain-basement version of his father?

Scorpius nodded firmly.

“You’re better,” Scorpius said, and for once in all his fourteen years of life, Albus had heard what he’d always wanted to, from the person who mattered most to him.


Albus could have punched the air with his triumph.

If Scorpius had started out with the usual romantic notions of Harry Potter and his heroism and adventures (like most kids these days), then the fact that at some point Scorpius had decided that he, Albus, even with his bad moods and pessimism and loser status was the far superior Potter made Albus almost dizzy with elation.

There was someone out there that had compared Harry Potter and his failure of a Slytherin son, and come to the conclusion that he was the best of the pair.

And this person just happened to be Albus’s favourite in the world.

If he hadn’t been fourteen years old, wearing a swanky uniform, and about to embark on a very important mission, he might actually have shed a tear.

“You’re my best friend, Albus,” Scorpius continued frankly, in that easy, affectionate way of his. “And this is mayhem to the nth degree! Which is great, thumbs-up great, it’s just - I have got to say - I don’t mind admitting - I am a tiny bit - just a tiny bit scared.”

Albus looked at Scorpius, really looked at him. Scorpius looked nervous, and eager, and bright-eyed. There wasn’t anyone else Albus would chosen to accompany him on the journey. Not even Delphi.

“You’re my best friend too,” Albus agreed, feeling warm as he said it. “And don’t worry - I have a good feeling about this.”

“Albus!” came a familiar and unwelcome voice, echoing eerily through the trees. It was the voice of Albus’s uncle Ron. He sounded worryingly close. The boys turned to each other in panic.

Clearly their disappearance had been discovered and news had spread. There wasn’t much time. If Uncle Ron managed to get to them they’d be dragged back to Hogwarts in disgrace and with nothing to show for it.

“But we’ve got to go - now,” Albus said decisively.

Scorpius nodded his head in agreement and held out the long golden chain around his neck. Albus moved in a little closer so that Scorpius could place it delicately over his head, leaving them linked, the Time Turner hanging in the small space between them.

Albus took the hourglass in his hand, and Scorpius reached out for Albus’s sleeve.
The boys shared a look, a nod of determined agreement, and then Albus pressed down on the Time-Turner, which began to twist and vibrate immediately.

The first task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament, they both thought desperately. Take us to the first task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament...

Scorpius clamped his eyes shut as their surroundings turned into a rush of colours and movement, the sensation making him dizzy. His grip on Albus’s sleeve tightened.

Albus kept his eyes firmly on Scorpius.

There was a whoosh of light, a smash of noise, and time stopped. It turned over, thought a bit, and began spooling backwards, slowly at first and then speeding up.

Then the Time-Turner vibrated violently. Albus was put in mind of the feeling of standing on a platform as a train rushed by, and the uneasy feeling that the platform itself was rushing backwards past the stationary train, only this was far worse, by at least one hundred times. The lights were so bright, the sensation so nauseating, that even Albus gave in and closed his eyes.

Silence.

And then suddenly a riot of noise. The world seemed to still.

Albus opened his eyes just in time to see he and Scorpius consumed by a crowd of rowdy, excitable students. It looked like the students had simply materialised around them, but Albus knew that just like with the platform and the train, it was only an illusion. It was they who had suddenly appeared out of thin air.

Albus reached out to gently nudge Scorpius, who still had his eyes shut. When he opened them he looked afraid of what he might see. Albus gave him an encouraging grin and carefully ducked out from under the delicate chain, leaving Scorpius in possession of the precious item and their only way home.

There weren’t many people Albus would have handed that Time-Turner over to given the circumstances.

Thankfully, the students surrounding the boys were all facing forwards, too busy clamouring to catch a glimpse of the proceedings taking place in the Hogwarts grounds, to notice that two Durmstrang boys had joined their number.

“Ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, I give you- the greatest - the fabulous - the one - and the only TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT,” came an amplified voice from somewhere above them.

A large cheer rose up in response.

Albus couldn’t quite believe they’d done it. Travelled back in time. He and Scorpius. Ready to change history.

After tucking the Time-Turner carefully away under his cape, Scorpius too tried to get the measure of the situation. Yes, this all sounded very promising, but Scorpius would not rejoice until he was sure.

“If you’re from Hogwarts. Give me a cheer!”

The Hogwarts students surrounding them yelled as loud as they possibly could. It was deafening.
They outnumbered everyone else by a fairly large amount.

“If you’re from Durmstrang - give me a cheer!”

A second cheer rose up, this one deeper but at about the same almost unbearable volume.

Neither Albus or Scorpius had recovered enough from the shock of their arrival to cheer on time, but judging by the immense and almost threatening roar that carried across the grounds, the Durmstrang boys didn’t seem to need their help on that front.

“And if you’re from Beauxbatons give me a cheer!”

The third cheer was ever so slightly limp.

“Slightly less enthusiastic from the French there,” quipped the commentator.

Scorpius turned to Albus with a beam. He recognised that voice. It was all the confirmation he needed.

“It’s worked! That’s Ludo Bagman!” he exclaimed, pointing needlessly in the direction of the commentator’s box.

They’d made it. Really made it. It was November 24th, 1994. A cold Sunday afternoon.

They were in the Hogwarts grounds, the mighty castle looming up above them, a large tent erected to their left and an even larger enclosure standing further over to the right.

For Scorpius, it was like stepping into a dream. It was everything he’d ever hoped for. He had landed slap bang in the middle of history.

Time and again he had read about the fateful event, about these very stands, the Champions Tent, the dragon enclosure, the rules, the regulations, the days leading up to the first task and even the emotions of the competitors. Fleur Weasley (née Delacour), decorated war hero and occasional model, had given several interviews since about the selection process, the preparation for tasks, the atmosphere in the tent. Scorpius had read every account with an almost desperate form of hunger, wishing that he too could be sucked into the moment to experience it for himself.

As Scorpius tried to drink in the feeling of standing in history, he tried to remember what he knew of the event, and what was happening at that very moment, even though it was hidden from he, Albus, and the rest of the cheering crowds.

He knew that Harry Potter had spent the previous day practicing a Summoning Charm with the help of his friend (and future Minister for Magic) Hermione Granger. In less than an hour Albus’s father would manage to get past a fearsome Hungarian Horntail by summoning his broom, a Firebolt (which had at that time been a fairly impressive brand), and soaring right over its head, flying closer and closer until the creature was successfully tempted and decided to chase him through the air, leaving the golden eggs unguarded. Harry Potter would sail through the task with only a slight shoulder injury from the dragon’s tail, and end up in joint first place along with young Quidditch star Viktor Krum.

Scorpius had always felt Harry had been under marked by then-Durmstrang Headmaster Igor Karkaroff, who had only given him a four out of ten for his efforts.

At the time, Scorpius knew that many of the Hogwarts faction had wanted to contest the score, but they would have thought it was simply a case of an overly competitive Headmaster. How could
they have known, back in 1994, that those with Dark Marks seared onto their skin were being summoned and now faced a choice of run to their former leader, or run far, far from him in order to keep their lives? How could anyone have known that the once-Death Eater Igor Karkaroff would be found dead in a shack only two years later, murdered by his own former comrades for refusing to rejoin the group when Voldemort rose to power?

At this very moment, Harry Potter was probably sitting in the Champions Tent with the three other (much older) Champions, having been briefed by Ludo Bagman; Head of the Department of Magical Games and Sports, and today’s commentator, about what was to come. Scorpius wondered if when fourteen year old Harry was nervous, he grew quiet and sullen, like Albus did.

As Ludo Bagman’s voice filled the grounds once again, and the crowd began to cheer him, Scorpius was forced to admit that his beloved books, although having truthfully recounted the facts about the 1994 Triwizard Tournament, had never quite managed to explain the electric atmosphere of the event satisfactorily.

“And there they are. Ladies and gentleman - boys and girls - I present to you - the reason why we’re all here - THE CHAMPIONS! Representing Durmstrang, what eyebrows, what a gait, what a boy, there’s nothing he won’t try on a broomstick, it’s Viktor Krazy Krum!”

Annoyingly, the view from the boys’ part of the crowd was limited, simply because of the amount of shrieking, animated students crammed into one area. As much as Albus jostled, and Scorpius stood up on his tiptoes, they couldn’t seem to catch a glimpse of anything that was going on.

But that didn’t mean they couldn’t participate. As the only Durmstrang Champion was given his introduction, Albus and Scorpius grinned at each other. Playing Durmstrang students seemed like it was going to be a lot of fun…

“Go Krazy Krum! Go Krazy Krum!” they chanted along with the other Durmstrang students.

Scorpius even took the opportunity to try out what Albus could only assume was supposed to be a Bulgarian accent.

Scorpius beamed with wonder. Viktor Krum had caught the snitch for Bulgaria at the 1994 Quidditch World Cup against Ireland at only eighteen years of age. His father, Draco, had been there, as a boy, and seen it all happen. He had told Scorpius about a particular move called the Wronski Feint which involved flying directly towards the ground and was incredibly dangerous. Draco had sat in the luxury box with Lucius and Narcissa, as guests of Cornelius Fudge. It should have been a delightful day out...

Although his father spoke only of his joy at watching the game, the wonderful seats, and his time with his mother, Scorpius was well aware of his grandfather’s part in the horrific events that followed. The torture and humiliation of a family of Muggles by Death Eaters had eclipsed the glory of the game, and although there had never been any concrete proof, Scorpius was certain his grandfather had been involved somehow. His father seemed to believe so too. The fact seemed to bring him shame.

It had only happened a few months ago, in August. Never before had the past seemed so close. Never had Scorpius understood how hard it might be for some to get over their preconceptions of the Malfoy family. How many of the students currently surrounding he and Albus had witnessed the attack on the Muggles? How many had run that day, fearing the Dark Mark conjured in the sky?

“From the Beauxbatons Academy,” continued Ludo Bagman. “Zut alors, it’s Fleur Delacour!”
It was ever so slightly surreal for Albus to hear the polite applause for his aunt. Although her cheer had been predictably less enthusiastic than the one for Quidditch legend (and absolute gentleman according to Aunt Hermione) Viktor Krum, she still had a fair amount of support. There were several cat-calls and wolf whistles from the Gryffindor boys and Durmstrang students which Albus tried his best to ignore.

“And from Hogwarts, not one but two students, he makes us all go weaky at the kneesy, he’s Cedric Delicious Diggory!”

The crowd went wild. Albus and Scorpius exchanged a look at just how cringey and overall odd it was for Ludo Bagman to be referring to a student as ‘delicious’. Everyone knew that Ludo Bagman was a dodgy character. To Scorpius and Albus (and pretty much everyone else back in 2020) he was something of a laughing stock. Ludo had lost his job a year after the tournament in order to go on the run from several goblins who he owed some serious debts. Listening to his voice now, so perky and full of showmanship, Scorpius felt sure he could hear the stress of his gambling problems somewhere in the back of his voice, or was that simply hindsight?

“And then the other - you know him as the Boy Who Lived, I know him as the boy who keeps surprising us all…”

“That’s my dad,” Albus said, unnecessarily.

Harry Potter was only fourteen years old. The same age as he and Albus. It seemed an awfully big challenge he had ahead of him. When he’d been younger Scorpius had thought that fourteen was plenty old enough to fight past a dragon. It was almost grown up. Harry Potter’s feat had seemed wonderful and heroic.

It was only now that he had reached the age himself that he realised just how far away from ‘grown up’ fourteen actually was, as much as Scorpius often wished otherwise.

He certainly could never have got through the first task. Just being face to face with a fearsome, beautiful, dangerous creature like a dragon would have caused Scorpius to faint.

And the thought of Albus being thrown in that enclosure… it was too awful to bear thinking about. How on earth had someone as young as Harry even been allowed to compete? If Harry Potter had been burned to a crisp by a dragon then Albus would never even have existed! The thought was too terrible to contemplate.

“Yes, it’s Harry Plucky Potter!”

A great cheer went up, and Albus saw Scorpius make a conscious effort not to start chapping and cheering excitedly along with everyone else. It was painfully noticeable that Cedric’s cheer had been louder than his father’s, but Albus refused to feel sorry for him.

The loudest cheer for Harry Potter, however, came from a shrill voice at the edge of the crowd. Recognising that sound (from witnessing Rose and Hugo being told off hundreds of times) Albus peered through the crowd to see a nervous-looking Hermione Granger.

Albus had seen the photographs of his aunt in her teens, and so he was familiar with her early face, but it had never before struck him how much she resembled Rose.

Albus wondered why Uncle Ron wasn’t standing with her to cheer on his best friend.

“And now,” Ludo Bagman announced with some drama. “Silence please all. The - first - task. Retrieving a golden egg. From a nest of - ladies and gentleman, boys and girls, I give you -
A cheer went up for Albus’s eccentric uncle and Albus and Scorpius both edged a little further to the edge of the crowd to try and catch a glimpse of him. They ended up standing directly behind Hermione, who looked so nervous that she could burst into tears at any moment.

“If you’re going to stand so close,” came a familiar, well-spoken, stressed-out, and rather bossy little voice. “I’d rather you didn’t breathe on me quite so much.”

Scorpius stared at the girl in front of him with shock.

“Rose?” he asked, furrowing his brows. “What are you doing here?”

Hermione Granger looked suddenly stern and got the measure of the pair of Durmstrang students currently gazing intently at her. The dark haired one looked a little like her best friend Harry, and the blond haired boy had been breathing so heavily in his excitement that she could only assume he was some Viktor Krum super-fan.

“Who’s Rose?” she asked. “What’s happened to your accent?”

Already she looked suspicious.

With no time to explain the family resemblance, Albus put a hand on Scorpius’s shoulder (to warn him to shut up) and smiled reassuringly at his aunt.

“Sorry, Hermione,” he said in what came out as a German accent, not intentionally. He’d been aiming for something near Norwegian or Swedish. “He’s got you mixed up with someone else.”

Scorpius seemed to get the message because his eyes widened and then he obediently closed his mouth.

“How do you know my name?” Hermione enquired curiously, narrowing her eyes.

“And with no time to lose, let’s bring out our first champion - facing a Swedish Short-Snout, I give you - CEDRIC DIGGORY!”

The fearful rumbling of a dragon’s roar distracted Hermione, who looked utterly petrified and gave a little jump. Instead of continuing her inquisition, she remained firmly facing forwards, trying to watch as much of the proceedings as she could from her limited view.

Scorpius and Albus exchanged a significant look. It was almost time.

Any second now Cedric Diggory would step into the enclosure, ready to face his selected dragon: the Swedish Short-Snout.

In minutes he would be dodging and diving for his life. The idea would strike him to use a distraction, to skilfully Transfigure a rock into a Labrador, and he would reach for his wand…

Which with any luck, Albus would summon from his hand, thus making him fail the task miserably.

Albus readied his wand and waited.

“And Cedric Diggory has entered the stage. And he seems ready. Scared but ready. He dodges this way. He dodges that. The girls swoon as he dives for cover. They cry as one: don’t damage our Diggory, Mr Dragon”
Scorpius felt an odd vibration and looked to the ground, wondering if the power of the dragon’s cry was causing the very earth to shake.

But the ground was still.

The Time-Turner tucked safely under Scorpius’s cape however?

“Albus,” Scorpius hissed. “Something is wrong. The Time-Turner, it’s shaking…”

An ominous ticking began, an incessant, dangerous ticking. The noise was coming directly from the heart of the Time-Turner. With no thought for secrecy, Scorpius pulled the Time-Turner out from under his cape and stared at it, perturbed.

“And Cedric skirts left and he dives right - and he readies his wand - what has this young, brave, handsome man got up his sleevies now-“

Albus extended his wand and concentrated. He only had one shot at this.

“Expelliarmus! Accio Cedric Diggory's wand!”

For a moment nothing happened, the crowd continued to ‘oooh’ and ‘ahhh’…and then a wand came speeding out of nowhere into Albus’s ready hand.

Albus would have shouted with relief had he not been keen to hide the item now in his grasp. He’d managed it first time! And it had been so quick that he was certain nobody had seen where the wand had ended up. Cheering along with the other Durmstrang students at the failure of the Hogwarts favourite, Albus allowed Cedric’s wand to drop to the ground, to be lost in the shifting, surging feet of the crowd.

“- but no, what’s this? Is it Dark Magic or is it something else entirely - Cedric Diggory is disarmed-“

Scorpius had not even noticed that Albus had completed his task, so disturbed was he by the noise emitting from his necklace. Instead he was peering at the Time Turner around his neck with suspicion and mild horror.

“Albus, I think the Time-Turner - something is wrong…”

The Time-Turner ticked more loudly still.

“It’s all going wrong for Diggors. This could be the end of the task for him. The end of the tournament…”

It was too much for Scorpius. Something felt very, very wrong.

A feeling in his gut told him that if didn’t act, and soon, something dreadful was going to happen. The Time-Turner was radiating heat, starting to spin of its own accord…

Scorpius threw the chain over Albus’s neck and grabbed him close just as the ticking reached its crescendo.

A flash of light rendered Scorpius momentarily blind. He clamped his eyes shut against the glow and absolutely refused to surrender his grip on Albus.

They were travelling in time again, colours merging into each other, lights flickering. There was so much noise.
All Scorpius could do was cling to Albus and wait for it to be over...

And then they stopped. Or the world had stopped. And all was silent.

Until a horrific sound filled the air.

Albus, hollering in agony, slumped heavily against Scorpius, gasping for breath.

Immediately Scorpius tried to hold his friend upright, trying desperately to work out what was wrong. Albus still had all his limbs, he didn’t seem to be bleeding, and he was still breathing... so why was he in so much pain? Then he noticed Albus’s arm, which he was holding at an odd angle. Scorpius realised it was probably broken (how had that happened?), and adjusted his hold on Albus so as not to touch it.

Scorpius didn’t immediately notice that the world had changed around them, that the tent and the enclosure had drifted out of existence, that all those rowdy clamouring students no longer existed, at least not the way they were then. He did not even have room in his brain or his heart to register that it was darker now, September instead of November, colder than that fateful afternoon of the first task. That time had moved furiously on for he and Albus. That twenty six long years had sped by in the blink of an eye, while they had simply stood still, eyes closed, clinging to each other. Scorpius was utterly overtaken by panic.

He patted Albus on the cheek nervously and considered his limited knowledge of healing spells. There were several that he knew might work, but he’d never attempted them before and he was afraid to hurt Albus.

“Albus!” Scorpius exclaimed as Albus gave another short moan and struggled to stay on his feet. “Did it hurt you? Albus are you -“

For a moment Albus went very still, awfully deathly still, but then with a pained groan he opened his bright green eyes. Scorpius could have wept with relief.

“What happened?” Albus asked, looking around with confusion and clinging to Scorpius with his good arm so that he wouldn’t fall down.

Scorpius shook his head with honest confusion.

“There must be some limit - the Time-Turner must have some kind of time limit…”

Albus reached out to put a hand on Scorpius’s arm, just to show that was all right and to calm his friend down. He was still in a fair amount of pain, but Scorpius’s distressed expression was enough to make him be brave.

“Do you think we’ve done it?” Albus asked weakly. “Do you think we’ve changed anything?”

Scorpius was spared having to answer because at that moment, four people rushed towards the boys, led by none other than a terrified Harry Potter. Just a step behind him was Ginny Potter, all but sprinting in the direction of her son, and then, looking equally as distressed, was his own father.

Scorpius had never seen his father run before, and he looked surprisingly inelegant as he dashed after the Potters, his dark stylishly-cut robes flying out behind him, his eyes fixed on his son.

And bringing up the rear was Ron Weasley, panting for breath and holding his chest.

The frantic approach of the four adults told Scorpius that he and his best friend were in some
serious trouble.

It was hard to think straight when Albus was leaning heavily on him and looking like he was about to pass out, but Scorpius knew he had a job to do.

Firstly he yanked at the Time-Turner around his and Albus’s necks and shoved it safely back into his pocket. Secondly, (as his father came into focus) he made sure he was holding Albus up far more firmly, but with far less intimacy.

Albus seemed less with-it. He hadn’t even managed to find a glare for his father, which meant this was seriously bad. Instead he was gazing vaguely around him.

Scorpius wasn’t sure he could possibly hold Albus’s weight any longer, not with the way his legs were now shaking, but he didn’t want to put him down on the ground in front of Harry Potter. He wanted to show both his father and Albus’s that he was a good friend.

“I told you,” panted Ron. “I told you I saw them.”

Scorpius remembered Albus’s previous question. Had they done it? Had anything changed at all?

“I think we’re about to find out,” he muttered, so quietly that the adults couldn’t hear him.

Draco Malfoy saw his son seemingly whispering something to Albus Potter and looked most displeased.

Upon hearing Scorpius’s voice, Albus knew he had to find some strength from somewhere. With effort, he raised his head, and was able to make out both his mother and father, looking horrified at his slumped form.

“Hello, Dad,” Albus said, loudly, seeing no reason to waste time. “Is something wrong?”

Harry stared at his son with utter disbelief.

“Yes, you could say that.”

It was too much for Scorpius. Albus gave a wobble, Scorpius tried (unsuccessfully) to support his full weight, and suddenly Albus collapsed onto the grass.

Scorpius tried not to feel embarrassed when Harry and Ginny Potter ran forward to scoop up their son, but he was.

He wished he’d been strong enough to hold him.

Chapter End Notes

I hope I managed to do these scenes justice! It's another one of those 'better on stage' parts, I think.

Anyway, please do leave me a comment because I read them all. They often come through when I'm writing and they give me such a boost of confidence.

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Act Two: Scene Eight

Chapter Notes

You get a bit of Harry this chapter! Hooray! (I love Harry, not gonna lie, even if he's a bit of a fool in CC)

I really hope you enjoy this!

It's started to get a bit necessary to have some 'grown up' scenes in order for this to make sense, so although I won't be doing all of them, if they are vital to the plot they will be included.

And just for anyone who has not read the script. Yes, ALL of this dialogue is 100% in the script. (Except from the dream sequence which is my own addition).

Please please please leave me a comment because I live for those!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry had been standing vigil at Albus’s bedside for at least two hours now. He’d been in and out of the hospital wing for the past day, even after Madam Pomfrey had assured him that Albus was in no danger. Ginny had told him to come away, that it was just a broken arm, that Albus might even resent his staying around to ‘guard’ him, but Harry was determined to be with his son.

Sometimes, Harry thought, it was easier to spend time with his youngest son when he was asleep.

James was the reckless one. Lily was the adventurous one. So Harry couldn’t quite understand why it was that he was here in the hospital wing with Albus instead of either of them. He hadn’t realised Albus had it in him to do something so risky.

When James or Lily got into trouble, it was always for the same reason: fun. Or excitement. Or just plain curiosity.

But with Albus there was always a deeper, hidden motive at play. It was difficult to be close to a son who seemed to keep the real version of himself entirely private.

Harry’s back was killing him. Over the past few years the aches and pains had hit him in a way he’d never have imagined as a young adult. Never before had he had to worry about spontaneously breaking into a run, or reaching a bit too high for something, or just waking up in bed having slept awkwardly.

He was still young, he supposed. He hoped that at forty years old he was only just approaching the halfway stage of his life, but making his way up to middle age… it was scary. He’d never planned on getting this far and now he was here it was all still a bit of a blur.

Harry checked once again on Albus, who was breathing softly, took his glasses off, and then rubbed his tired eyes. His legs were starting to ache from sitting by Albus’s bedside for so long. With a yawn, he stood up and began to walk slowly around the room, stretching his back and...
reaching up into the air.

And then a pair of eyes met his own.

Albus Dumbledore was standing in the picture frame just above Albus’s bed, looking altogether quite startled to be seen.

Harry was certain he probably looked fairly startled as well.

“Professor Dumbledore,” he said politely to the portrait. He’d never quite got used to talking to paintings. Was there an etiquette to this sort of thing? If there was, Harry had never been informed.

“Good evening, Harry,” Professor Dumbledore said kindly. The voice was so familiar that Harry relaxed. A few moments previously he had been an adult. He had been a responsible, fully-grown father, watching over his troubled son. Now he felt able to let go and be himself in front of the man who, in turn, had often played a fatherly role to him.

“I’ve missed you,” Harry admitted. “Whenever I’ve dropped in on the Headmistress lately, your frame’s been empty.”

“Ah, well, I do like to pop into my other portraits now and then,” Dumbledore admitted with a smile. The old man glanced down at Albus. “Will he be all right?”

“He’s been out twenty-four hours, mostly so Madam Pomfrey could reset his arm. She said it was the strangest thing… it’s like it was broken twenty years ago and allowed to set in the ‘most contrary’ of directions.” Harry realised he might have said more than was necessary and cleared his throat. “He’ll be fine,” he finished, with a nod.

Dumbledore gave a thoughtful hum.

“A difficult thing, I imagine, to watch your child in pain.”

Harry looked up at Dumbledore with his familiar silver beard, kind, brilliant blue eyes, and half-moon spectacles glinting in the light, and then down at his sleeping son. As usual, Dumbledore was absolutely right. It was… one of the worst things in the world. It made Harry feel helpless, useless.

“I’ve never asked you how you felt about me naming him after you, have I?”

Dumbledore gave a gentle smile and then bowed his head, seemingly acknowledging the kind gesture.

“Candidly, Harry,” he revealed. “It seemed a great weight to place upon the poor boy.”

It hadn’t been meant as a weight. It had been a gesture of love, the naming of Albus. Professor Dumbledore was the wisest man Harry had ever known. He’d been gentle, and kind, and above all, strong. Harry wanted all three of his children to have the strength needed to get through what was a strange, difficult, terrible, and often quite wonderful world.

He wasn’t sure it had been a particularly successful gift to Albus so far.

Harry took a deep breath. There were so many questions he wanted to ask. So many subjects he wished to discuss. But none more pressing than the safety of his son.

After Albus and Scorpius had gone missing, Harry had begun to search for them, taking time off
from the Ministry in order to right his wrong. A large group of Ministry-sent wizards and helpful locals summoned by an emergency edition of the Daily Prophet (put together by Ginny) had joined the search party, and were patrolling the grounds and area outside of Hogwarts. Even Draco Malfoy had joined the hunt. Harry had seen him pacing furiously about, calling for his son, and cursing the uselessness of the other searchers.

At one point, their eyes had met, and Draco shot him a look of such fury that Harry had been slightly worried for his safety. Never before in his life had he seen Draco so angry, so… afraid?

The look Malfoy gave him clearly expressed one thing: *If you and your pathetic excuse for parenting skills have cost me my son, I will end you, Potter.*

For the first time in his life, Harry felt Draco had a legitimate reason to be angry with him. It was an odd sensation, being so far in the wrong.

While searching the forest, Harry had come across the centaur, Bane. Centaurs weren’t usually the best conversationalists, but desperate times called for desperate measures, and so Harry had asked the proud, majestic creature if he knew anything which might help.

After the customary insults had been issued (Centaurs had one hell of a superiority complex), Bane had declared, horrifyingly:

> *There is a black cloud around your son, a dangerous black cloud.*

> “Around Albus?” Harry had asked, shocked.

> “A black cloud that may endanger us all. You’ll find your son again, Harry Potter,” Bane had said, solemnly. “But then you could lose him forever.”

Harry thought of Bane’s words and made a decision. The Dumbledore of the portrait smiled encouragingly at him.

> “I need your help,” Harry admitted. “I need your advice. Bane says Albus is in danger. How do I protect my son, Dumbledore?”

> “You ask me, of all people, how to protect a boy in terrible danger?” Dumbledore asked with what seemed like slight amusement. “We cannot protect the young from harm. Pain must and will come.”

Harry could feel the old familiar irritation rising in his chest. Dumbledore had been a great man, yes, a wise man, but there was nothing more frustrating than when he spoke in that almost poetically vague manner of his.

> “So I’m supposed to stand and watch?” Harry demanded, realising he sounded sulky and sullen and… actually rather a lot like Albus. He snapped himself out of it in an instant.

> “No. You’re supposed to teach him how to meet life.”

> “How?” Harry asked. “He won’t listen.”

> “Perhaps he’s waiting for you to see him clearly?” Dumbledore suggested.

Harry frowned, trying his best to digest that. He was seeing Albus clearly, wasn’t he? Yes, his son was fairly secretive... but he knew him. Didn’t he?
“It is a portrait’s curse and blessing to… hear things,” Dumbledore said softly. “At the school, at the Ministry, I hear people talking…”

Harry could feel his temper rising again. He had never liked people talking about him, and the thought of them taking it upon themselves to discuss his son filled him with rage.

“And what’s the gossip about me and my son?” Harry asked, trying very hard to remain calm.

“Not gossip,” Dumbledore said softly. “Concern. That you two are struggling. That he’s difficult. That he is angry with you. I have formed the impression that - perhaps - you are blinded by your love for him.”

“Blinded?” Harry repeated incredulously.

“You must see him as he is, Harry. You must look for what’s wounding him.”

“Haven’t I seen him as he is? What’s wounding my son?”

Harry paused to think on that.

“Or is it who’s wounding my son?”

Albus shifted slightly, still deep in dreams. Harry glanced down at him with concern.

“Dad…” he mumbled.

“This black cloud, it’s someone isn’t it?” Harry demanded, with a new fierceness brought on by seeing his son in such a vulnerable state. “Not something?”

Dumbledore gave another of his infuriating little smiles.

“Ah really, what does my opinion matter any more?” he said cheerfully. “I am paint and memory, Harry, paint and memory. And I never had a son.”

Dumbledore sounded worryingly final, like he was readying himself to disappear again.

Not this time, Harry thought furiously. You’re not leaving me again. Not when I need you.

“But I need your advice,” he insisted, more loudly than he’d intended.

“Dad?” came the voice of his son.

Harry looked down at Albus and then back up at Dumbledore’s portrait. What he saw made him want to swear with disappointment and fury. All that remained was an empty frame.

+++ 

Albus was having the strangest dream.

He’d been standing in the Forbidden Forest with Delphi. She was teaching him a spell that would make James’s hair pink whenever he was particularly annoying. It was all going just fine, in fact, better than fine. He felt relaxed, at peace, on top of the world.

“You’re amazing at magic, Albus,” said Delphi with awe. “Miles better than your father was at this age.”
Albus found he had to agree.

“And you’re far more handsome than he ever was as well. Not to mention that you’re in a much better House…”

Well, when Delphi put it like that…

Albus had been about to show off by turning Delphi’s hair pink (at which he was certain she would start clapping joyously at the shade and his skill) when suddenly, out of nowhere, Scorpius appeared between them with a Time-Turner around his neck.

“Albus!” he exclaimed, sounding deeply distressed.

“Can you move out of the way please, Scorpius?” Albus asked politely. But his friend wouldn’t budge.

“Albus, you need to listen to me!”

Delphi stepped out from behind Scorpius and all was well again.

“Do you know what would be really wizzo?” Delphi asked, grinning.

Albus shook his head.

“If you turned Scorpius’s hair pink.”

Scorpius did not seem to like the idea one bit.

“But I like my hair just the way it is! It’s like my father’s…”

“Come on, Albus. It’ll be fun,” Delphi continued persuasively. “And we love having fun, don’t we?”

Albus did enjoy having fun with Delphi. He did.

“Albus, can’t you see what she’s doing?” Scorpius exclaimed desperately. “And why is your hair blue? You hate bright colours!”

A mirror appeared before Albus, and Scorpius was right. The tips of Albus’s hair had been dyed blue, just like Delphi’s. When had that happened?

“It looks much cooler like that,” Delphi said, smiling.

“Does it?” Albus asked doubtfully.

Delphi nodded, and with a flick of her wand in Scorpius’s direction, incanted a spell which immediately turned his hair bright pink.

Scorpius began to cry.

“This isn’t right, Albus!” he sobbed. “Your hair is black and my hair is blond and we like it that way! Why do we have to change?”

“I…” Albus found himself muttering, looking between smiling Delphi and sobbing Scorpius. “I don’t… I…”
And then they both disappeared.

“What’s wrong with my son?” came a voice from behind him. Albus didn’t need to turn to know it was his father. “What’s wrong with my son?”

“There’s nothing wrong with me, Dad,” Albus tried to explain.

“What’s wrong with my son?” Harry Potter repeated, looming over Albus and casting an almighty shadow which blocked out the light. “What’s wounding my son? Who’s wounding my son?”

“Dad…” Albus said, but he found he couldn’t continue. The words wouldn’t come out.

“This black cloud, it’s someone, isn’t it? Not something?”

Black cloud? There was no black cloud… was there?

“I need your advice.”

“Dad…” Albus mumbled again.

And then a line of dancing blank-eyed male nurses, each in their pairs, tangoed past him and his father. A black cloud appeared above Albus’s head and then fell, suddenly, on his face, suffocating him.

Everything turned dark.

+++}

When Albus opened his eyes the first thing he saw was his father.

“Dad?”

His father looked at him briefly, and then up at something on the wall behind him.

“No, where have you gone now?” his father asked, looking incredibly stressed.

“We’re in - the hospital wing?” Albus suggested, looking around and only just noticing this fact for himself. What was he doing there?

And then he remembered. Amos Diggory. Delphi. The Ministry. Scorpius. The Time-Turner. The Triwizard Tournament. And now… here?

He couldn’t remember being wounded, but he suspected it must have happened as he and Scorpius traveled back to their time. Where was Scorpius anyway? He wished he was at his bedside instead of his father. At least then they could discuss what was going on.

Albus shifted slightly in his bed to try and get a glimpse of what it was his father had been looking at. An empty portrait sat on the wall above his bed. Presumably the occupant had just left. Well, that was something. At least he and Scorpius hadn’t created a world in which his father wandered about and talked to himself.

“Yes,” his father agreed, sounding rather discombobulated. “And you’re - you will be fine. For recuperation, Madam Pomfrey wasn’t sure what to prescribe and said you should probably eat lots of - chocolate. Actually, do you mind if I have some? I’ve got something to tell you and I don’t think you’ll like it.”
Albus glanced up at his dad. What did he have to say? Did he even want to know? From the look on his father’s face, this was something big.

He could have asked then and there, but somehow Albus felt the need to buy himself some time. He was still feeling a little hazy and so he decided not to engage for the moment.

“Okay,” he answered, in as light a voice as possible. “I think.”

Harry took a piece of chocolate from the bar on the bedside table. (Albus noticed that his father chose the piece closest to him.) With a deep breath he put the whole chunk in his mouth.

Albus looked at his dad, confused.

It was only in times of extreme stress or celebration that his father ate chocolate. Albus’s mother had a strict healthy eating policy at home. It was one of the only things Albus disliked about his mum.

“Better?” Albus asked tentatively, as his father swallowed his mouthful.

“Much,” Harry agreed. He picked up the chocolate bar and offered it to Albus, who took a piece from the very edge of the bar and popped it into his mouth.

“The arm,” his father said, in forced casual tones. “How does it feel?”

In all honesty, Albus had forgotten all about it. Glancing at his right arm he gave it a flex. It seemed to be working just fine.

“It feels great,” he told his father.

Harry’s eyes grew soft and concerned. Albus inwardly braced himself for what could potentially be an embarrassing outpouring of fatherly kindness. He knew how the game worked by now. His father would play the ‘good father’ card just so he could break whatever bad news he had to depart a few minutes later and get away with it.

“Where did you go, Albus?” Harry asked softly. “I can’t tell you what it did to us - your mum was worried sick…”

Clearly his father was putting on quite the performance, because Albus was sure he wouldn't have been overly disappointed to find his least favourite child had gone walkabout.

Well, two could play at that game.

Albus was an exceptional liar. Such an exceptional liar, that nobody knew it but him. And so he looked up at his father with complete and utter believable regret.

“We decided we didn’t want to come to school,” he told his father, hanging his head with mock-shame. “We thought we could start again - in the Muggle world - we discovered we were wrong. We were coming back to Hogwarts when you found us.”

His father raised a suspicious eyebrow.

“In Durmstrang robes?”

“The robes were… the whole thing… Scorpius and I - we didn’t think,” Albus stammered out, adding a few extra blinks to the mix.
When he glanced up at his father again, it looked like he actually believed it.

“And why… why did you run?” his father asked, looking pained. “Because of me? Because of what I said?”

Well this was getting easier by the second. Lies were always far easier to sell if you mixed them with the truth, and it was a well-known fact that Albus Potter hated Hogwarts.

“I don’t know,” he told his father with a shrug. “Hogwarts isn’t actually that pleasant a place when you don’t fit in.”

Which was the absolute truth. It was easy for his father, Albus thought. He’d been The Boy Who Lived from the very start. He’d never known what it was to be an outcast, an outsider, a complete and utter loser.

His father nodded, accepting this explanation also.

“And did Scorpius - encourage you to - go?” Harry asked, seemingly finding this topic a more difficult one to broach.

Albus was stunned out of his performance for a moment by the implausibility of the idea.

“Scorpius?” he repeated, surprised. “No.”

Harry took a long, hard look at his youngest son. Yes, he may have seemed the same stubborn, un-cooperative, difficult Albus he had always been, but somehow… Bane’s words made sense.

Albus would never have done anything like what he had in the past twenty four hours of his own accord. He was too quiet, too moody, too sullen. It couldn’t have been his idea.

Some influence was at work here. A dark cloud. And who did they know who came from a family of notorious Dark Wizards and seemed to have latched onto his son in an almost unhealthy manner?

“I need you to stay away from Scorpius Malfoy,” Harry said firmly.

Albus looked utterly baffled. It was the most expression Harry had seen on his son’s face in months.

“What? Scorpius?”

He sounded like he could laugh. Harry did not see this as a laughing matter.

“I don’t know how you became friends in the first place, but you did - and now - I need you to - “

“My best friend?” Albus clarified, still seemingly stunned. “My only friend?”

“He’s dangerous.”

“Scorpius?” Albus repeated, scoffing out loud at the very idea. “Dangerous?”

Albus felt the overwhelming and perverse urge to burst out laughing. The notion of Scorpius Malfoy of all people being any kind of bad influence whatsoever was hilarious in its implausibility. Scorpius was the most well-mannered, kindest, sweetest, overall good person Albus had ever met.

He couldn’t think of one possible fault his father could find in him. Which meant, of course, that
the great Harry Potter, was in reality a prejudiced, unfair, ignorant… well, Albus didn’t like to say what.

“Have you met him?” Albus demanded. “Dad, if you honestly think he’s the son of Voldemort -“

“I don’t know what he is,” Harry continued, in that same calm voice. “I just know you need to stay away from him. Bane told me-“

“Who’s Bane?” Albus burst out, almost hysterically.

Harry gave him a stern look.

“A centaur with profound divination skills. He said there’s a black cloud around you and-“

“A black cloud?” Albus repeated.

It was ridiculous. Comparing Scorpius to a black cloud was like… well, comparing he, Albus, to a rainbow with a pot of gold sitting at the other end of it. It was such a hideous misjudgement that it hurt.

Scorpius was the cheerful, friendly one. He, Albus, was the sarcastic, resentful, unforgiving one.

Either his father was an idiot or this was a punishment of some sort. Albus was inclined to believe it was the latter.

“And I have very good reason to believe that Dark Magic is in resurgence and I need to keep you safe from it,” his father explained. “Safe from him. Safe from Scorpius.”

Albus hesitated for a moment, half-convinced he was still dreaming, that this was just the next stage of his nightmare. Because this couldn’t be real. His father couldn’t seriously want him to stay away from Scorpius, who was probably the only good thing about his life at the moment...

But one look at his father’s face told Albus everything he needed to know. This really was happening.

Albus felt his resolve strengthen and his face grew hard.

“And if I won’t? Stay away from him?”

Harry glanced at his son and realised that he was about to face the full force of his obstinance.

Luckily he had already prepared for this.

“There’s a map,” Harry explained, refusing to give in to Albus’s stubbornness. “It used to be for those wanting to get up to no good. Now we’re going to use it to keep an eye - a permanent eye - on you. Professor McGonagall will watch your every movement. Any time you are seen together, she’ll come flying - any time you attempt to leave Hogwarts - she’ll fly. I expect you to go to your lessons, none of which you will now share with Scorpius, and between times, you will stay in the Gryffindor common room!”

Albus was so outraged by this fresh injustice that he almost pushed himself out of bed and to his feet.

“You can’t make me go into Gryffindor! I’m Slytherin!”

Never had Albus thought he’d be declaring that fact so loudly and proudly, and to his father of all
people, but here he was. He was proud to be a Slytherin, no matter what people thought of him, even if it made him a disappointment. Even if his own father was ashamed.

“Don’t play games, Albus,” Harry said wearily. “You know what House you are. If she finds you with Scorpius - I will fix you with a spell - which will allow me eyes and ears into your every movement, your every conversation. In the meantime, investigations will begin in my department as to his true heritage.”

It was too much for Albus. This was far far worse than any nightmare.

Shockingly, shamefully, he burst into tears.

“But Dad…” he sobbed, finding that even getting his words out was difficult with the new lump in his throat. That he could barely breathe with the way his body was shaking. “You can’t - that’s just not…”

“...I thought for a long time I wasn’t a good enough dad for you because you didn’t like me. It’s only now I realise that I don’t need you to like me, I need you to obey me because I’m your dad and I do know better. I’m sorry, Albus. It has to be this way.”

Albus had spent a great deal of his life resenting his father, criticising him, disliking him. From time to time he’d even imagined he’d hated him.

But now Albus knew he never had. Because right now, for the first time in his life, he felt true hatred burning in his chest. It was nothing like as glamorous as he had imagined.

It hurt.

Chapter End Notes

Comments make me so so so happy. Honestly I love them. They are keeping my motivation high.

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
After recovering from his crying fit, which had been an admittedly humiliating experience, Albus’s first thought was how he was going to get out of this. This being the company of his father, the hospital wing, and ideally, this nightmarish hour of his life.

When Madam Pomfrey had bustled off to see to another student, and his father had nipped off to the loo, Albus had slipped on his shoes, grabbed his wand, and made a break for it.

He’d made it all the way to one of the main staircases when his father appeared, sprinting like a much younger man as he turned a corner and spotted his son standing at the top of the nearest staircase.

Albus considered bolting for it. But his father had been an Auror and he was still pretty quick on his feet. Besides, where would he go? Wherever he went his father would catch him eventually, and then what?


He was serious too. Nobody was going to cage Albus Severus Potter. Not even his ignorant idiot of a father.

“Albus, get back in bed,” Harry said loudly, now following Albus up the stairs at a slower pace. Now he knew that his son couldn’t escape, he thought it was safe to walk again. After all, his chest was pounding. He really wasn’t as fit as he used to be.

He saw his son scan the nearest escape routes, like a trapped animal, and then (thankfully) realise there was no point in trying to get away. Harry had really hoped he wouldn’t end up chasing his youngest son around Hogwarts before managing to somehow bring him to heel, although he wouldn’t have put it past Albus to try something like that. It would have been very Albus to simply hotfoot it for as long as he possibly could, until his father was forced to use the Immobulus Charm on his own son.

“I’ll run away again,” Albus threatened, looking his father right in the eyes.

“No,” Harry responded calmly. “You won’t.”

“I will - and this time, I’ll make sure Ron can’t find us.”

It was the ‘us’ which disturbed Harry more than anything else. His son truly had fallen under the spell of Scorpius Malfoy. He should never have given the boy the benefit of the doubt. This was far worse than he’d thought…

“So I hear my name?” came a familiar voice.

Both Harry and Albus looked round as Ron appeared at the bottom of the staircase. He was holding a cardboard box in his arms, but that wasn’t the most unusual aspect of his appearance by miles.

Ron was now sporting a super-aggressive side parting and his robes were just that touch too short
for him. The whole look of him was wrong. His clothes were *spectacularly* staid. He looked like a businessman. He looked grey. He looked… boring.

Albus had a great many opinions on his Uncle Ron, not all of them favourable, but boring had never previously been an appropriate descriptor for him.

Albus gawped at his uncle, and then at his dad, who was acting, disconcertingly, like this was all entirely normal.

“Uncle Ron!” Albus exclaimed, putting aside his uncle’s strange new attire (maybe Aunt Hermione had finally smartened him up?), simply pleased to see a friendly face. Surely his Uncle Ron, so loving and affectionate to Aunt Hermione, would understand? He would understand that if you had a bond like that with someone, nobody could break it, and anybody who tried to because of ignorance and lies was just plain wrong. He would talk his father round, Albus was sure of it.

“Thank Dumbledore! If ever we needed one of your jokes it’s now…”

Ron frowned up at his nephew with confusion.

“Jokes?” he repeated. “I don’t know any jokes.”

Albus rolled his eyes. Yes, he’d asked for humour, but this odd routine was seriously not what he’d had in mind.

“Of course you do,” Albus said impatiently. “You run a joke shop.”

His Uncle Ron looked so confused at that Albus almost felt sorry for him.

“A joke shop? Well now. Anyway I’m pleased I caught you… I was going to bring some sweets - for a, uh, sort of, a, get well soon, but, uh… actually Padma - she thinks about things a lot more - deeply than I do - and she thought it’d be nicer for you to get something useful for school. So we got you a - set of quills. Yes. Yes. Yes. Look at these bad boys. Top of the range.”

Albus was so horrified that he didn’t even have a polite glance in the box.

“Who’s Padma?”

Harry frowned at Albus, clearly at the end of his tether.

“Your aunt,” he said firmly, shaking his head with disapproval at what he clearly believed was his son’s idea of a wind up.

“I have an Aunt Padma?” Albus confirmed, staring at his father, then Uncle Ron, and then back at his father again.

Uncle Ron looked at Harry with a smile.

“Taken a Confundus Charm to the head, has he?”

Then he turned to Albus, with admirable patience, but not even the slightest trace of humour.

“My wife, Padma. You remember. Talks slightly too close to your face. Smells a bit minty.”

Albus thought that if he could see himself in that moment, his eyebrows would be so far up his face that they would have disappeared under his hair.

Uncle Ron leaned in closer.
“Padma, mother of Panju!”

Albus gawped at Uncle Ron, feeling his stomach turn. He had understood only half of the previous sentence and he wasn’t entirely sure he wanted to understand the rest.

Sensing his nephew wasn’t in the mood to chat, Uncle Ron turned his attention back to Harry.

“That’s why I’m here, of course. Panju. He’s in trouble again. I wanted to just send a Howler but Padma insisted I come in person. I don’t know why. He just laughs at me.”

“But… you’re married to Hermione,” Albus said, as calmly as was possible at that moment.

Uncle Ron blinked at his nephew and looked genuinely confused.


Albus was stunned. Uncle Ron without Aunt Hermione was… well, it was unthinkable. About as unthinkable as his forced separation from Scorpius.

“Albus has also forgotten he was sorted into Gryffindor,” Harry informed Ron with a knowing look. “Conveniently.”

To his credit, Ron did smile then, although it was rather a weak effort.

“Yes, well, sorry, old chap,” he said. “But you’re a Gryffindor.”

The very notion of being in Gryffindor confused Albus. He felt like a Slytherin. It was a part of him now. It felt right.

“But how did I get Sorted into Gryffindor?” Albus demanded.

“You persuaded the Sorting Hat don’t you remember? Panju bet you that you couldn’t get into Gryffindor if your life depended on it, so you chose Gryffindor to spite him.”

Albus blinked.

“I can’t blame you,” Ron added dryly. “We’d all like to wipe the smile off his face sometimes, wouldn’t we?”

He seemed to think about that for a moment, and almost immediately regretted his comment.

“Please don’t tell Padma I said that,” he added.

“Who’s Panju?” Albus asked.

Ron and Harry stared at Albus. Uncle Ron with a great deal of concern, and Harry with utter disappointed disbelief.

“Bloody hell, you’re really not yourself are you?” Ron commented. “Anyway, better go, before I’m sent a Howler myself.”

With that, Uncle Ron stumbled his way up the stairs and disappeared out of sight. Albus felt sad. Albus felt sick. Uncle Ron wasn’t even an inch of the man he used to be.

“But that doesn’t… make sense,” Albus explained, resisting the urge to burst into tears again. He had a sudden surge of appreciation for the old Uncle Ron, with his ridiculous jokes, mis-matched
awful clothes, and complete lack of tact.

Now Uncle Ron had gone, his father became even more stern than before. He tapped his foot on the stair and raised an eyebrow.

“Albus, whatever you’re feigning, it isn’t working. I will not change my mind.”

No. No, this couldn’t be happening. Albus wouldn’t allow it.

“Dad,” he said, as firmly and confidently as possible. “You have two choices. Either you take me to-“

“No,” his father corrected him easily. “You’re the one with the choice, Albus. You do this, or you get in deeper - much deeper - trouble, do you understand?”

Albus recognised that look. It meant his father was serious. Deadly serious. That look only ever appeared in the most dire of circumstances. It made Albus feel just a little bit scared.

At that moment, Scorpius came rushing along the corridor, flying towards Albus with an expression of absolute relief but somehow, also, huge anxiety. He was back in his Hogwarts robes and looked fairly red in the face, like he’d been running for a while. It looked, to Albus, like Scorpius had run all the way across the castle, probably when he’d heard the news that he’d woken from his magically-induced sleep at last.

“Albus?” he exclaimed, looking his friend up and down, hunting for injuries, for any change in his best friend’s posture that might indicate he was wounded. “You’re okay! That’s fantastic!”

Scorpius thought he probably would have thrown himself at Albus in a hug just then, if he hadn’t heard Mr Potter’s tut, and seen Albus’s father standing right there, a few steps behind Albus. He looked extremely displeased, which was probably understandable considering he and Albus had run off together without telling anyone, but something in his look gave Scorpius the impression that it was more than that. It made him feel embarrassed. Small.

In an instant his euphoric mood dropped. Scorpius came crashing back down to reality, for the second time in the last twenty four hours.

“He’s completely cured,” Harry explained calmly, but with absolutely no warmth to his tone. “And we’ve got to go.”

Then he placed a warning hand on his son’s shoulder.

Albus looked up at Scorpius, whose eyes were so very wide and worried. He looked nervous, he looked embarrassed, he looked in need of a hug at the very least. But his father’s hand was heavy on his shoulder...

Heart breaking as he did so, Albus hung his head, and allowed himself to be steered past Scorpius, in the direction of the hospital wing.

Scorpius couldn’t understand what he’d done wrong. He blinked a few times, thinking desperately about their adventure, wondering if somehow he’d let Albus down.

“Are you mad at me?” he asked, voice smaller than he’d anticipated. “What’s going on?”

Albus stopped where he was and turned around. His father stopped as well, refusing to give his son a chance to shake him off.
“Did it work?” Albus demanded desperately. “Did any of it work?”

“No…” Scorpius admitted. “But… Albus-

“Albus,” said Mr Potter, far more firmly. “Whatever gibberish you’re talking, you need to stop it, now. This is your final warning.”

Albus felt torn between his dad and his best friend. Never in his life had a decision pained him so much. What should he do?

The brave thing to do would have been to tell his father to do his worst, because he was going to choose his own friends, even if his father didn’t approve of them.

But Albus wasn’t that brave. Not really.

He remembered his father’s threats. If he disobeyed him and continued to associate with Scorpius, his life would become a living hell. His every move would be watched. Privacy of any form would be a thing of the past.

And then there was what his father had said about Scorpius: In the meantime, investigations will begin in my department as to his true heritage.

Albus couldn’t chance it. It was too risky for them both. His father had the power to hurt Scorpius, not physically, but by utterly mortifying him. Already Scorpius tried his best to smile through the rumours about his parentage, but if an investigation was launched publicly… the consequences of that were unthinkable.

“I can’t, okay?” Albus told Scorpius.

Scorpius looked confused and more than a little hurt.

“You can’t what?” he asked.

“Just - we’ll be better off without each other, okay?”

With that, Harry cleared his throat and Albus turned again. Together, father and son walked steadily back down the stairs. Albus was hanging his head. For the first time in Scorpius’s life, he had to admit that Harry Potter didn’t seem much like a hero. He wasn’t sure if he’d ever be able to see Harry Potter as a hero again.

Scorpius stood alone at the top of the staircase and watched them go, heartbroken.

Chapter End Notes

I really hope you are enjoying this!

If you are then please do give me a comment! Every comment I get means the world. I really do treasure your words!

xxx

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Albus really wasn’t looking forward to his first class of the year. To start with he knew that everyone would be gossiping about he and Scorpius. He supposed that was to be expected after what they’d done, but to bear it alone? Albus was so used to having Scorpius’s sunny, optimistic presence at his side that he wasn’t sure he’d be able to keep his cool without him.

It was almost amusing how forgetful the majority of people were when it came to his inabilities. It seemed every year brought some new optimism, not for him, but for everyone else. Be it a Quidditch move or a particularly impressive spell, if Harry Potter had done it, then everybody waited with baited breath to see if he could too.

Albus could only suppose they got off on disappointment, because he couldn’t remember a single time he’d lived up to his father’s reputation so far.

Not to mention that this was Defence Against the Dark Arts, a subject his father had famously excelled in. Albus wasn’t even sure if it was possible to match, let alone outdo his father on this front.

Harry Potter’s prowess in this particular subject was well documented. He’d produced his first corporeal Patronus in his third year, and by his fifth year he had even taken it upon himself to teach the other students a thing or two about Defence Against the Dark Arts. And the most unbelievable thing (to Albus) was that the students had gone along with this whole ego trip and taken lessons from just another fifth year. If Albus had been around at that time, he would have been offended by the very offer of learning from another student, especially one like his dad. It was so typical of his father, Albus thought, to think he had the right to criticise other people, that just because of some scar on his forehead he was qualified to teach a class.

And then of course, he’d gone on to take private lessons from Professor Dumbledore himself in his sixth year, and, well, everyone knew what happened in what should have been his seventh year.

To top it all off, his father had not only become a top Auror, but was now the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement.

It seriously wasn’t fair. The bar could not possibly have been set higher.

No doubt Albus was going to disappoint everyone all over again this year, only this time he wouldn’t have Scorpius there to remind him that it wasn’t a competition, and that it seriously wasn’t worth cursing the students who laughed at him in retaliation, because he’d only get into trouble and they’d have won.

Albus steeled himself as he reached the classroom door, fixing his hair and checking he had his wand in his pocket. Whatever happened, he wasn’t going to lose his cool. Whatever fresh hell awaited him beyond that door would simply have to be dealt with. Albus Potter was not going to be
expelled in his fourth year because Scorpius Malfoy, (who was basically his conscience), wasn’t there to prevent him from getting to his feet and swearing at the other students.

There were few things worse (in Albus’s experience) than entering a classroom late. Especially at the beginning of the year. Especially if your best and only friend was halfway across the castle.

With one final deep breath, Albus pushed open the heavy oak door and entered the classroom, slightly unsure.

Thank goodness there was an empty desk at the back of the room. With any luck Albus could simply shuffle over as unobtrusively as possible and keep his head down for the rest of the lesson.

“Ah yes. Our train absconder. Finally joining us.”

Albus froze on the spot. He recognised that voice. But he absolutely definitely did not recognise that tone.

“Hermione?”

Aunt Hermione was standing before the class, the students hanging on her every word. She was leaned casually against the front desk, arms crossed over her chest, wand poised lazily in her right hand.

“Professor Granger I believe is my name, Potter.”

After the previous evening he’d had, Albus wasn’t quite shocked enough to sink to the floor, but it was a close thing.

“What are you doing here?” he asked, willing his aunt to reveal that this was all some hilarious joke. That she was just here as a guest speaker, being the Minister for Magic and all.

Hermione raised her eyebrows to the heavens.

“Teaching. For my sins. What are you doing here? Learning, I hope.”

The only time Albus had seen Hermione raise her eyebrows that high was the time Uncle Ron had told an extremely rude and inappropriate joke at the dinner table, and Lily had found it funny to copy him.

“But you’re… you’re… Minister for Magic…”

“Been having those dreams again have you, Potter? Today we’re going to look at Patronus Charms.”

The realisation that one of Albus’s most dreaded lessons (he was certain he’d never be able to successfully conjure a Patronus, and if he did it would be in the shape of an ant or a worm or something else equally embarrassing and insignificant) had finally arrived, was dwarfed by the dawning horror of the situation in general.

As idiotic as he was aware he was going to sound, Albus needed to clarify exactly what it was that was going on before he gave in and lost his mind.

“You’re our Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher?”

Well, he’d been right that he’d sound like a fool for asking. Several of the students tittered.
Albus was quite used to being ridiculed, but fresh horror arrived in the shape of his aunt looking like she actually enjoyed the sound of the other students laughing at him.

“Losing patience now,” she declared, sounding overdramatically bored. “Ten points from Gryffindor for stupidity.”

Polly Chapman, who was sitting at the front of the room, shot to her feet, full of affront.

“No! No,” she whined. “He’s doing it deliberately. He hates Gryffindor and everyone knows it.”

Was it Albus’s imagination, or did Hermione seem to approve of that little outburst?

“Sit down Polly Chapman,” she said mildly. “Before this gets even worse.”

Polly gave a great dramatic sigh and then sat.

“And I suggest you join her, Albus,” Hermione added acidly. “And end this charade.”

Albus ran through the past few seconds in his mind. Never in his life had he heard Aunt Hermione call any young person stupid. Uncle Ron? Maybe a few times during heated arguments, but the idea of her trying to destroy the confidence of a student was beyond imagining. Hugo had struggled with writing for a long time when he was little, and the discovery that he was dyslexic had only driven Hermione to be kinder and more supportive. When her son had declared himself ‘stupid’, Albus distinctly remembered Aunt Hermione telling him that people were simply clever in different ways and that even if he found the academic side of things a little more difficult than Rose, it didn’t make him any less of a person.

Seeing his aunt now, seemingly enjoying abusing her authority, was more shocking to him than the new appearance of Uncle Ron, and even the recent behaviour of his father.

What could possibly have driven her to this? How on earth had Cedric Diggory being disarmed during the first task of the Triwizard Tournament in 1994 led to this drastic and terrible change?

“But you’re not this mean!” Albus burst out, desperate for someone, anyone else to agree with him, to bring his aunt to her senses.

All he could think of was his much loved Aunt Hermione, who could be overbearing and very opinionated and sometimes a bit of a killjoy, but who was also kind and compassionate and supportive and cared deeply about the feelings of others. She would never, never have found pleasure in the humiliation of anyone, least of all a student.

Hermione rolled her eyes.

(Albus realised in that moment why it riled his father so much when he did it).

“And that’s twenty points from Gryffindor to assure Albus Potter that I am this mean.”

There was a collective groan from the students.

“If you don’t sit down right now, Albus…” declared Yann Fredericks, looking like he meant business.

Not sure what else he could do, and really not comfortable with being attacked by pretty much everyone in the room, Albus sat.

“Can I just say-” he tried weakly.
“No, you can’t,” Hermione cut him off with a sarcastic smirk. “Just keep quiet Potter, otherwise you’ll lose what limited popularity you already have. Now, who can tell me what a Patronus is?”

Nobody raised their hand. Albus thought it was probably because they were afraid they’d be humiliated if they got the answer wrong.

“No? No one? You really are a disappointing bunch.”

Albus had always thought of his aunt as a fairly attractive woman. She had dignity and poise and was always well-presented, not to mention she had a kind, expressive face and the sort of eyes that radiated honesty and reliability. But as she smiled a thin, almost sadistic smile, she looked, to Albus, like an entirely different person. A person he wouldn’t have wanted anything to do with. A person he could have hated.

“No,” Albus burst out (earning several more despairing groans from his classmates). “This is stupid. Where’s Rose? She’ll tell you that you’re being ridiculous.”

“Who’s Rose?” Hermione fired back, enjoying the chance to further belittle her pupil. “Your invisible friend?”

“Rose Granger-Weasley! Your daughter!”

Rose would have sorted everything out. Yes, she could be stubborn and pompous and had a surprisingly sharp tongue, but she would never have let this happen. If only he could go and fetch her. She was the proof that all this was a lie, that it was all wrong, that something had to change…

And then it hit him.

“Of course… because you and Ron aren’t married Rose-“

The class giggled again. Albus felt sick.

Rose no longer existed. Not now time had changed. Not now Uncle Ron had married some woman named Padma and had some other kid.

A world without Rose felt wrong. And Hugo… little Hugo wouldn’t exist either.

The sense of loss was too terrible to fully take in. Albus had never even made up with Rose before all this had happened. She’d reached out to him on the train, and he, being the stubborn, defensive, absolute idiot that he was had pushed her away.

What if he never saw her again?

“How dare you!” Hermione thundered, properly angry for the first time. “Fifty points from Gryffindor. And I assure you if anyone interrupts me again it’ll be a hundred points…”

She stared around the room. No one moved a muscle.

Albus was too dazed to do anything but slump at his desk.

He wasn’t going to cry this time. He felt too numb for that.

“Good. A Patronus is a magical charm, a projection of all your most positive feelings and takes the shape of the animal with whom you share the deepest affinity. It is a gift of light. If you can conjure a Patronus, you can protect yourself against the world. Which, in some of our cases, seems like a necessity sooner rather than later…”
Casting his first Patronus was the last thing on Albus’s mind. He knew already that it would be an impossible task.

Now he’d broken apart his own family and lost his best friend, he wasn’t sure he had any happy thoughts left.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I don't personally think there is any way Hermione Granger would EVER have become this person, but I am going with the script so I'm sticking with it.

If you enjoyed this then please leave me a comment because it means the world!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Albus had once again sneaked out of the Gryffindor common room. He was starting to run out of excuses. Sometimes he claimed to have left his belongings in far-away classrooms. Other times he pretended to have been called to detention with various bad-tempered professors. Tonight he had feigned a stomach upset and insisted he go along to the hospital wing to get himself checked out.

In reality, he was looking for Scorpius.

It wasn’t that he was planning to talk to Scorpius. Albus wasn’t quite that brave.

His father had already managed to fit several Hogwarts visits into his usually tight schedule at the Ministry and Albus was certain his father kept on popping up at the school just to make him aware of his presence. Yesterday Albus had spotted his father on his way to Professor McGonagall’s office, and had determinedly turned his back and walked away. His father had called out his name, but Albus ignored him. The deal was he didn’t interact with Scorpius. It wasn’t that he had to like it or ease his father’s guilt by being nice or even vaguely cordial to him. Albus was determined to use what little power he had left to show his father that he hated him. So much so that he wouldn’t scream or shout about his new predicament, but instead would simply treat his father like a nobody. Like he didn’t matter. Like Albus didn’t care if he lived or died.

He hoped that would hurt his father (although he doubted it would). It was the only revenge he could think of.

Albus’s aim was more to check on his best friend. Or former best friend, if things went on the way they were.

It felt important to Albus that Scorpius was okay. That he could see him being okay. If he could only make sure Scorpius was coping fine and being his sunny, optimistic self, then maybe, just maybe, Albus could get through this.

As long as Scorpius was coping, Albus would be able to relax. He’d be able to wake up every morning in the Gryffindor dormitories without feeling icy cold with guilt.

He’d already lingered around near the Slytherin common room for about ten minutes. The painted medieval witches in their long rectangular portrait with their pointy hats and beautiful, determined expressions had spotted him the moment he showed up.

For a moment, Albus had been afraid they’d give him up, seeing that he was a Gryffindor and thus an outsider, but just as before, in the other world, when he’d been a Slytherin himself, they merely watched him for a little while, and a couple had nodded, as though in understanding. After that they’d left him alone.
But after ten minutes of pretending to be lost, (a terrible excuse for a fourth year), a Slytherin prefect had wandered by and Albus had only just ducked behind an elaborate tapestry in time to avoid him. Just when the prefect had turned suspiciously in his direction, one of the painted witches (the one with the long, dark hair and pale, beautiful face) engaged the prefect in conversation. Behind her, the others gave Albus a significant look which clearly meant: *get out of here! Quickly!*

The experience had spooked him enough to send him rapidly back up the stone stairs to the main body of the castle. He’d been counting on the fact Professor McGonagall was probably too busy that evening, following a massive practical joke by some third years which had left the Great Hall smelling like sulphur, to patrol around the area near the Slytherin common room, but even Albus wasn’t willing to push his luck any further. At least, not that night. To be found in such a suspicious place couldn’t really be explained away.

It wasn’t too late yet. There was still hope Scorpius would be around somewhere. Perhaps he’d be on his way to or back from the library?

If that was the case then Albus knew his best chance of catching him was near the moving staircases, which led in every possible direction (at various times). Scorpius had told him once that this mass of staircases (known collectively as the Grand Staircase) had been created by Rowena Ravenclaw years and years ago. Albus thought that was typical Ravenclaw behaviour, always making life more difficult than it had to be.

Albus began at the very bottom of the mass of staircases closest to the Slytherin Dungeon, and made his excruciatingly slow way up.

Every step he took, he looked around him, desperate for the sight of that blond hair, or even the sound of a posh little gasp which meant Scorpius had clumsily tripped over his own feet misjudging a trick stair.

Whenever another student walked by, Albus made sure to be seen looking up at the hundreds of ancient portraits. He could hardly be put in detention for appreciating great portraiture, could he? And it wasn’t past curfew yet. He was a fourth year. He had every right to appreciate art in his spare time if he wanted.

Having reached the top of the first staircase, Albus felt it shift beneath his feet. Apparently this particular staircase didn’t want him diverting towards the library, because it was taking him slowly and yet steadily in the direction of the Hufflepuff Basement. Well, Albus wasn’t going to argue with a staircase, not when he had no particular place to be.

With a sigh, he stepped obediently off the top stair and towards the next corridor.

+++  

Scorpius was on his way out of the library, having experienced a not-too-pleasant evening trying to study.

It had started off all right. After all, books could always be counted upon to distract him when he was feeling especially lonely.

The problem had come when a group of Gryffindors had decided to join him at his table, unbeknownst to Madam Pince, who was too busy telling off first years for whispering too loudly to notice the group of fourth years towards the back of the library, near the shelves of history books Scorpius favoured.
What had followed had been one of the most passive aggressive bullying experiences of Scorpius’s life. It hadn’t been anything that could be explained or complained of. No harsh words had been exchanged. He’d been called no names and of course (as the son of Draco Malfoy), nobody had dared to touch him.

For Gryffindors, their tactics had been surprisingly sneaky. The group had first taken up the chairs around him, spreading their books all over the tabletop so Scorpius had to squish right up to the edge of the table to make room, despite there being plenty of free tables elsewhere. Next of all, a couple of the girls had found it particularly amusing to get up, have a quick skim of the history section, and then return to the table with books about Voldemort. Instead of reading them, they’d placed them down in Scorpius’s eye line. When Scorpius had looked up, a little confused, the boy opposite him had offered him a book of his own, as though he was trying to do him a favour by suggesting a particularly gripping read.

Scorpius had been so surprised that he’d taken the book that was offered with a grateful smile, thinking he was being extended a hand of friendship, that this particular Gryffindor had seen the unkindness of his friends and wanted to make amends for it… until he’d read the title. *Sinister Blood Lines: The Genealogy of the Darkest Wizards in History - EXPLAINED.*

He’d wanted to speak up for himself, but Madam Pince had spotted the group and looked very ready to hiss at the next person who so much as breathed in her silent library.

And so instead of saying a word (like his father, or even Albus would have done) Scorpius had finally given up, put down his book on the 1994 Triwizard Tournament, and left.

As he went, he’d heard the sound of a high five being given, and a couple of muted giggles.

Scorpius had been wandering sadly towards the Grand Staircase, on his way to the Slytherin common room, when his heart leapt.

He’d seen some familiar messy hair and a sulky sort of walk at the top of the nearest moving staircase. Without a thought, Scorpius had raced to the top of the first staircase, ready to call out, to catch his best friend… but by the time he got there, Albus was long gone.

Perhaps he hadn’t been there to begin with. After all, he wasn’t the only short dark-haired boy in the school. And Scorpius probably wasn’t thinking straight. After his horror of an afternoon he’d wanted desperately to see Albus, perhaps so desperately that his mind was playing tricks on him…

Scorpius stood for a moment, staring at the empty space before him. It was the icing on top of a frankly rotten day.

He slumped down to the floor, seating himself on the top stair, elbows on his knees, head resting miserably on his hands.

The staircase swept around with no regard for its passenger. Scorpius didn’t care. There wasn’t anywhere he wanted to go. There was nowhere left for him to retreat to.

He sat there in silence until he was disturbed by a tutting noise from a short distance below him. Madam Hooch, the elderly flying instructor, was currently making her brisk way up towards him and had spotted the dejected fourth year student currently dwelling in his own misery on the top stair.

Madam Hooch was well aware of the current predicament of the Malfoy boy. All teachers had been informed that Albus Severus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy were currently under an enforced period
of separation following some ridiculous goings on on the first day of term.

She didn’t know either boy particularly well. Albus Potter was one of her very worst students and could hardly mount his broom (she suspected out of stubbornness and sheer obstinance most of the time). He was also a sulker and a rather sore loser. He would certainly be winning no awards for sportsmanship. It was a shame he lacked talent, because his father had been quite the remarkable Seeker. Rolanda Hooch still remembered first seeing Harry Potter fly. He’d been a natural, a truly outstanding Quidditch player. His technique had been sublime.

And then there was Albus’s mother, Ginny Potter, who Madam Hooch remembered as a shy, red-haired little thing, who had quite suddenly grown in confidence in her fifth year and shown a remarkable talent for flying and a fearlessness on a broom that Madam Hooch especially admired in her young female students. It did the boys good, she thought, to see that the girls could be just as aggressive, just as talented, if they put their minds to it. She often read Ginny Potter’s sports column in the Prophet and was glad to see that the former Weasley, in her turn, was encouraging young women to get into sports.

As for Scorpius Malfoy, he seemed like a decent sort, but in Madam Hooch’s opinion, he oughtn't dwell so much on the thoughts of others and instead grow a bit of a back bone. She had taught his father once. Draco Malfoy wasn’t a pupil Rolanda believed she would forget in a hurry. He’d been a bad sport, and had a tendency to put down his classmates. Still, he’d been fairly good on a broom.

“Chin up, Mr Malfoy,” said Madam Hooch firmly, as she gestured for the young man to move off the stairs. There were, after all, plenty of other more appropriate places for a student to sit. “Whatever it is, it can’t be all that bad.”

If Scorpius had looked up, he might have noticed the kindness in Madam Hooch’s yellow eyes. But instead he obediently got to his feet and sloped off.

For a moment, Rolanda considered going after him. But young people often had such tiffs and tantrums in their teenage years. Puberty was something of a minefield. And so Madam Hooch tried to forget about the abject loneliness of the young Malfoy and went about her business as planned.

+++  

Albus had been wandering the halls like a Hogwarts ghost. He’d passed several of those on his walk, actually, but hadn’t stopped to chat. That awful Nearly Headless Nick had been floating about near the History of Magic corridor and looked ready to start a conversation, but Albus had quickened his pace and refused to look him in the eyes.

He had a particular dislike for that ghost, mostly because over the years he had tried a number of times to talk to him about his father, who Nick seemed to regard as a great friend and legendary hero.

Eventually, Albus realised, with some disappointment, he would have to give up and return to Gryffindor Tower.

It was darkly amusing to Albus, how disappointing the Gryffindor common room seemed having spent three years in the Slytherin Dungeon.

The two common rooms couldn’t have been more different. Gryffindor Tower was warm and red and hearty, which was nice for this time of year, but in the summer? Albus imagined it would have been unbearable.
Students from the other three Houses tended to think the Slytherins had a raw deal with what they imagined was a dark, dank, lair. It was true, the Slytherin common room was situated where the dungeons had once stood, and yes, the place could definitely come across as slightly intimidating to those that weren’t used to it.

But what these other students failed to grasp was quite how satisfying it was to have a room so cut off from the rest of the castle, so private, so exclusive. The stone walls were covered in elaborate Medieval tapestries, the decor a sophisticated and constant reminder of a rich House history. It was an inspiring environment, and one which encouraged ambition.

No matter how comfortable the Gryffindor common room was, no matter how casual and upbeat, the place had no finesse whatsoever. Where was the luxury? Where was the splendour?

The Gryffindor crimson and gold decor, which Albus had once so longed for, now made him feel vaguely nauseous. It was too much to wake to every morning. It was nothing like the relaxing, muted atmosphere of the Slytherin dormitories. The windows of Gryffindor Tower were all blue sky and clouds, instead of the peaceful, gently surging green glow of the lake.

The Tower was so exposed, so vulnerable, it was hardly an escape at all. After a day spent at lessons, Albus couldn't understand why anyone would want to return to a place so rowdy and overcrowded.

Annoyingly, it was never quiet. There were always Gryffindor students playing pranks or laughing raucously, or otherwise making fools of themselves. There was none of the unspoken respect of the Slytherin common room, where there were certain social dos and don’ts that were instinctively obeyed. It might have seemed a fairly formal environment compared with Gryffindor Tower, but there was a certain comfort in knowing that you could sit down in an armchair without fearing some foolish student (that thought they were hilarious) had placed a magically enhanced whoopee cushion (complete with noise and smells) beneath your seat.

Perhaps being in Slytherin had made him haughty. But Albus thought it was more likely he’d developed a sense of courtesy which the Gryffindors seemed to be severely lacking.

The very fact he was in Gryffindor House now, although it had only been a few days, filled him with shame.

Not because he felt that to be a Gryffindor was shameful, but because he felt that he was denying a part of himself. In this version of events (at least according to Uncle Ron), he had ended up in Gryffindor out of pure stubbornness. That was a fairly plausible explanation, but Albus couldn’t help but feel that the Sorting Hat had made a huge mistake.

He was a Slytherin through and through. No matter what some tatty old hat had to say about it.

Albus made his way back to the Grand Staircase, thinking he should probably show his face at the hospital wing before making his return, if only so he had some sort of alibi if anyone questioned what he’d been up to that evening. He didn’t put it past his father to owl Madam Pomfrey to check.

He began walking up the nearest staircase, wondering exactly how thick to lay on his upset stomach act, when he spotted Scorpius.

Unbelievably, his (former) best friend was making his own way up the staircase directly opposite Albus, and he had seen him too.

Albus didn’t know what to say. He didn’t know what he could say.
All this time he’d been on the hunt for him, desperately hoping to catch a glimpse of Scorpius if only for a second, and yet in true Albus fashion he’d not once thought about what he would say or do if the two ever came face to face.

All that had mattered to him was seeing Scorpius, making sure he was okay.

The rest… it was complicated. Too complicated.

As if sensing the strong emotions in the air, the deep emotional link between the two students, the Hogwarts staircases moved closer and then finally, unusually, met in the middle, creating what looked like a bridge in the centre of the Grand Staircase. A bridge that could very easily be walked across.

Albus didn’t think he’d ever seen the staircases move in such a way before.

Scorpius didn’t even seem to have noticed how rare an occurrence this was, and usually Albus knew he’d have jumped at the chance to explain the phenomenon, to relate it to one of his books somehow.

Instead Scorpius was looking utterly overwhelmed, standing there, lips slightly parted, his hands by his sides, pale fingers fiddling with the hems of his robe sleeves.

He looked so very, very hopeful. And so very very lost.

He looked like he wanted to speak but couldn’t find the words. He looked nervous, tentative. It killed Albus that Scorpius should ever be anxious because of him.

In moments Albus could be with his best ever friend again. World be damned. All he had to do was take that first step. All he had to do was put one foot in front of the other, dodge a trick-stair or two, and then they’d be together again.

But Albus was not the sort of boy who thought only with his heart.

He may have been in Gryffindor now, but that didn’t mean he had to make stupid, rash decisions, that would have long-lasting, terrible consequences for all involved. Not this time anyway.

Already he was under surveillance. The Marauder’s Map had recently been turned from an item of fond family legend, to a tool used to aid his captors. It was now in the possession of Professor McGonagall, his own Headmistress, who (led by his father) was playing her own part in this ridiculous exercise. Every last Hogwarts teacher had been warned that under no circumstances were Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy to interact. They were never to be alone together for any reason. Every single professor (even Professor Longbottom, who Albus had once counted as an ally) had been forced to partake in this Ministry-approved idiocy.

And they all went along with it because Harry Potter was waiting to come down on them like a ton of bricks if they let him down. He had the full force of the Ministry behind him, all aiding him in his quest to ruin his youngest son’s life.

It was a terrifying feeling, to know that an organisation as large as the Ministry was part of his nightmare. That he could never quite escape that feeling of claustrophobia, of that awful understanding that he no longer held complete control over his own life and choices.

Already he couldn’t bear it. It was unthinkable that Scorpius should suffer the same.

It was right then that Albus realised he was going to have to make a decision. And he was going to
have to be very brave and very cowardly at once.

Scorpius looked okay. Didn’t he? Maybe not happy. All right, maybe he looked frankly miserable, but he was in one piece and not currently crying or otherwise making a scene.

Wasn’t that all Albus had wanted? To check he was coping?

As heroic as it would have been to end this nightmare right now, no matter what his father said, no matter what punishments followed, Albus was no hero.

He was a realist, a pessimist, and (to his shame) a huge coward.

With one last glance at Scorpius, Albus determinedly looked away - and the moment was broken.

*It’s for the best,* Albus told himself. *If he knew, he’d understand.*

But Scorpius didn’t know and he didn’t understand, and worst of all Albus suspected that if he *did* know that Harry Potter was currently investigating his bloodline and could potentially make that information public, Scorpius would have given one of his brave little smiles and declared that he didn’t care. That friendship meant more to him.

The staircases began to shift, slowly parting.

Albus looked up once more, even though he knew he shouldn’t have. Scorpius was in pain. Pain that he, Albus, had some responsibility for. It made Albus feel sick. It made him feel that he hated himself.

Consumed by guilt and now feeling his stomach churn for real, Albus turned his back and began to walk away. He would find some other route to the hospital wing, even if it meant running into Nearly Headless Nick again.

He didn’t need to glance back to know that Scorpius was on the verge of tears. Albus, himself, couldn’t remember ever feeling anything like this level of unhappiness.

But in life there were sacrifices. It just so happened that the particular sacrifice involved in obeying his father came with a heavy price.

*Too heavy, it’s too heavy,* said a voice in Albus’s head. He swallowed hard and ignored it.

Chapter End Notes

All comments are SO appreciated. Please do keep them coming!

For anyone wishing for more of Scorpius's POV here, have no fear because the next chapter is going to be a filler which is going to give us some more of his perspective on the situation.

I love you so so much! To everyone who is reading this, thank you!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Two: Scene Twelve and a Half

Chapter Notes

This chapter is entirely my own. For anyone who has the script, you might notice it attempts to fill in a bit of a gap and explain how certain characters know certain things in later scenes.

I hope you enjoy this! I loved writing it!

xxx

Scorpius stared after Albus, lips parted with shock. He watched as his best friend turned his back on him without a single word, and walked right back down the stairs.

Never had his loneliness been more apparent to Scorpius. He had been a loser to begin with, and now even his best and only friend refused to give him the time of day without a word of explanation or reassurance. The hopelessness of his own situation hit him as though he were watching a scene from a play. He saw himself, quite suddenly, as a rather pathetic figure.

Until this moment, he’d never felt the injustice of the world crash down so heavily on his shoulders. With every bit of bad luck he’d amassed over the years, Scorpius had refused to see himself as any sort of victim. He had been determined to smile through the sad times until he convinced himself he was okay. Even when his mother died last summer he had forced himself to cope. For her sake, and for his own. At night, as he’d slept in the Slytherin dormitories, Albus snoring in the bed just across from him, Scorpius had fought with the furious thoughts demanding to be heard and validated.

It isn’t fair. It shouldn’t have been her. It should have been someone else…

But, as Scorpius kept sternly reminding himself, if not his mother then who? Nobody deserved to be taken so young. To claim his mother was somehow more deserving of life than others was just one step closer to the old Malfoy family superiority complex, which had caused his ancestors so much trouble.

Scorpius had battled with these thoughts, night after night, until he managed to pull himself from his stupor.

He was a lucky person. He had a large house and a family name. He had a huge inheritance coming his way. He would never know what it was to be poor. He’d always been fed and clothed and experienced the very best life could offer.

And so, aside from a few dark days directly after his mother’s death, Scorpius had kept himself together. Just the way he saw that his father had.

It wasn’t until he’d lost Albus that all that pain from the previous year, which Scorpius had never quite expressed, came flooding back.

Why had this happened to him? Why had he first lost his beloved mother, and now his best and
only friend? Was he cursed? Was that it? For all his good intentions and his determination to be kind and friendly, was he doomed to misery? Why was he bullied? Why him?

Standing there on the Grand Staircase, every single little bit of pain Scorpius had pushed away over the past year came rushing from within to overtake him.

Overwhelmed by a sense of pity for himself, Scorpius broke down in tears.

It wasn’t pleasant, crying in public, right in the middle of Hogwarts castle. It was embarrassing and uncomfortable and utterly, utterly humiliating.

But somehow he found he just couldn’t stop.

He was entirely alone…

Or was he?

Without thinking, Scorpius began to walk. And he kept on walking, tears streaming down his cheeks, until he had reached the very top of the West Tower.

He’d never visited the Owlery so late before, and it was an eerie experience to enter that draughty, circular room, with the gaping, open windows, the floor covered in straw, bones, and owl droppings, several pairs of bright orange eyes staring out at him from the shadows.

Scorpius did not have his own owl. He’d always felt he was too clumsy to care for a pet, and the thought of growing close to a pet and having something dreadful befall it, (as so often happened to the sons and daughters of Voldemort’s former followers), had entirely put him off the idea.

His father had offered any number of exotic pets to take to Hogwarts with him for his first year, several of which weren’t even on the official list. His dad seemed to think they would give him an edge right away, but Scorpius hadn’t liked the idea of the other children realising how much money his family had, or worse, for them to think he was flaunting his family name and status.

Luckily for Scorpius, however, animals, owls in particular, seemed to take to him. He had noticed this the very first day he’d stepped into the Owlery to send a fat letter home to his patents. Several had fluttered forward, seemingly keen to help him out, offering their services, more than willing to make the long flight to Wiltshire, even in the cold September weather.

One particular Long-Eared owl, who had been particularly friendly on that first day, had since become Scorpius’s favourite. It had soft brownish feathers streaked vertically with black, and some especially pleasing tufty white feathers on its face, shaped like a small cross, two ends of which stretched out above its piercing orange eyes like rather angry eyebrows.

Scorpius hadn’t named this owl, since he supposed it probably had a name of its own, but he imagined it liked him and considered itself his particular friend.

When Scorpius had entered the Owlery, weeping quietly on that September evening, parchment and quill in his hand, the Long-Eared owl had ventured out of its alcove (abandoning a tasty mouse in the process), and landed on the sad, gentle, blond human’s shoulder.

Scorpius leaned his paper against the curved stone wall, and began to scrawl a note.

When he was done, he checked it over (trying not to let his tears drip on the ink), folded it neatly, and attached it to the foot of his favourite owl.
“Malfoy Manor, please,” Scorpius said quietly. “If you could be quick that would be very - well - just please be as fast as you can. Thank you.”

His owl had given him one last, long look, seemed to bow his head ever so slightly, and then soared off out of an open window.

Scorpius watched him sweep through the evening sky with ease and saw his wings pound, trying to fly as hard as he possibly could.

+++ Malfoy Manor was a cold and rather lonely place at this time of the evening. Draco had never really noticed, until Astoria had passed, that his childhood home could be so very sombre.

Perhaps the reason it felt so very gloomy was the absence of inhabitants? The handsome manor house was a grand and impressive place to call home, but to live there alone, in truth, was not as glamorous as some might think.

There was the upkeep of the place, to start with. This aspect of owning such a home was second nature to Draco, having watched his parents do so through his young years, but without Astoria to consult on his decisions, to give him advice, and offer opinions, the place was in danger of falling into disrepair.

It had been hard, in those days and weeks and months after Astoria had succumbed to her family curse, to hold his head high. As a Malfoy, he’d refused to mourn publicly. There were plenty who seemed to think the Malfoys were simply reaping what they’d sowed, who saw Astoria’s death as some petty bit of revenge on the universe’s part, for all his family had done over the generations.

Some of that hatred, Draco knew, was deserved. But the rest? It was petty jealousy and Draco simply wouldn’t forgive it.

He had somehow kept himself sane during the period directly following Astoria’s death, busying himself with funeral arrangements and the wellbeing of his son. It was vital to him that Scorpius was able to remember his mother with pride, which was partly why he made the decision to have Astoria buried in a new, white marble tomb he had commissioned, instead of placing her in the Malfoy or Greengrass family plots.

He didn’t want Scorpius to ever visit her grave and feel guilty, or worse, face abuse of any sort. It was best she was put to rest away from the history of the family she had married into. In her life she had sacrificed enough to be with him, Draco thought. In death, she deserved to be at peace.

Draco still remembered how he’d felt during his sixth year at Hogwarts, when his father, Lucius, had been sent to Azkaban following what was now referred to as the Battle of the Department of Mysteries. The sense of loss had been overwhelming. The powerlessness had been the worst part. And then there was the injustice of the thing, perhaps not, with hindsight, the injustice of his father’s arrest, which even Draco now understood, but the injustice of a son being parted from his father. From a parent he admired and idolised. He had felt torn apart, empty.

And so he thought he could understand a little of how his son must have felt when Astoria passed. To have that huge supportive force ripped away so suddenly was… well, it was a harsh awakening to the ways of the world. And as Draco knew well, it could make or break a person.

The bond between Scorpius and Astoria had always been strong. Draco had watched them sometimes, the easy way they interacted, the smiles they shared, the way Scorpius would chatter
and Astoria would listen proudly, and realised that perhaps something had been very wrong with his relationship with both of his own parents.

The most damning thing was that he hadn’t realised it until he had seen, at first hand, what a healthy parent and child relationship could be.

Astoria had managed to gain Scorpius’s respect and adoration by being kind, fair, and gentle. She had been a fairly affectionate mother, despite her periods of weakness, and had never hesitated to hug her son or kiss him on the cheek.

Parenting had turned out to be one of the biggest challenges of Draco Malfoy’s life. Without Astoria, he knew he would never have succeeded in bringing up a son as good, as pure, as very special as Scorpius.

And now she was gone, he worried that the fragile relationship he and his son did share was on the brink of collapse. Not for lack of love, but for lack of... well, truthfully, his lack of ability to parent naturally or affectionately.

He did try. Scorpius was his number one priority, and had been since his birth. His son had been something of a miracle, because the Greengrass family curse had prevented many of the women of Astoria’s family from successfully or safely giving birth, but against all odds Scorpius had arrived, a quiet, rather small, pink and tearful little human that needed love, care, and attention.

Draco had vowed on that day, that he would be a better father than Lucius Malfoy. He would attempt to correct his mistakes, and yet recreate some of his better qualities, like his fierce pride, his single-minded devotion to the family line, and his absolute family loyalty.

It had come as something of a shock when Scorpius grew into a gentle sort of boy with no interest whatsoever in sports or boisterous activities. And yes, Draco had been surprised that his son took so strongly to reading and studying, rather than flying or duelling. When Draco had been a boy, he had begged his father to teach him to duel, and occasionally, just occasionally, when Lucius had been in a good mood, he had consented to show his son a few choice moves, some tips about stance, the certain way one could flourish a wand and then avoid a spell themselves. But when Draco had suggested he and Scorpius take part in a similar lesson, Scorpius had quite obviously found the whole thing uninteresting (despite being polite as always) and had no aptitude for it.

Over the years it had been a struggle to find common ground with his son, but Draco hoped he had made it clear that no matter how different they may have been, Scorpius was his main priority.

Draco’s world, now that his wife was dead and his son lived mostly away from home, had grown very small indeed.

Draco did not work. There wasn’t much point with the wealth his family had accumulated over the centuries, and Draco wasn’t sure there was anything he’d ever really wanted to do. Aside from an early ambition of becoming a star Quidditch player (which had been crushed by his lack of ability), Draco had always assumed he’d simply follow the path of his father and spend his days in the home, socialising, or visiting contacts at the Ministry.

But now his time had come Draco found himself disappointed with the reality of his privileged lifestyle. He tried his best not to visit the Ministry often simply because many of the employees (understandably) resented him. Socialising was something he’d never experienced outside of the lavish dinner parties of his parents’ day. After the Second Wizarding War the Malfoys had had no inclination to celebrate, and Draco had watched family friend after family friend carted off to Azkaban. House after great house left abandoned, with nobody left to tend them. The dismantling
of the world he’d grown up in, the realisation that he’d been on what was, perhaps, not the correct side all along, was disquieting to say the least.

The war against Voldemort had been won, and yet Draco had never been able to celebrate. He’d never felt he had the right to the relief he felt deep in the pit of his stomach when he remembered that the once Dark Lord would never be able to terrorise he or his family again.

Following this very public shame, Astoria’s illness had only further ostracised Draco from society. Aside from the fact many of his parents’ friends disapproved of the match, since Astoria, despite coming from a pureblood family, seemed to sway too far towards tolerance of Muggles and half-bloods, it was difficult to throw parties and host great dinners when his wife so often needed peace and quiet.

As for the curse, well, many people openly questioned why Draco Malfoy, heir to a fortune and a great family name, would marry such a fragile, quiet woman who went through spells of such weakness that she could not walk, and came from a family who it was well known found it hard to conceive children.

Draco had at first felt furious at such whispers. It was the first time he’d ever had to consider how it might be for Muggle-borns who fell in love with those with pure blood. Or even how it was for a witch or a wizard to fall in love with a Muggle. Never before had he understood what it was to have something so pure, so wonderful in your life, and yet have others laugh behind their hands.

Following his marriage, Draco had all but disappeared from high society. In honesty, over those first few years, Draco often found himself wishing he wasn’t a Malfoy. That his past could be erased.

But even wizards couldn’t change reality.

Now he lived alone at Malfoy Manor, Draco spent most of his time studying the finer points of Alchemy. It was an unusual hobby and yet he found it got him through many a cold, solitary night. He had amassed quite a collection of alchemical manuscripts which he pored over until the early hours, sometimes falling asleep in his armchair and waking late in the day, since there was nobody left to wake him at a reasonable hour.

His other great interest was sorting through the Malfoy family’s collection of Dark artefacts, which Draco housed in a private room of the Manor, and tried to keep in good order. This was not only a hobby on his part, but a duty. His family had amassed these objects, for good or ill, and until Scorpius inherited the rare and expensive collection, Draco saw it as his job to maintain each fascinating object.

The items were kept in pristine glass cases, and were carefully locked at all times, to prevent any thieves from getting their hands on them. Draco had cast several protective spells over the cases, some particularly nasty in nature, just to ensure his family could do no further harm, even years after the buying and use of these Dark artefacts.

Astoria had always remarked that the collection made her feel uncomfortable. She had accepted, of course, that they were family heirlooms, and had never asked Draco to part with this particular part of his inheritance, but still she had never liked to spend much time in the rooms in which they were displayed. The fact that Draco had vowed never to use them was enough for Astoria, and Draco was determined that he would respect her wishes.

Draco had been sitting at his large mahogany dining table, beneath the grand chandelier, his alchemical manuscripts scattered about him, a candle lit at his side, a fire roaring in the elaborate
fireplace across the room, when the owl arrived.

Not accustomed to receiving owls at such odd hours, Draco had pushed his books and papers aside, and used his most impressive ivory handled letter-opener to neatly tear along one side of the envelope.

It had come as something of a shock to see that that particular delivery owl was from Hogwarts.

More worrying was that the address on the note had clearly been written in his son’s handwriting.

Scorpius was a big letter writer and had written to his mother at regular intervals during his time at Hogwarts. Draco and Astoria had become accustomed to receiving a round-up of Scorpius’s latest week, and there was a comfort to knowing that without fail a letter would come. They had been addressed to Astoria, but Scorpius would often include details for his father, or add a footnote to tell him he was doing well and not to worry.

After Astoria passed the letters became less fat, less personal, and less frequent. But they still came.

For Scorpius to send an owl at this hour, one so hastily scrawled and looking a little, well…dripped on, was not a good sign.

Draco absently stroked the Hogwarts owl that had brought his son’s missive as he read the short note.

“Hi Dad,

It’s Scorpius. Obviously.

Things are not so good. I’m fine, but feeling a little bit low.

It’s probably silly of me, but I wasn’t sure who to talk to, and then I realised you’d told me I could write whenever I wanted.

Things have been quite bad ever since the incident. I understand I did wrong and I don’t mean that the punishments are unfair, but something isn’t quite right.

It would be very nice to hear from you sometime. I know you’re terribly busy, though, so I don’t mind if it takes a while. Or if your letter is short.

It would just be nice to talk to someone that isn’t a teacher.

Again, please do not worry about me. I am fine.

Love,
Scorpius.

x “

Draco finished the letter and frowned.

Nice to talk to someone that wasn’t a teacher? Where was Albus Potter when he was needed? If that Potter boy had abandoned his son in his moment of need, Draco was going to be most displeased.

As for those wet marks on the parchment, well, they could have been rain.
But Draco wasn’t willing to chance it.

The thought of his son friendless and alone in a hostile environment turned his stomach.

There was only one thing for it. He was going to have to pay Hogwarts a visit.

It may have been late, but that did not deter Draco. All thoughts of an enjoyable evening spent reading his newest alchemical volumes were banished.

He would simply smarten himself up a little (after all, appearance was hugely important), put on his best and most expensive travelling cloak (unnecessary but another small reminder of his place in the world), and remind his son what it meant to be a Malfoy.

“I’ll go at once,” Draco told the owl, now perched on the arm of an antique dining room chair. “You can go back.”

The owl immediately flew off, making the candlelight flicker with the power of its wings.

As Draco readied himself for his trip, he could feel himself growing in concern, and therefore fury. Scorpius was a good, kind boy. He was utterly undeserving of the unkindness he knew that his son suffered. Were the teachers not doing their jobs? Well, he would ensure that they did! The Malfoy name might not have carried the weight it used to, but Draco still possessed the power to put some pressure on. He would do whatever it took to solve whatever problem his son was facing. If that meant confronting the Headmistress herself then so be it.

Taking a handful of Floo powder from the silver pot on the mantelpiece, Draco felt a sudden surge of understanding for his father. He understood exactly how Lucius must have felt all those times he’d swept heroically into Hogwarts to make life easier for his darling boy. Being a father had unlocked something inside Draco, a terrible, powerful fierceness. An absolute, unfltering, petrifying love.

It was unlike anything else. It was all-consuming.

Draco stood before his main fireplace, hair swept neatly back into a ponytail, shirt buttoned neatly right up to his neck, white collar folded over pristinely, and threw a handful of glittering, silver powder into the flames. The room lit up with a sudden green glow.

“Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, Slytherin Dungeon. Astoria Malfoy,” Draco said clearly, and then stepped into the flames.

+++ The Slytherin common room hadn’t changed in the slightest since Draco’s day. There was a comfort in the familiarity of that cool green glow, the calm, restrained atmosphere, the luxurious furniture.

Draco stepped out of the fireplace, dusted himself down, and turned to face the mantle, above which was an elaborate portrait of a serpent with a glowing emerald eye.

The room was entirely deserted. Draco supposed that at this hour, the students would have gone to bed. It was something of a relief to know that his son wasn’t still sitting up, awake. Perhaps, Draco thought hopefully, his son had been feeling a little out of sorts earlier and by now was completely recovered. Perhaps his journey had been for nothing?

But then came a distinct sniffing sound from somewhere close to the nearest low-backed green
leather sofa. A familiar pale foot was poking out from behind it.

Draco felt like he had missed a step on staircase. His heart skipped a beat.

Slowly, Draco walked around the sofa and was forced to confront the horrendous sight of his son sitting curled up, knees drawn to his chest, head bowed.

“Scorpius?”

Scorpius looked up, shocked.

His son looked dreadful. Quite clearly he’d been crying. His eyes were rimmed with red and his face had turned blotchy.

“Dad?” Scorpius managed to choke out, trying to recover himself. “I… I didn’t know you were coming…”

That much was painfully clear. Draco had never seen his son in tears like this before. It had shaken him, that sight.

“I received your letter,” Draco said, trying to keep his voice at a normal tone.

Draco could have told his son to get to his feet and pull himself together. That a Malfoy didn’t cry, especially not in public. It was what Lucius would have done.

But Draco wasn’t his father.

“May I sit?” he asked quietly.

Scorpius nodded.

Entirely forgetting his dignity and his expensive clothes, Draco sat down on the floor beside his son, noticing it took him a little longer to do so than he remembered. His joints were becoming stiff.

“What is it that’s upset you?”

Scorpius blinked.

“You can tell me, son. Something has obviously happened. I’m your father. I’ll help you if I can.”

He wondered if his son would tell him the truth. He could see Scorpius deciding, in that moment, whether he should lie or be honest with his father.

His son was hiding something, that was certain. Scorpius had a very distinct guilty-look which Draco and Astoria had often laughed about together years ago when their son had been a small and clumsy boy who often knocked over priceless antiques and had to come and fetch one of them to break the bad news.

Scorpius sniffed again and opened his mouth. His words came out in a sudden rush.

“They won’t let me see Albus. I’m not allowed in any of his classes. Dad, I’m… I’ve got no friends. Nobody likes me. I’m…it’s awful.”

Really, this should have been Astoria’s area. She had always been good at providing their son with the emotional support he needed. Draco found it fairly difficult to know what to say in such
situations.

And so he went for the easiest part of Scorpius’s confession.

“Not allowed in his classes? Has there been a timetable change?”

Scorpius nodded, mutely.

“I wasn’t informed,” Draco commented, feeling his fury rise in his chest. “And this is because you and Albus pulled that prank on the first day?”

Scorpius took a moment too long to answer.

“Scorpius?”

“I… it’s not just that…”

“Tell me the truth, Scorpius.”

“After Albus woke up, Mr Potter was with him… he wouldn’t let me speak to Albus…”

Draco narrowed his eyes.

“I’ve tried to speak to Albus since but he won’t see me. And I’m not in any of his classes so I don’t even have a chance to…” Scorpius trailed off miserably.

Draco took a very deep breath and did his best to digest that information.

“Scorpius, are you telling me that Harry Potter has been interfering in your education and private life?”

“I…”

“He has absolutely no right!” Draco declared. “No right whatsoever!”

“Dad…”

But his father was not to be reasoned with. He looked utterly furious in a way Scorpius had never seen him before.

Draco placed a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Scorpius, I expect you to wash your face and go to bed. I’m glad you’ve told me the truth.”

Surprised that he hadn’t been chided for his tears, Scorpius nodded his head, feeling really quite relieved. In all honesty, he was still shocked by the sudden appearance of his father.

“I didn’t mean to worry you,” Scorpius said quietly. “Were you busy?”

“You didn’t worry me,” Draco lied. “And no, I was doing some reading.”

Draco got to his feet, and with another sniff, Scorpius followed suit. He looked slightly unwilling to let his father go.

“Leave this with me, Scorpius,” Draco said firmly. “You need to go to bed now.”

Scorpius nodded, already putting on his usual brave face. Draco felt half proud of him, and half
saddened. But still his son didn’t move towards the dormitories. Instead he peered at his father curiously with those watery blue-grey eyes.

“Dad, how did you…”

Draco allowed himself a sigh. He hung his head for a moment, composing himself, and then looked back at his son.

“Did you think I’d send you back here after… after your mother passed without first ensuring that Professor McGonagall would allow me to check on you?”

“But how?”

“The Slytherin Dungeon has been linked to our home by the Floo Network. I made some… I made some enquiries after what we… what you, what you were going through, and as long I use the password Professor McGonagall and I agreed on… it’s perfectly safe. I can only enter the common room. Any further and I believe I burst into flames.”

His father added a forced sort of laugh to that remark, but Scorpius was too stunned to join him.

“I didn’t know,” he breathed out.

“Well, now you do,” Draco said firmly, deciding never to try and make a joke in front of his son again. “And if you ever need me again, I’ll… I’m your father, Scorpius. I’ll come.”

Scorpius nodded his head uncertainly.

Sensing the conversation was at an end, Scorpius gave his father one of his odd little waves (at which Draco bowed his head slightly in response), and hurried off to the dormitories.

Draco watched his son go with fire in his belly. He knew exactly where he would be travelling next, even if it was an absurdly late hour for paying social calls.

If Harry Potter thought he could get away with breaking his son’s heart, then that arrogant, idiotic, utterly unbearable excuse for a man was sorely, sorely mistaken. Someone had to reason with that damn man. Someone had to get him to see sense. Most people saw The Boy Who Lived and went about kissing his feet, but Draco was not afraid of offending the great Harry Potter. In defence of his son’s happiness, Draco would curse any number of people who got in his way.

Chapter End Notes

So this one is purely mine and I hope hope HOPE you liked it.

I love the idea of the Draco and Scorpius relationship. Forgive me for allowing myself to get a bit lost in it here!

Yes, I also took a liberty with the idea of Draco being able to get into the Slytherin common room, but I hope my explanation for it made sense! Obviously in the next scene (SPOILER ALERT) Draco turns up at Harry's house in a pretty bad mood and somehow knows his son has been in tears and that his timetable has been changed.

This was my own version of explaining how he knew that.
Also for anyone with safety concerns about some random dude being allowed to use the Floo Network to enter the Slytherin Dungeon, Draco can only get there with his chosen password, and he cannot go any further than that room or else something super magical and awful would happen to him. McGonagall trusts Draco, but she is all about protecting her students!

I love you so so much and please do leave me a comment!

With these filler scenes I get kind of nervous about posting them, so your encouragement is lovely!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Two: Scene Thirteen

Chapter Notes

Enjoy!

(And yes, this really DOES happen in the script)

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Potter house was everything Draco had imagined it would be. Ordinary, prosaic, and entirely unremarkable. To look at the place you wouldn’t guess it housed one of the generation’s most famous wizards. There was nothing flashy or sophisticated about it, no sense of grandeur. It seemed like every other family home around.

Draco was certain that with the combined incomes of both the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement and a highly successful Prophet columnist and editor, the Potters could have secured a house far more impressive than this.

It was painfully mundane. Hideously domestic. And yet Draco couldn’t quite fight the tinge of jealousy that rose up in his throat as he walked down the driveway, straightening his travelling cloak, ready for battle.

This was a home for visitors, cups of tea, and, well, life. Harry Potter, despite everything, was living the sort of life Draco had only ever read about in books. What a freedom it must have been, Draco thought, to simply choose to be average. To decide to settle in a pleasant but standard house with your healthy wife and bring up your three flourishing children.

He shook these thoughts away in an instant. He was not going to become distracted on this particular afternoon.

The previous evening Draco had witnessed his fourteen year old son crying secretly in the Slytherin common room. His son, his heir, his responsibility, his Scorpius, was suffering and Draco was about to put a stop to that no matter what it took.

It had been difficult to sleep having seen that. Draco’s first instinct upon leaving Hogwarts had been to charge round to the Potters’ home that very instant. But it had been late, and out of consideration for Ginny (and to prevent himself from saying or doing something he might have regretted), Draco had instead chosen to go home and try to be reasonable about all this.

Astoria would have told him that it was never any good to act impulsively when it came such emotional issues. She would have told him to prepare his argument in advance, so that when it came to stating his case he had the upper hand.

She had been clever like that. Cunning. And very, very sensible.

According to Draco’s information, having gone to the house the previous evening would have been a waste of time anyway. Harry Potter had been working late at the Ministry, following some new, allegedly high-profile lead on a new source of Dark Magic. There were rumours of an investigation
of some sort, but Draco could not find out what exactly it concerned.

Having checked with the Ministry (so Harry had no excuse to escape him) that Potter was indeed taking an afternoon off the very next day, Draco had picked his window of opportunity wisely. Harry Potter was famously unsociable when it came to work-related house calls, but if Draco could catch him unawares there was no way the famous wizard would be able to wriggle his way out of this one.

The most surprising piece of information Draco had uncovered (using the few contacts of his that remained), was that Harry Potter seemed to have threatened numerous members of the Hogwarts teaching staff into separating their respective sons. It struck even Draco as hugely odd that Potter, of all people, could treat the professors in such a way. And yet the facts were there before him. For some unfathomable reason, Harry Potter had taken an intense dislike to Scorpius. Perhaps he thought that because Albus was a Potter, and Scorpius a Malfoy, his son wasn't quite good enough for that dark-haired troublemaker that was Harry's youngest son? If that was the case, it seemed Potter was in need of a reminder of his own well-praised moral code of tolerance and acceptance. The world saw a very different Harry Potter to the reality of the man, that much was certain.

With a deep breath, Draco gave a polite yet firm knock on the Potters’ front door. He’d been surprised (as always when it came to Harry Potter) that there wasn’t a protective enchantment around the premises, and that he had simply been allowed to stroll up the driveway. It was just like Potter, Malfoy thought, to pretend to be just another normal person, to play on that false modesty of his, like he always had done.

If you were going to be arrogant, Draco believed you should at least be honest about it.

Malfoy Manor was protected by a set of wrought-iron gates and enchantments which stretched right the way around the vast grounds. Even before the Malfoy family had found themselves enemies of the general wizarding population, privacy had been everything to Lucius and his ancestors. Draco was less concerned with prying eyes, and more with those ‘heroic’ men and women that got it into their heads to repay some lasting family vengeance by destroying property, or potentially worse. It had been paramount, to Draco, that his wife and son were protected from that.

Ginny Potter opened the front door looking rather more stressed than she usually did. Not that Draco paid much attention to such things, but Ginny had always struck him as a laid-back sort of woman. Perhaps he had come at a difficult time?

Draco noticed that she offered him a smile, despite her worried features. It looked fairly genuine as well. She had always possessed a more palatable personality than her useless husband, it was just that Draco had chosen not to see it back in his bigoted days. Back then she had been simply another Weasley, another member of that seemingly endless family of Muggle-lovers whom Draco was encouraged to openly despise.

Now? Well, Draco made a conscious effort to always be as courteous as possible to her, in the hope that she would understand he no longer held any animosity towards her for her name, although being the wife of Potter? Draco definitely had his doubts about anyone that would willingly agree to be married to that man. (Even if they did write a smashing sports column that read exceptionally well over breakfast).

“Draco...” she said, clearly stunned to see him standing on her doorstep at two in the afternoon, dressed in his best and looking like he meant business.

Ginny herself was clad in more casual attire. Draco noticed she had some dried ink on the back of
one of her hands from where he assumed she had been taking notes on something earlier in the day. She didn’t appear in the least embarrassed to be greeting him at the door in her informal clothes. Ginny Potter seemed to entirely lack the natural sense of self-consciousness everyone else (even Draco) possessed. She gave off a distinct impression of not caring what anyone thought of her. Draco envied her that.

“I hope I’m not intruding,” Draco said respectfully, holding back his anger for Ginny’s benefit. After all, he doubted she’d had a hand in any of this nonsense. It had Potter’s interfering paw prints all over it. “Is your husband in?”

“I… yes, but this might not be the best…”

“I’m aware that it’s odd timing, but I’m here to discuss my son. It simply can’t wait.”

Ginny looked ready to tell him to come back another day, that she and Harry were busy doing some dull domestic task which couples so often took for granted, but then Draco saw Ginny reconsider. Immediately, Draco sensed an ally. He would remember that for later, if it was necessary. His father had always taught him to notice who stood on your side and who stood against you.

Less pleasant was the fact that Ginny clearly seemed to remember that he, Draco, was a widower. There was certain concern which appeared on her face the exact moment she recalled that inescapable fact of Draco’s life. It wasn’t quite pity, but it caused Draco to raise his head a challenging inch higher nonetheless.

She gave a sigh and made a ‘what the hell’ sort of face.

Harry had caused this mess, Ginny thought. So he could sort it out again. She certainly wasn’t going to make life any easier for him, and she wasn’t about to turn Draco Malfoy away, not when he’d come all the way from Wiltshire.

“Go right through,” she amended.

With a sweep of her wand around the doorway (so there were protective enchantments after all), Ginny stood back to let Draco pass.

Draco kept his head high and strolled confidently into Ginny Potter’s house. It was a little trick he’d learned as a boy. If you walked as though nothing would stop you, people would rush to duck out of your way, they would part for you on the street. It was just another subtle way of displaying power.

Even Ginny Potter, who Draco knew could be notoriously fierce, stepped aside in an instant, pointing him wordlessly in the direction of the kitchen and blinking after him. The fact that she was letting him through could only hint, Draco thought, at what was a currently non-united front.

The Potter kitchen was as Draco had expected. In need of a clean-up. In need of a few new cabinets. Over-cluttered and full of junk. There was nothing even vaguely expensive in sight, only a row of patterned mugs on a shelf (many of which were Quidditch themed), a pot on the table in which a mess of strange items such as keys, coins, and stationary were stored, and a set of five egg cups in the shape of different species of dragon sitting proudly on a countertop.

In the centre of the room was a large dining table with six chairs around it. On one of those chairs sat Harry Potter. He was slumped tiredly with his back to the wall, one elbow resting on the table, one hand supporting his head. When Draco swept into the room he looked up, for a moment revealing an exhausted face, before he realised who his guest was and raised an eyebrow, sitting up
In other circumstances Draco would have made a polite effort not to turn his nose up at the room, or even to give Harry a nod or some other greeting, but with his son’s happiness on the line, Draco was too consumed by anger to even consider courtesy. It was taking an unbelievable amount of effort to hide his rage at the mere sight of the man, and Harry Potter hadn’t even opened his mouth yet…

“I can’t stay long,” Draco declared shortly. “I won’t need long.”

Harry gave him a look which clearly meant: Too right you can’t stay long, because this is MY house, MY kitchen, and you’ve not been invited.

Instead of expressing these (fairly obvious) sentiments, Harry took a deep breath and put on his best ‘dealing with difficult people’ expression.

“How can I help?” he asked calmly, pushing aside the plate beside him, which displayed the remains of a sandwich.

Draco felt it was best to get straight to the point. He wasn’t sure how long he could endure Harry Potter patronising him in that infuriating way of his.

“I’m not here to antagonise you,” Draco stated with an equal amount of restraint. “But my son is in tears and I am his father and so I am here to ask why you would keep apart two good friends.”

Harry looked definitely and distinctly guilty. Draco saw him glance swiftly at the doorway, as though anticipating Ginny’s return. When it became clear his wife wasn’t going to help him out of this one, and that, in fact, she seemed to have let Draco Malfoy right into their kitchen without a word of warning (which meant she was feeling very cross indeed), Harry crossed his arms on the table in front of him.

“I’m not keeping them apart,” Harry said.

Just as arrogant and unable to take criticism as always, Draco thought with great dislike.

Of course the great Harry Potter would attempt to rid himself of any blame and gloss over the situation. What Draco had realised, as he got older, was that a sign of maturity was being able to accept and take responsibility for one’s own mistakes. Time and time again Draco had been forced to relive his youthful crimes. To this very day he couldn’t enter the Ministry without receiving sour looks or even a few brave comments. And he accepted that, because he had done wrong, because he had taken part in some terrible terrible events and people had been hurt as a consequence of his actions. But ‘heroes’ like Harry Potter never did seem able to accept their flaws. Draco supposed that when most of the wizarding world worshipped you, it was inconvenient to accept that you were human, and made mistakes like everyone else.

“You’ve changed school timetables,” Draco pointed out with forced calm. “You’ve threatened both the teachers and Albus himself. Why?”

Clearly he hadn’t known Draco was aware of this little piece of information because Harry looked at Draco carefully and then turned away, unable to meet his eyes.

“I have to protect my son,” he said.

Draco felt his eyebrows raise of their own volition.
“From Scorpius?” he clarified, unable to stop the hint of incensed disbelief creeping into his tone.

Surely if either of those boys needed protecting it was Scorpius? Perhaps Draco was biased, but his son definitely seemed to be the more mild-mannered and gentle of the pair. Not that Draco held any especial ill-feeling towards young Albus Potter. On the contrary, he seemed like a decent sort of boy, and he’d been a great support to Scorpius following the death of his mother (for which Draco would forever feel slightly indebted to him). But the idea of Scorpius ever causing any sort of harm to Albus, his adored best friend, was clearly laughable.

“Bane told me he sensed a darkness around my son. Near my son,” Harry explained.

If Harry Potter was getting at what Draco thought he was…

“What are you implying, Potter?” Draco demanded, fingers flexing at his sides, eyes narrowed, daring Harry to continue, to say the words he so clearly wanted to. Draco had known he’d have to force the admission out of him, Harry Potter being the coward that he was.

Unexpectedly, Harry turned back to Draco. He blinked, took a breath, and then looked Draco dead in the eyes.

“Are you sure… are you really sure he’s yours Draco?”

The room was suddenly plunged into deadly silence.

Harry Potter seemed to realise he had said something entirely unacceptable, but he didn’t lower his gaze. He continued to stare evenly at Draco, clearly pretending he wasn’t shocked by his own blunt words.

Draco did not tolerate insults against his family. The crimes of his own parents and beyond were deserving of contempt, and Draco had taught himself to accept criticism and even hatred of those he had loved. But for a person to turn their animosity on Scorpius? On his very own, innocent, vulnerable, young son?

And then, somehow even worse than that blatant disrespect towards Scorpius, came the realisation that Harry Potter had just attempted to slander Draco’s beloved wife, no longer alive to defend her reputation. Being the Chosen One had clearly made Harry Potter believe he could say what he wanted to whom he wanted, but if Draco had his way, that was going to stop right now.

Potter would either retract his vicious implication or learn what it meant to disrespect Draco Malfoy’s family. Restraint be damned.

“You take that back… right now,” Draco hissed, fingers twitching once again.

Draco waited, more patiently than he’d assumed was humanly possible, giving Harry Potter every possible chance to rectify his mistake, to acknowledge the damage of his words, but instead, Harry simply stared at him.

Enough was enough. Draco reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out his wand.

“You do not want to do this,” Harry warned him lowly.

But oh Draco did.

“Yes I do.”
Harry glanced from Draco’s wand, to his grey eyes, positively radiating fury and a concealed desire for retribution. With a sigh, Harry placed his palms down on the kitchen table, pushed himself up from his chair, and got almost reluctantly to his feet. It was admittedly impressive, how Harry Potter, never the tallest of men, could create such a sense of formidability about himself. It was in the way he held himself, the body language of a man that did not want to harm you, but very well could if you forced his hand.

"I don't want to hurt you, Draco," Harry said, warily.

Luckily for Draco Malfoy, he had never fallen for Harry Potter’s bravado.

“How interesting,” Draco said, the smallest of smirks appearing on his lips. “Because I do want to hurt you.”

Harry finally reached for his wand (had nobody ever taught him that it was poor form to keep your wand in your back pocket?) and Draco narrowed his eyes, ready to defend the honour of his family.

For an obscure moment, the two men stood in silence, facing each other across the kitchen table, Draco on the balls of his feet, Harry looking like he really could have done without this but wasn’t going to pass up a challenge.

And then with a sudden spring, Draco shot out his wand. Harry followed suit, reacting almost instantaneously.

“Expelliarmus!” Harry and Draco yelled.

Both wands were repelled for the briefest of moments, and then broke apart with some power.

Draco, invigorated with fury, was the first to recover from this.

“Incarcerous!” he shouted, aiming directly at Potter’s unbearable, arrogant face.

Predictably Harry dodged to one side, seeming to anticipate the move even before Draco had made it.

“Tarantallallegra!” Harry fired back, and Draco threw himself bodily out of the way of Potter’s spell, only just staying on his feet by putting out both of his hands to keep his balance.

The fact that the ‘Dancing Feet’ spell had missed and yet he’d still managed to make an almost laughably balletic move to combat it, filled Draco with frustration.

Harry, already breathless with adrenaline, raised an eyebrow and paused as Draco recovered from his trip, seemingly finding the situation at least vaguely amusing.

“You’ve been practicing, Draco,” he declared.

Draco was not going to be humiliated by Harry Potter on today of all days. Not when the egotistical Auror was so clearly in the wrong.

“And you’ve got sloppy, Potter. Densaugeo!”

It gave Draco a great amount of joy to see Harry Potter only just manage to dodge his spell by arching his back.

But it also seemed to make Harry Potter angry at his own mistake.
“Rictusempra!” Harry shouted, lunging forward, this time with more determination.

The effect was somewhat spoiled by the fact that Potter was only using a basic Tickling Charm. Draco distinctly remembered Harry having used that particular Charm on him during their first duel in second year which had been watched over by Severus Snape and that utter fool Gilderoy Lockhart…

Not willing to be forced to laugh in a situation which threatened his family pride, Draco used the kitchen chair in front of him to block the spell, no longer caring if he made a mess. Harry Potter had started all of this with his ridiculous interfering and insulting assertions. Any damage done to the property was a regrettable side-effect of this long-overdue confrontation.

“Flipendo!” Draco yelled, and to his delight, Harry was sent twirling through the air, taken entirely by surprise at the viciousness of Draco’s latest spell.

Draco laughed, throwing back his head. That noise was so alien and so familiar at once. Draco realised, only a second after his outburst, that he had sounded almost exactly like his father in that moment of cruel amusement.

“Keep up, old man,” Draco declared, really starting to enjoy himself now he had the upper hand.

“We’re the same age, Draco,” Harry managed to point out, getting to his feet and grimacing.

Draco gallantly refused to fire another spell until his opponent was back on his feet.

“I wear it better.”

Perhaps Harry’s obvious ageing was a sore spot, because Harry lunged forward again with new vigour.

“Brachiabindo!”

Draco was caught off guard and found himself bound tightly, arms stuck rigidly at his sides, legs forced together painfully. Stuck like this Potter could have delivered the final blow and ended this, but Potter was too concerned with his hero status to do the deed. So far he was only firing off the most basic and harmless of spells. Somehow, that infuriated Draco more than anything else.

“Is that the best you got?” Draco demanded.

Somehow managing to retain his dignity in this situation, Draco gave an elegant flick of his wrist and enchanted the counter spell.

“Emancipare!”

His arms and legs were immediately freed. He didn’t pause for breath before enacting his revenge.

“Levicorpus!” Draco called out, but Harry narrowly dodged the jinx by throwing himself against a kitchen cabinet (sending a stack of plates crashing down on the kitchen tiles). “Mobilicorpus!”

The levitation spell worked just as planned. Harry was left dangling hilariously in the air, arms and legs flailing, glasses only just staying on his nose.

“Oh this is too much fun…” Draco crowed, bouncing Harry up and down on the table (all the while remembering his son’s poor, tearstained face) until his opponent somehow managed to roll himself free, toppling gracelessly down onto the kitchen tiles with a groan.
Draco wasn’t ready to let him get away that easily. With a sudden, energetic leap (that even
tenaged Draco would have been proud of), Draco jumped up onto the table, readying his wand to
hit Harry with yet another spell from his high ground. But Harry was poised on the kitchen floor
and aimed a spell back up at Draco before he could block it

“Obscuro!” Harry shouted, covering Draco’s eyes with a blindfold that Draco released himself
from the moment it hit.

The sparring was growing increasingly wilder, and Draco only truly realised he’d won when Harry
finally gave in and decided to fight dirty. Without even using his wand, Harry picked up a kitchen
chair and threw it as hard as he could across the table at Draco, grunting with the effort.

Draco ducked underneath the wooden missile and slowed it expertly with his wand. He would have
used his wand to propel it right back at Harry but both men were distracted by the entrance of a
third person.

Ginny re-entered the room looking stunned.

“I only left this room three minutes ago!” she exclaimed, glancing swiftly at the mess of a kitchen,
from her husband, who was panting and starting to look guilty, to Draco Malfoy, who was
currently levitating a chair high above his head and had paused in an almost comically poised
stance, one arm thrown elegantly up above him, the other waiting at his side.

Without another word, Ginny used her wand to return the chair to the ground, sweeping her hand in
an easy, casual motion and clearing the shattered pieces of dinner plates up and into the sink, where
she would get Harry to deal with them later.

Her arrival on the scene had broken the spell. The energy seemed to seep from the room. Both men
were exhausted. Harry was embarrassed. Draco was full of righteous anger and only the barest hint
of regret for his rash actions.

Draco returned his hands to his sides and brushed down his clothing. Harry ran a sheepish hand
though his messy hair and kept his gaze determinedly on the ground.

“What did I miss?” Ginny asked dryly.

Chapter End Notes

I am a hardcore Harry lover but even I am Team Draco in this situation.

Get your act together, Potter!

Obviously as we're getting deeper into the story the grown up scenes are becoming
more vital to the plot. Which I love because oh how I enjoy writing Draco Malfoy!!!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

Also please please please please please comment!

xxx
Act Two: Scene Fourteen

Chapter Notes

Dialogue is all from the script!

Enjoy!

xxx

Scorpius awoke feeling admittedly low, but somehow better than the night before.

The previous evening’s visit from his father had been a momentary relief for Scorpius, even if it all seemed so surreal that he’d had to remind himself several times that he hadn’t dreamt the whole thing up.

He supposed it had been really quite impressive of his father to show up like that, in his wonderful travelling cloak and his best clothes, the moment he’d received the owl. It seemed, to Scorpius, like a sort of magic in itself.

He knew how much his father despised Hogwarts, the horrid memories the place brought up for him, the past he wished he could forget, and yet still his dad had put all of those feelings aside, just for the sake of his only son. Without a single word of complaint, Draco Malfoy had come running. He’d come running at the barest hint of trouble.

Scorpius found the situation so utterly overwhelming that he didn’t like to think too deeply into it. For some reason, the understanding that his father really had meant it when he said he would be there for him no matter what, had shaken him.

Being such a disappointment to his father, he’d assumed those were empty words, offered out of courtesy.

Now he was faced with the astonishing realisation that he wasn’t alone after all. That even though his mother was gone, he still had a parent, and one that loved him. (And probably loved him quite a lot).

Even if his father showed his love in the strangest (and most formal) of ways, it was still love. Perhaps a different kind of love to the one Scorpius would have preferred, but it was there nevertheless.

Looking back at his evening he no longer felt embarrassed for having cried for so long (although he did feel guilty that his father had been forced to witness it). If anything, the momentary lapse in his usual optimism seemed to have done him good. It was hard work, being so cheerful all the time. Sometimes it really did feel good to have a long spell of self-pity. He understood, now, why Albus was such a keen sulker.

Despite his father’s grand words, Scorpius wasn’t sure that his father would be able to change his situation in any way, but he appreciated the sentiment. To have an ally, however distant that ally might have been, was a small comfort in a currently dreadful world.
He supposed his father might try talking to Professor McGonagall, but the Malfoys didn’t have nearly as much influence as his father liked to think. His dad seemed to live in the past sometimes, a past in which their family name could open doors and solve any sort of problem. Draco Malfoy clearly imagined he was still a major player in society, and for Scorpius, who was an observant boy, it was devastatingly upsetting to watch.

Nobody would listen to his father. Most people thought the Malfoy name was mud now, and even those that were more fair-minded would follow the inclinations of Harry Potter: The Chosen One over Draco Malfoy: former Death Eater.

Scorpius wasn’t sure what to think of Harry Potter any more. At first he’d imagined there’d been some form of change, that since he and Albus had changed time, Harry had become a whole new person. That had been a comfort to Scorpius, who had grown up on the stories of Harry Potter’s daring adventures and always rather looked up to him.

It had been a devastating blow to realise that Harry Potter’s life in this new reality was exactly the same as before. Which meant that The Boy Who Lived truly seemed to believe that he, Scorpius Malfoy, was a bad and unpleasant person.

Scorpius was no fool. Despite Albus avoiding him and not giving him the slightest chance to enter into conversation with him, he knew that his best friend was facing some sort of pressure from his father to keep his distance. On the day Albus had woken up in the hospital wing, and Scorpius had rushed to greet him, the coldness that radiated from Harry Potter had been palpable.

It had come as something of a shock, really. Scorpius wasn’t used to being disliked by adults. Other teenagers and kids? Absolutely. In their eyes he was a loser through and through. But most of his professors didn’t seem to think he was a bad person, and a few were even quite kind to him.

Perhaps being an only child who had conversed mostly with his mother and father had made Scorpius seem a little odd to others his age, but it also meant he usually came across quite favourably when it came to grown ups.

Trying to remain cheerful when Harry Potter, hero of the wizarding world, had deemed you unsuitable company for his son, was quite a task.

Remaining cheerful when that son (whom Scorpius adored and would have gladly defied his father for ten times over), for some inexplicable reason, was going along with this madness, was even harder.

Scorpius had spent the morning working hard at his lessons and researching frantically in every spare moment he got. So far he had skim read at least half of the modern history section of the Hogwarts library, trying to digest any and all useful information about wizarding life and society following the last Triwizard Tournament.

His last lesson before lunch had been Defence Against the Dark Arts with Professor Granger. Defence had previously been one of Scorpius’s favourite subjects, even though he wasn't naturally gifted at the whole being assertive thing, but now he was being taught by Professor Granger, Scorpius wasn’t sure he’d ever be able to achieve his best again.

To begin with it was very distracting to be taught by the Minister for Magic. Or rather, the woman who used to be the Minister for Magic. The woman who should have been. Scorpius had been more than a little star struck to be led into the Defence classroom and find Professor Granger leaning disinterestedly against the front desk. Yes, he’d seen Delphi as Hermione Granger, but this was the real thing!
Only it wasn’t. Because this new woman was not the Hermione Granger Scorpius had spent so much of his life admiring. This new woman was actually something of a bully.

Scorpius had been wise enough to keep his head down and follow her instructions, and so had avoided most of her temper, but when one of his fellow Slytherins sitting in the front row had accidentally dropped the bottle of Bubotuber pus they’d been asked to examine on the floor, Professor Granger had forced him to pick the broken shards of glass up himself - without dragon-hide gloves. That might have been all right if the shards weren’t covered in the thick yellowish-green liquid.

Having been seated at the back, on his own (since nobody wanted to sit with him), Scorpius had been spared the sight of the boils that had grown on the boy’s skin almost instantly, but the retching of the girl sitting beside him told Scorpius all he needed to know.

Scorpius was quite sure that making a student touch such a harmful substance was against the rules, after all, they were supposed to be learning to defend themselves from such attacks, not learn to endure them, but Professor Granger didn’t seem to care, and Scorpius was far too scared to point this out to her.

He knew that the Gryffindors had already endured their first Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson with Professor Granger, and Scorpius found himself hoping desperately that Albus had had the good sense to keep his mouth shut. He didn’t imagine Albus’s usual sarcasm would go down particularly well with Professor Granger.

As soon as the class had been dismissed, Scorpius had been intending to visit the library again while the other students went to lunch, but the fact that the majority of the Gryffindor fourth years had beaten him to it and taken up most of the tables (were they anticipating a test?), changed his mind.

That many Gryffindors in one place could only spell trouble for Scorpius.

And so instead of going to eat his lunch, or visiting the Slytherin common room (where he was sure the graphic story about the boils would be spreading as he spoke) he decided to indulge in a new favourite pastime of his: exploring the school.

Well, it wasn’t really exploring, since students were only permitted in certain areas, and Scorpius wasn’t a huge rule breaker now Albus wasn’t around to tempt him, but it was reassuring to Scorpius to lose himself in the school, in the architecture and the history and the portraits.

Today’s location was the fifth floor, near to the Grand Staircase. Wherever Scorpius went he made sure to remain close to the Grand Staircase, just in case he spotted students that were looking for trouble and had to make a speedy getaway. The Staircase seemed wonderfully wise in such moments, and would often change layout in ways which appeared to be in his favour, diverting raucous students, and sending name-callers sweeping in another direction.

The fifth floor was fairly peaceful considering it was lunch hour, and peering over the bannister of the nearest staircase was a surprisingly soothing exercise. Watching the heads of various students going about their business from up above was fascinating. Occasionally Scorpius would even catch snippets of conversations between the professors.

Just the other day he had heard Professor Longbottom conversing with Professor McGonagall about one of his first year students who was apparently failing miserably in Herbology. Professor McGonagall had been keen to send an owl home to the girl’s parents, but Professor Longbottom had insisted that all she needed was a bit of confidence. As they’d walked off, Scorpius had heard
Professor Longbottom volunteered his own break to offer extra help to those first years that might be struggling.

What with how Hermione had turned out, Scorpius found great relief in hearing the kind words of Neville Longbottom. It reminded him that some good still existed in this new reality.

Being up on the fifth floor came with the added bonus of a plausible excuse for his wandering, since there was a boys’ bathroom nearby, although the downside was that it was clearly unspoken Ravenclaw territory, and he did receive some suspicious looks, being a lone Slytherin loitering aimlessly.

The entrance to the Ravenclaw common room was situated just down the hall from where he stood. According to his books, a spiral staircase led the Ravenclaws up and into Ravenclaw Tower, where the views were said to be magnificent. Only a few corridors away was the famous Ravenclaw riddle door. Scorpius had never actually seen it first hand. Aside from the Slytherin Dungeon, the only other House door he’d seen was the Hufflepuff Basement, and that was only because Hufflepuffs seemed overall less suspicious of those that took an interest in such things. The entrance to their common room was obscured by a set of barrels, and rumour had it if you gave the wrong password, you were doused in vinegar.

A group of Ravenclaws passed Scorpius, in the midst of a heated debate, each student carrying at least one book. He wondered if they realised how stereotypically Ravenclaw they looked, and then remembered that they probably wouldn’t care.

The good thing about Ravenclaws, Scorpius thought, was that they didn’t often comment nastily about those that were considered slightly odd. In fact, Scorpius got the reassuring impression that the fact he was known as a bit of a loser and a geek was a Ravenclaw non-issue. Also, a great deal of them seemed permanently preoccupied, which meant there wasn’t time for them to stop and call him names, which was a nasty habit of some of the more outspoken Gryffindors. On the whole, aside from the numerous Ravenclaw students who glared over, turned up their noses, or whispered detailed theories about his parentage slightly more loudly than was necessary, the fifth floor was probably the most pleasant so far.

Scorpius had been examining a suit of armour at the top of the stairs, wondering which era it was from and who had engraved the beautiful wing patterns on the metal, when he was tapped urgently on the shoulder.

His immediate hope that the culprit was Albus was dashed in a second. Albus was not a shoulder-tapper. If he had turned up behind him and wanted to chat, Scorpius was one hundred percent sure Albus would have started by clearing his throat, or perhaps shifting around loudly and noticeably until Scorpius turned around.

Scorpius turned, seriously hoping that it wasn’t some overconfident Gryffindor specifically climbed up to this level to torment him, (that had happened a few times before) and was stunned to see some familiar silver-blond hair with blue tips…

“So - technically- I shouldn’t be here,” Delphi admitted, looking nervously about her.

Scorpius rubbed at his eyes, convinced he was dreaming.

“Delphi?”

She gave a little thumbs-up in response, and despite himself, Scorpius felt relief flood his veins. At last, a friendly face!
How Delphi had managed to get into Hogwarts, let alone find him, all while remaining undetected herself, was something of a miracle, but Scorpius wasn’t about to complain.

“In fact, technically I’m endangering our entire operation… which is not… well, I’m not a natural risk-taker as you know. I’ve never been to Hogwarts. Pretty lax security here isn’t there? And so many portraits. And corridors. And ghosts. This half-headless strange-looking ghost told me where I could find you, can you believe that?”

Scorpius hadn’t realised Nearly Headless Nick had seen him. He was quite worried about it, if he was honest. Nick, who had often floated over to talk to Albus back in the other reality, was admirably friendly, but not at all bright. If Delphi had been able to discover where he was, then would Nick give the same information to his fellow Gryffindors when they asked? Was that how the Gryffindors kept on figuring out where to find him when they wanted to make his life a misery?

Sometimes, Scorpius wished that a certain portion of the Gryffindors would think before speaking. Or acting. Or, well, if they could just think at all Scorpius thought that would be lovely.

And then he absorbed Delphi’s words, getting stuck on one particular revelation.

“You’ve never been to Hogwarts?” Scorpius repeated.

It was unusual for a British witch or wizard not to attend Hogwarts. He wondered if Delphi had instead been sent to Beauxbatons. It seemed odd that the Diggory family should send her all the way to France for her education, but then he remembered Cedric Diggory and the Triwizard Tournament, and realised that the Diggory family probably didn’t have a high opinion of what was, to Scorpius, the most wonderful wizarding school in all the world.

Delphi looked slightly uncomfortable at the question. She shuffled from foot to foot and then gave a small half-smile.

“I was - unwell - as a child - for a few years. Other people got to go - I did not.”

Scorpius blinked. He hadn’t imagined that a capable witch like Delphi could have been home tutored. The thought of being too ill to attend Hogwarts was a little too close to Scorpius’s heart for him not to feel sorry for the unusual young woman in front of him.

“You were too - ill? I’m sorry, I didn’t know that.”

Scorpius immediately felt guilty for his previous judgements of Delphi. Hadn’t his mother always told him not to make your mind up about a person straight away?

He knew what a long illness could do to a person, how difficult it could make a life. His mother had struggled for years and years, missed out on so much. Maybe Delphi had tried a little too hard to befriend Albus, but being too ill to attend school must have been horrendous. The loneliness alone would have been awful. He could suddenly understand why Delphi had latched onto Albus with such immediacy. In truth, Scorpius couldn’t blame her. Hadn’t he done exactly the same on that first day on the Hogwarts Express? Perhaps there was just something about Albus which made him so particularly appealing a companion?

Scorpius imagined the pain of seeing all the other children your age heading to Hogwarts, and being the only one left behind.

His mother had often found it hard to attend school herself. While Scorpius’s Aunt Daphne (who, with the exception of his mother's funeral, he hadn’t seen in a great many years following a huge
family row over politics) had attended Hogwarts and been in the same year as his father, Astoria had undergone such periods of weakness that she’d been forced to remain at home for whole terms at a time.

His mother hadn’t been able to play Quidditch, or even ride a broom. She’d been considered too delicate, too frail, and so had been forced to sit out and watch her classmates learn to fly in her first year.

She had so often spent time in the hospital wing that she’d had her own bed waiting for her, for the nights when the curse would hit her especially hard. It had been an isolating experience, Astoria had explained to her compassionate son, because all the other Slytherin girls had had fun in the dormitories while she was left with only the company of Madam Pomfrey.

Scorpius couldn’t help but wonder if Delphi too had some form of curse. It wasn’t an appropriate question to ask, but the idea lingered in his mind. The Diggory family hadn’t made any information like that public, and Cedric had seemed healthy enough, but Scorpius knew well the strange manifestations of a family curse. Often it would skip a generation entirely, or not show up until early adulthood. In some cases it waned and waxed like the moon. In the case of the Greengrass family, it seemed to be drawn towards women, which could have been the same for the Diggorys...

“I don’t advertise the fact,” Delphi said with a shrug, choosing not to elaborate. “I prefer not to be seen as a tragic case, you know?”

That registered with Scorpius. His mother had never liked to be treated like a child because of her illness and some of the only times he had ever heard her complain to his father were surrounding that subject. Although she always appreciated kindness, she had often looked quite startled to find herself spoken down to by a stranger when she was in her wheelchair. Even when his father occasionally carried his mother short distances, people wanting to address the family had always spoken to Draco directly, like his mother wasn’t there, and in hushed, mournful tones which even Scorpius could tell meant they thought his mother was a beautiful and yet dreadful burden. It had been a private pet peeve of Scorpius’s, the way people could romanticise illness in such a way, the way his mother had been treated like a delicate, meek, mild, helpless woman, when really she was just the same person she’d always been, just a little physically weaker than usual. Just in need of a little extra help sometimes.

And when it came to his own experiences, Scorpius understood all too well how distressing it could be to be seen as a victim by others. Especially as a Malfoy, he had been determined that his fellow students wouldn’t pity him after his mother died. His father had a similar aversion to being pitied, only he showed it slightly different to Scorpius. He had watched his dad grieve for his mother with his head held high, without a single tear shed. It would have been too close to weakness, and a Malfoy could never afford to be weak.

Scorpius’s favourite tactic to push aside the sympathy was entirely different. He had found that being sunny and smiley and unshakable in his optimism worked as an equally good deterrent. Being so determinedly happy meant that you weren’t pitiable.

After the death of his mother, Professor McGonagall had contacted his father directly, asking if there was anything she could do to help, but Scorpius had turned down any such offers. After all, unless she could bring his mother back to life, what use was she, really?

Already more than used to being a loser, Scorpius hadn't wanted to add to his (already rather pathetic) reputation by becoming that third year geek whose mother had died of a curse and whose father was potentially Voldemort. People might even have thought he was cursed himself, even
though as far as the family knew (and his father had researched the issue extensively), it only seemed to carry through the female line.

Scorpius already had enough gossip about him making the rounds. He hadn’t wanted to add a single drop of fuel to that fire.

He looked up at Delphi, wanting to explain that he understood perfectly, to put some of his thoughts into words, but before he could say a thing, Delphi ducked down and then scampered the last few steps down the hall, disappearing behind the beautifully carved suit of armour.

Scorpius turned to see a fifth year Ravenclaw on her way up the stairs. She was carrying a vast stack of books from the library, and it was an effort for Scorpius not to offer to help her with her haul. Not that she would have accepted his offer, him being who he was, but it still felt important to Scorpius to be well-mannered. It was what his mother would have wanted him to do.

Instead of volunteering his arms to carry the books, Scorpius leaned back against the bannister and tried to look casual. The young woman didn’t even glance at him. She continued past Scorpius and then onwards (past where Delphi was hiding), presumably on her way to Ravenclaw Tower.

For once, being ignored had actually turned out to be a good thing. Scorpius allowed himself to exhale as the girl disappeared around the corner.

“Have they gone?” came a whispered voice from behind the suit of armour.

Scorpius looked around to check the coast was clear. Before he had even finished looking Delphi daringly poked her head out again with a silly, playful grin.

“Delphi, maybe it is too dangerous for you to be here-” Scorpius began doubtfully.

But Delphi ignored him, returning to his side in an instant

“Well - someone’s got to do something about this,” Delphi declared with determination, gesturing at Scorpius with a pale, slender hand. Scorpius noticed she had painted her fingernails blue to match her hair.

Scorpius admired Delphi’s optimism, but even he had to admit it seemed a little misplaced.

Over the past few days Scorpius had undergone extensive research and come to the disheartening conclusion that for all their hard work and daring, they’d not succeeded. Poor Amos Diggory was still an ill, lonely old man. Cedric Diggory had still won the Triwizard Tournament with Harry. He’d still been killed by Voldemort.

The only significant changes seemed to have happened outside of the Diggory family. Most notably with former Minister for Magic Hermione Granger, and her once husband Ron Weasley.

“Delphi, none of it worked,” Scorpius revealed helplessly. “Time-turning, we failed.”

He felt there was nothing more to say than that.

But Delphi didn’t seem to recognise the awful finality of their situation. She tilted her head to one side, screwed up her nose a little, and then smiled.

“I know,” she revealed, in her bouncy way. “Albus owled me. The history books changed but not enough - Cedric still died. In fact, failing the first task only made him more determined to win the second.”
Albus had owled her?

Scorpius felt momentarily betrayed, but shook it off quickly. This was a serious, genuinely terrible situation. He had been partly responsible for the changing of lives. For children never born.

His father had brought him up to be able to accept responsibility for his actions, and to try to make amends where possible. But in a situation like this? Scorpius wasn’t sure what he could do to change anything let alone apologise. If he’d approached Hermione (now Professor) Granger and said how dreadfully sorry he was for the loss of Rose and Hugo Granger-Weasley, he’d have been sent to St Mungo’s in a heartbeat.

The disappearance of two people was now on his hands. It felt like… well, almost like a form of murder. Perhaps worse than just the taking of a life. The taking of a person’s memory was, to Scorpius, infinitely worse.

The strength of his father was more apparent to him now than ever. Scorpius had never fully appreciated what it was to carry that much guilt and be expected to just continue with life. It was hard not to think about your mistakes every second of every day. It took real effort not to go entirely mad.

“And Ron and Hermione have gone completely skewwiff,” Scorpius said, shaking his head and trying to remain as light and casual as Delphi. “And I still haven’t figured out why.”

“And that’s why Cedric has to wait,” Delphi declared with energy, making a chopping gesture with her hands. “It’s all become quite confused and you’re entirely right to be keeping hold of the Time-Turner, Scorpius. But what I meant was - someone’s got to do something about the two of you.”

Scorpius blinked, taking a second to understand the new direction of the conversation and suddenly reddening.

“Oh.”

“You’re best friends. Every owl he sends I can feel your absence. He’s destroyed by it.”

Scorpius very much wanted to believe that was true, as awful as he knew it was to wish unhappiness on his best friend, but he somehow doubted that was the case. If Albus had missed him so much, then he would have spoken to him, surely? He would have said something.

“Sounds like he’s found a shoulder to cry on,” Scorpius found himself saying, his voice far more sulky than he’d intended. “How many owls has he sent you now?”

Delphi stared at him, her dark eyes wide, and then broke into a soft smile. She inclined her head slightly as though she had just won some sort of victory. Like she had just scored a point in an unknown game. The way she looked at Scorpius was far too familiar. Far too knowing. It was almost as though she could read his mind and his heart, and found what she saw there amusing.

“Sorry,” Scorpius muttered, a little ashamed of his previous tone, but determined to keep his dignity. “That’s - I don’t mean - I just - don’t understand what’s going on. I’ve tried to see him, talk to him, but every time I do he runs off.”

Delphi still didn’t drop her smile. She raised a hand theatrically to her chin, miming deep thoughtfulness.

“You know, I didn’t have a best friend when I was your age,” she revealed, raising an eyebrow. It was almost sisterly, the way she was talking to him. Or at least, being an only child, it was the way
Scorpius might imagine a big sister might talk to her younger brother. She had a very hypnotic way about her, Scorpius thought. He couldn’t help but hang on her every word.

“I wanted one,” Delphi continued honestly. “Desperately. When I was younger I even invented one but-“

Feeling suddenly more comfortable with Delphi Diggory, who it appeared was not the cool, totally sorted young woman he had assumed she was (and may actually have once been a fellow loser), Scorpius decided to reveal a little story of his own.

“I had one of those too,” he admitted. “Called Flurry. We fell out over the correct rules of Gobstones.”

Delphi raised a fond eyebrow. She wasn’t willing to have the conversation steered elsewhere.

“Albus needs you, Scorpius,” she said gently. “That’s a wonderful thing.”

Scorpius chewed on his lower lip for a moment, uncertain.

“He needs me to do what?” he asked, trying not to drop his gaze with embarrassment.

Delphi beamed at his blushing face. She gave another of her energetic little movements and then held her hands together in front of her heart, resting them there.

“That’s the thing isn’t it? About friendships. You don’t know what he needs. You only know he needs it.”

He could hear the wistfulness in her tone and it made him feel guilty once again. It should have been obvious that Delphi Diggory was lonely from the start, but something had prevented Scorpius from seeing it.

Scorpius thought on Delphi’s words, chewing on his lower lip and pulling his sleeves down over his hands.

He might not have known what Albus needed, but he knew what he did.

He needed Albus.

If the past few days had taught him anything, it was that he could exist fairly easily without Albus, but he wasn’t quite sure he could live.

“Find him, Scorpius,” said Delphi softly, reaching out to lightly touch his arm. “You two - you belong together.”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave a comment if you enjoyed this!

Thanks!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Ginny despaired of her husband sometimes, she really did. Having walked in on an intense (and pretty technically awful) duel between Harry and Draco, Ginny had been forced to turn into her mother and somehow salvage the situation.

As she sent Draco and Harry to the chairs on opposite sides of the room, as far apart as was possible, Ginny remembered vividly the heated arguments between Fred and Ron, usually instigated by relentless (but usually unmalicious) teasing from the older brother until Ron snapped and let loose. Ron never had quite got it into his head that Fred’s aim in winding him up was exactly that sort of reaction. It made Ginny wonder, at the time, if the youngest group of her elder brothers were lacking in some serious brain cells.

Draco had gone silently and with great dignity to his assigned kitchen chair. He’d settled with his hands on his knees, back straight, head high.

Harry had been far less impressive about it. Ginny’s husband had moved shiftily to his seat, all the while looking as guilty as it was possible for a human being to appear. Clearly he was disappointed in himself for losing his temper, and perhaps, Ginny hoped, he had started to understand the impact of his recent rash decisions on those around him.

Standing between them, Ginny could have burst out laughing. Why could men never just sit down and discuss their problems like rational human beings? The majority of her husband’s problems Ginny believed could have been solved or at least improved by some better communication skills.

Parenting James and Lily (although admittedly not Albus) was easier than this.

“Sorry about your kitchen, Ginny,” Draco said, as expected, first to break the silence.

Ginny raised an eyebrow.

“Oh, it’s not my kitchen,” she informed him easily. “Harry does most of the cooking.”

She spotted Draco’s expression of surprise at her statement (although he tried to cover it up) and felt momentarily riled by his worldview, before realising that Draco Malfoy had probably never had to prepare a meal in all his life. She expected he had hordes of House-elves scurrying about Malfoy Manor to cater to his every need. It probably shocked him more that Harry Potter: Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement, would come home and make dinner for his family, than the idea of a husband cooking for his wife.

Draco shifted in his chair and seemed to make a decision. He looked over at Harry, who was still
looking down at the ground, and opened his mouth to speak.

“I can’t talk to him either,” he said, gesturing elegantly with his hands, palms facing up, as though addressing the room. “Scorpius. Especially since - Astoria has gone. As hard as I try, I can’t reach him.”

Well, that was unexpected. Ginny had definitely not been anticipating such frank honesty from Draco Malfoy of all people.

The catch in his throat at the mention of his late wife made Ginny feel markedly warmer towards him. She understood that it was quite courageous of Draco to speak so plainly about his innermost thoughts and feelings, not least in front of Harry Potter.

The first time Ginny met Draco Malfoy had been in Flourish and Blotts. She’d been about to start her first year at Hogwarts and on the annual family trip to Diagon Alley for supplies and new books. Harry had been particularly gallant that day, gifting Ginny a large stack of new Gilderoy Lockhart volumes. Ginny remembered feeling quite overwhelmed by Harry Potter’s kindness. Not to mention that to end up with first-hand copies of her school books was more than she’d dreamed of, since her family so often struggled with money.

Ginny had noticed the way Harry sidled his way uncomfortably out of the limelight, the way he seemed embarrassed by everyone in the shop staring at him, by the attention Gilderoy Lockhart had drawn to him. (Poor old Gilderoy. He'd been an almighty prat, but still…)

“You have these,” Harry had mumbled, tipping the books into Ginny’s cauldron. “I’ll buy my own-“

Draco Malfoy had appeared seemingly out of nowhere beside them. Ginny remembered spotting his pale, pointed face, his white blond hair, and his nasty sneer. She had known right away that he was a Malfoy. Her father often spoke about that family with some distaste, and her father hardly spoke badly about anyone.

This strange, unfriendly boy had begun to taunt Harry, right there in public, like he didn’t care who heard him.

“Bet you loved that, didn’t you, Potter? Famous Harry Potter. Can’t even go into a book-shop without making the front page.”

Ginny remembered looking up at the two boys, at Draco and his spiteful face, and then at Harry, who looked awkward and embarrassed and like he wished he could have sunk into the ground.

She didn’t like bullies. Growing up with six brothers had made her more than able to stand up for herself (even in front of kind, wonderful, older boys like Harry Potter). Eleven year old Ginny Weasley had felt the sudden, reckless, uncontrollable urge to tell Draco Malfoy exactly what she thought of him. Her fury had quite overtaken the shyness she’d been inconveniently plagued by ever since Harry Potter had turned up at the Burrow.

“Leave him alone, he didn’t want all that!” she had declared, narrowing her eyes dangerously at the pale boy who dared to insult Harry Potter.

Unfortunately for her, Draco hadn’t seemed to find her as intimidating as she’d hoped.

“Potter, you’ve got yourself a girlfriend,” Draco had drawled, and Ginny still remembered the way her face burned with mortification. (And longed for Draco’s words to be true).
There had been a confrontation shortly after, between Lucius Malfoy and her father. He had called Arthur Weasley a ‘disgrace to the name of wizard’, and the next thing Ginny knew a fight had commenced and her mother had started shrieking.

That had been frightening, but Ginny had done her best not to show she was scared. She had no problems with fighting people herself, if push came to shove (not that it ever did, after all, who would try to fight an eleven year old little girl?), but seeing her kind, gentle father being taunted into a brawl? It had given her nightmares for weeks, even though he’d come out of it with only a cut lip.

When Hagrid had waded in to separate the men, Ginny let out a small sigh of relief.

Lucius Malfoy had then done a strange thing. Ginny remembered seeing the hatred in his eyes, and he had turned that hatred on her. It wasn’t very nice, having a grown man look at you like you were a piece of filth, but Ginny had held her head high and made an effort to glare at Lucius Malfoy, even as he thrust her old transfiguration book at her and declared:

“Here, girl - take your book - it’s the best your father can give you -“

She hadn’t known, in that moment, that Lucius Malfoy had cursed her with the empty diary he’d slipped into her cauldron. That he had doomed her first year with that simple action. That for the rest of Ginny’s life, she’d never quite be able to recover from what followed.

Ginny would forever hate Lucius Malfoy. But what of his son?

She could have hated him. After all, over the years Draco had given her enough reason ten times over. But Ginny had long ago decided against it. After all, with a father as evil as Lucius Malfoy, what chance had Draco ever had, really?

When Ginny looked at Draco Malfoy now, at forty years old, horrendously overdressed in the kitchen of her family home, sitting obediently on his assigned chair, arms wide with honesty, his awful pretentious ponytail just a little bit skewwiff, she found it was hard to conjure up even the barest hint of dislike. He looked too pitiful in that moment, too much like any other father, desperately trying to do the best he could for his son.

This man was so utterly dissimilar to the boy she had encountered in Flourish and Blotts all those years ago, that had she not known better, she might have assumed this was not Draco Malfoy, merely his identical but utterly contrasting twin brother.

“You can’t talk to Albus. I can’t talk to Scorpius,” Draco continued, only glancing down for the tiniest moment before forcing himself to raise his head again. “That’s what this is about. Not about my son being evil.”

Ginny thought he’d hit the nail on the head. It was what she’d been telling Harry for days.

“Because as much as you might take the word of a haughty centaur, you know the power of friendship,” Draco finished.

As impressive as that little speech was, Ginny couldn’t help but think she’d accidentally slipped into a parallel dimension. Draco Malfoy extolling the virtues of friendship? Astoria’s passing truly had thawed Draco.

Ginny looked expectantly over at Harry. It was his turn to speak, no matter how much he wanted to avoid the moment.
Harry glanced at his wife and tried to think of something, anything he could say in response to Draco’s painful honesty.

“Draco, whatever you may think -“

“I always envied you them you know - Weasley and Granger,” Draco cut in. “I had.“

“Crabbe and Goyle,” Ginny finished for him. She remembered those two lumbering boys well. Goyle had been a Beater on the Slytherin Quidditch team, and what he lacked in finesse he’d more than made up for in power. Ginny remembered admiring his brute strength on a broom, but seriously questioning his sense of fair play.

As for Vincent Crabbe, Ginny remembered him as having a fairly nasty temper. Like Goyle he had been a Beater, and once he had furiously shot a Bludger in Harry’s direction following a spectacular catch from the Gryffindor Seeker. It was hard to feel any true animosity for the poor boy now, though. No matter what he’d done in his teens, he hadn’t deserved to die. He’d perished in the Room of Requirement during the Battle of Hogwarts, which Ginny thought must have been a horrendous way to go, engulfed by his own Fiendfyre in one last aggressive act.

“Two lunks who wouldn’t know one end of a broomstick from the other,“ Draco declared dismissively, pushing the very thought of the two boys away with his hand. “You - the three of you - you shone you know? You liked each other. You had fun. I envied you those friendships more than anything else.”

“I envied them too,“ Ginny found herself admitting.

Harry looked up at his wife with surprise, but Draco merely nodded, understanding entirely.

“I need to protect him-“ Harry said, skirting away from the uncomfortable subject of his wife and Draco Malfoy’s envy, and returning to the matter at hand, the wellbeing of his youngest son.

But Draco cut him off again, shaking his head.

“My father thought he was protecting me. Most of the time. I think you have to make a choice - at a certain point - of the man you want to be. And I tell you that at that time you need a parent or a friend. And if you’ve learnt to hate your parent and by then you have no friends… then you’re all alone. And being alone - that’s so hard. I was alone. And it sent me to a truly dark place. For a long time.”

Ginny had never heard Draco Malfoy articulate himself so honestly, so unguardedly before. When the imperious, snide, and haughty persona slipped away, what remained seemed to be an intelligent and insightful man, a man who was undoubtedly far older than his years and had been made weary by his experiences.

Draco possessed what could only be described as wisdom. Not the intentional kind, either. It was the wisdom that came from being forced to relive your past mistakes and learn from them. His every word was tinged with accidental shame.

If Draco could only put aside his pride for long enough, Ginny could tell he’d find the friendships he so sought after fairly easy to come by. If he’d been more like this sooner then there was every chance she and Harry would have made more of an effort with him after Astoria had passed. If there had been even the barest hint that such a person existed within Draco Malfoy, Ginny was certain he’d not be the lonely, unhappy man he now was.

“Tom Riddle was also a lonely child,” Draco continued. “You may not understand that Harry, but I
do - and I think Ginny does too.”

It was a risky move on Draco’s part, but Ginny chose not to take issue with the fact he’d brought up Tom Riddle. Draco had been very careful about it, not quite broaching the subject, but veering dangerously towards those nightmare events of her first year, of which Draco must have known his father had been perpetrator.

“He’s right,” Ginny agreed with a shrug of her shoulders. The sense of the words pouring from Draco Malfoy’s mouth was undeniable.

Her husband looked at her like she’d lost her mind, but Ginny refused to back down. If it wasn’t the done thing to agree with Draco Malfoy, then she found she didn’t care. Not when it meant doing what was right.

Draco seemed quite overwhelmed to have found himself an ally. He tried valiantly to hide his relief, but Ginny saw through him in an instant. This was a man who had grown used to fighting his own battles with very little support.

“Tom Riddle didn’t emerge from his dark place,” said Draco. “And so Tom Riddle became Lord Voldemort. Maybe the black cloud Bane saw was Albus’s loneliness. His pain. His hatred. Don’t lose the boy. You’ll regret it. And so will he. Because he needs you, and Scorpius, whether or not he now knows it.”

Ginny saw her husband look over at Draco, like he wanted to argue but couldn’t quite manage it. Harry was undeniably stubborn, but never to the point that it would stop him from doing the right thing. It was just that sometimes, with Harry, he needed a little time to understand that making instant, rash decisions, even with the interests of the people he loved at heart, was not always the answer.

Draco’s honest words had shaken Harry Potter. Ginny knew it was only a matter of moments before he gave in and admitted defeat. She was proud to say that her husband was the sort of man who could apologise for his mistakes, and always strove to do better, even if sometimes his judgment was a little off.

Harry opened his mouth to speak, and then stopped, suddenly, thinking better of it.

He looked so like the teenaged Harry Potter Ginny had known all those years ago, with his shifty, uncertain demeanour, his messy hair (even worse following his duel with Draco), and his need to do the right thing (thus his horror at realising that maybe, just maybe, he’d done the wrong thing by accident), that Ginny felt a surge of fresh affection for her husband.

The Albus situation (as Ginny thought of it) had caused her to doubt Harry for the first time in many years, but now she felt confident that everything would be okay. It might take time. It might take a few more excruciating conversations. But Harry was a good father, a loving father, and he would eventually do what was right for Albus.

The little push in the right direction her husband sometimes needed to get to this point, Ginny Potter was more than happy to provide.

“Harry,” Ginny said firmly. “Will you get the Floo powder or shall I?”

Chapter End Notes
This dialogue is all from the script and some of it is from Chamber of Secrets.

I wish Ginny had played a more prominent role in TCC because I adore her.

I hope I managed to capture her character!

If you enjoyed this then please please please leave me a comment because they make my life.

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Scorpius entered the Hogwarts library with a new sense of purpose. His conversation with Delphi had made him feel daring. If Albus never wanted to speak to him again, then Scorpius would have to deal with that, but he was fairly certain, knowing his best friend as well as he did, that all Albus really needed was a push in the right direction.

There was an inner courage to Albus. It was a characteristic which was often overshadowed by his tendency to step back instead of forward when a volunteer was needed, or his habit of running from conflict (with a few choice sarcastic remarks, of course) rather than engage with it.

But Scorpius knew it was there. He knew he could bring it out of him if he tried hard enough.

Just as before, the Gryffindors were still taking up most of the available tables. A few looked up at him and sneered as Scorpius wandered in. A few placed spare books down on tabletops to signal, very clearly, that he was not welcome to take the spaces beside them.

But today Scorpius decided he didn’t care. There was only one Gryffindor he needed to find, and really, deep down, that Gryffindor was a Slytherin.

Scorpius skimmed the room for that untidy black hair. He looked left. He looked right. And then he saw him.

Albus was sitting alone at a desk at the very back of the library, hunched over his books and frowning at a piece of parchment in front of him.

Scorpius couldn’t help but smile. That look could only mean Albus was attempting to complete a Potions essay.

It did surprise him to see Albus at his own table when there were so many free spaces with the other Gryffindors. Scorpius could only assume this was a form of self-imposed exile, because he was quite sure that without him, Albus could have been fairly popular.

He took a deep, calming breath, pulled himself together, reminded himself that he was a Malfoy (when had that become such a comfort?), and began to make his way around the various bookshelves towards Albus.

+++  

Albus had been utterly bored. Bored and miserable. Bored and miserable and contemplating what the exact reason for writing an essay about the various uses of Moonstone in potion-making was.
The only successful purpose he could think of so far was boring him out of his mind.

Potions had become almost impossible since he’d been separated from Scorpius. He was no good with the careful measuring out of ingredients and the reading of instructions. Not to mention that having seen Polyjuice Potion brewed and actually taken a bottle of it made the rest of his fourth year curriculum seem totally underwhelming.

The homework wouldn’t have been fun even if Scorpius had been sitting next to him, but Albus would probably have been able to get through it without longing for the sweet embrace of death at least twice.

Albus reached up and stretched, glaring a little at his fellow Gryffindors as he did so. Some of them were being fairly pleasant to him of late, and when he’d entered the library a few students had shifted up a seat or two to make space for him at their tables, but Albus wasn’t willing to forgive what they’d done in the other reality. He knew they’d never bothered with him back when he’d been in Slytherin. He remembered some of these very same students laughing at him and Scorpius, mocking them.

So without even thanking this handful of confused (and offended) students, he’d walked all the way to the other end of the library, near the back doors, and settled himself down in what he knew was a fairly sulky manner.

It didn’t matter to him that his peers thought he was bad-tempered. He thought the lot of them were hypocrites.

He’d been about a quarter of the way through his essay when he’d spotted Scorpius, making his tentative way over to his table, smiling hopefully and in a way that indicated nothing Albus might say or do could stop his approach.

“Hi,” Scorpius said as he reached him, as though this were just a casual conversation between two close friends. Like nothing out of the ordinary had happened in the past few weeks. Just like the old days.

Albus grimaced. This was the worst possible place for a confrontation to happen. And he felt so guilty that he was finding it hard to look Scorpius in the face, let alone explain himself.

“Scorpius. I can’t…”

“I know,” Scorpius said easily. “You’re in Gryffindor now. You don’t want to see me now. But here I am anyway. Talking to you.”

If this was Scorpius being assertive, then Albus thought he probably ought to work on his technique.

“Well, I can’t talk, so -” Albus said, starting to gather up his books and parchment and making to leave.

Scorpius took a step in front of him, blocking his path around the table.

“You have to. You think we can just ignore everything that’s happened? The world has gone crazy, have you noticed?”

The way he said that, like he was asking if he had noticed the short spell of rain earlier, was disconcerting. It was so Scorpius that it made Albus want to laugh.
He stopped himself at the very last moment.

“I know, okay,” Albus admitted. “Ron’s gone strange. Hermione’s a professor, it’s all wrong but—“

“And Rose doesn’t exist,” Scorpius pointed out firmly. He was looking at Albus like that was supposed to have struck a chord. Albus stubbornly refused to react. If he felt grief at the loss of his former favourite cousin, he wasn’t going to admit it.

“I know,” Albus said. “Look, I don’t understand everything, but you can’t be here.”

Scorpius blinked, looked wounded for a second, recovered himself, and then tried again.

“Because of what we did, Rose wasn’t even born,” Scorpius pointed out in as calm a voice as possible. “Do you remember being told about the Triwizard Tournament Yule Ball?”

Albus did indeed remember that. He’d heard the story of that ball from at least five different first hand perspectives. His mother told it best, in his opinion. She’d been to the ball with Professor Longbottom and Albus liked to hear about Neville’s transition from utter loser to well-loved (and actually pretty cool) teacher.

“All four Triwizard champions took a partner,” Scorpius continued. “Your dad took Parvati Patil, Viktor Krum took—“

“Hermione,” Albus finished for him. He’d heard this story dozens of times. His Uncle Ron was still ever so slightly bitter about the whole thing. Or at least the old Uncle Ron had been. “And Ron got jealous and behaved like a prat.”

“Only he didn’t,” Scorpius explained, talking fast. “I found Rita Skeeter’s book about them. And it’s very different. Ron took Hermione to the ball.”

Albus’s eyes widened. Surely that should only have made things better?

“What?” he asked, loudly.

Polly Chapman, who had been studying a few tables away, turned around especially to shush him. Scorpius somehow managed to knock one of Albus’s Potions books onto the floor as she did so. Albus realised then (with even more guilt) that Scorpius was horribly nervous. More nervous than he was letting on.

“As friends,” Scorpius continued, in a far quieter voice, leaning down to pick up the book. “And they danced in a friendly way, and it was nice, and then he danced with Padma Patil and that was nicer, and they started dating and he changed a bit and then they got married and meanwhile Hermione became a—“

“Psychopath,” Albus suggested, thinking of his most recent Defence Against the Dark Arts lesson.

“Hermione was supposed to go to that ball with Krum - do you know why she didn’t?”

Albus shook his head.

“Because she had suspicions the two strange Durmstrang boys she met before the first task were somehow involved in the disappearance of Cedric’s wand. She believed we, under Viktor’s orders, cost Cedric the first task…”

Well, when Scorpius put it like that, this did all seem like something of a catastrophe.
“Wow,” said Albus, trying to wrap his head around the fact that his entire reality had rested on one teenage ball at Hogwarts. On all those petty things he prided himself on being above, the things he’d determinedly deemed unimportant, like who danced with who, and who fancied who, and who’d recently been found snogging who in deserted corridors...

And then there was the more uncomfortable fact that he and Scorpius had really messed up.

He’d known that already, of course, but to hear it out loud like that was a bit overwhelming.

“And without Krum,” Scorpius continued, seemingly without drawing breath. “Ron never got jealous and that jealousy was all-important and so Ron and Hermione stayed very good friends but never fell in love - never got married - never had Rose.”

Scorpius stopped there, watching Albus expectantly, as though he was supposed to say something. Albus wasn’t sure what he could say in response to that. It was wrong on so many levels that Ron and Hermione had never got together in this reality. It filled Albus with a sense of dread that a couple like that, who were so clearly perfect for each other (even if Uncle Ron could seriously have stopped with the public displays of affection), could go awry so easily. Until this point Albus would never have admitted it, but he’d believed in fate. He’d believed that essentially, even though bad things happened, everything would work out in the end. This was a startling confirmation of the very opposite. That one wrong move could change everything.

And then a comforting thought struck him. If so much had been changed by such a small action, then surely that explained the way his father had been acting recently? It made perfect sense that his father had acted like such a prat if in this version of reality he was entirely different person.

“So that’s why Dad’s so - did he change too?”

Scorpius looked at him for a moment, wondering what to say. Albus knew what his answer was going to be the moment Scorpius paused to think.

“I’m pretty sure your dad is exactly the same,” Scorpius admitted apologetically. “Head of Magical Law Enforcement. Married to Ginny. Three kids.”

Albus wanted to scream with frustration.

“So why is he being such a-“

He was interrupted swiftly by a passing librarian who entered through the door just behind them at the back of the library. Scorpius looked a little startled and fell momentarily silent until she passed. Albus was too far gone to care.

He put a hand to his hair and then zoned out. It was too much to take in. It was a nightmare. An actual nightmare of which he had been partial creator.

“Have you heard me, Albus?” Scorpius demanded, waving a hand in front of his face. “This is bigger than you and your dad. Professor Croaker’s law - the furthest someone can go back in time without the possibility of serious harm is five hours. And we went back years.”

Albus was indeed hearing this. He was hearing it and very much wishing he wasn’t.

“The smallest movement, the smallest change, it creates ripples,” Scorpius explained. “And we - we’ve created really bad ripples. Rose was never born because of what we did. Rose.”
The same librarian poked her head around the corner of a nearby bookcase and shushed them, eyes narrowed with annoyance.

Okay, so yes, this was bad. It was very bad. Somehow worse than it had been prior to Scorpius entering the library, at least in Albus’s mind. Because now he could no longer avoid the reality of what they’d done. Here was Scorpius, ready to take responsibility, with all the information, eager to discuss the situation, and it was no longer possible to run or stick his head in the sand (which were Albus Potter’s two favourite coping mechanisms).

When it was all set out like that before him, it was startlingly clear that something had to be done.

His moment of horror dissolved into sudden clarity. There was a problem. They had created said problem. Therefore they had to solve it.

Albus thought quickly.

“Fine, let’s go back - fix it,” he said. “Get Cedric and Rose back.”

It was the perfect solution, surely? Albus didn’t think they could mess up worse than they had already, and maybe the second time would be easier?

But Scorpius looked utterly horrified by his suggestion.

“… is the wrong answer,” Scorpius breathed out, wide-eyed.

“You’ve still got the Time-Turner, right? No one found it?”

It was Scorpius’s turn to squirm uncomfortably. Looking really very reluctant, Scorpius reached into his pocket and pulled out the familiar hour glass on a gleaming gold chain.

“Yes, but…”

Albus snatched it from his hand.

“No,” Scorpius hissed, looking incredibly anxious. “Don’t… Albus. Don’t you understand how bad things could get?”

Scorpius tried to grab the Time-Turner back, but Albus was too quick for him. He moved it swiftly out of Scorpius’s reach.

With a look of utter disbelief and dismay, Scorpius tried again. This time Albus (who had a serious height disadvantage) was forced to give Scorpius a push back to prevent him from recapturing the device.

Albus had expected Scorpius to give up, then. After all, Scorpius hated confrontation. But with a fire in his blue-grey eyes (actually a quite striking one), Scorpius gave him a push back, almost making him topple over his chair.

There was nothing for it. Albus was not going to surrender the Time-Turner. Scorpius was not going to let Albus get away with snatching it and making some awful rash decision that would end in disaster.

Quite suddenly, the boys began to wrestle.

It was a muted and inexpert struggle, which mostly involved Albus trying to dodge Scorpius’s arms as they reached for the Time-Turner, and simultaneously trying to push him back. Scorpius could
be deceptively quick when he wanted to be, and impossible to hold still once he’d set his heart on something.

“Things need fixing, Scorpius,” Albus hissed, as Scorpius reached around him again. “Cedric still needs saving. Rose needs bringing back. We’ll be more careful. Whatever Croaker says, trust me, trust us. We’ll get it back…”

But Scorpius was not in the mood to be reasoned with. There was no way that Albus Severus Potter was going to use that confident, persuasive way of his to drag Scorpius into yet another ‘adventure’. As tempting as it was to simply trust Albus, Scorpius had learned over the past few days that sometimes, confrontation was necessary. He was a Malfoy! His father would never have given in and let a Potter do something so outrageously stupid for a second time.

“No. We won’t,” Scorpius argued, refusing to allow Albus to dodge past him and then suddenly launching himself bodily at his friend in yet another attempt to get him to see sense. “Give it back, Albus! Give it back!”

“I can’t,” Albus said, panting, and holding the Time Turner as far back behind him as he could reach. “This is too important.”

“Yes, it’s too important - for us,” Scorpius agreed, feeling a slight pang of hope as Albus took a retreating step backwards in order to protect the Time-Turner. “We’re not good at this stuff. We’ll get it wrong.”

“Who’s saying that we’ll get it wrong?” Albus asked, stepping back again and then disappearing behind the nearest bookcase.

Oh, Scorpius could have cursed Albus sometimes, he really could…

“I say!” Scorpius hissed back, joining Albus behind the bookcase where they were better hidden from the other students. “Because that’s what we do. We mess things up. We lose. We’re losers, true and total losers. Haven’t you realised that yet?”

Concealed from any watchful eyes, Scorpius was able to make another, more forceful attempt to recapture the Time-Turner. Albus, looking surprised by the vigour of his charge, grabbed him by the arms, and for a moment, the boys wrestled once again, neither one quite able to overpower the other.

Albus wasn’t ready to give up. He wasn’t going to abandon a perfectly good plan just because Scorpius was too apprehensive to give it a chance. With a sneaky bit of footwork (previously used on James), Albus managed to topple Scorpius over onto the ground. Scorpius made a very undignified noise as he hit the floor, and Albus quickly pinned him there in his moment of surprise.

Being the smaller of the two, it took quite some effort to hold him there, but somehow Albus did it with the strategic use of his body weight.

“Well, I wasn’t a loser before I met you,” Albus panted, the words leaving his mouth before he could stop them.

“Albus,” Scorpius tried, from his position on the floor. “Whatever you’ve got to prove to your dad - this isn’t the way -“

“I don’t have anything to prove to my dad,” Albus lied. “I’ve got to save Cedric to save Rose. And maybe, without you holding me back, I can make a proper go of it.”
Scorpius looked hurt once again, but then a new emotion replaced the injury. That glint was back in his eyes, the one Albus couldn’t help but stare at.

“Without me?” Scorpius repeated, trying to wriggle himself free as he did so. “Oh poor Albus Potter. With his chip on his shoulder. Poor Albus Potter. So sad.”

Albus paused.

“What are you saying?”

It was at that very moment Albus saw Scorpius explode. He realised only a second in advance that he had finally driven Scorpius to the edge. That his well-mannered, kind, sunny, optimistic best friend had reached his breaking point.

“Try my life!” Scorpius hissed, face reddening as he spoke. “People look at you because your dad’s the famous Harry Potter, saviour of the wizarding world. People look at me because they think my dad is Voldemort. Voldemort.”

Albus wasn’t going to be distracted that easily.

“Don’t even-“

“Can you even slightly imagine what that’s like?” Scorpius demanded, looking dangerously close to tears. “Have you ever even tried? No. Because you can’t see beyond the end of your nose. Because you can’t see beyond the end of your stupid thing with your dad. He will always be Harry Potter, you know that right? And you will always be his son. And I know it’s hard, and the other kids are awful but you have to learn to be okay with that, because - there are worse things okay?”

About halfway into that speech, Albus had been planning his retort, but by the time Scorpius reached his conclusion, Albus found himself lost for words. He found himself utterly silent, hanging on Scorpius’s every terrible word.

“There was a moment I was excited, when I realised time was different, a moment when I thought maybe my mum hadn’t got sick. Maybe my mum wasn’t dead. But no, turns out she was. I’m still the child of Voldemort, without a mother, giving sympathy to the boy who doesn’t ever give anything back. So I’m sorry if I’ve ruined your life because I tell you - you wouldn’t have a chance of ruining mine - it was already ruined. You just didn’t make it better. Because you’re a terrible - the most terrible - friend.”

Albus opened his mouth to speak and then closed it again. He found he felt hot all over.

When Scorpius put it like that he sounded… well, he sounded like a self-obsessed, thoughtless, insensitive, tactless, utterly terrible person.

“Albus?” came a stern voice from closer than Albus would have liked. “Albus Potter. Scorpius Malfoy. Are you in there together? Because I advise you not to be.“

Professor McGonagall was probably the worst person who could have stumbled upon this scene (except perhaps his father). The Hogwarts Headmistress had been charged with the specific task of keeping he and Scorpius apart. If she found them together… well, they’d be in deep, deep trouble. It shouldn't really have come as a surprise, thought Albus bitterly, considering his run of recent luck, that she was currently only metres away and on their trail.

It sounded like Professor McGonagall was waiting behind the back door of the library, dangerously close to where Albus was currently pinning Scorpius to the floor. Her voice echoed in the stone
corridor, and travelled through the thick wooden door.

Albus panicked. Far more than he’d expected himself to in this situation.

Scorpius looked strangely unconcerned. He was seemingly far too busy glaring up at Albus with disappointment, upset, and fury, to care that Professor McGonagall was about to give them detentions for life and separate them forever.

Albus released Scorpius from his hold in an instant. He shoved the Time-Turner into his pocket, no longer caring that Scorpius could grab it back if he wanted to and sat back on his knees, swearing under his breath as he rooted through his bag, hunting for the one item that might save them...

With an exhale of triumph, Albus pulled the Invisibility Cloak from his bag.

“Quick,” he hissed at Scorpius. “We need to hide.”

Scorpius was still laying on the floor looking betrayed and sorrowful. Albus wanted more than anything to scoop him up and give him a hug, but there was no time.

“What?” Scorpius repeated, frowning as he lifted himself up ever so slightly on his elbows.

“Scorpius, look at me,” Albus said urgently, trying to get his friend to hurry up and snap out of it.

Scorpius peered at the cloak with interest. He sat up a little straighter and tilted his head to one side.

“That’s the Invisibility Cloak? Isn’t it James’s?”

This was really not the time for an inquisition. Albus reached out and touched Scorpius’s arm, urgently.

“If she finds us, we’ll be forced apart forever. Please,” Albus begged. “I didn’t understand. Please.”

“I am about to enter,” Professor McGonagall announced grandly.

As Professor McGonagall entered the library (with a louder than necessary tap on the door), one of the librarians turned to shush her, and immediately regretted that decision upon seeing her face.

Albus peered through the gap in the bookcase closest to him. Professor McGonagall was holding the Marauder’s Map in her hands, one eyebrow raised above her square rimmed glasses. The library seemed to fall even more silent than before. Albus could sense the other students staring at her. And then slowly, terribly, she began to follow the map, wandering gradually closer to their aisle…

Albus grabbed the cloak, shook it out to its full size, seized Scorpius, and threw it over the pair of them.

From underneath the cloak Albus could see Professor McGonagall round the corner. She emerged directly in front of them, her eyebrow still raised with interest. She was reading the map and clearly couldn’t understand what she was seeing.

“Well, where have they - I never wanted this thing and now it’s playing tricks on me,” McGonagall remarked with exasperation.

Albus felt Scorpius shift closer to him.
McGonagall thought hard. She looked from the empty space between the bookcases, to the map, which clearly showed two names directly before her. Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy should absolutely have been in her line of sight by now. They should have been in the gap between the Study of Ancient Runes and Transfiguration sections.

With a quick glance at Scorpius, who was breathing far more heavily than was necessary but thankfully looking like he was back to his usual alert self, Albus got slowly to his feet. Scorpius stood up at the same time, careful not to dislodge the cloak.

Albus used his thumb to gesture wordlessly behind them, and Scorpius nodded. Together, they began to take tiny pigeon steps backwards on their tiptoes.

But it wasn’t easy to move while under the cloak. You couldn’t exactly turn around and check your path, for one thing. Albus was the first to knock a book accidentally from a shelf with his shoulder. As the heavy volume hit the ground, Albus felt Scorpius grab his arm.

McGonagall watched the Transfiguration textbook fall to the library floor with a frown. She was quite certain she had heard the tiniest gasp then, almost disguised by the thud.

She kept her eyes peeled on the space before her, and sure enough, a lamp only slightly further back wobbled suddenly, as though it had been knocked by some invisible force…

McGonagall walked more quickly now towards the disturbed objects. As she did so, another book went clattering to the ground, only this time, on the other side of her.

McGonagall turned sharply towards the source of the sound. And then it hit her…

“Unless… your father’s cloak.”

Minerva looked back at the battered Marauder’s Map in her hands. Albus and Scorpius’s names had now changed position to behind where she stood. As she watched the map, their names began to shift slowly towards the darkened back corner of the library via the next aisle.

With a wide, knowing smile, McGonagall paused on the spot.

If the boys were indeed making their slow progress back out of the library together, then she found she didn’t mind. Unless they were causing trouble, Minerva was inclined to let Malfoy and Potter get on with whatever it was they were doing. There had certainly been a great many (utterly disallowed) activities she’d got up to in her Hogwarts days that she was extremely glad had never been discovered.

“Well, if I didn’t see you,” McGonagall said cheerfully. “I didn’t see you.”

Instructions be damned. She was the Headmistress now and would not be dictated to by any person, least of all the father of one of her pupils. Even if that father had (secretly) been an especial favourite of hers.

With a sweep of her robes, McGonagall rolled up the Marauder’s Map, smiled to herself, and strolled right back out of the library.

Albus and Scorpius watched McGonagall go in complete silence. They had both been holding their breath. When the library doors swung shut behind her, Albus pulled the cloak off the pair of them.

Scorpius gave him a look. It was a look that meant: I cannot believe that just happened and I am very very pleased we are still okay and still together, but I have also not quite forgiven you for
earlier.

Well, Albus thought, that was fair enough.

The boys both sat down on the floor (well, Scorpius sank rather than sat), knees pulled up to their chests, hidden by the darkness of the furthest corner of the library, where the lamps were on the brink.

“Yes, I stole this from James,” Albus said, in surprisingly casual tones, continuing their earlier conversation. “He’s remarkably easy to steal from, his trunk combination is the date he got his first broom. I’ve found the cloak made avoiding bullies easier.”

Albus chanced a look at Scorpius. His friend was staring at him like he’d gone mad. But then, slowly, cautiously, Scorpius nodded, allowing Albus to continue, giving him wordless permission to chatter on.

“I’m sorry - about your mum,” Albus said quietly, looking down at his knees. “I know we don’t talk about her enough - but I hope you know - I’m sorry - it’s rubbish - what happened to her - to you.”

Scorpius blinked at Albus. He took in his body language, the way he was picking at a loose thread on his trousers, the seriousness of his tone.

“Thanks,” Scorpius said.

“My dad said - said that you were this dark cloud around me. My dad started to think - and I just knew I had to stay away, and if I didn’t, Dad said he would:“

“Your dad thinks the rumours are true - I am the son of Voldemort?” Scorpius asked.

Albus nodded, hating himself for having to.

“His department are currently investigating it,” he admitted, still keeping his gaze on his knees.

There was a brief pause, and then Scorpius took a breath.

“Good,” he said firmly, in his brave voice. “Let them. Sometimes - sometimes I find myself thinking - maybe they’re true too.”

Albus’s head shot up.

“No,” he said instantly, voice stronger than before. “They’re not true. And I’ll tell you why. Because I don’t think Voldemort is capable of having a kind son - and you’re kind, Scorpius. From the depths of your belly, to the tips of your fingers. I truly believe Voldemort - Voldemort couldn’t have a son like you.”

Scorpius needed a moment to take that in. He could already feel his anger evaporating. Actually he was quite… moved. His stomach had gone suddenly giddy.

“That’s nice,” Scorpius admitted. “That’s a nice thing to say.”

“And it’s something I should have said a long time ago,” Albus continued firmly, now finding the courage to turn his head to look at Scorpius, who was watching him right back. “In fact, you’re probably the best person I know. And you don’t - you couldn’t - hold me back - you make me stronger - and when Dad forced us apart - without you…”
“I didn’t much like my life without you in it either,” Scorpius said quietly, saving Albus from having to finish that thought.

Albus felt his heart soar. This was going well. Very well.

With new confidence, he continued.

“And I know I’ll always be Harry Potter’s son - and I will sort that out in my head - and I know compared to you my life is pretty good really and that he and I are comparatively lucky and-“

Scorpius couldn’t help but smile. Albus had slipped easily back into his self-indulgent mode. Why did that reassure Scorpius so very much?

“Albus,” Scorpius cut in lightly. “As apologies go this is wonderfully fulsome, but you’re starting to talk more about you than me again, so probably better to quit while you’re ahead.”

Albus looked momentarily embarrassed, and then beamed. He stretched out a hand to Scorpius.

“Friends?”

Scorpius glanced at the hand he’d been offered, which really was an odd thing to do considering they were sitting side by side on the floor of the library, huddled up in the darkness. He looked up at Albus’s honest green eyes, and then back down at his hand, still outstretched hopefully.

“Always,” Scorpius agreed, taking it.

But Albus didn’t shake his hand. Instead he used Scorpius’s hand to pull him to his feet and into a tight hug.

Scorpius only widened his eyes for a second before beaming as well.

“That’s the second time you’ve done that,” he said, over Albus’s shoulder.

After a long moment, the boys broke apart. Albus patted Scorpius fondly on the back, and Scorpius grinned goofily.

For another long moment, they simply stared at each other. Scorpius found himself noticing how pleasant it was, just to stand there, with Albus.

And then Albus opened his mouth again.

“But I’m pleased we had this argument because it’s given me a really good idea,” Albus announced cheerfully.

He had known it was simply too good to be true. Scorpius’s Albus-Is-About-To-Do-Or-Suggest-Something-Incredibly-Stupid senses started to tingle.

“What?” he asked warily.

“It involves the second task,” Albus elaborated. “And humiliation.”

“You’re still talking about going back in time?” Scorpius repeated, eyebrows raised with disbelief. “Have we been having the same conversation?”

“You’re right - we are losers. We’re brilliant at losing and so we should be using our own knowledge here. Our own powers. Losers are taught to be losers. And there’s only one way to
teach a loser - and we know that better than anyone - humiliation. We need to humiliate him. So in the second task that’s what we’ll do.”

Scorpius stared at Albus for a long time. His best friend was utterly mad. It was hardly a new observation, but in this moment more than most it was apparent. Albus Potter was the most unbelievable person Scorpius had ever met.

But at the same time, unbelievable didn’t have to be a bad thing…

Everything Albus had said was painfully true. A loser was not born but made. And usually a loser could be made by enough humiliation and humbling. One perfect (and rather tragic) example of this was Albus, who could have been popular and confident, had it not been for the relentless teasing and whispering following his Sorting into Slytherin. Once the label of ‘loser’ was assigned, it was a very hard one to rub off…

He imagined it would be hard to win the Triwizard Tournament when everyone was against you. Without confidence, mistakes became more frequent and some people just gave up. For someone who was used to being admired, Scorpius supposed it could disturb a person enough to ruin their chances entirely.

Scorpius thought hard and then broke into a smile.

“That’s a really good strategy,” he admitted.

“I know.”

“I mean, quite spectacular,” Scorpius said, already imagining poor Cedric Diggory turning from hero to zero in ten seconds flat. (Something which Scorpius was fully aware could happen when it came to the majority of fickle students). “Humiliate Cedric to save Cedric. Clever. And Rose?”

Albus beamed again. Scorpius was sure he was fighting back the desire to wink.

“That I’m saving as a sparkly surprise,” he revealed. “I can do it without you - but I want you there. Because I want us to do this together. Set things right together. So… will you come?”

It was very very tempting to say yes immediately. In fact, it took Scorpius a lot of self control not to say: Yes, Albus, I will come. Nothing in the world would make me happier.

But Scorpius wasn’t about to stop using common sense because Albus Potter had declared that he wanted him.

“But, just a minute, isn’t - wasn’t - the second task took place in the lake and you’re not allowed to leave the school building?”

Albus grinned.

“Yes,” Albus agreed, draping an arm around Scorpius’s shoulder. “About that… we need to find the girls’ bathroom on the first floor.”

Chapter End Notes

If you are enjoying this then please do leave me a comment because it makes my day!
(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Two: Scene Eighteen

Chapter Notes

Dialogue is all from the script.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Professor McGonagall was glad to be back in her office at last. Patrolling the school was not her favourite pastime, and although she tried her best not to get above herself in her position as Headmistress, she couldn’t help but think it was slightly beneath her. Albus Dumbledore would never have done it in his day. Come to think of it, Albus Dumbledore wouldn’t have agreed to accept the Marauder’s Map in the first place, let alone spy on his students...

Minerva glanced down at the map on her desk and frowned. It was a hideous item, really. Helpful, perhaps, in some circumstances. For instance, just the other night Minerva had spotted Draco Malfoy’s name in the Slytherin common room along with his young son. She had been alerted by her own security charms soon after, of course, but it had been admittedly pleasant to see those two names together on the map. Thus far, Draco Malfoy hadn’t used the Floo connection she had gone to so much effort to organise following the death of Astoria, but she was glad it was coming in useful at last. Reports from her fellow professors told her that Scorpius Malfoy was a lonely, isolated young man, and a visit from his father seemed like just the right solution, if only a temporary one. She had been about to suggest such a thing to Draco herself, in the hopes that he might be able to console his son and with any luck go on to tell Harry Potter a few home truths. (Truths that Minerva, as Headmistress of Hogwarts, and therefore duty bound to neutrality, could not very well tell her former student).

Years ago, Minerva would have scoffed at the idea of Draco Malfoy being able to teach Harry Potter a thing or two about anything, but now? Well, Harry had disappointed her more than she cared to admit of late. He’d become insolent, rude, overbearing, and quite frankly unbearable in his self-assumed righteousness.

Never (since the youth of Draco Malfoy) had Minerva McGonagall more wanted a student to disobey their father. She found herself rooting for Albus Potter in her quiet moments, when she could afford to drop her impartial front. He reminded her more of young Harry than Harry Potter himself did at the moment.

Several names shifted on the map on the table. Minerva raised an eyebrow and spotted a few Hufflepuff fifth years making their swift and stealthy way to the kitchens. No doubt the House-elves were slipping them the leftovers from lunch again.

The map was certainly interesting, and a clever bit of magic. Rather an impressive creation for a group of students. She heavily suspected that Remus Lupin had been responsible for the inventive spell-work, because she couldn’t remember James Potter, Sirius Black, or Peter Pettigrew possessing that level of skill.

She wondered what James, Remus, and Sirius would think of the newest use for their creation. (She didn’t like to think about Peter, that poor boy who had gone so very wrong). She could imagine
teenage Sirius Black’s reaction very clearly. He would have been horrified, dramatically and handsomely so.

She pushed away those thoughts quickly. It was difficult to comprehend that all four of those boys were now dead. Every one before their time. And every one because of Voldemort.

Wearily, Minerva gave the map a final glance. She didn’t think she’d be using it again for the rest of the day. Not after almost catching Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy getting up to goodness knew what in the school library. She expected she’d given them quite the fright, coming after them like that, although she hoped they realised that she had tried to give them every possible chance to evade her.

With a tap of her wand, Minerva abandoned her spying-on-Potter-and-Malfoy duties for the evening.

“Mischief Managed,” she declared, with some satisfaction, as the map turned instantly into a blank piece of parchment. She rolled it up neatly and put it away in her pocket.

She had just settled back in her comfortable chair when an almighty rattling shook the room.

Immediately McGonagall reached for her wand. Quite clearly, someone was about to emerge from her fireplace (the fire of which had turned preemptively green), and without warning, which McGonagall regarded as really rather rude. It would never have happened in Dumbledore’s day…

Eyebrow raised in preparation for her visitor (wand raised in preparation for an intruder), Minerva waited.

Ginny Potter came hurtling out of the fireplace in a flare of green flames, followed shortly after by her husband, Harry.

McGonagall lowered her wand and made sure to keep her eyebrow raised.

“Professor,” Ginny greeted her, dusting herself down. “I can’t say that ever gets more dignified.”

Minerva gave Ginny a stern look, and then turned to Harry Potter with deep disapproval. She might have gone along with his ridiculous demands in order to keep the Ministry from interfering, but that didn’t mean she had to act as though she approved.

Not only had Harry Potter issued commands to the Hogwarts teachers, but he had been uncharacteristically rude to her personally. The last time Harry had visited, McGonagall distinctly remembered his threat:

‘The map will reveal where my son is at all times - I expect you to use it. And if I hear you don’t then I will come down on this school as hard as I can - using the full force of the Ministry - is that understood?’

At the time she had been too bewildered (and wounded) to respond with the appropriate outrage, but now? Minerva McGonagall could not very well, as Headmistress, go about making enemies of powerful men like Harry Potter, but she most certainly could treat him with the disdain and contempt his recent behaviour deserved.

“Potter. You’re back. And you seem to have finally ruined my carpet,” she remarked coldly.

Harry had the good grace to look embarrassed.
“I need to find my son,” he said. “We need to.”

Minerva narrowed her eyes. If Harry Potter thought he could simply wander into her office and give out more instructions to limit his son’s life, she was not going to allow it. Albus Potter deserved better. And Harry deserved a good dose of common sense…

“Harry, I’ve considered this and decided I want no part of it,” Minerva declared calmly. “Whatever you threaten, I-“

“Minerva, I come here in peace, not war,” Harry said, putting out his hands in a gesture of surrender. “I should never have spoken to you that way.”

“I just don’t think I can interfere in friendships,” McGonagall went on, determined not to be distracted. “And I believe-“

Harry gave a sigh and seemed to deflate. He looked down at the (now incredibly dirty) carpet, glanced at Ginny, and then looked up at her again.

“I need to say sorry to you and sorry to Albus,” he admitted. “Will you give me that chance?”

The fire glowed green again and with bang of soot Draco Malfoy came strolling (rather more impressively) out of the fireplace behind Harry and Ginny.

“Draco?” McGonagall asked, shocked to see him following Ginny and Harry Potter of all people.

“He needs to see his son, and I need to see mine,” Draco explained, giving McGonagall a short nod.

Minerva glanced at Draco’s grimly determined expression. She nodded back at him and decided not to mention Draco’s recent visit to the school. Draco looked grateful as she turned back to Harry, his secret safe.

“Like I say,” Harry continued, with what was really more of a grimace than a smile. Clearly he was humbled to the ground by this potentially forced conversation. Minerva wondered if it had been Ginny or Draco that had finally persuaded him to see sense. “Peace - not war.”

Minerva studied Harry’s face. He didn’t drop his gaze, although she could tell he wanted to. Behind the shame and embarrassment was sincerity. McGonagall was suddenly reminded of the many times she’d been forced to discipline Harry Potter as a student, often with Ronald Weasley at his side looking shifty and red-faced. She decided, in that moment, that Harry was here in earnest.

Dumbledore would have given him a second chance. He would have made some vague and yet poetic philosophical comment about the ways in which people were driven to act under pressure, and then forgiven Harry in mere moments. Minerva was not quite so forgiving as Albus Dumbledore, but she found her expression softening just a tad. She was a stern and stubborn woman, but she had never been one to refuse a sincere apology.

With a short shake of her head, Minerva took the Marauder’s Map out of her pocket and opened it up.

“Well, peace is certainly something I can be part of,” she said, rather grudgingly.

Ginny Potter beamed at her. McGonagall couldn’t help but give one of her stiff little smiles back. With a sigh, she tapped on the map with her wand.
“I solemnly swear that I’m up to no good.”

The map came obediently to life. She placed it down on her desk and examined it, hunting for the correct two names.

Draco Malfoy walked up to her side and looked curiously over her shoulder. She didn’t complain of this, although usually she would have sternly requested he step back from her desk. Of late she had developed a newfound respect for Draco.

“Well,” she remarked, pointing at the two familiar names with her wand for Draco’s benefit. “They are together.”

“In the the girls’ bathroom on the first floor,” Draco read out seriously, before looking up, confused. He frowned at McGonagall, and then at Ginny and Harry.

McGonagall decided it was best not to meet his eyes.

“What on earth would they be doing there?”

Chapter End Notes

Please leave me a comment if you can. I live for them!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Before they could put their plan into action, Albus was adamant they stop off at the ground floor Herbology corridor. He was so excited to be getting on with things and to be back with Scorpius that he hadn’t been particularly clear about why he wanted to go there. Scorpius got the impression he was being deliberately vague because he thought he might disapprove.

The boys came to a stop in front of Professor Longbottom’s office.

“I’ll be one minute. You guard the door,” Albus commanded.

Scorpius looked horrified.

“Guard the door? Albus what are you doing? And what am I supposed to say if Professor Longbottom gets back?”

“Neville likes you, you’ll think of something,” Albus said confidently.

“He does?” Scorpius asked, distracted.

“Yep,” Albus agreed, like it wasn’t important. “He told Mum you were a ‘decent lad’.”

“A decent lad,” Scorpius repeated, tasting the words proudly and momentarily forgetting Albus’s reckless behaviour. A smile grew on his face. “A decent lad.”

“Do you think he’s put any special protection on the door?” Albus asked, peering at it with a deeply critical eye. He looked like some form of bank robber casing the joint.

“Well, if Hermione didn’t put protective spells on her office at the Ministry, I can’t see why Professor Longbottom would need to here,” Scorpius pointed out reasonably, like this was an entirely normal thing for them to be doing with their afternoon. Albus was addictive like that. One moment you were shaking your head and declaring that never again would you get involved in something so ridiculously stupid, and then the next he was grinning at you, and well… the rest was history.

A thought suddenly hit Scorpius. He frowned.

“Why did he say that?” he asked, rounding on Albus suspiciously. “Was your mum asking about me?”
“Say what?” Albus asked, currently peering through the keyhole, tongue held between his teeth.

“That I was a decent lad.”

“Oh, it was just the usual stuff,” Albus said vaguely, straightening up again and barely glancing at Scorpius. “I mean, obviously she wanted to know what you were like. But it’s okay. She’s not my dad. She doesn’t think you’re evil or anything.”

“Well, that is a relief,” Scorpius said, borrowing a bit of sarcasm from Albus (which went completely over Albus’s head).

“Yes,” Albus agreed, pointing his wand at the office door decisively. “Alohomora!”

The door clicked open and Albus gave Scorpius a triumphant grin.

“There. Easy. Told you there’d be no problems.”

Scorpius peered doubtfully into the office which looked like a comfy sort of place, more like a sitting room than anything else. It was full of interesting plants and books about Herbology. On one wall was a photograph of a smiling, slightly plump blond woman. A Remembrall was sitting in a stand on Professor Longbottom’s desk. It was currently full of red smoke.

“Are you really going to take something?” Scorpius asked. “I mean, Professor Longbottom’s your friend.”

“He’d understand if he knew,” Albus said confidently, waving the thought away. “He’s cool like that. I’ll just be a second.”

With that, Albus disappeared inside. Scorpius kept his eyes on the corridor, trying to look as casual as possible. How he’d explain to Professor Longbottom why he was leaning against the wall next to his office he wasn’t quite sure, but luckily, Albus emerged again in a few moments, looking incredibly pleased with himself and patting his pocket.

“Are you going to tell me what you just took?” Scorpius asked.

“Nope,” Albus answered cheerfully, draping an arm around Scorpius’s shoulder again to stop him from being so disapproving. (It worked like a charm, too). “You’ll see. Come on. First floor bathroom here we come!”

+++ The girls’ bathroom on the first floor was not a location Scorpius had ever anticipated visiting, but he had to admit that the thought of entering the room in which Hermione Granger had brewed her first Polyjuice Potion in only her second year, the opening to the Chamber of Secrets had existed, and Moaning Myrtle was said to haunt to this very day was a thrill. Hogwarts was an endless source of history, and Scorpius still couldn't help getting excited with each new discovery, even now he was in his fourth year.

It was a fairly shabby bathroom with a large Victorian sink in the centre of the room. Scorpius had always assumed that girls’ toilets were cleaner and neater than the boys’ but in all honesty, this one was in definite need of a good wash and some redecoration.

Albus stood in the centre of the room, twirling his wand in his fingers, clearly showing off for his benefit. On the way up the staircase to the first floor (during which Albus had remained under the Invisibility Cloak, and Scorpius had tried to resist chattering to him by accident) Albus had
explained his plan.

Albus was fairly good with that sort of thing. Thinking on the spot. Being resourceful. Scorpius always found it took far longer for him to come up with a solution to any of his problems. He liked to think things out beforehand, just to make sure he didn’t make any mistakes.

That was Albus’s main flaw, Scorpius mused. He jumped in without a second thought, sort of (not that he’d ever say so to Albus) like his Gryffindor father. Not this time, however, because Scorpius was going to make sure the plan was concrete before any time travelling began. There was no way they were going to mess things up a second time.

“So let me get this right,” Scorpius prompted. “The plan is Engorgement…”

“Yes,” Albus agreed confidently. He took the stance of one of those stereotypical fake Muggle wizards, who pulled rabbits out of hats and pretended to saw women in half. His green eyes were bright with excitement. It was incredibly infectious. “Scorpius, that soap if you may…”

Playing the part of Albus’s glamourous assistant (a role Scorpius felt he inhabited rather well) he fished a small, rectangular soap out of the sink and held it up.

Albus pointed his wand at the target with a flourish.

“Engorgio!”

The soap began to grow in an instant. Scorpius dropped it on the tiles as it ballooned to at least four times its size.

Albus raised his eyebrows, wanting Scorpius’s opinion on his (rather impressive even if he did say so himself) bit of magic.

“Nice,” Scorpius said, nodding his head admiringly at the soap and even giving it a little tap with his foot so it slid across the tiles leaving a soapy trail. “Consider me engorgimpressed.”

Albus grinned broadly and gave a mock bow.

“The second task was the lake task. They had to retrieve something which was stolen from them, which turned out to be-“

“-people they loved,” Scorpius finished for him.

Albus nodded.

“Cedric used a Bubble-Head Charm to swim through the lake. All we do is follow him in there, and use Engorgement to turn him into something rather larger. We know the Time-Turner doesn’t give us long, so we’re going to be quick. Get him and Engorgio his head and watch him float out of the lake - away from the task - away from the competition.”

That was all very impressive. Scorpius agreed entirely with that plan. But there was one part Albus had yet to explain.

“But - you still haven’t told me how we’re going to actually get to the lake…”

Suddenly a jet of water emerged from the sink, splashing Scorpius in the front but entirely missing Albus. A very wet Moaning Myrtle ascended, coming to a stop in front of the boys. Scorpius couldn’t help but grin at the sight of her. He’d heard all about her, of course, but it wasn’t often
that boys got to see Myrtle Warren (as she had once been known) in the flesh. Or in the… whatever it was ghosts had.

“Whoah,” Myrtle said loudly. “That feels good. Never used to enjoy that. But when you get to my age, you take what you can—”

“Of course,” Scorpius found himself breathing, turning to Albus with glee. “You’re a genius - Moaning Myrtle…”

Myrtle paused in mid sentence and swooped down upon Scorpius fiercely.

“What did you call me?” she demanded, her face closer to Scorpius’s than he would have liked. “Do I moan? Am I moaning now? Am I? Am I?”

“No, I didn’t mean…” Scorpius tried, backing away.

“What’s my name?” Myrtle asked angrily.

“Myrtle,” Scorpius admitted, wincing away from the furious young woman before him.


“Well…” Scorpius muttered, but Myrtle wasn’t listening.

The young woman burst suddenly and disconcertingly into a fit of the giggles, a pale hand raised to her mouth coyly.

“It’s been a while,” she declared gleefully. “Boys. In my bathroom. In my girls’ bathroom. Well, that’s not right… but then again, I always did have a soft spot for the Potters.”

She paused to give Albus a wink, twirling her dark hair around her finger as she did so. If Scorpius was honest, it wasn't a particularly appealing look.

“And I was moderately partial to a Malfoy too,” she added, seeming to feel that she was leaving Scorpius out. Scorpius managed to give her a small half-smile for her thoughtfulness. “Now how can I help you pair?”

“You were there Myrtle,” Albus said, stepping forward. “In the lake. They wrote about you. There must be a way out of these pipes.”

“I’ve been everywhere,” Myrtle bragged. “But where specifically were you thinking?”

“The second task. The lake task. In the Triwizard Tournament. Twenty-five years ago. Harry and Cedric.”

Scorpius blinked, wondering how that short and jumbled description had even begun to explain what they were planning. But Myrtle didn’t seem to notice how ambitious or poorly organised their plan was. If anything, she was excited by it.

“Such a shame the pretty one had to die,” Myrtle said mournfully. “Not that you father is not pretty - but Cedric Diggory - you’d be amazed at how many girls I had to hear doing love incantations in this very bathroom… and the weeping after he was taken.”

Albus ignored the comment about his father.
“Help us Myrtle,” he said, in what Scorpius thought was a very grave and impressive manner. “Help us get into that same lake.”

Myrtle put her hands on her hips and surveyed the boys.

“You think I can help you travel in time?”

Albus gave a sigh (one that was definitely put on for Myrtle’s benefit) and lowered his head.

“We need you to keep a secret,” he said seriously.

Immediately Myrtle clapped her hands together with excitement.

“I love secrets,” she exclaimed eagerly. “I won’t tell a soul. Cross my heart and hope to die. Or - the equivalent. For ghosts. You know.”

Scorpius could only admire what had been a beautiful piece of manipulation from Albus. He wished he could be quite so convincing when he needed to be.

Albus nodded at Scorpius, who pulled the Time-Turner from his pocket, holding it up for Myrtle to see. He threw it to Albus, who caught it easily.

“We can travel in time,” Albus explained. “You’re going to help us travel the pipes. We’re going to save Cedric.”

Travel the pipes? Travel the pipes?! Scorpius had definitely not been informed of this part of the plan...

Myrtle gave Albus a slightly manic grin.

“Well, that sounds like fun,” she said.

“And we’ve no time to lose,” Albus agreed.

Myrtle turned to point at the large Victorian sink she had emerged from.

“This very sink,” she revealed importantly. “This very sink empties directly into the lake. It breaks every bylaw but this school has always been antiquated. Dive in and you will be piped straight to it.”

Honestly, Scorpius was not particularly keen on the idea of being piped straight to anywhere, but Albus was already climbing courageously into the sink…

Trying to hide his reluctance, Scorpius followed Albus’s example, pulling himself into the sink as well.

He wondered for a moment what someone would think if they were to walk in on them like this. Fully clothed and sitting in a sink in the girls’ bathroom with Moaning Myrtle overseeing proceedings.

Albus dumped his cloak on the bathroom floor and pulled a small, screwed up bag out of his pocket with a bit of a flourish. He handed it to Scorpius and helped him dispose of his own cloak in the meantime, sensing Scorpius needed a little encouragement to help with his nerves.

“Some for me and some for you,” Albus explained, as Scorpius examined the contents of the bag. It looked like a handful of green foliage.
“Gillyweed?” Scorpius asked, looking up at Albus with admiration. He had to admit, this was most definitely worth the earlier burglary. Scorpius was quite sure Professor Longbottom would rather they took the Gillyweed than drowned somewhere in the middle of the Hogwarts lake. “We’re using Gillyweed? To breathe under water?”

“Just like my dad did,” Albus agreed with a nod. He tried his best not to look too thrilled by the expression on Scorpius’s face, like he thought he’d done something fantastic. “Now, are you ready?”

That was a question and a half. Scorpius wasn’t sure he’d ever be ready for what they were about to attempt, but at the same time, he knew it had to be done, and he knew he wanted to be part of it, no matter how much it scared him.

“Remember, this time, we can’t be caught out by the clock…” Scorpius reminded his best friend. “Five minutes,” Albus agreed. “That’s all we allow for, before we get pulled back to the present.”

Okay, so this was overwhelming. Frightening, actually. As well as exciting.

Scorpius felt himself wobble. A small part of him wanted to abandon the idea at the very last moment. What if the Gillyweed failed? What if they didn’t get back in time? What if they got stuck in the pipes? The possibilities for catastrophe were endless…

“Tell me this is all going to be okay,” Scorpius said, looking straight at Albus.

Albus grinned back at him. He reached out to pat him on the arm comfortingly. “It’s all going to be entirely okay,” he assured Scorpius. “Are you ready?”

Scorpius gave a tiny nod.

Myrtle, keen to be included, floated around the back of the sink, gave a little giggle, and with the sound of squealing metal (that made Scorpius’s teeth hurt), the back of the sink opened up, the rusty metal grille rising like a small portcullis, revealing a sizeable hole in the centre of the sink, which seemed to slope downwards like a slide.

It was very dark in there. And very wet. And looked like it might have rats somewhere within it. Scorpius peered doubtfully into the depths and half wanted to change his mind about this whole thing.

But before he could speak up, Albus reached out to take half the amount of Gillyweed from the bag Scorpius was holding, swallowed it in one almighty gulp, shot Scorpius a grin, gave himself a bit of momentum, and then disappeared down the large pipe with a satisfying whizzing noise.

It sounded like he’d been going quite fast…

“No,” Scorpius found himself muttering, looking down at the damp darkness his friend had been voluntarily swallowed up by. “Albus - Albus -”

But Albus would be long gone by now. Judging by the angle of the entrance, the pipe travelled almost vertically for at least a stretch.

Scorpius looked up to find Moaning Myrtle staring at him curiously. Her gaze was incredibly uncomfortable. Scorpius wished she would stop peering at him. It was eerie how oversized her glasses made her eyes look.
“I do like brave boys,” Myrtle declared provocatively.

Yes, Scorpius thought. So did he…

“Then I’m entirely ready,” he found himself saying, in what he hoped was a cheery and slightly heroic voice. “For whatever comes.”

Scorpius took the remaining Gillyweed from the bag and swallowed the green leaves in one go, just the way Albus had done. He stuffed the plastic bag back in his pocket and glanced at the circle of darkness waiting for him.

The pipes were big enough for a person to slide through, Scorpius told himself firmly. After all, years ago a Basilisk had been slithering through them without any problems. Actually, that wasn’t an altogether reassuring thought…

But Albus was waiting and he couldn’t let him down. To leave Albus down there in the lake was out of the question. They had agreed to do this together. And Scorpius (being a Malfoy) prided himself on being a man of his word.

Scorpius gave himself a little push, closed his eyes, and slid after Albus.

+++ Myrtle watched a little sadly as the boys disappeared. It had been nice to have company, especially handsome company. Especially handsome company that wanted to share secrets with her.

Albus really was the image of his father, and that Malfoy boy wasn’t exactly bad-looking either…

Myrtle had been considering which of the boys she would rather have had take her to the Hogwarts ball when the door to the bathroom swung open, hitting the tiles with a crash.

Harry Potter appeared at a run (oh he was looking lovely in his older years), followed by Draco Malfoy (she’d have chopped off that ponytail), Ginny Weasley (ugly, awful, no good), and Professor McGonagall.

“Albus… Albus…” Harry called out, desperately hunting the room.

“He’s gone,” said Ginny quietly, blinking down at the oversized soap on the floor with horrified disbelief.

Draco spotted the two cloaks left discarded on the damp ground. He picked them up with a grimace.

“He’s disappeared,” Professor McGonagall announced, consulting her map. “No, he’s travelling under Hogwarts grounds, no, he’s disappeared-”

“How is he doing this?” Draco demanded, furious with worry and exasperation.

Well, that sounded like her cue…

Myrtle drifted forth dramatically, quite liking the idea of being a hero. Of being the one with all the answers. The one to offer comfort and explanations. Especially to Draco Malfoy and Harry Potter.

“He’s using a rather pretty trinket thingy,” Myrtle explained helpfully, floating closer to the men with a smile.
“Myrtle!” Harry exclaimed, looking shocked to see her.

Really, Myrtle had been hoping for a ‘hello, Myrtle’ or perhaps even a ‘it’s good to see you again’, but she supposed surprise was better than nothing.

“Oops,” Myrtle said, giggling. “You caught me. And I was trying so hard to hide. Hello, Harry. Hello, Draco. Have you been bad boys again?”

Myrtle noticed Draco flinch at the question.

“What trinket is he using?” Harry demanded urgently.

Myrtle gave a shrug.

“I think it was a secret, but I could never keep anything from you, Harry. How is it you've grown handsomer and handsomer as you’ve aged? And you’re taller.”

Harry looked utterly irked. He didn’t seem to appreciate her compliment…

“My son is in danger,” he breathed out, running a hand through his messy hair. “I need your help. What are they doing, Myrtle?”

Myrtle blinked and then shrugged again.

“He’s after saving a dishy boy,” she explained. “A certain Cedric Diggory.”

Myrtle had never seen a person in her bathroom look so horrified. And over the years, there had been plenty of things to be horrified about. Harry appeared to stumble and then his face contorted into an expression which really didn’t show off his looks to their full potential. In fact, with his eyes narrowed and his mouth slightly parted, Harry looked frankly awful.

“But Cedric Diggory died years ago…” Professor McGonagall pointed out.

“He seemed quite confident he could get around that fact,” Myrtle said. “He’s very confident, Harry, just like you.”

Harry looked about ready to collapse on the bathroom tiles. Myrtle wondered if he would, and hoped that should such a thing happen, she would be able to swoop down and comfort him.

“He heard me talking - to Amos Diggory… could he have… the Ministry’s Time-Turner?” Harry breathed out.

But then he shook his head.

“No, that’s impossible,” he reminded himself firmly.

“The Ministry had a Time-Turner?” McGonagall asked, turning to Draco (who she currently regarded as her most likely ally in returning some sanity to proceedings) with disbelief. “I thought they were destroyed?”

“Isn’t everyone so naughty?” Myrtle declared, beaming and twirling a little on the spot.

Draco Malfoy exchanged another furious look with Professor McGonagall and then stepped forward.

“Can someone please explain what’s going on?” he demanded.
Harry turned to him with a grimace, not wanting to have to impart this particular piece of news to Draco Malfoy of all people.

“Albus and Scorpius are not disappearing and reappearing,” he explained slowly, glancing at Ginny with apprehension. She had her hands balled into fists at her sides, a sure sign of panic.

Draco was still staring at him incredulously, waiting for him to continue.


Chapter End Notes

If you enjoyed this then please comment! I read them all and get SOOOOO excited when they come through via email. Honestly. It makes my day.

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Two: Scene Twenty

Chapter Notes

Last part of Act Two! Thank you to anyone who's still with me!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The lake was freezing. Why Scorpius found himself surprised by that he wasn’t quite sure, because obviously a large body of water in the Hogwarts grounds in the middle of Autumn wasn’t going to feel like a nice relaxing bath.

As he’d rushed out of the pipe and into the dark expanse of the lake, for a moment, he had panicked. He couldn't swim, and despite the Gillyweed he’d swallowed just moments before, Scorpius had the horrendous sensation of not wanting to open his mouth beneath the water just in case. If the Gillyweed failed then there was no way he’d make it to the surface quickly enough to survive. And where was Albus?

Relax Scorpius, relax. Deep breaths. Okay no, not deep breaths. You’re in the lake. Actually, yes. Do take deep breaths. Perhaps not deep ones. Tiny ones. Start with tiny ones...

Suddenly, fantastically Albus emerged beside him, treading water to remain in one place and looking gleeful. He gestured at Scorpius’s neck.

The moment Albus pointed, Scorpius felt a piercing shot of pain on either side of his neck, just beneath his ears. It was excruciating. Was this how the Gillyweed was supposed to work or had something gone terribly wrong? Instantly his hands reached up to feel for the skin, only his hands were clumsy and his fingers wouldn’t work properly...

Albus was still grinning at him like a lunatic. He waved a webbed hand at Scorpius.

Oh Dumbledore he was going to faint. Right here under the water, he was going to faint...

His chest felt too tight. He needed air. He was going to die, wasn’t he? He reached out for Albus...

Scorpius opened his mouth to yell, and water flooded down his throat. But instead of choking, Scorpius gave a sudden gasp, feeling the oxygen return to his brain. The lightheaded sensation was disappearing. In fact, the temperature had changed. No longer was he burning with the chill. The water around him was pleasantly cool...

He was feeling just fine. Actually very much like he might have felt up on the surface, only slower and more nervous. And - oh - he was swimming. Not sinking. He found that with only a few movements of his hands and feet he could stay in one place. This was far easier than he’d dared to hope!

Scorpius felt momentarily embarrassed for having overreacted so badly. He had known how Gillyweed worked, but actually experiencing the sensations in the darkness of the lake was a whole different story to reading about the plant in his Herbology textbook.

Albus drifted easily to his side, and put an arm around his shoulders to wordlessly reassure him that everything was fine. He pointed again at Scorpius’s neck with a smile.
This time, Scorpius knew what was coming. He felt slowly for where the piercing pain had been, understanding that the clumsiness was due to his own webbed hands, and felt two definite slits in his neck, one just beneath each ear. *Gills.*

Okay, so that was disturbing to say the least…

Even in that murky lake, Scorpius had seen Albus roll his eyes.

Albus reached into his pocket (with some difficulty) and pulled out the Time-Turner, wrapping the chain three times around his wrist so it wouldn’t sink to the depths. Taking Scorpius’s arm, he pressed down on the Time-Turner, and closed his eyes.

*The second task of the Triwizard Tournament, 1995,* Albus and Scorpius thought together.

Time travelling underneath the water was a whole different experience to doing so on land. The water swirled around them, rushing and rising. Colours shifted, light streaming from the surface of the lake and then disappearing again over and over. Albus kept his eyes shut this time, but Scorpius stared up at the surface, hypnotised by the sheer beauty of seeing day turn to night in a rapid cycle, the way the colours danced above them, bathing them occasionally in light.

And then the rushing stopped. The lake decided on a colour, dark green with a foggy quality. Albus opened his eyes.

Above them came a voice. It was muted, like the sound of a distant radio that hadn’t been tuned correctly. It was coming from a little way above them, from the surface of the lake.

*“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you - the greatest - the fabulous - the one - the only TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT! If you’re from Hogwarts, give me a cheer!”*

A thundering sound somewhere above them accompanied by some distant yells told Scorpius and Albus they were in exactly the right place.

Together, they began to swim through the lake, trying to get right beneath the noise and end up in the path of the champions. Scorpius found it was far easier than he’d thought. He simply used his webbed hands and new flipper-like feet to propel himself forward. Without the fear he was going to drown, he didn’t feel the need to flail and kick, and could focus on cutting neatly through the water. Once he’d figured out the technique, Scorpius felt fairly comfortable with this whole swimming thing. Surprisingly, he managed to glide through the lake with more elegance than Albus.

With graceful ease, Scorpius followed Albus, descending through the water.

*“If you’re from Durmstrang - give me a cheer!”*

More thumping and cheering. Only lower pitched and more rumbling.

*“AND IF YOU’RE FROM BEAUXBATONS GIVE ME A CHEER!”*

A slightly limper cheer.

*“The French are getting into this,”* remarked Ludo Bagman dryly. Albus turned to Scorpius to grin at him, and Scorpius laughed, bubbles coming out of his mouth as he did so.

*“And they’re off!”* Ludo Bagman announced, followed by almighty cheering and screaming which was powerful even from the depths of the lake. *“Viktor’s a shark, of course he is. Fleur looks*
remarkable. Ever plucky Harry is using Gillyweed, clever Harry, very clever - and Cedric - well, Cedric, what a treat ladies and gentleman, Cedric is using a Bubble Charm to cruise through the lake!”

Keeping his eye out for Grindylows (which he knew had given Harry Potter some trouble during this task), Scorpius followed Albus, who seemed suddenly to have sped up. Seconds later Scorpius realised why they’d upped their pace. There ahead of them was Cedric Diggory!

Myrtle hadn’t been exaggerating, he really was handsome, even when his features looked oddly elongated inside the bubble which encapsulated his head. He was a good swimmer too, making excellent progress and looking incredibly athletic. Scorpius couldn't help but stare at him.

Albus turned back to Scorpius with a determined expression and reached for his wand. Scorpius shook himself out of it and did the same. Together, they raised their wands and fired an Engorgement Charm through the water towards the handsome Hufflepuff champion.

For a moment, nothing happened. Cedric kept on swimming.

And then the Charms hit him. The water around him glowed gold, lighting up the murky depths like a firework.

Cedric seemed to spot them, in that awful moment. He saw two boys in the water, just for a second, wands held aloft. His expression was one of (rather stretched) confusion and betrayal.

Determined not to give up, Cedric valiantly kept trying to swim deeper, faster. And then he realised that he wasn’t going very far. In fact, he was going… up?

His Bubble Charm was going wrong. The bubble full of oxygen surrounding his head was growing. And it was growing fast.

Cedric looked around himself, entirely panicked. He kicked out his arms and legs but there was nothing to be done. The bubble kept on growing, and Cedric kept on rising.

Albus and Scorpius watched with awe as Cedric ascended helplessly up to the surface until he was out of sight. By the time he broke the surface, the bubble around his head was going to be enormous. Unless he was able to stop the charm, Cedric was probably going to end up floating into the air before all the spectators…

“But no,” said Ludo Bagman dramatically. “What’s this… Cedric Diggory is ascending out of the water and seemingly out of the competition. Oh, ladies and gentleman, we don’t have our winner but we certainly have our loser. Cedric Diggory is turning into a balloon and this balloon wants to fly. Fly, ladies and gentlemen, fly. Fly out of the task and out of the tournament and - oh my, it gets wilder still, around Cedric fireworks explode declaring - ‘Ron loves Hermione’ - and the crowd love that - oh, ladies and gentlemen, the look on Cedric’s face. It’s quite some picture, it’s quite some sight, it’s quite some tragedy. This is a humiliation, there’s no other word for it.”

Scorpius turned to Albus at the description of those fireworks. Clearly Albus had hit Cedric with more then just an Engorgement Charm. Scorpius thought it was a brilliant idea. It would force Ron to admit his feelings for Hermione and poor old Padma Patil would just have to find someone else to marry.

Albus grinned back at him, jubilant with success, and then high-fived Scorpius as best he could with the slowing effects of the water surrounding them. He pointed a webbed hand in the direction of the surface, and Scorpius nodded. They’d been in the lake for a while. Any second now they
were going to be pulled back to 2020 and ideally they wanted to be back on dry land by then.

The boys began to swim upwards together. Albus slowed his pace slightly so that Scorpius could keep up.

As they drew closer to the surface, the hideous sound of mocking laughter began and grew louder with each metre they rose. Scorpius felt guilty until he reminded himself why they were doing this. Yes, it would be unpleasant for Cedric to deal with, but he’d get over it, wouldn’t he? Besides, saving someone’s life was infinitely more important than saving them a bit of mortification.

And then the laughter began to die down. It sounded like it was being steadily dimmed, like the noise was slipping further and further away…

Had it been five minutes already? Were they being pulled back?

A worrying thought hit Scorpius, and it was to do with the Gillyweed. Would the effects last after they returned? It had withstood the travel so far, but he doubted anyone had ever tried travelling back and forth twenty five years each time having eaten the plant. Magic was unpredictable at the best of times, and Scorpius couldn’t remember ever having read about Gillyweed being tested alongside the use of a Time-Turner.

The same thought appeared to reach Albus, because he grabbed Scorpius by the arm to pull him up faster.

As they rose through the lake everything began to change. The world grew darker by the second. So dark that the boys were almost swimming through an expanse of pitch black.

A flash. Followed by a bang. The Time-Turner began to vibrate on Albus’s wrist, ticking in a frenzied manner, seemingly trying to untangle itself and get away. It managed to twist about once, but Scorpius spotted the chain glinting in what seemed to be moonlight (how could it be, it had been the afternoon when they left?) and wound the remainder of the chain around his own wrist, tethering himself to Albus.

The ticking grew louder and louder until Scorpius broke through the surface of the lake with a gasp.

It was cold again. Utterly freezing. And oh it was good to breathe the air!

“Woooo - hoooooo!” Scorpius yelled triumphantly, punching the air with his (no longer webbed) free hand.

No, wait. That shouldn’t have been his free hand. Because that was the hand that should have been tethering him to Albus…

He looked around, surprised. He hadn’t noticed Albus free himself, but he supposed he had missed it in the excitement. Any second now his best friend would some shooting up to the surface of the lake with him, grin on his face, whooping and cheering with triumph.

“We did it!” Scorpius shouted.

Still nothing. Just a very still, very dark world. Eerily still, in fact. And almost too dark.

“Albus?” Scorpius repeated, trying his best not to panic.

Panicking was one of his very worst habits. Didn’t Albus always say so? There was no point in
worrying before something had even gone wrong. And there was no evidence that anything had gone wrong. None at all.

Albus was a good swimmer. He had said so himself. He had probably just surfaced a little further away…

Scorpius began to tread water clumsily, the Time-Turner still bound to his wrist bashing him on the hand every time he moved his arms to part the water.

He might have been proud of himself for being such a natural when it came to staying afloat considering he’d never swum more than a few metres before today if Albus had been with him. But Albus was not with him. Albus was very much away from him.

Where was Albus?

Scorpius turned awkwardly in the water to look about him. There wasn’t so much as a ripple on the surface of the lake aside from where he swam. Which meant…

There was nothing for it. Scorpius took a deep breath of cold air, found courage from somewhere, and ducked back under the water.

It didn’t feel good to be submerged without his gills. In fact, it was quite terrifying. But he couldn’t resurface until he’d spotted Albus.

Perhaps this was all some ploy to get him to swim a bit, Scorpius thought desperately. Maybe Albus was hoping that he’d grow in confidence if he had to duck back under and find him?

It was a feeble hope and Scorpius knew it. Albus would never have made him do something that scared him alone. Never.

It was dark in the lake. Darker than before. So dark Scorpius could make out absolutely nothing.

He wasn’t a strong enough swimmer to go any deeper without running the risk of being pulled under.

Scorpius was forced to put his head above the water again, lungs screaming for precious air.

“Albus…” he shouted, panting as he fought to keep himself afloat. “ALBUS? ALBUS?”

He’s not dead, he’s not dead, he’s not dead, Scorpius told himself, trying to resist the urge to start crying with panic. At worst he’s still in 1995. He’s fine. He’s not dead…

“Scorpius Malfoy,” came a commanding and yet childish, high-pitched voice. “Get out of the lake. Get out of the lake. Right now.”

Scorpius turned to see a woman at the edge of the lake. Thank Dumbledore. She sounded like a teacher. She would help him, whoever she was. Scorpius floundered towards her, gritting his teeth and spitting out lake water.

The short, squat woman reached for Scorpius with a surprisingly strong grip, and hauled him, shivering, out of the lake.

“Miss,” Scorpius breathed out, coughing up another lot of water. “I need help. Please, Miss!”

“Miss?” the woman repeated incredulously. If Scorpius hadn’t been too busy peering out at the lake surface, searching for a dark head bobbing about nearby, he might have recognised the woman
who stood beside him on the grass in a pair of short pink heeled shoes and a fluffy, equally pink cardigan. “I’m Professor Umbridge, the Headmistress of your school, I’m no Miss.”

“You’re the Headmistress?” Scorpius repeated, hugging himself tightly to attempt to stop the shivering. “But I…”

“I am the Headmistress,” Umbridge cut in with a simpering little giggle which expressed anything but happiness. “And however important your family may be - it doesn’t give you an excuse to dilly-dally, to mess about.”

Umbridge? Professor Umbridge? But how could she possibly…

No. Albus came first. The questions could come later.

“There’s a boy in this lake,” Scorpius explained quickly, through chattering teeth. (He noticed that although the woman wore a thick garish cardigan, she didn’t offer it to him). “You need to get help, I’m looking for my friend, Miss. Professor. Headmaster. One of Hogwarts’s students, Miss. I’m looking for Albus Potter.”

Umbridge paused for a moment, and then let out another of her awful little giggles. There was no urgency to her whatsoever. Scorpius wanted to scream.

“Potter?” she repeated in simpering tones. “Albus Potter? There’s no such student. In fact, there hasn’t been a Potter at Hogwarts for years - and that boy didn’t turn out so well. Not so much rest in peace, Harry Potter, more rest in perpetual despair. Total troublemaker.”

“Harry Potter’s dead?” Scorpius repeated numbly.

He felt his stomach lurch horribly, and Scorpius only just managed to stop himself from vomiting all over Umbridge’s eye-catching shoes.

It was so so cold. Scorpius could feel the September wind breathing against his neck, leaving him trembling.

The most terrible darkness seemed to surround him. Scorpius wasn’t sure if it was real, or just a mental manifestation of his horror. He felt empty. He felt lost. He wanted to sleep…

As Umbridge glanced across the lake impatiently, Scorpius remembered the Time-Turner still wound around his wrist. He had the good sense to stow it in his pocket. Something had gone terribly wrong and there was every chance he might need to use it again later.

Umbridge glanced back down at the soaking wet, shivering mess of a Malfoy curled up on the grass by her shoes. It was unusually insubordinate of him not to clamber to his feet out of respect.

“Have you swallowed something funny in there?” Umbridge asked, tilting her head curiously to one side. “Become a Mudblood without any of us noticing? Harry Potter died over twenty years ago as part of that failed coup on the school - he was one of those Dumbledore terrorists we bravely overthrew at the Battle of Hogwarts.”

Scorpius could feel the world slipping away. He was too cold. Was it usual to feel this tired?

“Now come along,” commanded Umbridge sternly. “I don’t know what game you’re playing but you’re upsetting the Dementors and entirely ruining Voldemort Day.”

Scorpius’s jaw dropped, his teeth now chattering soundlessly. His eyes were wide, his cheeks pink
with the cold, his lips starting to turn blue.

“Voldemort Day?” Scorpius repeated.

And then a terrible rush of emptiness descended, a sensation of intense dread.

Albus wasn’t going to resurface, was he? Without Harry Potter, there could be no Albus. It had all gone wrong. In the most desperate way possible.

Scorpius glanced up at the woman he now finally allowed himself to recognise as Dolores Umbridge, former High-Inquisitor of Hogwarts, usurper of Albus Dumbledore, famed Muggle and child abuser who had been sent to Azkaban following the Second Wizarding War for her crimes…

From every direction came dark, sinister figures, rising up up up, looming over him, making him feel numb, his head growing heavier and dizzier by the second...

Scorpius took a deep breath and then fainted.

Chapter End Notes

I am so thrilled to have reached the end of Act Two! Some of these chapters have been really hard, and I've been writing nonstop to get the chapters out as fast as possible. I'm enjoying every moment, but wow, I am proud of myself!

If you are still reading then thank you so much. Your comments and kudos mean the world. Every day I work on a new chapter and your encouragement gives me so much motivation and makes this so much more fun. Also thank you to those who have helped me with their crit. I have to admit, at first it felt sort of odd to have crit, but it has made this all so much better! I've been able to improve my work by miles thanks to you guys!

I super appreciate you all, and you have no idea how much a simple thing like getting a comment means to me. It fills me with joy. I genuinely start grinning at my computer!

I will see you for Act Three! This one is going to be tough but I am up for the challenge!

I love you loads!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
This new Hogwarts was an entirely different place to the one Scorpius had once been proud to call his temporary home.

He’d woken up three days ago in the hospital wing, only it wasn’t the hospital wing, not really. The windows were covered by black and green flags which depicted sophisticated snake symbols. The portraits had been torn from the walls, and in their place were engraved plaques. The one across from Scorpius’s bed was made of what looked like marble and read: *Magic is Might.*

Madam Pomfrey was still there, thank goodness, but she was different too, in this strange new reality. She was quieter, more furtive. She was hesitant to speak and went about bandaging and administering potions with determined efficiency.

After waking up and realising that he hadn’t simply had a terrible dream, Scorpius had spent a long while staring up at the ceiling, trying not to think about anything in particular (and trying to ignore the sense of dread overtaking his entire body).

*If I ignore all this, it will go away,* Scorpius told himself firmly. *There is no way this is real. Perhaps I’ve gone mad? Yes, that’s probably it. My brain was starved of oxygen for too long under the lake and now I’ve gone completely bonkers…*

Only even if he’d gone utterly crazy, Albus would be there, surely? And why would he have thought up such an obscure and devastating alternate reality which involved Dolores Umbridge, no Albus, and something ominously named ‘Voldemort Day’?

Madam Pomfrey spotted him with his eyes open and bustled over.

“Mr Malfoy, how are you feeling?”

“I… yes…” Scorpius stammered, noticing that Madam Pomfrey was wearing black medical robes instead of her usual clean, crisp white. “I’m not exactly sure.”

Madam Pomfrey had examined him, checked his eyes, asked him to open his mouth and say ‘ah’, taken his temperature with a tap of her wand, and then proceeded to select the most appropriate potion from her supplies.

“She Headmistress tells me you were found in the lake,” she commented, examining a bottle of
purple potion.

“Yes.”

“May I ask why?”

Scorpius blinked, thinking fast.

“For a dare,” he said quickly. “Swimming - you know. To see if I could.”

The old Madam Pomfrey would immediately have begun to berate him. She would have given him a ten minute long lecture on the dangers of such activities which included a list of the many illnesses and diseases a wizard could catch after such a long bout of cold.

But this new Madam Pomfrey merely glanced at him with mistrust, like she wanted to question him further but didn’t quite have the courage.

“Did they - did they find anyone else in the lake?” Scorpius asked as Madam Pomfrey handed him the bottle. It was a vain hope, a frankly ridiculous, impossible hope, that somehow, without Harry Potter, Albus could still exist, but Scorpius had to make sure.

“Not that I’m aware. Should they have?” she asked, looking horrified for reasons Scorpius couldn’t understand.

“Oh - no,” Scorpius said swiftly, taking a gulp of the potion and immediately coughing at the appalling taste and the burning sensation as it slid down his throat. “This is - strong…”

“I’m sure you can bear it, Mr Malfoy,” Madam Pomfrey said, almost coldly. “You’ve taken Skele-Grow enough times.”

Scorpius most definitely hadn’t. Not even once.

Judging it best not to question Madam Pomfrey further, he grimaced and swallowed the remainder of the potion. It made his chest ache, like a fire was burning inside his ribcage.

And then oddly, Madam Pomfrey leaned in close.

“Do I need to tell them to look for another student in the lake?” she all but whispered. “Mr Malfoy, please, if there’s a chance they could still be…”

Scorpius blinked again, shocked. How did Madam Pomfrey know about Albus? How was it even possible?

“He’d have surfaced by now,” Scorpius whispered back, determined not to start crying at the thought. “It’s no good.”

Madam Pomfrey then did a strange thing. She put a hand to her mouth with a horrified gasp.

“Not another one,” she breathed out, also looking like she very much would have liked to burst into tears.

“Another one?” Scorpius repeated.

“Your father may have covered it up the first time, but again?”

“Covered what up?” Scorpius demanded, trying to sit up and finding he was too weak to do so. “I
don’t know what you’re talking about.”

Madam Pomfrey seemed to think she had said too much. Scorpius saw her control herself, her temper and her horror.

“Of course you don’t, Mr Malfoy,” she said distantly, staring at him with something that looked like… was it hatred? “Get some rest.”

+++ 

For the first day, in which Scorpius had been told to stay in bed, he saw more students than he’d ever known visit the hospital wing in the space of a school day.

The girl who was given the bed beside him had some very worrying bruises on her wrists and looked paler than even he did. Madam Pomfrey had carefully held a glass of cool water to her dry lips to help her drink.

The girl slept for most of the day, but had a single visitor at lunch time. Another young woman dressed in dark Hogwarts robes perched nervously on the end of her bed. Scorpius pretended to be asleep so as to give them some privacy.

Scorpius had expected the visiting student to react a little more explosively to seeing her friend in such a condition, but worryingly, the girl merely sighed and shook her head.

“Emily, you shouldn’t have said what you did. You were on your final warning. And didn’t Magnus tell you not to struggle once you’re hanging up?”

“I thought I could get out,” Emily murmured from her bed.

“And then what?” the young woman hissed. “Better to be hung the right way up for one night, than upside down for longer. You know what happened to Maisie…”

Scorpius had to listen in on that conversation for at least five minutes before he could comprehend that hanging students in the dungeons by their wrists was now considered an acceptable punishment for wrongdoers.

Madam Pomfrey had visited him once again in the afternoon to take his temperature and give him a second dose of potion. She seemed oddly nervous of him, almost afraid, and made no mention of their previous conversation.

“It should be a few more hours before you’re fully recovered,” she explained, not meeting his eyes. “I hope to be able to discharge you tomorrow morning, Mr Malfoy.”

“It’s Scorpius,” Scorpius had said with a small smile, wanting her to know that he appreciated her kindness, that she didn’t have to be so tense around him. “Thank you.”

Madam Pomfrey merely stared at him, like he’d gone mad, and then bustled off to yet another student, this time a first year who had turned up at the door of the ward crying and clutching his stomach.

+++ 

In the middle of the night Scorpius had woken to the sound of pained gasping, and then the noise of frantic shushing. Slowly, so as not to make a noise, he’d slipped out of his bed and crept around the corner to see what was going on.
A screen had been erected around the bed closest to the door of the hospital wing, and Scorpius could just about make out the shape of Madam Pomfrey sitting behind it.

Squinting in the darkness, Scorpius moved closer, and was shocked to see three more figures behind the screen. A small group of boys were sitting on the bed beside Madam Pomfrey. She was handing them each a bowl of some liquid or other and glancing up at the door nervously.

“It’s only Murtlap Essence. Come along now, hands in. Quickly. You need to get back to the dormitories before the patrol…”

The boys obeyed her, placing their hands in their bowls. The tallest boy at the end of the bed swore under his breath. Madam Pomfrey didn’t chastise him for it. Instead, to Scorpius’s surprise, she placed a wrinkled hand on his shoulder.

“When will the scars go?” the boy in the middle asked in a whisper.

“In time,” Madam Pomfrey responded softly. “We’ve done the right thing. Now come along. Hurry up.”

Scorpius padded as quietly as possible back to his bed and feigned sleep.

“Through the back way,” Madam Pomfrey whispered, as the sound of three pairs of feet scurried past his bed.

Scorpius dared to crack an eye open, and in the light of Madam Pomfrey’s wand, he saw the right hand of the tallest of the boys.

Seemingly carved into the skin of the back of his hand were the words: “I will not pity Muggles.”

+++ He was discharged from the hospital wing the following morning, although he still felt incredibly weak. No physical symptoms were showing, but Scorpius was sure something wasn’t quite right. After he and Albus had travelled back from the first Triwizard task, Albus had become injured, his arm breaking horribly. Scorpius wondered if it was possible that travelling through time such a distance could damage a person in another way. If it could damage a person psychologically.

It was the only possible explanation for the exhaustion of his mind, the lowness of his mood, the desire to curl up and sleep.

He had been given a set of new, dark, Hogwarts robes, which he noticed were cut ever so slightly differently to the robes he was used to. These robes were more stylish, sharper. Elegant in their severity. They reminded him of the clothes his father liked to wear.

“If there are any further problems you may return,” Madam Pomfrey had told him formally. “I would advise no duelling in this state.”

Scorpius had nodded his head eagerly. He had no intention to duel whatsoever. He’d never had a proper duel in all his life and he wasn’t sure he’d be able to if he tried. He’d have been too afraid of accidentally casting the wrong spell and hurting someone.

“You may go. Just in time for breakfast, Mr Malfoy.”

“Oh - yes. Thank you. For the potion. And - er… just thank you.”
Madam Pomfrey looked shocked again and gave a stiff little nod. Scorpius wondered why his being polite startled her so very much. Who was he in this world? He really hoped he wasn’t someone with no manners.

He passed a window just before entering the Great Hall. Outside the Hogwarts grounds were grey, the Forbidden Forest obscured by an odd mist. He’d never seen the grounds look so unappealing. Even in the depths of winter, the grounds looked clear and crisp. Even when it pelted with rain it was never so dark, so murky…

And then he saw it. No. Them.

Two tall, dark, hooded figures swept past the window in what seemed like slow motion, their ragged black cloaks trailing hideously behind them, their faces horribly pale, mouths gaping open…

Dementors? Why were there Dementors in the Hogwarts grounds?

Scorpius backed a few steps away from the window with dismay. No wonder he was feeling so very cold and empty. It was well known that the presence of a Dementor could seriously affect the mood of a person. It could drive someone to despair.

Hadn’t Umbridge mentioned the Dementors? Scorpius could hardly remember. It had been a blur, those moments in which he realised he’d lost Albus.

Back in the real world, the proper world, the Dementors weren’t even allowed to guard Azkaban anymore. They were considered a breach of the prisoners’ human rights. Some witches and wizards thought this change in the law too soft, too liberal, but even Scorpius’s father agreed that the Dementors were vile creatures. After all, Lucius Malfoy had spent time alongside them in Azkaban, and Draco had once commented to Scorpius that he’d never been quite the same after that.

Suddenly a student banged into him, almost knocking Scorpius over. He turned swiftly, ready to apologise in case he had been at fault, only to find a tall fifth year boy with his hands up in a gesture of surrender, his face a picture of dismay.

“Sorry, Scorpius,” the boy gabbled, already backing away. “No offence meant. I wasn’t looking where I was going. My fault. Totally me.”

“It’s… it’s fine,” Scorpius found himself saying, before the new look on the boy’s face (of shock and relief) forced him to change his reaction slightly. “Just… don’t do it again,” Scorpius tried, waiting to see how his words would be received.

“Oh no, of course not,” the boy agreed. “Wouldn’t dream of it. Well, have a good breakfast.”

And with that, he all but ran off, as though terrified Scorpius might pursue him.

+++ As he walked into the Great Hall, Scorpius was reassured to see the beautiful room looking just as magical as always. Yes, the ceiling was currently displaying a grey sky, and there seemed to be less candles, but aside from that the layout was completely the same.

Four tables ran down the length of the Hall, only there were no House banners above them. Instead, were those odd black and green snake banners Scorpius had seen in the hospital wing.
Was it just him or was the room oddly quiet? He was used to chatter at breakfast, laughter, and banter, and complaining. But most of the students had their heads down, chewing in silence.

He didn’t know where he should sit. It looked like all the tables were completely full…

“Hey, Scorpius,” came a voice from the nearest table, sounding too-loud in the hushed room.

Yann Fredericks was waving a hand at him in a surprisingly friendly manner. Scorpius recognised him primarily for being a close friend of Rose Granger-Weasley in the other reality. After her, he was probably the most popular fourth-year Gryffindor student. He had disliked Albus and Scorpius on principle.

“Come and sit here!”

Half of the students at the table raised their head to look at him, only they didn’t sneer or look disgusted by his presence. Several smiled. Some looked rather intimidated. A few gasped with relief.

Grateful to see a familiar face, even if Yann Fredericks had been a bit nasty in the other reality, Scorpius strolled over to the table. The students immediately shuffled up to make room for him. One first year girl at the end of the table was jostled off the bench altogether.

“They never said you’d be back so soon!” Yann declared, sounding pleased. “Guess we should have known nothing could keep you down for long, eh, King?”

Scorpius was spared having to answer that by the arrival of a professor, who strolled up to the table and rapped Yann on the head with her wand.

“There will be silence at breakfast,” the woman said. Scorpius turned to look at her. She was tall and thin, and had a long, pale face. With her dull, dark eyes, and black robes, she looked rather like a Dementor herself…

“Yes, Professor Dune,” Yann said swiftly.

And then she caught sight of Scorpius. She peered at him oddly.

“Mr Malfoy, you’re back?”

“Er… yes, Professor,” Scorpius answered, following Yann’s lead. This woman was terrifying. She seemed like the sort of person who could lose their temper in an instant. Scorpius didn’t fancy being hit with her wand like Yann had been.

But instead of sneering at him, she smiled and gave a short nod, as though the pair were on fairly good terms.

“I’ll forgive your excitement, Fredericks,” she said wryly. “Seeing as you have your King back.”

Yann seemed to deflate with relief.

“But if I ever catch you talking at breakfast again, unless you are being addressed by a professor, you will go straight to the dungeons, do you understand me?”

“Yes, Professor,” Yann assured her, back straight, keen to look as respectful as possible.

“Good,” the woman said, and then with another glance at Scorpius, she walked away.
After that, the hall fell into total silence. The only noises heard were the occasional whispered requests to pass plates or the salt and pepper. Scorpius wasn’t hungry in the slightest, but he didn’t want to draw more attention to himself by sitting there and eating nothing, so he reached out for a piece of toast.

Before his hand had even touched the toast rack, at least three students rushed to slide it to him, eager to save him the trouble.

Scorpius had been too afraid to even thank them, in case he was sent to the dungeons for doing so.

+++ 

Classes went on as usual, only there was no chattering in the corridors on the way to each lesson. Students travelled the school in complete silence and bowed their heads every time they passed a professor. Scorpius thought it was probably due to a mixture of respect and utter terror.

Various professors walked around brandishing their wands like a threat. Unsurprisingly, none of the students pushed their luck around these fierce men and women in their dark robes and hoods.

Scorpius’s morning had been spent in Charms. Upon reaching the classroom, several students had rushed to take the seats beside him. A fight had almost broken out over who would get to sit on his right hand side. Scorpius merely stared at this odd behaviour, trying not to look as baffled as he felt.

Today’s lesson, taught by a professor named Ornerish, was dedicated to teaching the class how to correctly use a Fire-Making charm.

Scorpius had been excited, despite himself, to be learning what had previously been a fifth-year charm, but his hopes of having a moderately normal few hours were destroyed when the professor suggested a list of appropriate situations in which to practice the charm. They included setting alight Muggle houses, Muggle cars, and any ‘pro-Muggle propaganda’ they might spot while out and about.

Horrified, Scorpius kept his head down and refused to talk to anyone. Luckily, his classmates seemed to respect his decision and kept their distance.

+++ 

Lunchtime was a far less formal affair than breakfast and lessons. It seemed to be the only time of the day when the students were allowed to interact more freely. Scorpius noticed that when he had left his Charms lesson and gone to escape to the common room, a group of students had formed behind him, and followed him all the way along a corridor.

Scorpius spun around, expecting the worst out of sheer habit. But he was met once again by respectful, admiring faces.

“Hey, King,” said one of the boys who had pushed to the front of the group. Was that Karl Jenkins? The boy who had bullied he and Albus relentlessly for years? Scorpius wasn’t sure he’d ever seen him smile like this before, without a hint of malice. “Where you headed?”

King? Why did they keep saying that? Scorpius frowned.

“I, erm - I was just going to the common room. To have a rest. After… you know.”

“Lake got you pretty bad?” asked Yann, who had appeared at his side like some form of bodyguard, ready to fight back the others.
“Um - yes,” Scorpius agreed.

“It was pretty amazing of you to get out of that one alive,” Yann said, and the other students around him nodded their heads in earnest agreement. “I mean, that kid drowned last year after being in there for about twenty seconds. Dementors and that lake don’t mix.”

“To be fair,” said Karl, stepping up to Scorpius’s other side protectively, seemingly competing with Yann for the position of bodyguard. “That little Mudblood lover was asking for it.”

“She was only a first year,” pointed out a girl Scorpius didn’t recognise. He was sure he’d never seen her in the other reality.

“Yeah, but she ended up there for a reason. Her parents should have taught her some sense instead of spending time with Mudbloods.”

Most of the group laughed.

That harsh, horrible word put Scorpius on edge. It was one of the foulest slurs he could think of, and to hear it thrown about so casually was jarring. His father had expressly forbidden him from ever using it, not that Scorpius had needed the instruction. It upset him quite a lot that some people were made to feel so badly simply because of their parentage. He had never wanted to be a part of that. Never.

Were these students really his friends? Were they truly the people he had chosen to associate with in this reality? They seemed… cruel. Cruel and intolerant and, well, just not very nice. He and Albus would have stayed as far away from them as possible.

“A student died?” Scorpius asked, trying to sound like a person who had momentarily forgotten this small detail, instead of a boy who was absolutely horrified at the very notion of a student drowning in the Hogwarts lake.

“Well she was hardly a student when she drowned. She would have been expelled the moment Umbridge found out about her parents anyway,” Yann said reasonably.

Suddenly, Madam Pomfrey’s previous words in the hospital wing came back to Scorpius:

‘Do I need to tell them to look for another student in the lake? Mr Malfoy, please, if there’s a chance they could still be…’

’Not another one.’

“I… suppose so,” Scorpius forced himself to say, trying to stop his legs from shaking.

“And nobody could ever prove she was pushed,” Karl added, with a nasty smile. He turned to Scorpius and gave him an affectionate and approving shove.

‘Your father may have covered it up the first time, but again?’

Scorpius felt suddenly dizzy. The world began to spin. Had Madam Pomfrey implied what he thought she had…?

Scorpius felt like he was going to be sick. His legs wobbled dangerously.

“I need to lie down. Sorry. I really…”

“You heard the guy,” Yann Fredericks said, reaching out to pat Scorpius on the shoulder. “You lot
are crowding him. Back off, will you?”

The group seemed very reluctant to go.

“I’ll come with,” Yann added. “To keep you company.”

“You’re such a suck up, Yann,” one of the girls in the crowd declared. “You won’t get round King like that.”

King again?

“No, I… thank you, Yann,” Scorpius found himself saying. “That would be very nice. I think I’ve got some concussion from the lake.”

“I’ll take you back to the hospital wing,” Karl Jenkins volunteered nobly.

“He doesn’t need the hospital wing,” Yann declared, pushing Karl away. “You think the Scorpion King’s gonna keel over after one swim in the lake? You’ve seen what he’s recovered from before. The giant squid’s just lucky King didn’t run into him out there, or he’d be soup by now.”

What had he recovered from before?

The group melted away with disappointment, calling out well-wishes as they went. Yann led Scorpius down the corridor and towards the former Slytherin common room. Several students looked up at Scorpius as he passed them, many nodding their heads or giving him a wave.

“Nice one, King,” said one little girl as he passed her, even though he hadn’t done anything.

“Um… thanks?” Scorpius responded, before Yann shooed the girl away.

As they reached the stone wall of the Slytherin Dungeon, Yann paused to give the password.

“Bellatrix Lestrange,” he said clearly, and the familiar Slytherin door appeared.

Yann immediately pushed some younger students off the best sofa as they entered, so that Scorpius could sit down. The children went without fuss, scurrying away like this was normal.

“Sit down in front of the fire. You want some more cushions?” Yann offered, picking up the most comfy one he could find.

“No, thank you.”

“Go on,” Yann said, putting the cushion firmly behind Scorpius’s back. Scorpius felt it was best not to make a fuss.

Yann sat down at the other end of the sofa seeming oddly proud of himself. He kept looking around the common room like he wanted to be seen.

Scorpius glanced around the familiar room as well. It had hardly changed at all. In an alien reality, it was a small comfort to sit on Albus’s former favourite sofa and try to sort through his thoughts.

There were a great many things Scorpius needed to know. And a whole host of other things he very much wanted to know. He wondered how much he could ask Yann without him becoming suspicious…

“So, er, Yann,” Scorpius said, trying to sound casual. “I need to know some stuff - because of the
concussion, or whatever the lake did. This is going to sound mad but… could you tell me about the Battle of Hogwarts?"

Yann raised an eyebrow but looked more than happy to help.

"Blimey, okay, well the Dark Lord finally took back Hogwarts. There was a load of fighting, a ton of people died. Nobody important aside from the obvious."

"The obvious?"

"We lost Bellatrix Lestrange," Yann revealed solemnly. "But her sacrifice will always be remembered. Bravest witch of all time, hands down."

Scorpius made a huge effort not to grimace at that gross misjudgement of the infamous Bellatrix Lestrange. His father had been terrified of her, even though she was his aunt. To her, unlike the rest of his father's family, family loyalty had come second to her blind, single-minded devotion to Lord Voldemort, which Draco maintained set her apart from even some of the very worst of their ancestors.

Remembering their unfortunate (if thankfully distant) family connection, Scorpius tried to change his expression of appalled disgust into something that could have passed for vaguely respectful mourning.

"But I thought Harry Potter was killed?" Scorpius asked, frowning.

"Like I said," Yann repeated with a grin. "Aside from Bellatrix, nobody important."

"Oh, of course. Yes - I’m with you. Okay, but how exactly did that happen? How did Harry die?"

Yann sat up a little straighter as he explained.

"Voldemort killed him. He was a coward in the end. Everyone soon saw the truth about him. Even a load of people on his side came over to the Dark Lord. And Voldemort forgave them, too. Well, some of them. The ones that deserved to be forgiven. I mean, was that merciful or what?"

"Very - very merciful" Scorpius agreed, nodding. "Okay, what about Cedric Diggory?"

Yann spotted a small spider creeping slowly across the floor by his feet. In a sudden, shocking movement, he stamped on the ground, hard, making Scorpius jump.

"What about him?" Yann asked, lifting his foot at peering at the squished spider with interest.

"Is he… okay?" Scorpius asked, trying not to look at the dead spider, determined to stay on task.

Scorpius winced the moment he’d asked the question, knowing the phrasing was odd. But unlike the last reality, or the real world, Yann didn’t decide to mock him for his strange question. Instead, he took it all rather seriously.

"As far as I know. Isn't he supposed to be in Germany right now? Some secret business. Bit useless if you ask me," Yann said.

"Useless?"

"He was one of the lot that fought for the right side during the Battle of Hogwarts, but he wasn’t up to much. Typical Hufflepuff. I mean, I know you’re not supposed to say that now, but they were pretty pathetic. If I’d lived back then, I’d have been a Slytherin, I bet you anything.”
“Voldemort’s side?” Scorpius asked, too distracted to break the ‘bad’ news that Yann had indeed been Sorted in two separate realities and both times had ended up in Gryffindor.

“Yeah, I said the right side, didn’t I?”

Scorpius blinked.

“But why? Why did Cedric become a Death Eater?” Scorpius asked, frowning again.

“Why does anyone?” Yann asked him in return. “Because it’s the right thing to do.”

“The right thing to do?” Scorpius repeated.

“You know it is. I’ve already told you I’m joining straight after graduation, haven’t I? They only take the best, but I think I can hack it. I just need to up my marks in Dark Arts. It’s easy for you. That Dark Magic stuff comes naturally. You don't know how lucky you are with a dad like yours, King.”

Yann paused to shoo some first years away from the sofa, his expression contorting into something fierce and dangerous. Once the first years had obediently moved, he returned to normal again.

“I’m going to try and make a good impression. It should help me along,” Yann said. Scorpius frowned, unsure what he was talking about.

“Make a good impression on who? Help you with what?”

“Being a Death Eater. Voldemort’s going to do one of his school visits in two weeks. He wants to inspect us. You know he is, King. You were the one who told me about it.”

The idea of Voldemort conducting a school visit was one of the most surreal and frightening things Scorpius could think of.

He could just imagine Albus’s response to that in his head: *Great. I’ll make sure to polish my shoes for the occasion. I’d hate for the Dark Lord to see me looking scruffy.*

Scorpius forced himself to stop thinking of Albus. It was too distracting. He had a job to do.

“And, er… can I just clarify - why are you calling me King?” Scorpius ventured tentatively.

“Oh Potter,” Yann said, whistling. Scorpius did his best not to react to the fact that his best friend's last name was apparently some form of curse word now. “The lake really did mess with your head. You’re the Scorpion King. It’s your title. You’re like - a legend, King. A proper legend.”

“I’m a legend?”

Yann stared at Scorpius with concern.

“Maybe you *should* go back to the hospital wing?” he suggested. “Not saying that you need to, but - well - it’s Divination next - so you wouldn’t be missing much.”

“You know what,” Scorpius said numbly. “I think that might be a good idea.”

+++ 

Scorpius spent his third day back in the hospital wing. Madam Pomfrey did not look pleased to see he’d returned. The sight of him seemed to bring her considerable stress. Still, she sorted him out
the most comfortable bed she could manage, and told him to rest.

Instead of sleeping, as he was instructed to do, Scorpius stared up at the ceiling of the hospital wing and considered his situation carefully. Oddly, he hadn’t panicked yet. Aside from the initial moment he’d lost Albus in the lake and discovered Dolores Umbridge standing beside him, he’d been surprisingly calm. Three days with no emotional meltdown was surely deserving of some medal for courage?

Perhaps he was in such a state of anxiety that the panic no longer touched him? Or perhaps the presence of the Dementors had dulled his hysteria? Certainly he was filled with an empty form of dread. He had lost his appetite, found it difficult to sleep, and was merely going through the motions as though in a dream.

What would Albus have done?

Well, for starters, Scorpius thought, he probably would have got himself hung upside down in the dungeons after about ten minutes of this reality. And following that? Honestly? Scorpius could see Albus trying to make a break for it through the Hogwarts grounds. He wouldn’t have been able to stand this new Hogwarts, it would have broken him.

But it was all nonsense anyway, Scorpius reminded himself, because in this reality Albus didn’t exist to be sulky and sarcastic and contradictory and wonderful. And he wouldn’t have wanted him to, either. Albus deserved better.

It was a sign of quite how dire the situation was that Scorpius counted Albus’s fading from the timeline as a relief of any kind.

Scorpius still had the Time-Turner. He kept it on his person at all times, tucked into his pocket or underneath his robes. It was the one item which was preventing his sanity from dissolving completely. It was going to bring back Albus. It was (somehow) going to sort this mess out. If only Scorpius could figure out how best to use it…

Having an ally would have helped. But Scorpius could think of no one to turn to. After all, in this reality, who remained to aid him?

The only person he could think of was his father, but until he knew more about how his dad might react to his request, Scorpius felt it was best to keep it to himself.

Gathering information would have to be enough for now. It might not have been a grand plan, but it was the first step. If only Scorpius could understand what had gone wrong with time, what their actions in the Triwizard Tournament had done, things would be clearer.

+++  

At lunchtime, Scorpius received a visit from Karl Jenkins and Yann Fredericks. They both arrived, arms full of sweets and chocolate, seemingly fighting each other for the honour of standing closest to his bed.

“They’re saying you might have been hexed,” Yann said, without preamble. “That it’s messed with your head.”

“Oh, I feel fine,” Scorpius lied, sitting up in bed and accepting a Chocolate Frog from Yann. “I think I just needed some time out.”

“If anyone’s hexed you it’ll be those Dumbledore rebels,” Yann declared with a disgusted shake of
his head.

“If they’ve touched our Scorpion King they’re dead,” Karl said, cracking his knuckles. “Anyone tries to mess with you’ll have us to answer to.”

“That’s - very nice of you,” Scorpius admitted, understanding and almost appreciating the strange sort of kindness behind those very aggressive words.

“Nice?” Karl repeated, like the word was alien to him. “It’s justice. Old fashioned idiots trying to get to you just because you want to move forward and help the world. It’s messed up.”

“I - what? I want to help the world?”

“Come off it, King,” Yann said, patting Scorpius companionably on the shoulder (much to Karl’s displeasure). “You’re the number one. You know Umbridge’ll pull some strings so you can get into leadership. You’re a Malfoy, right? And without you, well, let’s be honest, this school would be overrun by vermin.”

Feeling sick, Scorpius unwrapped his Chocolate Frog. A card slipped out of the packet and onto the bedcovers. Scorpius picked it up and saw an image of a fierce, dark haired wizard snarling out of the card.

Scorpius recognised the face of Antonin Dolohov before he’d read the caption beneath the moving image, declaring this evil, intolerant murderer a ‘hero of the Battle of Hogwarts’.

Scorpius had read all about Antonin Dolohov. He had murdered Remus Lupin at the Battle of Hogwarts, and wounded countless others. Before that he had served a long sentence in Azkaban for his crimes, a sentence which had never been completed because with the rise of Voldemort, Dolohov had escaped in the notorious mass break-out of 1996. He had taken part in the battle of the Department of Mysteries and was returned to Azkaban shortly after, but following a second break-out in 1997 had escaped once again. He had served as a faithful and despicable Death Eater to Voldemort in the nightmare year that followed, torturing men, women, and children indiscriminately.

He should have been defeated at the Battle of Hogwarts, after his murder of Remus Lupin. The history books said Professor Flitwick had trapped him in a full body bind and then brought him to justice, sending him to Azkaban for the final time, where Antonin would die in custody.

“Sweet, is that Dolohov?” Karl asked, noticing the card.

Scorpius held up the card, unable to speak.

“I’ll swap you a Fenrir Greyback for it?”

“I… you can have it,” Scorpius said quietly, taking a few deep breaths to stop himself from being sick.

“Cheers, King,” Karl said brightly. “Although you’d have been doing me a favour taking Greyback. Who wants that werewolf scum in their collection?”

“I’ve heard they’re taking him off the cards,” Yann said. “Because of the complaints.”

Scorpius bit the head off his chocolate frog. It was what Albus would have advised. Chocolate was always his solution to panic.
Madam Pomfrey bustled up to Scorpius’s bed with a stern expression.

“Mr Malfoy needs rest,” she declared, shooing the boys away with her hands. “You’ve been here long enough.”

Yann looked irritated, and Karl openly made a rude gesture at Madam Pomfrey, who seemed hurt but not surprised by this behaviour.

“Madam Pomfrey’s probably right,” Scorpius said, feeling a sudden need to support the harassed-looking woman. “I could do with a sleep. But - thank you - for the sweets.”

“My idea,” Yann said proudly.

“Who carried the stuff here?” Karl demanded.

“We both did!”

“Yeah, but who carried most of it?”

“Oh, come on. You know it was my idea-“

“Thank you,” Scorpius said again, cutting in swiftly before an argument commenced over his favour. He wished the two boys would leave him in peace. He needed to think. He needed to recover his wits.

Madam Pomfrey placed her hands on her hips and stood pointedly behind Yann and Karl.

“Oh, all right,” Karl said rudely. “We’re going, woman.”

The boys began to walk out of the hospital wing, but Yann turned around, suddenly remembering something.

“You don’t have to worry about your stuff going down the pot while you’re in here, King. We’ll keep the Mudblood-lovers in line for you,” he called across the hospital wing.

“My stuff?”

“Yeah,” Karl agreed, wanting to show that he too was willing to help out. “Just cause you’re in here doesn’t mean they get a breather.”

Before Scorpius could respond to that (really quite horrific sentiment), Madam Pomfrey succeeded in banishing the boys from her hospital wing with a scowl on her face.

Scorpius wanted to explain to her that he had nothing to do with this. That maybe some version of him had got involved, for some reason he couldn’t understand, but that he was a good person. He was. Just like Albus said: he was kind.

He couldn’t bear for Madam Pomfrey to look at him like he was a nasty, aggressive, bully of a boy.

But nor could he afford for her to find out the truth. His lake-induced memory loss story would only work for so long. In a few days time people would start to question why he hadn’t recovered, why he wasn’t his usual self.

Scorpius just needed to figure out who that ‘usual self’ was.

+++
When Scorpius returned to his bed after a trip to the bathroom, he found the bed beside his own had been taken by a person he recognised. Beside him was a fifth year student who had formerly been in Ravenclaw. She had shiny black hair and a pale, heart-shaped face. Scorpius had seen her in the library quite a few times, he was sure of it.

In truth, she didn’t look her best in this reality. To start with her eyes were currently swollen shut and she seemed to be in some pain.

This young woman was clever, at least she had been in the other reality. Perhaps she could give him more information? Hopefully, Scorpius lay on his side, wondering how to begin a conversation with this older student who in the other reality liked to pretend he didn’t exist.

“So, what are you in for?” Scorpius asked, trying to sound like the confident legend he was supposed to be.

The girl jumped as soon as she heard his voice.

“Scorpius Malfoy?” she asked, sounding starstruck. She bought her hands up to swiftly flatten her hair.

“Um - yes - hello.”

Scorpius gave a little wave before realising that she wouldn’t be able to see him.

“Conjunctivitis Curse,” the girl revealed, stammering a little. “I’m Miya. I’ve played against you in Quidditch before. I’m a Chaser. Do you remember me?”

He played Quidditch? How was that possible? He was utterly terrible at all kinds of sports.

“I… no,” Scorpius admitted, feeling the truth was the safest option. “I’m in for some memory loss. It’s… a bit complicated.”

Miya looked incredibly disappointed by his answer. Clearly she had wanted to be remembered. But despite this disappointment, she managed to put on a sympathetic face for his benefit.

“So, how come you ended up with the Conjunctivitis Curse?” Scorpius asked curiously, thinking it was probably best not to go straight in with his questions.

“I messed up my Transfiguration mock,” Miya revealed casually.

Scorpius almost choked on his own saliva.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Professor Dune was expecting me to get at least an Exceeds Expectations, but I only got Acceptable so…”

Miya trailed off with a sigh. It was the sort of sigh a person might give before revealing they’d been given an inconvenient yet fairly-deserved detention.

“Are you saying that a Professor cursed you?” Scorpius clarified, feeling his skin go icy cold.

“Yes, but I probably deserved it. She’s okay, Professor Dune. This could have been much worse. I’ve had my Oculus Potion now, so it should sort itself out in an hour or so.”

Scorpius forced himself not to react in the way he wanted to. After all, the Scorpion King didn’t
sound like the sort of guy to flinch at the idea of a simple curse. In truth, he sounded like the sort of
guy who had probably administered a few choice curses himself…

“Can I ask you a question?” Scorpius asked, as assertively as possible.

“Of course!” Miya said eagerly. “Anything!”

Okay, so that was weird…

His status really had risen in this reality. This older, fairly attractive young woman seemed
desperate to help him out. She hadn’t grimaced at him or mocked him once.

“Can you tell me about Cedric Diggory?” Scorpius asked.

“Cedric Diggory?” Miya repeated. “Well, there isn’t much to tell. I heard he was on some mission
for Voldemort. In France? Or maybe it was Germany. Somewhere in Europe. Probably best he’s
not here to be honest. I mean, he’s gorgeous, but… well, a bit scary.”

Miya winced and suddenly wished back her words, remembering who it was she was talking to.

“I mean, no disrespect meant,” she said hastily. “I wasn’t trying to - you know…”

Scorpius ignored her back-pedalling, too interested in what else she could tell him.

“But how did that happen? Why did he become a Death Eater?”

“I mean, I don’t know for certain or anything, but I heard that Hogwarts back before Voldemort
was a pretty awful place. People used to get bullied for stupid stuff like what House you were,
instead of things that really matter. They were letting in Muggle-borns and everything back then,
pretending it was normal. Can you imagine that?”

“No,” Scorpius lied. “So Cedric got bullied?”

“Yeah, I mean he lost the Triwizard Tournament so I guess that was rough.”

“He lost the tournament?”

“I think so.”

At that moment a strange man in scarlet robes swept into the room. He had jet black hair, slicked
back sharply. His eyes were small and shiny. He looked incredibly impressive. Madam Pomfrey
rushed after him looking worried.

“Scorpius Malfoy?” the man asked in a deep, no-nonsense sort of voice. Scorpius felt his chest
tighten. This man looked frighteningly businesslike. He had walked in with great purpose and was
surveying Scorpius with scrutiny. Miya had fallen silent at the mere sound of his voice. Who was
he? What did he want?

Had he been discovered?

“Um, yes,” Scorpius said, numbly. “I mean, that’s me. Obviously.”

“The Headmistress says I’m to check you for curses and hexes.”

Scorpius made a conscious effort not to glance down at his pocket where the Time-Turner was
hidden. Would the spells involved in this scan pick up the magical object?
“I’m sure it’s nothing…” Scorpius said, trying to wave the idea away. “I’m feeling much better already - really -“

“I’ve got my orders,” the man said.

Scorpius didn’t want to be scanned for anything. It was far too risky. He sat up slightly and narrowed his eyes in what he hoped was an imperious manner.

“I said I was feeling fine,” Scorpius said, trying to emulate his father at his most formidable. “Did you not hear me?”

The man looked almost amused by his tone. He allowed himself the smallest of smiles. This boy was a Malfoy all right…

“Stay very still,” the man said firmly. “This won’t take a moment.”

Unable to do anything else, Scorpius obediently lay flat on his back again.

Scorpius tried not to panic as the man pulled out his wand and incanted a soft spell under his breath. He began sweeping his wand through the air above Scorpius’s body, eyes narrowed with concentration. Over and over again he moved his wand in elegant motions, pausing a few times over Scorpius’s face and chest. Occasionally his wand would stop moving, and Scorpius’s breath would catch… only for him to mutter something and continue.

“All clear,” the man said after a moment, more to himself than Scorpius. Madam Pomfrey looked relieved.

“I did say so,” she remarked. “I know how to spot a curse.”

“Headmistress’s orders,” the man repeated. “His father wanted to be sure.”

“Is my father here?” Scorpius asked hopefully. Both Madam Pomfrey and the red-robed man looked at him like he was mad.

“I hardly think that Draco Lucius Malfoy can take time away from the Ministry for something like this,” the man declared with a scoff.

His father was at the Ministry? What was he doing there?

“And,” Scorpius asked tentatively, trying his best not to get his hopes up. “Is my mother around…”

Madam Pomfrey looked deeply concerned by his words. Beside him, Miya gave a little gasp of shock.

“Your mother is dead,” Madam Pomfrey declared quietly. “You do remember that, don’t you, Mr Malfoy?”

“I…” Scorpius swallowed down his disappointment and nodded his head. “Yes, of course… my head is - it’s not quite…”

“One more day to get him on his feet,” the red-robed man told Madam Pomfrey firmly. “And then the Ministry gets involved. His father wants him back the way he was. And if you can’t manage it, then perhaps you’ve outstayed your welcome here at Hogwarts?”

Madam Pomfrey bristled, going red in the face and straightening her robes.
Scorpius couldn’t believe the man had said such a thing to Madam Pomfrey, let alone in front of two students.

“I’m competent at my job,” Madam Pomfrey defended herself quietly. “I’ve worked here for years without any complaints so far.”

“Then consider this your first complaint,” the man said sharply. “Do you know how close you are to being removed?”

He moved in closer to Madam Pomfrey, utterly ignoring her personal space.

“I’ve heard some worrying reports about you,” he said quietly. “That you’re healing students who’ve been punished before getting permission from Umbridge.”

“Nonsense,” Madam Pomfrey lied.

“Yes, well I hope it is nonsense,” the man snarled, finally stepping back. “For your sake.

He inclined his head at Scorpius in a respectful manner, didn’t deign to look at Madam Pomfrey, and then swept from the room.

+++ 

There was nothing else for it, Scorpius decided as he lay in his hospital bed that night. He’d already wasted enough time. There was no way he could spend another day hiding in the hospital wing, trying to figure out the next stage of his plan, not when Madam Pomfrey’s job (and potentially much more) was on the line.

All that he could do was try to blend in, to live within this mess, to adapt. He still needed information. He needed facts. He needed someone to help him, if such a person existed in this reality.

He had to become the Scorpion King. On the outside at least.

In this reality he was clearly a popular student. Not only did he have people fighting for his friendship, but he was quite certain that several of the girls, even the older ones seemed especially keen to see him around. Perhaps even a couple of the boys.

He had a gaggle of adoring students, a (frankly ridiculous but apparently affectionate) nickname, power, respect, and if the red-robed man had been correct, a hugely influential father.

It should have been wonderful. It should have been everything he wanted.

But there was no Albus.

Being a loser with Albus Potter was a far better deal than being the Scorpion King with students falling at his feet. Scorpius had known this already, but the confirmation only made him miss Albus more.

It was all very well to have a pair of bodyguards, but they weren’t friends. Yes, they seemed to care about him, but they were cruel, and aggressive, and seemed to admire his name more than who he was as a person.

In this reality, he was living the life his father had once known, only ten times worse (or better). He was the sort of assertive, aggressive, charismatic boy he expected his father might have been proud
But he wasn't proud of himself.

Despite there being no Houses anymore, Scorpius was a Slytherin. And that meant he had to be cunning. He had to be resourceful. He would have to think carefully on his next move to make sure he didn’t make a mistake. He had one shot at getting Albus back, and he wasn’t going to waste it.

+++ 

That night, Scorpius dreamed of Albus, floating with him under the Hogwarts lake, grinning and waving at him with a webbed hand. His dark hair stuck up absurdly in the water. His eyes were especially green.

But when Scorpius reached out to him, a current began to pull Albus away, up and up and up until he was a dot, rising to the surface of the water. He watched Albus drifting, unable to move his arms and legs. He wanted to join him, to break the surface too, but he was too heavy and his limbs wouldn’t work the way he needed them to.

And then a first year girl dropped suddenly, out of nowhere, like a stone, into the murky depths beside him. She was wearing her dark Hogwarts robes, her eyes closed like she was asleep. She was drowning…

Scorpius tried to reach her so he could swim her up to the surface, so he could save her, but his arms and legs still wouldn’t move. He glanced down and saw they were bound by the golden chain of the Time-Turner.

“I’m sorry,” he called out. “I never - I didn’t - I’m so sorry!”

But the girl sank lifelessly into the darkness below, leaving Scorpius, alone, in the eerily silent lake.

Chapter End Notes

I get so nervous about posting my own chapters! It's actually quite hard to post them but hey ho.

Comments make me so happy! Please do leave one for me!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Scorpius woke the next morning to the worrying news that Professor Umbridge wanted to see him. Madam Pomfrey informed him that the Headmistress was expecting him before breakfast, and would not tolerate tardiness. Following their first meeting, in which she had pulled him from then Great Lake (and introduced him to the horrifying concept of 'Voldemort Day'), Scorpius was more than a little wary of what a second meeting might entail.

He washed, dressed in his new, stylish robes, checked he still had his Time-Turner safely in his pocket (he did), and then left the hospital wing.

He hoped that the Headmistress’s office would still be in the same place, because he imagined getting caught wandering in entirely the wrong direction would have given him away.

Scorpius had only been to the Headmistress’s office a few times before. The worst and most memorable visit had been after the death of his mother. He remembered vividly being called to see Professor McGonagall on the first day of his third year, being offered a biscuit from a tin on her desk, her words of consolation and concern, her assurances that the school would do all they could to help him should he require any extra time for completing his essays or assistance with study.

It had been very nice of her, really, but at the time Scorpius had spent the whole visit wishing he could leave again. Albus had been waiting loyally outside for him in the Gargoyle Corridor. He had wanted nothing more than to be excused so he could escape to his utterly tactless, well-meaning, emotionally clumsy best friend. Being with Albus made everything so much more normal. Somehow it made everything just the tiniest bit more okay.

As Scorpius reached that same dismal Gargoyle Corridor Albus had once lingered in for his sake, he noticed an immediate flaw in the arrangement.

The last time he had been in this corridor, he’d been equipped with the latest password, which he had spoken aloud in front of the ugly stone gargoyle at the end of the corridor, causing the creature to spring to life and hop aside.

He still remembered Albus patting him awkwardly on the shoulder before he entered the spinning staircase. Scorpius had caught sight of Albus as he travelled up and out of sight. His best friend had been standing, watching the doors close, hands in his pockets, green eyes full of sympathy and support.

But this time he had no such magic word (and no such wonderful friend to calm his nerves). Madam Pomfrey hadn’t passed it on. Obviously the Scorpius from this reality knew the password.
already.

Scorpius stopped in front of the (really very ugly) stone gargoyle, feeling ridiculous.

He would have to think up a password. He was a Slytherin, he could do that. He would use his intelligence and cunning to achieve his goal. Easy peasy.

Okay, the office belonged to Dolores Umbridge…

“Voldemort Day?” Scorpius suggested. The large gargoyle did absolutely nothing.

No, it was too specific.

“Voldemort?”

The gargoyle continued to stare blankly out at him. He supposed that one had been too easy. Anyone could have guessed it.

Scorpius scanned his brain for facts about Dolores Umbridge. All those history books he read in his spare time must have contained something that could help him…

Back in her Hogwarts days she had been Sorted into Slytherin (unfortunately). Following her education she had gone on to work for the Ministry of Magic as an intern for the Improper Use of Magic Office. Scorpius knew that she had worked hard until she managed to become Head of the Office. It was one of her only vaguely positive qualities, in Scorpius’s opinion.

After that she had worked her way through the Ministry, advancing through the ranks by pretending to be a pure-blood. Rumour had it she cut off entirely from her Muggle mother and Squib brother out of shame, desperate to hide her Muggle connections. Hadn't she even changed official documents to hide the truth of her parentage? Scorpius was sure he'd read about her bribing and threatening officials to keep her secret. Clearly blood purity meant a lot to her. Far, far too much...

“Pure blood?” Scorpius tried, hopefully. Still the gargoyle did not move.

Okay, what else did he know? Well, he was pretty certain Dolores Umbridge had been the person responsible for the hateful anti-werewolf legislation back in 1993. What might a person who hated werewolves use as their password?

“Half breeds?”

The gargoyle remained still.

*Oh, come on, Scorpius! Think!*

As Headmistress of Hogwarts, following the overthrow of Albus Dumbledore, Dolores Umbridge had done her utmost to grab as much power as she possibly could. She had set up the Inquisitorial Squad (of which his father had been a member), claiming the group was for those who supported the Ministry and wanted to restore order. In reality, she had used the group to attempt to root out and punish wrongdoers, and those loyal to Albus Dumbledore. The students not in Umbridge’s fickle favour had suffered horribly under her leadership of the school.

“The Inquisitorial Squad?”

Still no spiral staircase. No anything.
Scorpius was growing increasingly anxious. If he couldn’t work out the password soon then he was going to have to use the concussion excuse again. He hated to have to do it, because of what that could mean for poor Madam Pomfrey, but he couldn’t be discovered. His situation remaining a secret was the most important thing. Because if he was found and the Time-Turner confiscated, the world would be stuck like this forever…

Thinking desperately, Scorpius tried to put himself in Umbridge’s shoes. She admired loyalty and those with strong political beliefs (as long as they aligned with hers, of course). Perhaps the password would be a sort of test? The word could be something that those not entirely supportive of her and her cause would never even think of speaking aloud…

“Mudblood?” Scorpius said clearly, feeling sick at even saying the word. It echoed through the corridor around him. Guilt rose up in Scorpius’s chest, even though he knew it was ridiculous.

The gargoyle did not move. Scorpius let out a sigh of frustration and considered giving the ugly great gargoyle a kick to see if that might make a difference. It was what Albus would have done… Which actually meant it was probably an urge he should resist.

“Ah, Scorpius, you’re early,” came a brisk, high-pitched voice from behind him.

Feeling really very glad he hadn’t lost his temper, Scorpius spun around sharply, hands forced neatly to his sides.

Dolores Umbridge was trotting along the corridor towards him, a large frog-like smile on her face, pink heels clicking loudly on the stone floor. Today she was wearing a hideous black velvet bow atop her head.

She held an unusually short and stubby wand in her right hand, brandishing it as though she may have used it mere moments ago. Scorpius didn’t like to think about who may have been on the receiving end of Umbridge’s anger that morning.

For a strange moment he found himself hoping it hadn’t been Yann or Karl, before he snapped himself out of it.

Scorpius decided it was best not to speak first. Umbridge was clearly a woman who liked to be in control and he feared it might rile her. Besides, he needed to judge her mood as quickly as possible, to get a feel for the atmosphere so he could take his cue from there.

“I do so appreciate punctuality,” Umbridge declared with satisfaction, standing at Scorpius’s side. Somehow at the lake Scorpius hadn’t appreciated quite how small she was. He had to look down to see her face.

“After you,” Umbridge said, gesturing at the gargoyle with a sinister smile on her lips.

Scorpius hung back, panicked. She wanted him to say the password right in front of her, didn’t she? Was this a test? Did she know?

“What is it?” Umbridge asked, raising an eyebrow, still smirking.

“I…” Scorpius faltered.

Umbridge broke into a simpering little giggle at the sound of his hesitance.

“Surely you’re not nervous?” Umbridge asked, sounding delighted at the prospect. “Do I frighten
you so much? After all this time? Surely you can’t think I’d hold your silliness in the lake the other
day against you?”

Scorpius knew that responding to that would have led him into a trap however he chose to answer,
and so he remained silent.

“Well, that is interesting,” Umbridge remarked, peering up at him with greedy curiosity. “Come
now, Scorpius, you’re not in any trouble. I only want to have a discussion.”

Scorpius nodded his head, not having to act the fear he felt as he looked at this tiny, unpredictable,
frankly evil woman.

Umbridge turned suddenly to the gargoyle and said clearly: “Fluffy little kittens”

Scorpius almost choked.

The gargoyle obediently hopped aside and the wall behind it split in two, revealing the entrance to
a small spiral staircase which was moving like an escalator.

“Go on,” Umbridge said, putting a hand on his shoulder and pushing him onto the first step. “We
haven’t got all day.”

Together they travelled up through the Headmistress’s Tower, to where Umbridge’s office was
located. Scorpius felt it was best to remain silent, but Umbridge hummed a cheery little tune to
herself, sounding incredibly lively for this time of the morning.

The staircase stopped moving as he reached the top. Scorpius stepped out quickly, moving politely
aside for Umbridge, who gave him a simpering little smile and went towards the large, shiny oak
door ahead of them. She opened the door with a sigh of satisfaction, and Scorpius followed her.

The moment Scorpius’s entered the Headmistress’s office, he understood the password entirely.
Scorpius had never seen the place look so incredibly vile. The walls were covered in ghastly pink
wallpaper and were decorated with various china plates on which watercolour kittens pranced and
slept. There were doilies everywhere. Vases of wilting flowers stood on every available free
surface.

Near the fireplace was a new carpet, a large pink and grey monstrosity on which garish flowers and
more kittens were embroidered.

Never had Scorpius’s been more aware of his own snobbishness when it came to interior decor
than in that moment.

Umbridge strolled over to her desk and settled on the large, comfortable chair behind it, on which
was a baby pink tasselled cushion.

As Scorpius waited to be addressed, he noticed that the wallpaper was lumpy in places. The more
he stared, the more he realised that every so often a rectangular shape must have existed beneath it,
because the paper strained oddly around each rectangle.

It took him only a moment to realise what should have been visible to him by now.

Had she covered up the portraits? The portraits of all the former Headmasters and Headmistresses
of Hogwarts?

Was Albus Dumbledore under there somewhere, muted by garish pink paper? Was Armando
Dippet currently covered in wallpaper paste?

She must have been unable to remove them, Scorpius realised with satisfaction. He knew that certain magical portraits could be tricky like that. His father had tried to remove a great many Malfoy ancestors from the halls of Malfoy Manor, but to no avail. Instead of taking them down, his father had ordered some specially designed curtains to hide the faces of the men and women he had once so admired. Scorpius had been warned never to open those curtains unless his mother or father were present. He supposed his father feared he might end up listening to one of them.

Scorpius stood respectfully before Umbridge’s desk. Usually he would have nervously allowed his hands to disappear within his robe sleeves, but not today. Today he was Scorpius Malfoy: aka the Scorpion King. He thought of his father, his impressive, dignified stance, and tried to emulate him. He parted his feet slightly and allowed his hands to meet behind his back, chest forward, chin up.

He wasn’t quite sure what to do with his expression, and so he tried to keep it as blank as possible, hoping he didn’t appear as anxious and pensive as he felt.

Before looking up and addressing him, Umbridge lined up a couple of pink quills on her desk, smiling as she managed to get them in a pleasing arrangement.

“Scorpius,” she began, businesslike, as though they had not just spoken outside of her office. “Thank you so much for coming to see me.”

Well what else was he supposed to do? This version of Hogwarts really didn’t seem like the sort of place where you disobeyed a command, not least one from the Headmistress. Although come to think of it, back in his reality, he could think of very few students who had ever dared to disobey Professor McGonagall either.

“Professor,” Scorpius said respectfully.

Umbridge nodded her head at that. She seemed to enjoy the obvious power she held over him, the obedience of his voice and tone. Scorpius made sure to note that.

“Scorpius, I’ve thought for a long time that you have Head Boy potential, as you know,” she said, peering over her desk at him appraisingly. “Pure-blooded, a natural leader, wonderfully athletic…”

“Athletic?” Scorpius repeated, only just fighting back his disbelieving expression in time.

“No need to be modest, Scorpius,” Dolores simpered, resting her elbows on the table and framing her round face with her plump little hands. “I’ve seen you on the Quidditch pitch, there’s rarely a Snitch you don’t catch. You are a highly valued student. Valued by the faculty. Especially by me.”

Scorpius dreaded to think what sort of a person this other Scorpius must have been if he was a personal favourite of Dolores Umbridge…

“I’ve positively glowed about you in dispatches to the Augurey. Our work together, flushing out the more dilettante students has made the school a safer - purer - place.”

“Has it?” Scorpius asked, feeling the familiar nausea rise in his throat.

There was a sudden scream from outside of the office. It sounded like it was coming from a few corridors away. It echoed horribly against the stone walls. Scorpius went to turn towards the noise…

But Umbridge seemed not to have heard it. At any rate, her facial expression hadn’t changed in the
slightest. If she had heard the scream, she was consciously choosing to ignore it.

Scorpius swallowed hard and abandoned any thoughts of heading towards the sound to offer help. He had to control himself or else risk blowing his cover, and he dreaded to think what Umbridge would do to him if she discovered who he really was. If students were being sent to the dungeons for ‘looking insolent’ then there was a very real possibility he could come to physical harm if identified. Knowing what he did of Umbridge from his history books, she would have had no qualms with torturing him, or perhaps even killing him.

That thought in itself scared Scorpius so much that he forced himself to look back up at Umbridge with attentive respect. He did this by imagining she was Professor McGonagall.

“But in the three days since I found you in that lake on Voldemort Day you’ve become… odder and odder - in particular this sudden obsession with Harry Potter…”

There was nothing he could do but deny it. Would anyone dare to contradict the Scorpion King? He hoped not.

“I don’t…” Scorpius began, but Umbridge cut him off.

“Questioning everyone you can about the Battle of Hogwarts. How Potter died. Why Potter died. And this ludicrous fascination with Cedric Diggory. Scorpius - we’ve checked you for hexes and curses - there were none we can see - so I’m asking if there’s anything I can do - to restore you to what you were…”

Restore him to what he was? Scorpius didn’t like to think what that may have entailed. Umbridge was watching him hungrily. It made him want to back away, to drop his gaze. But the Scorpion King would never have done that.

“No,” he said quickly. “No. Consider me restored. Temporary aberration. That’s all.”

Umbridge looked satisfied by his response. Clearly no other would have sufficed.

“So we can continue our work together?” she asked sweetly.

Scorpius swallowed.

“We can,” he said in as firm a voice as possible.

Umbridge smiled her wide smile again. She looked like a toad about to catch a very tasty fly.

She stood up behind her desk, and then put her right hand to her heart, before touching her wrists together in front of her in the shape of a ‘V’.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” she declared with passion.

Scorpius scrambled to copy her, almost using the wrong hand but catching himself at the last minute.

“For - um- yes.”

Chapter End Notes
Writing Umbridge is a creepy delight. How JK came up with such a vile character, I do not know, but she is definitely the HP character that scares me the most (probably tied with Voldemort).

Some of the early Umbridge and Scorpius stuff is mine, but when they reach the office all the dialogue is from the play.

Please do comment! I read them all and get excited when they arrive! Every time my email noise go I get all hopeful it's going to be a comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The only part from the script is the interaction between Karl, Yann, Scorpius and Polly.

The rest is all mine.

I really hope you enjoy!

(And sorry it is so dark!)

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Hogwarts grounds were a frankly dismal sight in this new reality. Not only were they cold, dark, and shrouded in mist, but the grounds were guarded by Dementors, who were supposedly stationed right around the castle night and day as a security measure.

Scorpius wasn’t sure that part about security was entirely true. From what he’d heard, they were just as much there for keeping students in, as keeping unwelcome visitors out.

There were numerous horror stories circulating about the fates of students who had decided to pack their things and run away. The lucky ones were caught by the Dementors. As for any that fought or struggled? Nobody knew what became of them. There would simply be a new spot at the breakfast table the next morning and their name was never spoken again.

A great many students suspected these runaways and rebels had been killed. They suspected it like one might suspect it might be a touch chilly later, with the most disconcerting (if slightly downhearted) acceptance.

But despite all of this, Scorpius had chosen to spend his lunch hour doing something exceedingly risky, and potentially very dangerous.

He had put on his scarf, drawn up his courage, and embarked on a long solitary walk of the grounds.

He felt he needed to check the perimeter, to discover just how true those rumours were. Surely the Dementors couldn’t keep watch on every section of the school grounds at once? There had to be some way to get beyond them without having your soul sucked out, or worse, being reported to Umbridge.

In order to change the world back to the way it should have been, Scorpius knew he would need to reverse he and Albus’s meddling. That meant travelling back to the first Triwizard task to put things right. Which also meant getting beyond the Dementors’ territory and to the space where the dragon enclosure had stood in 1994. Somehow.

*Easy,* Scorpius told himself, trying to remain optimistic. He had a Time-Turner. Which was exactly what a person wanting to change time would require. And he was at Hogwarts, which was exactly
where he needed to travel to, only twenty five years ago and a few kilometres ahead of him. *Simple.*

Only it wasn’t. Because to get to the location of the first Triwizard task, Scorpius would need to get to the edge of the Hogwarts grounds by the Forbidden Forest. A place currently out of bounds to all students. A place that he was quite sure was more dangerous now than it had ever been before.

One step over the invisible line and he’d be risking the wrath of Dolores Umbridge.

If only he could work out how to make the Time-Turner move him through not only time, but space as well! Scorpius imagined such a thing was impossible, and even if some genius of a witch or wizard somewhere did know how to make it happen, it was still impossible for him. There was no way his spell-work was at that level, and there was little hope it could get to that level in the short space of time he had.

He considered using the Time-Turner first, and then moving as swiftly as possible to his destination. The plus side of this plan was that there would be no Dementors lurking around the area in 1994, and no equally as demonic Headmistress waiting to torture him for his pains. But with only five minutes to take action, Scorpius doubted this would work. It had taken he and Albus a long walk to get to the clearing by the Forbidden Forest where the first dragon task had taken place. And if he was brought back by the Time-Turner before he had completed his task, he was going to be in some very serious, very deadly trouble.

The whole situation was more frustrating than Scorpius could express.

Ahead of him, in the distance, he could see the Forbidden Forest. He could see where he needed to be.

And yet he couldn’t quite get there.

Scorpius wandered casually in the direction of the Forbidden Forest, trying to look like a boy on a relaxing stroll rather than a boy planning to dismantle an entire reality, just to see how far he’d be able to get before the Dementors swooped in.

He’d reached a few metres from Umbridge’s boundary when the sinister, floating figures had descended.

They hadn’t surrounded him or made to attack. More eerily than that, they had amassed in his path, staring out at him with their empty eye sockets. A dreadful rattling sound filled the air and Scorpius had struggled to draw breath.

His thoughts had turned immediately to his mother. Scorpius tried desperately to steer them away, but he found he could not. He could see her, in his mind’s eye, peaceful and still in her large bed, pale and beautiful and unmoving. He could feel his father’s hand on his shoulder, heavy and firm.

*“She’s gone. Come away now, Scorpius.”*

No. No. He wasn’t going to be forced back to that dreadful time, to revisit those torturous memories. Not by anyone. Especially not by Umbridge’s personal army of wicked, hateful, utterly loathsome creatures.

Scorpius reached quickly into his pocket for a Chocolate Frog, already prepared for this occurrence. The huge amount that Yann and Karl had gifted him when he was in the hospital wing had come in rather handy, even if he threw away the cards with disgust.
He hastily unwrapped the Frog and shoved it into his mouth (with no regard whatsoever for manners). He forced himself to chew and swallow, chew and swallow, until his body began to feel less stiff, less stuck in one spot.

Scorpius had been able to back away, slowly. He kept a firm image of Albus in his mind as he did so. He focused on Albus’s bright green eyes and his cocky smile. Happy thoughts, happy thoughts, happy thoughts...

When he had retreated far enough, the Dementors rose up into the air together, and drifted off to continue their patrol of the school grounds.

Okay, so maybe they could keep watch over the entire grounds. That was annoying. And scary. And he was definitely not trying that again.

Scorpius sat down on the damp grass, looked around to make sure nobody could see him, and then hugged himself.

He wished Albus could have been there with him. Albus would have made some awful sarcastic joke about the situation which would have broken the tension wonderfully. As it was, he had to make do with his own attempts to cheer himself.

Putting the Chocolate Frog wrapper and card neatly back in his pocket, Scorpius drew his knees up to his chest and placed his arms around them. He was going to have to think his way out of this. Think his way back to the real world, and Albus.

Scorpius was a firm believer that if you put your mind to something and worked hard enough, you could achieve your goal. It was how he had become so good at Potions back in his reality. With dedication and patience, he had become one of the best in his class. Even though the other students laughed at him, and he and Albus were forced to sit at the back on their own, Scorpius had managed to achieve some fairly impressive marks. He’d helped Albus improve his own Potions grade as well.

There was a solution to every problem, wasn’t there?

Yes. Absolutely there was.

So what was the solution to Dementors?

Well, that was easy. The solution was a Patronus Charm.

But Scorpius had never cast one before, and even if he could, he doubted that any person could create one powerful enough to fight off this amount of Dementors. Not in this miserable, terrifying world. The Patronus Charm wasn’t even on the Hogwarts curriculum anymore. Scorpius expected this was to prevent any students from getting any elaborate ideas about escaping or attempting to battle the Dementors.

Was there any other way past Dementors?

Perhaps they could be distracted? But that would mean a decoy. And who could be expected to risk having their soul sucked out for him? He expected a fair few of the students would do whatever the Scorpion King commanded, but Scorpius couldn’t have lived with himself if someone had been attacked by Dementors because of him. Even in a reality which could cease to exist minutes later.

But what if it was the only way?
It would have to be a last resort, Scorpius decided with some difficulty. A terrible, guilt-inducing, but not quite out of the question last resort. If more students died. If he had to make a choice.

Scorpius sat in silence for a long while, running through his usual list of facts, mentally reminding himself of all he had learned, of what he still needed to discover. High on that list was the question of Cedric Diggory.

The one factor that baffled Scorpius above all others was how Cedric Diggory had become a Death Eater.

Somehow, after the second task of the Triwizard Tournament, after he had floated up out of the lake and been humiliated before his peers, Cedric had gone to the Dark Side. Instead of that pain and embarrassment resulting in the planned temporary wounding of his pride and loss of confidence in the final task, something far more sinister had happened. Something that had changed the entire world.

It was hard to believe that Cedric Diggory of all people could become a Death Eater. From what Scorpius had read, he was a heroic sort of person. There was even a yearly minute of silence for him at Hogwarts, in which candles were lit and the students were encouraged to remember his bravery and sacrifice. He was remembered by the Hufflepuffs with a great deal of pride. His name was often brought up if ever someone claimed that Hufflepuffs were useless or boring, and instantly the argument would be won.

Scorpius knew by heart the famous eulogy Albus Dumbledore had made to Cedric. He had read it hundreds of times in his history books.

"Remember, if the time should come, when you have to make a choice between what is right and what is easy, remember what happened to a boy who was good, and kind, and brave, because he strayed across the path of Lord Voldemort. Remember Cedric Diggory."

Even Albus Dumbledore had thought Cedric was a thoroughly good person. And Albus Dumbledore was well known for being an exceptional judge of character. He’d even seen the good in Scorpius’s father, in his early days, when he was lost and scared and involved in something far too big and too real for him. The Draco of Scorpius’s reality spoke of Albus Dumbledore with begrudging respect.

Scorpius supposed, in some awful way, Dumbledore’s eulogy still applied. Because that was what Voldemort did. He took people who could otherwise have been good and kind and brave, and made them into monsters. He took every good thing about them and made it bad. He manipulated and he used. Hadn’t he done the same thing to his father?

And Scorpius knew for a fact that his dad was a good man. Draco Malfoy wasn’t perfect, in fact he was far from it, but he wasn’t evil. He may have had the remains of his Dark Mark scarred onto his left forearm, as lingering evidence of his past sins, but that didn’t make him a bad man. It made him a man who had made a huge mistake. It made him a person who had made poor choices, and made them for lack of being shown any other way by the people that were supposed to teach him that.

Perhaps Cedric Diggory was the same? His father in reverse?

Didn’t this horrifying new reality prove that anyone, any person at all, in the wrong circumstances, the wrong environment, with the wrong propaganda, could stumble into that desperate place, and become so lost in it that rescue was almost an impossibility?
It all rested on that one task, that one moment of humiliation. All the pain that followed, all those terrible judgements, the final transformation from which there was no going back - stemmed from his and Albus’s Engorgio spell.

It was very easy to feel guilty about that. To feel that he and Albus had created this new Cedric Diggory. But that wasn't quite right. As much as Scorpius wanted to believe Cedric would never have been capable of such a thing, he knew that humiliation and bullying was no excuse for the man he had become. Didn't he and Albus suffer it every day back in their reality? Perhaps it had made Albus a bit sulky and sarcastic, and maybe it had made him just a tiny bit pompous deep down inside, but they'd never dreamed of hurting anyone.

Scorpius thought of Amos Diggory, the man Albus claimed to have done all this for. He wondered if Amos would rather his son be alive and a Death Eater, or dead and remembered as a hero.

No, Scorpius decided, the Amos of his reality could never find out about this. That was one thing Scorpius was adamant about. That old man adored his son. He could never know that his son had the potential to become a Death Eater somewhere within him. He deserved to die in ignorance. Even if he was old and ill, at least he still had the memory of his precious son intact.

Scorpius wished he could have remained in ignorance himself. He wished he'd never known about the Scorpion King. He wished someone could have spared him that nightmare discovery that somewhere, deep down inside him, was the potential to be cruel.

The actions of the Scorpion King in this world had scared Scorpius more than he could explain. Because the Scorpion King was him. Perhaps he’d grown up in a different atmosphere, perhaps he’d been taught different values, but the biology was the same. It was more than likely that this monster of a person existed somewhere within him, somewhere deep down, somewhere even he couldn't reach. It was his most terrifying realisation so far (even worse than the rumours of Muggle death camps).

His mother wouldn’t have been proud of who he was in this reality. She would have been horrified. In this reality, she must have died knowing what her son had become. She must have watched her beloved son grow cold and callous. Scorpius hoped that the Scorpion King had had the good sense and decency to spare Astoria the truth of his actions at Hogwarts. He hoped that even that vile, despicable version of himself had held enough respect and love for his mother in his heart to at least act like a thoughtful human being in front of her. The thought of her disappointment, her grief at what had become of her son, was unbearable.

Slowly, reluctantly, Scorpius got to his feet, brushed himself down, and began to walk back towards the castle. As he walked he changed his posture, standing up straighter, lengthening his strides. He pretended the cold wasn’t making his teeth hurt.

He had to get back into character. To inhabit the mind of the Scorpion King. His lunchtime of freedom was coming to an end, and he fully expected his afternoon to be equally as hellish as his morning had been.

As mornings went, his first class of the day had been one Scorpius wasn't likely to forget in a hurry...

+++ 

In Transfiguration earlier, Scorpius had been forced to endure a lesson taught by Professor Dune, the woman that had cursed one of her own students for underperforming in a test.
He hadn’t been sure that since seeing her hit Yann over the head with her wand at breakfast, and finding out she had struck Miya with a nasty Conjunctivitis Curse, his mental impression of her could have been any worse, and yet she had somehow succeeded in surpassing his nightmarish expectations.

Professor Dune was a sharp, unpredictable young-ish woman who seemed to take great joy in rapping people on the head with her wand when they took too long to give her an answer, and made so many threats that they were hard to keep track of. Her classroom was covered in pro-Voldemort propaganda, from framed posters of terrible quotes about wizard superiority, to various stationary items marked clearly with the same snake print Scorpius had seen on the banners in the hospital wing.

Scorpius noticed she seemed to very much enjoy saying: ‘For Voldemort and Valour’

Not only did she say it seven times during the course of her lesson (Scorpius counted), but she expected the words to be chanted back to her. Once she had made them all repeat themselves because the first time they hadn’t been quite passionate enough. Cassandra in the front row had been struck on the head with Professor Dune’s wand for looking distracted while she said the words.

Undoubtedly she was a talented witch. Even Scorpius had to admit that she was an expert on Transfiguration. He had wanted her to be awful at her subject, so he could console himself that she was simply in her position because of her fanatical beliefs, but the truth was, she was spectacular.

Before their eyes she had used the notoriously complex Bird- Conjuring Charm to force the class into silence. With a sound like a shotgun being fired, a flock of foul, black, seemingly underfed birds burst from her wand and circled the students until they had returned their attention obediently to their professor.

Several of these creatures had pecked and scratched at those students who had been whispering to one another while Professor Dune had written something on the board a few moments previously.

Scorpius hadn’t imagined that by this point things could possibly get any worse. He was being taught by a die-hard Voldemort supporter, several members of the class had been attacked by a flock of demonic-looking birds (and several were sporting nasty cuts to their arms as evidence, their robes torn and frayed), and she had managed to throw the word ‘Mudblood’ into her utterly non-related comments about Transfiguration with almost admirable skill.

But Scorpius had been far too optimistic in his assumption. Because from then on the lesson only managed to become more uncomfortable.

At one point Dune had told one of Scorpius’s classmates, Max, that if he didn’t manage to adequately summarise Gamp’s Law of Elemental Transfiguration, he’d be turned into the ‘useless slug that he so clearly was’.

To Scorpius’s horror, this had not been an idle threat, but a promise, because moments later a large, fat slug was squirming in the place of the boy, leaving a slimy trail on his bench. Scorpius had never really thought much about the emotions of common garden slugs before, but he was certain that this particular slug was writhing in what appeared to be distress.

Many of his classmates had laughed at the humiliation of their peer. Scorpius had forced himself to join them.

When Max had been turned back after a few minutes of his punishment, he was clearly disturbed
by what had happened to him. He was a fairly big, beefy sort of boy, who Scorpius had never expected to see trembling in front of his fellow students, and yet trembled he had.

Max’s humiliation hit home for Scorpius more than most. When his father had been at Hogwarts, he had fallen victim to a similar punishment from who he believed, at the time, to be Alastor Moody, his own Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher. His father had been transfigured into a ferret in front of his classmates and thrown up and down in the air over and over and over until Professor McGonagall had raced to intervene.

Many of the students had laughed then, too. Even though Scorpius found it hard to see anything remotely funny about such a situation.

Even imagining such a thing happening to his father distressed Scorpius. It wasn’t only the embarrassment of the thing, but the shame of it. Scorpius imagined being transfigured against your will could be devastating. It simply wasn’t fair to make a person feel so powerless, to control their body. And it certainly wasn’t okay for a person in a position of power to use that power to hurt others.

In his reality, the proper reality, there were laws against such practices. Professors had a duty to protect their students. The Minister for Magic herself had made certain that teachers were not to use any form of magic as a punishment.

In his father’s case, the culprit had turned out to be Death Eater Barty Crouch Jr, trying to punish Draco in order to hurt Lucius, and not one of his teachers after all. Scorpius often wondered if this fact made the situation easier to digest for his father.

If it had been him, Scorpius imagined he’d have found it difficult to ever trust a teacher again. Even if the person who had done the damage had been a Death Eater in disguise.

As for his father, no matter how calmly he had spoken about the incident to Scorpius, in his pre-first year speech, in the hope that his son would report any such behaviour from his own teachers and not feel humiliated into silence, Scorpius noticed that if ever a photograph of the late Alastor Moody appeared in the Prophet, his father would swiftly turn the page.

Thinking of his father, Scorpius had longed to walk across the classroom and pat Max on the back. It hadn’t mattered in that moment that he’d heard Max say some honestly rather vile things under his breath at breakfast, to do with Mudbloods and curses. It was one of the biggest challenges Scorpius had yet faced in this dark reality, not to comfort that disturbed boy.

And yet he hadn’t. He had remained in character and laughed along. He had taken part in Max’s humiliation, a humiliation that would undoubtedly stay with him for the remainder of his life.

Scorpius only managed to control his guilt by remembering that he could reverse all of this. That he could spare Max that ordeal. That maybe, just maybe, he could even spare Max his horrendous views about Muggles too.

+++ 

As Scorpius entered the castle courtyard, he found himself being stared at by a number of students. They were looking him up and down as though hunting nervously for something. It was a most disconcerting way to end a lunch hour.

Scorpius supposed that the sight of the Scorpion King coming back from an antisocial walk around the Hogwarts grounds was a pretty ominous one. It would certainly have frightened him. Perhaps
they were looking for evidence of a duel? Perhaps they were looking for evidence of worse…

“Hey Scorpion King!” came the familiar voice of Karl Jenkins from behind him.

Scorpius turned, not wincing this time. Karl and Yann were making their way across the courtyard towards him, seemingly in competition over who could reach him first.

Karl was the winner of their private battle, and he celebrated this by giving Scorpius a very enthusiastic (and actually quite painful) high five.

Yann Fredericks looked annoyed to have missed out and instead of deciding to give the second high-five, apparently resolved to act like he’d never been aiming at giving Scorpius one in the first place.

“We’re still on right, tomorrow night?” Yann said loudly, so that any passing students could hear about his plans to socialise with the Scorpion King.

Scorpius paused. He blinked at Yann, trying to figure out what it was he’d agreed to do with him the following evening. He really hoped it wasn’t something Quidditch related, because the game would be up the moment he got on a broom. Heights and Scorpius really didn’t agree with each other.

“Because we’re ready to spill some proper Mudblood guts,” Karl added enthusiastically.

Oh, that was okay.

Wait, no it wasn’t! That was very much not okay!

Scorpius hoped desperately that it was simply a figure of speech. Karl was the sort of boy who appeared to be all talk, but the look in his eyes said otherwise…

“Scorpius,” came another voice from behind him.

He turned and saw Polly Chapman standing on the stone stairs that led down to the courtyard, leaning back against the castle wall in a very odd way indeed, her hips pushed strangely forward, her head tilted ever so slightly to one side so that her dark hair fell partially over her face.

Since when had she ever approached him? In the other reality, Polly was a pretty and popular Gryffindor student. She was the sort of girl that all the boys liked to talk about, which personally Scorpius couldn’t understand, seeing as she wasn’t exactly the friendliest of people and hardly ever smiled. Not at him, anyway.

“Polly Chapman?” Scorpius asked, surprised.

She looked thrilled to hear him say her name, but Scorpius noticed she hid that joy in an instant.

Karl and Yann started to grin on either side of him. With a nudge from one and a pat on the back from the other, the two sloped off to give Polly and Scorpius some privacy.

Scorpius actually rather wished they had stayed…

“Shall we cut to it?” she asked, in a voice he’d not heard her use before. It was lower than usual, more intimate. “I know everyone is waiting to know who you’re going to ask because you know, you need to ask someone and I’ve been asked by three people already and I know I’m not alone in refusing them all. In case, you know, you were to ask me.”
“Right,” Scorpius answered vaguely, not sure what else he could say to that without being rude.

“Which would be great. If you were interested. Which rumour is - you are. And I just want to make clear - at this moment - that I am also interested. And that isn’t a rumour.”

Scorpius blinked as Polly moved a step closer.

“That’s a f - a - c - t- fact,” she finished, with a strange half smile.

Was Polly implying what he thought she was? Surely he had the wrong end of the stick? Yes, he absolutely must have missed something. Because this made no sense whatsoever. This was utterly ludicrous…

“That’s um - great, but - what are we talking about?” Scorpius asked uncomfortably.

Polly gave a flip of her hair and rolled her eyes (in as seductive a way as possible).

“The Blood Ball of course - who you - the Scorpion King, are taking to the Blood Ball.”

*Oh dear. Oh no.* Scorpius hadn’t even considered that in this reality he might have to deal with a situation like this.

To start with, back in his reality, he was quite certain nobody had the slightest bit of interest in him, at least, not in *that* way. And why would they? He was an utter geek. A total loser. He had absolutely nothing going for him.

He wasn’t like Albus, who had a certain unknowing appeal, an oddly pessimistic charm, the sort of face that was actually really very handsome if anyone bothered to look at it properly.

He was Scorpius Malfoy. Utterly hopeless.

And he had no idea how to flirt. Was this even flirting? Surely it was? Was he supposed to flirt back? Where was Albus when he was needed?

Scorpius remembered the answer to that question and tried not to deflate for the hundredth time that day.

Polly batted her eyelashes and placed a hand on her hip, waiting for his response with a playful smile on her lips.

For all those days and nights Scorpius had found himself wishing he was the sort of boy who knew exactly how to flirt with ease and charm, (instead of a boy who stumbled over his words and went red in the face when talking about his feelings) the reality of the thing was way more awkward than he had imagined…

“You - Polly Chapman - want me to take you to a - ball?” Scorpius repeated, just to be sure.

A sudden shrill scream sounded somewhere nearby, breaking the moment.

*Saved,* Scorpius thought with some relief.

And then he remembered that screaming was bad. Very bad.

Had he become so used to this world already? Because he really ought to have jumped out of his skin much sooner than he had done...
The scream had been one of terror. Perhaps of pain. It was echoing eerily around the stone courtyard and seemed to be coming from somewhere below…

“What is that screaming?” Scorpius asked, in the voice of forced calm he had adopted recently, wondering why nobody else was wincing at all at the awful noise. Students continued to walk past, and Polly didn’t even flinch.

Polly gave a musical little laugh, throwing back her head more than was necessary.

“Mudbloods of course,” she said affectionately, like Scorpius was making some sort of joke. She reached out to poke him on the arm needlessly. “In the dungeons.”

The screaming was getting steadily louder and more desperate. What was being done to the students down there? Surely not torture? Oh please no…

“It was your idea wasn’t it?” Polly said, rolling her eyes and fully expecting Scorpius to play along with her.

But Scorpius did not. He couldn’t. Those people down there, were they really screaming because of him? Was he responsible for their pain? What had possessed the other Scorpius to suggest such a wicked, inhumane thing? And who in their right mind had paid him the slightest bit of attention?

The answers came to him with painful ease.

He was going to be sick. Right there in the courtyard. And why was the castle spinning? Was it supposed to be spinning?

Polly stared at Scorpius with concern. The Scorpion King wasn’t supposed to look nervous like that. It wasn’t nearly as attractive as his usual confident composure.

“What’s going on with you?” Polly asked, raising a perfectly plucked eyebrow.

Scorpius wanted to scream at the top of his lungs that there was nothing wrong with him. That it was perfectly normal, perfectly reasonable, perfectly understandable and actually quite a good thing to feel distressed by the sounds of people in pain. He wanted to yell: *Me? What’s wrong with YOU?*

He willed himself not to vomit. It would only make the situation worse. Taking deep breaths, he regathered his composure, and put on a confident expression for Polly's benefit.

But Polly had already been distracted by something else.

“Oh Potter,” she remarked with irritation. “I’ve got blood on my shoes again…”

Scorpius glanced down at her feet, ignoring the sudden thought of Albus the curse word had brought with it, and sure enough, her smart Hogwarts shoes were covered in horrible wet red smears. That was… quite a lot of blood.

Polly seemed to think so too, because with a sigh she bent down (arching her back more than was necessary) and carefully used the sleeve of her robe to wipe her shoes clean.

When she was finished she stood up straight again and placed a hand on her hip, smiling at him.

“Like the Augurey insists,” she said, raising her eyebrows provocatively. “The future is ours to make - so here I am - making a future - with you.”
Scorpius blinked. Never in his life had he imagined a girl like Polly Chapman would say those words to him of all people. He had considered that in a few years time, when the girls actually opened their eyes and realised what a catch Albus was, he might be in for several such conversations, but Scorpius? It was almost unbelievable.

He wasn’t sure that being a heartthrob suited him. Instead of making him feel important or confident, the whole idea was actually quite embarrassing. It was more pressure than Scorpius cared to have added to his current (obscene) amount. But he supposed he didn’t have much choice in the matter.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” Polly said with a wink, making the same movements as Umbridge had when she said the words.

Scorpius forced himself to smile.

“For Voldemort it is,” he agreed, swallowing.

Polly smirked at him one last time, and then strolled confidently back up the stairs, looking thrilled.

Scorpius watched her go. He felt bad, oddly, for not telling her the truth. A moment later he realised how absurd that thought was. After all, the Polly Chapman of this reality would cease to exist one day soon (if he succeeded in his plan), and never know that she wouldn’t get her wish of attending the Blood Ball (a less inviting name for a dance Scorpius had never heard) with the Scorpion King.

The screaming started up again from below. This time the offending voice sounded incredibly shrill, incredibly high-pitched. It sounded like a first year…

*I’m going to fix this*, Scorpius promised that unknown first year, trying not to wince. *I’m going to do everything I can.*

He felt for the Time-Turner in his pocket and let his fingers tangle in the gold chain for comfort.

“Scorpius Malfoy?” came a rather timid voice from the top of the stairs.

Quickly releasing the Time-Turner, Scorpius looked up to see a small, panting boy, red in the face from what appeared to be a bout of running.

“Yes?”

“Professor Umbridge wants to see you, Scorpion King - I mean Mr Malfoy - I mean…”

The little boy looked petrified he’d just insulted him.

Scorpius blinked, mind whirling. Why did Umbridge want to see him? She’d spoken to him only yesterday. Did she know something? Did one of his peers suspect? Had he looked too sorry for Max earlier during the slug incident?

“When?” Scorpius asked as firmly as he could.

Another scream sounded.

“Shut up, will you?” a passing student muttered in response to the pained shriek, shaking his head with irritation. “Blimey, some of us are trying to enjoy lunch.”
Scorpius felt guilty for thinking along similar lines. The screaming combined with all the other stress of this reality was sending him towards a complete nervous breakdown.

How could anyone concentrate or get on with their lives when they could hear people in pain yelling for help?

The little boy continued to stare at Scorpius with wide brown eyes.

“R-right now, King, Sir. She says it’s urgent.”

Scorpius swallowed down his panic (something that was becoming a new skill of his), and inclined his head curtly at the little boy.

“I’ll go right away,” Scorpius said.

The boy was still staring at him with awe, knees knocking together. Was he waiting to be dismissed? By another student? Surely not?

“Um… thank you,” Scorpius found himself saying. “I appreciate your urgency in this matter.”

The boy looked thrilled at the praise but still didn’t appear willing to run off again.

“I… it’s no problem! I’m Sam! If you need a-another message sent! I…I think you’re really good at Quidditch Mr King…” Sam blurted admiringly.

It was no good. Despite his meeting with Umbridge, his conversation with Polly, and the screaming still coming from the dungeon at odd intervals, Scorpius couldn’t find it in himself to be cruel to this little boy. Even the Scorpion King must have had some kindness in him, surely?

“Well, Sam,” Scorpius said, placing a hand grandly on his shoulder in an impersonation of his father. “I’ll make sure to remember your name, in case I need a message passed on.”

Sam looked positively delighted. Still a little bit scared, but definitely pleased. Finally, he scampered off again, giving Scorpius a beam of adoration as he went.

Scorpius watched the second year disappear back into that castle before allowing his news to wash over him.

Oh no. This was bad. This was very very bad.

If Umbridge wanted to see him urgently, then Scorpius had no choice but to go to her. He put his hand back inside his robes again, finding the Time-Turner. He could only imagine something dreadful had transpired. She must have begun to suspect him.

But surely if that was the case he would have been escorted to her office? Forced there. Maybe even by some of the professors. Umbridge wouldn’t have sent a second year rushing to request his presence…

It was no consolation. Not with a woman like Umbridge. Scorpius knew the way she had treated the students back in his reality. He knew the games she had played with Harry Potter. Was that what this was? Was he going to walk voluntarily into her office only to be attacked there?

Be brave, Scorpius, he told himself firmly, as he walked confidently up the steps and back into the castle. Admit nothing and whatever you do DO NOT drop the act.

Students parted for him in the corridor, recognising the displeased expression on the Scorpion
King’s face. Scorpius was so afraid that he didn’t even notice. He just kept on walking, robes billowing impressively out behind him, head held high.

If this was the end of his adventure, or even the end of his life, then Scorpius was going to approach it the way he did everything else. With determined optimism, and an utter, unshakeable desire to do what was right.

Being a hero meant encountering danger, and hadn’t he wanted to be a hero all his life? Wasn’t this what his historical idols had faced in their times?

*You have to give the performance of your life,* Scorpius told Scorpius. *You have to give this your everything. You HAVE to do this.*

*You CAN do this.*

No matter what happened in that office, no matter what was waiting for him at the end of the Gargoyle Corridor, Scorpius was going to show what a true Malfoy was made of.

And if Umbridge killed him, he'd finally be able to see his mother again, to hug her tight, to tell her how much he'd missed her every single day since her passing. He might even be able to see Albus, at the end of it all. Maybe.

At least that was something.

Chapter End Notes

This one was tough. In the script this scene is really really short but I wanted to contextualise it a bit.

Next scene is probably my favourite in the entire play, so I cannot wait to post it!

Please give me a comment if you are enjoying this. I get so excited every single time I get an email notification. It brings me so much happiness.

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Three

Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy this!

More notes at the end of the chapter!

xxx

Scorpius reached the Gargoyle Corridor with his head held high. He could be brave. He could.

He was the son of Draco and Astoria Malfoy, and that was no small thing to be.

Compared to the heroes of Scorpius’s beloved history books, this ending was not the most exciting or dramatic of ways to meet his fate. And he had hoped to go with something a little more aesthetically pleasing before him than that ugly stone gargoyle and the garish pink wallpaper of Umbridge’s office…

No, no he couldn’t think like that. There was every chance Umbridge simply wanted to speak to him about something else. And would she dare risk harming the son of Draco Malfoy? He supposed he had more of a chance of withstanding her displeasure than most. Perhaps he could reason with her? Could anyone reason with a woman like Umbridge? It seemed unlikely, but he would have to try.

Perhaps he could bargain with her instead? Clearly his family was even wealthier than before in this reality. Surely there had to be something Umbridge wanted which he could give her? Yes, Scorpius thought, determined to remain hopeful, from what he knew of Umbridge, a bargain would work far better than any common sense or plea for compassion.

The Gargoyle Corridor was dark and gloomy. Ominously so. One of the torches at the end of the corridor seemed to have gone out.

Standing there facing the great ugly stone creature, Scorpius became horribly aware of just how alone he was. How vulnerable that made him.

As the Scorpion King he had tons of students willing to vouch for him, but if it got out that he wasn’t who he claimed to be? Those same students would undoubtedly see him sent to the dungeons. They’d probably laugh at the sound of his screaming. Worse, they’d ignore it all together. They’d walk past during their lunch hours, not even remotely concerned by his pain.

This time, he spoke the password ‘Fluffy little kittens’ without even wincing. The gargoyle moved obediently aside, and Scorpius had to admit that the power of that, the way the walls opened at his command, was incredibly thrilling.

He pushed that thought away in an instant. No. He and power clearly didn’t mix, as evidenced by this mess of a reality and his place in it. If there was a single chance that he could end up anything like his foul counterpart, Scorpius was going to avoid it like the plague.
When he got back to his reality (if he ever did), he was going to live a nice, normal life and focus on being a good, kind person, who might be able to make the world better in some small way.

As he travelled up the spiral staircase, Scorpius was struck by how surreal this situation was. He’d never thought, no matter how bad things got for him, that he’d end up frightened for his very life at the age of just fourteen.

It wasn’t how things were supposed to be. Not after the Second Wizarding War. That was supposed to have been the end of the fear and the death. Wasn’t the world meant to be better now? Otherwise what was the point of all that pain and fear and sacrifice? If the bad guys won then it was all for nothing. It was all in vain.

As he reached the shiny oak door that led to Umbridge’s office, Scorpius took a brief moment to himself.

He could be brave like his father had been in turning his back on his past. He could be brave like his mother when the family curse caused her almost unbearable pain.

He would be brave like his parents.

He would be brave for Albus.

Scorpius tapped on the griffin knocker and waited.

“Come in,” came a sickeningly sweet voice.

Umbridge didn’t sound like she wanted to hurt him.

With a deep breath, Scorpius pushed open the oak door with confidence. The Scorpion King wouldn’t have been tentative. He clearly thought that being a Malfoy gave him special privileges. It was delicate balance, this performance, between obedience and entitlement.

“Scorpius,” Umbridge greeted him with a smile as he entered. She was sitting at her desk as usual, eating what looked like a bowl of sugar lumps. There was a cup of tea on a doily before her, the cup covered in Umbridge’s favoured floral designs.

Beside her, a quill was taking notes, scribbling away frantically. Umbridge raised the dainty teacup to her lips and took a small sip. As she did so the quill settled down on the desk again, clearly understanding that it was not to transcribe this private conversation.

It was disconcerting, how sweet Umbridge looked in that moment. Like any person’s grandma or aunt. It somehow made the horror of her true personality all the worse.

Underneath his robes, Scorpius had a hand on his wand. If Umbridge tried anything, then he was going to fight back. He’d never duelled or hurt another person before, but there was a first time for everything, wasn’t there?

Albus would have wanted him to fight. He would have told Scorpius to resist whatever Umbridge did with everything he had.

Umbridge finished her noisy little sip of tea and gave a satisfied sigh. For a moment, she glanced over the cup at Scorpius. Her brown eyes shone horribly.

“I’ve received word from your father,” Umbridge announced. “He wishes to see you at once.”
It took everything Scorpius had not to collapse in a heap on the hideous pink and grey carpet.

“Right now?” Scorpius asked, hoping his voice wasn’t too high pitched with relief.

Umbridge frowned a little at him, seemingly displeased.

“Absolutely,” Umbridge agreed, rather sternly. “He’s a busy man, Scorpius. You should think yourself lucky he’s making time in his schedule to meet with you.”

“I… yes,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. “You’re right, of course. Do you - do you know what it’s about?”

Umbridge pursed her lips as though she found something faintly amusing.

“I think this is a family matter,” she said. “And I would hate to interfere in the relationship of a father and his son.”

Umbridge popped a sugar cube into her mouth and crunched it between her teeth.

“I’ve said you may use the Floo Network for the occasion,” she revealed, as though she was doing him a huge favour. “Via my office.”

Scorpius glanced at the large fireplace beside him.

“I appreciate that,” he said, being sure to sound as grateful as he was supposed to.

“Oh don’t be silly.” Umbridge said with a simpering giggle. “You know that you and I share a… bond. If a Headmistress were allowed to have favourites, well, let’s just say you would stand a very good chance, young man.”

They shared a bond? Scorpius felt utterly sick.

“I’m quite certain we’ll do much work together in the future. You set an excellent example to the other students, Scorpius. You and I, well, I believe we can turn this school around. Make real progress.”

“Yes, absolutely,” Scorpius agreed with enthusiasm, thinking of nothing but his escape from this oppressive circular room and its terrifying occupant.

“And when the time comes, perhaps you might even end up surpassing your father?”

Her eyes bulged oddly with that comment, as though Scorpius should have caught some deeper meaning in her words. Knowing he probably should have left the subject well alone, Scorpius enquired further.

“Surpassing my dad?” Scorpius asked, eyebrow raised.

Umbridge studied him for a moment, her eyes narrowing, but then the look dissolved into a fond one.

“The false modesty again? My, my, Scorpius. It really doesn’t suit you. If you have a gift and are willing to put it to good use, then I see no reason why you shouldn’t make it public. Well, perhaps in our case we oughtn’t make what we have planned public just yet. But one man’s arrogance is another’s greatness. Remember that, Scorpius. Your time will come. And perhaps sooner than you might think.”
What did the Scorpion King have planned with Umbridge? And what did that have to do with his father?


Umbridge nodded her head, satisfied. She took another sip of her tea.

“Well go on then,” she prompted him. “You know how I hate dilly-dallying.”

Scorpius refused to show how nervous he was. It was too important that he remain in character. He had never liked travelling with Floo powder. The sensation of spinning from place to place made him dizzy, and it took quite a lot of guts to actually step into the flames.

Where on earth did Umbridge keep her Floo powder? The Scorpion King would have known that, wouldn’t he? Or perhaps he wouldn’t? Misjudging this simple thing could put him in jeopardy. Should he ask her?

One glance at Umbridge told him that he definitely should have known. She was watching him with a strange and unsavoury mixture of interest, impatience and titillation.

It was more uncomfortable than Scorpius could explain and he wasn’t quite sure why.

Scorpius’s eyes scanned the mantle. There were two pots sitting atop it, one at each end. One was painted with the image of a kitten in a rainbow-coloured bow tie. The other looked like it was supposed to be in the shape of a flower, only it had ended up more like a splat of paint.

He had a fifty-fifty chance of guessing correctly. Now was not the time for hesitance. He would have to be like Albus and simply jump in.

Remembering Umbridge’s password, Scorpius walked towards the pot with the cat on it. He lifted the lid, aware of Umbridge’s eyes on him… and saw the familiar glittering silver powder.

More confidently, knowing his escape was imminent, he took a handful and threw it into the fire.

His father worked at the Ministry he was sure of it, and in a fairly high-up role judging by the respectful way the other students and teachers spoke of him. He wouldn’t have to specify a department. Visitors to the Ministry entered via the Atrium, and from there he was sure he could find his way.

“The Ministry of Magic,” Scorpius said clearly, and without glancing back at Dolores Umbridge, he stepped bravely into the green flames.

He was certain he’d heard a simpering little laugh as he went.

+++ 

Scorpius stepped bravely out of the fireplace and into the grand Atrium of the Ministry of Magic.

It was… darker than he remembered. He was quite sure it had been brighter than this when he’d travelled here with Albus and Delphi.

All around him witches and wizards were walking swiftly out of golden fireplaces, many carrying briefcases, some holding hats or umbrellas. Many looked fairly damp, something Scorpius assumed was more to do with the rain outside than the witches and wizards who had entered the Ministry by flushing themselves down the Whitehall underground toilets.
Scorpius moved out of their way so as not to cause a blockage. He stepped into the centre of the Atrium and took a deep breath. He simply had to be calm. He simply had to be brave.

As he wandered backwards, reading the signs on the ceiling, trying to figure out where he ought to look for his father, he almost collided with the base of a large black stone statue. Turning around he stared up at the mighty sculpture. A witch and wizard sat in a pair of elaborate thrones, gazing out at the Atrium.

Scorpius had seen this monument before. There was a large photograph of it in one of the history books in the Hogwarts library. It was a famous and harrowing image. He blinked up at the statue with wonder. It was a terrible thing, utterly awful in every way, but the photograph in his book hadn’t quite managed to portray the sense of awe the sculpture created. You couldn’t help but stare at it.

Looking closer, Scorpius spotted the most gruesome and disturbing detail of the sculpture, the detail that had become notorious in his reality. The thrones on which the witch and wizard sat were made up of what were supposed to be hundreds of human bodies squashed together, their faces ugly and stupid. Men, women, and children made up the mighty thrones of the witch and the wizard, some contorted horribly for effect.

Somehow seeing it up close was worse than Scorpius had ever imagined. It made it real.

It forced him to accept that things like this could happen. And that when they did, nobody stopped them. When they did, people simply got on with their lives as best they could.

In the real world, in his reality, the hideous statue had been knocked down following Voldemort’s defeat at the Battle of Hogwarts. There were said to have been cheers in the Atrium as the witch and wizard were magicked into dust.

But here, in this reality, the statue had stood for twenty three years. It had stood for Scorpius’s whole life.

Scorpius glanced at the base of the statue, which read: MAGIC IS MIGHT.

Had Albus seen the monument, he was certain he would have tried to vandalise the thing. It would have made Albus almost impossibly angry. But Scorpius was shocked to find that his own reaction was of sadness more than anything else. An overwhelming sense of despair, of almost hopelessness, that such a thing had been allowed to sit in the Atrium unchallenged for all that time. That people were walking past it in that moment, and probably walked past it every day. It had become normal to them.

Several witches and wizards nodded their heads at Scorpius as they passed him. Scorpius nodded back at each one, hoping that nobody would engage him in conversation. He supposed they were colleagues of his father in this reality. That was something, at least. In this mess of a reality his father might not have been so very alone. He hoped that would mean his father was a happier person.

A passing wizard strolled into Scorpius, dropping his briefcase in the process. Various papers fell out and scattered across the Atrium floor.

“Typical,” the man said to himself, rather rudely. Scorpius thought it would have been far nicer to apologise. After picking up his papers, the man turned to Scorpius looking ready to complain, but after seeing who he had bumped into, his eyes widened.
“Scorpius Malfoy?” he said, shocked. “My apologies!”

Scorpius had been living as the Scorpion King for five days now. He knew better than to tell the man that it was fine and offer to help him with his case.

“Perhaps you’ll look where you’re going next time?” Scorpius said imperiously.

The man nodded his head.

“Yes, my fault,” he agreed. “Well, have a good afternoon, young man. Give my best to your father.”

Scorpius raised an eyebrow, saying nothing.

It worked. The man backed away just the same as people always did when they saw they had inconvenienced him. Scorpius expected this sort of reaction at Hogwarts, but at the Ministry? It was laughable that this grown man would fear his displeasure. The only explanation Scorpius could think of was that his father was considerably more important then even he had dared to hope.

Only once the man had disappeared into the crowd did Scorpius see the newspaper he’d left on the ground at his feet. Curious, Scorpius picked it up. It was the latest edition of the Daily Prophet, fresh off the press and slightly rained-on.

What he saw on the front page shouldn’t have surprised him by now, but it did.

‘Muggle Massacre’ the headline read in large black font. The image used on the front cover displayed a large bridge which had somehow crumbled in the middle, so that the two broken parts hung precariously into the river below, making the shape of a letter ‘V’.

Swallowing, Scorpius turned to the correct page and began to read.

More then one hundred muggles had been killed that very morning in what was definitely a planned attack. Three bridges across London had been targeted. Three wizards had handed themselves proudly in to the authorities, bragging about their feat. The Muggle world was in shock, fearing a terrorist attack, but unable to comprehend how such a thing could have happened so quickly, so ruthlessly, and in three simultaneous locations without any explosives being found. The Muggle Prime Minister was facing calls to resign.

Scorpius had known it was bad out there, beyond Hogwarts. But he had hoped, somehow, that the terrible stories he had heard about life outside the castle were exaggerations. He started to wonder, now, how many of those rumours he’d disregarded as fiction were actually true.

He’d heard a large number of horrific tales from fellow students. The former Slytherin common room was constantly alive with gossip and excited rumour-spreading.

Some of the worst Scorpius had heard were the reports of death camps for ‘Mudbloods’, and the burning alive of Voldemort’s political opponents. Staring down at the paper in his hands, at the headlines on each and every page, Scorpius was forced to admit that those awful things didn’t seem nearly so far-fetched as before. In fact, they seemed fairly likely. He supposed, in a world like this, they wouldn’t seem so absurdly foul. They would be accepted.

“Scorpius Malfoy?” came a loud voice at his side. Scorpius turned to see a tall, rather plump man with large unkempt eyebrows and a ruddy face smiling at him. He was wearing a long black coat, which looked fairly expensive, and his voice sounded rather posh. A red bow tie was just visible around his neck.
“Yes?” Scorpius forced himself to say confidently, not wanting to commit to any particular tone since he didn’t know how the Scorpion King knew this man.

“Shouldn’t you be at school? Playing truant are we?” the man asked with a hearty laugh.

“I have permission from Dolores Umbridge herself,” Scorpius responded firmly. “I’m here to see my father.”

The man glanced down at him, and then broke into a wide smile.

“Well of course you are, dear boy,” said the man cheerfully, patting him on the shoulder. “I daresay your father will be pleased to see you. You’re an example to us all.”

From what he’d noticed so far in terms of other people's behaviour around him, Scorpius doubted a stranger would dare to touch him. It was more than likely the Scorpion King knew this man at least vaguely.

“I… thank you,” he allowed himself to say, uncertainly.

“You remember me, don’t you?”

Scorpius paused. Should he?

“Ah, well I have put on weight since last we met,” the man admitted amiably, patting his considerable stomach. “The last time I saw you you were about this high.” He put out his hand somewhere around his middle.

A friend of his father’s? Definitely someone who had met him in his youth. Which made this encounter all the more difficult to manoeuvre.

Scorpius decided that the best way to play this was by being as silent as possible. The less he said, the less opportunities he had to put his foot in it.

When Scorpius still didn’t respond, the man laughed again in a kindly fashion.

“I’m Edward Pole. I work for your father. Well, I used to work for your father. Now I’m more part-time. Carrying out more private work. Old age is a terrible thing, my boy. I’m not as spritely as I once was!”

Ah! Perfect! A person who would be inclined to help him, but wasn’t quite close enough to ask any difficult questions. Scorpius allowed himself to feel a little bit optimistic.

“And what is it that you do for him?” Scorpius asked, casually.

“Oh, never you mind that,” Edward said, attempting a wink but not quite managing it. “Let it never be said that Edward Pole is one to give away secrets! Even to the son of my boss! The trouble I could be in!”

Ah! Perfect! A person who would be inclined to help him, but wasn’t quite close enough to ask any difficult questions. Scorpius allowed himself to feel a little bit optimistic.

“And what is it that you do for him?” Scorpius asked, casually.

“Oh, never you mind that,” Edward said, attempting a wink but not quite managing it. “Let it never be said that Edward Pole is one to give away secrets! Even to the son of my boss! The trouble I could be in!”

Ah! Perfect! A person who would be inclined to help him, but wasn’t quite close enough to ask any difficult questions. Scorpius allowed himself to feel a little bit optimistic.

“And what is it that you do for him?” Scorpius asked, casually.

“Oh, never you mind that,” Edward said, attempting a wink but not quite managing it. “Let it never be said that Edward Pole is one to give away secrets! Even to the son of my boss! The trouble I could be in!”

Scorpius forced a smile.

“What brings you here, Scorpius? If you don’t mind my asking. All’s well I hope?” Edward enquired kindly.

“I have an appointment with my father,” Scorpius admitted. He couldn’t answer that last question because he had no idea himself.
“Ah, what a stroke of luck!” Edward boomed (startling a few passing witches on their way back from lunch break). “I was just going to pop by and see him myself. I say, would you mind if I accompany you?”

Mind? Scorpius was overwhelmed by his own luck. Now he didn’t have to ask suspicious questions about how to get to his father’s office. He could simply follow old Edward Pole all the way there!

Oh, fate was on his side today!

“Of course not,” Scorpius said courteously, as though granting the man a favour.

“Good, good.”

Edward Pole led Scorpius to the nearest lift and stepped in with a cheerful spring to his step. He took up most of the space, but Scorpius didn’t complain. He was finding it increasingly difficult to keep up his distant persona with this jolly man. Scorpius thought he seemed like a good friend for his father to have. He might have been a bit pompous, but he seemed like an optimist, and a kindly one at that. Like the sort of uncle he might have enjoyed having.

Scorpius watched as Edward pressed the button for Level Two. It looked like they were heading for the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. Did that mean his father was an Auror?

“My grandsons will be starting at Hogwarts next year,” Edward said conversationally as the lift carried them up through the Ministry. “I’ve told them not to fear. But you know what youngsters are like. Far too anxious for their own good!”

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. Although deep down he thought that the adults of this reality were rather too relaxed about the state of things. Any anxiety Edward’s grandchildren might have had seemed, to Scorpius, well justified.

“Lovely boys, the pair of them. They look after their old Grandad!”

Scorpius couldn’t help but smile at that. He wished he’d known either of his own grandfathers better. And that they had been kinder, better men.

“I’ve told them there’s nothing to worry about, but it’s their mother that’s put these ideas into their heads. She thinks they’ll be associating with Mudbloods, but I told her, Julia, my dear, Hogwarts is a very different place now. A far superior one. They don’t let that sort run riot nowadays, thank Voldemort.”

Scorpius felt his jaw drop. He found himself staring at Edward with utter shock.

Edward didn’t seem to notice his expression because he chuckled and patted Scorpius on the back.

“I told the boys: as long you follow the example of your betters. As long as you listen to your professors you’ll be just fine. Umbridge is the best thing that’s ever happened to that school. Wonderful woman.”

Scorpius took a very deep breath in order to remain calm.

People like Umbridge and Professor Dune, Scorpius could just about deal with. Because at least you could tell they were nasty people. But men like Edward Pole? Moments previously Scorpius had assumed he was just a kindly, hard-working old grandfather. There was no outward sign of his foul beliefs whatsoever. He seemed frighteningly… nice.
Edward leaned in a bit more intimately.

“I hope you don’t mind, but I’ve told them to watch you especially. So they learn how to conduct themselves in the proper way.”

“Oh, wow,” Scorpius said politely, trying desperately to disguise his horror.

“Gilbert and Bartholomew, their names are. Twins. Barty is a real handful, but I’ve told him to be on his best behaviour. His mother seems to think he’s too aggressive, but I say that’s a good thing, times we live in, wouldn’t you say?”

Scorpius nodded numbly.

“A bit of discipline and he’ll turn out just fine. I hear that you were quite the handful in your early days, eh Scorpius?”

“Apparently so,” Scorpius agreed, willing the lift to hurry up.

As though reading his thoughts, the lift doors opened and Scorpius stepped out into the corridor beyond. Edward followed him, still chattering away, entirely unaware of his companion’s disapproval.

Casually, Scorpius allowed Edward to walk just a step ahead, so that he could follow him all the way to his father.

“As for Gilbert, well I regret to say he’s the bookish type. Terrible on a broom. Scared of his own shadow. Too close to his mother, you know? I always told her not to baby him, but would she listen? No.”

Gilbert sounded very much like himself. Scorpius felt a pang of sympathy for that little boy. If this awful reality continued for much longer, Scorpius knew what Gilbert would be in for. He had known well what it meant to be like them in the old reality. And that had been hard enough. But in this one? Poor Gilbert wouldn’t stand a chance.

Edward led the way down the corridor and round a corner towards a set of heavy oak double doors.

“I’d very much like them to get involved in what you’re doing at the school. I know you can’t talk too candidly about it, but just know that you have supporters in the Pole family. You have those willing to stand with you for what is right. Even if they call you a fanatic. For Voldemort and Valour.”

“For Voldemort and Valour,” Scorpius agreed, managing to get the gesture right this time.

“Ah, here we are!” Edward declared, pushing open the double doors and entering the Auror Office.

His father was an Auror! That was… well, pretty fantastic.

But Edward kept walking, past the many cubicles, some of which contained busy-looking witches and wizards who nodded their heads politely in Scorpius’s direction, and towards the end of the corridor.

He came to a stop outside a door which said: Head of Magical Law Enforcement.
Scorpius stared up at the sign with awe. Was his father really head of the department? Was he really doing the job that Harry Potter did back in the other reality? Scorpius felt overwhelmingly proud.

It shouldn’t have made him feel that way. Scorpius knew that well enough. His father was working for what was now a corrupt organisation. But still…

His father had respect now. No doubt he was admired. People probably didn’t talk badly of him when he passed them. They probably didn’t bring up his Dark Mark and look at him like filth on the bottom of their shoes.

No matter what else Scorpius felt about all this, he couldn’t help but feel relief for his dad.

Before Edward could reach out and knock on the door, it opened suddenly, displaying his father. Framed in the doorway like that, in his impressive clothes, hair as neat as ever, wand in one hand, eyebrow raised, Scorpius thought his dad looked magnificent.

“Ah, Draco,” Edward said jovially. “Good to see you again! I just popped by to let you know that our - ”

His father stopped the man in his tracks with a simple gesture of his hand.

“Not in front of my son, Edward,” Draco said quietly. “I will speak with you later.”

Edward swallowed and tried again.

“But after this morning I just…”

“I will speak with you later,” his father repeated.

Scorpius simply stared up at the man who had raised him. He was radiating menace. Radiating power.

There was a terrible moment in which Edward remained where he was. Even Scorpius was willing him to walk back down the corridor before his father lost his temper.

He had seen that expression on his dad’s face only a few times before. Each time had involved some passerby shouting insults while he, his father, and his mother had gone out together for a family meal, on those days when his mother had felt strong enough to eat properly.

The last time it had happened, Scorpius remembered his mother placing a gentle hand on his father’s arm and telling him that it didn’t matter. That those people weren’t worth his anger. That they were nothing. And that they certainly weren’t important enough to ruin their day out.

Scorpius hoped that his father disliked Edward Pole because of his beliefs. Maybe in this version of reality you weren’t allowed to admit you were tolerant, but Scorpius was sure there must have been plenty of witches and wizards out there who disagreed with the regime as it was. He was almost certain that his father would have been one of them. Even if he had been on Voldemort’s side since his Hogwarts days, Scorpius knew that there was good in his father. His mother had told him so. He had seen it for himself. No matter what anyone else thought.

“Yes, quite,” Edward said, also noticing Draco Lucius Malfoy’s icy rage and pulling himself together. With a smile he backed away. “Well, whenever you have a moment. Pleasure to speak to you, sir. As always. Fine boy you have there.”
“Thank you,” Draco said coldly and then disappeared back into his office.

Scorpius had no option but to follow his father, who he noticed hadn’t spoken to him once. He’d barely even looked at him. That hurt rather a lot. But perhaps being an Auror made a person like that? Maybe it was like Harry in the other reality? Albus said his father was consumed by work. That sometimes it got in the way of his being a dad.

Trying to be fair (and not feel disappointed by this less than friendly greeting), Scorpius remembered the amount of stress his father must be under.

He was trying very hard not to get his hopes up, but just seeing his father’s stylish robes billowing as he stalked into his office made Scorpius want to run to him and explain everything. It made him want to tell the truth. It made him feel suddenly less alone, less scared. For all his troubles with his father, he knew his dad would always protect him, no matter what. Scorpius even felt his fear of Umbridge fade to the back of his mind as he wandered after his father.

His father’s office was a marvellous and impersonal place. Files were stacked on shelves across the back wall, loose documents scattered across the main desk, a mug on the table. This looked like the office of a man who worked hard, but perhaps a man who didn’t find much joy in his occupation.

Flying down either side of the room were grand flags, which depicted a symbol Scorpius hadn’t seen before. It looked like a strange thin black bird (where had he seen one of those before?). It was somehow sinister. Perhaps because it reminded Scorpius of a vulture? He couldn’t for the life of him work out what it was supposed to be.

As Scorpius stepped into the centre of the room, he glanced around, searching for something that would have shown this office belonged to his father beyond his presence. He had hoped to see a picture of himself, or perhaps one of his mother, but there were no such items in sight. There wasn’t even a single volume on Alchemy, his father’s greatest interest.

Draco was currently standing with his back to him, fingers resting on his desk, head bowed. Scorpius saw his father take a deep breath and then turn, slowly, to take in the sight of his only son.

Scorpius fiddled anxiously with his robe sleeves. He wasn’t quite sure how to behave. He wanted to keep up his pretence, but in front of his father it was incredibly difficult. Despite their differences, he loved his father fiercely. It was an overwhelming relief to see the face of a person he loved, even if that face was currently oddly blank. Even if he did seem more stressed than usual.

He hoped, deep down inside, that his father was the answer to all his problems. His father would surely help him? He’d come straight to the Slytherin common room that time he’d sent the owl. Even though it had been late. Even though it had most probably been inconvenient.

That very thought made Scorpius bright with hope again.

Draco waited a moment for his son to speak, and when he did not, crossed his arms slowly over his chest.

“You are late,” Draco said.

Well, Professor Umbridge hadn’t given him an exact time. And lunch had only just finished, hadn’t it? People were still arriving at the Ministry downstairs.

Scorpius swallowed and looked around him once again. He gestured at the room with his hands, trying to show how impressed he was. He wanted his father to know that he thought it was
wonderful, all this hard work. That he was proud of him.

“This is your office?” Scorpius asked, still slightly dazed by this new reality.

“You are late and unapologetic,” his father said sharply. “Maybe you are determined to compound
the problem.”

His father was certainly stricter than he had been, but Scorpius supposed you had to be if you had
such an important job. He still couldn’t get over that little piece of information. His father was one
of the most high-ranking wizards in Britain!

“You’re Head of Magical Law Enforcement?” Scorpius said, beaming despite himself. It wasn’t
only because of the title or family pride. Rather selfishly, it meant that Scorpius may well have
been able to access resources. It meant that if his father would agree to be his ally, they could work
on this problem together. He was certain that the Head of Magical Law Enforcement could do
something about his Dementor problem at the very least. His dad would keep him safe.

Draco went silent for a moment. Scorpius peered up at him with awe.

And then Draco exploded in a rage.

“How dare you!” Draco shouted, making Scorpius flinch, his smile falling from his face in an
instant. “How dare you embarrass me and keep me waiting and then not apologise for it!”

Scorpius had the sudden, terrible urge to cry.

His father had never yelled at him like that before. It really wasn’t very nice to be shouted at. It
made him feel small and stupid.

“Sorry,” Scorpius said swiftly, desperate to appease his father so he’d calm down. He wasn’t quite
sure how to stop the anger, but he wanted it to stop more than anything. He wished his mother was
there.

“Sir,” Draco corrected him sharply.

Scorpius swallowed hard. He’d never been afraid of his father before his moment. Afraid of his
disapproval? Yes. But never had he felt in any danger around his dad. It was a dizzying feeling.

Perhaps if it hadn’t been so sudden Scorpius could have coped with this, but he couldn’t help but
feel like the ground had been pulled out from under him. He was too shocked to even disguise his
confusion. This was so entirely new (and entirely frightening) that Scorpius didn’t know how he
should act or respond. His legs were growing weaker by the second, threatening to give out on him.

It’s not really him, Scorpius told himself, so no tears would fall and shame him. He got the horrible
impression that this version of his father would only grow more angry at the sight of tears. He loves
you. He does. You know it. He must just have a different way of showing it now...

“Sorry, sir,” Scorpius recited obediently.

He noticed that it seemed to soothe his father, this compliance. Just like it had soothed Umbridge.

“I did not bring you up to be sloppy, Scorpius,” Draco declared in a quieter voice. The volume may
have decreased, but the danger was still there in his tone. “I did not bring you up to humiliate me at
Hogwarts.”
“Humiliate you, sir?” Scorpius asked, trying his best to hide the shake in his voice.

His father made an elegant hand gesture and gave a furious sigh, like he was at the end of his tether, like Scorpius had driven him to a place he truly didn’t want to go.

Scorpius didn’t want him to go there either. He was terrified. But he didn’t know what he was doing wrong…

“Harry Potter,” his father spat out with distaste. “Asking questions about Harry Potter, of all the embarrassing things. How dare you disgrace the Malfoy name!”

Scorpius felt like he was falling. His stomach lurched. He felt more afraid than he had following Albus down the pipe to the Hogwarts lake, or jumping off the roof of a moving train. He was even more afraid than he had been in his first face to face office meeting with Umbridge.

“Oh no,” Scorpius found himself breathing out before he could stop himself. He looked up at his father, at his terrible, magnificent power. He could hear his words echoing in his head. He glanced again at the ominous flags covering the walls of his dad’s office.

This was not his father. Not really. This man may have looked like him, and sounded like him, but he wasn’t Draco Malfoy.

There was no trace of kindness in this version of his father. This man was just as impressive, even more authoritative, but there was no goodness. Not even a hint.

*He won’t help me*, Scorpius realised with some distress. *He hates me*...

In the other reality, Draco would have been utterly ashamed to have lost his temper with his son. He would never have shouted. Never have raised his voice.

He would have noticed that Scorpius was scared. He would have stopped.

And if this version of his father could seek to frighten him into submission, Scorpius thought grimly, if he could look at his own son with such cold disapproval, with such open shame, then he could very well have had a hand in the terrible atrocities happening in this dark, dark world.

Scorpius had few memories of his grandfather, but the deeds and reputation of Lucius Malfoy were a constant stain on his family. What Scorpius could remember was a man who was cold, curt, and strict. He remembered a man that had sneered at his mother, who had once made her cry.

Looking at his father now, Scorpius wondered if this was how Lucius had been in his prime. Was this version of his father simply doomed to repeat the mistakes of his ancestors?

All his romantic notions of his father leading his department out of duty, but being a force for good within it, of hidden kindness, of secret tolerance, seemed to blink out of existence.

Scorpius remembered the words of Madam Pomfrey. The words he’d been trying to forget for days: *’Your father may have covered it up the first time, but again?’*

This was a man who had worked to conceal the true circumstances of the death of a student. The death of a first year. Probably only to protect his name. To protect his position. Not to protect his son at all...

Draco raised an eyebrow, daring his son to continue.
“Are you responsible?” Scorpius asked in a small voice, thinking of the terrible rumours he had heard. Thinking of the position of power his father held, of his influence on the wizarding world. Of the attacks that had happened that very morning. Of his private business with Edward Pole.

His father didn’t say a word.

“No,” Scorpius said swiftly, trying to force the thoughts from his mind. His father was no murderer. He was a good man. He was. He had to be. Even like this. Somewhere, deep down inside, was the Draco Scorpius knew. “No. You can’t be.”

“Scorpius…” his father remarked warningly.

Scorpius was afraid of what asking more questions might mean. He was afraid of his father's temper. Of what he might learn. But his five days of hell had taught him a resilience, a courage he’d never known he possessed. He may have been terrified, but Scorpius was not going to give up. Albus wouldn't have. He would have got his answers and stood up for what was right.

“The Daily Prophet today,” Scorpius said, swallowing. “Three wizards blowing up bridges to see how many Muggles they can kill with one blast.”

His father did not even blink. The terrible attack seemed to neither shock or appall him. The lack of response was almost more scary than a confirmation of guilt.

“Is that you?” Scorpius asked weakly.

“Be very careful,” Draco said with more force. Scorpius could see the anger building in his father’s body, burning in his eyes. He was fighting to keep it back. But Scorpius couldn’t stop. He had to know. No matter what that meant for him. He needed to know if his father had been the cause of all that suffering, that death, that destruction…

“The ‘Mudblood’ death camps, the torture, the burning alive of those that oppose him,” Scorpius listed, hearing his voice shake as his fears poured out of him and no longer caring. “How much of that is you?”

Draco balled his hands into fists and then extended his fingers again, trying to control his temper. The impertinence of his son was overwhelming. The audacity of the boy even asking such a thing. Did he not know when to keep his mouth shut? Did he not realise what speaking his mind could result in? Had he, Draco, not spent years training his son to choose his words carefully? To make sure he never spoke dangerous words in front of even more dangerous people?

“Mum always told me that you were a better man than I could see, but this is what you really are, isn’t it?” Scorpius burst out, on the brink of tears. “A murderer, a torturer, a-“

It was too much. At the mention of Astoria, Draco snapped. With sudden violence, Draco dived for his son, grabbing him roughly by his blond hair and dragging him over to the desk. He pushed his head down against the wood with deadly speed, holding his son there with unnecessary force.

“Do not use her name in vain, Scorpius,” Draco hissed, pulling at Scorpius’s hair warningly. “Do not score points that way. She deserves better than that.”

His son had fallen immediately silent with shock. He wasn’t even struggling. His eyes were clamped shut like a small child having a nightmare and wishing they might wake up.
Immediately, Draco released Scorpius as though he were red hot.

He hadn’t meant to do that. He hadn’t meant to lose his temper. He hadn’t meant to hurt his son…

Draco took a step back and smoothed a hand over his hair, taking a deep breath to steady his nerves. He should never have lost his temper like that. He should have remained calm. He should have remembered Astoria. If she had been alive to see his behaviour, Draco knew she would have been appalled. But then Astoria had always been too soft on Scorpius. She had objected to a great deal of his training.

“And no,” Draco continued, as though the desk incident had not just happened. “Those idiots blasting Muggles, that’s not my doing, though it’ll be me the Augurey asks to bribe the Muggle Prime Minister with gold.”

Scorpius removed himself very slowly from his father’s desk. His entire body was trembling. He could hear his heart beating in his ears. He wasn’t badly hurt, but he was entirely shaken.

He should have fought back. Why hadn't he? Albus would have fought. Albus would have punched and kicked and wriggled himself free. He wouldn't have gone entirely still with terror.

But Scorpius supposed Harry Potter had never dreamed of doing such a thing to his child.

“Did your mother really say that of me?” Draco asked his son, watching the way Scorpius tentatively stood up, like he was afraid of making a sudden movement, afraid it would draw his father’s anger to him once again.

But then his son forced himself to look his father in the eyes. The bravery of that, after what had just transpired, was undeniable.

“She said that grandfather didn’t like her very much - opposed the match,” Scorpius said quietly, holding his own hands together for comfort. “Thought she was too Muggle-loving - too weak - but that you defied him for her. She said it was the bravest thing she’d ever seen.”

It was Draco’s turn to swallow.

“She made being brave very easy, your mother,” he admitted.

Draco saw his son glance up at him, his blue-grey eyes full of disappointment. That was hard to take.

“But that was - another you,” Scorpius said simply.

He sounded devastated.

Scorpius stared up at his father. Still willing him to show some form of remorse, some kindness. Not ready to accept that this was it.

Meanwhile Draco peered at his son with concern. How was it that his son was showing every emotion he felt so clearly on his face? What could possibly have happened to bring this about? Usually Scorpius hid his emotions with the skill of a Malfoy. He would never have dared to challenge him, either. This speaking back, this questioning, this sudden obvious vulnerability (and new form of strength) shook Draco to his core.

His son blinked up at him earnestly.

“What have we become, Dad?”

“We haven’t become anything,” Draco said quickly, before he was forced to think about that question in any detail. “We simply are as we are.”

His son finally dropped his gaze. Scorpius stared down at the floor and gave a small, hopeless smile.

“The Malfoys,” Scorpius said, shaking his head, sounding almost amused in his despair. “The family you can always rely on to make the world a murkier place.”

Those words hit home for Draco. He remembered, once, a long time ago, thinking much the same thing. There had been a moment, in his youth, when Draco had wobbled. It had been around the time his father had attracted the displeasure of Voldemort himself.

Draco had recovered from this momentary lapse, of course. He had dusted himself off, and refused to be on the losing side. After all, he was a Malfoy. It was his duty to protect the family name and status for the next generation. It was for Scorpius. It had been. Even in the years before Scorpius had existed, Draco had acted with the determination of a boy brought up as the only heir of his family. Every hope the family had rested on him. It meant that certain choices were necessary. It meant compromising sometimes. And if his moral code ever complained about his actions, he would simply remember his duty.

Only despite the power and the wealth, despite his great reputation, the great glory he had won for his family, somewhere along the line Draco had lost something far more precious than any of that. He’d lost his sense of self.

If he’d had his time again Draco often found himself wondering if he would have chosen the same path.

It was too late for him now, of course. Far too late.

But for his son?

Draco did not want Scorpius to be unhappy. Despite his harsh actions towards his son, he loved him dearly. He wanted the best for him. It was why he was strict, why he used threats. This was a dangerous world, and a smart, successful young man had to learn how to exist within it. Hadn’t his own father taught him those very same lessons? Hadn’t Lucius sacrificed time and time again for his sake? For the good of the family?

More than anything, Draco wanted to understand Scorpius. Perhaps if he could, he might have more success in reaching him?

Astoria would have told him to try harder, to be more patient. She would have begged him not to upset their son. She would have done all she could to help him remember the man he was when he came home from the Ministry and returned to Malfoy Manor. So often those lines could become blurred. Draco wasn’t exactly sure there was a difference in the two men, but Astoria had been certain. She had married Draco Malfoy, she told him. Not the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. And whatever work he did, no matter how he made his money, no matter what dreadful acts he was forced to partake in, he was Draco first, and their man second. She would have wanted him to reach out to their son, now she was not alive to do so. This distance between he and Scorpius would have wounded her.
“This business at the school - what’s inspired it?” Draco asked his son, as quietly and calmly as he could. He crossed his arms over his chest in the hope his son might stop wincing like he anticipated being harmed again.

Scorpius swallowed, took a deep breath, and then held out his hands.

“I don’t want to be who I am,” he said simply.

That was an altogether worrying statement. Draco sighed and rubbed his temple.

“And what’s brought this on?” he asked.

Scorpius looked pained by the question. He frowned with deep thought, unable to express himself adequately.

“I’ve seen myself in a different way,” his son settled on, meeting his father’s eyes again.

Draco glanced down at his feet uncomfortably. His son’s gaze was too honest, too childlike in its intensity. He had not seen his son like this for a great many years now. Since long before his time at Hogwarts.

He was suddenly, startling reminded of Astoria. It wasn't any physical similarity. In look, Scorpius was his son through and through. But he had a softness to him, which Draco had noticed some time ago. He had done his best to help his son get rid of it, and up until now he believed he had succeeded. But for some reason, there his son was, looking just as vulnerable and docile as he had as a small boy.

Draco Malfoy could see the boy his son could have been. In another world, another time.

“You know what I loved most about your mother?” Draco asked.

He didn’t dare look up and see his son’s shocked face. Draco never spoke about Astoria. It was simply too painful.

“She could always help me find a light in the darkness. She made the world - my world anyway - less - what was the word you used - ‘murky’.”

Scorpius took an instinctive step towards his father. Draco looked up cautiously, unsure of what that step meant, of what he was supposed to do in response.

“Did she?” Scorpius asked in a whisper.

His eyes were wide with sympathy, with pain. His lips were slightly parted, like he wanted to speak but wasn’t sure what to say. Already he had put aside the violence, the terror. He was simply a son entranced by hearing his father speak lovingly of his dead mother.

Draco studied his son and sighed.

“There’s more of her in there than I thought.”

He watched Scorpius for one more long moment, before choosing his next words.

“Whatever you’re doing,” he told his son quietly. “Do it safely. I can’t lose you too.”

Draco had the absurd urge to reach out to his son, to pat him on the shoulder, perhaps. To touch his arm.
“Yes. Sir,” Scorpius responded obediently.

No, Draco thought, pushing the thought away. If he were to reach out now he knew his son would flinch, fearing another act of violence. He couldn’t bear to see that happen. He couldn’t bear to be reminded of what he’d just done.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” Draco said resolutely.

His son peered back at him and copied his gesture.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” Scorpius agreed solemnly.

It was too late now. His son had closed off. He had done that himself, Draco realised with private despair. He had acted out impulsively, in a childish and irresponsible manner, and he had scared his son. Scared him into silence. Astoria would have been ashamed.

Draco gave a short nod of his head, excusing Scorpius, and his son backed respectfully (and terribly cautiously) from the room.

Chapter End Notes

The first part with Umbridge is all mine. The Draco bit is from the script.

I struggled with this a lot. I think my main problem was the fact there are two very important perspectives to show here, and at some point in the scene, when you read it in the script, the POV character seems to change.

I don't know about you guys who have got the script, but it feels like it starts very much with Scorpius, and ends with Draco.

I am aware it might feel like an odd chapter because of that, and I did consider choosing just one perspective, but I couldn't do it. I felt that both of their thoughts were needed for this to make sense.

So huge apologies if this reads weirdly! I promise I am trying my best! And I hope I've managed to get away with it!

Please do leave me a comment (because it makes my day and boosts my confidence so much). Especially after a chapter like this I sort of dread it going up in case it doesn't really flow correctly.

I love you loads if you are reading this story! I read all of your comments!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Three and a Half

Chapter Notes

This one is all mine.

I REALLY hope you like it!

More notes at the end of the chapter!

(And please do leave a comment!)

xxx

Scorpius arrived back in Umbridge’s office with forced calm. There had been no time to think, no time to process what had just transpired between him and his father. Scorpius had simply pushed the horror aside out of sheer necessity. After all, he doubted the Scorpion King would be caught dead sobbing outside of his father’s office.

“Ah, Scorpius. Welcome back,” said Umbridge.

Scorpius noticed he and Umbridge weren’t alone. For a moment he was relieved to be spared another uncomfortable one-on-one conversation, before he realised what was going on.

A student was sitting at the end of Umbridge’s desk, a chair magicked into the space especially. It looked uncomfortable.

He was currently writing lines on a piece of parchment with a long, thin quill with a dark feather. Was that what he thought it was?

Scorpius did not look at the parchment to see what the student’s crime had been, instead he looked right past it to the back of the student’s right hand. It was dripping with blood.

Umbridge was using her notorious Black Quill to punish the student. Scorpius had read all about this particular monstrous object. The quill was magically altered so that it needed no ink whatsoever. Instead, it used the writer's own blood. Umbridge had forced Harry Potter to use it in his fifth year. It was one of the many offences the Umbridge from his world had been penalised for under the new laws for student protection. Hadn't it added at least five more years to her life sentence in Azkaban?

Scorpius remembered the boys he had seen in the hospital wing on his first night of this reality, with words carved into their hands. Clearly, the student sitting by Umbridge's side was not the first victim of the Black Quill. He doubted he would be the last.

The boy stopped his writing to look up at Scorpius.

“Oh no, Mr Jones,” Umbridge all but sang. “You can do another ten minutes for allowing yourself to be distracted.”

The boy winced but bowed his head quickly, writing with new fervour. Scorpius heard his breath
hitch with pain.

“Your father is well, I presume?” Umbridge asked Scorpius, in a pleasant, conversational tone. As though there wasn’t boy sitting at her left hand side currently maiming himself at her command.

“I… yes. Quite well,” Scorpius agreed swiftly, tearing his eyes from the terrible sight.

“Excellent. I assume he’s rather busy on today of all days.”

Umbridge gave him a faintly amused smile. Scorpius remembered the Daily Prophet headline and realised that he absolutely one hundred percent **hated** her. Possibly more than anyone he’d ever met in his life.

How anyone could find joy in the idea of hundreds of innocent people being killed while going about their daily business was beyond Scorpius’s understanding.

He forced a weak smile in return.


She paused to give the student beside her a significant look.

“And make sure you keep an extra special eye on this one. Dylan Jones. Third year.”

“I will,” Scorpius agreed.

“Because he’s **very** close to a spell in the dungeons. And you know how I **hate** having to send my pure-blood students there.”

Dylan swallowed and kept on writing, baring his teeth with the pain of each letter.

Scorpius found he didn’t want to know what Dylan had done wrong. He didn’t want to take a closer look at the words carved into his skin. He didn’t want to have to face the fact that this student was undergoing this nasty form of psychological and physical torture as a special favour. That this activity was probably considered tame, that Umbridge had been lenient because of Dylan Jones’s blood status. That Dylan was probably expected to be grateful for her generosity. If this was what Umbridge’s mercy looked like, Scorpius dreaded to think of what her full spite might entail.

“Good afternoon, Headmistress,” Scorpius forced himself to say, with a stiff nod, already moving towards the door. He needed to get out of there and fast. For all his efforts to stay in character, Scorpius was slipping back through. His time with his father had startled him from his performance. He could feel tears burning hotly in his eyes, just waiting to fall. He couldn't quite banish the recent memory of being pushed violently against his father's desk, the sudden pain of the act, the shock of it all...

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” Umbridge called out.

Scorpius stopped, thought, and then understood.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” he recited, not meeting Umbridge’s eyes.

“For Voldemort and Valour,” Umbridge agreed fervently, and with that she waved him away.

+++
What Scorpius needed in that moment was his best friend. He needed Albus Severus Potter. He needed Albus to tell him that everything was going to be okay, that what his father had done was out of line, and that he had every right to be upset. The trouble was that in this reality such acts of aggression seemed so normal.

He tried to imagine Albus’s reaction to his news. Scorpius could see his best friend looking furiously aghast. He would probably have called his father a rude name. Knowing Albus he would have offered him a new place to stay. He would have volunteered his own room back at the Potter household. He could be suddenly, heroically generous like that.

Only those thoughts didn’t make sense. Because in the reality where Albus existed, he would never have needed to escape from his father in the first place. He would never have felt afraid at the thought of his dad. His father would never have hurt him. Never.

The rest of the students were in afternoon lessons, which made the school seem like a fairly quiet and empty place. It was unusual, in this reality, to see a student rushing to a lesson late, or daring to avoid one altogether. Umbridge’s strict discipline seemed to have frightened any trace of rebellion from the minds of the students.

Scorpius was supposed to be attending Care of Magical Creatures, but he decided, for the first time in his life, to skive the class. It was that, or turn up in the Care of Magical Creatures classroom and start bawling his eyes out like a child.

Being potentially discovered as a skiver (and the potential line writing with that evil quill) seemed the better option of the two.

Too upset to make his way to the common room, Scorpius diverted to the nearest boys’ bathroom.

After a quick check that the place was empty, Scorpius wandered up to the ancient sinks and peered at himself in a grimy mirror. The Malfoy family blue-grey eyes stared back out at him.

Scorpius hung his head and finally allowed himself to cry, silently, tears dripping into the basin.

His mother had always said that it was sometimes good to cry. That if you were feeling especially awful, a good cry could make you feel so much better.

Scorpius doubted this particular cry would make him feel any better, but at the very least it would get it out of his system. His fear was that some small event later would push him over the edge and he’d be discovered. That someone might mention his father and he’d break down entirely.

“Scorpius?” came a familiar voice behind him.

He spun on the spot, trying to disguise his tears. The bathroom had been empty…

Moaning Myrtle was floating in the middle of the boys’ bathroom, looking more solemn than he’d ever seen her before.

“I thought you might be here,” she said quietly.

Scorpius drew himself up to his full height. He could still salvage this situation. How would the Scorpion King have responded to a nosy ghost? Probably quite nastily…

But Myrtle was not looking at him like he was the Scorpion King. Come to think of it, she wasn’t being her (fairly irritating) over-dramatic self either. She looked worryingly serious.
“I heard you had a meeting with your father. Was it all right?”

Since when had Myrtle asked such sincere questions?

“News travels fast,” Scorpius said, sniffing and trying not to look like he was about to burst into tears again.

“So do ghosts,” Myrtle responded with a small smile. “But don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. The Bloody Baron saw you in the Gargoyle Corridor. I thought it was probably another disciplinary thing.”

“It was,” Scorpius admitted, tentatively.

“Was he very angry?”

“I…” Scorpius trailed off, unsure what he could safely say.

Myrtle floated closer to his side.

“I won’t tell anyone. You can trust me. I didn’t tell last time, did I?”

Last time? There had been a last time?

Was the Scorpion King on speaking terms with Moaning Myrtle? It didn’t make sense.

Myrtle tilted her head to one side with sympathy and waited for him to respond. Scorpius made an instinctive decision to trust her. Perhaps not with everything, but with the bits he could without putting himself in danger.

“Quite angry,” Scorpius agreed.

“Did you want to take a seat?” Myrtle offered, gesturing at the nearest cubicle.

Not entirely sure why he did so, Scorpius nodded.

He walked across the bathroom to the cubicle, put the toilet lid down and sat on it, knees drawn up to his chest. They were fairly large compartments, and Myrtle was able to stand in the doorway without getting uncomfortably close. From what Scorpius knew of Myrtle, he would have thought she’d relish the opportunity to flirt and be silly, but instead she stood solemnly, hands behind her back.

“You don’t have to pretend,” she said. “I understand, you know.”

“What do you understand?”

“How difficult it all is for you,” Myrtle said. “What everyone expects. Having to be two things at once.”

Did she know? How was it possible? She had to! Myrtle had to know about the Time-Turner and who he really was. Was she the ally he had been searching for? How had he not thought of her before? Maybe, somehow, ghosts were immune to the effects of a Time-Turner...

“Myrtle,” Scorpius said breathlessly. “Can you help me?”

Myrtle blinked behind her ghostly glasses. She looked worried.
“I can’t do it again,” she said.

“Again? Do what again?”

Myrtle floated up a few inches with dismay.

“Don’t you know? Don’t you remember?”

“Of course I don’t,” Scorpius said. “How could I?”

“Oh no,” Myrtle said quietly. “I thought you were just play-acting. To get out of trouble. Did it really… did what happened really make you forget?”

“Forget? There was nothing to forget. I wasn’t there. It was a different me.”

“It wasn’t,” Myrtle said, rather forcefully. “I know it wasn’t. I know who you are, Scorpius.”

“And who am I?” Scorpius asked, needing to know if Myrtle was hinting at what he hoped she was.

She blinked at him, confused.

“You’re the Scorpion King. You’re Draco Malfoy’s son.”

“I’m the Scorpion King?”

Myrtle nodded.

“Yes. And you’re strong, Scorpius. I’ve known you since you were a third year. You’re brave.”

So Myrtle didn’t know. There was no way she could, because the Myrtle he knew had only just met him a few days ago in the other reality. Scorpius felt the urge to cry again. Another potential ally was lost to him. It had been stupid of him to get his hopes up in the first place...

And then he recalled Myrtle’s words.

“Brave?” he repeated, frowning.

Myrtle nodded.

“And good,” she added with certainty. “Even though it takes a while for you to see it sometimes.”

Scorpius stared at Myrtle, lips parted with shock.

How was it that Moaning Myrtle was addressing a boy that she believed to be the Scorpion King, and being so very kind and understanding? He was a monster in this reality. He knew he was.

“I’m good?” Scorpius repeated incredulously. “Myrtle have you seen what I’ve done? Do you know all the people I’ve hurt? That girl in the lake…”

“You never meant to hurt her,” Myrtle pointed out, very quietly. “We never meant it.”

“Never meant it? I pushed a first year into the lake! She died! I killed her!”

Then Scorpius stopped.

“We?” he demanded.
Myrtle shifted a little. She looked incredibly guilty.

“You didn’t push her,” Myrtle revealed, eyes wide. “I was there. It was my fault too. It was both of us. I helped.”

“You helped me murder a student?” Scorpius asked, horrified.

“No,” Myrtle said, looking shocked by the words. “We weren’t trying to hurt her. We tried to get her out through the pipes.”

Scorpius blinked.

“You got the Gillyweed from the greenhouses. I opened up the secret entrance from my bathroom. We did it together.”

“But… but why?”

“Umbridge knew about her parents,” Myrtle explained. “She told you she was about to act. So you came to me and we tried to sneak her out, before Umbridge could get to her.”

Could it be true?

“No,” Scorpius said, shaking his head. “They saw me. They saw me out by the lake. When she died. I know they did. That’s why they think I pushed her. I couldn’t have been here.”

“You weren’t,” Myrtle agreed. “You were out in the grounds ready to help get her to her parents. You were waiting for her to come up to the surface. Only she never did…”

She trailed off and fiddled with her hair, staring at the ground uncomfortably.

“I didn’t kill her?” Scorpius asked in a whisper.

“You were trying to help. But she wouldn’t go up. I kept telling her to swim, but she was too scared. I was in the lake with her, watching. I kept on telling her, but she wouldn’t listen. There were too many Dementors. She wasn’t used to it…”

A single fat tear rolled down Scorpius’s cheek.

Myrtle swallowed.

“It was… quite tragic really,” she said, shaking herself out of it. “But she went on. I had hoped she might stay, you know? Because it gets lonely. Sometimes. But most of them go on. I can’t blame her. If I could choose again…”

Scorpius stared at Myrtle with new understanding.

“The other girls didn’t like her much,” Myrtle explained quietly. “They bullied her terribly. I used to hear them in my bathroom. Sometimes they would steal her glasses. Once they flushed them down a toilet. I had to rescue them for her.”

Myrtle fixed her own glasses on her nose.

“You know, she reminded me a little bit of… well, of me,” she admitted, with a small, sad smile.

“I’m so sorry, Myrtle,” Scorpius said, before he could stop himself.
Myrtle gave a shrug of her shoulders and tried one of her usual dramatic twirls. It didn’t look the same as it had in the other reality. She seemed more... real, suddenly. Like a person who could be wounded just the same as everyone else. It made sense, now, the persona Myrtle put on. Her reputation for nosiness and inappropriate comments and dramatic outbursts. He knew what it was like to pretend to be silly and quite frankly ridiculous when you were hurting inside.

“But they all think I pushed her in…” Scorpius said, after a moment. “The other students.”

“Of course they do. What else could you tell them? That you were smuggling her out? You’re Draco Malfoy’s son, you couldn’t have told the truth. Think what would have happened to you. To your dad.”

Scorpius went quiet for a very long time. The truth of that statement was inarguable. Myrtle stared at him, hardly blinking.

“You helped me?” Scorpius said eventually, his voice small.

Myrtle nodded.

“I understand you, Scorpius. I’m your friend.”

To have a friend in this ghastly reality meant so much to Scorpius that he fell silent again. Myrtle wasn’t Albus. She wasn’t anywhere close. She didn’t make his stomach leap or make him want to burst out laughing. She wasn’t very good at reminding him of all the good things in the world, the way Albus was. Albus could manage that wordlessly, by his very existence.

But Myrtle was kind and she cared. Talking to her, well, it was good. It was quite a relief. A partial release from his five day long pretence. She might not have known who he was, or what had happened, but she did know that there was good in him. Deep down. Somewhere.

Scorpius could not possibly have hoped to explain what it meant to know that the Scorpion King, for all his foul behaviour, did have his almost-redeeming qualities. That he had a conscience. That he had done one thing, at least, that would have made his mother proud.

“You remind me of your father,” Myrtle revealed, drifting on the spot. “Before. You know… When he was young.”

Scorpius had forgotten that Myrtle knew his dad.

“Only you’re braver,” Myrtle continued. “If they still Sorted, you’d be a Gryffindor. I just know it.”

Somehow, Scorpius managed to laugh. He simply had to. This was all too surreal, too unbelievable, too utterly bonkers not to.

He felt high with relief. High with horror. Just… outside of his body. Utterly utterly overwhelmed.

“Scorpius?” Myrtle asked, as she watched him laugh to himself, tears still streaming down his cheeks.

“I’m fine. I’m… actually surprisingly okay. Surprisingly more okay than I was when I came in here.”

Myrtle looked uncertain, but gave a little smile as well. It was shy, and kind and not the least bit mocking.
Scorpius felt guilty for ever having thought of Myrtle as just a Hogwarts oddity. A historical figure to study and add to his collection of amazing sights at the castle. He felt awful for having first referred to her as ‘Moaning Myrtle’ in his reality, instead of by her name.

“You should probably wash your face,” Myrtle suggested gently. “Otherwise they’ll know you’ve been crying again.”

Scorpius nodded, smiling.

“That’s a good idea.”

Myrtle drifted backwards so that Scorpius could exit his cubicle.

He went to the sink and turned the ancient taps, splashing his face with cool water and allowing himself to breathe. He decided not to look at his reflection in the mirror. He didn’t want to see his father’s eyes, not right now.

“Better?” he asked Myrtle, turning to her.

She looked him up and down seriously.

“Much,” she agreed.

Scorpius felt the need to say something more to Myrtle. To thank her. To tell her how much it meant that even in this reality, there was goodness. That he was sorry to have ever treated her like a thing instead of a person.

But he thought probably even the Scorpion King wouldn’t have said any of that.

He had work to do. Now that he knew his father would be no help to him, Scorpius was swiftly running out of ideas. The only place he could think of going for help was the one place that had never let him down. It was full of wonder and history and beautiful beautiful books.

“I’m going to the library,” Scorpius told her, feeling he owed her something. “Things to research.”

Myrtle nodded, understanding the gesture.

“You’re not planning anything dangerous, are you?” she asked.

Scorpius gave her his best reassuring smile, the smile that Albus so often wore. He wasn’t sure he quite pulled it off.

“Nothing at all,” he lied.

He had the distinct impression Myrtle didn’t believe him, but she didn’t ask any more questions. Perhaps she thought it was safer not to.

“If you ever need to talk you know where to find me,” she said.

Scorpius nodded.

“Thanks, Myrtle.”

Myrtle looked like she had been in colour, she may have blushed.

“That’s okay.”
With that, Scorpius straightened his robes, smiled at Myrtle, took a deep breath, and strolled out of the boys’ bathroom. A certain amount of darkness lifted from his shoulders as he left the room, never to return.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, so one thing I've always had a bit of a problem with is how in the play Myrtle is written as a bit of a joke character. I think that her story is pretty tragic and I feel REALLY sorry for her.

I know I took a liberty here. I've had quite a few comments encouraging me to add more of my own content, and I hope it works! I just wanted to fill a gap and add a bit more to the world Scorpius is in at the moment.

For anyone who is wondering, the Scorpion King of the Dark AU, (in my interpretation at least) is a bit like young Draco. I think he's probably driven by pressure from his family and society but I imagine he struggles with morals just like Draco did. I cannot believe ANY version of Scorpius could be 100% bad. Which is why I decided to add this extra little plot point.

I'm not trying to make out he's a good guy because I think he is probably still a huge bigot and involved in some dubious stuff, but like with Draco I wanted to show that he has his wobbles and there is a certain line he feels uncomfortable crossing. And of course his mum is Astoria as well, so I think he would struggle to go along with all of Umbridge's ideas.

I hinted in the last chapter that he and Umbridge have private business together to do with Draco. For anyone who picked that up (because I'm not going to put any more about it in the chapters) Umbridge is trying to manipulate Scorpius into betraying his father when the time comes. Umbridge thinks Draco is too soft and lenient on Muggles and she wants him gone.

Please leave me a comment if you can because they make me so happy. Every time I get one I get so excited. Usually they come through when I'm actually working on the next chapter so it really gives me confidence and helps me through the tough parts!

See you next scene!

xxx
The Hogwarts library was almost empty by the time Scorpius got there. Just as he’d hoped, most students seemed to still be in afternoon lessons, leaving him to have a good old nose around with as few prying eyes as possible.

Albus would have told him he’d thought far too much already. Albus would have declared it was time to act.

But Albus never did understand danger, even when it was staring him in the face. He was wonderfully brave, braver than he seemed to realise, but that could also lead to mistakes. Scorpius was aware he had one chance, and that was it. One chance to get this right or else all those deaths, all that pain, everything he had seen so far, would be on his conscience.

It was his fault this had happened. And Albus’s. But mostly his. He should have realised this was a terrible idea. He should have stopped Albus. Persuaded him somehow to think first and act second.

But he had been swept up, once again, in Albus’s charm and enthusiasm, and because of that they were in this mess. Well, he was in this mess. Albus did not exist. And people were dead. Lots of people.

Being dazzled by Albus and his impulsive ideas was probably his greatest weakness, Scorpius had realised, during his many moments of deep thought in this hellish reality. Only Albus Potter seemed to be able to make him forget common sense and believe in something wonderful. Something wonderful which actually usually turned out to be something accidentally dreadful.

Scorpius wasn’t sure what he was looking for in the library, but he knew, instinctively, that if there were answers, he would find them there. Books were his friends. No matter what reality he was in.

Trying to appear as casual as possible, Scorpius strolled in the direction of the History section. It was without doubt his favourite part of the library.

On his way there he passed a familiar rope, guarding a tall bookshelf.

The Restricted Section still existed? Scorpius was baffled. The whole point of the Restricted Section in the old reality had been to ensure that only the very oldest and most trustworthy of students were allowed to view books on Dark Magic. Scorpius had assumed that since Dark Magic was encouraged and even taught at Hogwarts now, the section would be obsolete.

He got as close as he could without touching the rope, fearing that in this reality it would have some sort of painful curse on it.

The shelf no longer housed volumes on Unforgivable Curses and notorious Dark Wizards. Scorpius frowned, trying to make out the names of some of the books from the short distance away. And then he recognised one.

‘The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore’ by Rita Skeeter sat proudly at one end of the shelf.

Scorpius had read that foul book himself. He thought it was not only poorly written, but badly researched. Instead of being an interesting study of one of Hogwarts’s greatest Headmasters, it had
turned out to be made up mostly of rumours and speculation. As something of a history expert, Scorpius could not forgive such a gross lack of research, let alone the heavily biased tone.

The only interesting part of the book had been the letter printed on the inside, from Albus Dumbledore, to famous Dark Wizard Gellert Grindelwald. Scorpius liked to read about that relationship quite a lot. He had one special volume all about it in the library at Malfoy Manor. His father had looked quite concerned when he’d requested it for his birthday, but had bought it nonetheless.

If he remembered rightly, and he was quite sure he had, Rita Skeeter's book had been incredibly critical of Albus Dumbledore. In some places it had questioned his moral character entirely.

So what was it doing in the Restricted Section? Surely it was something any Voldemort supporters would approve of?

Scorpius squinted at the next title.

‘The Boy Who Lied: How One Wizard Deceived the Nation.’

Was that about Harry Potter?

Scorpius felt loyalty bubbling in his stomach. Harry Potter may have let him down. He may have tried to separate him from his best friend. But he was still Albus’s dad. Part of his rage was on Albus’s behalf, since he couldn’t be there to express it himself.

Albus would complain about his father constantly if he could, but he found it difficult to hear others doing the same. Albus may have had issues with his dad, but Scorpius knew that his best friend was loyal at his core.

Clearly these books weren’t portraying Harry Potter or Dumbledore in a positive light, and yet there they were, restricted.

Scorpius scanned some of the other titles.

‘Dumbledore’s Army: The Enemies Within.’

‘The Harry Potter Hoax’

‘The Order of the Phoenix: Terrorism for a Modern Age’

Every single book Scorpius could see concerned either Albus Dumbledore, Harry Potter, or those that had chosen to stand against Voldemort.

In this reality, Scorpius realised with distaste, you needed Umbridge’s written permission to take out a book which so much as mentioned their names. Even if the books were heavily biased in Voldemort’s favour.

At least that meant she was scared, Scorpius consoled himself, trying to remain positive. It meant that there were still students in the castle that wanted to stand up for what was right.

If the books on Harry Potter and the time before Voldemort had won the Second Wizarding War were so heavily controlled, Scorpius could only assume his planned research was going to be very difficult indeed.

Frowning, Scorpius walked past the Restricted Section and into his beloved History aisle.
The smell was the same as always, Scorpius realised with a sigh. He took a deep breath of the comforting scent of old books, of leather spines, of knowledge.

The Modern Magical History section looked promising. If there was information on the Triwizard Tournament of 1994 and beyond, it would be there.

He ran his fingertip along the spines, hunting for a helpful volume. There were no books about Harry Potter, as expected, but there were some which might have held some useful information.

Ah, perfect! *The Encyclopaedia of Modern Magical History* would surely have some answers for him?

Excited by his find, Scorpius pulled the large, leather-bound volume from the shelf and carried it over to the nearest table. He settled down comfortably beneath a glowing lamp, ready to research.

“How did Cedric become a Death Eater?” Scorpius asked himself in a whisper. “What have I missed?”

He opened the book up and examined the contents page.

“Find me some - light in the darkness.”

As with most Encyclopaedias, *The Encyclopaedia of Modern Magical History* was organised alphabetically.

Okay, so he wanted to find out about the Battle of Hogwarts and Cedric Diggory. But first, he had to check one thing.

Scorpius flicked through to the ‘P’ section, hunting for any mention of Harry Potter, no matter how fleeting. Surely Umbridge had missed a trick here? After all, this book hadn't been sent to the Restricted Section and it was sure to contain mention of Harry. But there on the page where Harry Potter should have been, instead of the paragraphs on one of the most famous wizards in recent history, was a blank space. The words had simply been magicked out of the book.

As a history-lover, Scorpius felt a new surge of fury. Nobody had the right to do that! You couldn’t just rewrite the bits of history you didn’t like. You couldn’t pretend they never existed. How could anyone learn from the past if nobody ever knew about it? Not to mention you couldn’t just vandalise a book like that!

Indignantly, Scorpius moved onto his next hope, finding the ‘D’ section and running his finger down the list of names.

And there was Cedric Diggory. Scorpius spotted the black and white photograph of him before anything else. He was handsome in this photo. Very much so, and looked to be in his thirties. But there was something in his expression that put Scorpius on edge, some look in his eyes…

Scorpius looked away from the image swiftly.

Cedric Diggory’s paragraph hadn’t been removed like Harry Potter’s had been. In fact, it seemed to have been extended. Cedric’s information was currently blocking the section on Elphias Doge. Scorpius suspected that was Umbridge’s work.


Scorpius wished the information was more detailed.

If only he could figure out what Cedric had done at the Battle of Hogwarts! Somehow, Cedric’s actions during that time must have meant that Harry Potter and his allies lost. But Cedric Diggory wasn’t celebrated as a hero. He wasn’t celebrated at all. To Scorpius's fellow students he was simply a minor (and quite scary) Death Eater. So whatever it was he had done hadn’t seemed important or worthy of note at the time. But it had been. It had changed everything.

Scorpius turned to the ‘L’ section, eager to read more about the Lestrange Medal Cedric had apparently been awarded. The information he needed followed three pages of text on Bellatrix Lestrange. Scorpius couldn’t bring himself to read about her. Even seeing her face frightened him.


A shadow fell over the page.

Scorpius turned to see if the lamp above him had gone out and instead found Craig Bowker Jr standing behind him and looking nervous.

Craig was a boy Scorpius recognised from the other reality. He had been a studious, rule-abiding sort of boy, and actually sometimes just a little bit irritating. He had the awful habit of reciting the Slytherin common room rules every moment he could and frustrating almost everyone there in the process.

Albus held a particular dislike for Craig, since he would often remind certain professors of homework that was due in, homework which Albus usually had not completed.

Scorpius didn’t mind that much, since he enjoyed writing essays, but he supposed it was a pretty annoying habit of Craig’s.

In this reality Craig really wasn’t looking his best. Scorpius tried not to stare too hard at his tattered robes. The Craig of before had always been pristinely presented as a point of pride. His shoes were always well shined and he could often be found in the Slytherin common room with polish and a rag, improving the effect.

If Scorpius was honest, Craig looked awful.

And then Scorpius recalled another fact about Craig, which made sense of it all. Craig was a half-blood. His father was a Muggle. He had lived with his dad, since his mother had run away with another Muggle man and moved to America. At the time (in their second year) it had been big news among the Slytherins.

Scorpius knew enough about this reality to guess at what had become of Craig Bowker Sr.

Without his father, Craig was probably living alone. No wonder he looked so awfully shabby.

“Why are you here?” Craig asked, looking nervous.

“Why can’t I be here?” Scorpius demanded, covering his book with his arm.
Craig seemed rather distressed.

“It’s not ready yet,” he admitted, fingers twitching. “I’m working as fast as I can. But Professor Snape sets so much of it, and writing the essay in two different ways. I mean, I’m not complaining… sorry.”

Scorpius frowned and closed his book, not wanting Craig to notice what exactly he'd been researching.

“Start again,” he commanded, in the way he knew the Scorpion King would have done. “From the beginning. What’s not ready?”

“Your Potions homework,” Craig reminded him, looking a little offended that he’d needed to ask. “And I’m happy to do it - grateful even - and I know you hate homework and books, and I never let you down, you know that.”

“I hate homework?” Scorpius repeated.

Craig gave an awkward forced sort of laugh, like he believed Scorpius had made a joke and thought he ought to pretend it was funny.

“You’re the Scorpion King. Of course you hate homework,” Craig remarked, scratching his nose.

Nosily, he peered over Scorpius’s shoulder at *The Encyclopaedia of Modern Magical History*. He looked slightly affronted that the Scorpion King was apparently doing his own History of Magic homework.

“What are you doing with History of Magic?” Craig asked. “I could do that assignment too?”

Scorpius glanced up at Craig, eyebrow raised. It was… actually quite liberating to be able to simply show people when you were finding them annoying.

He wanted to be left alone. He definitely didn't want Craig's anxious presence at his side. Covering his book protectively, Scorpius picked it up, shot Craig a withering look, and strolled off, in true Scorpion King fashion.

That was one positive about being the Scorpion King. He could be as tactless as he needed to be. There was no time wasted on sparing the feelings of others. It wasn’t something he thought he could get used to, but it really was a lot less draining than being nice all the time.

He couldn’t believe he’d let Craig do his Potions homework for him! And History of Magic too! Scorpius knew for a fact he was better at both of those things than Craig. His History of Magic work was exemplary!

And the very thought of having Professor Snape mark a Potions essay written by Craig Bowker Jr, thinking it was his work, was infuriating. Surely the Scorpion King still had a brain? So why wasn't he using it?

*Oh…* Scorpius thought, stopping on the spot. *Oh my goodness…*

He ran through Craig’s words in his head. Had he heard right?

Full of new energy, Scorpius turned back to Craig to clarify, but Craig was long gone.

Frowning to himself, in the middle of the Hogwarts library, Scorpius froze.
“Did he just say Snape?” he asked himself aloud.

A librarian shushed him.

Scorpius found he didn’t care. Discarding his book on the nearest table, Scorpius bounded to the library doors, almost knocking two second years over in the process.

Chapter End Notes

This scene is very short in the play. Added a bit of detail but all dialogue is the same.

Please do keep commenting because it makes my life!!!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Five

Chapter Notes

I LOVE THIS SCENE!!!

More notes below!

(And please comment!)

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scorpius ran all the way to the dungeons, leaping down the Grand Staircase, not even caring when his foot got caught in a trick stair. He simply yanked it back out with a breathless ‘ha!’ and dashed onwards. Nothing was going to stop him. Not now he had his hope at last!

And in the form of one of the greatest wizarding heroes of all time!

The very thought sent shivers down Scorpius’ spine. Not the now-usual shivers of terror or anxiety. Shivers of pure history-loving delight.

All this time Severus Snape had been right there in the castle! His solution had been right under his nose!

On the Potions floor students were leaving their lesson, looking tired and carrying cauldrons and books. Seeing the Scorpion King rushing towards them, they stopped chattering and parted in an instant, gaze lowered. They wondered who he was looking for and privately wished that person luck.

Scorpius raced down the dark, torchlit corridor and saw the Potions classroom. The door was wide open! Without a single thought for how he might be received, Scorpius hurtled through the doorway and came to a skidding stop on the stone floor. With something of a flourish he slammed the door shut behind him.

Severus Snape looked up from his desk, not so much startled by the loud noise as irritated by it.

“Did no one teach you to knock, boy?”

Scorpius could have done a cartwheel right then and there! Oh, if only Albus could have been there with him!

He looked just like in all the books! Scorpius could have recognised him anywhere! That hooked nose, the sallow skin, even the slightly overlong dark (but now greying) hair! Scorpius had never been so thrilled to see someone’s greasy hair in all his life!

“Severus Snape,” Scorpius panted out, breathless with excitement. “This is an honour.”

It took everything he had not to run over and shake Professor Snape by the hand in his exultation.
“Professor Snape will do fine,” Snape responded acidly. “You may behave like a king in this school Malfoy, but that doesn’t make us all your subjects.”

His voice was just how Scorpius had imagined it. Sarcastic and slightly drawling. It was a perfect mixture of disinterested and authoritative.

Scorpius continued to stare at Snape with wide eyes, full of wonder. This was a miracle! This was like something from a very very good dream! Just like that time he’d fallen asleep with his History of Magic textbook and dreamed he’d been having lunch with the four Hogwarts founders. He recalled Helga Hufflepuff being especially nice to him. She’d offered him a cream cake…

He shook himself out of it. This was no time to (as Umbridge would put it) dilly-dally, and Severus Snape was not famed for being a particularly patient man. At least not when it came to students.

“But you’re the answer…” Scorpius burst out, feeling the urge to cry with pure joy.

Snape stared at him with a pair of dark, penetrating eyes. And then he rolled them. Just like Albus did!

Scorpius knew Albus had been given Severus Snape’s name for a reason!

“How very pleasant for me,” Snape drawled. “If you’ve got something to say boy, then please say it… if not, close the door on your way out.”

Oh he had tingles! Actual tingles!

Scorpius took a deep breath, swallowed hard, and refused to move.

“I need your help,” he announced.

Snape did not even look up from his papers.

“I exist to serve,” he said dryly.

“I just don’t know what help I - need,” Scorpius explained, feeling surprisingly less nervous than he had anticipated. Meeting Severus Snape wasn’t like meeting a stranger. It was like meeting a well-known family friend. Scorpius had grown up on the stories of his heroism, and his sarcasm. His father had been particularly fond of him.

“Are you still undercover now?” Scorpius asked eagerly. “Are you still working secretly for Dumbledore?”

To Snape’s credit, he didn’t flinch. In fact, he didn’t react at all.

Oh he was a fantastic liar! A wonderful actor!

“Dumbledore?” Snape repeated, like Scorpius had gone entirely mad. “Dumbledore’s dead. And my work for him was public - I taught in his school.”

“No,” Scorpius said confidently. “That’s not all you did. You watched the Death Eaters for him. You advised him. Everyone thought you’d murdered him - but it turned out you’d been supporting him. You saved the world.”

Snape raised a dark eyebrow.

“These are very dangerous allegations, boy. And don’t think the Malfoy name will prevent me
inflicting punishment.”

No, the Malfoy name wouldn’t prevent him from inflicting punishment. Scorpius knew that much. There would be no punishment because Scorpius knew what talking about such topics in this reality could mean for a student. Scorpius was utterly certain Snape would never reveal this conversation had taken place. He wouldn’t have disclosed the information to Umbridge no matter who the student was. Because he was a good man.

“What if I was to tell you there was another world?” Scorpius asked, puffing out his chest impressively. “Another world in which Voldemort was defeated at the Battle of Hogwarts, in which Harry Potter and Dumbledore’s Army won? How would you feel then…”

“I’d say the rumours of Hogwarts’s beloved Scorpion King losing his mind are well founded,” Snape fired back, quick as anything.

Scorpius took a deep breath.

“There was a stolen Time-Turner,” he explained in a rush. “I stole a Time-Turner. With Albus. We tried to bring Cedric Diggory back from the dead, when he was dead. We tried to stop him winning the Triwizard Tournament. But by doing so we turned him into an almost different person entirely.”

Snape listened to the entirety of his speech with only mild interest.

“Harry Potter won that Triwizard Tournament,” Snape pointed out.

“He wasn’t supposed to do it alone,” Scorpius gabbled, stepping forwards in earnest. “Cedric was supposed to win it with him. But we humiliated him out of the tournament. And as a result of that humiliation he became a Death Eater.”

Snape was still listening. Although he was pretending otherwise, Scorpius could tell he was holding the legendary wizard’s attention.

“I can’t work out what he did in the Battle of Hogwarts,” Scorpius admitted, frowning. “Whether he killed someone or - but he did something and it changed everything.”

“Cedric Diggory killed only one wizard,” Snape commented unemotionally. “And not a significant one - Neville Longbottom.”

Professor Longbottom! How had he not thought of it before?

“Oh, of course,” Scorpius breathed out. “That’s it! Professor Longbottom was supposed to kill Nagini, Voldemort’s snake. Nagini had to die before Voldemort could die. That’s it! You solved it!”

Scorpius couldn’t help but give a happy little wiggle on the spot.

“We destroyed Cedric, he killed Neville, Voldemort won the battle! Can you see? Can you see it?”

Severus Snape surveyed him for a long moment. Scorpius held his breath.

“I can see this is a Malfoy game,” Snape declared flatly. “Get out before I alert your father and plunge you into deep trouble.”

This was starting to go horribly wrong. Scorpius hadn’t considered he might have to convince
Snape that he was telling the truth. Somehow he had imagined this would be easy. That he could simply go to Snape and like a hero, the professor would solve all his problems. But Scorpius hadn’t accounted for the suspicion of this reality, the hesitance that anyone with half a brain-cell needed to show in their interactions with others.

Scorpius thought hard, and decided to play his final, desperate card.

“You loved his mother,” Scorpius said bravely. “I don’t remember everything. I know you loved his mother.”

Scorpius was sure he’d seen Snape wince. It could have been a twitch, but it spurred him on.

“Harry’s mother. Lily. I know you spent years undercover. I know without you the war could never have been won. How would I know this if I hadn’t seen the other world…”

Professor Snape did not speak. He had no sarcastic comments left to deliver. He simply stared at Scorpius with those accusing eyes of his.

“Only Dumbledore knew, am I right?” Scorpius continued. “And when you lost him you must have felt so alone. I know you’re a good man. Harry Potter told his son you’re a great man.”

Another silence, this one longer than before. Snape’s face was twisted with confusion. He looked so very old.

But the suspicion was falling away. Scorpius could see it. He could tell. He was getting through!

“Harry Potter is dead,” Snape said in monotone.

Scorpius shook his head.

“Not in my world. He said you were the bravest man he’d ever met. He knew, you see - he knew your secret - what you did for Dumbledore. And he admired you for it - greatly.”

Scorpius took a deep breath and imparted his best piece of information yet.

“And that’s why he named his son - my best friend - after you both. Albus Severus Potter.”

Just saying his name in that Potions classroom, with Severus Snape mere metres away made Scorpius feel entirely overwhelmed.

By the rather constipated (and not at all glamourous) look on Snape’s face, it seemed he was struggling to retain his impassive facade as well.

“Please,” Scorpius said quietly. “For Lily, for the world, help me.”

Severus Snape stood. He was wearing long black robes just like in all the photographs and portraits. He was slightly shorter than Scorpius had imagined.

In a sudden movement, he swept around his desk, taking out his wand as he walked confidently towards Scorpius.

Scorpius took a step back, frightened, hands held up in front of him.

But Snape only raised an eyebrow at this behaviour and aimed his wand just over Scorpius’s right shoulder, right at the door.
“Colloportus!” Snape declared, and an invisible lock slammed into place behind Scorpius. 

He then stalked past Scorpius, stopping in front of the wall covered in shelves of glass jars. Snape reached behind a particularly nasty-looking green jar and suddenly a hatch opened up at the back of the classroom. Behind it was darkness. It looked like a secret tunnel! Oh, Severus Snape was amazing.

Snape turned his head and fixed Scorpius with a weary, rather impatient sort of look.

“Well, come on then…” he said.

Wide-eyed and still a little shaky, Scorpius scampered to Severus Snape’s side.

He saw Snape roll his eyes again at the enthusiasm of his compliance.

“Just a question,” Scorpius said, blinking into the darkness behind the hatch. “But where - exactly - are we going?”

“We’ve had to move many times,” Snape informed him. “Everywhere we’ve settled they destroyed. This will take us to a room hidden in the roots of the Whomping Willow.”

A secret room! Severus Snape had a secret room! Right under Umbridge’s nose!

Severus stepped back so that Scorpius could climb into the passage first. Scorpius paused, turning back to Snape curiously.

“Okay, who’s we?” he asked.

Snape’s lips curled into the tiniest of smiles then.

“Oh. You’ll see,” he remarked, and then gestured impatiently for Scorpius to hurry up.

The passageway looked dark and like it could be full of spiders and rats and other unpleasant things. There was a dampness to it which put Scorpius on edge.

But he was with Severus Snape. Hero of the Battle of Hogwarts. One of the greatest wizards in modern British history. A man who was somehow a part of Albus.

With a nod, Scorpius took a deep breath, and hurried courageously into the gloom.

Chapter End Notes

Snape Snape SEVERUS SNAPE!!!

Writing Snape is amazing. I genuinely love writing his character. I thought it was a really great thing the play did, to have Snape be appreciated for his bravery in one universe, even though in the real one he had a tragic end.

Wizard god let him meet precious bean Scorpius Malfoy. Which is a great consolation, I think.

Please leave me a comment if you have the time! They mean everything to me.
See you next chapter. (It's a biggie and writing it is HARD. But I am enjoying the challenge!)

(Say hi on twitter if you like! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scenes Six and Seven

Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy!

More notes at the end of the chapter, and please leave me a comment!!!

xxx

The swift walk through the tunnel was completed in silence. Scorpius had hoped Severus Snape might want to take the opportunity to have a good old chat, but instead, he only ever spoke to warn Scorpius of a sharp turn ahead, or to duck slightly where the ceiling of the tunnel was especially low. When Scorpius turned around to look at him, Snape was holding out his wand to light the way and wearing a determined expression.

Where were they going? Who would be there? Scorpius’s heart leapt at the thought of the potential secret underground society. After the Second Wizarding War, several people had simply gone missing, their names disappearing from history books and records. Harry Potter might have been dead, but there had to be others. Surely there were? All those that had fought Voldemort must have ended up somewhere. They couldn’t all have been killed. Could they?

Scorpius made a rather unpleasant list in his head, of the people he had discovered no longer lived in this reality.

Ginny Weasley had been killed soon after the Battle of Hogwarts, tortured by Rodolfo Lestrange using the Cruciatus Curse in revenge for Molly Weasley’s murder of his wife. The students seemed to think this a romantic story. Scorpius winced every time he heard it, thinking of poor Albus, who loved his mother fiercely. The thought of Ginny Weasley being dead was unbearable. The thought of her never growing up to bring Albus into the world was even worse.

The Weasley family was thought to be extinct. Scorpius had overheard a fifth year student talking about it in the common room, calling it a waste of pure blood.

As for Hermione Granger, nobody ever spoke about her. The one time Scorpius had dared to bring up her name, he’d been met with looks of shock and a long, terrible silence. If he hadn’t been the Scorpion King he imagined he might have found himself in deep trouble. He’d not said her name again after that.

Who else was there? Who had fought Voldemort before?

Luna Lovegood had been a friend of Harry Potter’s. In Scorpius’s reality she was a famous naturalist. Her discoveries were often mentioned in the Prophet, and she had married Rolf Scamander, grandson of the author of *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*: Newt Scamander.

But after her initial surrender at the Battle of Hogwarts, Luna had disappeared only a few weeks later. Like many of those who had fought against Voldemort, nobody knew if she had been killed,
or had managed to slip away to safety somewhere. He hoped she was okay, wherever she was.

Then he remembered the old Hogwarts professors from his reality, which extended his list considerably.

Yann had been particularly helpful in gathering this information. He seemed a good deal smarter than Karl, and claimed to know all sorts of horrific rumours (obtained by listening in on his Voldemort-loving family). He took great pleasure in telling them to his fellow students, especially the awed, terrified faces of the first years.

According to him, Sybil Trelawney had disappeared following a prophecy which could have been interpreted in Voldemort’s disfavour, Horace Slughorn had been executed immediately after the Battle of Hogwarts for disloyalty, Rubeus Hagrid had been chained like a beast in his hut only for it to be burned to the ground, Madam Hooch had died of seemingly natural causes, and Firenze, the famous centaur, had been sent back to his colony. The rumours were that the centaurs were muzzled now, although Yann hadn’t been able to confirm it.

Professor McGonagall had been killed in an almighty duel with Voldemort himself. There was a fairly new tapestry near the kitchens which showed the moment Voldemort had (magnificently, if the tapestry was to be believed) defeated her at the very gates of Hogwarts castle. Death Eaters were embroidered all around the pair, cheering as the witch was vanquished in a shock of green light. If Scorpius hadn’t known better, he would have supposed McGonagall was the criminal, that she was a wicked and powerful force, scotched by the bravery and might of Lord Voldemort.

This particular tapestry stretched all the way along the corridor wall, and went on to show a very small wizard (who Scorpius assumed was Professor Flitwick) being transfigured into a mouse and then stamped on, followed by a dark-skinned wizard in flowing blue robes (Kingsley Shacklebolt, no doubt) being fought by seven Death Eaters, his face mean and vicious, and finally ending up sprawled on the ground.

Scorpius considered his current Hogwarts professors. He couldn’t think of a single one who might be willing to work against Voldemort. They all seemed entirely taken with Umbridge’s regime. It seemed to be a requirement that a professor was loyal to Lord Voldemort, almost fanatically so.

But Snape would have the solution. Of course he would. He probably had a whole team of witches and wizards working secretly against Umbridge and Lord Voldemort. No doubt he’d recruited them himself. The passage was sure to lead to a room full of brave, helpful faces, and stacks and stacks of resources.

Scorpius saw a light at the end of the passage and turned to Snape.

“Keep walking, boy,” Snape said firmly, and with the slightest hint of dry amusement. “You’re about to enter the headquarters of the resistance.”

Scorpius almost jumped up with delight, but realised (luckily) at the last moment that the passage had a low ceiling.

The room ahead looked… smaller than Scorpius had imagined.

Still, he scrambled eagerly out of the passageway and found himself in an almost-empty, very tiny, very unimpressive, and actually quite chilly room. A large rickety table sat in the centre, covered in maps, parchment and quills. The lighting was poor and there was a distinct smell of damp.

Before he could turn to ask Snape if they had come to the wrong place, Scorpius was grabbed by
his robes from somewhere to his right and yanked into the centre of the room. With a squeak of fear, Scorpius was pushed against the table by someone very strong and very determined.

“You make one more move and your brain will be a frog and your arms will be rubber,” declared a very no-nonsense sort of voice. A very familiar no-nonsense sort of voice.

Scorpius twisted his head slightly and saw Hermione Granger looming over him, wand pointed directly at his face.

Hermione was alive! Thank Dumbledore! Alive and working with Severus Snape to defeat Lord Voldemort once and for all! It was like something from one of his dreams...

Oh, she looked magnificent. Scary. Perhaps a little bit scruffy. But every inch the heroine.

“Safe,” Snape declared witheringly, as he arrived through the passageway. “He’s safe.”

Scorpius looked up at Hermione’s blazing brown eyes and nodded with what he hoped was a friendly and not-at-all-suspicious smile.

“You know you never could listen,” Snape declared, sweeping further into the room. “You were a terrible bore of a student and you’re a terrible bore of - whatever you are.”

Scorpius could not help but let his jaw drop. He’d never heard anyone dare to speak to Hermione like that before. As Minister for Magic, she was regarded with a great deal of respect. To her face, at least.

“I was an excellent student,” Hermione responded, not loosening her grip.

“You were moderate to average,” Snape quipped back, before gesturing at Scorpius. “He’s on our side!”

“I am, Hermione,” Scorpius agreed hurriedly.

Hermione frowned down at him, distrustfully.

“Most people know me as Granger. And I don’t believe a word you say, Malfoy.”

With Severus Snape only a few steps away, Scorpius wasn’t afraid. He was too relieved for that. Finally he was with good people. Good people who would help him. Who would help him get Albus back. Who would help him change this awful world.

“It’s all my fault,” he revealed in a rush, seeming to deflate, the words coming out more childishly than he’d intended. “My fault. And Albus’s.”

“Albus?” Hermione repeated, glancing at Snape. For one fleeting moment she looked awfully hopeful. “Albus Dumbledore? What’s Albus Dumbledore got to do with this?”

“He doesn’t mean Dumbledore,” Snape explained wearily. “You may need to sit down.”

Hermione gave Snape another quizzical glance and then reluctantly, she let Scorpius go. She took half a step back and lowered her wand.

Scorpius stood slowly and dusted himself down. He realised he needn’t have bothered when he saw the state of Hermione’s clothes. She was dressed like a Muggle, in a pair of patched jeans and a faded zip up jacket, both of which had dirt and cobwebs on them. Her hair was tied back rather messily, so as to keep it out of the way.
She looked like a warrior.

Snape gave Hermione an approving nod. An uncertain sort of peace filled the air.

And then a man burst into the room.

Scorpius jumped, but Snape and Hermione didn’t move a muscle.

Wait… was that?

It was! It was Ron Weasley!

Ron Weasley was alive as well! Alive and maybe a bit skinnier than before, and with strangely spiked up hair, but there he was! With Snape and Hermione! The Weasley family weren’t extinct after all!

“Snape,” Ron Weasley announced, talking very fast, and panting a little, like he’d been running. “A royal visit and -“

He turned and saw the three people in the room with him. One of them definitely should not have been there.

“What’s he doing here?” Ron demanded, fumbling in his jeans for his wand.

He pointed it right at Scorpius.

“I’m armed and - entirely dangerous and seriously advise you-“

Ron stopped suddenly, realising that he was holding his wand the wrong way around. A little red at the ears, he cleared his throat and turned it the right way around again.

Somewhere to Scorpius’s right, he heard Snape scoff.

“-to be very careful,” Ron finished lamely.

“He’s safe, Ron,” Snape said firmly, sounding very much like he was rolling his eyes as he did so.

Ron looked at Hermione for confirmation. She nodded her head.

Looking immensely relieved, his body language changing in an instant, Ron let out a sigh of relief.

“Thank Dumbledore for that,” he breathed.

“Yes, thank Dumbledore you didn’t just curse yourself, or the boy who may be our only way out of this situation,” Snape deadpanned. “A typical Gryffindor response.”

Ron shifted a bit with embarrassment.

“Better to be safe than sorry.”

Scorpius couldn’t help but stare up at the three adults in the room with him. Maybe there weren’t as many people as he’d hoped. Maybe the room itself was underwhelming. And maybe this seemed like more of an obscure club gathering than a meeting of a revolutionary movement. But Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Severus Snape were all alive, and best of all, good.

After the week he’d had, Scorpius could have fainted with delight.
“How?” Hermione asked Snape, walking over to Ron and patting him on the arm, as though to console him for his earlier mortification. “How is he our only way out of this?”

Scorpius couldn’t help but beam at Albus’s aunt and uncle. If only Albus had been there to see his Uncle Ron dressed in a too-small leather jacket and looking like an awful 90s pop star!

“Did you want to explain, or shall I?” Snape asked.

It took Scorpius a moment to realise he was being addressed, so overwhelming was the situation.

“Oh - yes. I will. If that’s all right…”

Snape gave a generous gesture of his hand which was only the slightest bit ironic.

“Well,” Scorpius began, glancing from Snape, to Ron, to Hermione, and then back to Snape again. “I am Scorpius Malfoy. But not the one you know. I mean - I’m not sure if you know him exactly -”

“We’re more than aware of Scorpius Malfoy,” Snape remarked.

Scorpius took a deep breath.

“Right - yes. Well I used a Time-Turner, well, Albus and I both did. We were trying to bring back Cedric Diggory, who died, or was supposed to die. So we went back to the Triwizard Tournament to stop him from winning, but the first time he still did. And everything was different when we came back. Wrong different. And so we tried again at the Second Task. Albus was amazing. He made these fireworks that spelled out… well, it was brilliant. But we got it wrong and somehow everything went Dark, and I ended up here, and Albus (that’s my best friend) died because Harry was killed at the Battle of Hogwarts. And now things are bad - very bad - and actually quite terrifying - and it wasn’t supposed to be like this. At all.”

Scorpius stopped talking. Ron was staring at him with a slack jaw. Hermione was frowning with thought. Snape looked utterly underwhelmed by his description.

“What he means to say,” Snape began, summoning a rickety wooden chair with his wand and sitting down. “Is that he and his friend took it upon themselves to change history. Because of their meddling, Cedric Diggory lost us the Battle of Hogwarts. Which is how we ended up here.”

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. “Exactly that.”

Hermione scratched her chin with her wand.

“How did Cedric Diggory lose us the battle?”

“He killed Professor Longbottom - I mean - Neville. He killed Neville Longbottom, and Neville was supposed to kill Voldemort’s snake, and that would have meant Harry could kill Voldemort.”

“How did you get hold of the Time-Turner?” Hermione asked sternly. “Do they not have regulations in your version of events? How did two students manage to get anywhere near a Time-Turner?”

“Um…”

“Unimportant,” Snape cut in. “I’m assuming you have the Time-Turner in question, Malfoy?”

Scorpius nodded and reached into his pocket, pulling out the golden chain. He reached across the
table and offered it to Hermione with a small smile.

Blinking a little at his immediate trust, Hermione accepted the item.

Snape gave a sigh and with a wave of his wand summoned two more rickety chairs for Scorpius and Hermione. Ron looked over hopefully but no chair appeared behind him.

“I haven’t seen one of these in years,” Hermione admitted, examining the item with fascination. “They were all destroyed soon after Voldemort rose to power.”

Hermione glanced across the table at Scorpius. He looked ever so much like Draco had in his youth, but undeniably softer. His mannerisms were entirely different. He looked… kind.

“And how can we be sure we can trust you?” Hermione asked him, in a softer voice than before.

Scorpius looked helplessly at Snape, unwilling to reveal the professor’s secret. Snape understood his hesitance and seemed, for a moment, quite touched by his silence.

“Because he knows about Lily,” Snape said quietly. “About my agreement with Dumbledore. He knows it all.”

Hermione glanced at Snape with surprise. Snape simply bowed his head.

“And I know all about you, too,” Scorpius added, addressing Hermione. “I know about how you used a Time-Turner in your third year, and how you hate Divination, and how you went back for my dad. In the Battle of Hogwarts. You and Harry and Ron went back for him in the Room of Requirement. You saved his life.”

The memory was clearly a painful one for Hermione Granger, because she dropped his gaze for a moment. It took Scorpius a few seconds to understand that she was probably wishing she, Harry, and Ron hadn't gone back for his father after all. After what he'd learned of his dad in this reality, Scorpius wasn't sure he blamed her.

“Your father could have told you that,” Hermione pointed out.

“He could,” Scorpius agreed. “But I don’t think this version of my dad would ever have told me that Harry Potter saved his life.”

Hermione could say nothing to that. He was entirely correct.

She went back to examining the Time-Turner.

“So you’re telling me,” Ron said, surprising everyone in the room. “That the whole of history rests on… Neville Longbottom?”

Scorpius had almost forgotten he was there.

“I mean, that’s pretty wild,” Ron added, appealing to Hermione, clearly hoping she'd agree.

But she slid the Time-Turner back across the table to Scorpius (something which Scorpius hoped was a sign of growing trust) and nodded her head.

“It’s true, Ron,” she said.

“Right. And you’re sure because…”
“What he knows about Snape - about all of us - there’s no way he could…”

“Maybe he’s just a really good guesser?” Ron suggested.

“I’m not,” Scorpius said. “Can you help?”

Ron gave a sigh that meant ‘what the hell’ and placed his hands on his hips, trying to look impressive.

“We’re the only ones that can,” he said bitterly. “Dumbledore’s Army has shrunk considerably since its peak, in fact, we’re pretty much all that’s left, but we’ve kept fighting on. Hiding in plain sight. Doing our best to tickle their nose hairs. Granger here is a wanted woman. I’m a wanted man.”

“Less wanted,” Snape said, dryly.

Scorpius refused to allow himself to feel disappointed. Perhaps Dumbledore’s Army was now made up of three people. Perhaps the DA headquarters were hidden in a small, shabby room beneath the Whomping Willow. And perhaps that wasn’t as impressive as he’d hoped.

But it was more than he’d had. He was no longer alone, he had allies, and two of those allies were extremely competent when it came to magic. Even Ron had to be better than he seemed. He’d been an Auror back in the other reality for two whole years.

Alone, Scorpius had felt hopeless. But now? Maybe, just maybe, he’d found his light in the darkness?

“To be clear,” Hermione said, leaning forwards. “In this other world… before you meddled?”


Hermione frowned, considering this, and then broke into a small smile.

“I’m Minister for Magic?” she asked, sounding fairly surprised, but undeniably pleased.

Ron stepped forward and rested his hands on the table.

“Brilliant,” he declared. “What do I do?”


Ron blinked. He waited for a moment, hoping that someone might burst out laughing at what was a pretty hilarious joke. When nobody did he swallowed hard.

“Okay, so she’s Minister for Magic and I run a - joke shop?”

Scorpius looked at Ron’s poor, hurt face.

“You’re mostly focussed on bringing up your kids,” he answered with an apologetic sort of shrug.

But Ron didn’t seem overly disappointed by that. In fact, he brightened considerably.

“Great,” he said, warming to the idea, clearly imagining his brood of red-headed children. “I expect their mother is hot.”
Hermione tutted loudly.

“Well… um…”

Scorpius paused, feeling the blush rising in his cheeks. He chanced a look at Snape who looked so knowing (and repelled) that he was certain he already suspected what he was about to say.

“… depends on what you think of … the thing is, you two, sort of have kids… together. A daughter and a son.”

Ron and Hermione both looked up, astonished.

“Married. In love. Everything,” Scorpius said in an embarrassed rush. “You were shocked the other time too. When you were Defence Against the Dark Arts teacher, and Ron was married to Padma. You’re constantly surprised by it.”

The room suddenly seemed to have become very small.

Ron and Hermione looked across the table at each other and then looked away again. Ron began clearing his throat repeatedly.

“Close your mouth when you’re looking at me, Weasley,” Hermione said sternly.

Ron did as he was told but couldn’t seem to stop staring at her.

“And - Snape?” Ron asked, his voice sounding slightly odd. “What does Snape do in this other world?”

Scorpius opened his mouth to speak, but Snape beat him to it.

“I’m dead, presumably.”

He looked at Scorpius, right in the eyes. Scorpius couldn’t bear it. His face fell.

Seeing his reaction as confirmation, Snape smiled thinly.

“You were a little too surprised to see me,” Snape admitted, sounding oddly amused in spite of everything. “How?”

Scorpius swallowed.

Severus Snape had been killed in the Shrieking Shack on the day of the Battle of Hogwarts. He had been brutally attacked by Voldemort’s snake, Nagini. It hadn’t been a quick or painless death. It had been messy, and savage, and one of the most terrible things Scorpius had ever read about.

“Bravely,” he answered, in as firm a voice as he could muster.

“Who?” Snape asked curiously.

“Voldemort.”

Snape gave another of his thin smiles.

“How very irritating,” he said.

The room went silent out of horror and respect. Hermione looked devastated. Ron looked
confused. Snape simply looked interested, and somehow, calm.

“Still, there’s glory in being taken down by the Dark Lord himself, I suppose,” Snape commented.

Hermione reached across the table, as though she would touch Snape’s arm. She paused at the last moment and instead placed her hand down beside his.

“I’m sorry, Severus,” she said quietly.

Snape looked up at her, swallowed, and gave a short nod of his head, to acknowledge her kindness.

Then he pointed at Ron with a lazy flick of his hand.

“Well, at least I’m not married to him,” he said, dryly.

Hermione didn’t smile. She couldn’t seem to see the funny side of the situation. Instead she turned back to Scorpius.

“Which spells did you use? When you went back?”

“Expelliarmus in the first task and Engorgio in the second,” Scorpius answered, trying to be helpful.

“Simple Shield Charms should set both of those right,” Ron commented, rubbing at his chin thoughtfully.

“And then you left?” asked Snape.

Scorpius nodded.

“The Time-Turner took us back, yes. That’s the thing - this Time-Turner, you only get five minutes in the past.”

Hermione frowned.

“And you can still only move in time not space?”

“Yes, yes, it’s - uh - you travel back to the same spot you stand in-

“Interesting,” Hermione remarked.

Snape looked up at her and the pair shared a grim look.

“Then it’s just me and the boy,” Snape said with finality.

Hermione shook her head.

“No offence, Snape, but I’m not trusting this to anyone. It’s too important.”

“Hermione, you’re the most wanted rebel in the wizarding world. Doing this will require you to go outside. When was the last time you were outside?”

Scorpius saw Hermione’s expression falter.

“Not for a long time,” she admitted. “But…”

“If you’re found outside, the Dementors will kiss you - they’ll suck out your soul.”
Hermione looked conflicted for a moment, before slamming her hands down on the table.

“Severus, I’m done with living off scraps, making failed attempts at coups, this is our chance to reset the world.”

She nodded at Ron who wandered to a corner of the room and pulled on a handle, which revealed a large map of the Hogwarts grounds.

“The first task of the tournament took place at the edge of the Forbidden Forest,” Hermione said, in business mode. “We turn time here, get to the tournament - block the spell and then return safely. With precision - it can be done and won’t require us to show our faces outside in our time at all. Then we’ll turn time again, make our way to the lake, and reverse the second task.”

“You’re risking everything-” Snape muttered, shaking his head.

“We get this right, Harry’s alive, Voldemort’s dead and the Augurey is gone. For that no risk is too great.”

Ron nodded his head with grim enthusiasm. Scorpius wondered if he was more excited by the idea of Voldemort's demise, or simply having his best friend back.

Hermione paused then.

“Though I am sorry what it will cost you,” she said to Snape.

“Sometimes costs are made to be borne,” Snape replied with a (surprisingly Albus-esque) shrug of his shoulders.

Snape and Hermione exchanged another look.

“I didn’t just quote Dumbledore, did I?” Snape asked.

Hermione broke into a small and somehow fond smile. It lit up her whole face.

“No, I’m pretty sure that’s pure Severus Snape.”

She turned to Scorpius, who immediately sat up straighter. He wanted to show how much this meant to him, that these three adults were all willing to sacrifice their lives to help. He wanted them to know that he would do anything, anything, to make amends.

“Malfoy,” she said.

She didn’t need to explain what she wanted. Scorpius was already on his feet. He walked around the table and handed Hermione the Time-Turner once again. This time she accepted it with a small smile.

“Let’s hope this works,” Hermione said with a sigh.

Scorpius nodded. He felt certain that it would. He was with Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger, and Severus Snape. How could they possibly fail?

The Whomping Willow was perfectly placed for their operation. Scorpius couldn’t have planned it any better himself. The strangely aggressive tree stood almost beside the Forbidden Forest. Surely without the distance and without the Dementors, it would be easy to reach the location of the first task?
Snape stood up (a little stiffly) and walked over to Hermione. Ron, not wanting to be left out, rushed over to do the same.

The four of them stood in an odd group, peering at the Time-Turner in Hermione’s hands.

“You only have to think about where you need to be,” Scorpius said helpfully, as Hermione examined the Time-Turner one last time. “It’s been altered by the Ministry.”

“Whoah,” Ron said, looking awed.

“That’s - some very impressive magic,” Hermione admitted. “So just to be clear, we need to get to the first task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament.”

Scorpius felt sure she had specified that for Ron’s benefit.

“Wait - hold up,” Ron said. “What if one of us thinks somewhere different? What happens then?”

“Unless you get the date wrong, that oughtn’t be a problem,” Snape drawled.

The golden chain wasn’t long enough to put around all of their necks, and so they settled for holding a part of the chain each. Scorpius wound both of his hands in it nervously.

“Are we ready?” Hermione asked the group.

“As I’ll ever be,” said Ron.

“Of course,” said Snape.

“Yes - absolutely,” said Scorpius.

The first task of the 1994 Triwizard Tournament, thought Ron, Hermione, Snape, and Scorpius.

Hermione pressed down on the Time-Turner. It began to vibrate violently, and then suddenly exploded into a storm of movement.

There was a whoosh of light, a smash of noise, and then time stopped.

It turned over, thought a bit, and began spooling backwards…

Chapter End Notes

I chose to combine scenes six and seven because they take place in the same location and it didn't make any sense to me to write them as separate chapters. To link them, I added some extra dialogue, although the majority of the dialogue is actually from the script.

I have my issues about the way Ron is written here, especially, but I didn't want to change any of the dialogue, so I've just tried to go with it and keep him as Ron-esque as possible.

I hope it works!

Please leave me a comment if you can because it means the world.
(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Eight

Chapter Notes

This is another one which I am sure works better on stage, but I tried my best! I hope it isn't too confusing!

Please leave me a comment if you enjoyed this!

xxx

By the time the Time-Turner had finished vibrating, the room around the group had changed only marginally, the maps, quills, and papers disappearing, leaving the space even more dismal than it had been before.

“Five minutes,” Hermione said firmly, as though readying herself for a challenge.

She handed the Time-Turner to Snape, and led them out through a second secret passage, the one through which Ron Weasley must have arrived. At the end of a sloping tunnel was an unsteady set of stairs leading up to a pair of rickety wooden doors, which Hermione used her wand to fling open. Daylight flooded the dark tunnel (along with a healthy amount of dirt, mud, and general foliage) and Hermione climbed the stairs, gesturing for the others to stay put.

Scorpius peered out of the tunnel and up into the light as Hermione pressed on a small knot in the trunk of the Whomping Willow, which caused its swaying branches to still obediently.

Hermione gestured that the coast was clear, and Scorpius clambered out after her, staring up at the Whomping Willow with awe.

Scorpius tried to remember exactly where it was on the trunk she had pressed, just in case he ever needed to get to the room again on his own, and didn't feel like being attacked by a violent tree.

“Oh, fresh air!” Ron declared as he reached the surface behind the others and stepped out into the chilly afternoon. “And no Dementors! Always a bonus.”

Even from their position at the base of the Whomping Willow, the sound of excitement filled the air. Students were cheering and clapping. The first task was happening just around the corner!

Hermione gave Scorpius a nod, and began walking at a considerable pace towards the noise. Snape joined them, only sounding the tiniest bit out of breath as he did so. For his sixty years, he could certainly move fast when he wanted to. It was only Ron who fell behind, staring out at the landscape appreciatively and sniffing the non-misery-filled air.

“Keep up, Weasley,” Snape called back, and Ron immediately rushed over, clearing his throat and trying to look as solemn and serious as the rest of the group.

They reached the clearing in no time. Hermione walked fearlessly through the brambles, and Snape used his wand to clear his own path. Scorpius stayed close to Snape’s side so that he could benefit from that as well.
And then there it was.

The now familiar sight of Hogwarts castle, reaching up into the sky. Scorpius had gazed up at this exact same image, almost at this exact same point in time with Albus. It had been one of the most wonderful moments of his entire life.

“It’s just through here,” Scorpius explained, unnecessarily, seeing as they were now close enough to make out some frankly appalling commentary from Ludo Bagman.

The moment they stepped through the gap in the trees, they were engulfed by noise and excitement. The atmosphere was even more electric than Scorpius remembered.

There was the Champions’ Tent on one side of them, and the dragon enclosure on the other. Students dressed in Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and Beauxbatons uniforms were jostling to try and get to the front of the crowd, to get a better view of proceedings.

“What if someone notices us?” Ron asked, rather too loudly. A Beauxbatons student turned to look at him but was quickly distracted by the arrival of one of her friends, who she threw herself at, shrieking.

“If you keep your voice down nobody will notice us,” Snape declared pointedly, glancing at the excitable students with distaste. “You’re not that spectacular a sight, Weasley.”

“I wasn’t talking about me. I mean, the Hogwarts students might be startled by the fact you’ve aged about forty years,” Ron retaliated.

“This was less than thirty years ago.”

“Well, don’t beat yourself up about it. Looks aren’t everything.”

“Oh for heaven’s sake!” Hermione hissed. “Both of you, concentrate! This really isn’t the time…”

Scorpius led the three adults towards the part of the crowd he knew he and Albus would be standing in. His path was currently blocked by some very beefy-looking Durmstrang students who took one look at his (unusual) Hogwarts uniform and didn’t seem to want to let him through.

“The _first_ task. Retrieving a golden egg. From a nest of - ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you - DRAGONS. And guiding the Dragons - CHARLIE WEASLEY.”

“Charlie’s here?” Ron asked, sounding slightly shaken.

Hermione put a hand briefly on his arm.

“If we get this right then you can see him back in our time. In a better world.”

“You can,” Scorpius added helpfully. “You will. I’ve never met him but Albus says-“

“You’re becoming distracted,” Snape cut in. “Remaining alert is imperative to our success.”

Ron swallowed hard and then nodded his head bravely.

“Yeah, of course.”

Noticing Scorpius’s struggle with the Durmstrang students, Snape gave a subtle flick of his wand and the boys parted without fuss, leaving the way clear. Scorpius gave Snape a grateful little smile.
“And now, with no time to lose, let’s bring out our first Champion - facing a Swedish Short-Snout, I give you - CEDRIC DIGGORY!” boomed the voice of Ludo Bagman. The Hogwarts students began to shriek and cheer their support.

“Oh - wow,” Scorpius said, standing up on his tiptoes.

“You can see you?” Hermione asked.

“Over there,” Scorpius agreed, nodding fervently.

He had just spotted one familiar head of dark, messy hair and had to resist the urge to jump into the air with delight.

It was Albus! There they both were! He and Albus were both standing near the edge of the crowd in red Durmstrang uniforms.

He’d never seen the back of his own head before. At least not in person. It was a strange sensation.

“There we are!” he whispered excitedly to Hermione. “That’s Albus! That one right there! With the dark hair. Do you see him?”

“We see him,” Snape drawled.

But Hermione looked shocked.

“That was you?” she asked, eyes wide. “I saw you. I spoke to you!”

“Um - yes,” Scorpius agreed. “I thought you were… never mind.”

“Oh wow, Hermione, look!” Ron exclaimed, catching on a little later than everyone else and pointing through the crowd at the teenage girl standing just in front of Albus and Scorpius. “There you are. You were so young. You never realise, do you, how young you are - until you get old.”

And then Ron caught sight of Albus properly. His eyes widened.

"Your mate Albus... he's not, I mean - he's not by any chance-"

"Harry's son," Hermione breathed out, staring at Scorpius oddly. "Your best friend is Harry's son?"

"Yes," Scorpius agreed with some pride.

"Harry has a son," Ron said, still staring. "Whoa. And how old is he? About thirteen surely? Now I really do feel old-

“Your nostalgia can wait,” Snape snapped. “And you’re not old. If you really thought that you wouldn’t be wearing that ridiculous leather jacket.” He turned to Scorpius. “How soon does it happen?”


“And Cedric Diggory has entered the stage,” Ludo Bagman announced dramatically. “And he seems ready. Scared but ready. He dodges this way. He dodges that. The girls swoon as he dives for cover. They cry as one: don’t damage our Diggory, Mr Dragon. And Cedric skirts left and he dives right - and he readies his wand-“

“This is taking too long,” Snape remarked. “The Time-Turner is spinning.”
“What has this young, brave, handsome man got up his sleevies now?”

Albus raised his wand ready to cast his Summoning spell. Hermione raised her own only a split second after him.

She blocked his spell wordlessly. Scorpius gazed at her with awe. She made it all look so easy, so effortless.

Albus looked at his wand, disconsolately. He gave it a shake and then lowered it. Scorpius’s heart ached. Albus would think he had failed. He would be feeling dreadful…

The Time-Turner began to tick loudly in Snape’s hand. Snape grabbed for Scorpius. Hermione grabbed for the Time-Turner’s chain and Ron (who was too busy staring at young Albus with disbelief to notice what was going on).

They’d done it! They had changed history! Scorpius held onto Severus Snape’s robe sleeve firmly.

“A dog - he’s transfigured a stone into a dog - dog diggity Cedric Diggory - you are a doggy dynamo!”

A sudden flash of light, a loud whooshing noise…

Scorpius glanced up at Snape as the world changed around them, ready to beam at him now one half of their job was done. But Severus Snape was looking grim.

And then Scorpius realised. They may have altered the first task, but they were travelling in time, right now, and any second now they would be left out in the open. The very cold, very dark, very Dementor-infested open of 2020.

They’d taken too long. They were in terrible danger. There was no way to pause the rushing of time all around them and the moment it stopped, who knew what might be waiting?

*Severus Snape is with me*, Scorpius told himself, watching the man’s resolute face as his greying greasy hair whipped about him, the light changing hundreds of times a second. *Severus Snape is with me, and he won’t let anything bad happen.*

Chapter End Notes

Comments give me life. I am so grateful for them!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The edge of the forest was a darker, murkier, altogether more foreboding place in 2020.

Ron gave a groan to Scorpius’s left. Scorpius didn’t look at him, he had his eyes fixed on Severus Snape, who he was sure would be able to get them out of this.

Snape seemed rather less confident in his own abilities. He took in their surroundings with grim speed, assessing the situation with a sweep of his dark eyes.


“Ron… Ron… what has it done to you?”

Scorpius turned to Hermione and Ron. Ron looked bad. Very bad. His face was pale and sweaty, and he was currently leaning against Hermione in order to remain on his feet.

“Oh no, I knew it,” Snape muttered, sweeping past Scorpius, wand in hand, to examine the darkness around them.

“The Time-Turner did something to Albus too,” Scorpius gabbled to Hermione. He remembered holding Albus in that exact same way after their first visit to the past. “The first time we went back.”

“Useful - time to - ow - tell us,” Ron moaned.

Hermione shifted slightly to better support his weight.

“We’re above ground,” Snape said sharply. “We need to move. Now.”

“Ron, you can still walk, come on…” commanded Hermione. But the moment Ron tried to stand up straight he shouted in pain and slumped again.

Snape raised his wand and began pointing it around the group, into the darkness of the forest and the foggy grounds. It seemed very much like he was expecting an ambush.

Scorpius chewed on his lower lip nervously.

Okay, positives. There had to be some positives to the situation, didn’t there? At least they had completed what they set out to. The first part of it anyway.

“Did it work?” Scorpius asked Hermione, fingers crossed.

She seemed rather preoccupied with Ron, but managed to answer him.

“We blocked the spell. Cedric kept his wand. Yes. It worked.”
“But we came back to the wrong place,” Snape cut in darkly. “We are outside. You are outside.”

Ron raised his head (which looked like it took some effort) and glanced at Hermione with concern.

“We need to use the Time-Turner again - get out of here - “ he managed to say in a strained voice.

“We need to find shelter,” Snape corrected him. “We’re horribly exposed.”

As if in answer to Snape’s declaration, a horribly icy wind rushed about them. Scorpius shivered. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up. He felt not only cold, but terrified. Terrified and freezing and stuck to the spot...

Snape was the first to locate the source of the sensations. Then Hermione.

Ron decided not to look up at all.

Beginning to emerge dreadfully from the darkness, were tall, cloaked figures. They drifted in the sky above them as though underwater, their mouths gaping open, empty eye sockets blank and unseeing.

Scorpius took in the sight of the Dementors closing in and began to tremble.

“Too late,” Hermione breathed out.

“This is a disaster,” Snape declared.

Scorpius couldn’t have put it any better himself.

Hermione glanced down at Ron, took in the sight of Scorpius, standing there, knees knocking together, and then finally fixed her gaze on Snape with a sad, understanding expression. Snape was shaking his head, but Hermione ignored him. Her face grew determined.

“They’re after me, not any of you,” she said.

Snape made a frustrated noise.

“Ron. I love you and I always have. But the three of you need to run. Go. Now.”

“What?” said both Scorpius and Ron.

Ron now looked baffled in addition to appearing in a great amount of pain.

“Can we talk about the love thing first?” he asked.

“This is still Voldemort’s world,” Hermione declared. “And I am done with it. Reversing the next task will change everything.”

“But they’ll kiss you,” Scorpius pointed out, wide eyed with horror. “They’ll suck out your soul!”

“And then you’ll change the past,” Hermione answered calmly. “And then they won’t. Go. Now.”

Scorpius wanted to argue, but the Dementors took that moment to advance. They began to swoop towards Hermione, slowly, like awful rattling shadows.

“Go!” Snape hissed, grabbing Scorpius by the arm. “We go!”

Scorpius stared at Hermione Granger, who was standing with Ron in her arms, looking braver and
more heroic than Scorpius had ever seen her.

Snape yanked Scorpius back from the Dementors, and together they rushed into the safety of the darkness. The Dementors didn’t seem to notice them go. Their orders were clearly to take Hermione Granger, and nothing was going to stop them from doing that.

It was only when they reached the relative cover of the surrounding trees that Scorpius realised someone was missing. Ron was not with them. Of course he wasn’t, because how could he run unaided?

Scorpius peered out of the trees with horror, as Ron and Hermione stood in the midst of the growing darkness.

“You’re supposed to be going too,” Hermione told Ron firmly.

The impossibility of this was obvious. Snape put a hand on Scorpius’s shoulder to keep him at his side, to prevent him from rushing out into the open clearing to help Ron hobble to safety. Snape knew better than most that when a cause was lost there was no point in crying for it. A survivor prioritised the preservation of the self, and those they had sworn to protect.

“Well,” said Ron, in a forced-casual tone. “They are after me a bit and I really am in quite a lot of pain. And, you know, I’d rather be here. Expecto-“

He reached up awkwardly to cast the spell, but Hermione stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“Let’s keep them here and give the boy the best chance we can,” Hermione said quietly.

Scorpius looked up at Snape with horror. Snape merely raised an eyebrow, expression grim. If he was distressed he certainly wasn’t showing it.

Ron looked up at Hermione and then nodded, sadly.

“A daughter,” Hermione said, with a small smile.

“And a son. I liked that idea too,” Ron agreed.

Ron looked up at the mass of Dementors. There were more of them than Scorpius had ever seen. Umbridge had to be terrified of Hermione Granger if she’d sent what looked like the whole troop of Hogwarts Dementors to apprehend her.

“I’m scared,” said Ron, quietly.

The Dementors began to swarm.

“Kiss me,” said Hermione.

Ron thought about it, and then leaned up. Hermione leaned down. It could have been funny, that strange embrace, in any other circumstances.

The kiss only lasted for a moment before the Dementors swooped in to separate them. Slimy, scabby-looking grey hands reached out of the tattered black cloth sleeves and took Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley by the throats. Ron let out a horrific choking noise. Hermione clamped her eyes shut.

As Ron and Hermione were pinned to the ground, side by side, the remaining Dementors circled them ominously, forming a shield of darkness. Distorting horribly, as though being viewed through
water, two Dementors pulled back their hoods.

And then slowly, terribly, they leaned over their struggling victims. Hermione’s back arched with agony, and Ron tried to kick his attackers away, but it was no use. Scorpius watched as a golden-whitish haze was drawn slowly from the bodies of Ron and Hermione, who began to stop fighting for freedom.

Snape’s hold on Scorpius’s shoulder tightened.

The Dementors finally clamped down their jaws on Ron and Hermione’s mouths, administering the fatal kiss. Where Ron’s legs had been kicking (and then twitching), his battered trainers were now deathly still. One of Hermione’s arms lolled lifelessly on the muddy ground.

They had taken their souls, Scorpius realised, staring numbly out at the scene, as though stuck in a nightmare. They had sucked out the souls of Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger.

“Let’s get down to the water,” Snape said quietly, with only the tiniest hint of disquiet in his voice. “Walk. Don’t run.”

Scorpius looked up at Snape with wide, terrified eyes.

“Stay calm, Scorpius,” Snape instructed the boy firmly. “They may be blind but they can sense your fear.”

But Scorpius found that staying calm was easier said than done. His mind wouldn’t stop replaying the awful thing he had just seen. He was petrified. He didn’t want his soul to be sucked out as well. He didn’t want to become a limp, lifeless rag-doll of a person, with blank, staring eyes. He didn’t want to die like that. He didn’t want to die!

“They just sucked out their souls,” Scorpius said to Snape, numbly, teeth chattering.

A terrible darkness was settling over Scorpius. A terrible, inescapable dread. He wanted to run for his life and collapse in a ball on the floor at the same time.

A Dementor suddenly descended, landing right in Snape and Scorpius’s path, seemingly attracted by Scorpius’s terror.

“Think of something else, Scorpius,” hissed Snape, moving to get between the Dementor and Scorpius. “Occupy your thoughts.”

“I can’t,” Scorpius breathed out. His legs were shaking. His mouth was dry. Everything was starting to blur. Was he fainting?

“I can’t see,” he told Snape with some panic, realising that this was utterly true. The darkness had infiltrated his very eyes. “There’s a fog inside me - around me.”

Scorpius swayed on the spot. Snape reached out swiftly to keep him on his feet, not taking his eyes from the Dementor standing before them, simply waiting, scenting weakness, sensing a new victim.

“You’re a king, and I’m a professor,” Snape said firmly. “They’ll only attack with good reason. Think about those you love, think about why you’re doing this.”

The professor watched as Scorpius Malfoy trembled. He seemed to be on the brink of losing consciousness.
Scorpius could hardly think. His memories were rushing towards him, sweeping him away.

_Are we taking her to another Healer?_

_I expect you to be strong for your mother._

_I love you, Scorpius. So very much. Always remember that. Always remember that my perfect boy…_

“_I can hear my mother,”_ Scorpius said, trying to shake the thoughts away.

And then his memories distorted. A recurring nightmare forced itself to the front of Scorpius’s consciousness.

He could hear his mother pleading with him. He could see her. Pale and ill and thin. She was crying, shaking arms outstretched. She wanted some sort of cure. She thought he had it. She was begging and begging and begging…

_“She wants me - my - help but she knows I can’t - help.”_

Snape could take this no longer. If the Malfoy boy could not be drawn from his Dementor-induced panic then they would fail their mission. The deaths of Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley would have been for nothing.

Clearly the boy did not have the presence of mind to bring himself out of this. Which meant there was only one option left to him.

Snape did not enjoy using Legilimency. It took concentration and deep mental energy to enter the mind of another. But he was no stranger to using this skill under pressure. After Voldemort had won the Second Wizarding War, Snape had been forced to utilise his talents for both Legilimency and Occlumency more times than he could count. In truth, it was this skill more than any other which was keeping him alive.

And now, Snape thought, as he incanted the spell _Legilimens_ in his mind, it would keep him (and also the Malfoy boy) alive once again.

Scorpius Malfoy’s mind was an exceedingly bright and unexpectedly complex place. Unlike his father, it was not weighted down with guilt, nor loathing.

The boy was intelligent, of that there was no doubt. His mind was full of layers, full of strange facts and observations, of huge, unrestrained feelings.

Snape sieved through the useless information, finally reaching the forefront of Scorpius Malfoy’s mind.

Ah, there was the memory in question. Astoria Malfoy lay in her sickbed. She looked thinner than Snape had ever seen her. Dying, apparently. So these were her last moments? Snape could feel Scorpius’s loss, his despair.

That was no good. No good at all.

Snape would need to find some positive memory, some other subject or recollection with which to distract Malfoy, to bring him back to the present.

What had young Draco Malfoy needed to keep his spirits up? Snape remembered looking into his
mind on many an occasion, years ago, and seeing small moments of happiness in words of praise from Lucius Malfoy, affection from his mother, Narcissa, and even the feeling of soaring through the air on a broomstick. Draco Malfoy had been a complex boy, but easily read. Worryingly so.

The same could not be said of his son.

Snape decided to dig deeper. Ah! What was this…

There was Draco Malfoy, throwing his son against a desk, impressive and violent and terrible… the words ‘Son of Voldemort’ were scrawled on a trunk with bright red letters… a small, blond haired little boy walked hand in hand with his mother and father along a wizard street while a passerby yelled out ‘Death Eater scum!’… Scorpius rose triumphantly from the Hogwarts lake only to find himself alone and afraid…

The influence of the Dementors was making it almost impossible for even Severus Snape to reach some sort of positive thought in Scorpius’s mind. It seemed that every negative feeling the boy had ever experienced was rushing to the surface.

Surely there was something? There had to be?

And then he saw it.

No. Not it.

Him.

Breaking disobediently through the darkness at the very edge of Scorpius’s mind was a dark haired, green eyed boy. Those were Lily’s eyes…

Harry Potter?

No. This boy had no scar. It had to be Albus Potter. The boy from the second task. Scorpius Malfoy’s supposed best friend. Harry Potter’s son.

There was Astoria Malfoy dying in her bed, Draco Malfoy and Scorpius Malfoy at her side… and yet Albus Potter refused to fade. He was shining through the memory with the intensity that Lily Evans shone through his own subconscious. That brightly. Truly, that powerful.

Snape had his solution.

“Listen to me, Scorpius” Snape said clearly, keeping his wand raised in the direction of the Dementor. “Think about Albus. You’re giving up your kingdom for Albus, right?”

Scorpius wavered ever so slightly. But it wasn’t enough. His mind was still dark.

“One person,” Snape continued, hand on Scorpius’s shoulder. “All it takes is one person. I couldn’t save Harry for Lily. So now I give my allegiance to the cause she believed in. And it’s possible - that along the way I started believing in it myself.”

Albus… Snape heard Scorpius think.

More memories burst into life, forcing the others away.

Snape could see a train compartment on the Hogwarts Express in which two boys, Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy, looking incredibly young, were eating sweets and laughing, smoke was shooting from Scorpius’s ears… he could see the Hogwarts grounds covered in snow, those same two boys
trudging along with their books, green scarves wound tightly around their necks…

Albus Severus was a Slytherin? How could that be?

A game of exploding snap in a green dormitory, which ended in Scorpius weeping with laughter, Albus Potter grinning back… a sudden unexpected hug on the Hogwarts Express where the boys looked much older… the roof of a train hurtling past what looked like a large body of water, Albus Potter and Scorpius backing away from the Hogwarts Trolley Witch, clinging to each other for balance… Albus Potter complete with gills and webbed hands grinned at Scorpius, drifting towards him…

Scorpius blinked.

“You’re kind, Scorpius. From the depths of your belly, to the tips of your fingers”

Was that Albus Potter’s voice?

“In fact, you’re probably the best person I know. And you don’t - you couldn’t - hold me back - you make me stronger - and when Dad forced us apart - without you…”

Snape felt the hope, the determination, the sudden optimism before he saw it appear on Scorpius’s pale face. It felt like sunrise.

Looking dazed, like he’d woken from a nightmare, Scorpius stepped decisively away from the Dementor, who in turn was beginning to drift upwards, no longer sensing the despair it longed to feed on.

Inside Scorpius’s mind Snape saw a guilty smile. A guilty smile and those painfully familiar green eyes. They were glinting. So alive…

The Dementor disappeared into the darkness.

Young Malfoy blinked once again, stunned by his own achievement, and then turned to Snape with a brave, determined smile.

“The world changes and we change with it,” Scorpius said, swallowing. “I am better off in this world. But the world is not better. And I don’t want that.”

Snape found himself feeling proud of the boy. He hid that as well as he could.

“Professor Snape!” came a shrill, furious-yet-sugary voice.

Both Snape and Scorpius turned and saw Dolores Umbridge trotting rapidly towards them, stumpy little wand raised. Scorpius gave a small gasp, but Snape merely raised an eyebrow.

“Professor Umbridge,” he greeted her in monotone, as though there was nothing strange at all about his being out in the forbidden Hogwarts grounds with a student.

“Have you heard the news?” Umbridge demanded, her black hat balancing precariously atop her greying hair. “We’ve caught that traitorous Mudblood Hermione Granger. She was just out here.”

Snape forced a thin, albeit rather disinterested smile.

“That’s - fantastic,” he drawled.

“With you. Granger was with you.”
Umbridge’s shiny brown eyes did not leave Snape’s face.

“With me?” Snape repeated coolly. “You’re mistaken.”

“With you and Scorpius Malfoy. A student I’m becoming increasingly concerned about.”

“Well…” Scorpius began, but Snape silenced him with a pat on the shoulder.

“Dolores, we’re late for class, so if you’ll excuse us…”

Snape kept a hand on Scorpius’s shoulder and began to lead him away from Umbridge at a casual pace. Scorpius could hear his heart beating in his ears.

“If you’re late for class,” Umbridge called after them. “Why are you not heading back to the school? Why are you heading to the lake?”

Scorpius froze on the spot and looked up at Snape.

There was a terrible moment of silence.

And then Snape turned to face Umbridge, slowly, wand in hand. Scorpius turned as well, eyes wide.

Severus Snape raised an amused eyebrow at Dolores Umbridge and then - strangely - smiled.

“How long have you suspected?” he asked.

Umbridge gave a sigh of satisfaction. The look in her eyes was malicious. She drew herself up to her full height and smiled back at Snape, sugary sweet and deadly. Umbridge opened her arms wide, full of Dark Magic, rising like a witch from a Muggle fairytale.

Scorpius took a horrified step backwards, and Snape immediately shielded him with his body.

“Years,” she responded, sounding almost joyous in her triumph. “And I should have acted upon it far earlier.”

Snape and Umbridge both raised their wands.

But Snape was a fraction of a second faster.

“Depulso!” yelled Snape.

Dolores Umbridge was propelled backwards through the air, short arms and legs flailing. She soared up and then horribly, came crashing down again somewhere in the forest with a distinct crunching noise. The ensuing silence made Scorpius wonder if she was dead. The thought filled him with mingled relief and horror.

“She always was too grand for her own good,” Snape remarked calmly. “There’s no turning back now.”

The sky began to turn black. It was as though night had fallen, even though Scorpius knew it was impossible. All the light was being blocked out…

Alerted by the attack on their commander, hundreds of Dementors swooped down towards them.

“Expecto Patronum!” Snape shouted, and with a flourish of his wand, a beautiful white Patronus
was sent forth. It looked like a deer… no. It was too small to be a deer. And it had no antlers…

“A doe? Lily’s Patronus?” Scorpius breathed out with wonder.

Snape gave a nod of his head.

“Strange isn’t it? What comes from within.”

Snape’s Patronus tore through the descending Dementors, sending others scattering from its path. Scorpius stared up at the sight, his lips parted with awe. But it wasn’t enough. The doe, alone, wasn’t strong enough for the amassing Dementors, who seemed to be growing in number by the second.

“You need to run,” Snape declared, taking the Time-Turner from his robes and placing the chain around Scorpius’s neck. “I will keep them at bay for as long as I can.”

Scorpius didn’t want to leave him. He didn’t want to do this alone. He faltered on the spot.

But then the death-rattle of the Dementors grew louder. Coldness began to fill the area, despite Snape’s doe Patronus.

If he didn’t go now this would all be for nothing. He would never have another chance to get Albus back.

He didn’t know what to say to Snape. He didn’t know how to adequately express his admiration and his gratefulness, and his complete and utter respect. He didn’t know how to explain what an honour it was - had been - to have met the wizard who brought about the end of the Second Wizarding War. The hero that had saved his father’s life time and time again.

“Thank you for being my light in the darkness,” Scorpius said, blinking.

Snape looked at him, at this odd Malfoy boy with none of the darkness of his father. At least he would leave this world having seen this goodness, Snape thought, having seen hope. He hadn’t seen that in a very long time. He had almost forgotten what it looked like.

He thought of Scorpius Malfoy’s memories. Of the boy that shone through his thoughts. The boy who looked like Harry Potter, and yet didn’t. The boy with the dark messy hair and Lily’s green eyes. The boy who did not appear the slightest bit arrogant, but instead looked like an awkward, troubled soul. The boy who Scorpius clearly adored.

The boy with Lily’s kindness. The boy with his name.

For a moment, Snape smiled, softly. And then he shook it away.


Snape gave an elegant wave of his wand and the doe turned its back on the swarming Dementors. It changed course and dashed obediently to Scorpius’s side. Severus Snape had given him a final gift of protection.

The doe looked at Scorpius with its large, sad eyes, and then began to run along the edge of the forest. With one last lingering look at Severus Snape, who was standing like a hero, hands at his sides, ready to face death, Scorpius raced after the doe.
Behind him the Dementors gave an almighty death rattle, Severus Snape shouted out, and then there was silence.

Tears streaming down his cheeks Scorpius sprinted on, the doe guarding him from the darkness, from the cold, from the hopelessness.

The lake was close. Scorpius could see the surface glinting in the moonlight. He had made it almost all the way to the bank!

And then the doe turned to Scorpius, with her beautiful eyes. The moment she dissolved into nothing, Scorpius knew that Snape was dead. That his soul had been sucked from him.

Scorpius clutched at the Time-Turner around his neck and with great determination ran to the lake’s edge.

*The second task of the Triwizard Tournament, 1995,* Scorpius thought, as he pressed down on the Time-Turner, took a deep breath, and threw himself headfirst into the water.

He did not notice the world changing around him. He did not hear the whooshing of the years passing by in an instant or the sound of students cheering and laughing up above. Scorpius was too busy allowing himself to sink. He needed to get to Albus. If he drowned in the process it could hardly be worse than returning to Voldemort’s world. After the sacrifices of Hermione, Ron, and Snape, Scorpius knew he had no excuse to be cowardly. And if he died, trying to do what was right, trying to make amends, then at least he could look Severus Snape in the eyes in the next life and be proud.

He knew he still had a chance when Cedric Diggory came swimming into view with a normal-sized bubble around his head. Which meant he and Albus had to be nearby. Somewhere to his right…

Yes! There they were! He spotted his own blond hair before he spotted anything else. Scorpius really hoped that they wouldn’t spot him because of the same reason. They both had webbed hands, and Scorpius noticed he actually looked rather graceful swimming along just a bit behind Albus.

Albus turned back to his Scorpius, and then pointed his wand at Cedric Diggory.

It was now or never! Albus’s spell hit Cedric in a burst of golden light, revealing his shocked face as the bubble around his head began to grow. As Cedric kicked out his legs, nobly trying to stop himself from floating upwards, Scorpius pulled out his wand and aimed it at the handsome Champion.

He did not know the counter curse to Engorgio, and it was too late to use the Shield Charm Ron Weasley had suggested, but Scorpius did remember a simple counter spell. He had seen it used often in the Dark reality during duels to reverse the most dreadful disfigurements and evil curses.

*Finite Incantatem,* Scorpius thought, and his wand obeyed.

Almost immediately Cedric Diggory stopped struggling. The bubble around his head shrank to normal size, and with a look of confusion and relief, Cedric swam on.

Scorpius would have shouted for joy had he not been holding his breath.

He glanced over at Albus, checking all was still well, and saw that he, the other Scorpius, had disappeared. The other him had simply blinked from existence. It was a startling and strangely
Albus hadn’t noticed yet. He was too busy watching Cedric swim off towards what looked to be a distant Merman.

*Take me back, take me back, take me back!* Scorpius thought desperately, pressing down on the Time-Turner as his lungs ached for air. He prayed the Time-Turner would understand. He had no time left to think of dates or specifics. Not while his chest burned like it was about to burst.

Scorpius kicked to the surface, his natural need for oxygen overtaking every other thought in his head.

And as he did so, the water swirled around him, the lights dancing, the Time-Turner ticking obediently. The noise of cheering students drifted away…

The moment his head broke the surface, Scorpius took a huge breath of air, gasping to try and return the oxygen to his body. He was alive. He was alive!

He began to tread water, looking up at the sky. It was definitely bluer than before.

That meant no Dementors. He hoped it meant no Voldemort. No troubled Cedric Diggory turning to the Dark Side. No Dolores Umbridge waiting for him at the lake’s edge.

But did it also mean no Albus?

Where was he? Harry Potter should have won the Second Wizarding War, which meant Albus Potter had to exist now, didn’t he?

A horrendous thought struck Scorpius. What if the world was better, if it was good and bright and not being ruled over by some despotic wizard, but there was still no Albus Severus Potter?

Scorpius hadn’t wanted the last world, not one bit. But if that was the case he wasn’t sure he wanted this one either…

And then suddenly a dripping wet, panting, utterly exhilarated if slightly confused Albus Potter emerged beside him.

For a moment Scorpius didn’t allow himself to believe it. He looked at Albus, unblinkingly.

Albus looked right back.

The world was so still, so peaceful, that the only sounds were of both of their breathing. In and out, in and out, louder than was necessary.

“Whoah!” Albus exclaimed, grinning.

Scorpius could hold back no longer.

“Albus!” he yelled out joyously.

“That was close!” Albus panted. “Did you see that Merman? The guy with the - and then the thing with the - whoah!”

“It’s you!” Scorpius blurted out, cheeks pink with a mixture of the cold and his complete and utter relief.
“It was weird though,” Albus said, oblivious to Scorpius’s euphoria. “I thought I saw Cedric start to expand - but then he sort of started shrinking again - and I looked at you and you had your wand out…”

Scorpius could have cried! He wanted to punch the air with relief!

“You have no idea how good it is to see you again,” Scorpius said, slightly tearfully. He hoped the fact he and Albus were both sopping wet would disguise this fact.

“You just saw me two minutes ago,” Albus said, raising an eyebrow.

There was nothing else for it. Scorpius launched himself at Albus, right there in the lake, hugging him tight, clinging to him as best he could. He had missed Albus with every fibre of his being. Never was he letting he and Albus become separated again. He would duel Harry Potter himself if he had to!

“A lot has happened since then,” Scorpius told his best friend, over his shoulder.

There was a pause, then, in which Albus gave him a fleeting squeeze in return, and then, rather awkwardly patted him on the back.

“Careful,” Albus said, mildly. “You’re drowning me. What are you wearing?”

“What am I wearing?” Scorpius repeated, disentangling himself from Albus. He pulled off his dark cloak with some difficulty, disposed of it in the water, and then looked at Albus’s own clothing.

“What are you wearing?” Scorpius asked, reaching out to grab Albus’s robes. Albus raised his eyebrow even higher but didn’t move away.

“Oh…” he breathed out, seeing the Gryffindor crest on his best friend’s robes. "Well... I suppose that’s not so bad."

By the fond roll of Albus’s eyes, he clearly thought his best friend had gone entirely mad. Actually, no. He didn’t look like he thought his best friend had gone mad. He looked more like he knew already that Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy was utterly beyond words or explanation and had come to terms with that fact some time ago.

“Did it work?” Albus asked, more seriously now. “Did we do anything?”

Scorpius forced himself not to be disappointed. He had hoped that Albus might end up back in Slytherin. But after what he’d been through, he knew that even if he and his best ever friend were in different Houses, they would find a way past it. Somehow.

“No,” Scorpius informed him with a beam. “And it’s brilliant!”

Albus stared at Scorpius with disbelief.

“What? We failed?”

Albus looked down at his own robes and frowned at the Gryffindor lion. He had the urge to tear the thing off him altogether. What had been the point of all this if he was still a Gryffindor? If he was still parted from Scorpius?

“Yes. YES. AND IT’S AMAZING!” Scorpius all but shouted. He felt so happy, so utterly filled with pure, unadulterated joy, that he attempted to dance in the water, splashing about delightedly.
Albus grimaced as the cold lake water rained down on his face, and moved to the bank, pulling himself out of the lake with a grunt and all but collapsing on the grass.

From the bank, Albus rolled onto his side and watched Scorpius’s celebrations. Well, for one thing, his best friend had learned to swim from the experience, which meant it couldn’t be counted as a complete failure.

Scorpius looked euphoric. Albus couldn’t understand it. He thought for a moment it might have been a side-effect of the Gillyweed, but he felt just fine. Okay, perhaps not fine. But certainly not ready to start performing an elaborate routine in the freezing Hogwarts lake.

“Scorpius, have you been eating too many sweets again?” Albus asked, frowning.

Scorpius stopped his dancing in an instant, almost sank under the water (at which Albus sat up sharply, ready to dive to his rescue), remembered he was supposed to be treading water, and then continued cheerfully.

“There you go see - all dry humour and Albus-y,” Scorpius declared, sounding rather like Uncle Ron did when he was getting all drunk and affectionate with Aunt Hermione. “I love it.”

Albus blinked a bit at the compliment.

“Now I’m starting to get worried…”

At that moment Albus became aware of the sound of heavy footsteps behind him. Running footsteps.

He turned to discover the source of the noise, and Scorpius bobbed about in the water, watching with glee as Harry Potter sprinted towards his son looking so relieved he might faint.


Before Albus could answer, Draco Malfoy reached the bank, with his mother, Ginny, hot at his heels. Behind them, Professor McGonagall was half running, half striding in quite a hilarious fashion, holding her black pointed hat atop her head to stop it from flying off.

“Harry!” Scorpius declared joyfully. “It’s Harry Potter!

Harry Potter glanced down at Scorpius with surprise. He hadn’t expected so warm a greeting from Draco’s son. Guilt twisted in Harry’s stomach as he watched the boy swim excitedly to the bank and begin to heave himself up beside Albus.

“And Ginny!” Scorpius said, seeing Albus’s mother step forwards. “And Professor McGonagall.”

Scorpius paused as he rolled, rather clumsily, onto the grass. He seemed to wind himself for a moment, before picking himself up, beaming.

“And Dad,” he announced, looking up at his father with shining eyes. (Harry privately wished Albus would look at him like that, with such adoration and respect.) “My dad. Hi. Dad.”

He gave his father a tiny, hopeful wave.

“Hello Scorpius,” Draco said. And then he gave his son a small, relieved smile.

Scorpius looked about ready to start crying with relief.
“You’re all here,” Albus said, staring at the odd group of adults. He wanted to look his father dead in the eye, to tell him that he was done with following his ridiculous rules, and that he was a Slytherin. If that meant being the first student to change Houses then so be it. But he still felt too embarrassed, too small. Not to mention guilty, after his and Scorpius's second attempt at time travelling.

Ginny placed her hands on her hips. Never in her life had Albus seen her look more like his grandmother.

“And Myrtle told us everything,” she declared, eyes narrowed.

Immediately Albus decided it was best to deny everything. He could lie his way out of this. He could lie them both out of this if he really put his mind to it…

“What is going on?” he asked innocently.

Professor McGonagall gave him a stern look.

“You’re the one that’s just returned from time,” she declared in steely tones. “Why don’t you tell us?”

*Oh Dumbledore*, how did she know that? Albus raised his eyebrows with pure disbelief. As though Professor McGonagall had gone quite mad.

Scorpius looked from face to face. Harry looked confused and hurt. Ginny was staring at her son fiercely with a mixture of anger and devotion. Professor McGonagall was currently getting the measure of Albus, glasses on the end of her nose. But his father was simply looking from him to Albus with curiosity. He looked overwhelmed. Actually, he looked exhausted. Scorpius felt more than a little guilty for that.

If the Dark reality had taught him anything it was that he was never going to live a lie again. Not for anything. He was going to be Scorpius Malfoy. Entirely. No matter who didn't like it.

And he wasn’t going to lie to his father. Not this version of his father. The real version. Because he was a good man and Scorpius loved him and he deserved the truth… Except from when it was absolutely one hundred percent necessary.

Swiftly tucking the golden chain beneath his robes, Scorpius looked down at his chest theatrically, the picture of distress.

“Oh no,” Scorpius muttered. “Oh bother. Where is it?”

“Just returned from where?” Albus asked Professor McGonagall politely.

“I’ve lost it!” Scorpius declared miserably. “I’ve lost the Time-Turner!”

Albus’s head shot to his right so fast that it was almost unnatural.

“You’ve lost what?” he hissed, sounding deeply annoyed that Scorpius had just given the game away and landed him right in it.

Scorpius gave Albus an apologetic shrug.

Harry Potter shook his head at his youngest son, sounding irritated, but like he was making a real effort to hold it back.
“Time to cut the pretence, Albus,” he said authoritatively.

Albus gave Scorpius another look of betrayal.

Professor McGonagall noted that Albus Potter had just lied to her face, and rather well as it happened. She also noted that Scorpius Malfoy appeared to be the least rebellious and rather more remorseful of the pair.

Never, in all her years at Hogwarts, had she encountered such a pair of Slytherin troublemakers. It was usually the Gryffindors she had to watch when it came to daring adventures and pranks. Occasionally the Ravenclaws when one of them got it into their head to go exploring or had one of their ‘creative’ moments. The Hufflepuffs were by far her best behaved House. But Slytherins? Such recklessness from them was almost unheard of.

Well, she supposed it was to be expected of Albus Severus Potter. He may have been a Slytherin, but he was still Harry Potter’s son.

Walking as sternly as possible over to Albus (and hiding her relief to see both him and Mr Malfoy back unharmed), she gave an irritated little tut. Albus gulped as she approached.

“I think you’ve some explaining to do. Starting, Mr Potter, with why you are wearing those Gryffindor robes...”

Minerva was not sure she had expected any sort of reaction to those words other than the usual anxiety of a student in deep trouble, but what she got instead was the strangest and most unnecessary explosion of triumph she had ever witnessed.

Scorpius punched the air and made a small whooping noise. Albus gave Scorpius a grin of relief and seemed to sink slightly in his overwhelmed satisfaction. Harry, Draco, Ginny, and Professor McGonagall stared at the boys like they’d gone quite mad.

"Yes!" Scorpius declared, patting Albus enthusiastically on the shoulder. "A Slytherin! You're a Slytherin!"

Draco looked rather worried for his son's mental health.

Scorpius looked very ready to launch himself upon Albus with relief. Albus was still grinning broadly.

"Come, Scorpius," Draco cut in, stepping forward before his son could embrace Albus Potter in front of this unlikely audience. He wanted to shield him from the others before he was witnessed saying anything else odd or unusual. His son had quite enough to contend with, without people adding the fact he had lost his mind to the vicious rumours. "I think we ought to go to the hospital wing..."

"I think not," Professor McGonagall said, sharply. "First, explanations. Which will take place in my office. Immediately. And I'll have no argument from anyone, is that understood?"

That made the jubilant expressions disappear from Albus and Scorpius's faces.

McGonagall turned her steely gaze on each and every one of them. Parent or child, they all looked nervous. Albus Potter gulped again. Draco Malfoy looked ready to argue.

"And then, Draco, you make take your son to be examined," McGonagall relented.
Draco gave a stiff nod at that.

Scorpius and Albus got to their feet, trying to force themselves back into the perfect picture of shame. But Draco did not miss the overjoyed nudge that Albus Potter gave his son as they did so. Nor did he miss the euphoria shining in his son's eyes. That was... an oddly pleasant sight. And so Draco pointedly ignored the gesture and placed a hand on his son's wet shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so this one was a struggle for a number of reasons. The main reason being that when you actually think about the time travel element too hard it doesn't actually make sense. If you have the play you will know that the scene where Scorpius sets the second task right does not exist. Obviously it needed to in a novelisation!

There were also several issues such as: how does Scorpius manage to stay under the water long enough to change the task? If there were two versions of Scorpius then what happened to the other Scorpius? If Albus doesn't fade out of existence then shouldn't he still have the Time-Turner? etc.

I ask you to please please please excuse the fact that the logic of this is very dodgy. I genuinely spent a number of hours re-reading the scene and asking myself how on earth any of this was meant to work. I hope I have managed to give you a chapter which tried very hard to explain some things and doesn't draw hideous attention to the parts that simply cannot make sense.

I have some people to thank as well! When I was driving myself up the wall trying to figure out how to get this to make some sort of sense, I asked on twitter if anyone could help me, and the first two people that came to my aid were: her_infinite_variety_ks (that is an Ao3 name), and @werefern (who is from twitter).

Without them I couldn't have worked out how to do this, so thank you so so much you wonderful people!

Please leave me a comment because it truly gives me confidence and encouragement. Especially with a chapter like this one! Ahhh the stress!!!

I also cried while writing this chapter. Not even going to deny it. You probably know which part I am talking about!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The walk back to the castle had been completed in disgrace. Well, it had been by Albus, who had been all but frogmarched back through the grounds by his furious parents. Scorpius seemed rather more bouncy, although admittedly very apologetic. He walked alongside his father eagerly, occasionally looking up at his dad with delight.

Professor McGonagall had performed a Hot-Air Charm on the boys, which had dried their clothes in an instant, but Scorpius was also wearing his father’s long sweeping cloak over his dark Hogwarts robes. Draco had insisted he take it, determined that after all that had happened, he was not going to lose his son to something ridiculous like pneumonia.

Several students watched from the windows as Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy were escorted back to the castle. Many pointed with excitement at the sight of Harry Potter. Several noticed Ginny Potter striding across the grounds and rushed to watch her with almost as much gusto. She was a great heroine among the more sporty girls, especially those on the Gryffindor Quidditch team.

When they saw Draco Malfoy walking along beside his son, however, a couple of students gasped. Several glared.

In the courtyard the difference in reception between the Potters and the Malfoys was painfully obvious. Faces seemed to change the moment the first group passed, ready to scowl at the ex-Death Eater and his son.

Draco was more than used to this treatment by now and paid them no mind. It was imperative that his son understood that no matter what others thought, no matter what preconceptions they might have, the two remaining members of the Malfoy family had to keep their heads high.

He had worried his son might become inconsolable, but to his surprise (and relief), Scorpius seemed relatively content. He didn't appear in the least bit perturbed by this unpleasant reaction. Draco was proud of him.

The boys were led into the Gargoyle Corridor, which Scorpius realised with great relief was brighter than before. Professor McGonagall stood before the ugly stone gargoyle and declared:

“The Montrose Magpies”

Scorpius was quite sure he had seen Ginny Potter look over at Professor McGonagall with a brief smile before remembering what they were there for and growing stern once again.
One by one they trooped into the revolving staircase. Professor McGonagall led the way, followed by Ginny, then Albus, and then Harry.

Scorpius looked up at his dad, wondering if he noticed how the Potter family had suddenly closed ranks. It made Scorpius’s heart ache for a moment, to see Albus flanked by his mother and father. It made the Malfoy family seem awfully small.

“Come along,” his father said quietly, giving his son a pat on the shoulder, as they too travelled up to McGonagall’s office.

Once inside, McGonagall summoned three chairs for Harry, Draco, and Ginny which she placed around her desk.

“You two can stand,” she declared sternly, gesturing at the space in front of her desk with her wand.

Albus glanced at Scorpius grimly. Scorpius gave him a supportive little smile as they went to stand where they were told.

Draco Malfoy did not go to his assigned armchair. Instead, he went to stand behind Scorpius, almost daring McGonagall to argue with him.

She did not. Instead she gave a sigh and nodded her understanding.

Seeing Draco refuse his seat made Harry think twice about taking his own. He hovered awkwardly above his chair and then looked at Ginny, who was rolling her eyes. The pair of them came to a decision together, and went to stand behind Albus, one on each side of him.

Glancing at the apparent parenting competition before her with disbelief, Minerva settled in her own comfy chair and waited for someone to speak.

When nobody did she turned her attention to Albus and Scorpius, who were standing contritely before her. Well, Scorpius was looking contrite. Albus was looking a mixture of ashamed and perhaps a touch frustrated at being caught.

“Well,” Minerva said to the silent room. “I shall need to know all of it. Every detail. And be warned, boys, that the truth will be discovered eventually, and if I discover you have lied to me I will be most displeased.”

She aimed that last part at Albus Potter in particular.

The boys looked at each other. Scorpius Malfoy nodded.

And then Albus, shuffling awkwardly from foot to foot, began to tell her the whole story…

+++ By the time Albus and Scorpius’s explanation was finished, Minerva had considered a nice comfortable retirement at least twice. She also counted herself very lucky to have no children of her own. Teaching students was a wonderful gift, an honour, even, but how she would have managed to remain even relatively sane had she decided to have her own child, was entirely beyond her.

To be able to go to sleep of an evening without wondering if your offspring was jumping from the roof of a moving train was, Minerva realised, a blessed deliverance.
As it was, Harry Potter had been compulsively messing up and then flattening his dark hair in an odd cycle, occasionally gawping at his son with shock, at other times falling silent and almost sullen in what could have been anger or guilt. Ginny Potter had placed her hands on her hips and removed them almost as many times as her husband had touched his hair.

Draco Malfoy had been the most composed of the three. He had listened closely to every word that left Albus Potter’s mouth, eyes constantly darting to his son as though for confirmation that it was indeed the truth. Every so often Draco would glare at Harry Potter coldly, at the moments the story became especially dangerous. In those moments Draco’s grip on his son’s shoulder would tighten almost imperceptibly.

Despite Albus having been the one to tell the story, Scorpius had joined in earnestly every few sentences to back his best friend up. The first part had been troubling but easy enough to understand.

And then somewhere in the middle of the story, Scorpius Malfoy had taken over. What that boy had to say, in particular, almost caused Minerva’s glasses to fall from her nose. It was unthinkable. Utterly unthinkable.

Scorpius Malfoy (who Minerva very much supposed was under the influence of troublesome Albus Potter) had not only ended up existing in one alternate reality, in which Rose and Hugo Granger-Weasley had never been born, but in his and Albus’s attempts to rectify their mistake, had found himself plunged into what sounded, to Minerva, like nothing short of a catastrophe.

Voldemort had won the Battle of Hogwarts. That loathsome Dolores Umbridge had become Headmistress of Hogwarts (the very thought made Minerva shudder). Harry Potter was dead, therefore Albus Potter didn’t exist, which to Scorpius Malfoy was clearly the most terrible of all possible developments.

Minerva had the distinct impression that even despite these revelations, Scorpius Malfoy was withholding a great deal of information.

And oddly, throughout his serious retelling of his time spent in a new and Dark reality, Scorpius kept staring up at the portraits on the walls and beaming. Every so often he would glance over at Albus Potter, to which his story also seemed to be news if his slack jaw was anything to go by, and beam as though he’d been given a lifetime supply of Chocolate Frogs.

Minerva hoped very much that the boy had not lost his mind, although if even half of what he had described to her was true, she could understand it entirely. That boy had survived a nightmare, of that there was no doubt. It struck Minerva as a miracle that he was even alive.

His father also seemed to share her concerns, because Draco Malfoy’s face had grown paler and more shocked-looking throughout the story.

A terrible silence fell when Scorpius reached the end of his tale. Nobody seemed quite willing to break it. Albus and Scorpius were both holding their hands behind their backs, the very image of repentance. Poor Draco Malfoy seemed torn between wanting to hold his son close and begin shouting at Harry Potter (of which he did neither). Minerva could certainly empathise.

Minerva had to use a great deal of her (considerable) self control not to lose her temper. Of all the ridiculous pranks and plans she had heard from her students over the years, this one topped them all.

“So to be clear,” McGonagall remarked. “You illegally jumped off the Hogwarts Express, you
invaded and stole from the Ministry of Magic, you took it upon yourself to change time, whereupon you disappeared two people—“

“I agree it doesn't sound good,” said Albus, cutting in to save Scorpius from having to.

He was promptly shushed by his mother.

“And your response to disappearing Hugo and Rose Granger-Weasley was to go back in time again - and this time - instead of losing two people you lost a huge number of people and killed your father - and in doing so you resurrected the worst wizard the world has ever known and heralded in a new age of Dark Magic.”

McGonagall paused for effect.

“You’re correct, Mr Potter,” she said dryly. “It doesn’t sound good does it?”

Both boys looked deeply ashamed of themselves. Albus looked slightly defensive in spite of it.

“Are you aware how stupid you’ve been?” McGonagall demanded.

“Yes, Professor,” Scorpius Malfoy replied, nodding his head earnestly.

Minerva was satisfied that at least one of the boys could see the error of his ways. Albus Potter, on the other hand, looked like he was about to try and wriggle out of his own admission of guilt.

The boy hesitated for a moment and then glanced at his father.

“Yes,” Albus agreed, more sulkily than Minerva would have liked.

Harry stepped forward.

“Professor, if I may—“

“You may not,” Minerva responded sharply. Harry Potter hung his head in the exact same way he had done as a boy. “What you choose to do as parents is your matter, but this is my school, and these are my students, and I will choose what punishment they face.”

McGonagall waited for Harry (or Albus) Potter to argue with her. Both looked very much like they wanted to, but neither quite had the courage.

Draco Malfoy, however, gave a solemn nod of his head. He was no stranger to accepting the consequences of one’s actions, and he seemed to have instilled this same trait in his son, who was blinking nervously.

“Seems fair,” Draco said.

Harry looked up at his wife, but Ginny shook her head sternly. Minerva was glad that at least one Potter parent possessed a modicum of good sense.

McGonagall surveyed the two boys before her.

“I should expel you,” she began. Scorpius Malfoy gave a horrified gasp which he tried very hard to disguise. “But…”

She gave Harry a warning look to let him know he was not to intervene and that she believed he had a great deal of blame in all this.
“… all things considered - I think it might be safer for you to remain in my care. You are in detention for - well, you can consider yourself in detention for the rest of the year. Christmas is cancelled for you. You can forget visiting Hogsmeade ever again. And that’s just the start…”

Suddenly a very flustered-looking, very determined, very full of action Hermione Granger burst into the office. Everyone turned to look at her, and Scorpius Malfoy gave a joyous little clap of his hands.

“What did I miss?” Hermione asked, stepping up to McGonagall’s desk.

Minerva narrowed her eyes.

“It is considered polite to knock when entering a room, Hermione Granger,” she said fiercely. “Maybe you missed that?”

Hermione looked a little startled and then blinked.

“Ah,” she breathed out, taking a slight step back again, realising she’d overstepped the mark.

“If I could also give a detention to you, Minister, I would. Keeping hold of a Time-Turner, of all the stupid things!”

Hermione flushed with embarrassment.

“In my defence—”

“And in a bookcase,” Minerva continued sternly. “You kept it in a bookcase. It’s almost laughable.”

Albus and Scorpius could not seem to tear their eyes from the sight of the Minister for Magic being told off like a naughty schoolgirl. Even Draco looked fairly surprised.

“Minerva,” Hermione tried, taking a deep breath. “Professor McGonagall—”

“Your children didn’t exist!”

Hermione fell silent. She did not seem to want to think about it. Her expression was a picture of shock and dismay. As Minister, she had of course been alerted to the fact two students had stolen a Time-Turner (which she very much should not have had) from her office, and had promptly disappeared with said item, but clearly nobody had yet told her the consequences of Albus and Scorpius’s actions. How could they have? Minerva felt just the slightest pang of guilt at breaking such news to Hermione Granger so blantly. To lose one’s children was clearly the most terrible of happenings. And yet sometimes, Minerva thought, a person needed a short, sharp, shock to prevent any further wrongdoing, or in Hermione's case, uncharacteristic irresponsibility.

Ginny Potter looked like she wanted to comfort the Minister, but then thought better of it.

“This happened in my school, under my watch. After all that Dumbledore did, I couldn’t live with myself…” Minerva trailed off, shaking her head.

“I know,” said Hermione softly.

Minerva took a moment to compose herself. She pushed her glasses back on her nose and forced aside the dreadful thought of Albus Dumbledore dying in vain.

She turned her attention back to Albus and Scorpius, who turned their heads sharply from
Hermione Granger, not wanting to give her any further reason for fury. Luckily for them, Minerva felt far too drained to be cross for much longer.

“Your intentions to save Cedric were honourable if misguided,” Minerva admitted fairly. "And it does sound as if you were brave, Scorpius, and you, Albus, but the lesson even your father sometimes failed to heed is that bravery doesn’t forgive stupidity."

Harry Potter looked down at the ground.

"Always think. Think what’s possible. A world controlled by Voldemort is-“

“A horrific world,” Scorpius Malfoy finished for her. Draco patted his son once on the shoulder.

“You are so young,” Minerva said, glancing at the boys in front of her. Really, they were children. And then Minerva looked up at Harry Potter, Ginny Potter, Draco Malfoy, and Hermione Granger. She remembered them all at that very same age. With the exception of Draco Malfoy, they were all still the same. Perhaps they had grown older, a little more weary, but they were still those same students Minerva had watched turn from children, to teenagers, to young adults.

“You’re all so young,” she continued, gesturing at them all. “You have no idea how dark the wizarding wars got. You were - reckless - with the world some people - some very dear friends of mine and yours - sacrificed a huge amount to create and sustain.”

That seemed to strike a chord with Albus Potter. He shifted from foot to foot.

“Yes, Professor,” he said, sounding, at last, sincere.

Minerva looked expectantly at Scorpius, who rushed to add his own assent.

“Yes, Professor,” he declared, solemnly.

Professor McGonagall took a deep breath and then sat back in her chair. Honestly, she had never given Dumbledore the credit he deserved for what was truly an exasperating and almost maddening job.

“Go on,” she declared. “Get out. All of you. And find me that Time-Turner.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this chapter!

Comments make me very happy indeed.

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
As soon as the boys had been released from Professor McGonagall’s office, Scorpius had been rushed off by his father back down the Gargoyle Corridor in the direction of the hospital wing. Albus had heard Draco talking quietly about potential pneumonia and negative side-effects of Dementor-proximity. Scorpius had given him a small smile and walked off eagerly at his father’s side. Albus had never seen Scorpius so happy to be with his dad, to spend time with him. That hurt a little, even though Albus knew it was selfish of him.

Albus had been hoping to have a chance to speak to Scorpius, just the two of them. Some of the stuff Scorpius had talked about back in the office, about Voldemort and the other reality, sounded terrifying. But that couldn’t happen while his dad was around. Albus wanted desperately to be anywhere but in the presence of Harry Potter right now.

The moment his father looked ready to begin a conversation, Albus had considered feigning a headache so he could get sent to the hospital wing with Scorpius, but his mother was no fool and he was in no position to push his luck. His dad already looked like he was preparing a lecture in his head.

“I need to talk to you,” said Harry Potter, calmly.

Albus felt his spine go cold with dread. Little talks with his father never seemed to go well. Especially not when he was in trouble for something. His dad would be righteous, patronising, and completely unbearable.

“Right - er - did you want to talk here, or…”

“Not tonight,” his father said, sounding distracted. "First I’ll need to get back to the Ministry. I want to find that Time-Turner as soon as possible. I'll need to get Regulation and Control on board with this. We'll need the consent of the Merpeople to go rooting around down there, and that won't be easy...”

"Luna could help with that?" Ginny suggested. "She and Rolf have communicated with the Merpeople before-"

Harry shook his head, looking stressed.

"They're in India. There's bound to be someone at the Ministry. It's just the paperwork involved in all this is going to be a nightmare."

“You’d better go now, Harry,” said Ginny. “I’ll stay with Albus.”

Albus nodded his head. He much preferred the idea of staying with his mum, even if she was
currently furious with him. And anything which delayed the inevitable conversation with his father could only be a good thing.

"Hopefully I can get this sorted tonight, but I could be home late. Ideally we need this kept as quiet as possible. Hermione could be in some serious trouble."

"Do whatever you have to," Ginny said, patting her husband on the arm. "I'll hold the fort until you get back."

Albus noticed that his parents seemed to have entirely forgotten his presence. It was strange to see them working as a team, talking about finding solutions to a problem he had caused, like he was a naughty toddler that had made a mess.

"Will you let Ron know? Hermione's probably told him, but she'll be pretty overwhelmed right now..."

"I'll owl him as soon as I get home," Ginny assured her husband.

"What about your deadline?"

"It can wait," Ginny said easily, waving the idea away with her hand. "The editor owes me."

Harry Potter nodded his head, readying himself to leave. And then he remembered his son, who was watching him shiftily.

“I should be here tomorrow morning,” Harry told Albus. "We'll talk then."

He seemed to realise this sounded like an order, and rethought his approach. “Is that okay?”

“I guess so,” Albus answered, understanding that he didn’t really have much of a choice.

He was certain his father was only being so careful with his words because his mum was there, watching.

“Don’t wait up,” Harry said, giving Ginny a quick kiss (at which Albus cringed) and then strolling quickly down the corridor back to McGonagall’s office. Albus was sure he’d heard him sigh with what could have been stress or relief as he left them.

“So…” Albus began awkwardly, looking up at his mother cautiously and trying to read her mood. "On a scale of one to ten, how much trouble would you say I’m in right now?"

He had hoped his mother might smile at that, but instead she raised an eyebrow.

“A nine? Nine point five?” Ginny suggested.

Albus tried a smile of his own. His mother’s expression didn’t soften, but he knew that was because she was making an effort to be stern. Like his grandma, she didn’t like to let him off the hook if he did wrong.

“Look, Mum, I know this all seems bad but-“

“Too right it does. Albus Potter, you have no idea what you’ve put me and your father through. Why would you do something so stupid?“

Albus had hoped that was a rhetorical question, but the way his mother was staring at him with disbelief told him otherwise.
“Because I thought it was the right thing to do,” Albus said easily, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Ginny was once again reminded strongly of her husband in his teens. This was a common occurrence when it came to Albus at his most obstinate or accidentally-heroic.

“Your dad was devastated. Do you know that?” Ginny asked.

“How could I? I was literally in another reality.”

“Don’t get cheeky with me, Albus Potter. I’m deadly serious. Don’t you know how much it hurts him? How much it hurts me?”

Her son did look guilty at that, although he tried to hide it by scuffing his shoes on the stone floor.

“I just wanted to fix things for Amos…” Albus explained.

Ginny tilted her head to one side, surveying her youngest son with uncertainty.

“Was that really why you did it?”

Albus blinked, thought about it, and gave the floor another sort of kick.

“I thought… I know how much he loved Cedric. And Dad… I know it wasn’t his fault, but he died because of him.”

“Albus, that isn’t true,” Ginny said firmly, shaking her head. “You know it isn’t.”

“But it is,” Albus insisted. “I don’t mean it in a bad way. I’m not… not blaming him or anything. But people get hurt. Not because of dad, but because of who he is. And it’s just… it’s not fair. When I saw Amos, he really loved his son. Really loved him.”

“Your dad loves you, Albus,” said Ginny softly.

Albus frowned. He looked like he was resisting the urge to roll his eyes.

“I… okay.”

It hurt Ginny at her very core to see that her son didn’t quite believe her words. She knew for a fact that Harry adored Albus, and deep down, she knew that Albus adored Harry. Otherwise why would either of them spend so much of their lives contemplating the situation? Ginny liked to think she knew her youngest son very well, and after all these years she was an expert at reading Harry Potter. If only men would talk about their feelings instead of covering them up constantly, Ginny thought. This problem could have been solved in a heartbeat.

“You could have been hurt, Albus,” Ginny pointed out. "Did you think about that?”

“No,” Albus admitted.

“Scorpius said you didn’t exist. He said that you and your dad both… that neither of you existed in that awful place. Albus, just the thought of it…”

“But Scorpius fixed it,” Albus said quickly, not wanting his mum to get upset. “He fixed it even though Dad’s been an absolute prat to him…”

“Albus, you can’t talk about your father like that.”
“But he has!” Albus burst out. “He’s never liked him. Even though Scorpius never says anything bad about Dad. He practically worships him. He thinks he’s this huge hero. But what sort of a hero would treat my best friend like that? Just because he’s a Malfoy or whatever…”

Ginny could tell this was a sore spot for Albus by the way he had raised his voice suddenly, by the injustice shining in his green eyes. Once again, she could see her husband, defending his own friends, even defending her.

“Scorpius seems like a nice enough boy,” Ginny said. “Neville likes him.”

“I know,” Albus said sulkily. “But it’s not enough for Dad, because with him everything has to be this huge drama because he’s Harry Potter and I can’t even make my own friends because he thinks they’re not good enough or something—”

Her son’s words were far too close to her own thoughts on the matter for comfort. Ginny rubbed her forehead tiredly.

“He just wants you safe,” she said. “You’re so important to him. You don’t realise it, Albus. And everyone makes mistakes. You know what happened to his dad, to his parents. He’s so afraid he’ll lose you, like he lost them.”

Albus didn’t want to have to think about that. He didn’t want to be forced to see the situation through his father’s perspective. He was too furious for that.

“Al!” came a loud voice, saving Albus from having to respond.

It was James. He was sprinting down the Gargoyle Corridor towards his little brother.

“What the hell did you do?” he asked.

Albus grimaced.

“Oh, hi Mum,” said James, cheerfully.

“Hello James,” Ginny responded with a sigh.

“Come on! Spill the beans. I ran all the way here,” James continued eagerly.

Albus really wasn’t willing to discuss the situation with James of all people.

“It’s… a long story,” Albus said vaguely.

“Everyone’s talking about it! When they said Mum and Dad were here, I thought… I mean I knew Lily was all right, but… blimey.”

Had James been worried about him? If so then Albus did feel a little guilty about that.

“And Draco the Ponytail is here too,” James continued. “He never shows his face around here.”

“Don’t call him that,” Ginny reprimanded her eldest son. “How many times do I have to tell you?”

“Sorry, Mum,” James said instantly, before turning back to Albus. “But I thought you and that Scorpius kid had done something really stupid.”

“We… did,” Albus was forced to admit.
James took a moment to look at his mother, who seemed stressed beyond belief, and then back at his little brother, who seemed even more sulky than usual.

“I knew he was bad news!” James declared knowingly. "Dad said so himself. You need to stay away from him, Al—"

Ginny did not manage to stop him in time. James was rather like his closest uncle in that he seemed unable to know when to keep his mouth shut. He was also notoriously bad at reading Albus's moods. Unlike Lily, who knew when to stop her teasing, James always liked to stick a toe over the invisible line, sometimes utterly obliviously.

“James, it’s none of your business who my friends are,” Albus snapped, trying to square up to his much taller brother. “And he’s not bad news, okay? This whole thing. This whole situation. Is MY fault. I was the one who came up with it. I dragged him along. So if you don’t shut up about my best friend I swear I’ll—"

James looked stunned. He glanced at his mother, who remained silent. Having grown up with more than a few annoying big brothers of her own, Ginny knew that occasionally it was good for a younger sibling to stand their ground.

James took a moment to assess the situation, to take in those words, and then Albus’s big brother broke into a grin.

“It was your idea?” he repeated cheerfully. “I knew you had it in you!”

“Do not encourage him, James!” Ginny snapped.

"My little brother, all grown up and leading poor impressionable boys astray," James declared, grinning.

"Shut up," Albus snapped.

“Myrtle told Rose that you and Scorpius went sneaking off to the girls’ bathroom together. We all thought she was making it up, but little bro, if that’s true, then that is so not classy.”

“James!” exclaimed both Ginny and Albus at once.

“Okay, okay,” he said, putting his hands up, finally sensing he’d crossed a line. “Just checking you were all right.”

“I’m fine,” Albus muttered sulkily.

“And Mum, if you happen to receive an owl from a certain Transfiguration teacher tomorrow, I swear it was all just a bit of fun and there was no harm done in the end…”

“James!”

“Bye Mum!”

With that, James gave his little brother a grin (Albus scowled back) and ran back down the corridor.

Ginny sighed and tied her hair up in a ponytail. She was feeling more stressed than she had done in months. Albus watched her and seemed to notice this fact, instantly changing his posture now his big brother had scarpered. Albus was always more sensitive and articulate when James wasn't
around to tease him.

“Sorry about… you know, worrying you,” he managed to say, awkwardly.

“I just don’t understand it, Albus,” Ginny said, honestly. “I know you and your dad have some… issues to work through. But this? This is on another level.”

“When James was in his fourth year he-”

“James pulls stupid pranks,” his mother corrected him sternly. “But he’s never done anything like this.”

“I’m sorry…” Albus mumbled.

“I don’t want you to be sorry. I want you to never do anything like that again. You’re my son, Albus. If anything happened to you I couldn’t bear it. You’re incredibly special to me, you know that, don’t you?”

Albus felt tears pricking in his eyes. He blinked them away and gave a sniff.

“You and your dad, you’ll work things out,” Ginny continued. “You will. Sometimes… sometimes it can be this way. But it doesn’t mean you’ve done anything wrong. Or that he has. It can just mean that-“

“That he doesn’t like me?” Albus suggested.

“No! Of course he likes you, Albus.”

Albus did not look at all convinced.

“Uncle Percy didn’t speak to Grandad for a long time. They struggled. But look at them now. They couldn’t be closer.”

“I thought Uncle Percy was acting like a prat back then?” Albus pointed out.

“Albus…”

“That’s what Uncle Ron said.”

Oh, Ginny could have strangled her youngest brother sometimes…

She took a deep breath, forced calm, and looked Albus right in his green eyes. Trying desperately to get through to him.

“Please try, later. When your father gets back. Just hear him out.”

“Mum, I…”

“Please, Albus. For me.”

Albus paused, thought about it, and then nodded.

“I will.”

“Because he loves you so much. You don’t know it, Albus, but he does. If you could hear the way he talks about you…”
“I know he prefers James and Lily, Mum,” Albus said darkly. “You don’t have to pretend. I’m fourteen.”

“He doesn’t prefer them. They’re just…”

“What he wants his kids to be?”

Ginny sighed. There was no way she was going to get anywhere when Albus was being like this. Unlike Harry, who grew frustrated by their youngest son’s awkwardness, Ginny usually took a step back. Albus simply needed time. Time and a bit of space. And to know that he was loved.

“I’m going to go and see to Lily now,” Ginny said calmly. “If James knows about all this then I expect the whole of Gryffindor does. I don’t want her to worry.”

“Will you tell her…” Albus trailed off.

“Yes?”

“Just let her know I’m okay.”

Ginny nodded.

“I will. You'd better get to your dorm. I expect you to be ready when your father comes tomorrow. No excuses, Albus.”

Albus shuffled uncomfortably from foot to foot.

“Do I really have to-“ he began.

“Yes,” Ginny interrupted firmly. “You do.”

Chapter End Notes

This one is all mine! Just a filler piece to get us to the next scene. Also I wanted to include a bit of James Potter. In my interpretation (purely from the script and the last bit of Deathly Hallows) I see him as a mixture of Ron, Fred, and George. Big heart and no tact, basically.

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Ten and Three Quarters

Chapter Notes

Another one of mine! I hope you enjoy!

I thought you might want to follow Draco and Scorpius down to the hospital wing! I did!

Please leave me a comment if you liked it!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

With a brief smile at Albus, Scorpius had allowed himself to be led off by his father in the direction of the hospital wing. He had gone with him quite willingly, despite not feeling ill in the slightest. Just to be with his father, the real version of his father, was a comfort.

His father walked with a hand on his shoulder. Scorpius didn’t pull away. If anything he leaned slightly closer. One thing he had learned after all he had been through was that he was lucky to have a father like Draco Malfoy. He had never appreciated him properly before, but now, he would. He’d never take him for granted ever again. And he’d never think badly of his father for his past. Not now he knew the strength it had taken to leave it all behind and start again.

To Scorpius, the huge difference between the two versions of his father made his dad a hero. Because unlike other people, who had been taught the correct way to live to begin with, he had clearly made a massive and conscious effort to change. Just like Severus Snape, his father had turned his back on his old life and decided to be better.

Scorpius could see, now, what his mother meant when she had spoken of his father’s goodness, his bravery, his conviction. When Scorpius looked at his dad now he saw a new man. He saw a man he could be entirely proud of. Even if he did have a Dark Mark shaped scar on his forearm. Even if some people would forever hate him for his wrongs as a youth.

It was a wonderful feeling.

“Come, Scorpius,” Draco said quietly, as they walked past a group of staring students lingering near the hospital wing. Several of them whispered. Scorpius didn't care.

“I feel fine, Dad,” Scorpius assured his father. “Honestly I do.”

But his father was taking no chances.

“Madam Pomfrey will check you over, just to be sure,” he declared. “And then you can get back to your friend.”

Madam Pomfrey was not on the ward, which today was almost entirely empty aside from a sleeping girl in a bed towards the middle of the room. Scorpius couldn't help but smile at the lack of awful black and green snake flags, and the comforting absence of general doom about the place.
Draco marched right over to the Nurse’s office with his son and knocked firmly.

Madam Pomfrey appeared most displeased to be disturbed. It looked like she had been attempting to catch a moment of sleep while the ward was quiet. Still, she bustled to her feet and opened the door.

She glanced from Malfoy to Malfoy, and fixed Draco with a look of dislike.

Poppy Pomfrey had never taken to Draco Malfoy in his schooldays. He had been too quick to overact for sympathy at the most minor of scrapes, something Madam Pomfrey detested. Not to mention the amount of students she had been forced to treat because of the very man standing in front of her. She remembered Hermione Granger turning up at the hospital wing in some distress, her front teeth grown hideously long, after a curse from Malfoy had apparently missed its target. She remembered Miss Katie Bell who had touched a cursed necklace and become so unwell that she had been transferred to St Mungo’s, supposedly after becoming accidentally embroiled in one of Malfoy’s foul schemes to hurt Albus Dumbledore. That had been quite a distressing one for Madam Pomfrey. Not to mention the girl’s poor friend (was it Lisa? Leah?) who had needed to be treated for shock after witnessing Katie’s casualty.

Draco Malfoy had been responsible for all of these things, and more. And although it wasn’t quite the done thing to hold grudges, especially not after what had become of the Malfoy family, Poppy did not entirely believe that a boy as hideous as Draco could change his ways.

The image of Katie Bell lying there in agony while she stood by, unable to help, would never leave her.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen you, Mr Malfoy,” she said stiffly.

Draco had no time for such smalltalk.

“I need you to take a look at my son,” he said without preamble.

Madam Pomfrey looked appalled by his lack of manners. Immediately, Draco caught himself and added: “I would be extremely grateful.”

Madam Pomfrey gave a stiff nod and looked down at young Scorpius, who did not look ill or wounded in the slightest.

Never had she refused to examine a student, and she wasn’t about to start today, no matter who the boy’s father was.

“Come along then, Mr Malfoy,” she said to Scorpius, showing him to the nearest bed on the ward. Scorpius stood beside it rather tentatively. Since he was feeling fine he didn’t like to lie down, but it didn’t seem right to remain on his feet either. He settled on perching on the hospital bed, hands placed politely in his lap.

“How do you feel?” Madam Pomfrey asked him, allowing Draco to come and stand beside his son, and then pulling a screen around the bed to give them all some privacy.

“I feel fine, actually,” Scorpius admitted.

Madam Pomfrey gave Draco a pointed look, clearly thinking he was wasting her time.

“My son has been exposed to Dementors,” Draco said with some dignity. “I’m taking no chances.”
Madam Pomfrey digested that information, and was forced to admit that bringing Scorpius to her was, in fact, the most sensible course of action. How he had come into contact with a Dementor was quite beyond her, but Poppy Pomfrey did not feel it was her place to ask.

‘Quite,’’ she agreed. ‘‘And Professor McGonagall is aware of this?’’

“We’ve come straight from her office,” Draco said.

“Hm,” said Madam Pomfrey, unable to argue with that.

Scorpius sat up straight, trying to be as helpful as possible. He smiled up at Madam Pomfrey. In the Dark reality she had cared for the students, despite the risk to her own job and even safety. It didn’t matter that she was strict and a bit more fussy than was necessary, because she was good and kind. In the darkest days Scorpius could imagine, Madam Pomfrey had stood firm.

She swept her wand over the space in front of Scorpius.

“Temperature is normal,” she remarked, mostly to herself. “No chill at all. Perhaps a little colder than usual, but nothing that would give cause for concern.”

Draco raised an eyebrow.

“Usually I advise chocolate after close contact with a Dementor,’’ Madam Pomfrey said, frowning slightly at the way Scorpius was beaming up at her. “I’ll need to fetch some. It’s not often students encounter Dementors anymore, and chocolate isn’t particularly good for the health.”

“Chocolate? Is that all?” Draco demanded. “There must be something else?”

“Mr Malfoy,” Madam Pomfrey said with forced calm. “Your son is not displaying any ill effects one might associate with a Dementor encounter.”

“Perhaps if you looked properly-“

“I beg your pardon?”

“You may not like me,” Draco continued. “And I don’t care. I’m sure I deserve it. But this is my son, who has done nothing wrong, and I won’t have him put in any sort of danger simply because you hold resentment towards me and my family.”

Madam Pomfrey looked like she wanted to argue, but her frustration seemed to evaporate when she saw the way Draco Malfoy kept glancing at his son, his eyes full of fear and concern. She had seen that look before on the face of many a parent. Apparently being a Malfoy didn’t make a person immune from worrying terribly about their children...

“Mr Malfoy, look at your son,” Madam Pomfrey said with a sigh.

Draco did so.

“Is his skin clammy?”

“No,” Scorpius said helpfully. “It isn’t, Dad.”

“Is he looking especially pale?”

“No,” Draco was forced to admit.
“Is he unable to talk or respond nonverbally when spoken to?”

“I can,” Scorpius said. “Honestly, Dad. I feel fine. I promise.”

Draco took a deep breath.

“What about his mental health?” he asked, thinking of his father Lucius, whose exposure to the Dementors for a prolonged period of time had entirely altered his personality. After his time in Azkaban, Draco’s father had never quite been the same. Draco didn’t think he’d ever heard him laugh since. Not once up until the day he died.

“I’m afraid even my remedies cannot alter the state of a person’s mental health, Mr Malfoy,” Poppy Pomfrey scoffed. “Although I wouldn’t say that your son appears particularly depressed at this moment.”

Draco looked at his son who was swinging his feet rather childishly and blinking up at them both.

“I’ll fetch some chocolate,” Madam Pomfrey declared firmly.

This time, Draco didn’t argue. As Madam Pomfrey bustled off, muttering under her breath about people with no manners, Draco sat down on the hospital bed beside his son.

“Did you want your cloak back?” Scorpius asked. “It’s a little bit long for me, I think.”

“Are you still cold?”

“Only a bit.”

“Then you keep it for now,” Draco said.

“Thanks, Dad.”

There was a pause, then. Such pauses weren’t unusual in conversations between Draco and Scorpius. His father seemed to find comfort in the silence, but Scorpius didn’t like to be left with his thoughts.

“Dad?” he asked.

“Yes?”

“Are you really cross with me?”

His father sighed and considered his response.

“I’m disappointed,” Draco explained calmly. “And I’m confused. Because what you did was uncharacteristically reckless. But no, I’m not angry.”

“Really?”

“Scorpius, there’s no point in my getting angry because what’s done is done. You’re safe. And you’ve accepted your punishment from Professor McGonagall. Which is all that can be asked of you.”

“I am very sorry for worrying you,” Scorpius said nervously. “If I worried you.”

“You did.”
“I only meant… we were trying to help. To make things better. But everything - it went wrong - and we shouldn’t have done it - but we never meant to hurt anyone, or worry anyone…”

“I know that you’re not a troublemaker, Scorpius,” Draco admitted. “I’m sure your intentions were good.”

Draco fell silent again. Scorpius chewed on his lower lip for a moment, thinking.

“But it wasn’t Albus’s fault either,” Scorpius said. “He didn’t make me go - I wanted to. I wanted to go with him. To help him. I couldn’t let him do it alone. And he wanted me to come - because we work better together - but it was my choice.”

Draco glanced at his son. He wasn’t very good at talking about the more emotional topics. He didn’t know quite how to respond in these situations. He wasn’t even particularly sure he made the correct facial expressions when such issues were discussed. After all those years spent hiding his thoughts and feelings, Draco still struggled to show any sign of them, even when he wanted to.

“And I don’t want you to hate Albus or think that any of this is his fault, because it’s just as much mine, and I… I really want you to like him,” Scorpius continued nervously.

Draco could understand that well enough. He had desperately wanted his father’s approval of his own friends (if they could be called that). It was partly why he had associated with Crabbe and Goyle in the first place. If his father had ever disapproved of a fellow student, Draco disapproved of them too.

But he wasn’t sure that approving of a person and liking them were quite the same thing. His father may have approved of Crabbe and Goyle, but he certainly hadn’t liked them. Draco had never asked him to. It would have felt too difficult, too uncomfortable.

“He’s very special to you, then?” Draco asked.

Scorpius nodded with unashamed enthusiasm.

Draco sighed. As it happened, he already approved of Albus Potter. And he wasn’t entirely sure it would be difficult to come to like him. As alien as the concept was, if it mattered to his son, Draco would try his best to improve.

“I don’t blame Albus,” Draco admitted. “Or hate him, as you said.”

Scorpius looked ever so relieved.

“And I’m glad you have somebody you trust. Somebody you might be able to turn to. Which is important. However…”

Scorpius winced.

“I do have my concerns.”

“Concerns?”

“As ridiculous as what you both did was,” Draco began carefully. “And I can appreciate that you wanted to be loyal - my concern is that, sometimes, that you might feel… pressure to do things - that you might not otherwise do.”

“Albus would never-“
“I’m not blaming Albus. But I do understand what it is to want to be accepted. It’s normal to want people to like you, Scorpius. But you must never let that lead to acting against your conscience or your morals.”

“I won’t let it, Dad,” Scorpius said honestly. “I never have.”

There was another pause. Draco felt ever so slightly more relaxed to have given voice to this particular issue. It was what he wished someone had told his young self.

“I’m sorry about Christmas,” Scorpius said into the silence.

Draco looked confused.

“It means I can’t come home, because of what Professor McGonagall said. I was going to. I thought that we could have Christmas together. A really nice one.”

Draco hadn’t considered that. It was a depressing thought. Spending Christmas alone at Malfoy Manor for a second year running was not something he imagined would be much fun.

“I’m sure I’ll find something to do,” Draco said. “The Manor is in need of repair. I’ll probably use the time sorting that out. There are artefacts that need to be examined, perhaps sold.”

“I can help you, when it gets to New Year,” Scorpius volunteered eagerly. “Not with the artefacts, because I know I’m not supposed to go near them. But I could help with the repairing. Or decorating. Or if you need someone to hold something for you while you do it?”

It was quite overwhelming for Draco to hear that his son actually wanted to be in his company.

He pushed that thought away before the emotion showed on his face.

“It would be nice to have your company,” he said, slightly awkwardly. “Although I doubt there’ll be much to do. I only oversee the work. I wouldn’t do it myself. I expect I’ll hire someone for the repairs.”

“Then I can oversee them with you,” Scorpius suggested brightly.

Draco was suddenly reminded of all those times he had begged his father to teach him to duel, to watch him on his broom, to bring him along with him to important functions. Was this Scorpius’s own way of doing the same?

“That sounds…good,” Draco said.

Another silence grew between them. Draco wished that Madam Pomfrey would hurry up and return with that chocolate. Not because he disliked spending time alone with his son, but because he was unused to it. He could not help but feel he was getting everything wrong. His son was a sensitive and incredibly perceptive boy. It took quite some effort to provide him with the comfort and easy conversation he obviously craved (and had had with his mother).

“Dad?” Scorpius piped up again.

“Yes?” Draco answered patiently.

“Thank you for looking after me.”

Draco was so startled by that sentence that he frowned.
“For looking after you?”

“For being so nice. I know I’m probably not… well, not what you expected, but thank you for being there anyway.”

“Scorpius,” Draco said quietly, turning to his son. “You don’t have to thank me for anything. I’m your father.”

“Yes, I know,” Scorpius agreed. “But it’s very… very nice to be back here. And to have you here. Properly.”

Draco took a deep breath. Ever since Scorpius’s explanation in Professor Mcgonagall’s office, Draco had been suspicious about the gaps his son had left in what was an already grim story. To an outsider, perhaps it wouldn’t have noticed, but the fact that Scorpius had not mentioned either he or Astoria rang alarm bells for Draco. His son would absolutely have discovered what had become of them.

It seemed his own place in this reality had been conveniently left out of the tale, which Draco could only put down to either shame or loyalty. Perhaps both.

All this with the addition of Scorpius’s odd declaration of thanks for the simple act of being a parent, meant Draco had to enquire further.

“In the other reality, you never did say where I was,” Draco said.

“You weren’t there,” Scorpius only half lied. He spoke too quickly for Draco to believe him.

“Oh?”

“You died,” Scorpius said, looking his father right in the eyes. “I don’t know exactly how.”

“And your mother?”

“Just the same as now,” Scorpius admitted, looking down at his knees. “I think that maybe the curse always gets her.”

Draco blinked. Father and son sat in silence for a while. Scorpius was chewing his lower lip again.

“Scorpius,” Draco said after a moment.

“Yes?”

“I wasn’t dead in the other world, was I?”

Scorpius looked deeply uncomfortable. He fidgeted on the spot.

“I…”

His father gave a sad sort of smile.

“You’re a good liar,” Draco said with odd pride. “But I know how it was, back then. What the Battle was like. I was… in truth I was scared. I was a coward, Scorpius. I think you know that.”

“Well… you’re not a coward now,” Scorpius said quietly. “I think you’re brave. Braver than me.”

“You were so pleased to see me. At the lake. I did notice, Scorpius. I know the face you make
when you think you’re in trouble. It’s the same face you’ve pulled since you were five. That was not it.”

Scorpius seemed to think about it for a moment, and finally, he gave in.

“Okay… so maybe you weren’t dead,” he admitted. “I’m sorry for lying to you.”

Draco nodded his thanks.

“Why did you lie?”

“I…”

“Was I on the wrong side?”

Scorpius swallowed hard.

“I… I don’t know if you were exactly. But you weren’t… yourself.”

Draco had suspected as much. The fact his son had tried his best to spare his feelings, and also successfully spared him from the shame of announcing the truth in front of Professor McGonagall and Harry Potter, filled Draco with a mixture of pride and distress.

“Tell me,” Draco said, quietly.

“Well you were… you worked at the Ministry,” Scorpius revealed.

“A Ministry job?”

“You were very important. You were Head of Magical Law Enforcement. In charge of all the Aurors. And you had an office. It was… quite impressive.”

“Harry Potter’s job?” Draco said to himself, looking confused.

Scorpius nodded and then fell silent.

“Something’s wrong,” Draco said, watching his son. “What is it?”

“Nothing really.”

“Scorpius, what did I do?”

Scorpius said nothing, just fiddled with his robe sleeves.

A terrible thought struck Draco. One that made his body go icy cold.

“Did I mistreat you in some way?” he asked, watching his beloved son intently.

The sudden blinking and lack of immediate denial made Draco feel nauseous.

“You were quite… strict,” Scorpius finished, not looking up.

Draco knew what that meant. It meant he had become a man like his father. A man worse than his father, perhaps, because at least his father, for all his faults, had inspired both love and loyalty in him.

To Draco Malfoy, the idea of harming his son in any way was infinitely worse than any other
possibility.

He placed a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“I… I apologise, Scorpius. Truly.”

Scorpius looked up at his father with surprise.

“Thanks, Dad,” he said sincerely. "But it wasn't you. I know it wasn't. I knew as soon as he - well you're not like that. You never have been.”

The Malfoys were distracted, then, by the sound of whispering and footsteps entering the hospital wing. Scorpius turned around but couldn’t see through the screen around the bed. His father didn’t seem very interested in the noise at all. He was rubbing his forehead with the palms of his hands, his posture unusually slack.

The whispering grew into giggling. It sounded like a group of girls.

“Four-eyes Frankie,” came a voice. It was followed by more stifled laughter. “Hey, Frankie! Wake up! Look who’s come to see you.”

Scorpius frowned.

“You know I’d be doing you a favour if I took these…”

“No! I need them! Please Olivia! Give them back!”

“Oh, are you getting upset? You’re such a baby.”

“I need my glasses…”

“Chill out, Frankie. We’re just borrowing them…”

Scorpius turned to his father with outrage at this injustice. Draco did not appear to be listening to the girls. He seemed too preoccupied with what he had just learned. In fact, he looked rather ill.

“Those are my new ones! Liz, tell her?”

“You’re not crying again are you, Frankie?”

But apparently Frankie was crying, if the sniffling was anything to go by.

That was enough. Scorpius was about to push himself to his feet, when, like magic, his father got to his with a sigh and pulled back the screen around the bed.

Scorpius watched, wide-eyed, as his father walked over to the group of girls. There were four of them, standing close to the girl in bed. They looked like Slytherins. Scorpius wished they hadn’t been.

“Is there a problem here, girls?” Draco asked calmly.

The girls clearly hadn’t realised there were other people in the hospital wing with them. They looked deeply uncomfortable at having been overheard.

“My… my glasses,” came the nervous voice from the bed.
“Madam Pomfrey will be along in a minute,” Draco said in a firm but even voice. “Perhaps you’d like to hand those back to your friend? Or to me? I’m due to see Professor McGonagall in a moment.”

The tallest girl who was holding the pair of glasses blinked up at Draco Malfoy, considered for a moment, and then threw the glasses to him, not wanting to get too close.

With that they rushed off together, whispering.

Scorpius’s lips parted with awe as his father wiped the fingerprints from the lenses on his own shirt and then handed the glasses to the small girl.

“T-thank you,” she stammered.

With an oddly formal nod at the girl, Draco returned to his son, this time keeping the curtains open, perhaps to keep an eye on the situation. He sat back down on the bed, rather awkwardly. He looked embarrassed.

When he finally turned to his son, Scorpius was beaming at him, eyes glimmering with admiration.

The pride in his son’s eyes was too much for Draco. He felt it wasn’t at all deserved.

“I could only find a few bars I’m afraid,” Madam Pomfrey announced loudly, bustling back in. “Here you go, Mr Malfoy. Have one tonight and save the other for tomorrow, just in case. There’s no need to remain here. You may return to your dormitory.”

Draco immediately stood up and straightened his clothes, not liking to be seen sitting so casually by Madam Pomfrey.

Scorpius accepted the two chocolate bars gratefully.

“And my son can return if he starts to develop any negative symptoms?” Draco clarified.

“I never turn a child away from the hospital wing, Mr Malfoy,” responded Madam Pomfrey coldly. “As you well know. No matter what injuries or illnesses they might exaggerate.”

Draco cleared his throat.

“Well, thank you,” he said uneasily.

“Yes, thank you,” Scorpius said, smiling at Madam Pomfrey again and getting to his feet. "For all that you do."

Madam Pomfrey was so startled by that oddly kind sentiment that she blushed pink like a girl. She found herself entirely lost for words.

As the Malfoys left the hospital wing, Scorpius turned to see the little girl slightly further along from them sitting up in bed, glasses on her nose, dark hair pulled up into scruffy pigtails. She gave Scorpius a shy smile.

Scorpius returned the gesture warmly, and walked off with his father, striding a little more than was usual, proud to be at his side.
Ah Draco and Scorpius. I love writing them.

Little bit of trivia for you. The little girl Draco goes to help is in fact the same girl who drowned in the lake in the Dark AU.

If you enjoyed this then please leave me a comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Eleven

Chapter Notes

All but the last part of this is mine! I HOPE you enjoy it!

Leave me a comment if you did please! It means the world!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Scorpius returned to the Slytherin common room that evening it was with a spring in his step. Yes, the students on the way from the hospital wing had been nasty, and yes he was hideously unpopular again, but what did all that matter? The world was as it should be. He, Scorpius, was a complete and utter loser.

He wanted to shout it from the castle roof! I, Scorpius Malfoy, am an absolute and utter geeky loser who has a grand total of one friend and have never bullied anyone in my life!

His father dropped him off at the Slytherin door with a pat on the shoulder, promising to visit again soon. Scorpius wanted to hug him, to throw himself at his father and cling on tight, but even this version of his dad wasn’t a particularly cuddly sort of person. And although that was a bit sad, to Scorpius, it was okay. He was finished with comparing his father to other dads. The father he had might not have been the sort to sweep him up in a comforting embrace, but he was a good man who cared for him, and that was all Scorpius could ask for.

The Slytherins were not pleased to see him. Most of the younger students had already gone to bed, but Craig Bowker Jr was standing on the inside of the common room by the entrance, arms crossed over his chest. His robes were smart and freshly pressed. His hair was immaculate. And oh, his shoes were shining!

“Hello Craig!” Scorpius declared brightly.

Craig looked confused.

“We all wanted to know if you’ve lost us points. Because, as you know, we, as a House, have been working very hard to challenge the Ravenclaws, and your stunts with Albus Potter are extremely detrimental to that effort-“

“Um… actually Professor McGonagall didn’t say anything about points, so I think we’re okay there.”

“Are you sure?” Craig demanded.

Scorpius nodded and gave Craig another smile.

“Hm,” said Craig suspiciously, before wandering off, presumably to shine his shoes once again.

The rest of the Slytherins didn’t bother to talk to Scorpius. Some of them glared. Some of them ignored him entirely. But a couple nodded their heads with what could have been respect. Scorpius
felt it was more than he deserved.

Quite happily, he wandered to the Slytherin dormitory, knowing that Albus would be waiting for him.

Just as he expected, Albus was sitting hunched up on his bed at the end of the room, by the circular lake window.

Oh, what a sight that was! Albus Potter back in the Slytherin common room, looking sulky and solemn and anti-social.

The other two beds had their curtains closed already, which meant their occupants had probably gone to sleep.

Scorpius approached at a run and belly-flopped onto his own bed, just across from Albus.

Albus looked up at him, mid-run, and raised an eyebrow.

“I’m guessing your dad hasn’t grounded you until you’re thirty, then?”

“I’ve never been grounded before,” Scorpius admitted, getting himself comfortable on his front and resting his head on his hands. “Probably because I never go anywhere - although my dad did ban me from our library once after he caught me talking to the portrait of old Septimus Malfoy in the upstairs hall. I was only asking him about what the Ministry was like in the Eighteenth-Century, to help me with research, but I suppose I shouldn’t have done it…”

Albus was about to ask who Septimus Malfoy was, when he decided that he didn’t much care, not to mention that Malfoy family members, aside from Scorpius’s mother and father were usually a conversational no-go because of the whole Dark Magic thing.

Instead, he had something else much bigger on his mind. Something he could only really talk to Scorpius about.

“My dad’s coming in again tomorrow,” Albus revealed glumly. “He wants to talk.”

“Maybe that’s a good thing?” Scorpius suggested, with almost annoying positivity. “It’s a chance to clear the air. And you can explain why we did what we did. Maybe he might understand?”

Albus rolled his eyes.

“I think you’re still living in another universe,” he remarked. “My dad won’t understand. You know what he did, before. What he did to us. Even if he doesn’t.”

Scorpius reached into his pocket and pulled out a chocolate bar. He unwrapped it, almost took a bite, and then remembered his manners.

“Chocolate?” he asked, offering the bar to Albus.

“Please,” Albus said.

Scorpius threw the bar to Albus, who took a sizeable chunk and popped it into his mouth, before throwing the bar back to Scorpius, who for once didn’t fumble the catch.

“Mum says I have to talk to him. No excuses,” Albus explained, looking incredibly doom-laden.

Usually, it might have been just the tiniest bit annoying to hear Albus going on about his dad when
actually, something rather more important was staring them both in the face, but after his week without him, Scorpius found he’d never been so pleased to hear Albus moaning about Harry Potter.

Scorpius would gladly have listened to Albus go on about his father-son issues all night.

“Well, you probably should,” Scorpius said, fairly. “If only because if you disappear again you’ll be in even worse trouble than we already are - and the trouble we are in right now is probably the most trouble any student could possibly get into without being expelled. I’d put it at a ten on the trouble-o-meter. If ten was the absolute highest it could go without exploding.”

Scorpius really was in an excellent mood. It was disconcerting after all Albus had heard in McGonagall’s office.

“I’m going to be honest,” Albus said. “I expected you to be at least slightly upset about everything.”

“So did I,” Scorpius agreed. “But I think the relief may have taken over. At the moment I still can’t believe I’m back.”

“Almost a whole week in Voldemort’s world,” Albus said, thinking about it. “That’s a big deal.”

“A very big deal. A huge deal,” Scorpius agreed. “Most of all I still can’t believe you’re here. And in Slytherin! With me!”

“Thanks,” Albus said, going a little pink at how thrilled Scorpius sounded.

“And technically that makes me a week older than I should be, which entirely messes up my birthday,” Scorpius continued.

Albus considered Scorpius for a moment. Yes, he looked cheerful. But Scorpius, Albus had learned, was extremely talented at putting other people before himself. Albus supposed that had he been the one to live in Voldemort’s reality for a week, he would have wanted to get it off his chest. Actually, he realised, he probably would have been moaning about it non-stop.

“Did you want to, you know, talk about it?” Albus offered, slightly awkwardly.

Scorpius looked up at Albus gratefully and nodded his head.

Albus had been preparing himself for a very miserable Scorpius who might very well have been in need of comfort, or at least a bit of sarcasm to distract him a little from his sadness, but instead he was faced with an oddly invigorated version of his best friend.

At that moment, Scorpius was swinging his legs up behind him with glee and watching Albus with wide, overjoyed eyes.

“I can’t believe I met Severus Snape!” he announced.

Albus blinked, slightly wrong-footed by his sudden jubilance.

“Was he… cool?” Albus asked, at a loss as to why that was the one topic Scorpius had chosen to discuss.

“Oh Albus, he was wonderful,” Scorpius all but gushed. “He was fantastic. He was so brave! And so clever!”

For some reason (that Albus couldn’t rationalise) he felt the instinctive urge to put Snape down.
Perhaps it was because he was a man so closely linked to his father?

“Uncle Ron always said he was a bit of an arsehole,” Albus said.

“Albus!”

“Actually, the word might have been git.”

“Well I think he was brilliant,” Scorpius said loyally.

Albus knew that Severus Snape was a hero. According to his dad he was the bravest man he’d ever known. And everyone knew that he had played a huge part in the vanquishing of Voldemort all those years ago, but never in his life had Albus seen anyone look so utterly thrilled at the very thought of him. Scorpius was clearly spellbound by the man.

“Was he charming and good-looking too?” Albus teased him.

“Well, no,” Scorpius admitted seriously. “Actually he was quite sarcastic and really needed to wash his hair.”

“Wow.”

“But Albus, he was AMAZING.”

Scorpius paused. He took a moment to look up at Albus, thinking hard.

“And he said… he said to tell you that… that…”

“He wanted to tell me something?” Albus repeated, eyebrow raised.

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed. “He wanted you to know that- that’s proud. That you carry his name.”

It surprised Albus to hear that he’d been mentioned at all. It made him feel embarrassed. Unworthy.

“He doesn’t know anything about me,” Albus said swiftly. “I bet you anything he wouldn’t say that if he knew me for real.”

Scorpius looked over at him earnestly.

“I think he’d be even more proud if he knew you,” he told Albus. “I know that I would be.”

Albus wasn’t sure what to say to that. He cleared his throat and looked away from Scorpius.

“You said… when you were talking to McGonagall, you said Uncle Ron and Hermione were with you.”

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, far more quietly.

“Only you didn’t say what happened to them.”

Scorpius grew more solemn at that. He chewed his lower lip for a moment before speaking.

“They… it was bad.”

“Were they killed?” Albus asked.
Scorpius nodded.

Albus pushed away any horror at that confirmation. They weren’t his aunt and uncle. He hadn’t even existed in their reality.

“By who? Voldemort?” Albus asked, trying to be matter-of-fact about it.

“No. I never saw him. By Dementors.”

Albus couldn’t help but shift forward on his bed to get closer to Scorpius, to hear more. Dementors were one of the most terrifying things he could think of.

“You saw a Dementor take someone's soul? Up close?”

“Sort of,” Scorpius admitted. “That’s why I have the chocolate.”

He waved the remains of his chocolate wrapper at Albus.

“And do they really make you feel as bad as they say?”

“Dreadful,” Scorpius confirmed. “Like… like you’ll never be happy again. You forget what it’s like to be hopeful. And it’s so cold…”

Just thinking about them made Scorpius feel a little uneasy. He reached into his pocket for the second chocolate bar, unwrapped it, and broke off a square. He popped it into his mouth and chewed. It made him feel a tiny bit better.

Albus did not miss that small act of self-comforting.

“Well, you don’t have to worry about those anymore,” Albus said, hoping to reassure his best friend. “We’ll be learning proper Patronuses next year.”

“That’s it!” Scorpius exclaimed, suddenly remembering. “Snape’s Patronus! It was a doe, Albus!”

“A doe?”

“Like Lily’s.”

Albus raised his eyebrows with surprise. Two people having the same Patronus was almost unheard of. It was unusual enough that his late grandmother and grandfather had conjured a doe and stag as their protectors.

“How does that even happen?” Albus asked, wondering if Scorpius, with all his reading and odd little bits of trivia might have the answers.

“I don’t know,” Scorpius admitted. “But I saw it with my own eyes. He really must have loved her. More than just a usual sort of love. More than most people can.”

Albus didn’t know what to say to that. It felt weird to think about. Almost like he was betraying his late grandad.

“And he told me, he said: 'it’s strange what comes from within',” Scorpius remembered.

“Well, they say you can’t choose your Patronus. You know Uncle Ron has a really small dog. A terrier. Which I think sums him up just fine but he doesn’t seem to think so…”
“Your dad has a stag,” Scorpius said, unnecessarily.

“Yes. And Mum has a horse. I think the horse is cooler.”

“I don’t know what my dad’s is,” Scorpius admitted, thoughtfully. “But my mum’s was a dove. A white dove. When she was at school all the other girls were jealous because it was so pretty. They didn’t think she’d be able to make one, you see, what with how frail she was…”

Scorpius lapsed into silence. Not a happy one.

Albus noticed he had another bite of his chocolate and swallowed it with a gulp.

“How are you… okay, after all of this?” Albus asked.

“Because it never happened,” Scorpius said firmly.

“But it did-“

“Nope, it never did,” Scorpius continued with determination. “It could have happened and it almost did, but it was just another possibility. There must be hundreds of those. If you think about it there are so many what ifs. Every day. Hundreds. Thousands. We’re probably cutting off a potential future right now with this conversation.”

Scorpius did not sound okay. Not at all.

“I guess that makes us fairly powerful,” Albus said.

“Yes. Which is why we have to think. Very carefully. About everything. And why I am never ever ever being in charge of anything or anyone or - just - I need to stay away from all of that.”

“I don’t think they’re going to offer you the Minister for Magic job just yet.”

“No, I suppose not. But like Professor McGonagall said, we should always think. Always.”

“Thinking isn’t really your problem,” Albus said, trying a smile. “You think more than most people combined. Probably even more than she does. Definitely more than is healthy for a person.”

Scorpius smiled weakly at the compliment.

“So aside from meeting Snape, was there anything else good about the other reality?” Albus asked, in a forced jolly voice which he realised came out oddly like his brother James.

“Um…”

“There must have been some good things about it. Come on, Scorpius. You’re supposed to be the optimist here.”

Scorpius frowned as he thought, and then he broke into a slightly shy smile.

“Well… I suppose I was popular,” he admitted.

“Tons of friends?”

“Um - more followers than friends. They sort of wandered about after me. Or tried to. Yann was there. And Karl.”
“From our year?”

“Yes. Sort of like bodyguards. And Polly Chapman was there too.”

Albus raised an eyebrow.

“Polly Chapman? What does she have to do with all this?”

Scorpius went suddenly very pink at the cheeks. Albus felt his chest tighten.

“Well - actually - um… she may have asked me to ask her out.”

Albus felt quite suddenly angry. Out of nowhere. Like he wanted to get up from his bed and pace about a bit.

“Are you kidding me?” Albus settled for saying.

Scorpius made a face and gave a half shrug of his shoulders.

“Is it really that unbelievable?” Scorpius asked, looking slightly self-conscious.

“Yes! I mean… no. I mean - Polly Chapman!”

“She asked me to ask her to a dance. A ball. Called the Blood Ball.”

“And did you ask her?” Albus demanded, wondering why his throat was suddenly so dry.

“Actually I sort of avoided it. There were… distractions.”

Ah, _that_ was why he had felt so angry. Because it was just like Scorpius to miss an opportunity that was right under his nose. He was far too cautious for his own good.

“I can’t believe you passed up the chance to go to a ball with Polly Chapman,” Albus declared, giving a short whistle (and then wondering why on earth he had).

Scorpius fixed him with a rather wounded look.

“Albus, I know you’re very - well - keen on that sort of thing, but I had other things on my mind. It wasn’t… fun. It was awful. Even the good parts were bad.”

So having Polly Chapman fancy him _had_ been a good part?


“That’s okay,” Scorpius said with a smile, instantly forgiving him.

“Did it feel good, though? To have someone like Polly ask you?”

“It felt… strange,” Scorpius admitted, taking another thoughtful bite of his chocolate bar. “Not bad strange but not quite… you know?”

“Would you ask her out here? In this reality?”

Scorpius gave a little laugh, like he thought Albus was joking.

“I don’t think the ‘son of Voldemort’ is a particularly appealing dance partner. And I’ve never asked _anyone_ out. I think I’d probably faint if I tried. I am _hopeless_ with that sort of thing. You
know that.”

A strange and traitorous voice in Albus’s head was tempted to agree. Absolutely Scorpius would be terrible at that sort of thing. He talked too much. He was clumsy. No girl would ever want to go to a dance with him so there was no point in him asking. Not any of them. Ever.

But Albus pushed it away, confused by the strength of the thought. That had been mean.

“Tell me the rest of it,” Albus asked. “Anything you can remember.”

Scorpius shifted slightly, getting comfortable again, and then began.

“Okay, so Hogwarts. Imagine a medieval punishment system. And pure evil professors. So evil that they were probably immune from the Dementors. No souls.”

“Is Umbridge as bad as they say?”

“Worse,” Scorpius confirmed with gusto. “Absolutely horrible woman.”

“My dad told me she used to wear this stupid hat that made her look like a frog-“

“She did! And pink shoes. And her office! Cats everywhere! Not real cats. Painted cats. In rainbow colours.”

“Yuck.”

“And she’s actually a lot smaller than you’d imagine-“

“Can you two shut up?” came the tired voice of one of their dormmates.

Albus rolled his eyes with frustration at the interruption, but Scorpius blushed with embarrassment. They probably had been talking a little loudly for the time of the evening.

“Sorry,” Scorpius called back, making a face at Albus. (The boy grunted in response).

Scorpius, reminded of the hour, began to change out of his robes, clearly about to go to bed. He turned his back on Albus as he did so. Albus thought he heard his best friend opening and closing his bedside draw, but he couldn’t be certain.

Politely, Albus took an interest in the circular lake window as Scorpius changed into his pyjamas. Why he wore pyjamas, Albus had no idea. Every other boy in the dormitory wore a t-shirt and boxers to bed, but not Scorpius. He wore his expensive nightwear without shame, sometimes along with a Slytherin green dressing gown, which had been a gift from his father.

When Scorpius was done, Albus looked back again. Scorpius was already sitting up in bed, sheets pulled neatly up over his knees.

Albus was not willing to end the conversation there. Not because some idiot sharing their dorm had made a fuss. Instead of getting into his own bed, he went to sit on the end of Scorpius’s, closing the curtains of the four-poster behind him to give them a touch more privacy.

“You are all right, though?” Albus whispered, so as not to invite the wrath of their dormmates.

“I think so.”

“Because what you did… what you saw, that was big. That was a lot.”

“Only because you stopped it,” Albus pointed out. “You were… pretty brave, Scorpius.”

For a moment, Scorpius thought on that. And then he broke into his familiar delighted smile.

“I was, wasn’t I?”

“Seriously, shut UP!” came another groggy voice.

Albus looked about ready to send a jinx the boy’s way, but Scorpius shook his head. Sighing, Albus shifted up the bed slightly so he could talk more quietly.

“Is your dad really angry with you?” Albus whispered.

“Not as angry as he should be. He was… really nice about everything. Very kind.”

“And is he really angry with me?” Albus asked, a little nervously.

“No,” Scorpius said honestly. “I think he’s most angry with your dad.”

Albus nodded his head.

“I mean, technically, it was more Hermione’s fault,” Albus admitted, not really understanding why he had felt the need to defend his father, but doing so anyway.

“It was our fault,” Scorpius corrected him. “We were the ones who decided to change things. We were the ones who thought we could make a difference. Every person has to be accountable for their own choices, for their own actions.”

Well, that had told him.

“You’re way better at doing the whole accepting guilt thing than I am,” Albus said with a grin.

“Yep,” Scorpius agreed.

A comfortable silence settled around them. Albus wished he could just flop down on the end of the bed and remain there for the rest of the night.

But that was not the done thing, and would probably get them in some sort of trouble.

“I guess I should go to bed too,” Albus said, reluctantly.

“Potions tomorrow,” Scorpius agreed, getting himself comfortable. He patted his pillow down like a child might before sleeping. That was, to Albus, fairly endearing.

“Potions and a meeting with my dad,” Albus remembered. “Great.”

“But on the plus side, we’re alive!” Scorpius exclaimed with a beam, even giving a little fist pump. “We’re alive and together and back at Hogwarts and we didn’t bring an end to the wizarding world as we know it!”

When he put it like that, Albus had to admit it didn’t seem so bad.

Albus had the strangest urge, then, to give Scorpius a prod or a shove or maybe even a pat on the arm. To do something. Or maybe say something. To let him know how pleased he was that he was
“See you in the morning, Albus,” Scorpius said, smiling and settling himself down with his head on the pillow. Albus noticed that Scorpius slept curled up on one side of the bed, his cheek resting against the pillow.

“Night,” Albus agreed, getting up, giving Scorpius one last look, and closing the curtains safely around him.

+++  
The Great Hall the next morning was buzzing with the news that Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy were in some serious trouble. Nobody quite seemed to know what they’d done wrong, but the consensus was that it would go down in Hogwarts history.

On their way down to breakfast, the boys had heard a number of theories about their rule-breaking antics. Some were much more heroic than the truth. Others, a whole lot more embarrassing, many of which they both pretended not to have heard.

When they reached the Slytherin table, Scorpius and Albus took the seats at the very end, so they wouldn’t have to suffer the humiliation of having other Slytherin students move away from them.

Albus could feel the familiar anger rising in his stomach, but Scorpius looked like nothing could possibly dampen his spirits. With every glare or unpleasant comment, his smile only grew. He kept on staring up at the House banners and beaming to himself.

Scorpius helped himself to a boiled egg and a slice of toast, which he began cutting neatly into soldiers with his knife. Albus reached out miserably for some toast of his own and began chewing it with a rather sulky demeanour.

Today was the day his father would arrive, probably in good-father mode, ready to give some huge and embarrassing lecture which would make Albus feel like a child. It didn’t help that he felt guilty enough as it was, without the added telling-off from his dad.

“Enjoying that?” Albus asked, watching as Scorpius set about dunking thin strips of toast into his boiled egg happily.

“Ya-huh,” Scorpius agreed.

Just when Albus thought his morning couldn’t get any worse, he spotted Professor McGonagall making her way down the hall from the High Table. She did not look at all pleased to see him.

“Albus Potter,” she announced, standing at the end of Slytherin table with her hands on her hips. Almost every student in the hall turned to see what was happening. Many of the Gryffindors looked gleeful, thinking the Slytherins were about to be put in their place by the Headmistress once again.

Albus didn’t answer her, but he gave a nod of his head. It wasn’t that he was trying to rude, he just wasn’t sure he’d be able to talk without making her angry. Sometimes the sarcasm just came out of his mouth without permission.

“Morning Professor McGonagall,” Scorpius said brightly.

McGonagall looked a little startled by this warm welcome, but managed to remember her manners.
“And a good morning to you too, Mr Malfoy,” she responded. “With any luck you can get through today without plunging us all into deep trouble.”

Her words may have been stern, but there was a glimmer in her eyes which made Scorpius smile and nod his head.

She turned back to Albus with less warmth.

“I’ve received word from your father. He has very kindly agreed to come in and speak with you today regarding yesterday’s events.”

“Right,” Albus mumbled, wishing the other students would mind their own business and stop staring over.

“You will be excused from Potions this morning. Instead, you will go to the Slytherin dormitory, where your father will meet you.”

He was excused from Potions? Well, that certainly sweetened the pill a bit.

“The Slytherin dormitory?” Scorpius repeated, as the yolk from his current soldier dripped onto his plate.

“Yes, Mr Malfoy, the Slytherin dormitory,” Professor McGonagall confirmed. “Unless you have a particular aversion to the idea?”

“Oh… no,” Scorpius said swiftly. “No - that’s fine. I mean - it’s not up to me anyway - but if it was it would still be fine…”

McGonagall narrowed her eyes until Scorpius stammered to a stop and continued eating his breakfast.

A group of students had shuffled increasingly closer during this exchange, trying to overhear. McGonagall gave a sigh and turned to them with disapproval.

“Was there something you wanted?” she asked them. Predictably, nobody answered. They moved away again quick as anything.

“And I fully expect you to catch up on any missed work,” McGonagall told Albus.

With a final stern look, she walked off again.

Scorpius watched her go, clearly waiting to say something but not wanting to open his mouth until she was out of earshot.

“I can’t believe they’re letting your dad up to the dormitory!” Scorpius exclaimed, as soon as he judged her to be far enough away.

“Yeah, it’s a complete joke,” Albus agreed.

“They’ve not let a non-Slytherin into our common room for seven whole centuries!”

Albus glanced up at Scorpius, knowing full well he would be smiling. Only he could get excited over history at a time like this.

“Well I guess when you’re Harry Potter the rules don’t apply,” Albus said miserably, taking a bite of toast.
At that moment the daily post owls streamed into the Great Hall, circling tables and looking for the correct recipients of whatever letters or packages they were carrying. Albus held his breath, hoping that he wouldn’t end up with a Howler. Luckily, he couldn’t spot any red envelopes.

A familiar Eagle Owl flew low over the Slytherin table, soaring right to the very end where Scorpius and Albus sat and deposited a fairly large box beside Scorpius’s breakfast plate.

Scorpius put down his spoon and wiped his fingers neatly on a napkin.

“From your dad?” Albus asked, glancing at the rather fierce looking creature now flying off with the rest of the owls.

Scorpius opened the note first. Like all of his father’s missives, it was short and to the point.

Scorpius,

At even the slightest sign of belated symptoms I expect you to have one of these and take yourself directly to Madam Pomfrey. I hope to see you shortly.

Your father.

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, blinking.

“What did he send?” Albus asked, peering warily at the box.

Scorpius carefully opened the box and beamed at what he found inside. He slid it across the table to Albus.

“Chocolate Frogs? Your dad sent you a whole box of Chocolate Frogs?” Albus announced with disbelief, as he stared at the rows of chocolates.

“Yep.”

“After what we did?”

“I think it’s because of the Dementors,” Scorpius explained. “I did tell him I was fine, but you know what my dad can be like.”

The very thought of he, Albus receiving any type of gift after getting into as much trouble as they just had, was ludicrous.

“I don’t need all of these,” Scorpius said, glancing at the box.

“Are you complaining about getting a box of chocolates? Because if so, I am seriously worried about your mental wellbeing.”

Professor McGonagall, who was back at the High Table, seemed to have watched the owl delivery and was now frowning over. Clearly she too thought it was unacceptable for a student in such disgrace to receive a treat, but there was nothing she could do about it. She couldn’t very well forbid communication between students and their families.

“I don’t deserve them,” Scorpius continued. “Not after what we did.”

Albus frowned with disbelief.

“Are you mad?”
“Maybe,” Scorpius said with a shrug.

Scorpius looked around the Great Hall. Lots of students were staring over and whispering about the delivery, speculating about the contents of the package he’d just received. He overheard a Slytherin a little way up the table commenting loudly that he was certain it was some sort of Dark object.

Not one of them smiled at Scorpius as he glanced from face to face.

And then Scorpius spotted her.

It was the little girl from the hospital wing last night. Scorpius recognised her by her brown pigtails, her glasses, and most notably, the fact that she was sitting alone at the end of the Ravenclaw table, eating in silence and not looking up.

“Three each,” Scorpius declared, causing Albus to raise his eyebrows.

He took six Chocolate Frogs out of the box, handed three to Albus, left the others on the table by his plate, and then picked the box up, rising from his bench.

“Wait a second - where are you-”

“Back in a sec!” Scorpius told Albus cheerfully, already heading for the Ravenclaw table.

Albus watched with a grimace as Scorpius effortlessly broke convention by seating himself at the Ravenclaw bench alongside the lonely second year girl. That was just asking for trouble. Trouble they seriously didn’t need right now.

But with Professor McGonagall sitting at the High Table and the other professors looking on, nobody dared to challenge Scorpius. Albus was glad, because he really didn’t feel like jinxing the whole of Gryffindor House that morning.

Scorpius seemed oblivious to the excitement he was causing. It looked, to Albus like he was having a conversation with the little girl. At first, the girl looked nervous, but then Albus saw her visibly relax. She smiled shyly at Scorpius and appeared to be chattering back.

He supposed Scorpius was pretty amazing like that. He practically radiated kindness.

And then Scorpius handed her the box of Chocolate Frogs.

Albus was not the only student in the Great Hall to notice. Even Professor McGonagall was watching with surprise.

When his short conversation was finished, Scorpius returned to Albus with a smile. Immediately several of the Ravenclaw students shifted down their benches to see what the girl had just been given.

“How do you know how long those would have lasted us?” Albus asked dryly.

“I saw her in the hospital wing last night,” Scorpius explained. “There were some girls there - quite nasty ones. They tried to steal her glasses.”

“Right, and you gave her your Chocolate Frogs why?”

“Because I thought they might help her make friends?” Scorpius suggested hopefully.

Albus stared across the table at Scorpius.
“You are unbelievable, do you know that?”

“Unbelievable in a good way or a bad way?” Scorpius asked.

“Probably a bit of both,” Albus admitted.

Scorpius beamed.

+++  

Scorpius went off to Potions straight after breakfast, oddly undeterred by the fact it was with the Gryfffindors. He gave Albus a wave and went strolling off, books under his arm, collapsable cauldron in hand, quite possibly humming to himself.

Albus, on the other hand, traipsed back down to the Slytherin dungeon. On his way, he ate one of Scorpius’s Chocolate Frogs.

Being alone in the Slytherin common room was a strange experience, especially having spent time in the Gryffindor common room. It made him appreciate the lavish decor and civilised atmosphere all the more.

If he’d had the choice, he would have taken the opportunity to sit down on his favourite sofa by the fire and just soak in the atmosphere of the grand room. The room where he was supposed to be. Of the colour green and the ornate serpents everywhere. But he was too nervous for that. His father was on his way and Albus could no longer avoid the fact that he and the man that had parted him from his best ever friend would come face to face, alone, in what could be a matter of minutes.

Once in his bedroom, he slumped down on his bed, arms behind his head. He watched the green lanterns on the ceiling, the only source of light apart from the occasional shifting glow from the lake. Even in daytime, the Slytherin dormitory was a fairly dark place. That suited Albus just fine.

He wondered how Scorpius would be getting on in Potions without him. A nasty part of Albus wanted him to struggle on his own, to miss him, but it was quickly overshadowed by his conscience. Scorpius was getting seriously good at Potions, to the extent that he actually seemed to enjoy the lessons, even if they did usually include a whole lot of ridicule. He’d pass his O.W.L.s with flying colours next year, Albus was sure of it.

A familiar knock on the dormitory door pulled Albus from his thoughts. He sat up on his bed and swallowed, preparing himself for battle.

He didn’t want to fight with his dad, but Albus never entered any sort of conversation with his dad without being ready for it to happen. He didn’t like to be caught off guard.

“Come in,” he called out.

His father entered the room looking exhausted. Like he hadn’t slept at all. His hair was sticking up absurdly at the back, and his glasses were hanging slightly lopsided. One of the buttons of his smart Ministry waistcoat was undone.

“Thanks for letting me come up,” Harry said awkwardly, walking slowly towards his son.

Albus turned to his father. He nodded, cautiously, trying not to give anything away.

“No luck, as yet, with the Time-Turner searching,” Harry said conversationally. “They’re negotiating with the Merpeople to dredge the lake.”
Albus gave a half nod of his head which displayed polite interest. His dad was angry, he knew that much. No matter how hard he was trying to disguise his impatience, Albus could see through him as easily as a ghost.

Harry sat down, uncomfortably, on the end of Albus’s bed. Albus shifted slightly further away from him.

“This is a nice room,” said Harry, trying not to be hurt by the fact his son had just moved a few inches away.

He looked up at the round window beside Albus’s bed, through which the lake could be seen. Harry felt curiously like he was on the bottom deck of a boat (albeit a very grand one) rather than in a school dormitory.

Albus watched his father take in the room. He shouldn’t have been there, Albus thought bitterly. He was a Gryffindor. It wasn’t his right to get to see the common room of another House. Especially not a House he clearly had such a low opinion of.

But his father was making an effort, and Albus wasn’t going to throw it back in his face. Not today. Not after the promise he had made to his mother.

“Green is a soothing colour, isn’t it?” Albus said. “I mean Gryffindor rooms are all well and good, but the trouble with red is - it is said to send you a little mad - not that I’m casting aspersions…”

Harry merely sighed at his son’s attempt at humour. It bothered him that Albus couldn’t understand the seriousness of his actions, that he didn’t seem to be showing any particular remorse. James would have apologised instantly. Lily would have burst into tears. But Albus… Albus was an entirely different animal.

“Can you explain why you tried to do this?” Harry asked, biting back his other questions and accusations. Ginny had told him to be fair, to be calm. And doing things his way didn’t seem to have worked so far.

Albus didn’t meet his father’s eyes. He resented being asked the question, seeing as he had explained exactly what happened in Professor McGonagall’s office yesterday. But that was just like his dad, thinking he was owed something extra, some special bonus nobody else was allowed.

He’d answered the question in his head a hundred times already, just to make sure he didn’t sound like an idiot in front of his dad, but as usual all that came out were a string of thoughts.

“I thought I could - change things - I thought Cedric - it’s unfair.”

His father gave a sigh of frustration and ran a hand through his dark hair. Albus hated it when he did that.

“Of course it’s unfair Albus, don’t you think I know that?” his father asked loudly. “I was there. I saw him die. But to do this… to risk all this…”

“I know,” Albus muttered, picking at a loose thread on his deep green duvet cover.

He didn’t need to be reminded of what he’d done, of what he’d almost made happen. Did his dad think he didn’t realise? Did he seriously think he was so much of a nasty person that he didn’t feel bad about it?

“If you were trying to do as I did, you went the wrong way about it,” Harry fumed, failing to
contain his temper at what he saw as his son’s indifference. “I didn’t volunteer for adventure, I was forced into it. You did something really reckless - something really stupid and dangerous - something that could have destroyed everything.”

Albus swallowed hard. He wasn’t going to cry. He wasn’t. Because he was fourteen years old and his father wasn’t even shouting at him. But it wasn’t the anger that upset him so much. It was the disappointment. He had always known he was a disappointment to his father, but to hear it all come out, to realise that in his quest to prove himself equal he had only proved himself a failure, was too much.

“I know,” Albus said quietly. “Okay, I know.”

He wanted to say more, he truly did. But he didn’t think he could with the way his voice was breaking. To his horror, a single tear betrayed him by slipping down his cheek. Albus swiftly wiped it away before his father could notice.

But Harry did notice. He was rather shocked to see that his youngest son was crying, or at least fighting back the urge. Albus was usually so obstinate, so sarcastic, so determined to have the last word, that it hadn’t occurred to him that his son might become so upset.

He felt guilty at once.

Yes, he was angry. Furious, in fact. But that didn’t mean he couldn’t acknowledge his own wrongs. He had hurt his son. Perhaps without meaning to. Perhaps thinking that he was helping him. But hurt him he still had.

Harry was immediately struck by the memories of his fifth year at Hogwarts. By his fury at Albus Dumbledore’s distance that year, his odd behaviour. Now he was older he understood. He knew what it was to want to protect someone so much that you forgot about all else. He knew what that level of responsibility could do to a person. But he still remembered the feelings of injustice, of confusion, of anger at what he saw as adults keeping secrets from him, as them trying to take control of his life.

He remembered being taken to Dumbledore’s office on the day Sirius Black died. He had raged at Dumbledore then, in his grief and betrayal. Only a year older than Albus was now.

And he also remembered Dumbledore’s calm explanation, his patience, his kindness, and last of all, his tears. To see a man that great and powerful explain himself to a child, to admit his wrongs, had been a significant experience for Harry. He wanted to be as good a man as Dumbledore had been, or at least to try.

Taking a deep breath, Harry swallowed his pride.

“Well, I was wrong too,” he said. Albus looked up at him with surprise. “To think Scorpius was Voldemort’s son. He wasn’t a black cloud.”

“No,” Albus agreed.

Sighing, Harry tried again.

“And I’ve locked away the map. You won’t see it again. Your mum left your room exactly as it was when you ran away - you know that? Wouldn’t let me in - wouldn’t let anyone go in - you really scared her… and me.”

“Really scared you?” Albus repeated.
“Yes.”

Albus seemed to think on that for a moment.

“I thought Harry Potter wasn’t afraid of anything?” he said rather combatively.

Harry couldn’t understand it. He couldn’t understand his son. He couldn’t understand how defensive he was, how prickly. Most of all he couldn’t understand where it had all gone so very wrong between them.

“Is that how I make you feel?” Harry asked quietly.

Albus looked up at his dad, trying to figure him out. His father was the most complicated person he knew. And (with the exception of James) the most infuriating.

But he owed him something. Not quite an apology, but an acknowledgment.

“What Scorpius said, about when we returned after failing to fix the first task,” Albus managed to say. “When I was suddenly in Gryffindor House - nothing was better between us then either.”

He swallowed hard and continued.

“So the fact that I’m in Slytherin - that’s not the reason for our problems. It’s not just about that.”

“No, I know,” Harry agreed. “It’s not just about that.”

There was a long pause then. Albus seemed unsure of what to say. He couldn’t look his father in the eyes.

“Are you okay, Albus?” Harry asked his son quietly.

“No,” Albus answered.

Harry sighed, wishing beyond all else that Albus would simply reach out for a hug like Lily, or drape an arm around him like James.

But Albus was Albus. Defensive, and guarded, and horribly horribly stubborn.

“No,” Harry agreed, watching his beloved youngest son. “Nor me.”

Chapter End Notes

I know this one is LONG, but there was so much to include. In the script this scene is just the last bit with Harry and Albus, but I wanted to try and give it some context and add a bit more Scorpius!

My filler scenes fill me with nerves. Your lovely comments about them are just so nice! I hope this one is enjoyable!

If you liked it then please please PLEASE leave me a comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Ginny’s editor had been surprisingly understanding about her deadline. As soon as she'd returned from Hogwarts, she had contacted him directly to sort out an alternate story to put in the place of her column.

She had told him she had a ‘family emergency’, which Ginny thought was a pretty good assessment of the situation. When your youngest son thought it was a good idea to illegally travel back in time (causing untold mayhem and destruction in the process), apparently for the approval, love, and respect of his father, (also to prove a point), there was no more appropriate descriptor. The Potter family was in a state of crisis.

Albus was acting out horrendously. Harry seemed on the way to a stress-induced breakdown, not to mention the nightmares he had started experiencing every night. James was adding fuel to the fire by taking every available opportunity to tease his brother. As for Lily, she was becoming noticeably aware of and upset by the failing relationship between her beloved youngest brother and adored father.

When Ginny had checked on Lily in the Gryffindor common room, she’d found her only daughter looking a mixture of distressed and furious. She was by far the most expressive of Ginny's children, utterly unafraid of showing exactly how she felt. This was probably because of her friendship with Luna, who Lily considered to be something of an unofficial aunt. It was a relief for Ginny to have a child so unashamedly open with their emotions, in contrast to the complicated, spiky, guarded boy which was her youngest son.

Thankfully Lily had been surrounded by second year friends, and James had been sitting by her side protectively, every inch the devoted big brother. It warmed Ginny's heart to see how easily Lily and James interacted, how despite their many squabbles, in a moment of crisis they would come together without fail. In such moments James would leave his jokey persona behind, and Ginny would glimpse a very sensitive, if rather clumsy and inarticulate boy. It filled her with pride to witness James at his best. And his best always came out when his little sister was distressed.

Two of her three children were okay, Ginny reminded herself. And the third would be. Eventually. She hoped.

Once alone in the Potter household, Ginny had felt the strong urge to go out for a quick fly to calm her nerves. Nothing could clear her mind better than soaring through the clouds on her broom, even all these years after her Quidditch glory. But she felt that somehow she ought to remain in the house, in case Harry needed to get in contact with her urgently.
After an evening of stress, waiting, and pacing about, Ginny had heated some of last night’s lasagna (a specialty of Harry’s), tried (unsuccessfully) to listen to the radio, and then gone up to bed. Sleep came easily. After the day Ginny had had she thought she could probably have slept for weeks.

She was faintly aware of her husband getting into bed beside her in the early hours of the morning, but by the time she had woken up again at the sound of the alarm, Harry was gone again, yesterday's clothes in the laundry basket, the smell of aftershave in the air. Ginny wasn't sure how, but there was an air of urgency about the house. As though Harry had accidentally left behind some of his stress as he'd hurried back to work that morning.

He’d left a note on the fridge:

_Had to go in early. Should be able to see Albus this morning. Hermione fine. Not found the TT yet. Merpeople in talks. No word from Ron. - Harry_

Oh.

_Ron._

In the excitement of the previous evening, Ginny had completely forgotten to contact him. There had been Albus to talk to, and then Lily to check on. Her promise to owl Ron had entirely slipped her mind.

She hoped that Hermione had remembered to fill him in, otherwise this was going to be awkward.

Sitting at the kitchen table, Ginny took a piece of parchment and a quill and began to think of how to begin such a missive. It didn’t feel quite appropriate to launch straight in with: *my son and his best friend may have resurrected Voldemort yesterday and then erased him again, did you know?*

Nor did it feel right to say: _Hi Ron, your wife may have accidentally put the entire wizard world in danger and if anyone finds out she’s going to be in huge trouble._

Not only did that feel like too huge a bomb to drop over a breakfast owl delivery, but it could potentially have left Hermione’s job at risk. After all, owls could be intercepted. Especially owls sent to the Minister for Magic’s husband. Ginny couldn't chance talking too explicitly about the events of the previous day, just in case.

Really, the whole situation was too much to convey via owl. Ginny frowned at the parchment. Usually words came so easily to her, but not today, apparently.

In the end she settled on a brief note which she hoped wouldn’t worry her brother:

_Ron,_

_Harry asked me to let you know that Hermione was working late last night. I forgot, sorry. Maybe she's already owled you, but just in case she didn’t: she’s fine. Something big came up._

_I really need to talk to you, so come over as soon as you can. It’s urgent._

_I’ll tell you more when I see you,_

_Gin_

_x_
“Your favourite brother is here to see you,” came a loud voice from the living room, about three quarters of an hour after Ginny had sent the family owl to Ron and Hermione's home.

Usually Ginny would have shouted back: “Oh, hi Bill!”, but not today.

Ron poked his head around the kitchen door looking slightly concerned by the lack of teasing response.

“Everything all right, Gin?” he asked.

Ginny tied back her hair and took in the sight of her obviously oblivious brother.

Clearly Hermione had also forgotten to send a message. Her brother looked far too casual and breezy to be in the know. Ginny inwardly winced. She really hadn't wanted to have to tell the story, but Ron couldn't be left out of the loop any longer. He had a right to know. Even if it was going to be uncomfortable. Ginny felt an unusual spark of annoyance with Hermione, before she managed to recover herself.

Ron took off his blue stripy scarf and draped it over the back of a kitchen chair. Today he was wearing a hideous orange and grey striped sweater which was just a touch too small for him in the stomach and clashed with his scarf.

“Hermione was supposed to send an owl,” Ginny said, frowning with worry.

“About her working late?” Ron asked. “Sometimes she does. I keep telling her she works too hard, but you know what Hermione’s like. Loves to be on the go. I’ve no idea what they’d do without her. You know what they’re saying? That the Ministry’s never run so well. It’s like clockwork. And to think I used to hate that place.”

“You’re going to need to sit down,” Ginny announced, stirring two cups of tea with her wand.

Ron pulled up a chair at the kitchen table, looking very much at home. He folded his long limbs under the table as best he could, and relaxed with a sigh, arms behind his head.

“So what is it? Or did you just crave the company of your funniest and most entertaining brother? If that’s the case then I can’t blame you.”

Ginny was in no mood to fall into their usual teasing banter.

“Ron, listen, this is serious.”

At the sight of her grim face, Ron wiped the smile off his own in an instant.

“Is it about the kids?” Ron asked, sitting up straighter.

“Not yours,” Ginny said with a sigh.

Ron relaxed and then sat up again, seemingly thinking up another horrible possibility.

“Is James okay?”

Ginny wasn’t surprised by this obvious favouritism. Ron was, after all, James’s godfather. Although Ginny wished Ron would sometimes be tactful enough not to show how much he preferred James when Albus was around.
“They’re fine. Everyone is fine. But there’s some big news. It’s going to be hard to swallow.”

She placed a steaming hot cup of tea in front of Ron and took the seat across from him.

Ginny took a deep breath, composed herself, and then told her brother everything.

Throughout her story, Ron made a number of facial expressions Ginny couldn’t have described if she tried. At numerous points he lifted his cup of tea to his lips and then forgot to take a sip, placing it down on the table untouched. A few choice swearwords had also slipped out of Ron Weasley’s mouth. Once, he had gone to scratch his nose, become distracted by his sister’s words, and left his hand in front of his face until his arm began to ache.

When the story was finished, Ron stared at Ginny like she’d gone entirely mad.

“So you're telling me that our Albus and that Malfoy kid almost brought Voldemort back in some utterly mental quest to save Cedric Diggory?”

“Pretty much,” Ginny agreed.

“That is… a lot to take in,” Ron admitted, looking dazed.

“Try having it told to you by your son in front of Professor McGonagall.”

“Point taken.”

Ron let out a long breath. He frowned, thoughtfully, and scratched his chin.

“And who knows about Hermione keeping the Time-Turner?” he asked, looking conspiratorial. Ginny wondered if he was planning on using a Memory Charm in order to protect Hermione’s reputation. He’d expressed regret for not using it on a reporter before, when Hermione had made a minor (and quite harmless) mistake in her early days as Minister and thanks to a prying journalist it had somehow reached the Prophet. Everyone had laughed at Ron's suggestion, and Hermione had tutted, declaring that she would make amends and work doubly hard in future never to repeat her blunder, but Ginny couldn't help but wonder if he’d been serious. Ron could be almost scarily loyal where Hermione was concerned.

“Just me, Harry, Professor McGonagall and Draco.”

Ron had nodded at all of those names except the last.

“Draco! He could ruin Hermione’s career with that!”

“I don’t think he’d want more of a scandal,” Ginny said fairly. “And he’s hardly going to want his son dragged into this, which he would be if anyone investigated.”

“Blimey,” Ron breathed out, sitting back in his chair. He remembered his (now lukewarm) tea and took a swig.

“So me and Hermione, in this other reality we never actually…”

“Not married,” Ginny agreed. “According to the boys.”

Ron let out a whistle.

“Was anyone else with her?” Ron asked, eyebrow raised.
Ginny would have smiled at her brother if she hadn’t been so stressed.

“No. I think you two were still a team.”

“Oh, well, that’s okay I suppose,” Ron muttered, thinking it over.

“Professor McGonagall is furious. Albus is in detention for the rest of the year. I’d be surprised if he’s ever allowed another moment of leisure in that school until the day he leaves.”

“I never would have thought Al was the type,” Ron admitted. “That one’s a bit of a shocker.”

“Albus is full of surprises,” Ginny agreed, with a mixture of fondness and resignation.

“But he was always the quietest of your lot. Never got in any trouble. I mean James? Yes. I can see that. He’s a Weasley through and through. Did you hear the one he told about the Hippogriff and the barmaid the other week?”

Ginny raised an eyebrow.

“No offence, not that I have favourites. I love all my nieces and nephews equally.”

“This wasn’t just some prank, Ron,” Ginny emphasised, sighing. “What Albus did was dangerous.”

“He was trying to do the right thing,” Ron defended him. “Maybe he got it wrong, but still.”

Ginny looked at her brother thoughtfully. Ron had a wonderfully simple way of looking at things. Sometimes, it could drive her mad, but others, well, it made things a bit easier. Ginny supposed Albus had indeed been trying to help. That was what she’d cling to.

“I just don’t know what to do about him,” Ginny admitted. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.”

“Get Harry to talk to him?” Ron suggested.

“I have. Harry is… well, Harry is struggling.”

“Do those two still have issues?”

Ginny put down her own mug of tea with bewilderment.

“Ron, you’re his best friend, how can you not know that?”

Ron gave a sheepish shrug of his shoulders.

“We never really talk about it.”

“You two are constantly out together! What do you talk about?”

“I don’t know. Quidditch. Work. The good old days.”

“Yes, they still have issues,” Ginny revealed with exasperation. “Albus is… he’s incredibly stubborn. And Harry - well - he’s Harry.”

“I could get Rose to talk to him?” Ron volunteered.

Ginny shook her head.
“Rose and Albus aren’t exactly on the best terms at the moment.”

“What?” Ron asked, looking surprised.

“Ron, you must have noticed they’re hardly speaking.”

Clearly this was news to her big brother. Ginny wondered how much of life simply flew right over Ron’s head.

“Why?”

Ginny gave a vague gesture which meant: ‘it’s complicated’.

“They fell out over Scorpius. Albus doesn’t talk about it much, but I’m guessing Rose doesn’t think much of him.”

“And who can blame her?” Ron remarked robustly.

Ginny rolled her eyes to the heavens.

“Ron, have you actually met Scorpius?”

“No,” he admitted. “But I spent enough time with his father to know what he’ll be like. It seriously doesn’t surprise me that Draco’s kid was involved in all this. Are you sure Albus wasn’t bewitched or something?”

“One hundred percent certain,” Ginny said. “Because it was my son’s idea.”

“Yeah, that’s what he *told* you…”

Ginny narrowed her eyes at Ron from across the table. It was the exact same look she used to give as a girl, just before administering a Bat Bogey Hex.

“Ron, if you’re going to be that pig-headed and just plain mean, then as your sister, I am going to have to tell James that his sacred godfather is scared of tiny weeny little spiders…”

“You should have ended up in Slytherin, you know,” Ron grumbled. “And okay, fine. I get your point. And not because of the spider thing, which is perfectly reasonable after what Fred did to my teddy bear - by the way.”

Ginny gave a huff.

“Look, just because your son decided to pal up with a Malfoy doesn’t mean you have to join their fan club,” Ron remarked. “What next? Is Draco coming over for a nice family dinner? Because I am pretty sure that ponytail would put me off my food.”

“So that’s where James is getting it from!” Ginny declared. “You do realise James has started to call him Draco the Ponytail. That’s not one of yours, is it?”

“Not one of my best, granted…”

“Well whatever you think of Draco, his son is a nice enough boy.”

“Sure he is.”

“Neville likes him,” Ginny pointed out.
That seemed to change everything. Ron respected Neville a great deal. He stopped in his tracks and reconsidered.

“Well, I guess Neville teaches him. Although I still reserve the right to be very suspicious of that kid.”

Ginny sighed.

“I’m meeting Neville later, actually. At Hogsmeade,” Ron revealed. “I was going to try and get Dean and Seamus along, but they’re staying in Ireland again. Something about Seamus’s mother they said. Tell you what, I don’t envy Dean one bit. Talk about the mother-in-law from hell. I’ve no idea how he does it.”

Ginny raised a disapproving eyebrow, although privately she rather agreed.

“So it’s just me and Neville at the minute,” Ron continued. “D’you think Harry can sneak some time off?”

“I don’t think Harry will be able to make it,” Ginny said. “Not with what’s happened. He’s working hard. Maybe too hard. Apparently they’re going to dredge the lake.”

“With the Merpeople in it? Good luck with that,” Ron scoffed. “He’d have better luck negotiating with the bloody Acromantulas.”

“Well he thinks this is all his fault.”

“Rubbish,” Ron declared loyally. “Kids will be kids. I mean look at Rose. She can be a proper madam when she wants to be. I don’t think I’ve ever won an argument with her in my life. Too much like her mother. Which is usually a wonderful thing, apart from when you want her to do as she’s told.”

“That’s because you spoil her,” Ginny pointed out, smiling slightly.

“Okay, maybe I do, but Harry spoils Lily rotten. It’s just a dad - daughter thing.”

“Maybe you should pop in on Hermione before you see Neville?” Ginny suggested, summoning the biscuit tin with her wand and offering it to Ron. He eagerly opened the lid and helped himself to chocolate biscuits.

“She’ll be busy,” Ron answered, chewing. “Says I get in her hair when I’m lurking around the place.”

“I’m not sure I’d want you lurking around the place either,” Ginny admitted. “Shop not open today?”

Ron made a face.

“To be honest, Gin,” Ron explained, confidentially, leaning forwards over the table and lowering his voice. “It’s not doing as well as it was.”

Ginny knew how much the shop meant to Ron. Her youngest brother had always taken pride in having something of his own, a place in which he could be in charge. When George had given Ron full ownership of Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes, Ron had talked about it non-stop for months.

“It isn’t about the money,” Ron said swiftly. “I can’t complain on that front. I mean, Hermione
earns more than enough, even after she’s given a fair chunk of it to all her charities, but it’s just the principle - you know?”

Ginny did know. She gave a kind smile.

“It’ll pick up again,” she said.

“What I really need now is new stock,” Ron explained. “But I’m all out of ideas, and George says he’s done with the shop now. Besides, I don’t exactly want to go pestering him to help me out of trouble.”

Ron shook himself out of it in an instant. He forced a smile.

“Anyway, there’s me talking about myself. What about you, Gin? Your column was good the other day.”

“Thanks,” Ginny said, taking a biscuit of her own. Usually she never would have touched chocolate apart from on special occasions, but in times of stress she had to admit that a chocolate biscuit was actually a pretty good distraction. “I’m juggling, as usual. It’s easier when the kids are away at school, but all this stuff with Harry.-“

“Juggling!” Ron interrupted her gleefully, swallowing a huge mouthful of chocolate biscuits. “Right - so I’m thinking enchanted juggling balls that - wait for it - transfigure in the air!”

Ginny raised an eyebrow and Ron remembered himself.

“Oh, right, sorry. You were talking.”

“Harry’s been getting these dreams…”

Ron immediately grew solemn.

“I know about those,” he said. “The Voldemort ones. They sound nasty.”

Ginny was glad that her husband and his best friend did occasionally converse about something other than Quidditch. And she was also pleased that Harry had confided in Ron. Harry had a terrible habit of keeping his problems to himself, determined to handle them alone. It was a startlingly similar approach to their son, Albus, who seemed equally as unwilling to ask anyone for help.

“His scar is still hurting,” Ginny admitted. “It hasn’t hurt him in years. I’m… worried.”

“Well even if it was something important, it was probably about the Time-Turning stuff, right? I mean, Voldemort was back in that other reality. Maybe that was what Harry was feeling? I bet you it was.”

“They could just be nightmares,” Ginny said. “Everyone gets those.”

“Yeah, especially anyone who ever saw Voldemort in the flesh. D’you ever-“

Ron trailed off, embarrassed.

“Do I ever dream about it?” Ginny finished for him. "The Battle?"

Ron nodded his head.
“Of course I do. We all do.”

“I mean it’s not the sort of thing you can talk about, is it?” Ron said, seriously. “Especially not when everyone thinks we’re heroes or whatever. And not when Harry went through all that…”

“Well, you were a bit of a hero,” Ginny conceded with a smile. “And you can savour that because I’m only saying it once.”

“Cheers,” said Ron, smiling back. “But it just feels wrong, doesn’t it? Complaining about it all when Harry’s right there. After what he had to face.”

Ron could be surprisingly selfless sometimes. It was, in Ginny’s opinion, one of his most endearing traits. Yes, he could be a typically annoying big brother, lacking in tact and finesse, but there was no denying that Ron cared about his family and friends. His devotion to his best friend had always struck Ginny as pretty admirable.

“Sometimes I give Harry a Sleeping Draught. When it gets bad. You could give it a try?”

Ron appeared to think about it, and then waved the idea away with a smile.

“No, I’ll be fine. Besides, I’ve got to keep the wife satisfied, and honestly, our love life has never been better.”

Ginny grimaced.


“Well, with that, I’m off,” Ron said, putting on his blue striped scarf. “Might try and see if I can do something about that juggling idea before I meet Neville. Thanks for the tea, Gin. And the biscuits. Hermione’s got a pretty strict no-biscuit rule going at home at the moment. To do with blood pressure or something like that. You know what her parents are like. D’you think I’m putting on weight?”

Ron stood in profile and sucked in his stomach. He was definitely starting to get a little bit of a gut. Ginny raised an eyebrow and decided to be kind.

“Not noticeably,” she lied.

Immensely cheered by that, Ron smiled.

“Thanks for letting me know about all... this,” Ron said. “As mental as it is.”

“Have you ever noticed how we just take it in our stride?” Ginny remarked, walking with her brother to the living room fireplace.

“All the crazy stuff that happens?”

“Yes.”

“Gin, we grew up with Fred and George. I genuinely don’t think there’s any better preparation for the unpredictability of life.”

“Profound,” Ginny remarked, giving her brother a fond shove, just like she had when they were children.

“Call me the next Albus Dumbledore,” Ron responded, giving a mock bow. He threw a handful of
Floo powder into the flames.

“Weasleys’ Wizard Wheezes,” he said clearly, and then bent down as he stepped into the green flames, spinning out of sight.

+++  

Chapter End Notes

I wrote this for a few reasons. Firstly I wanted to include a bit of the sibling dynamic between Ron and Ginny. Also, I feel that Ron can come across as a bit of a fool in the script (I am sure he has more depth when you watch the play live, but it's hard to get those nuances when you're just reading the lines), and I wanted to show more of who I imagine he is now.

Obviously I needed Ron filled in on what happened because he seems to know about it in later chapters, so I took the opportunity to have Ron and Ginny interact.

Just a warning, with the next few scenes, I am going to mess with the order a bit. If it seems like I have skipped one, I haven't, I am just switching a couple around. It shouldn't mess with the chronology of events, but hopefully will build a bit of tension!

Please leave me a comment because I really value your words!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Fourteen

Chapter Notes

I've not skipped 12 and 13. I'm just messing with the order a bit!

Please leave me a comment if you enjoyed this!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scorpius Malfoy lay awake on his bed in the Slytherin dormitory, staring up at the ceiling, hands interlinked neatly on his stomach. The early hours of the morning were a good time for thinking, Scorpius found, and at the moment he had a lot of thinking to do.

His first full day back in reality had been a good one.

To start with, he had woken to the sound of Albus Potter snoring in the bed just across from him. At breakfast he had eaten in a non-silent, non-evil-professor-infested Great Hall, and received a box of Chocolate Frogs from his father. Everyone had stared at him like he was a loser. Someone had called him the ‘son of Voldemort’ under their breath.

In short: all was well with the world.

Albus had received a visit from his father that morning, which had left him fairly sulky for the remainder of the day. Also, Scorpius noticed that Albus did not deal well with being in trouble. Not at all.

He seemed to resent Professor McGonagall for the punishments he’d been given, and complained constantly about the fact he wouldn’t be allowed to go to Hogsmeade this year, even though Albus had previously talked non-stop about how much he hated the place and wouldn’t go there for anything.

Albus truly was a contradictory, difficult, and overall awkward person.

But Scorpius didn’t mind. Without all those things, Albus wouldn’t have been Albus. And Scorpius wouldn’t have changed a single thing about his best friend, even his regular (and slightly repetitive) dissecting-the-moral-character-of-Harry-Potter sessions, which happened every time he and his dad had a row.

Following his brief stint as the Scorpion King, and time away from Albus, Scorpius found he was able to view his best friend with new clarity. Everything seemed different now. Scorpius was determined not to take a single thing or person for granted, having lived in a world without them, or with the wrong them in their place. But no longer was he going to live in his childish world of idealisation. He was fourteen years old, which meant it was time to be a little more mature.

Somehow, the acceptance that Albus was actually a sometimes selfish, very spiky, oddly impulsive, probably slightly too sarcastic, determined pessimist of a best friend only made him that bit more real. More wonderful.
The reason Scorpius was awake at two in the morning, mind whirring, was that he had a secret. A secret and a choice to make. A very important one.

The night before, when he’d first returned from the hospital wing with his father, Scorpius had stowed the hidden Time-Turner in his bedside drawer. He’d chosen not to tell even Albus that he had it stashed safely away. When he’d woken up that morning, he had put the Time-Turner on beneath his robes, just on top of his nice warm thermal vest. It had been far too risky to leave it in the dormitory. The Hogwarts house-elves liked to clean up during the day (something Scorpius was honestly quite thankful for considering the state Albus left his section of the room in), and Scorpius wasn’t going to chance his precious Time-Turner being discovered.

Scorpius had used his day as something of a test.

So far, everything in this reality seemed to be back to normal. But Scorpius was not going to say goodbye to the Time-Turner before he was certain. To give up the only chance he had of rectifying any further mistakes would have been ridiculous. Even if it meant lying to his father, Headmistress, and even the Minister for Magic in the process.

Lies were bad. Scorpius knew that much. He had been taught from an early age by both his mother and father to be honest. And yet as Scorpius had grown older, he’d learned that sometimes, just sometimes, a truly smart person needed to lie in order to do good.

Hadrn’t Severus Snape helped win the Second Wizarding War by living a lie for years of his life? Hadn’t Albus Dumbledore often kept his own plans hidden, only choosing to reveal them at the appropriate moments? Even his father lied sometimes, and that was okay. Draco would tell Scorpius over and over that a Malfoy didn’t care for the ignorance and preconceptions of others. That those things were nothing. That if a person happened to call him ‘Death Eater scum’ (as they sometimes, terribly, did) he did not take it to heart.

That was a lie. Because Scorpius could see that it hurt his father when people reminded him of his past. And yet he told Scorpius otherwise to help him learn, to spare his feelings, to attempt to spare him some of that same pain.

And that was what Scorpius was doing now. Saving other people pain. He was keeping the illegal Time-Turner in his possession not for some selfish reason, but because it was the right thing to do. Because he knew well enough that even the Ministry couldn’t be trusted with such an item. It could bring about the most terrible danger. People could get hurt. And Scorpius wasn’t willing to let that happen.

But equally he didn’t want to have the burden of the Time-Turner forever. What gave him the right? It was too close to the power he had held as the Scorpion King, and Scorpius wanted nothing to do with that temptation ever again.

Which meant there was only one thing for it.

If the Time-Turner could not be returned to the Ministry, and it could not be kept by him, it would have to be destroyed.

It was the only way.

But did he dare do it?

Scorpius’s stomach gave a horrible churning sensation at the thought. Could he really get rid of the only Time-Turner in existence?
What if this reality still wasn’t how it should have been? What if there was something he had overlooked?

No, that was silly. Scorpius had gone over and over his mental list of changes in this reality. Probably more times than was necessary.

Harry and Ginny Potter were alive, married, and had three children. One of whom was the best person in existence (aka Albus Severus Potter).

Hermione Granger was the Minister for Magic. She was married to Ron Weasley. Both of their children were very much in existence.

Rose, especially, was on fine form.

Scorpius paused then, remembering his earlier Potions lesson without Albus, during which he’d managed to humiliate himself beyond belief in front of Rose Granger-Weasley.

For once, such humiliation had brought him nothing but joy. The very disdain of (the formerly non-existent) Rose had become somehow more wonderful than ever before…

+++  

On his way to Potions, having left Albus to wait in the Slytherin dormitory for his father, everyone had been whispering (fairly loudly) about him, speculating wildly about both his antics with Albus Potter, and his gift to the Ravenclaw girl that morning.

That had been okay. Very much okay. Because people talking about him as though he wasn’t there was something which would never have happened in the other, terrible reality.

Scorpius had made his way to his usual seat at the back of the Potions classroom as unobtrusively as possible and set up his cauldron. Without Albus there to complain about unfinished homework and unread textbook passages, it had been a less pleasant task than usual, although he took heart in the lack of Voldemort propaganda on the dungeon walls.

Rose Granger-Weasley and Yann Fredericks had chosen that moment to stroll in together, chattering and laughing about Quidditch.

Scorpius had been unable to hide his delight at seeing Yann in his Gryffindor scarf and Rose, well, just existing. Existing in her usual vivacious, overall carefree way.

And like a miracle, they had noticed him, standing there beaming. Yann had looked a bit annoyed, but Rose had given her friend a shove and led him to one of the desks in the third row, right in front of Scorpius.

Instead of setting up their cauldrons and continuing their conversation, Rose Granger-Weasley turned around and fixed Scorpius with her usual slightly-fierce, slightly-suspicious look. Then she had leaned confidently on his desk.

Scorpius remembered blinking rather a lot at that.

“So I heard you and Albus got into some big trouble, Bread Head,” she had announced.

For a moment, Scorpius had been so stunned that he couldn’t for the life of him figure out the meaning of his new nickname. And then suddenly, it came to him.
“Oh! Because I said you smelled like bread! On the train! And you do! Smell lovely - I mean. I probably should have explained it was supposed to be a good thing…”

Rose and Yann glanced at each other, eyebrows raised.

“If you didn’t know that then it probably sounded really rude…” Scorpius had continued, rather breathlessly. “Which was entirely my fault because I mess things up sometimes when I talk - and actually I think I am talking too much right now - and I’m going to stop.”

Scorpius had been praying desperately in that moment that he hadn’t just dug himself even deeper. It mattered to him, what Albus’s former favourite cousin thought of him. Rose was Albus’s family. And she was wonderful. Even if sometimes she could be just a tiny bit mean.

If he was utterly honest with himself, Scorpius envied Albus his family, even though envy wasn’t a very nice trait in a person.

Having no family of his own aside from his father, he couldn’t help but admire the intermeshed family of the Potters and Weasleys. He would always remember the moment Rose Granger-Weasley and Albus Potter walked into his carriage of the Hogwarts Express. It had been the beginning of everything, really.

And secretly, Scorpius hoped that maybe, just maybe, Albus and Rose could be friends again one day. And that he might be friends with them too.

“O-kay,” Rose had finally remarked, rolling her eyes.

Well, that had been better than being ignored.

“And Yann! Hello!” Scorpius added, feeling unexpectedly thrilled to see the boy who had been probably the closest thing he had to a friend in the other reality. He’d been no substitute for Albus, but he had been loyal. Scorpius could appreciate that. Loyalty was an admirable trait in a person.

“Why isn’t Albus here?” Rose had demanded, when Yann didn’t respond, only looked fairly shocked to be addressed so warmly by Scorpius Malfoy of all people. “Have they excluded him? Surely he’s not been expelled?”

“Oh, no,” Scorpius assured her. “He has to see his dad. Your uncle. Harry Potter.”

“Yes, I know who my uncle is, thanks,” Rose remarked.

Yann looked a bit uncomfortable with the conversation and returned to his seat, sitting down and getting out his books. Rose, however, remained where she was.

Scorpius had been racking his brains for more acceptable conversational topics, when Rose had looked around her, and then leaned in slightly closer.

“I saw what you did just now.”

What he had done just now? Had he done something wrong?

“You gave that second year your Chocolate Frogs. That was… a fairly nice thing to do. Unless you had an ulterior motive…”

“Nope - no ulterior motives here,” Scorpius assured her quickly. “I am completely free of any motives which are not entirely overt.”
Rose had looked at him then, for a long moment. A moment which seemed to stretch on forever.

And then Rose smiled, nodding her head with what seemed like reluctant approval; something Scorpius had wanted for years now, ever since that first day on the train with Albus.

“Good for you, Bread Head,” she had declared.

At that moment, Rose had reached out to pick up a spare textbook at Scorpius’s side, but Scorpius, dizzy with optimism following this actually quite civil and fairly friendly exchange, and anticipating reconciliation between Albus and his former favourite cousin, had misread the gesture and leaned over his desk to give Rose Granger-Weasley an ecstatic hug.

In mere seconds he became aware that Rose had not, in fact, been aiming for a hug. He had noticed around the time Rose kicked him in the shin under the table.

“Ow ow ow…” Scorpius exclaimed, hopping about a bit. “Ow.”

“What was that?”

“I thought… okay, I thought wrong. I’m really very sorry. Very sorry indeed. I thought you might have been… and I hoped that…” Scorpius trailed off, face red with embarrassment.

“Never do that again,” Rose warned him fiercely.


“Did he just hug you?” Yann asked Rose, who had returned to her seat in a flash, looking embarrassed.

“I think so,” Rose responded.

“God, he’s such a weirdo,” Yann declared, sounding a little more hostile than was necessary. “Those Chocolate Frogs were probably poisoned…”

For a moment Scorpius had cringed (rubbing at his shin), feeling so deeply embarrassed that he wanted nothing more than to disappear. But then he remembered that this was how things were supposed to be.

After all, what better indicator was there that the world was back to how it should have been, than his own foolish blunder, and Rose Granger-Weasley’s resulting fury?

Although Scorpius suspected (or perhaps just hoped) that she was melting. A tiny bit. The tiniest of tiny bits.

He would have to work on that.

+++ 

Next on his list had been Polly Chapman.

She was absolutely definitely back to normal, because when Albus and Scorpius had passed her in the Great Hall during lunch, she hadn’t even looked up, let alone used that odd, low voice of hers, or batted her eyelashes.

In fact, even Albus seemed to have picked up on that, because he’d made rather a point of telling Scorpius that neither of them had a chance with a girl like Polly in this reality, and that there was
no use in even imagining a girl like that might be interested, because she was so far out of their league. By miles and miles. And didn’t Scorpius think so too?

Scorpius hadn’t actually thought so. For himself? Yes. But Scorpius imagined Albus could have easily interested a girl as pretty as Polly if he put his mind to it. In fact, Scorpius thought Albus was quite a bit too good for the likes of Polly Chapman.

In the afternoon he and Albus had attended a Herbology lesson with Professor Longbottom, who was very much alive, and very much his usual, encouraging self.

He’d even taken Albus aside while they were supposed to be examining the Bubotuber plant, to check that he was okay, and to let him know that if he ever needed to chat, he was available.

Albus had actually been ever so slightly sharp with Neville, which Scorpius thought was a shame. But Albus could often be spiky after a talking to from his father, and luckily Professor Longbottom hadn’t taken it to heart.

Cedric Diggory was no Death Eater. He was still dead. Murdered during the 1994-1995 Triwizard Tournament by Voldemort and his followers.

Scorpius hadn’t needed to visit the library to discover this information (however much he would have liked to). Now he and Albus were in constant detention, all of their free time (aside from a few hours or so dedicated to homework and study) was taken up with performing helpful maintenance tasks around the school. (Although not in the Forbidden Forest, since Scorpius’s father had been very firm about that).

And so when the other students had finished with lessons and returned to their comfy common rooms for the evening, Albus and Scorpius had been sent trooping up to the Trophy Room, today on the fourth floor, and set the tedious task of shining as many trophies, plaques, and medals as they could in the space of two hours.

It had been a fairly enjoyable activity for Scorpius, who had never before been allowed in the grand room full of shining glass cases, and even Albus had been slightly surprised with what he’d found there.

During their cleaning, Albus had spotted a large wooden block engraved with the names of various Hogwarts Head Boys, on which he had seen his Uncle Percy, Uncle Bill, his ‘other grandad’, and Teddy Lupin, who was a family friend. The discovery seemed to fill Albus with both awe and dismay.

Scorpius had come across a posthumous medal for bravery, awarded to one Cedric Diggory in 1995, while looking through a selection of fascinating ancient Hogwarts shields.

He’d been so excited to see it that he’d dragged Albus away from the commemorative cups.

“We already knew he was dead here,” Albus had pointed out, still in his bad mood.

“Yes, but this is the proof! Isn’t it wonderful?”

Albus had raised an eyebrow.

“Not for Amos Diggory,” he’d remarked, and then resumed his sulky polishing.

Scorpius supposed Albus had been entirely right. He’d done his best to hold back his jubilant mood after that.
With his list complete, Scorpius gave a nod of his head. It was a very determined nod. A nod which meant that something had to be done, and it would be.

The hours of deliberation were over. Now it was time to act.

Because that was who Scorpius Malfoy was now. A boy who acted. Not a boy who worried endlessly. A boy who could be kind like his mother, but take action, like his father.

It felt good, being decisive. Not dithering over the choice, simply being assertive and doing what had to be done. Yes, it was scary, because what if your choice was wrong? But this was no impulsive decision, Scorpius reminded himself. It was a decision backed up by good sense and facts.

Scorpius supposed that was one of the (very few) positives the other reality had gifted him. A sense of his own independence. The realisation that although he preferred to be with others (mostly Albus), he could cope on his own. He could handle terrible situations without crumbling or curling up in a ball. He was fourteen years old and ready for anything.

From just across the room, Albus gave a loud (and rather well-timed) snore.

Albus.

He would have to be included in this. There was no question of Scorpius doing this alone. To start with, he didn’t want to, and then there was the fact that Albus deserved his chance to make things right. If they could destroy the Time-Turner together, then that would be it. Done. Forever.

And then maybe they could forget this whole unfortunate incident had ever happened.

It would be an adventure in itself! A wonderful, heroic, but utterly responsible adventure.

An adventure led by he, Scorpius. His first real expedition. An expedition of heroism and bravery and integrity. Perhaps not as exciting and action-packed an adventure as the ones he’d had with Albus previously, but one that was probably infinitely more important.

Just thinking about it made Scorpius beam to himself in the darkness of the Slytherin dormitory. He was aware he probably looked quite mad, but he didn’t care. He and his best friend were going to rid the world of Voldemort once and for all!

Right then, Scorpius thought. Step one. Wake Albus.

He liked the idea of his adventure having steps, a nice well-thought out plan which could be followed for the minimal amount of extra anxiety.

Albus had been asleep for hours. As soon as they’d returned from their evening cleaning session in the Trophy Room, Albus had crawled into bed (without even brushing his teeth or changing his clothes), given a vague grunt and then begun to snore.

Scorpius supposed it was the stress.

Quietly, Scorpius crept on his tiptoes to Albus’s four poster. It seemed a shame to wake him, really, but Scorpius knew that Albus would want to be a part of this. And that he should be.

He pulled back the curtains quietly.
Albus was sprawled inelegantly on his bed, mouth open, covers all but kicked off him. He wasn’t usually much of a snorer, but ever since they’d been found in the lake, Albus seemed to have picked up the habit. Maybe he was catching a cold, Scorpius thought. He’d make sure to tell Albus to wrap up warmly in future, or perhaps lend him a thermal vest…

Scorpius moved up to Albus’s bedhead and leaned over it.

“Albus…” he whispered.

Nothing.

“Psst… Albus,” Scorpius tried again, a little louder this time.

Albus grunted something in his sleep, stopped snoring, and then settled again. Honestly, Albus could probably have slept through the demolition of the school…

“ALBUS!” Scorpius hissed.

Albus woke with a start, giving an odd sort of full-body twitch, and looking like he anticipated disaster.

At the sight of his best friend’s stunned expression and the way he swore under his breath, Scorpius couldn’t help but laugh. He almost doubled over with amusement.

Albus rubbed at his hair, gave Scorpius a betrayed look, and then settled back on his pillows, arms behind his head, trying to regain some of his dignity having jumped out of his skin.

“Pleasant,” Albus deadpanned, only sounding the slightest bit croakier than usual. “That’s a pleasant and not scary way to wake up.”

Scorpius beamed at him. Oh how he loved that sarcasm. He’d never ever get tired of it.

“You know it’s the strangest of things but ever since being in the scariest place imaginable I’m pretty much good with fear,” Scorpius revealed. “I am - Scorpius the Dreadless. I am - Malfoy the Unanxious.”

He added a strange sort of shimmy to that statement.

Albus thought that Scorpius the Very Much Asleep and Not Pestering Him at Two in the Morning, was a title he might have preferred at that particular moment.

“Good,” Albus grumbled, reaching for the crumpled covers around his waist and pulling them up again, getting ready to go back to sleep.

Scorpius didn’t seem to notice.

“I mean, normally, being in lockdown, being in constant detention. It’d break me by now - what’s the worst they can do?”

Albus seriously hoped he wasn’t expected to answer that.

“Bring back Mouldy Voldy and have him torture me?” Scorpius asked himself aloud. “Nope.”

Coming to terms with the fact that Scorpius was not going to shut up any time soon, Albus rubbed at his eyes.
When his vision became less blurry and he could take in Scorpius’s expression, he became immediately aware that Scorpius was in one of his very chatty, very optimistic, very very enthusiastic moods.

Who looked that happy in the middle of the night? It was ridiculous. Every reasonable person in the world should have been sleeping, or trying to sleep, or otherwise thinking darkly about the day ahead.

But not Scorpius Malfoy, apparently.

“You’re scary when you’re in a good mood, you know that?” Albus remarked, yawning.

Scorpius beamed his agreement.

“When Rose came up to me today in Potions and called me Bread Head, I almost hugged her. No, there’s no almost about it, I actually tried to hug her-“

Albus was too tired to take in that whole story. Something about Potions and Bread Head and Rose and a hug…

Wait, a hug?

Albus had been about to ask what on earth he’d been playing at (suddenly a great deal more alert), when Scorpius continued.

“- and then she kicked me in the shin,” Scorpius finished, oddly proudly.

That sounded very much like his cousin. Good old Rose, Albus found himself thinking, before he remembered that Rose was not a ‘good old’ anything, and then wondered why on earth he’d felt so strangely pleased about it in the first place…

“I’m not sure being fearless is going to be good for your health,” Albus commented dryly.

Scorpius looked at Albus. His face grew contemplative and he chewed on his lower lip.

Albus recognised that expression. Scorpius obviously wasn’t feeling as merry as he seemed. Albus could understand that. It made him feel less annoyed about being woken up, and actually, a bit pleased.

He knew it was wrong of him to see Scorpius worried and feel any sort of pleasure whatsoever, but there was a certain pride in being woken especially to comfort someone. It was almost humbling. At home, when his little sister Lily had had an upset, it was always his father, mother, or even James that she ran to. It felt surprisingly good to be the person someone ran to at their most afraid. It meant a lot.

Albus sat up in bed and made sure he was concentrating. He nodded at Scorpius, very aware of this new responsibility, to let him know he was ready to listen.

“You don’t know how good it is to be back here, Albus,” Scorpius all but whispered. He had his hands held together in front of him, and kept fiddling with his fingers. “I hated it there.”

Albus knew that already. Of course Scorpius had hated it in the other reality. Anyone even vaguely nice would have. It was a pretty obvious and unnecessary thing to come out with.

But Albus knew Scorpius, and he knew what he was really saying with those words. He was asking
for comfort, for reassurance. Albus wished he was better at providing those things.

“Apart from the Polly Chapman fancying you bits,” Albus suggested, trying to cheer Scorpius up with their usual repartee, hoping it would make him laugh.

But Scorpius ignored the comment. His eyes had taken on a thoughtful, faraway quality.

With a sigh, Albus shifted over in bed and patted the space beside him. A bit of dry humour clearly wasn’t going to cut it this time.

Nodding gratefully, Scorpius sat down next to his best friend and leaned back against the headboard.

“Cedric was a different person entirely,” Scorpius explained, appearing lost in his own thoughts. “Dark, dangerous. My dad - doing anything they wanted him to. And me? I discovered another Scorpius you know? Entitled angry, mean - people were frightened of me. It feels like we were all tested and we all - failed.”

Albus glanced at Scorpius’s profile in the murky light of the lake window. Even though he had called himself *Malfoy the Unanxious*, and *Scorpius the Dreadless*, Albus thought he could sense a lot of anxiety and dread going on.

“But you changed things,” Albus reminded him quietly. “You had a chance and you changed time back. Changed yourself back.”

Scorpius chewed on his lower lip again.

“Only because I knew what I should be,” he admitted.

Albus took a moment to digest that.

Was Scorpius actually feeling guilty about all this?

If Scorpius was feeling guilty, then Albus knew he probably shouldn’t have been sleeping at all. It should have been him that was awake, unable to relax, rather than poor Scorpius. He should have been the one left stuck in Voldemort’s reality, alone and afraid. It was his fault, after all.

There weren’t a great deal of things Albus would have done differently if he’d had the choice. He should have been that was awake, unable to relax, rather than poor Scorpius. He should have been the one left stuck in Voldemort’s reality, alone and afraid. It was his fault, after all.

There weren’t a great deal of things Albus would have done differently if he’d had the choice. He still thought that he and Scorpius had done the right thing in trying to save Cedric. Even if it had all gone wrong. Even if he had claimed otherwise to Professor McGonagall and his father. But he did regret any upset he had caused his mum and little sister. Most of all, he regretted causing Scorpius all that pain. If he could have taken that back, he would have in a heartbeat.

The idea of being tested was not a new one to Albus. His own father had been tested at the age of eleven. As a first year he had faced Voldemort, and he had shown himself to be brave, capable, and kind. In his second year he had saved Ginny’s life, risking everything, at the age of twelve, to save the wizarding world. Every year his challenges had only increased, and his father had met them with courage. Time after time he had proved himself. No matter what was thrown at him. Never had he faltered. Never had he crumbled.

Albus had known he could never live up to that, that his father was an exceptional case, but it still struck him that he had fallen at the very first hurdle. That in his first attempt to do some good, to have an adventure of his own, he had very nearly destroyed everything.

And there was nobody to blame but himself. In fact, it had only been Scorpius that had prevented a
complete disaster.

“Do you think I’ve been tested too?” Albus asked his friend, glumly. “I have, haven’t I?”

Scorpius thought about it, fiddled with his hands, and then shook his head.

“No,” Scorpius answered quietly. “Not yet.”

“You’re wrong.” Albus pointed out. “The stupid thing wasn’t going back once - anyone can make that mistake - the stupid thing was being arrogant enough to go back twice.”

“We both went back, Albus.”

“And why was I so determined to do this?” Albus continued, voice raising a touch. “Cedric? Really? No. I had something to prove. My dad’s right - he didn’t volunteer for adventure - me, this, is all my fault - and if it wasn’t for you everything could have gone Dark.”

“But it didn’t,” Scorpius said firmly. “And you’re to thank for that as much as me.”

Albus didn’t raise his head. He gave a half sigh - half scoff which clearly meant: yeah, right.

Scorpius watched Albus for a moment and then decided to confide in him.

“When the Dementors were - inside my head…” Scorpius began, struggling to find the words. “Severus Snape told me to think of you.”

Albus looked up, then. He frowned with confusion.

“You may not have been there, Albus, but you were fighting,” Scorpius continued. “Fighting alongside me.”

Albus gawped for a moment and then nodded his head, understanding that he’d been told something massive, something important, something which probably meant an awful lot.

When you faced a Dementor, everyone knew you could withstand them for longer if you thought of something happy, something that made you want to keep going, to keep fighting.

Had he truly been that thought in Scorpius’s head?

Albus felt his stomach grow warm. It was an odd sensation...

“And saving Cedric,” Scorpius continued, clearly finding this part easier to express. “That wasn’t such a bad idea - not in my head anyway - though, you know right - that we definitely can’t try again.”

“Yes,” Albus admitted, swiftly. “I do. I do know that.”

There was an odd silence then. Scorpius seemed to be pondering something. He was making his most thoughtful of thoughtful faces, which admittedly wasn’t his most attractive look.

Albus felt the need to do something. Just to show his support. To thank Scorpius for what he had just told him. To let him know that it meant the world.

Slightly awkwardly, he reached out and draped a casual arm around Scorpius’s shoulders. He kept his gaze fixed on the green curtains in front of him, refusing to look at his best friend. It would have been too embarrassing somehow, to see him in that moment. Albus wasn’t sure why, but he
knew it was best not to turn his head.

Scorpius remained silent for a moment. And then he gave a happy little sigh.

*Good,* Albus thought, inwardly relaxing.

But instead of holding that (really pretty nice) moment, Scorpius propelled himself from the bed in a burst of energy, dislodging Albus’s arm.

“Good,” Scorpius said brightly.

And then he began to unbutton his pyjama top.

Albus shifted back in bed a little cautiously, eyes wide. Had Scorpius gone mad? What *was* this? Why was he grinning like that?

His best friend reached down beneath his shirt and then pulled out a familiar gleaming golden chain…

*Oh no...*

“Then you can help me destroy this,” Scorpius announced, revealing the Time-Turner with a flourish.

Albus’s first reaction was to gawp unattractively at the item. He had a very strong urge to either swear or laugh with pure perversity.

“I’m pretty sure you told everyone that was on the bottom of a lake,” Albus said, more calmly than he’d realised was possible.

Scorpius raised his eyebrows and attempted to wiggle them. He added a strange little shimmy, holding the Time-Turner like a hypnotist’s pendant.

“Turns out Malfoy the Unanxious is a pretty good liar,” he announced proudly.

Albus blinked. Okay, so this was happening fast. Scorpius was… happy? That grin could mean nothing but trouble. It was more disconcerting than should have been humanly possible to see a look like that on the face of Scorpius Malfoy. It *seriously* didn’t belong there.

And in an odd and unintentional role reversal, Albus found himself sighing with disapproval at his clearly rather frenzied best friend.

(*Oh Dumbledore, was this what it felt like to be Scorpius? How did he cope?*)

“Scorpius, we should tell someone about this…” came the most sensible voice Albus had ever heard emit from his own mouth.

“Who?” Scorpius demanded. “The Ministry kept it before, do you really trust them not to keep it again?”

Albus had to admit he had a point.

“Only you and I have experienced how dangerous this is,” Scorpius continued persuasively. “That means you and I have to destroy it. No one can do what we did, Albus. No one.”

It was no fun at all being the killjoy. And Scorpius did make it sound ever so tempting…
How was his willpower supposed to withstand that smile from Scorpius? Albus gave a sort of sigh, sort of groan which meant: ‘all right, fine’.

Triumphant in the knowledge he’d successfully recruited his best friend to his cause, Scorpius drew himself up to his full height and struck a pose.

Albus stared up at him with bewilderment.

“No, it’s time that time-turning became a thing of the past,” Scorpius declared grandly.

Albus raised an eyebrow.

“You’re quite proud of that phrase, aren’t you?”

“Been working on it all day,” Scorpius agreed, beaming.

+++ 

Chapter End Notes

Hope you enjoyed!

Please leave me a comment because it makes me sooooooo happy!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scenes Twelve and Thirteen

Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy!

I am aware these chapters come before the last one I posted, but I felt it worked better in this arrangement.

Please do leave me a comment because they mean the world!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry returned from a stressful day at the Ministry late in the evening, longing for his bed. The Time-Turner had still not been recovered. The Merpeople were being as difficult as possible. And Albus… well, Albus had been his usual obstinate and maddening self.

Despite the day of meetings and decisions and working harder than he’d had to in months, the worst portion of Harry’s day had undoubtedly been his conversation with Albus. No new understanding had been reached. His son seemed determined to carry on despising him.

He, Harry, had probably not dealt with things as well as he could have done. Maybe he could have been softer, more understanding. In fact, now he looked back, he couldn’t understand why he had waited for his son to initiate contact. He could very well have reached out for a hug himself, pride be damned. Even if Albus had chosen to push him away, he would have known he had tried everything.

“Albus just wants to know that he’s loved,” Ginny had told him earlier. “He needs to know it, Harry. You need to make sure he knows it.”

But showing Albus love was harder than it seemed. When his every movement seemed to radiate deep loathing, Harry found it a real struggle to express the affection he held for his youngest son, and undoubtably most difficult child.

That’s a thought for tomorrow, Harry told himself firmly. His son was secure at Hogwarts. Protected in the Slytherin dormitory. Possibly sulking, but nevertheless safe.

He could try again tomorrow. He would try again every day for the rest of his life if it meant getting through to Albus.

Harry crept up the stairs as quietly as possible so as not to wake Ginny. He took off his Ministry clothes, changed into a t-shirt and Muggle pyjama bottoms, and climbed into bed beside his wife.

Ginny looked peaceful, Harry noticed, with some relief. Beautiful and peaceful and the same as always. If he hadn’t been afraid of waking her, he would have planted a quick kiss on her forehead. It was on days like this that Harry truly appreciated having Ginny at his side. Being able to come home to a person who truly understood him, with whom he could be entirely himself. No longer the famous Harry Potter. Just plain Harry.
Harry took off his glasses, placed them on the bedside table, gave his wife one final glance and then succumbed to sleep within moments, disappearing into dreams…

+++  

Harry could see a gravestone. A gravestone covered in bunches of flowers. Roses and carnations and pure white lilies. There were so many of these that it was a wonder they hadn’t strayed onto the other graves currently visible in the large graveyard.  

In his small, childish hand were a bunch of flowers of his own. They were the sort you could buy at cheap petrol station, wrapped in crumpled plastic and already slightly squashed.  

“Go on then,” declared a familiar, rather unpleasant voice. “Lay down your grotty little flowers and then let’s go.”

Aunt Petunia was beside him with her long neck and blonde hair, looking, as usual, like she was disgusted by something or other.  

“I already hate this poxy little village, I don’t know why I even had the thought - Godric’s Hollow, Godless Hollow more like, the place is clearly a hive of filth - go on, chop chop.”

It was only once she had said the words that Harry realised they were indeed standing in Godric’s Hollow. There was the church, with its bright stone glass windows, and a small distance away Harry could see cottages.  

With an impatient look from his aunt, Harry wandered forward, approaching the grave. But something wasn’t right. Something didn’t quite make sense…

“Now, Harry… I don’t have time for this. Duddy has his Cubs tonight and you know how he hates to be late.”

“Aunt Petunia,” Harry ventured bravely, his voice coming out higher pitched than usual. “We’re their last living relatives, right?”

“Yes. You and I. Yes.”

“And - they weren’t popular? You said they didn’t have any friends?”

Aunt Petunia gave an irritated sniff, nostrils flaring unpleasantly and making her appear even more horselike than usual.  

“Lily tried - bless her - she tried - it wasn’t her fault, but she repelled people - by her very nature. It was her intensity, it was her - manner, it was her - way. And your father - obnoxious man - extraordinarily obnoxious. No friends. Neither of them.”

Harry frowned.  

“So my question is - why are there so many flowers? Why are there flowers all over their grave?”

Petunia glanced about her, and registered the bunches of flowers with some shock. Had she not seen them before? They were right there. They’d been there the whole time.  

Harry watched as his aunt took in the sight. She appeared to be moved, eyes starting to swim. Aunt Petunia approached the grave as though in a trance and then sat, quietly, beside it, staring at her sister’s name, lips parted.
Never had Harry seen his aunt so very soft, so very human, almost childlike. He stared at her as she swallowed, eyes downcast, smoothing down her pale blue floral dress.

“Oh. Yes,” Aunt Petunia said, rather quietly. “Well, I suppose there are a few. Must have blown over from the other graves. Or someone’s playing a trick. Yes, I think that’s more likely, some young rascallion with too much time on his hands, has gone around collecting flowers from all the other graves and deposited them here—”

“But they’re all marked with their names,” Harry pointed out boldly, moving closer to read the handwritten notes. “Lily and James, what you did we will never forget… Lily and James, your sacrifice…”

“I smell guilt, there is a stench of guilt upon the air,” came a high, cold, clear voice.

“Get away!” Aunt Petunia suddenly shrieked at Harry, jumping to her feet. “Get away from there!”

His aunt grabbed him by the arm and pulled him back from the grave, making Harry stumble. He opened his palms with surprise, but no bunch of flowers fell to the ground. They had disappeared…

Suddenly the gravestone changed. It began to morph, right before Harry’s eyes, his mother and father’s names disappearing, a terrible white hand reaching up into the air, bursting from the stone but somehow not breaking it.

And then a figure began to grow, in a large, jagged, oddly human shape, which left Harry in shadow, looming over him, blotting out the sun.

“I knew it,” Aunt Petunia remarked, calmly, as though the figure wasn’t emerging from the grave in front of them, turning the world icy cold. As though she hadn’t just sensed the menace mere moments before. As though she had simply forgotten. “This place is dangerous. The sooner we leave Godric’s Hollow the better.”

Aunt Petunia grabbed him by the arm once again, dragging him forcibly away. But Harry twisted in her grasp, desperate to see, to know what it was, what was happening.

Voldemort stood before him, shrouded in darkness and death.

“Do you still see with my eyes, Harry Potter?”

Harry fell onto his back, scrambling in the dirt. Aunt Petunia had disappeared. So had the cottages and the flowers and the stained glass. Only he and Voldemort remained.

Voldemort’s cloak billowed, although there was no wind at all, and then suddenly a boy burst from within, a panting, terrified, dark haired boy, reaching out with a desperate hand.

“Dad!” Albus Severus Potter yelled. “Dad!”

Harry tried to push himself to his feet but he was stuck on the spot. Something was holding him down.

He’s coming, hissed a terrible, echoing voice. He’s coming. He’s coming…

A scream filled the air. A scream that was his own.

“Haaarry Pottttter,” whispered a voice. An unmistakable voice. The voice of Voldemort…

+++
Harry woke with a jolt, sitting up immediately in bed, chest heaving. His scar was burning. He
couldn’t tell if the pain was real or just another remnant of his nightmare.

He was too hot. His body was covered in sweat. His dark hair was stuck to his forehead.

“Lumos,” came a tired voice from his right, and Ginny’s face appeared beside him in the darkness.
Her red hair was tumbled about her in some disarray. Her eyes were half shut with sleep.

“I can’t…” Harry found himself saying, kicking off the sheets and pushing himself out of bed. He
grabbed for his glasses and put them on with shaking fingers.


It was too much. He could still feel Voldemort’s presence, even now. Harry felt invaded, as though
his very body had been occupied. He didn’t feel safe. He couldn’t just lay there. He couldn’t do
nothing.

In his mind’s eye he could still see Albus, screaming for him.

Harry gave his wife a brief look and then bolted.

Frowning, Ginny forced herself out of bed, grabbed her dressing down, and followed her husband
down the stairs, wand in hand, racing to catch up with him. He always went to the kitchen in
moments of stress, and just as she’d expected, she entered the room to find the window pushed
wide open and Harry sitting at the kitchen table taking deep breaths.

“Harry? Harry? What is it? You were screaming…”


Ginny forced back her concern. It was no good the both of them falling to pieces over what may
well have been a perfectly normal stress-induced nightmare. Someone had to remain grounded, and
right now, that person could not be her husband.

She moved towards Harry and placed a hand on his shoulder. He placed his own clammy palm on
top of it in an instant.

“They weren’t likely to stop immediately,” Ginny soothed him, the way she had so often soothed
Lily from her own nightmares. “It’s been a stressful time and-”

Harry pulled away from her comforting hand with frustration. Ginny wasn’t so much hurt, as
startled by how Albus-esque that gesture had been.

Her husband placed both of his elbows on the kitchen table and cradled his head.

“But I was never in Godric’s Hollow with Petunia. This doesn’t-“

The way Harry was rubbing at his head was not at all rational. In fact, it made him look just a tiny
bit unhinged…

“Harry, you’re really scaring me,” Ginny said, heart pounding.

“He’s still here, Ginny,” Harry announced, raising his head and staring at his wife with fearful
resignation.

There was something about that calm delivery which frightened Ginny beyond all else.
“Who’s still here?” she forced herself to ask, even though she knew the answer. She knew by taking one glance at her husband’s pale face.

“Voldemort,” Harry confirmed.

Ginny raised a hand to her own forehead and sighed. This was not good. These dreams could not continue to plague her husband. Something had to be done. This was the last time she would wake up in the night with Harry, him shouting out like a terrified child and bolting for the kitchen.

“I saw Voldemort and Albus,” Harry continued heavily.

Ginny’s head snapped up in an instant.

“And Albus…?” Ginny breathed, brown eyes narrowed with alarm.

Harry swallowed and gave a grim nod of his head. He closed his eyes, forehead wrinkling, apparently trying to remember his dream.

“He said - Voldemort said - ‘I smell guilt, there is a stench of guilt upon the air.’ He was talking to me.”

Harry looked right at his wife, whose eyes were shining with what could have been fury or terror. His scar began to burn in that moment. Grimacing, he brought a hand up to touch it.

Ginny followed the gesture with her eyes and then her face fell.

“Harry,” she forced out in as calm a voice as possible, although her knuckles were white as she clutched the back of a kitchen chair. “Is Albus still in danger?”

Harry tried to regain composure, but his heart was pounding. He felt sick. His face blanched.

“I think we all are,” he admitted.

Ginny closed her eyes and let out a breath of quiet horror. She forced herself to remain on her feet and moved to the fridge, on the front of which was a photograph, attached by magnets.

In the image, her three children smiled out at her. Lily was on James’s back and laughing, over and over in a loop, head thrown back, red hair blowing about in the wind. James was sticking out his tongue, and then turning his head to look up at his little sister with big-brotherly adoration. And then finally there was Albus, standing beside them, his dark hair being ruffled by James. His expression was utterly comical. He looked both irritated and pleased at once. He was fighting back a smirk.

Ginny reached out to touch the photograph and behind her, she heard her husband get to his feet.

“I can be ready in two minutes,” Harry said.

Ginny tore her eyes away from her children.

“I’ll contact Professor McGonagall,” Harry continued, sounding soothed by his own plan of action. “I just need to check. I have to be sure he’s okay…”

“Two minutes,” Ginny agreed, taking a deep breath and making for the door.

On her way out of the kitchen Harry reached out to touch her arm.
But Ginny pulled away. Fearing for her youngest son, she had no comfort left to give her husband.

Chapter End Notes

When I began this, I decided to write from the perspectives of Albus and Scorpius only, but as we've gone on, that's been harder and harder to stick to, as the adults' perspectives are becoming equally as important to the plot. That's why I am including Harry's dream here.

Please leave me a comment because I get so excited when I read them!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Scorpius got dressed as quickly as possible, (although Albus noticed he took the time to comb his hair). Albus didn’t need to do a thing since he’d gone to sleep wearing yesterday’s clothes. Something which he maybe wouldn’t have done if he’d realised they were planning an adventure this evening.

“Are you ready?” Scorpius asked him.

“You know I am.”

“Excellent!” Scorpius responded, truly relishing his role as expedition leader.

The common room was thankfully empty, and the boys crept through it in the darkness, Scorpius overacting his tiptoeing just the tiniest bit.

“So where exactly are we going to do this?” Albus asked as they exited the Slytherin common room and began to creep through the corridors, the eyes of the Slytherin portraits watching them with great interest, but also with a sense of solidarity. Albus had a distinct feeling they wouldn't mention what they'd witnessed if asked. The portraits were loyal like that.

“Somewhere with lots of space,” Scorpius answered. “I was thinking we could sneak out into the grounds and-“


“In case of us?”

“In case any of the other students decide to follow our example. I heard them talking about it in the common room earlier. It’s cut down Quidditch practice apparently, because they can’t overrun. It’s only lost them about five minutes, though, so I don’t know what the fuss is all about…”

“So we may have single-handedly annoyed just about every student in the school?” Scorpius asked, eyebrows raised.

“Pretty much,” Albus agreed. “Although you say that like we don’t already annoy just about everyone at this place…”

“Okay, what about the roof?” Scorpius suggested, brisk again.
Albus thought on that.

“The roof could work.”

“What about the roof of the Owlery? At least we’d have an excuse for being there.”

“Sending owls in the middle of the night? Sure.”

“You must have wanted to write to your parents at strange times before.”


Scorpius gave a shrug of his shoulders, utterly unashamed.

“Well, I have. And some people definitely do do that. So it’s better than us being caught anywhere else. And hopefully the owls will be quite noisy up there, so we won’t attract so much attention.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Albus agreed.

Scorpius nodded his head and then began to lead the way to the Owlery, arms swinging confidently at his sides. Usually Scorpius walked with his hands half hidden in his robe sleeves. Not to mention that he was less childishly bouncy and yet somehow just as enthusiastic. This was new…

“Did the Scorpion King walk differently?” Albus asked, after watching him for a moment.

Scorpius turned.

“Am I walking differently?”

“Just a bit more… I don’t know. Older?”

Scorpius didn’t laugh at his remark. Instead, he pondered it as they took a detour in order to avoid going anywhere near the Gargoyle Corridor, at the end of which Professor McGonagall was probably sleeping.

“Well, I suppose I feel older,” Scorpius admitted. “I feel… well - honestly- I feel like I’ve grown up.”

Albus raised his eyebrows.

“I mean it, Albus. Everything has changed. You don’t come out of a world like that in the same way you went in. It makes you think - about everything - really really hard. And you discover things you never noticed before - things which you took for granted.”

Albus supposed that made sense.

“I, Scorpius Malfoy, am a new man,” Scorpius declared grandly.

“Great.”

“I feel reborn.”

“Good for you.”

“Like a phoenix, rising from the ashes.”
“Laying it on a bit thick now…”

A distant sound of chuckling made both boys stop on the spot. They looked around nervously.

“Did you hear that?”

“Yes.”

“Do you think there’s someone-“

“Ooooh, can I hear students out of bed? Peevsie can heeeaaarrrrr youuuuuuu!”

“Peeves!” Albus and Scorpius exclaimed, eyes wide.

“Quick,” Albus hissed, grabbing Scorpius (who appeared to have frozen), and pulling him behind the nearest tapestry.

Both boys held their breath as the sound of eerily childlike giggling drew closer.

“Are we playing hide and seek?” Peeves asked. “Naughty naughty. I wonder where you are…”

Peeves had never before struck Albus as a sinister presence. Annoying, yes. Troublesome, absolutely. But as the Hogwarts poltergeist giggled in the corridor just beyond them, Albus could feel his heart pounding in his ears. If Peeves realised what they were up to then Scorpius would have to give the Time-Turner back. Professor McGonagall would be called. Any hopes of ending the nightmare they’d created once and for all would be dashed.

“Peevsie knows you’re there!”

Albus grimaced. Scorpius turned to his best friend, gave a determined look, and thought fast. He had to think of something, or Peeves would raise the alarm...

“Yes, you are - absolutely right,” Scorpius agreed, not moving a muscle.

Albus stared at him with horror.

“What are you playing at?” Albus hissed.

“And I’m not alone,” Scorpius continued, giving Albus a significant look which meant: please just go with it.

“Two students out of bed!” Peeves declared gleefully. “Naughty naughty! Who’s that then? Peevsie wants to see…”

“You absolutely definitely do not want to look behind this tapestry,” Scorpius said.

Albus rolled his eyes. If he was trying to sound authoritative then he’d failed miserably. And everyone knew that you couldn’t tell Peeves what do to. In fact, the moment you told Peeves not to do something, he would make sure he would.

“And why’s that?” Peeves asked, clearly enjoying the game.

“Because we are…” Scorpius screwed up his face, thinking. And then it hit him. He beamed at Albus. “Kissing?” he continued. “Yes, kissing. Very passionately.”

Albus very nearly fainted.
Scorpius had his fingers crossed beside him, but he had majorly misjudged Peeves. Albus knew for a fact that catching students getting up to no good was a favourite pastime of Peeves, if only so he could spoil the moment and then go snitching to everyone who would listen.

With a laugh of pure trouble, Peeves must have reached out for the end of the tapestry, because it began to move, revealing Scorpius’s shoes…

Scorpius looked at Albus desperately, wand in hand. If they didn’t think of something and fast, they’d be forced to attempt to silence Peeves some other way, which probably wouldn’t end well, considering Peeves was a ghost, and Albus certainly didn’t know how you stopped one of those.

Peeves began giggling even more loudly. Scorpius’s free hand grabbed for the Time-Turner around his neck protectively.

“You seriously DO NOT want to look,” Albus suddenly piped up.

The tapestry stopped moving. He had caught Peeves’s attention.

“And why’s that, then?” the poltergeist asked.

It was Albus’s turn to think fast. Peeves had been a Hogwarts poltergeist since the founding of the school, which must have been years ago. (Scorpius would have known exactly when). Which meant that not only was he a nuisance, but he was very probably old-fashioned as well…

“Because,” Albus called out. “We are two guys. Passionately kissing, like he said. You really don’t want to see that.”

Peeves made a very dramatically appalled sound.

Scorpius beamed.

“Yuck!” Peeves declared, blowing another raspberry for good measure. He began to sing a rather rude little ditty, and sounded like he was moving further and further away…

“Is he leaving?” Scorpius whispered.

The boys listened as Peeves’s song became even more inappropriate, but definitely more distant as well.

As soon as his voice had become a far off echo, Albus and Scorpius burst out from behind the heavy old tapestry, panting with relief.

Scorpius gave a sneeze from all the dust, but luckily it was a fairly quiet one.

“That was brilliant,” Scorpius declared. “Fantastic! Oh, it was a stroke of genius!”

“I can’t believe you went for the kissing excuse! Of all the things you could have come up with,” Albus breathed out, dusting himself down.

“I thought it might make him leave us alone.”

“Peeves loves ruining romantic moments for people. It’s like his version of Euphoria Elixir. You should hear the stories Uncle Ron tells about him deliberately trying to get in the way of my mum and dad when they were at Hogwarts…”

Albus trailed off, feeling a little sick at the thought.
“Professor McGonagall is going to be furious when she hears that song he was singing,” Scorpius said, slightly gleefully. “It breaks so many of the rules about tolerance and harmony within the school.”

“Kissing, honestly…” Albus remarked, shaking his head. For some odd reason he was transfixed on the idea.


“What sort of books are you reading?” Albus asked suspiciously.

“I read everything. If it has words and a spine, I will give it a go. Unless, of course, it’s in the Restricted Section, or my dad has told me not to. Which is probably actually with good reason, I have recently come to realise.”

“I think I’m discovering a whole new side of you…” Albus deadpanned.

“An adventurous and decisive side?” Scorpius asked hopefully.

“I mean, yes,” Albus admitted. “But mostly that you are an even bigger geek than I thought was possible.”

Scorpius beamed at the compliment.

Together, the boys began making their way towards the Grand Staircase, and then started to climb as quickly as they could, heading for the West Tower.

“Do you suppose he sees lots of kissing after hours?” Scorpius asked curiously, gesturing in the direction which Peeves had flown off in, and neatly dodging a trick stair.

“I guess so. I mean, Teddy always used to be in trouble for snogging my cousin Victoire. They had to contact Uncle Bill about it.”

“Wow. Was he cross?”

“Not really,” Albus admitted with a shrug. “Uncle Bill’s a cool guy. Pretty laid back. And he’s known Teddy for years.”

“Uncle Bill’s the one who works for Gringotts,” Albus added.

“He’s a Curse-Breaker,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. “And he’s the oldest Weasley of his generation. He fought in the Battle of Hogwarts.”

Once, Albus would have been surprised by this unexpected bit of knowledge but he’d known Scorpius far too long for that.

“You know, it’s sort of disconcerting - how much you know about my family.”

“I have at least five books about them,” Scorpius revealed proudly. “And about you.”

“I’m in books?”

“You’re mentioned. Albus Severus Potter. Second son of Harry and Ginny Potter. I knew your name years before I met you.”
“Albus Potter: second son and the family disappointment?” Albus suggested, grimly.

“No offence, Albus,” Scorpius said, dodging yet another trick stair. “But can we not make this into another one of those things where you talk about being the black sheep of your family?”

Albus caught himself in an instant. He frowned, confused by his own comment. Following his heartfelt (and maybe slightly difficult) conversation with Scorpius in the other reality, Albus had promised himself he'd be a more caring and selfless best friend. But somehow, the words had just slipped out...

Was he really so self-absorbed?

“Wow, okay I didn’t realise I’d gone there again,” Albus admitted. "I'm... going to have to work on that.”

“You go there a lot,” Scorpius said. “And it’s not always a bad thing. Actually - it’s something I totally understand, probably more than most people, and something that you should talk about because it's important to you and when we have time I will be more than happy to listen, thrilled, in fact, but right now - we need to focus.”

Albus nodded his head, accepting this, although feeling slightly embarrassed all the same.

The boys climbed one more staircase, which helpfully decided not to carry them in another, unwanted direction, and ended up on the fourth-floor, from which they would be able to reach the entrance to the West Tower.

Albus followed Scorpius all the way down the corridor and then up the spiralling staircase to the Owlery without saying a word. He was thinking hard about their plan.

Unsurprisingly, since Scorpius had come up with it, it seemed pretty foolproof, but there was one part of the plan Scorpius had suspiciously not accounted for, and Albus couldn’t help but feel it was a deliberate move.

Although they had set out on this journey together, they had not got this far alone. There was someone still unaccounted for.

Albus had spent so long thinking about his own relief at being back in Slytherin with Scorpius, and worrying about how his best friend was coping with reality after Voldemort, that he had all but forgotten Delphi Diggory.

It was funny, how easily she had slipped from his thoughts, considering how heavily she had featured in them to begin with. When Albus had first met Delphi he had been dazzled. It had been exciting, to have an adventure with someone older, someone older who actually seemed to care what he had to say, who believed in him. And Delphi was the sort of girl that Uncle Ron would probably have called a ‘corker’. The sort of girl James definitely would have fancied. It had been admittedly nice to be in her company.

But in no time at all she had been all but forgotten. Albus was struck by how strange that was. How he’d been so entirely overtaken with his best friend to even notice her absence.

He wondered what Delphi was doing now. Probably waiting for news. Perhaps worrying herself sick about her cousin and wondering why things hadn’t changed yet. Caring for Amos and reassuring him, promising him that they were doing their best, that there was still hope. The thought of it did not sit well with Albus’s gallant streak at all.
There was only one noble thing to be done. And Albus was very keen on the idea of being a bit noble now he had a second chance at things.

“You know what. I just need a minute,” Albus said, as he and Scorpius wandered across the straw-scattered floor of the Owlery, deliberately not looking down if ever their shoes crunched on what may well have been rodent bones.

Scorpius turned to him, blinking with surprise.

“Oh… okay. Did I upset you? Was it what I said about you talking about your dad-thing again…”

“No,” Albus said. “I just… give me a sec?”

Scorpius looked confused. He didn’t appear to believe him, because he kept glancing at his eyes with worry.

“Albus are you-“

“Meet you out there?” Albus suggested.

“I… well, all right,” Scorpius said doubtfully. “But what are you-“

“There’s something I have to do.”

“Albus…”

“Trust me?” Albus asked.

That stopped Scorpius’s questioning in an instant. He blinked and then nodded, solemnly. It warmed Albus's heart to see how suddenly he had paused in his inquisition to answer.

“Yes,” Scorpius said firmly.

“Good, then I’ll see you up there.”

Albus smiled at Scorpius in what he hoped was a reassuring manner. It did appear to work at least marginally, because Scorpius nodded, and looking slightly baffled, made his way out to the roof, only pausing to greet a particular Long-Eared owl on the way.

+++ 

The moment Scorpius had gone, Albus plonked himself down on the bench in the corner. It may have been covered in owl droppings, but Albus chose not to look. On the (rather dirty) table beside it, stood a stack of Hogwarts parchment and a selection of quills.

At least twenty pairs of bright yellow and orange eyes stared out at him as he selected a quill and parchment, which was an odd sensation. Albus wasn't much of a letter-writer at the best of times, let alone while being watched. He supposed he was lucky that the majority of the Hogwarts owls were out hunting.

What to write? How was he supposed to break it to Delphi that they'd failed? That there was no way of putting things right. That her beloved cousin had to stay dead in order for everyone else to live as they should. That Amos was going to have to die without ever seeing his son again.

As Albus thought on this, one of the owls made a soft hooting noise and swooped over to where he sat, resting on the desk in front of him. Albus looked up to see Scorpius’s favourite Long-Eared
owl. It did not peck at him (as some of the Hogwarts owls tended to), but instead watched him peacefully, seeming fairly relaxed.

"All right?" Albus said awkwardly to the creature. He felt ridiculous the moment the words had left his mouth, but Scorpius always said hello to his particular owl. It felt rude not to.

The owl simply stared at him. Albus took that as a sign that he should get on with his letter.

There was no way he'd be able to express how sorry he was via a hastily scribbled message. And he didn't have Scorpius's gift with words. The only choice was to reassure Delphi that they had not forgotten and to fill her in on what was happening, as vaguely and in the least upsetting way possible.

Tongue between his teeth, Albus began.

Delphi,

It's Albus. We haven't forgotten you. Me and Scorpius are about to do something big. Really sorry if you feel left out of things, but it's for the best. It's the right thing to do. You have to trust me. I will explain when I see you.

Albus.

Reading it back Albus grimaced, but he couldn't think of a better way to put things, and Scorpius would be wondering what he was up to. He couldn't keep him waiting for much longer.

The owl gave Albus a look, as though it was disappointed by the length of his missive. Apparently it was used to being asked to carry much longer, more elaborate letters. Never had Albus seen an owl look so underwhelmed. Albus was well used to being seen as inadequate by those around him, but to have that come from an owl was a whole new level of embarrassing.

"D'you mind taking this?" Albus asked, folding up the note and not even putting it in an envelope.

The owl moved slightly closer and then offered its leg.

"Thanks," Albus muttered, tying the note to the owl carefully with the brown and rather stained string the Hogwarts Owlery provided. "St Oswald's. You know, the one for old people."

The owl appeared to understand because it looked up at Albus, gave a soft hoot, and flew off in an instant.

+++  

Chapter End Notes

The reason I decided to make this a chapter is that a) I wanted us to see Albus and Scorpius on the way to the Owlery, and b) we needed to have Albus send an owl, on his own, somehow without Scorpius realising. Which doesn't actually make much sense since I assume they go there together! But I tried to think up some situation which could make that happen.

I love writing scenes with the boys!
Please give me a comment! I LOVE comments!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
“What is the meaning of this?” Professor McGonagall demanded, entering her office dressed in a tartan dressing down and matching slippers, wand in hand.

Harry and Ginny Potter were waiting by the fireplace, looking distressed, a Hogwarts house-elf standing politely at their feet.

“It’s Albus,” Harry announced grimly. “We need to check on him.”

The house-elf looked up eagerly, hoping to be given the task of checking on the young Potter boy, but Minerva shook her head.

“Thank you very much…”

“Gerald!” the house-elf declared in a squeaky voice, excited to be addressed.

“Thank you, Gerald, for your help at this late hour. You may go.”

With a last awestruck look up at Harry and Ginny, Gerald snapped his thin fingers and disappeared,

“Never in all my years have I been woken at this hour so parents could ‘check on’ a student!” McGonagall declared, starting to lose her temper. “I won’t have it! This is a school, not a nursery!”

“We think Albus is in danger,” Ginny breathed out. “Please. We have to make sure…”

“In danger? Why on earth would you think that?”

“Harry’s sc-“

“There isn’t time for this!” Harry exclaimed, walking right past both Ginny and Professor McGonagall, the latter of which stared at him, open mouthed. “Professor McGonagall we need to go to the Slytherin common room.”

“I… you surely can’t think he’s in any danger again?” Minerva asked, hurrying along behind the Potter parents, holding her dressing gown around her tightly. “It’s been one day!”

“All I know is that my son could be in trouble,” Harry said, racing down the spiral staircase. “I’m not going to risk his safety again.”
“I can assure you, he’s quite well,” Minerva said, rushing down the Gargoyle Corridor and trying to keep up. “He and Scorpius Malfoy attended their lessons today, as planned, and then attended their detention activity in the Trophy Room. I made certain of that—”

“It’s Harry’s scar,” Ginny explained. “I’m sure you understand why we’re concerned.”

“His scar?” McGonagall repeated, for the first time looking horrified. “Again? I can’t understand it. It shouldn’t be possible. After the Battle of Hogwarts it should have—”

“Stopped,” Harry agreed, grimly. “Yes, it should have. Because Voldemort died.”

“You’re not suggesting that—”

“I don’t know what I’m suggesting,” Harry admitted.

Just then, Harry, Ginny, and McGonagall passed a corridor in which Peeves was singing an extremely rude and offensive song. Minerva was so distressed by the sudden appearance of the Potters and the news they had to impart that she didn’t even pause to berate him.

Once they reached the dungeons, Harry stepped back so that McGonagall could open the Slytherin common room door.

“Uric the Oddball,” Minerva declared, and the stone wall opened, displaying a short passage which led to a grand wooden door.

“Well, go on then,” McGonagall all but snapped, stepping back in quite a fluster.

Gratefully, Harry and Ginny raced down the passage, through the door, and into the Slytherin common room. Minerva frowned and followed them at a slower pace.

The moment Harry and Ginny entered the very green, very lavish room, they were confronted by a boy in a nightshirt, clutching his wand and looking rather disgruntled to see them there.

“Excuse me, but the rules clearly state that non-Slytherins cannot enter this common room without the express permission of the Headmaster or Headmistress…” the boy declared.

Harry and Ginny ignored the boy currently trailing them. Harry pointed out the direction of the Slytherin dormitories and headed for them.

Craig Bowker Jr watched them, horrified by this breach of regulation. He rushed to block the entrance to the dormitories, determined to defend the school rules at any cost.

“Can I repeat again? This is against the rules and it’s the middle of the night.”

“I need to find my son,” Harry said firmly, getting ready to push Craig aside.

“I know who you are, Mr Potter, but even you must understand that it’s against school covenant for parents or professors to enter the House quarters without express permission from…”

At that moment Professor McGonagall charged into the common room.

“Please don’t be tiresome, Craig,” she said swiftly, raising a hand to prevent him from arguing further.

Craig looked utterly shocked to be told off by the Headmistress for following the rules.
“Headmistress. I’m - I was just-”

“I appreciate your efforts, Craig, but as you can see, these parents do not only have my express permission to be here, but are in my company, so if you could go back to bed…”

“I… yes, Headmistress,” Craig agreed swiftly, going very red in the face. “Absolutely. If they have your permission then that’s utterly in line with the covenant…”

Harry, Ginny, and Professor McGonagall made their way to the Slytherin dormitories. Ginny was so stressed that she didn’t even look around at the elaborate wall tapestries and grand carvings.

“That one,” Minerva said, pointing out the boys’ dormitory.

Harry nodded and pushed open the door. Ignoring the two beds nearest the entrance, he went directly to the bed at the end of the room, on the left, by the lake window.

He pulled open the bed curtains to reveal nothing but crumpled green sheets.

“He’s gone?” Professor McGonagall asked, frowning with dismay.

“Yes,” Harry said through gritted teeth.

Minerva turned to Ginny Potter, wondering if she was thinking the very same thing as she was…

“And young Malfoy?” Minerva said, in a forced casual tone.

Ginny seemed to get the message, because what looked like a sudden spark of hope shone in her brown eyes. Minerva pointed to the bed just across from Albus’s, and Ginny went to it, eyes closed with desperation.

Making sure to rustle the curtains as much as possible, she opened Scorpius Malfoy’s bed curtains slowly…

“Oh no,” Ginny breathed out.

Minerva rushed to her side, and indeed, neither boy was anywhere to be seen. Scorpius Malfoy’s bed was empty.

Professor McGonagall swallowed, determined not to panic. Dumbledore never would have jumped to the worst conclusion. He would have considered the worst case scenario, but exhausted all other potential outcomes first.

“Then let’s turn this school upside down,” Minerva declared in a determined voice. A movement in the doorway behind her caused all three adults to turn, but it was only Craig again, apparently trying to see what was going on covertly (and failing miserably).

He looked embarrassed to be caught, but McGonagall stopped him from opening his mouth with a click of her fingers.

“Craig,” she said. “We’ve work to do.”

The boy visibly brightened, standing up straighter, trying to appear helpful and industrious in front of Harry and Ginny Potter. Professor McGonagall gave Ginny Potter a consoling nod before trotting out of the dormitory with Craig at her side.

Harry and Ginny remained in the dormitory, staring at Albus’s empty bed. Harry reached out to
touch the pillow and then pulled his hand back, feeling foolish.

“Haven’t we been here before?” said Ginny quietly.

“Something feels even worse this time,” Harry admitted, face grim.

Ginny looked at her husband, full of fear.

“You spoke to him earlier?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“You came to his dorm and talked to him?”

Harry frowned.

“You know I did.”

Ginny took a deep, calming breath.

“What did you say to our son, Harry?” she asked quietly.

Harry could hear the accusation in her voice, even though she was trying, valiantly, to remain civil, to keep her head. Ginny thought that he was responsible.

“I tried to be honest like you said,” Harry explained, palms outstretched. “I didn’t say anything.”

Ginny did not seem to believe him. She looked her husband dead in the eyes, searching for something.

“And you controlled yourself?” Ginny continued, in a voice of forced calm. “How heated did it get?”

Harry blinked, trying to remember the conversation. It hadn’t gone well, that was for sure. But it hadn’t gone horribly wrong either. Harry had kept his temper. Albus had seemed upset, but not hysterically so. Their difficulties had not been solved, but they had parted on non-warlike terms.

“… I don’t think I… you don’t think I’ve scared him away again?” Harry asked his wife, confused.

Ginny swallowed. Her brown eyes were very hard. Harry couldn’t understand how he had managed to mess up the Albus situation yet again, when he had tried his best to approach everything more rationally, with more maturity.

“I can forgive you for one mistake, Harry,” Ginny said quietly. “Maybe even two. But the more mistakes you make, the harder to forgive you it becomes.”

“If anything’s happened to Albus I won’t be able to forgive myself,” Harry said instantly. “I just don’t know what I’ve… how can I have even… I don’t understand.”

Ginny looked away from him, and glanced at Scorpius’s Malfoy’s empty bed.

“We’re going to have to tell Draco,” she said.

Harry grimaced. Contacting Draco Malfoy in the early hours of the morning to inform him that his son had gone missing with Albus yet again, was not an action Harry was keen on taking.
“He’s not going to be pleased,” Harry commented.

Ginny fixed her husband with another hard look.

“No,” she agreed. “He’s going to be terrified.”

With that she turned, and stalked out of the dormitory, wand in hand.

Harry reached out to touch Albus’s pillow a final time before rushing after her.

Chapter End Notes

Okay so I did make a small change to this scene. In the script, Harry and Ginny are already in the Slytherin dorm when McGonagall shows up saying she’s got their message. Which personally I think would never ever happen because I am hoping McGonagall would have better security going on in her school than that! Also how did Harry and Ginny get into the Slytherin common room to start with? Craig is very right. You need permission for that.

So I changed it so Harry and Ginny enter the school via McGonagall's fireplace and meet her there. Just because I do not like the idea of random people being able to pop up in common rooms and dormitories! Security matters!

Please leave me a comment if you enjoyed this. Your words mean the world to me!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Scorpius’s shock of blond hair was looking especially prominent this evening, Albus noticed, as he gave a sniff and walked out onto the roof. It wasn’t exactly shining like Delphi Diggory’s did, but then having sparkling hair was probably just the \textit{tiniest} bit unnecessary. Cool? Absolutely. But it wasn’t exactly like Scorpius needed some outlandish hairstyle to get himself noticed.

Oh \textit{wow}, he’d just sounded like his Grandma...

Albus’s best friend cut quite a striking figure up there, surrounded by darkness, bathed in moonlight, his expression serious and purposeful. He was staring out at the Hogwarts grounds, stars sparkling in the sky far beyond him, the full moon just over his right shoulder, lights from the village of Hogsmeade glowing warmly. Albus would have liked to take a picture just then.

Albus pulled himself away from the sight and strolled to Scorpius’s side, clearing his throat so as not to startle him.

“So, I think a simple Confringo,” Scorpius announced, as soon as he noticed Albus.

The Blasting Curse? Albus was not happy with that at all. If they were going to get this done, then it had to be with something a bit more flashy than \textit{Confringo}.

“Definitely not,” Albus argued, finding it easy to slip back into their usual chatter, and feeling very glad of it. Scorpius apparently wasn’t holding his five minutes alone against him, and everything was back to normal. Albus felt ridiculously comforted by Scorpius’s refusal to comment on what his mother, father, or big brother wouldn’t have hesitated to call a sulk. “For something like this you need Expulso.”

“Expulso?” Scorpius repeated, looking appalled at the very idea. “Expulso and we’ll be clearing bits of Time-Turner from this Owlery for days.”

Albus privately still thought a bit of Expulso would have done the trick nicely, even if it was a fairly imprecise and often messy sort of spell. But this was Scorpius’s plan, and Albus had to respect that.

“Bombarda?” Albus suggested.

Scorpius had the nerve to raise his eyebrows as far as they would go. The old, pre-Scorpion King Scorpius would never have done anything like that. He would have at least \textit{pretended} he thought it was a good idea, even if he thought up a new one straight afterwards.
“And wake up everyone in Hogwarts? Maybe Stupefy. They were originally destroyed using Stupefy…”

“Exactly,” Albus cut in. “It’s been done before. Let’s do something new - something fun.”

“Fun?” Scorpius repeated, looking scandalised. Albus wanted to grin at Scorpius’s utter consternation that he, Albus, might want to have fun at a time such as this. Scorpius may have been a ‘new man’, but his annoying (and slightly endearing) killjoy trait was shining just as brightly as ever.

“Look,” Scorpius declared. “Many wizards overlook the importance of choosing the right spell, but this really matters. I think it’s a much-underestimated part of modern witchcraft-”

Albus couldn’t fight back his smile this time. That was potentially the geekiest thing Scorpius had come out with all week.

“A much-underestimated part of modern witchcraft’ - you two are the greatest - you know that?” came an unexpected voice.

Albus and Scorpius both turned swiftly to see Delphi Diggory beside them on the roof, looking just as quirky and excited as ever, silvery hair practically glowing in the moonlight (it put Scorpius’s blond hair to shame), a travelling cloak over her shoulders. She really was very pretty, Albus realised. Although maybe just a little less so than Albus had remembered…

Scorpius looked up at her with surprise. His eyes widened, and then he fought back an expression of what Albus knew was thinly veiled disappointment.

Albus became suddenly very interested in the stone floor so Scorpius couldn’t see his guilty face.

“Wow,” Scorpius said, awkwardly, trying his best not to be rude. “You’re… um… what are you doing here?”

That was a very good point. Albus hadn’t anticipated Delphi getting to them so quickly. He’d only just sent the owl...

Perhaps she’d been close by? Yes, that was probably it. And this was a pretty urgent matter.

A moment of awkwardness was starting to settle over the three of them. Scorpius seemed uncomfortable, and Delphi was looking at Albus significantly. For the first time Albus began to regret his act of heroism. The three of them, together, wasn't nearly as exciting as it had been. To be honest it was a bit overcrowded...

Albus cleared his throat and stood up straighter, desperate to smooth things over. He hadn't actually invited Delphi to join them, and he wished Scorpius knew that, but at the same time it would have been a pretty hurtful thing to say in front of Delphi. He didn't want her to feel like she was intruding. Even if maybe she was.

“It felt important to send an owl,” Albus admitted, giving Scorpius an expression he hoped read as both mature and apologetic. “Let her know what we’re doing - you know?”

Scorpius stared at him accusingly, looking more than a little hurt.

“This concerns her too,” Albus added, more quietly.

If Delphi was irritated by being referred to as 'her', she didn't show it.
Scorpius thought about it and then nodded, accepting the truth of what Albus had said. He supposed Delphi did have a right to be there, even if he had hoped this could be a special moment for he and Albus. Actually, it had probably been rather remiss of him to leave her out. Especially after her kind words in the last reality, after all of her help. Scorpius felt suddenly proud of Albus, even if he had gone behind his back. That had been a very nice thing for him to do. A kind thing.

“What concerns me?” Delphi asked brightly, placing a hand on Albus’s arm. “What’s this about?”

*A kind thing*, Scorpius reminded himself firmly, noticing the gesture and making a conscious effort not to frown.

He was not going to act like a child about all this. He was Scorpius Malfoy. The new Scorpius Malfoy. Who did not get jealous if a very pretty young woman put her hand on his best friend’s arm.

Albus gestured at Scorpius, and Scorpius felt compelled to take the Time-Turner from around his neck and hand it over.

It felt like handing over leadership of the operation, which wasn’t a pleasant feeling. But he trusted Albus. More than anyone else in the world. And so he did.

“We need to destroy the Time-Turner,” Albus explained, showing it to Delphi. He steeled himself to tell the truth, even if it made Delphi upset. “The things Scorpius saw after the second task… I’m so sorry. We can’t risk going back again. We can’t save your cousin.”

Delphi looked down at the Time-Turner hanging from Albus’s hand, and then up at the boys. Her expression was unfathomable. She appeared to be in shock.

Scorpius felt a sudden surge of pity for her, so strong that it entirely overtook any feelings of resentment about her sway over Albus. He imagined that if he had been in her shoes, he might have started crying. And for all Albus’s declarations of anger at Rose, Scorpius knew that if he had lost the chance to save her life, he probably would have broken down as well.

“Your owl said so little…” Delphi whispered, eyes shining.

Scorpius felt so sorry for Delphi that he wandered over and patted her tentatively on the arm. She flinched away at first, but then appeared to understand and appreciate the gesture.

“Imagine the worst possible world, and then double it,” Albus explained, talking fast so that he could finish his explanation more quickly. “People being tortured - Dementors everywhere - a despotic Voldemort - my dad dead, me never born, the world surrounded by Dark Magic. We just - can’t allow that to happen.”

There was a moment of terrible stillness, where Delphi appeared to take in this information. And then she swallowed, her face breaking.

“Voldemort ruled?” she whispered, looking at Albus. “He was alive?”

Albus found himself unable to respond, so horrified was he by Delphi’s devastated expression.

“He ruled everything,” Scorpius agreed, solemnly. “It was terrible.”

“But what we did?”

Scorpius nodded, and Delphi was forced to turn away from Albus and listen to him instead.
“Humiliating Cedric turned him into a very angry young man, and then he became a Death Eater and - and it all went wrong. Really wrong.”

Scorpius could feel the memories rushing back, and with them a sense of terror. Albus watched him with concern, knowing exactly what explaining all this again would do to his best friend.

Delphi studied Scorpius’s brave face carefully, and then her own face sank. She bowed her head.

“A Death Eater?”

“And a murderer,” Scorpius said. “He killed Professor Longbottom.”

Delphi took a deep breath. Her shoulders seemed to sag. Albus and Scorpius exchanged a concerned look.

And then she raised her head, beautiful face pale and determined. She looked like a tragic heroine from a story. Full of bravery and sorrow.

“Then - of course - we need to destroy it,” she managed to say, through gritted teeth.

Never had Scorpius felt more respect for Delphi Diggory than in that moment.

“You understand?” Albus asked, looking relieved.

“I’ll go further than that,” Delphi said briskly. “I’ll say Cedric would have understood.”

Scorpius smiled at Delphi warmly.

“We’ll destroy it together,” Delphi continued, nodding to herself. “And then we’ll go to my uncle. Explain the situation.”

Albus stared at Delphi, stunned by her level of understanding. It made him feel like a child, to be beside Scorpius Malfoy and Delphi Diggory, who had both suffered so much and forced a smile, while he complained about the most insignificant details of his life. The realisation of his own immaturity was a crushing blow.

“Thank you,” Albus said solemnly.

Scorpius nodded his agreement.

Delphi swallowed again, gave a weak sort of smile, and then reached for the Time Turner. Albus handed it over carefully, and noticed that her hand was shaking.

She took a deep breath and composed herself. For a moment, the three of them stood in respectful silence on the roof of the Owlery.

Delphi’s silver hair was blowing about all over the place in the breeze. She reached up to tie it back, and as she did so, her cloak slipped slightly from her shoulders. Albus gallantly went to catch it before it fell to the ground.

“Oh, nice mark,” Albus commented, seeing a winged symbol of some sort drawn on the base of Delphi’s slender neck.

“What?” Delphi asked, as Albus helped her straighten her cloak again.

“On your back,” Albus said, trying to cheer Delphi up with a compliment. “I hadn’t noticed it
before. The wings. Is that what the Muggles call a tattoo?”

“Oh. Yes,” Delphi agreed, sounding distracted. “Well, it’s an Augurey.”

On Delphi’s other side, Scorpius’s head suddenly shot up.

“How Augurey?” Scorpius repeated, frowning.

Delphi finished fixing her hair and turned to Scorpius. Albus was glad to see that she looked slightly better now.

“How you met them in Care of Magical Creatures?” Delphi asked. “They’re sinister-looking black birds that cry when rain’s coming. Wizards used to believe that the Augurey’s cry foretold death. When I was growing up, my guardian kept one in a cage.”

Scorpius had gone even paler than usual.

“Your… guardian?” he asked.

Delphi looked at Scorpius and smiled. Albus realised that was probably the first real smile she’d given him. That was nice, he thought. It was progress. If Scorpius and Delphi could find a way of getting on then this would be so much easier.

“She used to say it was crying because it could see I was going to come to a sticky end,” Delphi explained, laughing rather darkly at what sounded like a fairly mean comment from her mum or aunt or whoever it was her guardian was. “She didn’t like me much. Euphemia Rowle… she only took me in for the gold.”

“Why would you want a tattoo of her bird then?” Albus asked curiously.

Delphi took a deep breath and raised her head.

“It reminds me that the future is mine to make,” Delphi declared, impressively.

Albus thought on that. It actually sounded like a pretty stubborn thing to do. A symbol of defiance. He could appreciate that.

“Cool,” Albus said, nodding his respect. “I might get an Augurey tattoo.”

During this exchange, Scorpius’s mind had been whirring. Euphemia Rowle rang a bell somehow...

Oh.

The Rowles were a pure-blood wizarding family, and according to Scorpius’s books, a member of the Sacred Twenty-Eight. Hadn’t there been a Rowle involved in the Second Wizarding War? He was certain there had been...

“The Rowles were pretty extreme Death Eaters,” Scorpius said out loud.

Neither Delphi or Albus paid him any attention.

“Come on,” Albus declared, capitalising on the sort-of friendly mood between them all and the fact Delphi no longer looked to be on the brink of tears. “Let’s get destroying… Confringo? Stupefy? Bombarda?”
Albus turned to Delphi, trying, nobly, to include her, to show her she was welcome.

“Which would you use?”

Something inside of Scorpius was making a great deal of fuss. And for once it wasn’t about the sight of Albus and Delphi standing so close together…

“Give it back,” Scorpius declared, reaching out his hand. “Give us back the Time-Turner.”

Albus gawped at him in horror.

“What?” Delphi asked, eyebrows raised.

“Scorpius?” Albus hissed, giving Delphi an apologetic look. “What are you doing?”

Scorpius took a deep breath and refused to back down. If he had learned anything from all he’d been through, it was to always think first. It was to trust his instincts. It was to never ever let anyone influence him, even if that left him alone against the rest of the world.

How had Delphi reached them so quickly? How could she possibly have received an owl from Albus? Unless Albus could see the future, then he could only have sent his owl in the past ten minutes. And yet there Delphi Diggory was, standing on the roof. It didn't make sense. How had she entered Hogwarts? Weren't there protective enchantments in the grounds?

“I don’t believe you ever were ill,” Scorpius said to Delphi, boldly. “Why didn’t you come to Hogwarts? Why are you here now?”

Albus blinked at his best friend’s rudeness. Never in his life had he seen Scorpius acting out like this.

“I’m trying to bring my cousin back!” Delphi exclaimed.

She turned to Albus, appealing to his good sense, but Albus merely gawped at the pair of them with confusion. He was staring at Scorpius, waiting to hear what he had to say before committing to any point of view.

None of it made sense, Scorpius realised, his stomach twisting with horror, with a terrible falling feeling. The very word Augurey made him want to vomit with fear. Why did it? Where had he heard it before?

“I’ve positively glowed about you in dispatches to the Augurey.”

“Like the Augurey insists - the future is ours to make - so here I am - making a future - with you.”

“And no, those idiots blasting Muggles, that’s not my doing, though it’ll be me the Augurey asks to bribe the Muggle Prime Minister with gold…”

“If we get this right, Harry’s alive, Voldemort’s dead and the Augurey is gone. For that no risk is too great.”

Physically trembling, but unwilling to back down, Scorpius shook his head. Eyes wide, he took a step towards Delphi. She did not back away. Instead she raised her chin rather proudly at the challenge.

“They called you the Augurey,” Scorpius whispered. “In - the other world - they called you the Augurey.”
A small smile grew on Delphi’s face.

“The Augurey?” she asked with great interest. “I rather like that.”

Albus looked from his best friend to Delphi and then back again. A feeling of dread was starting to settle in his stomach.

He wanted to believe Scorpius was just being rude. Maybe that he was just a touch jealous. But his best friend's expression said otherwise.

“Delphi?” Albus asked, hoping she could explain away all this unpleasantness.

But Delphi only raised her eyebrows and then suddenly, shockingly, reached for her wand.

Everything happened very fast after that.

Scorpius rushed forward, lunging for the Time-Turner, but Delphi was too quick for him. Levelling her wand at Scorpius with a smirk of pleasure, she repelled him.

Albus froze with horror as Scorpius tumbled back and then regained his balance. Like lightning Scorpius raised his own wand to try and defend himself, but Delphi was once again one step ahead. Scorpius's arm was trembling as he held it out towards the much older, much more capable witch.

Realising that there was no hope of his overpowering Delphi, Scorpius gave Albus a desperate look, and then threw himself bodily at Delphi, abandoning magic altogether, trying to get between the silver-haired young woman and his best friend.

“Fulgari!” Delphi shouted before he could reach her, and Scorpius’s arms were bound in vicious, luminous cords.

“Albus!” Scorpius exclaimed, trying to writhe free. “Run!”

Albus looked around, bewildered. What was happening? Why had Delphi done that? He didn’t understand…

Heeding Scorpius’s order, not feeling able to think for himself in that moment, Albus turned and began to run, adrenaline taking over. If he could only reach the inside of the Owlery he’d be safe! He could get help! He could sound the alarm!

“Fulgari!” Delphi shouted again.

Albus was propelled to the floor, landing horribly on his front, arms bound together in front of him so he couldn’t break his fall. Behind him he could hear Delphi laughing. Albus felt dizzy. The world was spinning. He thought he could feel a hotness on his head, a horrible dribbling hotness.

“And that is the first spell I’ve had to use on you,” Delphi crowed. “I thought I’d have to use plenty more. But you’re far easier to control than Amos - children, particularly male children, are so naturally pliant, aren’t they? Now, let’s sort this mess out once and for all…”

Albus found himself being turned over, onto his back. The cords around him moved like snakes, manoeuvring him so that he could stare up at Delphi, whose eyes were wild and crazed.

Twisting his head awkwardly, Albus could see Scorpius, forced to stand on the spot, arms and legs bound tightly. Too tightly. He looked like he was in pain.

A cord had wound its way over Scorpius’s mouth, gagging him. He kept twitching, trying to get
free, trying to shout out. But it was no good.

His blue-grey eyes were wide with concern. He stared at Albus with horror.

“But why?” Albus groaned, grimacing with the pain of the cords. “But what? But who are you?”

Delphi took a step closer. She loomed over him, blocking out the moonlight.

Scorpius gave a horrendous muted cry from somewhere behind her.


She leaned down and took Albus’s wand from his hand. With a smirk, she held it up in front of him and then snapped it in half, dropping the pieces on the ground. Albus was too dazed to react with the anger he should have.

“I am the new future.”

Delphi stepped back and turned to Scorpius. She reached for his wand, but Scorpius wasn’t willing to let go. He held on for dear life, eyes narrowed with determination, but Delphi simply flicked her own wand. The snake-like cords around him grew tighter, causing him to cry out in pain. His wand slipped easily from his palm.

That was when the anger kicked in.

Holding it up for Albus to see, she brandished Scorpius’s wand and then snapped it in half. The pieces fell to the ground alongside the remains of Albus’s wand.

Delphi took a deliberate step forward and crunched the remnants under her shoe.

“I am the answer this world has been looking for.”

With an almost lazy flourish of her wand, Delphi laughed, and Scorpius fell still and entirely silent, head lolling forwards onto his chest. Albus kicked out his legs, desperate to get to him, willing to fight Delphi with his fists alone if he had to, but then the world started to spin, his vision blurring, and he, too, began to slip out of consciousness and into the waiting darkness.

Chapter End Notes

Dum dum DUM.

So yeah, Delphi is a baddie. Who’d a thought it!!!

I hope you enjoyed this chapter! I enjoyed writing it a lot.

Please leave me a comment because comments keep me going!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Draco Malfoy came charging into the Hogwarts grounds, looking fiercer than Harry had ever seen him. His cloak billowed out behind him, and his hair was secured in his usual ponytail, although Harry noticed it looked far more hastily tied than usual.

He had been summoned from Malfoy Manor mere minutes ago, by the sudden (and rather shocking) arrival of Ginny Potter's horse Patronus. It had spoken with her voice and informed him, terribly, that his son was missing.

Draco had jumped out of bed in an instant, dressed, and used the Floo Network to reach Hogwarts castle. He was shocked not to have been greeted by Professor McGonagall in her office, but rather by an over-enthusiastic house-elf who had directed him to the Potters. The elf had originally asked him politely to stay where he was and wait for the Headmistress, but Draco refused. He would not sit and wait while his only son was missing.

“What do you mean gone?” Draco demanded by way of greeting as he reached the Potters, who were standing together, but looked, oddly, like they weren't speaking.

Harry gave a pained look.

“How have they gone?”

“We don’t know, Draco,” Ginny said with forced calm. “But there’s no proof they’re in danger. We just thought it best to contact you.”

“Yes,” Draco nodded. “I expect that was your idea?”

Ginny gave a conflicted look. Draco understood that perfectly.

“I appreciate that. Unlike some people I would be there for my son at the drop of a wizard’s hat.”

That remark was quite clearly aimed at Harry, who shuffled awkwardly from foot to foot.

“Draco - that’s really not-

“Have you checked it thoroughly? The school,” Draco asked Ginny, interrupting her.

“McGonagall is on it as we speak.”

“The secret passages? The moving rooms?”
“Professor McGonagall knows the school better than anyone alive,” Ginny said, peaceably.

Draco looked like he wanted to argue, but then nodded his head at the good sense.

“Well, if McGonagall is checking the school, I’ll do the grounds—“

“Draco—“

But Draco was in no mood to be pacified. He glanced at Harry for the first time, narrowing his eyes at the man’s sweaty hair, shifty expression, and general scruffiness.

“Potter, you need to check by the lake. I’ll go towards the greenhouses.”

Draco turned to Ginny, unwilling to give her an order.

“I’ll go and help McGonagall,” Ginny agreed. “We can cover more ground that way. We’ll wake the other professors if we have to.”

Draco nodded at her with respect. Harry looked at Ginny pleadingly, not wanting to be left alone with a furious and protective Draco Malfoy, but she refused to meet his eyes and marched off with great purpose.

“The lake, Potter!” Draco said sharply, only just stopping short of snapping his fingers in front of Harry’s face. “And if you find my son then let him know I am here.”

“Meet you back here?” Harry asked, weakly.

“Yes. We’ll do a full loop. Come on.”

Draco stalked off in the direction of the greenhouses, wand held before him. Never in his life had Harry felt like such a failure of a parent. If Draco Malfoy was charging about looking tired but desperate, giving out directions, then what was he, Harry, playing at? Standing about worrying wasn’t going to solve anything.

Harry began to trudge towards the lake. He moved more slowly than Draco had, but it was not for lack of urgency. Harry had an exceptional talent for spotting things that other people missed. It had first become apparent in his appointment as Gryffindor Seeker, and then again in his profession as an Auror. There was no way he’d miss anything as long as he kept his mind on the task.

He thought about his son. If Albus didn’t want to be found, then his hunt would prove fruitless, no matter how desperately Harry wished to locate him. Albus was a cunning boy, absolutely the most shrewd of his three children, and if this was some sort of punishment or way of getting his own back for being told off earlier, then there was nothing to be done but wait for Albus to reveal himself again.

That was assuming Albus had gone willingly…

Harry pushed the thought away, grimacing as he did so. Scorpius was missing too. Perhaps if Albus had been alone, it would have seemed more likely he’d been abducted, but would anyone wishing to cause him harm also have use for the Malfoy boy?

No, Harry told himself firmly. And there was no visible sign of a struggle. The other boys in the Slytherin dormitory had slept through their disappearance and when they had later been woken by a rather flustered Professor McGonagall, to find out what they knew, both boys claimed to have seen or heard nothing.
Of course, their memories could have been altered to erase the information. Any witch or wizard of any prowess could perform a simple Memory Charm…

Harry stopped on the spot, having heard a rustling at his side. He kept his wand out warily ahead of him, ready to defend himself. With a soft hooting noise, an owl flew right over Harry’s head, with what looked like a mouse in its beak. It was headed to the Owlery, most likely.

You’re being ridiculous, Harry told Harry. You’re paranoid.

Albus was in no danger. Albus was not him. He was not being hunted by the most terrible Dark Wizard in an age. He was not marked for death.

And yet… the dreams. The pain in his scar. The instinctive twist of his gut which hardly ever failed him.

They’ve run away again, that’s all. They’ve run away to spite you. They’ll come back. They’re just two young boys messing about.

Harry wanted to believe the sensible voice in his head which told him Albus was fine. He wanted to believe it with all his heart. But somehow, he couldn’t rid himself of the image of his youngest son reaching out for him, screaming his name.

In what felt like no time at all, Harry spotted a light in the distance. He raised his wand as it approached.

Please be Albus, Harry thought desperately. Please be my son.

But as the light drew closer, Harry could make out a familiar pale, pointed face, illuminated in the darkness.

Draco was shaking his head with frustration. His search hadn’t proved fruitful either.

“Well?” Draco demanded as Harry walked up to approach him.

“No sign,” Harry admitted. “I’m sorry, Draco.”

“Why are you apologising?” Draco asked suspiciously. “What have you done wrong this time? If you’ve had a hand in this…”

“I haven’t done anything,” Harry said wearily, hoping he sounded like he meant it.

“Are you sure about that?” Draco demanded, narrowing his eyes.

Harry felt oddly like a guilty schoolchild.

“Albus and I had words,” he found himself admitting, awkwardly.

Draco looked ready to start shouting at this revelation.

“After what they did are you telling me you didn’t tell Scorpius he’d been an idiot?” Harry asked, starting to lose his temper with guilt.

“Are you calling my son, my son, an idiot?” Draco hissed, wand raised.

“I’m calling both of them idiots!” Harry burst out, messing up his own sweaty hair and giving the grass a kick. “What you say to your son is up to you, but Albus messed up. He really messed up.
He put people in danger, and he needed to know that. And as his father, I needed to tell him… that it’s just not on."

Draco stared at Harry for a moment, and then, unexpectedly, lowered his wand.

“Of course it’s not on,” Draco agreed. “It’s ridiculous. These notions of heroism. The danger of it all. They’re just children…”

“Fourteen years old,” Harry said, thinking suddenly of himself at the same age. It was strange to think of a boy the age of Albus being involved in the Triwizard Tournament, to think of that same boy having faced Dementors, a Basilisk, Lord Voldemort himself…

How had it been allowed to happen? Why had nobody intervened? When Harry had been fourteen, the idea of being called a child would have frustrated and insulted him, but now with a son the very same age, it struck him how very young he had been, how young his own son was…

“They grow up too fast!” Draco continued, sounding angry at no one in particular.

“Sometimes… sometimes that can’t be helped,” Harry found himself saying.

Harry looked at Draco. Draco looked back.

Draco seemed to be remembering too. Harry wondered what it was he was thinking of. What had gone on in his own fourteenth year? It was common knowledge now that the Malfoy family at that time had been involved deeply in Dark Magic, and Harry was not naive enough to imagine that Draco had been kept away from it all.

By the time they had reached their seventh year, both boys had been fighting a war, on opposite sides. How had they got there? How could it have happened? It was madness that two children could have reached that point. Even in the climate of the old days, the danger of it all, it was ridiculous.

Draco Malfoy was the one to look away first, breaking the odd moment of curiosity and understanding.

“Come on,” he declared. “I say we do one more loop of the grounds. Just in case either of us missed anything.”

Harry nodded his head and together, rather awkwardly, Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy walked along in the darkness, side by side.

For a long while they searched without speaking. Occasionally Harry would sigh with frustration, or Draco would make some irate remark under his breath about the lack of Hogwarts security or lax student protection. A couple of times, when they heard a noise, Harry would grow very quiet and still, listening intently, but Draco would immediately call out: "Scorpius? Scorpius!"

Without fail Draco and Harry would be disappointed.

They were about three quarters of the way through their second loop when Harry plucked up the courage to confide in his once arch nemesis.

“Look, I’m going to tell you something, and I don’t care what you think of it. But you have a right to know.”

“What?” Draco snapped.
“My scar hurt. This evening. My scar hurt and that’s why Ginny and I came here tonight. It was why we checked on Albus.”

“Everyone knows about your scar,” Draco remarked, sounding irritated. “Doesn’t it give a twinge every other week? Or is it just when you’re falling out of the limelight?”

Harry had the tremendous urge to kick Draco, just then. He valiantly held it back.

“Can you drop all that for one second?” Harry asked. “Because in case you hadn’t noticed, this is serious. Do you really think I wanted to be roaming the Hogwarts grounds with you in the middle of the night? Do you think I wanted to be worried sick about Albus?”

Draco raised an eyebrow, reluctantly conceding the point.

“So what are you saying? That you think your scar hurting and our sons disappearing are linked in some way?”

“Voldemort’s allies have been moving. I’ve been following them with my department for months. I’m not saying it’s him. But I can’t be too careful—“

“Of course,” Draco burst out, spitefully. “At the first sign of trouble you go to your usual scapegoat.”

“Are you calling Voldemort a scapegoat?” Harry asked, utterly bewildered.

“You know what happens when you make these ludicrous, unfounded accusations. To those that supported him. To their families. Who do you think pays the price when you jump to conclusions? When you talk about your scar?”

“Are you seriously making this about you?”

“Do you realise what happens every time a story breaks in the Prophet? Every time someone so much as suspects He’s back?”

Harry shook his head mutely.

“My son pays the price! My wife… she used to pay the price. Innocent people! I’ve had threats, you know. People wishing death upon my son, my only son, and all because of your hysteria…”

“I’m sorry about that, okay?” Harry burst out with frustration. “Do you think I want your son to suffer? But what your family did, what you did. That’s not on me. All I can do is my job. Which is to protect people.”

“Because you love to play the hero.”

“You know what I love?” Harry snapped. “I love a bit of peace and quiet. I love not waking up in the night with my scar burning, to find my son is gone. I would love to just go to bed at night and not have to worry. But guess what, some of us have no choice. I never asked for any of this. Any of it. But I deal with it. And I could do without people like you constantly acting like I’m some sort of hate monger for being even the slightest bit suspicious of the people who used to want me dead.”

Draco fell silent.

“And you know what? I get that you’re angry. Okay? Because I would be too. Your son is missing. But I am not making this up, and I could really seriously do without you trying to make out I’m this
overdramatic, fame hungry, attention-seeker.”

Draco took a deep breath and appeared to be fighting back the urge to retort.

“All right?” Harry said, letting out a breath.

Draco blinked a couple of times and tried to recover his dignity after that almighty dressing-down from Harry Potter of all people.

“Go on then. You were talking about your scar,” Draco forced out.

“Right,” Harry said, a little thrown by Draco Malfoy’s sudden cooperation. “I had a dream - a nightmare. I heard Voldemort’s voice. I saw my son. He was… in trouble.”

“And what made you think it wasn’t just a normal nightmare?”

“Just a feeling,” Harry admitted. It felt embarrassing enough as it was to admit to the dreams in front of Draco Malfoy, let alone have it pointed out that he was essentially starting a panicked search on the basis of a burning scar and gut feeling. Even Harry knew it sounded ridiculous.

“Did you see my son?” Draco asked, desperately.

“No,” Harry said. “Just Albus. Calling for me.”

“You don’t suppose the dreams are prophetic?”

Harry’s eyes widened at how seriously Draco was suddenly taking this. Never had he imagined he would find himself discussing his dreams with this man. And it was almost beyond belief that Draco could go for more than ten seconds without insulting him for his honesty. And yet there Draco Malfoy was. Listening.

“No. I’ve spoken to Hermione about it. It’s not Divination. It’s… it’s hard to explain.”

Draco thought on that.

“Potter, do you honestly believe that Voldemort is involved in this somehow?” he asked, quietly.

Harry squinted in the wand light to see if he was being mocked. But Draco’s face was deadly serious, perhaps even a touch fearful.

“I believe there’s a possibility Dark Magic is involved.”

Draco took a deep breath and nodded his head, grimly. He looked pained. Harry was sure he’d seen him close his eyes for a short moment.

“But it’s only a possibility. We have to keep our options open at this point,” Harry found himself saying, suddenly in Auror-mode. “We don’t know anything for certain. There could be hundreds of explanations.”

“Potter,” Draco said darkly, looking over at him. “Even I can tell you think this is serious, or you wouldn’t be having this conversation with me. So don’t try that ridiculous Ministry facade. I can see right through it.”

“I’m just saying, we don’t need to panic…”

“There is every point in panicking!” Draco suddenly burst out. “Someone has got my son!”
Hearing those dreadful words, the words that he, Harry, so longed to express himself, he somehow found the strength to be the reasonable voice in all of this. The voice he desperately needed to hear.

“We don’t know that anyone’s got them. They could have just wandered off-“

“You suspect Dark Magic, Potter! And do you know what that means? It means that my son will be a target! They’ll want him harmed to punish me for leaving it all behind. They won’t care that he’s a child!”

“Draco…”

“Don’t try to patronise me! My son is in danger!”

“We don’t know that either of them are in any danger-“

“Nor do we know that he’s safe!” Draco snapped.

Harry stared over at Draco, unsure of how to deal with him in such a state. He wished Ginny was there to help him out. Or even Professor McGonagall.

“He’s got Albus with him,” Harry said, in what he hoped was an encouraging tone.

“Oh wonderful!” Draco scoffed darkly. “I’m sure he’ll be a great help! Just like when my son ended up alone in some alternate reality ruled by Voldemort himself, and your son disappeared!”

Never in his life had Harry seen Draco Malfoy work himself up into such a frenzy of anxiety. He was quite clearly beside himself with concern for his only son. When people had told Harry that grief had changed Draco Malfoy, he hadn’t quite believed it. Not until that moment.

It was almost pitiful, that sight.

“We don’t know there’s anything suspicious going on. Not for certain,” Harry tried again. “They might have just… I don’t know. Gone for a walk or gone exploring. Anything. Ron and I got up to all sorts when we were at Hogwarts. It could just be that.”

“Oh yes, a stroll in the early hours of the morning, leaving no trace!”

Harry was about to point out that he, Ron, and Hermione had quite often embarked on such forbidden activities, but he realised that Draco, having had no real friends during his time at Hogwarts, couldn’t see that this was a possibility.

“Look, they ran away before. Maybe they’ve done it again?”

That was clearly the wrong thing to say, because Draco’s expression darkened at the memory.

“If your son is in any way responsible for this…” Draco fumed, turning his fury quite suddenly on Harry.

“What makes you think it isn’t down to Scorpius?” Harry shot back, temper flaring in his stress.

“Because my son would never never have acted so irresponsibly until he met Albus.”

“What are you trying to say?” Harry demanded, squaring up to Draco.

But Draco did not continue. He seemed to catch himself mid-rage, and with great power of will swallowed it back down again. Draco took a few deep breaths before he felt able to speak.
“I didn’t mean to disrespect Albus. I… he means a great deal to my son.”

“Understood,” Harry mumbled, taking a deep breath of his own and running a hand through his hair.

“But this can’t keep happening. It can’t.”

Harry couldn’t help but agree with that.

“If we can’t find them tonight, then I assume we’ll seek Ministry involvement?” Draco enquired, oddly calmly. Harry glanced at him and saw that he was turning back into the restrained and proud Draco Malfoy he recognised. Part of him was glad. The other… maybe not so much.

“Yes,” Harry agreed, equally professional. “I’ll use the whole of Law Enforcement if I have to.”

Draco nodded his head with approval.

There was an odd silence which was only broken by the distant hooting of owls.

“Another loop?” Harry suggested.

Draco nodded again.

Without another word, the two men began to walk again, in almost-companionable and yet incredibly anxious silence.

+++.

Chapter End Notes

Writing for Harry and Draco is so fun!

This scene is all mine. I added it because I felt we could do with some Harry and Draco interaction. I’ve always found their relationship fascinating. Even more so as adults. Their scenes together in the script are some of my favourites.

I hope you enjoy this!

Please let me know if you do! It makes me smile so much to get a comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Hermione had spent all night at the Ministry. It wasn’t unusual for her to remain in her office through the early hours of the morning, but on those occasions she would usually manage to catch a moment or two of sleep between meetings, sometimes sitting up in her desk chair. Not so today. She had been simply too busy to even sit. Her feet ached and she longed for her bed, but Hermione Granger liked things to be done properly, and if that meant working non-stop that was simply how things had to be. This was her mess and she was determined to fix it. It was the only responsible thing to do.

She had been preparing her notes for a later meeting with the Gringotts goblins when she heard a familiar jaunty knock at her office door.

Hermione frowned a little. It was fairly early in the morning for a social call.

“Come in,” she called out.

Ron wandered into her office, looking rather peaky although undeniably cheerful. It looked like he was still wearing yesterday’s clothes…

“I have had the most amazing night,” Ron declared, walking rather unsteadily towards her desk.

With a sigh, Hermione summoned a second chair so that Ron could take a seat, but instead of sitting on it, Ron decided to heave himself onto her desk, looking almost absurdly relaxed. Clearly he’d been enjoying a few Firewhiskies the night before.

“So I can see,” she commented, although she couldn’t help but smile at the sight of her husband. “How was Neville? Is Hannah feeling better now?”

“Oh - yes,” Ron agreed, pushing a few books aside so he could spread out. “Hannah’s well. She only went into St Mungo’s for a day. All clear.”

“Thank goodness,” Hermione remarked.

“And Neville is on top form. The stories that guy has…”

“We really should meet up,” Hermione commented vaguely.

“Exactly what I said!” Ron agreed with gusto. “If you let me know when you’re free, I can sort it out. I’m thinking the whole gang, back together! Dean and Seamus are back from Ireland in a
month. And you know what, I’ve missed Luna. Sometimes you don’t appreciate her craziness until she’s off again.”

“That sounds nice,” Hermione agreed, a little impatiently. She paused for a moment and looked at the clock on her wall, trying to be tactful.

“As lovely as it is to see you, what are you doing here?”

“I’ve come to see you!” Ron explained, looking a little hurt. “You’ve been working non-stop.”

“Ron, we’ve talked about this-“

“I know, I know,” Ron conceded. “But things have been mental. And I know how much you’ve got on your plate right now.”

Hermione softened at that.

“Have you eaten yet?” she asked.

Ron shook his head.

Raising her eyebrow fondly, Hermione gave an elegant and effortless flick of her wand, which summoned a bowl of hot porridge, complete with spoon, from a cabinet in the corner, to her husband.

Ron grinned down at the sight with joy.

“I love it when you do that,” he remarked, picking up the spoon and tucking in.

Hermione began looking through her papers, sorting them into order, frowning every so often when she spotted a mistake. After the Gringotts goblins she needed to visit the Muggle Liaison Office. Not to mention the Merpeople seemed almost ready to cooperate, and she expected she'd be needed in talks at some stage.

“I saw Ginny yesterday morning,” Ron said, yawning, unaware of his wife’s busy thoughts. “She filled me in on… well. All of it.”

“Oh?” Hermione asked, still sounding slightly distracted.

“Can you imagine? The stuff she was telling me. What Albus and that Malfoy kid saw. Utterly mental.”

That caught Hermione’s attention.

“I… yes. It was dreadful. Utterly terrible,” Hermione remarked, feeling guilt settle in her stomach. “Those poor boys. I can’t believe I was so lax with security. It was my fault. I was ridiculously naive…”

“Well, sounds like they’re okay to me,” Ron said robustly, eating another large spoonful of porridge and giving a satisfied sigh. “And anyway, what harm did it do us? We got up to all sorts at their age. Albus has more guts than I gave him credit for. He’s kind of getting more Harry-ish with age, have you noticed?”

Hermione frowned.

“I should think it did them a great deal of harm. Especially poor Scorpius Malfoy.”
“What I mean,” Ron amended quickly. “Is that you shouldn’t feel guilty. Because it wasn’t your fault. It wasn’t like you gave it to them. They went looking. And okay, *maybe* you didn’t hide it all that well. Or shouldn’t have had it in the first place—”

Hermione raised an eyebrow.

“But it’s all okay now. And don’t worry about Draco Malfoy, because if he says a word about what happened he’ll land his own kid in it, won’t he? And he wouldn’t do that.”

“Funnily enough I wasn’t worried about Draco Malfoy,” Hermione said dryly.

“And then there’s us. I’m not going to lie, that was the weirdest part.”

“Ron—” Hermione started, sensing her husband was about to begin a long and ponderous chat, which Hermione really didn’t have time for just then.

“I can’t get over it really. The fact that in some realities we aren’t even, you know, married.”

Hermione privately agreed. But she absolutely wasn’t going to have a personal conversation with her husband while she was supposed to be working. People were counting on her. No matter how much she would have liked to sit down with Ron and talk, she had a job to do.

“Ron,” she said, more firmly this time. “Whatever this is - I’ve got ten minutes until the goblins show up to talk security at Gringotts—”

“I mean,” Ron continued, as though she hadn’t spoken. “We’ve been together so long - and married for so long - I mean, *so* long—”

“If this is your way of saying you want a marital break Ron,” Hermione said, with a tiny smile, “Then, to be clear, I will skewer you with this quill.”

Ron gave a mock-offended huff and brandished his spoon comically. It honestly wasn't funny, but for some reason it made Hermione want to giggle like a girl. She held back the urge.

“Shut up. Will you shut up for once? I want to do one of those marriage renewal things I’ve read about. Marriage renewal. What do you think?”

Hermione couldn’t help but stop on the spot. She blinked with surprise, utterly touched.

“You want to marry me again?” she confirmed.

“Well, we were only young when we did it the first time,” Ron said, going rather pink at the ears. “And I got very drunk and - well, to be honest, I can’t remember much of it—”

Hermione couldn't help but let out a laugh at that bare-faced lie. She laughed then like a much younger woman, her cares momentarily disappearing.

“—and… the truth is - I love you Hermione Granger - and whatever time says - I’d like the opportunity to say so in front of lots of other people. Again.”

Hermione looked so deeply moved that Ron cleared his throat.

“Sober,” he added.

His wife stared at him for a moment, her brown eyes very warm, expression soft. She really was beautiful, Ron thought. Even when she was stressed beyond belief and hadn’t slept.
Hermione reached out to Ron, grabbed him by his stripy blue scarf, and pulled him in for a kiss.

“You’re sweet,” she said, sounding sentimental.

Ron loved that tone of her voice, how very passionate Hermione could be when she forgot about what Ron liked to call her Minister-mode. People across Britain were in awe of the formidable Hermione Granger, but Ron knew the truth. That for all his wife’s magical prowess and ruthlessness in the pursuit of justice, deep down she was, well, just the same as she’d always been. Perfect in every way.

“And you taste of toffee,” Ron said, rather bashfully, and trying not to blush. Was it normal to still blush like a schoolboy when your wife kissed you? Ron wondered.

Hermione laughed, throwing back her head with youthful joy.

Ron was just leaning in to get a second kiss when the door opened swiftly. Cursing his bad luck, Ron pulled away, and Hermione sprang back looking embarrassed and smoothing down her hair.

Three very stressed-looking figures walked into the room with some urgency.

“Harry, Ginny and - I, uh - Draco - how lovely to see you,” Hermione said, looking flustered.

Ron frowned with confusion. Harry wasn’t such a surprise, since he was always at the Ministry, but Ginny wasn’t in the habit of visiting so early, and why in the name of Merlin was Draco Malfoy following his best friend and sister into his wife’s office?

“The dreams,” Harry announced without preamble. “They’ve started again, well, they haven’t stopped.”

“And Albus is missing. Again,” Ginny added.

“Scorpius too,” said Draco. “We’ve had McGonagall check the entire school. They’re gone.”

Ron glared fiercely at that intruding ponytail and the man attached to it.

Hermione, however, was back in Minister-mode, courteous and brisk. She frowned, thinking hard.

“I’ll get the Aurors immediately,” she decided, getting to her feet. “I’ll-“

But Ron reached out a hand to stop her. She looked down at him with surprise.

“No, you won’t,” he said, helpfully. “It’s all fine. Albus, I saw him last night. It’s all good.”

Ginny made a sighing noise of deep relief. Harry also seemed about ready to deflate.

Draco, on the other hand, narrowed his eyes.

“Where?” Draco demanded, glaring with distaste both at Ron, and the bowl of porridge Ron was in the middle of devouring.

Everyone turned to look at Ron. It was a bit disconcerting to have everyone stare at you like that. Ron had no idea how Hermione managed it.

He cleared his throat and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand (at which Draco gave a noise of disgust).
“I was having a couple of Firewhiskies with Neville in Hogsmeade,” Ron began. “- as you do - setting the world to rights - as we do - and we were coming back - quite late, very late, and trying to work out which Floo I could use because when you’ve had a drink sometimes you don’t want to use the tight ones - or the turny ones or-“

“Ron, if you could get to the point before we all strangle you?” remarked Ginny with the instant disrespect of a younger sister.

“He hasn’t run away,” Ron explained, aiming his words at Harry. “He’s having a quiet moment - he’s got himself an older girlfriend-“

Ginny frowned with confusion and turned immediately to Draco, who looked equally as surprised.

“An older girlfriend?” Harry repeated, blinking at Ron.

“And a cracking one at that,” Ron agreed, smiling at his best friend in a reassuring manner.

“Gorgeous silver hair. Saw them on the roof together with Scorpius playing the gooseberry.”

Draco sighed and lowered his gaze.

That was typical of Draco Malfoy, Ron thought. Any other father would have been relieved to know their kid was all right, but Draco looked quietly devastated. That slimy git probably wanted trouble, Ron thought unkindly, just so he could try to bring Hermione down a peg or two…

But Harry was frowning too. Ron hadn’t expected that sort of reaction from Harry of all people. It was good for Albus, Ron thought, to finally have a bit of romance in his life. That poor kid had been a miserable little git for the past couple of years, and as much as Ron loved his sulky little nephew, he knew for himself that a bit of love could go a long way.

“Her hair - was it silver and blue?” Harry asked.

Ron thought on that. It was hard to remember exactly what the young woman had looked like following the amount of Firewhiskies he’d drunk - apart from the fact she was a real corker. But she'd definitely had shiny hair of some sort. And the ends had looked darker than the rest of it…


He helped himself to another spoonful of porridge.

Harry turned to his wife with knowing.

“He’s talking about Delphi Diggory,” Harry said, grimly. “Niece of Amos Diggory.”

Ginny, Draco, and Hermione all seemed to understand. They were all wearing strangely similar worried expressions. Ron had no idea what the big deal was.

“This is about Cedric again?” Ginny asked.

Harry said nothing, which made Ron suppose the question was rhetorical. His silence seemed to spark something in Hermione, because she took a deep breath and then looked around the room with concern.

Ron frowned. Something had to be wrong. Hadn’t the whole thing with Albus and the Malfoy kid been about bringing Cedric Diggory back to life? But what did that have to do with Amos’s corker of a silver-haired niece? And why was Draco Malfoy looking so bloody concerned?
It didn’t make any sense.

Hermione walked swiftly to her office door and called out: “Ethel. Cancel the goblins.”

Ron dropped his spoon into his almost-empty porridge bowl with a clatter. Draco glared at him.

If his wife was cancelling a meeting with those miserable little Gringotts gits then this was serious.

“Where is Amos Diggory now?” Harry demanded.

“St Oswald’s,” Hermione answered, looking worried. “But Harry…”

“I’m going right now,” Harry said. Ginny looked up at him with concern, but nodded.

Ron had been about to get to his feet and volunteer to go with his best friend, for moral support, when Draco Malfoy beat him to it.

“I’ll come with you, Potter,” Draco declared.

To Ron’s shock, Harry inclined his head at Draco, accepting his offer.

“I really don’t think we should act so rashly-“ Hermione began, but Draco and Harry were already getting ready to go. Ginny gave her husband a quick kiss and then Harry Potter and Draco Malfoy stormed out of the room side by side.

Ron watched them go with disbelief. Forget Albus and the Malfoy kid, it felt like he had slipped into an alternate reality.

“Since when have they been so pally?” Ron demanded, raising an eyebrow at his sister.

“Oh, just eat your porridge!” Ginny snapped, before sinking into a chair. “My son is in danger and you’re getting jealous!”

“Jealous of that ponytail?” Ron scoffed, forcing a laugh. “Give me a break.”

“I will hex you Ronald Weasley,” Ginny fumed.

Ron turned to his wife for back up, but she shook her head at him firmly and went to Ginny’s side. She put an arm around her.

“He’ll be okay,” Hermione said gently. “We’ll do everything we can. As soon as we know what’s happened we can act.”

Ginny was oddly silent.

“I need the Undersecretary,” Hermione said to no one in particular.

Just then Ginny’s shoulders gave a horrible tremble and Ron’s little sister dissolved into tears, covering her face with her hands.

Hermione rushed to comfort her, rubbing her back and shushing her. She even stroked her red hair in a rather motherly fashion.

“Ron, can you stop gawping and get the Undersecretary?” Hermione asked over her shoulder.

Oh, she had been asking him to get the Undersecretary. That made a lot more sense.
“Right, yes,” Ron agreed, rather shaken but rushing to do as he was told. Seeing Ginny cry was awful. He paused by the door, wanting to show his support. “I - er… don’t worry, Gin. Everything will be okay.”

“Go, Ron!” Hermione hissed.

Ron went.

Chapter End Notes

Ah, the wonderful mind of Ron Weasley. Can I just say how much I love Ron? Because I love Ron.

Please leave me a comment! It means so much to receive them!

I love you all so much! And I hope you know that I am reading everything you comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
“What do you make of this?” Draco asked Harry, as they walked quickly down the corridor and towards the lift. Ministry workers parted instantly for the pair of formidable-looking wizards. Many gawped, open mouthed, when they realised exactly who it was walking beside Harry Potter.

Draco, as usual, ignored the looks.

“He’s taken them,” Harry answered darkly. “As punishment. For what I did to Cedric.”

Draco frowned as a couple of witches politely stepped aside so they could take the next lift. Harry seemed too stressed to thank them, and so Draco was left to awkwardly nod his head at the pair of women. He would never have it be said that Draco Malfoy had no manners.

Harry pressed the correct button and stood back against the wall of the lift, looking distressed.

“Delphini, he’s used Delphini to get to my son. He’s used his own niece. They’re working together. They must be.”

“Who is this Delphini?” Draco asked.

“Amos’s nurse. His niece. I’ve only met her once, but she works at St Oswald’s. She seemed so… how did I manage to miss it? They visited me. In my own home. I let them in. I let them in where my family were sleeping. Where my children were sleeping.”

Harry shook the thought away.

“This is my fault,” he repeated, seemingly to himself.

“Potter,” Draco declared when the lift doors had closed behind them. “Do you have any idea how tiresome your hero-complex is?”

“Not right now,” Harry answered tiredly, closing his eyes. “Save it for when this is all over. If it ever is-“

Draco made a scoffing noise at that.

Harry stared at him.

“Even I can see you did nothing to Cedric Diggory. That one isn’t on you. It never was.”

“Whether it was my fault or not, it’s happened because of me. Because Cedric died and I didn’t.”
“Don’t be ridiculous—”

“He’s got them, Draco,” Harry forced out. “He’s got my son. He’s getting revenge. He’s got his niece involved. Why didn’t I see it sooner?”

“How were you supposed to see it sooner?” Draco demanded, as though he thought Harry was quite mad. “Some crackpot old man decides to orchestrate a revenge mission to spite you for something that happened over twenty years ago, and you think this is your fault?”

Harry didn’t know what to say to that.

“You really do love being a martyr,” Draco remarked, shaking his head.

There was a silence while the lift moved them through the Ministry.

“What I don’t understand is why your son is missing,” Harry revealed, deciding to be honest with Draco Malfoy. He was too overwhelmed with fear for his son to put on a front, and it seemed that even Draco was struggling to remain his usual mocking self (although he was giving it a good try). “Did you have anything to do with Cedric?”

“Nothing,” Draco admitted.

“Then why Scorpius as well? Assuming that the disappearances are related.”

“Obviously they’re related,” Draco declared. “And I can answer that one for you.”

Harry frowned at Draco, waiting.

“Because he wouldn’t have let them take Albus,” Draco answered, head bowed. “He’ll have gone running along after him. He hasn’t the good sense to stay out of these things—“

Harry stared at Draco. That didn’t sound like a lack of good sense. It sounded like bravery. Was that the true Scorpius Malfoy?

“He would follow your son anywhere,” Draco sighed out, looking pained. “And now he’s followed him into… into this.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Will you stop apologising?” Draco snapped, as the lift finally opened, revealing the Atrium. "Come on."

+++  

They reached St Oswald’s in no time at all, using the Floo Network to take them to a nearby stop. For most of their short journey, the two men travelled in silence, only occasionally commenting about some small detail or making a suggestion. Conversation did not come easily between them, although Harry did occasionally find himself almost making some casual comment or another, before biting it back when he remembered who his companion was.

Harry pressed on the button at the entrance of St Oswald's, leaning towards the speaker. Draco stood beside him, frowning at the horribly ordinary building.

“Hello, St Oswald’s,” came the voice of a rather chirpy woman.

“Harry Potter, Head of Magical Law Enforcement,” Harry responded with well practiced ease.
Immediately the buzzer made a dull noise and the front doors clicked open.

The woman at the desk in the reception area looked incredibly nervous to see the two men. She stood up and straightened her dress as they approached.

“I… beg your pardon, Mr Potter, but for security reasons I can’t let you in without-“

She didn’t have to finish her sentence because Harry gave a wave of his wand and called out: “Expecto Patronum!”

A majestic stag made of bright light burst from the end of Harry’s wand and charged about the entrance hall before fading into nothingness.

Draco had to admit he was impressed.

The woman at the desk took in the sight with a little gasp and then nodded at him.

“And this is?” she ventured to ask, looking Draco up and down.

“My associate. Draco Lucius Malfoy. I need to see Amos Diggory. Ministry business.”

“Room twenty seven,” the witch said quickly. “Go straight up.”

They caused quite a stir as they charged through the living area, Draco in his billowing cloak, Harry Potter looking like he meant business.

The dancing male nurses (today performing a Rumba) even paused in their performance to stare.

But Harry and Draco paid them no attention.

“You could have simply shown her your badge,” Draco pointed out, as the two men sprinted up a flight of stairs.

“With respect, Draco,” Harry said, trying his best not to sound breathless from the running. “Shut up.”

To his immense surprise, Draco did.

At the end of a long, twisting corridor, they saw room number twenty seven.

Draco and Harry both took out their wands, and with a nod, Harry burst into the room, Draco right behind him.

An elderly man jumped suddenly with shock and put a hand to his chest. He was sitting propped up in a hospital bed, not matching the optimistic lemon of his bedroom in the slightest.

“Where are they?” Harry demanded.

Amos Diggory recovered from his fright and then fixed his wrinkled old face into an expression of pure loathing as he identified the intruder.

“Harry Potter, and what can I do for you sir?” he asked acerbically.

He took in the sight of the man beside Harry Potter. He recognised the man in an instant. Anyone would have. He had the distinct countenance of every Malfoy. A pale, pointed face, light blond hair, and the look of the privileged.
“And Draco Malfoy,” he added with just as much dislike. “I am blessed.”

“I know how you’ve used my son,” Harry said, moving slowly towards the old man’s bed with a great deal of restraint.

“I’ve used your son? No. You sir - you used my beautiful son.”

Draco was not feeling nearly as inclined to go easy on the old man. He wasn’t the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. He had no code of conduct to abide by. And Amos Diggory was responsible for the disappearance of his only son.

“Tell us - now - where are Albus and Scorpius or face the profoundest consequences,” Draco hissed, raising his wand.

Amos Diggory was clearly a fine actor, because he gave an almost-believable look of surprise at the accusation.

“But why would I know where they are?” Amos asked, frowning.

“Don’t play the senility card with us, old man,” Draco continued fiercely. “We know what you’ve done.”

“I’ve done nothing!” Amos exclaimed.

“Amos,” Harry said warningly, his voice very low. “You’re not too old for Azkaban. They were last seen on the Hogwarts tower with your niece when they disappeared.”

“I have no idea what you are…”

Amos Diggory paused, and then frowned again. He blinked a few times, seeming utterly baffled.

“My niece?” he repeated.

“There are no depths to which you won’t sink, are there - yes, your niece, are you denying she was there under your express instructions?”

“Yes,” Amos spluttered. “I am - I don’t have a niece.”

Harry paused, utterly disconcerted. He turned to Draco with a frown of his own.


But Amos remained stubbornly resolute.

“I know I don’t have a niece because I never had any brothers and sisters. And nor did my wife.”

On Amos’s bedside table, Harry suddenly caught sight of a photograph of Cedric Diggory smiling almost shyly and occasionally glancing at his father with loving concern. Beside it was another frame. An empty frame.

Harry’s time as an Auror had taught him not to disregard such odd little details. Who had previously occupied the frame, and where were they now?

Draco lowered his wand, apparently coming to a similar conclusion to Harry. Amos Diggory was telling the truth. But how could that be?
“We need to find out who she is,” Draco announced. “Now.”

“But what are you talking about?” Amos asked, trying to lean forwards and grimacing at the pain the movement gave him. “Who is this Delphini? I don’t understand…”

Harry gave a sigh and turned to the photo of Cedric apologetically.

“Amos, I’m afraid we’re going to need to send for some Ministry back-up,” he said wearily.

Amos made a noise of outrage.

“For your own protection as well as anything else.”

“You’ll not send me to Azkaban on false charges! I’m an innocent man! It is you who are the criminal! It is you who should be behind bars! You! You, Harry Potter! Am I to die in Azkaban for your own guilt? Haven’t you done enough harm to my family?”

This was not a man who had orchestrated a kidnapping, Draco realised, feeling ill. This was an old man still grieving for the loss of his only son. A man driven to the brink of madness by the loss. He could barely move out of bed, let alone do anything else.

Those hateful words seemed to bounce off Harry Potter. Clearly he had heard them many times before.

“My sincerest apologies for startling you,” Harry said quietly. “You’ll need to answer a few questions from my associates. And then we can leave you in peace.”

“Peace?” Amos all but shouted in his hoarse voice. “You think I can be at peace? Do you think I will ever know peace again? Now my precious boy… my precious son… my precious Cedric… my Cedric…”

“Come on, Potter,” Draco said firmly, knowing that he needed to get Harry out of that room before he took any of that nonsense to heart. He would be no use if he was feeling too guilty to investigate further. “We’re leaving. Now.”

Mutely, Harry followed him from the room, leaving Amos Diggory to sob himself into a coughing fit.

Chapter End Notes

The start and end of this are all mine, although the majority of the Amos conversation is from the script. I changed a few lines VERY slightly. It makes no difference to the plot, don't worry, it just keeps things clearer.

Please leave me a comment!

Especially with regard to the Draco and Harry interactions, which I love writing! And I mean LOVE.

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Three: Scene Nineteen

Chapter Notes

It's a dark one! Sorry guys!

(I may have cried writing it.)

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Albus grimaced with pain, opening his eyes. He had the worst headache imaginable. Why was it so dark?

Oh.

Oh.

From his position on the ground he could make out two standing figures. One was Delphi Diggory, looking tall and resolute, hair shining in the moonlight. The other was staring down at him with horrified concern, and (thankfully) no longer wrapped in luminous cords. Only Scorpius’s arms remained bound.

He was alive. They both were. That was something.

Blinking out at his surroundings, Albus became aware that they were no longer on the roof of the Owlery. He was laying on grass. Slightly damp grass.

Just beyond them was a towering stand, decorated in Hufflepuff colours…

“What are we doing on the Quidditch pitch?” Albus asked, wincing with the pain in his head as he spoke.

Delphi said nothing. Apparently she no longer had the energy to converse with him.

“The Triwizard Tournament,” Scorpius said nervously, eyes glancing furtively at Delphi as though terrified he might be harmed for speaking. “The third task. The maze. This is where the maze was. We’re going back for Cedric.”

Albus frowned and then wished he hadn’t. That had hurt.

“Yes,” Delphi agreed grandly, in a far posher voice than Albus was used to, one that was far less disjointed, far less bouncy, far more self-assured. “It is time to spare the spare once and for all. We will go back for Cedric and in doing so we will resurrect the world you saw Scorpius…”

“Hell,” Scorpius declared, bravely. “You want to resurrect hell?”

“I want a return to pure and strong magic. I want to rebirth the Dark.”

“You want Voldemort’s return,” Scorpius breathed out, with horrible resignation. He closed his eyes for a moment, taking that in.
“The one true ruler of the wizarding world. He will return. Now you’ve ensured the first two tasks are a little clogged up with magic - there are at least two visits from the future in both of them and I will not risk being revealed or distracted. The third task is clean, so let’s start there, shall we?”

Delphi turned her wand on Albus. Scorpius made a noise of protest, but with a lazy flick of her wrist, the cords binding Albus’s arms, legs, and torso, began to fade, unravelling and disappearing into nothingness.

Albus blinked up at her with confusion. She repeated the gesture, this time pointing her wand at Scorpius, and he too was freed.

Were they supposed to be grateful for that? Delphi looked as though she expected grovelling thanks for her mercy.

Cautiously, Scorpius stepped towards Albus. Delphi didn’t stop him.

Scorpius reached out to help him to his feet, glancing nervously at his forehead where Albus assumed, because of the stinging pain, he’d acquired a cut. Albus’s whole body ached, but he found the strength to stand up straight. Scorpius reached out to touch his chest, patting him with anxiety, as though to reassure himself he was still there.

Looking impatient, Delphi gestured with her wand that they should separate. With a final squeeze of his arm, Scorpius did as he was told, taking a few steps away from him.

Scorpius looked petrified. Albus knew that he had to be brave for him.

“We won’t stop him - whatever you force us to do,” Albus declared, wishing his voice didn’t sound so childish and fearful. “We know he needs to win the tournament with my dad.”

“I don’t just want you to stop him. I want you to humiliate him. He needs to fly out of that maze naked on a broomstick made of purple feather dusters-”

Albus turned to Scorpius with horror. Scorpius was simply nodding with resignation. Delphi Diggory, the beautiful, sparkling, bouncy Delphi Diggory, was out of her mind. Out of her mind and extremely dangerous.

“Humiliation got you there before and it’ll get us there again. And the prophecy will be fulfilled.” That last part was said with some satisfaction.

“Wasn’t aware there was a prophecy,” Scorpius piped up. “What prophecy?”

At first Albus thought Scorpius was being absurdly reckless by asking his question. That he’d gone mad as well with the stress of the situation. But then he realised. He was gathering information. He was trying to think them out of this.

“You have seen the world as it should be Scorpius, and today we’re going to ensure its return,” Delphi declared.

“We won’t,” Albus said, swallowing hard. “We won’t obey you. Whoever you are. Whatever you want us to do.”

“Of course you will,” Delphi responded, like this was obvious.

Albus narrowed his eyes. Nobody made him do anything he didn’t want to. He was Albus Potter. The famously stubborn. If Delphi thought he’d just go along with what she wanted of his own free
will then she had another thing coming.

“You’ll have to use Imperio,” Albus said boldly. “You’ll have to control me.”

“No,” Delphi snapped, waving the idea away with her hand. “To fulfil the prophecy this has to be you, not a puppet of you... you have to be the one to humiliate Cedric, so Imperio just won’t do - I’ll have to force you by other means.”

Albus gave a smile then. Even though he was terrified. Because he knew that he could hold his nerve. His biggest talent was being obstinate and difficult. Even Harry Potter couldn’t get him to change, to do something he didn’t want to, to be something he didn’t want to be. Albus Severus Potter would not be ordered about. Especially not by someone who was threatening him.

He’d been there once before, when his father had ordered him away from Scorpius. He’d gone along with it then, and it was one of his biggest regrets. Never again was he going to take the easy option. Never again was he going to be such an almighty coward.

Delphi pointed her wand at Albus’s chest.

Scorpius made a panicked squeaking noise, but Albus merely raised his head, bravely, sticking his chin out. Whatever pain was coming his way, he could take it. Delphi couldn’t kill him. She needed him. She’d said so herself.

“Do your worst,” Albus all but dared her, feeling strangely impressive as he did so.

Delphi seemed to sense the futility of her attempt before it had begun. She stared at Albus, narrowing her eyes at his determined resolve. She could admire a person who refused to be moulded (although this was the first time Albus Potter had shown any such signs of noncompliance), but this simply would not do. Albus was the missing piece of her puzzle, and without him the final stage of her plan could not be completed. It was too risky to harm him.

Beside her, she became aware of very heavy breathing. Very terrified heavy breathing.

“I will,” Delphi declared, pleasantly, smiling as the solution hit her.

She turned her wand away from Albus... and towards the trembling figure of Scorpius Malfoy.

“No!” Albus Potter shouted.

“Yes, as I thought - this seems to frighten you more...”

Scorpius Malfoy’s knees were knocking together. He looked like he wanted to start crying. But to Delphi’s surprise, the weaker of the two boys did not plead to be spared. He didn’t beg Albus to agree to her commands.

That was intriguing.

“Albus, whatever she does to me - we can’t let her.” Scorpius stammered out.

Delphi hadn’t expected the Malfoy boy to be so defiant. According to Delphi’s extensive research, the Malfoys were a family of cowards, ready to do anything to save their own useless skins. Perhaps this boy was the exception to the rule?

With relish, Delphi cast the Unforgivable Curse.

“Crucio!”
Scorpius Malfoy sank to his knees, screaming in agony. His hands went to his head as though he might somehow be able to spare himself the red hot pain of one hundred knives piercing his skin. He screamed like a child, Delphi noticed, rather high-pitched. It was an intensely annoying sound.

She raised an eyebrow at Albus, who looked like he wanted to vomit.

“I will…” Albus panted out.

Did he think he could bargain with her? Oh, it was simply too funny.

Delphi let out a laugh, which clashed eerily with the whimpers and screams of young Scorpius Malfoy.

“What? What on earth do you think you can do? A wizardwide disappointment? A sore on your family name? A spare? You want me to stop hurting your only friend? Then do what you’re told.”

Albus looked on the brink of giving in. Scorpius had stopped making any noise at all by this point, so focussed was he on staying conscious, on not losing his mind.

But there was still a hint of resistance there in Albus Potter’s green eyes. And that simply wouldn’t do…

“No?” Delphi enquired casually.

Albus bit down on his lower lip to stop himself from responding.

With an overly-dramatic sigh, Delphi pointed her wand at Scorpius once again.

“Crucio!”

At once he began to scream again, tears streaming down his face. This time he remained upright with sheer agony, unable to even crumple. Within moments he would be longing for death, longing for any escape from the pain. Delphi had often been subject to the Crucius Curse herself and knew the experience was like no other. She had only avoided insanity herself by sheer force of will, because of her noble blood. She doubted the Malfoy boy would be able to sustain his sanity for long...

“Stop!” Albus yelled, rushing forward, unable to take it a moment longer. “Please!”

Quite suddenly a new figure burst onto the Quidditch pitch, causing Delphi to pause in her torture of Scorpius.

Scorpius slumped, taking a deep breath in his moment of respite.

It was Craig Bowker Jr, dressed in his nightshirt and trousers, eyes wide, looking just as pompous and self-righteous as ever.

“Scorpius?” he asked, staring at the unpleasant scene he’d just stumbled upon. “Albus? Everyone’s looking for you-“

“Craig!” Albus yelled. “Get away! Get help!”

But Craig took a second too long to understand. He was staring at Scorpius’s tearstained face with confusion and distress.

“What’s happening?” he demanded bravely. Craig did not stand for any such unpleasantness. If
one of his fellow Slytherins was being harmed, then that was against the rules. It went against House covenant. It was his job to intervene, on behalf of Hogwarts.

Albus realised what was about to happen a second before it did.

Delphi gave a bored turn of her head and turned her wand on Craig.

“Avada Kedavra!”

A flash of blinding green light shot from Delphi’s wand and hit Craig square in the chest. Immediately he was propelled backwards, his body flying through the air and then landing in a horrible unnatural heap on the grass.

And then there was nothing but silence.

A boy was dead. Albus had just *seen* a person die. He’d witnessed a murder.

“Did you not understand?” Delphi asked. “These are not childish games we are playing here. You are useful to me, your friends are not.”

Scorpius’s eyes were wide as he hugged himself tightly, but Albus found he was unable to react at all. He felt numb. Like he was floating away from his body.

Both boys stared down at Craig, their minds in hell. His meticulously shined shoes glinted in the moonlight.

“It took me a long time to discover your weakness, Albus Potter,” Delphi said, not even bothering to look at the boy she had just killed. “I thought it was pride, I thought it was the need to impress your father, but then I realised your weakness was the same as your father’s - friendship. You will do exactly as you’re told, otherwise Scorpius will die, just like that spare did.”

Albus made an instinctive move towards Scorpius, but Delphi shook her head.

“Voldemort will return and the Augurey will sit at his side. Just as it was prophesied. *When spares are spared, when time is turned, when unseen children murder their fathers: then will the Dark Lord return.*"

She was mad. Completely mad. There was no reasoning with her. No way of talking their way out of this.

She would kill Scorpius, Albus realised with horror. It was no idle threat, as she had just proved. She would turn her wand on him and throw out a Killing Curse like it was nothing. And then Scorpius would be the one slumped on the ground…

It was too much. Albus could not allow it to happen. The mere thought of it made his legs go suddenly weak.

Delphi smiled, as though reading his thoughts.

Raising an eyebrow, she reached out for Scorpius, dragging him viciously towards her. Albus saw his friend close his eyes for a brief moment, anticipating further pain.

“Cedric is the spare, and Albus-“

She reached out for Albus with a surprisingly strong grip. Albus went to her without word, legs shaking as he took one last look at Craig Bowker Jr’s body.
“- the unseen child who will kill his father by rewriting time and so return the Dark Lord.”

The Time-Turner began rotating in Delphi’s hand. She pulled Scorpius and Albus’s hands to the chain, roughly.

“Now!” she yelled.

The world began to change around them, but Albus didn’t watch it happen.

Instead he kept his eyes on Scorpius and his poor, exhausted, tearstained face. He shifted his hand on the chain ever so slightly, so it was touching Scorpius’s, silently willing him to understand that everything was going to be okay. That he would make it okay.

Scorpius’s hand was shaking on the chain, but he fixed Albus with the bravest look he had ever seen.

Outside of Delphi’s notice, Albus moved his little finger just a fraction to his right so he could touch Scorpius’s, curling his finger around it as best he could. As the three of them rushed back through the years in a whoosh of light and noise, Delphi smirking with triumph, Albus and Scorpius remained determinedly linked.

Chapter End Notes

Oh lord this one was hard to write. Mostly because it’s just so upsetting. Poor precious little Scorpius.

Please do leave me a comment if you can! They mean the world to me!

Lots of people said they didn’t get email updates for the other chapters. I think something went wrong with A03? I didn’t get any comments through my email either, but they’re starting to come through now. I am still putting up a chapter a day (or two if I can) so if you don’t get an email just give the story a check! The Summer holidays are over now and I am studying but I don’t think that should impact how often I put out a new chapter. I am loving this and more than willing to make the time!

Your support on this means so much! It makes the work worthwhile!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The Hogwarts Quidditch pitch had always filled Albus with a sense of dread, but never before had he seen it look so dark, so menacing.

Looking around, Albus realised that he, Scorpius, and Delphi, had emerged in the centre of a giant maze. And it really was giant. The hedges surrounding them had to be at least twenty feet high.

In the distance, students could be heard cheering and screaming, only the sound was strangely muted. Albus couldn't help but feel like he was underwater again, somehow cut off from the rest of the world.

Albus instinctively grabbed Scorpius by the arm and yanked him away from Delphi, who seemed utterly unconcerned by this. It was clear she did not see them as a threat.

“Are you okay?” Albus whispered, and Scorpius nodded his head mutely.

Delphi looked about her, seemed satisfied with their position, and then gave a nod. She turned back to the boys, who were standing arm in arm, huddled very close together, like children. She had no time for such distractions. She would not allow their mission to become disrupted, and Albus Potter would not be allowed to waste precious time tending to his companion.

“Incarcerous!” Delphi declared impatiently. “Incarcerous!”

Immediately the boys found their arms bound in front of their bodies. Scorpius Malfoy seemed to droop a little now he had nobody holding him up. Clearly the Crucius Curse had taken its toll.

“You’ll follow me, do you understand?” Delphi said sharply. “And you’ll be quick about it.”

She began to stride further into the maze, but she sensed not a single movement behind her.

Delphi spun on the spot impatiently, cloak billowing. The boys were refusing to move, standing shoulder to shoulder, not taking a single step forward. Delphi wasn’t quite sure if Scorpius Malfoy was actually able to walk after the several bursts of the Crucius Curse he’d been subjected to, but she was certain that Albus Potter was openly defying her.

“If you’ll not move of your own accord then I will just have to help you along,” Delphi said, giving a wave of her wand.
Immediately Albus and Scorpius found themselves being dragged forward, rather painfully, by the cords binding their arms. They had no choice but to stumble along after Delphi.

“And if either of you decide to dig in your heels again, then you know what will happen,” she added menacingly. “One of you, I need. The other…”

Albus swallowed hard and then upped his pace. Scorpius walked along at his side, taking deep breaths, determined not to fall behind.

“Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, I give you - the greatest - the fabulous - the one - and the only TRIWIZARD TOURNAMENT!” boomed the voice of Ludo Bagman.

Delphi gave a hum of satisfaction and seemed to use the voice to get her bearings. Nodding to herself, she made a sharp turn left into an even darker section of the maze. The boys were forced to wander after her.

“If you’re from Hogwarts. Give me a cheer!”

A loud cheer sounded from somewhere to their right.

“If you’re from Durmstrang - give me a cheer!“

A deeper, more rumbling cheer, and some chanting.

“AND IF YOU’RE FROM BEAUXBATONS GIVE ME A CHEER”

The loudest cheer of all sounded, full of screeching and squeals. Albus could hear his Aunt Fleur's name being chanted over and over.

At that moment, the hedge just ahead of them began, impossibly, to close in. Albus stared at it with disbelief as it moved towards them, ready to sweep them all off into another direction.

Delphi moved easily to one side and with a flick of her wand, the boys were dragged out of its path too. Scorpius gave a little gasp as the hedge narrowly missed him.

“The French finally showing us what they’re capable of there. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you - the final of the Triwizard tasks. A maze of mysteries, a disease of uncontrollable darkness, for this maze - it lives. It lives.”

Albus turned to Scorpius at that description. He’d known the maze was dangerous, and very much alive, but a disease of uncontrollable darkness? Albus really hoped that Ludo Bagman was exaggerating.

Somewhere down a pathway to their left, a figure passed by. Delphi turned to it with some urgency.

From what Albus had seen, the person had been tall, thin, and slightly round-shouldered. They had disappeared swiftly down a nearby path,

“Krum,” Scorpius mouthed to Albus, while Delphi let out a hiss of frustration to have spotted the wrong Triwizard Champion.

Albus felt almost absurdly relieved that it hadn’t been his father, who he knew was somewhere in the maze with them too. He didn’t want his dad coming anywhere near Delphi.

“Where is he?” Delphi asked herself aloud, sounding impatient. “Where is Cedric?”
The hedge to their right suddenly seemed to lunge. Albus spotted it before Scorpius did, and gave his best friend an almighty shove, almost sending him sprawling. They only just parted in time to avoid being dissected by a sharp knife-like edge which seemed to have come from nowhere, and then disappeared back into the wall of the maze.

Delphi did not even turn to see what the commotion was about.

“‘The hedges want to kill us too?’” Scorpius breathed out. “This just gets better and better.”

Despite their desperate situation, Albus shot him a rueful smile. Scorpius did his best to return it.

“You will keep up or face the consequences,” Delphi declared loudly.

“The perils are plentiful, but the prizes are palpable. Who will fight their way through? Who will fall at the final hurdle? What heroes do we have within our midst? Only time will tell, ladies and gentlemen, only time will tell!”

Delphi kept stalking forward at quite a pace, compelling the boys to follow her. But in her growing distress she seemed entirely preoccupied with finding Cedric. The cords binding both Albus and Scorpius seemed to pull more weakly than before.

Without her eyes on them, Albus took the opportunity to move closer to Scorpius, so that they were shoulder to shoulder again.

“Albus,” Scorpius whispered, out of the corner of his mouth. “We need to do something.”

“I know,” Albus agreed. “But what? She’s snapped our wands, we’re bound, and she’s threatening to kill you.”

From a nearby section of the maze came a horrendous crackling noise, like a roaring fire. A nasty smell filled the air. Neither Albus or Scorpius chose to look up to see if they could locate the source. They felt it was better not to know.

“I’m ready to die if it’ll stop Voldemort returning,” Scorpius said firmly.

If Albus hadn’t been being pulled along by the cords twined painfully around his arms, he would have stopped on the spot.

“Are you?” he asked uncertainly, trying to scan his best friend’s face in the darkness.

Albus wasn’t ready for Scorpius to die. Even if that meant Voldemort. Did that make him a coward?

And nor was he ready to die himself. Albus was afraid of the idea of death. There was still so much he wanted to do, so much he needed to say…

“You won’t have to mourn me for long,” Scorpius pointed out, with awful rationality. “She’ll kill me and quickly kill you too.”

How could Scorpius be so calm about this? It frightened Albus, the clinical way Scorpius was assessing the situation. Even after all they had seen…

But of course Scorpius had been here before, in hell. Perhaps he’d even seen worse than this. He had lived in Voldemort’s reality for days. Who knew the horrors he had witnessed there that he was valiantly keeping to himself?
Were they truly going to have to die in order to stop Voldemort returning? Was that what this had all been leading to? Were they going to have to make that sacrifice?

No, Albus thought frantically. No. Neither of them were dying. Nobody else was going to be killed.

Desperately, Albus racked his brains for the solution. There had to be something. His dad would have figured it all out when he was fourteen. Therefore he could too. He might have been the black sheep of the family, but he was still a Potter.

“The flaw in the Time-Turner, the five minute rule,” Albus said quickly. “We do all we can to run down the clock.”

“It won’t work,” Scorpius said sadly.

But they had to try, didn’t they?

The hedge they had been heading for suddenly changed direction, leaving another pathway open. Delphi frowned, but had no choice but to take this new route. With a flick of her wand, Albus and Scorpius were pulled after her at some speed.

Scorpius almost tripped and fell, only managing to remain on his feet by sheer luck. If he hadn’t, he thought the cords on his hands would probably have dragged him along anyway.

Albus was certain he had just seen a Blast-Ended Skrewt lingering ominously in a pathway Delphi thankfully dragged them past.

Well, that explained the fire…

“Now let me remind you of the current standings! Tied in first place - Mr Cedric Diggory and Mr Harry Potter. In second place - Mr Viktor Krum! And in third place - sacré bleu, Miss Fleur Delacour.”

Suddenly Albus and Scorpius were faced with a wall of what looked like glass. Only it wasn’t glass. It was twisting and morphing, like bubble mixture. Where had it come from?

Albus swore under his breath with the shock of it. This maze was going to be the end of his sanity, if nothing else.

But beside him, Scorpius was beaming.

For a moment Albus stared at him, wondering if his best friend had beaten him to losing his mind. And then he understood.

They were no longer being pulled forward. They had stopped, right in front of the murky white barrier.

The ominous boundary had clearly broken the spell for a moment. Delphi was stuck on the other side. They were no longer in Delphi’s power.

“She’ll find us,” Albus pointed out, but Scorpius didn’t seem to care.

“She’ll have to look first!” Scorpius responded, full of sudden energy. “Come on!”

Albus took a breath, and then nodded at Scorpius. Together, they sprinted clumsily back down the pathway, in the direction from which they’d come. It was hard, running, when their hands were bound together, but it didn’t stop them.
Scorpius led the way, darting down a pathway to their left, which twisted and turned as they ran through it side by side.

If they came across one of the maze’s obstacles, then they were done for. With no wands and not even able to use their arms, their chances of getting through this in one piece were slim. And yet they kept on tearing sharply around corners, sometimes stumbling and skidding, but always forcing themselves onward.

All that mattered was putting distance between them and Delphi. All that mattered was that they could waste enough time to ruin her plan. Surely they could keep this up for a few minutes?

And then the maze blocked off their next exit, quite suddenly. The boys skidded to a stop.

“We have to go back,” Albus said, catching his breath.

Scorpius stared at the dead-end, which now looked eerily like it was preparing to attack, vines beginning to creep from the hedge…

“Yes… back. Back is good,” he agreed.

They ran for what could only have been seconds before finding themselves approaching that same odd glassy barrier, twisting and now sparkling. Hadn’t it been further away before?

They were on the wrong side, Albus realised with horror. They were on Delphi’s side. How had that happened?

“Where did she go?” Albus panted, looking around them nervously.

“What does it matter? Which way do you think?”

Something was happening to the barrier. It was starting to fade and shatter at once. It gave an odd popping noise and then disappeared, clearing the way.

With a glance at one another, Albus and Scorpius began to sprint onward.

But over the sound of their panting, came a terrible voice…

“You poor creatures,” Delphi crowed.

Albus glanced over his shoulder, but Delphi was nowhere to be seen. Her voice seemed to be coming from above.

Albus and Scorpius squinted up into the darkness to see the unwelcome sight of Delphi, floating high up in the air, and looking like she was getting ready to swoop down upon them. It was such a shocking view that Albus did not allow himself to think about it in that moment. Running was all that mattered. They had to get away.

“You think you can escape me?” she continued, sounding darkly amused, and horribly close…

They tried to run, but in seconds a violent force from behind threw them to the ground.

Albus skidded to the foot of the nearest hedge, and Scorpius was sent sprawling down beside him with a cry of shock.

“You’re not - even on a broom,” Albus breathed out, raising his head and staring up at Delphi with horrified awe.
“Brooms - such unwieldy unnecessary objects. Three minutes gone. We have two minutes left. And you will *do what you’re told.*”

Delphi had her wand in her hand again, and looked more than ready to use it.

Very awkwardly, because of their bound arms, Scorpius and Albus scrambled to their feet, neither wanting to give Delphi the satisfaction of having them sprawled on the ground before her.

Scorpius was sporting a horrible graze on his wrist, and Albus was aware of more wet trickling on his forehead, which meant his cut was bleeding again.

Albus had the horrible impression, from the way Scorpius was standing, with his back straight, chest puffed out, that he was about to do something heroic.

“No,” Scorpius said bravely, standing shoulder to shoulder with Albus and staring at Delphi, who had landed majestically in their path. “We won’t.”

“You think you can fight me?” Delphi asked, looking faintly amused as she took in the sight of the two boys, the two *children,* that were daring to disobey her.

“No,” Scorpius answered, shaking his head. “But we can defy you. If we lay down our lives to do so.”

Albus turned his head to Scorpius, looking horrified. His friend refused to meet his gaze.

“The prophecy must be fulfilled,” Delphi said sharply. “We *will* fulfil it.”

“Prophecies can be broken,” Scorpius argued. Albus winced at the words. At his best friend’s daring. Clearly he believed he had nothing to lose, if he was challenging Delphi like that.

“You’re mistaken child,” Delphi declared. “Prophecies are the future.”

“But if the prophecy is inevitable why are we here trying to influence it? Your actions contradict your thoughts - you’re dragging us through this maze because you believe this prophecy needs to be enabled - and by that logic prophecies can also be broken - prevented.”

Albus recognised that speech as a valiant effort to waste more time, but unfortunately, so did Delphi.

“You talk too much child,” she said suddenly. She pointed her wand at Scorpius’s chest.

“Cruciio!”

Beside him, Scorpius began to scream again.

“Scorpius!” Albus yelled, trying vainly to catch him as his best friend crumpled on the spot, crying with sudden pain.

Delphi ceased the torture for a brief moment, raising an eyebrow at the boys, daring them to defy her again. The Cruciusus Curse *would* force them into obedience. She was certain of it.

“You wanted a test, Albus,” Scorpius panted out, sweat beading on his forehead as he stood up straight once again. Most horrifyingly of all, he forced a small, brave smile. “This is it - and we’re going to pass it.”

Albus looked at Scorpius, and Delphi seemed to disappear. The maze too. Everything.
All he knew was that Scorpius was ready to die, and that this was it. For both of them. They were going to die here.

At the age of fourteen Albus Severus Potter was going to die beside his best friend, beside the person he loved most in all the world.

And he was ready, too. If he had to be. If Scorpius was. If it meant making up for what they had done. If it meant proving to his dad, once and for all, that he wasn't a coward. That he could be a hero. That for once in his life he could live up to the Potter name.

Taking a deep breath, Albus nodded his head.

“Then you will die,” Delphi threatened.

But Albus Potter, shockingly, stared up at her. He looked her right in the eyes with new strength.

“Yes. We will. And we’ll do so gladly knowing it’s stopped you,” he said loudly.

Beside him, Scorpius Malfoy nodded his head with agreement.

How was it possible? How had this happened? She had used torture, she had killed one of their peers. How was it that these two children were prepared to die for their cause? She had not anticipated such idiocy. For who would choose death over life? Who would choose pain over safety?

“We don’t have time for this!” Delphi all but shrieked with rage.

Scorpius winced, anticipating punishment, but didn't try to run away. Albus looked like he was preparing himself to make a sudden movement, but not one of retreat.

Delphi rose up into the air, full of fury, full of Dark Magic, full of power, ready to perform the Cruciatius Curse on Scorpius Malfoy again. This time she would not stop until he had lost his wits, until he contorted with agony, until Albus Potter begged for mercy…

“Cruc-“

“Expelliarmus!” came a voice from behind them.

Delphi’s wand was pulled from her with a bang. For the first time she appeared truly alarmed.

“Brachiabindo!”

And suddenly, Delphi was dragged back to the ground with a crash, her arms bound tightly. For a moment she struggled, and then she fell still.

As one, Albus and Scorpius turned to the source of the spells…

Behind them was an extremely good looking young man, with grey eyes and light brown hair, wand held aloft.

Scorpius gave a gasp of recognition.

Instinctively they made to approach him, to get to safety, to get away from Delphi, but the boy held up a warning hand.

“Come no further,” the boy commanded.
“But you’re…”

“Cedric Diggory,” the boy announced. “I heard screaming. I had to come. Name yourselves, beasts, I can fight you.”

“Cedric?” Albus repeated, staring at the man with awe.

This was who it had all been for. The future of everything rested on the fate of this boy. The future of everything depended on his death.

This was the boy that his father had watched die. *The spare.*

And he had saved them. He had saved their lives like it was nothing. He had saved their lives and therefore unknowingly ended his own.

“You saved us,” Scorpius announced, sounding utterly overwhelmed.

“Are you also a task?” Cedric asked, raising an eyebrow handsomely with confusion. “An obstacle? Speak. Do I have to defeat you too?”

Neither Albus or Scorpius could believe their luck.

“No,” Scorpius said eagerly, shifting forward helpfully and holding out his bound arms. “You just have to free us. That’s the task.”

Cedric thought on that, clearly trying to figure out if he was being tricked. He stared first at the young (and oddly familiar-looking) blond boy who was gazing at him with barely disguised admiration, and then at his companion, a slightly smaller boy with dark hair and a stunned, disbelieving expression. He was somehow familiar too.

They didn’t look like they were dangerous.

And those snake-like cords around their arms appeared painful…

“Emancipare!” Cedric declared. “Emancipare!”

Immediately the cords binding Albus and Scorpius unravelled, curling neatly into coils on the ground.

The moment Albus’s arms were free he had the strongest urge to throw them around Scorpius and cling on for dear life.

Scorpius, meanwhile, was beaming at Cedric with wonder.

“And now can I go on?” Cedric asked them uncertainly. “Finish the maze?”

The smile dropped from Scorpius’s face in an instant. He turned to Albus with despair.

Albus took a deep breath and then, almost imperceptibly, shook his head. If they let him go now, then they were letting him run gallantly off to his death. At seventeen years old.

But they couldn’t save him from that. Because sometimes being a hero meant making sacrifices. Even if it was painful. Even if the guilt would stay with them for the whole of their lives.

Albus looked at Cedric Diggory and knew in an instant that he would have chosen this for himself, if he’d been able to. Because he was a good person. The sort of boy who had rushed to the aid of a
person who was screaming, even though it might have cost him precious time and all sorts of glory. The sort of boy that had no reason to trust them, and yet had.

They were saving him, really, Albus told himself. They were saving him from a terrible, terrible future. They were saving his memory. His good name. They had to do this. They had to condemn him to an early grave. They had to ensure that Cedric Diggory died a terrifying, sudden, utterly pointless death in mere minutes, leaving a grieving mother and father in his wake, a father who would never recover from the loss.

“I’m afraid you have to finish the maze,” Albus said, as calmly as he could.

Cedric frowned a little, thought about it, and then nodded.

“Then I shall,” he agreed, sounding like some sort of romantic hero on a quest.

He gave them both a courteous nod and then walked confidently away, wand in hand, ready for his next challenge.

“Cedric-“ Albus called out.

Scorpius glanced at him with horror, fearful that Albus was going to try and stop Cedric, to save him. He reached out to touch Albus’s arm, warningly.

Cedric turned back, confused.

“Your dad loves you very much,” Albus blurted out.

Scorpius let out a breath of sadness and relief.

“What?” Cedric asked, frowning.

Albus swallowed hard.

“Just thought you should know that,” Albus said, forcing a smile.

“Okay. Um… thank you,” Cedric responded, seeming baffled but nevertheless pleased.

Cedric loved his father, Albus could tell. He would remember that. He would remember that and tell Amos. If they ever got out of this, he would let Amos know that Cedric had thought of him, in that maze. In what were probably some of his last moments.

Cedric Diggory took one last look at the perplexing, small, dark-haired boy. It was the strangest thing, but from this angle he reminded Cedric a little of Harry Potter…

Another trick of the maze, Cedric told himself. And a trick he would not allow himself to be fooled by.

Cedric nodded his head, full of resolve, and then turned, walking away briskly, ready for whatever lay ahead.

“Albus,” Scorpius said softly, supportive and perhaps even a touch proud.

But Albus turned suddenly on the spot, instantly alert. Something had just moved behind them.

Delphi was crawling, almost snake-like, along the ground, fighting her binds. Already one of her hands was free. She reached into her robes and pulled out the Time-Turner.
“No!” Albus shouted, causing Scorpius to spin suddenly and spot Delphi as well. “Wait…”

“The Time-Turner is spinning… look at what she’s doing!” Scorpius exclaimed. “She can’t leave us behind!”

The boys ran towards her as one, diving to the ground as the Time-Turner began to vibrate in Delphi’s hands. They scrambled to catch a portion of the golden chain…

A sudden whoosh of light, a smash of noise. The world began to change around them, time spooling backwards, turning over, and then coming to a sharp stop.

The maze was gone. They were back on the Quidditch pitch. All three of them, assembled awkwardly around the device.

Delphi was injured, still unable to move with ease. She looked like she was fighting to remain conscious.

“Albus…” Scorpius breathed out, raising his head.

“What have we done?” Albus asked aloud, blinking at their surroundings. Hogwarts was still there, but this was not the same time they had left from. Here it was dawn. The world was bathed in blue, early morning light. What had Delphi done?

“We had to go with the Time-Turner. We had to try to stop her,” Scorpius said, as though reassuring himself they had made the right choice.

Delphi’s eyes opened at those words. They were full of pain, and yet full of fury. In a sudden, shocking movement she got to her feet, yanking the Time-Turner from their hands.

“Stop me?” Delphi shrieked. “How do you think you’ve stopped me? I am done with this. You may have destroyed my chances of using Cedric to darken the world but maybe you’re right Scorpius - maybe prophecies can be prevented, maybe prophecies can be broken.”

Scorpius made an awful noise of realisation. Albus got quickly between Scorpius and Delphi, just in case she wanted to try and Crucio him again.

“What is undoubtedly true is I’m done with trying to use you annoying, incompetent creatures for anything. No more wasting precious seconds on either of you. Time to try something new.”

Delphi glanced down at the Time-Turner in her hand. For one horrible moment, Albus was convinced she was going to try and travel back again…

But worse than that, she dropped the Time-Turner to the ground and then stamped hard on it with her shoe. It exploded into a thousand pieces with a terrible crunch, fragments of gold and glass and sand scattering across the grass.

Scorpius stared down at it with horror, blinking. Albus was rather more concerned with the fact that suddenly, Delphi began to ascend, yet again without a broom.

From above, Delphi began to laugh. It was a terrible, unnatural sound. Looking delighted, she began to set off, floating through the air like it was nothing, like it took no effort at all.

Albus grabbed Scorpius by the arm to get his attention, and together the boys ran hard after her, trying to chase her, to stop her, to do something.
But it was no use. Delphi flew higher and higher, faster and faster. There was no way to catch her on foot. Not even the slightest chance.

“No… no…” Albus panted, still sprinting forward despite the fact Scorpius had given up. “You can’t…"

Albus watched with dismay as Delphi rose up and over the mountains, moving further and further away until she'd disappeared entirely from view, obscured by mist.

Overwhelmed and furious at being beaten, Albus gave the grass a kick. As he did so, he managed to hurt his foot, causing him to swear under his breath.

Feeling sick, he limped back to Scorpius, who was on all fours on the ground, apparently trying to recover the Time-Turner pieces.

“The Time-Turner? It’s destroyed?” Albus asked, already knowing the answer.

Scorpius took a moment to compose himself, and then sat up on his heels, turning to Albus.

“Utterly,” he agreed, determined not to burst out crying. “We’re stuck here. In time. Wherever in time we are. Whatever it is she’s planning to do.”

Okay, that was not good. In fact, that sounded pretty awful.

“Hogwarts looks the same,” Albus pointed out, nodding hopefully at the castle.

For some reason, that didn’t seem to comfort Scorpius in the slightest. It only made him frown with thought.

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, getting to his feet. “And we can’t be seen here. Let’s get out of here before we’re spotted.”

Albus could barely think, he was so stressed. How had this happened? How had Delphi got away? How had they let her?

“We need to stop her, Scorpius,” Albus said, breathing heavily.

Scorpius closed his eyes for a moment. When he opened them again, he seemed a great deal more composed.

“I know we do,” he agreed, wandering over to Albus and taking him by the arm. “But how?”

Chapter End Notes

The boys are brave little sausages. And oh my lord they are FOURTEEN! This is too much for them!

Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this!

Please do leave me a comment! I love getting your comments sooooo much!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Act Three: Scene Twenty-One

Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy!

And please leave me a comment if you can!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Following their dealings with Amos Diggory, Draco had expected Harry to try and get rid of him at the soonest possible opportunity. That sort of embarrassment, Draco knew at first hand, was uncomfortable to deal with by oneself, let alone in the company of others. Had the tables been turned Draco knew he would have found it hard to keep Potter in his company.

But it seemed Potter had more good sense than Draco had given him credit for. He clearly understood that as a father he would not give up his search, and nor would he leave the fate of his son in the hands of others. He did not ask Draco to leave, nor even to give him some space. Instead, he ran a stressed-out hand through his messy hair, took a deep breath, and then went straight into Auror-mode, right before Draco’s fascinated eyes.

Amos could be heard weeping in his bedroom, but both men pretended they couldn't hear.

“Information,” Harry declared, to no one in particular. “We need everything on this Delphini character. Everything we can get.”

“Reception will have staff records, I assume,” Draco pointed out.

Harry gave a nod of his head and chose not to snap at Draco that he was the Head of Magical Law Enforcement and he did know how to do his job.

Harry and Draco raced back down to reception, full of purpose, to where the witch behind the front desk was looking nervous and confused.

“Is everything all right?” the woman asked as the two men stormed towards her. “Is Amos in any trouble?”

“Delphini Diggory, what do you know of her?” Draco asked bluntly.

The witch looked startled by the question.

“I… is that a relative of Amos’s? I’m afraid Amos doesn’t get many visitors. Would you like me to make enquiries for you?”

Draco took a deep breath.

“No, thank you,” Harry said quickly, giving Draco a significant look which meant: please, be polite. “I’ll need a list of your staff here.”
“Of course, Mr Potter, but what-“

“Have you seen a young woman with silver hair?” Draco demanded, placing his hands down on the desk authoritatively. “She’s apparently difficult to miss.”

The secretary frowned and shook her head.

“No, I’m sorry. Should I have?”

The witch gave a wave of her wand and beside her, a piece of parchment appeared with a list of names scrawled on it in neat lines. She handed it to Harry helpfully.

Harry scanned the list, looking for names he recognised.

“Who’s been caring for Amos Diggory?” Harry asked.

“A nurse,” the woman answered easily, as though that was an adequate response to the question.

“A nurse?” Draco repeated incredulously. “That truly narrows it down. And does this nurse have a name?”

The woman looked horribly blank. She shook her head with confusion.

“Surely you have her on record? Do you not keep documentation of your staff?” Draco demanded.

“What sort of an establishment is this?”

“I… there was someone… I…I’m sure I did know…”

Harry looked over at Draco with knowing. He handed the list over so that Draco could take a look for himself (and to distract him from making the woman feel even more distressed than she already did). Draco instantly began searching for any names he knew were associated with old Death Eater families, for the family friends of his childhood. He knew of them all, off by heart. He had grown up surrounded by supporters and practitioners of Dark Magic, and in this moment it seemed like a help rather than a hinderance.

The woman sank down into her desk chair, and Harry ran a hand through his hair, doing his best not to panic. Ginny would have told him not to jump to the worst conclusion, but even taking everything into consideration, this didn’t look good.

Amos Diggory carrying out some sort of revenge mission would have been bad enough, enough to make Harry lose about ten years of his life to stress, but to find out that Amos Diggory had been manipulated by someone else? That he had been used as a pawn in what looked to be a deeper and far more sinister plot?

It was too much like every nightmare Harry had ever had about his son. It frightened him, truly.

“What do you remember?” Harry asked the woman, as politely as he could. “Anything at all could help us.”

“I… oh my goodness, I can’t… I can’t for the life of me…”

“Anything,” Harry repeated, feeling his stomach lurch. “Please, if you can try then we’ll be very grateful.”

“I’m sorry Mr Potter,” the woman stammered out, looking deeply upset. “I… I don’t know what to tell you… I don’t know what to say… I don’t… I don’t remember anything… there are gaps and
I… how didn’t I notice them? None of it makes… oh my goodness I don’t understand…”

Harry looked up at Draco grimly, patting the woman comfortingly on the back as he did so.

“She’s wiped her memory?” Draco asked, glancing up from the list with alarm.

“More likely she’s used the Confundus Charm,” Harry answered quietly. Draco raised his eyebrows at that.

Harry patted the woman on the back again. It had never been his forte, comforting the victims of magical crimes. He was far better with rooting out the source than sorting out the difficult aftermath.

“You’re going to be all right,” he reassured her. “I’m going to need to search the place. Can I see your records? Do you have a floor plan? Accommodation records?”

“Yes, of course…”

The woman waved her wand again and summoned another piece of parchment. She handed it to Harry.

There were storage areas, Healing rooms, a kitchen, and a room for laundry. On the upper levels of the building were identical tiny square rooms on which were written either the name of the patient or staff member currently inhabiting them. All except for one…

“Room number forty two on the top floor. Whose is that?”

The woman glanced over at the floor plan over Harry’s arm and then smiled, seemingly with recollection as she spotted the room. She looked relieved to be able to answer a question for Harry Potter.

“We keep that one empty,” she declared, nodding.

“Why?” Draco asked, frowning.

The smile fell from the woman’s face yet again. She began to look perturbed as it dawned on her that she did not know.

“I… you know, I’m really not quite sure…I did know… I’m sure there was some reason…”

“Miss…” Harry consulted her name badge. “Bryant. Please try not to be alarmed but we think you may have been the victim of a Confundus Charm.”

She stared at him with horror.

“We’ll need to ask you a few questions, and then you can go to St Mungo’s to be checked over.”

“But I feel… I feel fine…”

“I’m sure you are fine. But it’s just a precaution. I’m going to get one of my Aurors to speak with you.”

"And nobody leaves," Draco added sharply. "Nobody leaves this building until we're done."

"Please wait here," Harry said professionally. "And thank you - for your time."
Harry gave the woman a nod and left her at her desk. He didn’t want to let his guard down in front of her. One of the first things he’d learned as an Auror was that you never let on that you were panicking.

Draco followed Harry down the corridor until they were ought of the secretary’s line of sight. It was only as they made their way up the stairs to the top floor, away from the prying ears of the elderly witches and wizards on the lower levels that he decided to speak.

“You’re sure it’s Confundus?” Draco asked. “Not the Imperious Curse?”

“No, it looks like Confundus to me. She’s confused, not entirely unaware. And if she’s so skilled at the Imperious Curse, why would Delphini have been seen on the roof with the boys? She could easily have had someone else take her place. My instinct is that she’s not controlling them - Amos and Miss Bryant. She’s messing with their minds. Just enough to make them think this all makes sense.”

“And are we thinking she’s still here?”

“I doubt it, but she could be,” Harry said. “The Confundus is wearing off already, which either means she's forgotten about it - unlikely, or it hasn't been topped up. She may not have been back here since Ron saw her last night.”

Draco let out a noise of frustration.

"There might be an accomplice," Harry pointed out. "Belongings. Anything that could lead us to them. There'll be something. And if not, we'll find her some other way.”

“She’ll be long gone,” Draco declared grimly. “If she’s capable enough to have carried out all this for as long as you say, then we'll be too late.”

“Unless she wants recognition,” Harry said.

Draco raised an eyebrow.

“You’d be surprised how many enjoy that. They like to be found. It gives them a kick. It might be that we’re supposed to find her. That could be another reason for the Confundus not being renewed.”

“Well, I hope for her sake that she isn’t waiting for us,” Draco declared darkly. "Because I warn you, Potter, if she’s done anything to my son then I’ll-“

“Help me question her and take her into Ministry custody,” Harry finished for him swiftly, before he was forced to banish Draco from the scene via Law Enforcement guidelines.

Room forty two looked just like all the others, situated in the centre of the upstairs hall, surrounded by other staff bedrooms. It didn’t seem to be in any way suspicious, but as Harry had learned long ago, looks could be deceiving. Some of his worst cases in recent years had taken place in the most mundane of settings.

“Right then, follow my lead,” said Harry, taking a deep breath and non-verbally unlocking the door.

“I think I know how to handle myself, Potter,” Draco shot back.

They burst into the room, wands raised… only to find the room almost entirely empty. It was a
small nurse’s quarters, with oak panelling on the walls, a single bed in the centre of the room, along with a small wardrobe, an open, empty trunk, and a bedside table complete with old-fashioned oil lamp. There was nothing at all out of the ordinary about it. In fact, it looked surprisingly generic.

Harry immediately noticed that there were no personal items, no photographs, no trinkets, not even so much as a used coffee cup on the side. Whoever had lived in this room had clearly not planned to stay long, or worse, had already long gone, taking everything of importance with them.

“She’s gone,” Draco said, unnecessarily, sounding furious. He stalked over to the wardrobe and pulled open the doors dramatically. Inside were a few wooden hangers and nothing more.

“She’s gone, Potter. Long gone. Look at this room! Nobody is living here! It’s like a hotel room. What is the meaning of this? Is she still with them? Does she have my son?”

“No idea,” Harry admitted, looking grim. “But we’re going to find out.”

“Expecto Patronum!” Harry incanted, and once again a silver stag burst from his wand.

“Ministry of Magic, Hermione Granger’s office,” Harry commanded it. “The following: Check all records for Delphini Diggory. Send Aurors. Meet us here as soon as possible. Room forty two, St Oswald’s.”

The stag appeared to drift, listening to the message, and then with a bow of its majestic antlered head, it disappeared.

Draco watched it go with jealousy. In all his years he had never managed to conjure a corporeal Patronus. Only Astoria had ever known that about him. The best Draco had ever managed to produce had been a thin wisp of silver, which seemed to take no form whatsoever.

In what could only have been minutes (which were filled by an uncomfortable, furious, and distinctly anxious silence), Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, and Ginny Potter charged into the room.

Ron looked rather green, which meant the three of them had probably Apparated somewhere nearby.

“What is it, Harry?” Ginny asked, looking red in the face, and like she’d been crying. “Have you found something?”

Hermione put a hand on her back, supportively, as they all turned to him, wanting to hear his assessment of the situation.

“You’ve brought Aurors?” Harry asked.

“Of course,” Hermione agreed instantly. “They’re downstairs checking the building for enchantments, questioning the staff. I’ve already ordered a search for a woman of this Delphini’s description.”

“Harry?” Ginny asked again, quietly.

“Delphini Diggory is not who she seemed,” Harry said, wondering where to begin. “This is her room-“

Draco cut over him impatiently.
“Amos had no brothers or sisters. We spoke to him ourselves. He was adamant. He had no recollection of her whatsoever. According to him, she doesn’t exist.”

“But she’s been his carer for a fair bit,” Ron pointed out. “You don’t think he was lying for her?”

“No,” Harry admitted. “No, I think Amos was telling the truth.”

Draco nodded his head with agreement.

“But then how—” Ron asked.

“It must have been a Confundus Charm she used on him,” Harry said grimly. “Used on them all. She faked being a nurse. She faked being his niece.”

A horrible silence fell in the room.

“I’ve just checked in with the Ministry,” said Hermione, looking nervous. “But there’s no record of her. She’s a shadow.”

It was all very well, Draco thought, checking records and examining floor plans, but sometimes one simply had to act.

“Specialis Revelio!” Draco declared suddenly with a flourish of his wand.

In a rather humiliating moment, everyone turned to look at him, and absolutely nothing happened. No spell or enchantment was revealed.

“Well, it was worth a try,” Draco snapped, stalking restlessly about the room. “What are you waiting for? We know nothing, so we just have to hope this room reveals something.”

“Where can she have hidden anything?” Ginny asked, looking around them doubtfully. “It’s quite a spartan room.”

Ron wandered up to the oak panels on the walls and tapped on them, tongue between his teeth with concentration. Draco hated to admit it, but he did look like he knew what he was doing. He supposed Ronald Weasley’s two years as an Auror had not been entirely misspent.

“These panels,” Ron said, tapping once again. “These panels must conceal something.”

Draco considered where he might hide something in this tiny room. At Hogwarts, he had stored his letters from his mother underneath his mattress, so that the other students wouldn’t discover that he liked to keep them.

“But the bed,” Draco said, moving towards it. He got down on his knees and peered underneath the bed, ignoring the dust. There was nothing there but a spider. Draco crawled back out from under it and began to turn over the mattress. To his surprise, Harry moved to help him, so they could share the weight.

With a deep breath, Ginny Potter tied back her red hair and appeared to dive into action. She spotted the old-fashioned oil lamp on the bedside table and decided to examine it.

“What you hiding?” Ron shouted, hammering on the next set of panels. “What you got?”

Hermione moved into the centre of the room, watching this frantic search with concern. Nobody would find anything at all this way, she thought. What they needed was a plan of action. An appropriate order of proceedings so nothing was missed. She cleared her throat to try and attract
their attention.

“Maybe we should all stop for a moment and have a think about what-“

At that exact moment, Ginny unscrewed the chimney of the oil-lamp and the sound of a loud, exhaled breath echoed around the room.

It had not come from any of them.

Staring at the lamp with confusion, Ginny placed it down on the bedside table and took a step back.

Hissing filled the room, a horrible snake-like noise.

“What was that?” Ginny asked aloud.

Everyone turned towards the lamp. Ron took an instinctive step in front of Hermione and then turned to Harry with concern.

Harry was wearing an expression of bleak shock. Clearly he had heard such a noise before. Draco recognised it too. It reminded him of times he would rather forget…

“That’s - I’m not supposed to be understanding - that’s Parseltongue,” Harry admitted, looking dazed.

“And what does it say?” Hermione asked in a voice of forced calm.

Harry put a hand to his head looking greatly distressed.

“How do I…? I haven’t been able to understand Parseltongue since Voldemort died.”

“And nor has your scar hurt,” Hermione pointed out.

Harry took a look at Ron, who gave him an encouraging nod.

“It says ‘welcome Augurey’,” Harry translated, frowning. “I think I need to tell it to open…”

“Then do it!” Draco snapped.

Harry closed his eyes and commanded the room to open.

To the others, the noise that emitted from Harry's mouth sounded like an almost comical hiss. Ron put his arm protectively around Hermione’s shoulders, and Ginny watched her husband intently. The sound seemed to disturb her.

As Harry spoke, the room began to transform around them. Immediately it became darker, larger, and more desperate. The furnishings became more ornate, all dark wood and grand carvings.

It was changing into a room Draco might well have had in his own Manor.

The walls began to writhe as painted snakes appeared on them, each complete with small glinting eyes. They were intricately patterned… no, not patterned. Letters were beginning to emerge on the painted scales of the snakes, becoming larger and clearer with every passing second.

Harry opened his eyes and let out a groan at what he saw. Ginny went instantly to his side.
“What is this?” Harry asked, looking jumpy.

Draco was alarmed by the fear on show. Harry Potter ought not to have looked so startled. It simply wasn’t how things were supposed to be.

Ron moved tentatively closer to the painted snakes, seemingly feeling it was his responsibility now Harry wasn’t quite himself. They were writhing into odd positions, now, the letters on their backs forming words…

“When spares are spared, when time is turned, when unseen children murder their fathers: then will the Dark Lord return,” Ron read out.

Draco felt cold horror creep down his spine.


Only Hermione Granger remained calm. She took a deep breath and thought.

“Cedric,” she said. “Cedric was called a spare.”

“When time is turned…” Ron repeated, frowning.

He looked at Hermione with sudden horrified understanding.

“She has that Time-Turner, doesn’t she?” Ron said.

Nobody answered him for a moment. Harry was now sitting on the bed in the centre of the room, truly shaken. Ginny stood by his side with her hands on his shoulders.

“She must do,” Hermione confirmed, when she felt able to speak again.

“But why does she need Scorpius or Albus?” Ron asked.

“Because I’m a parent - who hasn’t seen his child,” Harry answered, in a quiet voice. “Hasn’t understood his child.”

Ginny rubbed her husband’s shoulders in support.

Draco had no time for such sentiment. Not when his boy was in danger. After all, he had no such luxury. He had no wife to take his hand and tell him all would be well. In that room, with Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Ginny Potter, and Harry Potter, Draco felt suddenly and startlingly alone.

“Who is she?” Draco burst out in frustration. “To be obsessed with all this.”

Ginny looked up at the ceiling and seemed to freeze with her neck craned oddly backwards.

“I think I’ve got the answer to that,” she said grimly.

With all eyes on her, Ginny pointed up.

Every face sank with fear as they followed her freckled arm towards the source of her distress.

On the ceiling were more words. They were carved determinedly and violently into the surface by what must have been a bewitched knife.
‘I will rebirth the Dark. I will bring my father back.’

“No. She can’t…” Ron stammered. He turned to Harry for reassurance but found none.

“How is it even - possible?” Hermione demanded, fighting to remain logical, even now.

Draco felt the world spinning around him, out of his control. If those words were true, if they meant what they appeared to, then his son was in danger. Real danger. Draco feared for Scorpius’s life.

“Voldemort had a daughter?” Draco breathed out, frowning. He hoped desperately that somebody might contradict him. He would even have been pleased to have Hermione Granger point out his mistake in that moment.

But nobody answered him and the words were left to settle terribly in the air about them.

Finally, Harry got to his feet. He stared up at the ceiling with horror, lips parted with distress.

“No, no, no,” he muttered.

Ginny took Harry’s hand and rested her head against his arm, eyes closed.

“Anything but that.”

Chapter End Notes

I have this craving for a cop drama about Harry and Draco. The reluctant partners in solving-crime.

WE HAVE REACHED THE END OF PART THREE! HOORAY!

Anyway, thank you for all your lovely comments! And please do keep them coming! Every one is SO appreciated!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
A student was dead and Hogwarts was in a state of shock.

Minerva McGonagall had endured one of the most stressful and upsetting days in her considerable time as Hogwarts Headmistress. Not since the war, all those years ago, had she felt so very disquieted.

In the early hours of the morning Minerva had been called away from her search of the school for Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy, to the Quidditch pitch, where Professor Longbottom had apparently spotted the ominous sight of what appeared to be a student lying unconscious.

Minerva had not expected it to be Craig. Her fear was that it would be one of the missing boys, and that she would have to contact either Draco Malfoy or Harry Potter to break the appalling news. Never had she imagined that the unconscious student might not have been unconscious, but rather, dead.

And yet dead Craig Bowker Jr most definitely was. Minerva recognised the signs of a Killing Curse the moment she got close enough to see the way the poor boy was frozen in a moment of confused shock, his eyes still half open.

At the very least his death had been instant, Minerva told herself, as she resisted the urge to cry (after all, as Headmistress of Hogwarts she did not have the luxury of tears). It would have been sudden and painless. Craig may not have suffered.

Minerva had sent for Madam Pomfrey nevertheless, but it had been far too late for Poppy Pomfrey to intervene. Neville Longbottom, who had been the one to spot Craig on his way back from a well-deserved night in Hogsmeade, leaned down gravely to close the boy’s eyes.

“We’ll have no panic,” Minerva had instructed her two companions. “The safety of the children is imperative. I need you to remain calm.”

But even as she had given out her instructions, Minerva had been fighting back tears.

She had sent Craig out to search. She had allowed Craig to accompany her that evening. Instead of sending him to bed, she had been glad to have Craig Bowker Jr at her side, funny, pompous, overly formal boy that he was.

Minerva had been planning on making him a Slytherin prefect. Perhaps even Head Boy, in time. She had always held a soft spot in her heart for Craig. He had been a well-meaning if rather infuriating presence around the school, always willing to lend a hand, perhaps a little too prepared...
to drop his fellow students in it when they broke the rules. Minerva had seen some of her own conscientious streak in Craig, in his determination to do things well and thoroughly.

Neville Longbottom, who looked rather worse for wear, had volunteered to go directly to Gryffindor tower to guard the children. Minerva had taken up his offer with appreciation. Poppy Pomfrey had volunteered the hospital wing as a place to house Craig’s body for the time being, through her horrified sobs.

The remaining professors had been sent for, the Prefects woken and asked to guard the doors of their common rooms in the meantime. Instructions had been issued to all levels of staff at the school. Not one adult in the castle was left to sleep. All were needed to protect the children.

Minerva had not planned on ever having to organise the aftermath of such a crisis and yet if she had to, she was determined to do things properly. It was in moments such as this that a tone was set, and if she led with panic, chaos would follow.

Craig’s body had been levitated to the hospital wing in terrible silence. He had been placed in a cordoned off bed, screens erected all around to shield any other injured or unwell students from the sight of their dead peer.

A patrol had begun, with professors and staff members wandering the school perimeter in groups, guarding against any outside threat. The Ministry had been contacted immediately, as protocol dictated.

Minerva would have felt far more useful joining her colleagues in this silent act of defence, but as Headmistress, it had fallen to her to take the worst job of all: contacting Mr Bowker Sr, Craig’s beloved father.

Minerva had had dealings with Mr Bowker before, following the break up of his marriage and the subsequent impact on Craig. He was a Muggle, whose wife had run off to America (of all places) with another man, leaving him to bring Craig up alone. Minerva thought that he had done a smashing job. He was a shining example of a Muggle who had stood by his wizard son through thick and thin. Despite not understanding their world entirely, he had been a constant support, learning to exchange owls, doing his best to keep abreast of important examinations. He had even once visited Minerva personally to discuss Craig’s future career options, and how he might best excel in the wizarding world.

He reminded Minerva a little of her own Muggle father, whom she had dearly loved.

Mr Bowker had arrived early in the morning, before the students awoke, looking just as smart as Craig, with shined shoes and a Muggle suit.

Having to break the news of his son’s death to Mr Bowker had been one of the worst experiences of Minerva’s life. The poor man, usually so very upright and restrained, had broken down entirely at the sight of Craig’s body, and Poppy Pomfrey had ushered him off to give him something for the stress.

It hadn’t seemed right to give the man the formal speech Minerva had been planning, and so instead she had ended up doing her best to describe the speed of the Killing Curse and apologising profusely, although for what, she wasn’t quite sure. Mr Bowker had then been given a hospital bed of his own, so that he might calm down. Quarters were being prepared for him so that he could stay at the school with his son’s body until permission was given to move it elsewhere.

Dumbledore would have known how best to deal with this, Minerva thought. He would have been
a reassuring and yet authoritative presence. But Minerva felt horribly out of her depth.

The Ministry would need a statement, and so would the Prophet. An enquiry into safety at the school would no doubt take place. The professors would be questioned. The death of a student was a terrible thing, and Minerva herself would have to face the consequences of such an event happening under her leadership of the school. She understood well enough that she may well be forced out of her role as Headmistress, although the thought brought her pain.

The students would need to be informed at some point. It hadn’t felt right to wake the children, but the hour was coming when Minerva would have to gather her students in the Great Hall and explain to them that one of their peers was dead.

And then there was the equally disturbing, and perhaps rather more pressing problem. That two more of her fourth year students, Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy had still not been found. The search of the school had been fruitless. Minerva’s biggest fear, following Craig’s death, was that two more bodies might be recovered. She wasn’t sure her heart could take the strain.

McGonagall had been sitting in her office, about to contact the Potters and Draco Malfoy directly, informing them of the results of the search, when a familiar silver stag Patronus burst into the room. It opened its mouth and spoke with the voice of Harry Potter.

“Professor McGonagall, Hermione is holding an Extraordinary General Meeting tomorrow. She hopes you will attend. We have heard reports of a death at the school. Aurors are being sent as we speak to investigate. Please do not make any statements until the Ministry gives you clearance. We fear that this may be linked to the disappearance of my son. I will send details as and when I get them. Please know that Hermione is doing all she can to defend your position. Do not speak to the Prophet. Secure the school. I apologise for not coming to see you myself.”

Harry’s voice disappeared and the stag dissolved into nothing.

Defend her position? Minerva frowned with disbelief. Never had she felt so very enraged with her own former students. Was that all the message she was to be gifted? After the death of a student?

She cast her own Patronus with a flick of her wand and a cat began to pad about the room on its toes.

“The following, to Harry Potter, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement:”

McGonagall snapped. “There has been a death at my school and the Head of Magical Law Enforcement is not coming here in person? Pray tell, what is more important than this? Do I need to send my students home? Are they safe?”

In moments, the cat had stalked off, but less than a minute after, the stag returned again.

“Keep the students in the school. I am busy sorting things at my end. You will understand more tomorrow. I appreciate your concern but please follow Ministry instruction on this. Minerva, this is worse than we imagined. Please trust me. We need to keep the students safe.”

“Expecto Patronum!” Minerva declared once again.

“The following, to Harry Potter, Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement: Understood.”

As her cat Patronus stalked off for a second time, Minerva sat back at her desk chair, lips pursed in a thin line, and looked up at the portraits surrounding her. Most were snoozing in their frames, but not all.
Professor Dumbledore was watching her with his kind, blue eyes.

Minerva wondered how long he had been surveying her for.

“Albus?” Minerva asked, turning in her chair to face him. “Are you aware of what’s happening?”

“I have visited my portrait down in the hospital wing, my dear Minerva. I am well aware.”

Just to hear that soft voice was a small comfort. Minerva was skeptical when it came to the idea of talking to her portraits, who were, after all, mere echoes of the men and women they portrayed, but in that moment, she was glad of the company.

“A student dead, Albus,” Minerva breathed out. “In our school. I can’t believe it. I thought that… after all we went through. After the war, that this would be over. Never again did I imagine having to—”

“You are doing all that you can,” Dumbledore said gently. “We cannot know what is to come, but we may face it with grace when it arrives.”

McGonagall gave a huff. Dumbledore had always been unfailingly poetic in his speech. Minerva preferred things to be simple and to the point. She had never been one for poetry.

“I’m not sure I am the best at providing grace at a time such as this, Albus,” she admitted, fixing her glasses on her nose.

“Minerva, if I might be so bold, you are a most brilliant woman to have at one’s side in a time of crisis. The way you have served this school thus far has been admirable. I freely admit, you put me to shame.”

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” McGonagall said, waving the words away, touched. “I try my best to follow your example, but sometimes I feel that I’m… that I’ve failed. First what happened with Potter and the young Malfoy. Now this.”

“My example?” Dumbledore asked with a twinkle in his eye. “Minerva, you flatter me. But it is I who take heart in watching your leadership. The progress you have achieved in such a small space of time. Not to mention that the administrative documents were never so well organised in my day.”

Minerva ignored what she supposed was one of Albus’s little jokes. This was no time for merriment.

“Do you truly believe the students respect me? The way they did you?” she asked.

“Believe it? I know it, Minerva. And I daresay young Mr Bowker thought a great deal of you.”

A single tear trickled down Minerva’s cheek.

“He was a good boy, Albus. Truly. A fine boy.”

“I do not doubt it,” Dumbledore agreed peaceably. “But now, you have the rest of your students to attend to. All of which will be looking to you for comfort, for reassurance.”

Minerva took a deep breath.

“Are they safe, Albus?”
“Ah, that I could not tell you. And if I may speak plainly, dear Minerva, you do not set much store in the words of a portrait, I believe. Which is just another sign of your wisdom. Thus my thoughts on the matter would not be of much use.”

“It was you who told me you are paint and memory,” Minerva pointed out, dabbing at her eyes.

“Indeed.”

“However I do value your advice,” Minerva admitted. “Even if I’m well aware that you are not truly the man I knew.”

Dumbledore nodded gravely.

“Sensible as always,” Dumbledore agreed. “It is prudent to think for oneself and not become absorbed in the opinions of others. Least of all those who are but echoes of their former selves.”

“I had to speak with his father earlier,” Minerva said. “That poor man. To lose a child, and in such a senseless way…”

“A pain I expect we cannot fully comprehend,” Dumbledore remarked sadly. “For which in some ways we should be thankful.”

“Potter and Malfoy are missing. The boys, I mean. Not their fathers. Oh Albus, what if they’re dead? Harry seems to think Craig’s death and their disappearance are related in some way.”

Dumbledore thought on that for a long moment. He bowed his head.

“It’s very possible.”

“I couldn’t bear to tell them… I couldn’t bear to tell more parents. Not Harry. And not poor Draco Malfoy.”

“You have grown fond of Draco?” Dumbledore asked with interest.

“He is… not the boy he once was. I admit he was not given the best start…”

“No, indeed,” Dumbledore agreed with great pride. “And his son does him great credit. The world is full of second chances, Minerva. It is a strange and beautiful thing, that one can atone for their early mistakes, and yet a curse, I think, that one never can see such a change in oneself. It is an eternal quest, to right one’s wrongs.”

Minerva wondered if that was Dumbledore's tactful way of implying she held some responsibility for all of this.

“Have I been lax, Albus? Perhaps this is through some oversight on my behalf?”

“Darkness will always find a way to reach the light,” Dumbledore answered peaceably. “No matter what walls we may put up. This, Minerva, was inevitable. And you are not to blame.”

“I don’t think many will share that opinion. They may well fire me for this, Albus,” Minerva said bluntly. “I am sure there’ll be an enquiry.”

“Ah, well, everything must end,” Dumbledore responded vaguely, already beginning to wander off, as though distracted by something just beyond his frame. “Just as this conversation is drawing to a close. I wish you well, Minerva. And know that I have complete faith in you, always.”
“I… thank you, Albus. That means a great deal.”

With a nod of his head, Dumbledore disappeared.

Minerva dabbed once again at her eyes. To speak with her mentor, with her old friend, had been a great relief. She missed Albus Dumbledore dearly.

“Don’t listen to that old coot,” came the sudden incensed voice of Phineas Nigellus, who was now watching from his own portrait, apparently wide awake. “Paint and memory indeed! He might be out of his mind, but the rest of us can think perfectly clearly! You mustn’t let the Ministry force you out. It’s beneath the dignity of a Headmistress of Hogwarts to take orders from that over-egged organisation! What that eccentric fool fails to realise is-

“Thank you, Phineas,” McGonagall interrupted him sternly, returning instantly to the fierce Headmistress of Hogwarts she had been before Albus's words. In fact, she felt quite recovered. Stronger, somehow. “But perhaps in future you might keep your opinions to yourself unless asked? You are here to advise me. Not comment on personal conversations.”

“You Gryffindors are all the same,” Phineas declared with great animosity.

"Do not force me to put up a curtain, Phineas," McGonagall declared, raising an eyebrow. "Because I warn you, I will."

Bright red with outrage, Phineas Nigellus stormed sulkily out of his portrait.

From somewhere, Minerva found the tiniest of smiles.

Chapter End Notes

Minerva McGonagall is one of my favourites. I love her.

The reason I made this a chapter is that I thought we ought to see the impact on Hogwarts and how, you know, actually horrifying it is that a student got killed. In the script we move about a day or so forward and miss that.

I hope you enjoyed!

If you did then please leave me a comment!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Minerva arrived punctually, as always, for the Extraordinary General Meeting. She was surprised by the sheer amount of witches and wizards who had arrived at the Ministry to hear the Minister give her latest speech. Never had she seen so many people try to fit into the Grand Meeting Room.

As Headmistress of Hogwarts, Minerva had been assigned a seat in the second row, alongside the high-up Ministry workers and several reporters from the Prophet. As she walked to her seat, Minerva was very aware of whispers about a dead student at Hogwarts. She put on her best no-nonsense face and hoped it would spare her being asked direct questions. Minerva was nothing if not true to her word, and she had assured the Ministry that she would make no formal statements about the death of Craig Bowker Jr.

A hastily made stage had been assembled at the front of the room and on it stood Harry Potter, looking grim and uncomfortable, wearing a waistcoat and blazer, although with a rather scruffy loose tie. He kept on looking to his right and then staring out at the sheer amount of people crammed into the room, ready to listen to the Minister, and Head of Magical Law Enforcement, comment on the latest rumours.

Standing at the edge of the stage, at a lower level, were Ginny Potter and Ronald Weasley, apparently there in support of their spouses. Minerva recognised them immediately. The Weasley red hair was hard to miss.

Hermione Granger walked onto the stage from the right (much to Harry’s relief) and stood in the centre of the platform. Harry remained at her right hand side, a step or two back.

The Minister raised her hand, appealing for silence, and appeared surprised by the instant obedience of the room. Many witches and wizards leaned forwards in their seats, eager to hear what was said.

“Thank you,” Hermione began. “I’m so pleased so many of you were able to make my - second-Extraordinary General Meeting. I’ve got some things to say - I ask that we deal with questions - and there will be a lot of questions - after I speak.”

Beside Minerva, journalists were were holding pieces of parchment, on which enchanted quills were already scribbling down every word that left the Minister’s mouth.

“As many of you know, a body has been found at Hogwarts. His name was Craig Bowker. He was a good boy.”

A collective gasp went up around the room. Many heads turned to Minerva, who refused to look anywhere but at the Minister.
“We have no firm information who was responsible for the act but yesterday we searched St Oswald’s. A room there revealed two things: one, a prophecy that promised… the return of darkness - two, written on the ceiling, a proclamation - that the Dark Lord had a - that Voldemort had a child.”

Minerva’s knuckles were white on the arms of her chair.

“We don’t know the full details,” Hermione continued swiftly, before the room could descend into panic. “We’re only just investigating - questioning those with a Death Eater connections… and as yet no record has been found either of the child or of the prophecy, but, it does look like there’s some truth to it. This child was kept hidden from the wizarding world, and now she’s - well now she’s-”

“She?” Professor McGonagall suddenly burst out, unable to hold back her horror any longer. “A daughter? He had a daughter?”

“Yes,” Hermione confirmed. “A daughter.”

“And is she now in custody?” Minerva demanded, straightening her hat with distress. Several other nearby witches and wizards made noises of agreement.

From the back of the stage, Harry Potter sighed. He took a few steps forward and gave Minerva an apologetic look.

“Professor,” he said politely. “She did ask for no questions.”

Minerva raised her eyebrows to the heavens. After such appalling and almost unbelievable news did they truly expect their audience to remain silent?

How was it even possible? The very thought was repulsive. The practicalities of such a suggestion alone were beyond belief.

“It’s fine, Harry,” Hermione said, smiling at him gratefully. Harry took a step back.

“No, Professor, that’s where this gets worse. I’m afraid we’ve no means of taking her into custody. Or indeed, stopping her doing anything. She’s out of our reach.”

“We can’t - look for her?” Minerva repeated with disbelief.

Hermione took a deep breath and steeled herself to be honest. This was the part she’d most been dreading. Hermione looked for Ron, who was standing at the side of the stage. He nodded at his wife encouragingly and gave her a thumbs up.

“We have good reason to believe she’s hidden herself - in time,” Hermione revealed.

Another collective gasp went up. At once almost every witch or wizard in the room began to make exclamations of horror or disbelief.

Minerva could truly have fainted with the shock. That a former pupil of hers could have allowed such a thing to happen was mortifying. And Hermione Granger, of all people! Minerva respected Hermione Granger a great deal, but this? This was an unforgivable lack of oversight.

“Of all the reckless stupid things!” she burst out, looking ready to combust with incredulity.

“You’ve kept the Time-Turner even now?”
“Professor, I assure you—” Hermione began, but the room was too loud. Hermione’s voice was drowned out by outraged voices. Several wizards shook their fists. One little witch at the back of the hall let out a long moan.

“Shame on you, Hermione Granger!” Minerva declared, utterly horrified by this latest development.

A journalist nearby directed their quill: “Headmistress of Hogwarts leads calls for Hermione Granger’s resignation as Minister for Magic.”

Hermione looked for a moment like she wanted to shrink back. She looked like she had as a girl, after being told off by a teacher. Mortified and utterly ashamed. It was with sheer force of will alone that she didn’t burst into remorseful tears.

Harry looked from Hermione, who seemed about to lose control of the room, to Ron, who looked just about ready to climb up onto the stage himself and give the assembled wizards a piece of his mind, and then to Professor McGonagall, who appeared the most appalled he had ever seen her. Her lips had almost disappeared in her fury.

“No,” Harry said loudly, stepping forward once again to stand at Hermione’s side. “She doesn’t deserve that.”

The room began to fall silent once again as Harry Potter spoke.

“You have a right to be angry. You all do. But this is not all Hermione’s fault. We don’t know how the witch got hold of the Time-Turner. Whether my son gave it to her—”

“Whether our son gave it to her,” Ginny Potter continued, stepping up onto the stage with her husband. “Or whether it was stolen from him.”

“Sports Editor for the Prophet hijacks Ministry meeting,” a nearby journalist dictated to her quill, before realising that the headline would be harmful to her own publication, and hastily commanding the quill to scrawl it out again.

McGonagall got to her feet, red in the face with dismay. Even she found it hard to believe that Albus Potter would wilfully aid the supposed daughter of Voldemort. The boy was sulky and difficult, not to mention obstinate, but to do this would have taken a most despicable or cruel wizard.

And wasn’t the Time-Turner supposed to be at the bottom of the Great Lake? If it wasn’t there then why on earth had there been all that business with the Merpeople? How had Albus Potter got hold of it?

Minerva was confused. She did not enjoy the feeling.

“Your solidarity is admirable,” she admitted, staring up at Hermione Granger and the Potters. “But it doesn’t make your negligence negligible!”

Harry grimaced as the crowd nodded. They were fighting a losing battle, and he knew it.

And then another voice spoke out. A rather posh drawling one.

“Then it’s negligence I too should face,” declared Draco Malfoy from the back of the hall, walking up to the stage in his stylishly billowing cloak. Several witches and wizards turned in their seats to watch his approach.
Draco climbed up the steps to the stage and stood beside Ginny Potter, who nodded at him in a rather amiable way.

“Hermione and Harry have done nothing wrong but try and protect us all,” Draco said loudly. “If they’re guilty, then I am too.”

Hermione Granger, Minister for Magic, looked across at her unlikely cohort and appeared deeply moved. Draco kept his head held high and didn’t hold her gaze.

Minerva wasn’t sure how the world had managed to turn upside down in such a short space of time. Was Draco implying that Scorpius Malfoy was involved in this also? Were those boys with this daughter of Voldemort?

Seeing Draco Malfoy receiving such a look of appreciation from his wife, Ron decided it was time he too climbed up to the stage. He went to stand right next to his wife, and draped an arm around her shoulders.

“Public Displays of Affection in the Grand Meeting Room: Can Hermione Granger really keep her public and private life separate?” dictated the journalist beside Minerva.

“No one can know where they are - whether they’re together or apart,” Ginny said, addressing the hall. “I trust that our sons will be doing all they can to stop her but…”

“We haven’t given up,” Hermione finished for Ginny. “We’ve gone to the giants. The trolls. Everyone we can find. The Aurors are out flying, searching, talking to those who know secrets, following those who won’t reveal secrets.”

Harry fixed his glasses on his nose and ran a nervous hand through his hair. He cleared his throat. Immediately he had the full attention of the room again.

“But there is one truth we can’t escape: that somewhere in our past a witch is trying to rewrite everything we ever knew - and all we can do is wait - wait for the moment she either succeeds or fails.”

McGonagall was now holding onto the chair in front of her for support, unsure whether to sit or stand, to frown or close her eyes and weep.

“And if she succeeds?” she demanded, aiming her question at Harry.

Ginny looked up at Harry with concern, but he didn’t falter.

“Then - just like that - most of the people in this room will be gone, we’ll no longer exist, and Voldemort will rule again.”

At the back of the room, a wizard fainted. Hardly anyone seemed to notice.

The room descended into panicked whispering, mutters about Voldemort, about Albus Potter, about the Malfoy boy, about a Time-Turner, about a mysterious daughter.

Minerva could not help herself. She reached over and snatched the quill out of the air. The world had enough troubles without that headline popping up tomorrow.

From up on the stage Ron Weasley cleared his throat. Slowly, the audience’s attention turned to him, uncertain and afraid.

“Right,” Ron said awkwardly, to the hall at large, rubbing his hands together with optimism. “Well, shall we do questions now, or what?”

Chapter End Notes

Do I think this would actually happen? No.

Just putting that out there. The Spartacus moment sort of makes me cringe.

But hey it’s in the script so I’m using it.

Please leave me a comment because comments mean the world to me!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
The boys moved as stealthily as possible through the Hogwarts grounds, further and further out, heading towards the mountainous peaks, past which Delphi had ascended.

“We could still go back,” Albus pointed out, watching as Scorpius struggled to keep walking. He was hugging himself tightly against the cold. Albus worried that the Cruciatus Curse had taken its toll. “Get help at the castle?”

The last thing Albus wanted was for Scorpius to collapse in the middle of the Highlands. And if he was honest, he wanted help. Adult help. Doing this alone felt terrifying. It was a lot of pressure to carry.

“I know it’s a risk, but if it’ll help us stop her…”

But Scorpius shook his head.

“We might upset things,” Scorpius said firmly. “Time is delicate, Albus. And if we ruin anything else…”

Scorpius shuddered at the thought and Albus supposed he had a point.

“Okay, so where are we going?” Albus asked. “How do we find her? There must be some way to track her down.”

“First step is to get as far away from here as possible,” Scorpius said.

“So we keep walking?”

“Until we’re far enough out to stop,” Scorpius agreed. “We have to. And then something will come to us. It has to.”

“Right,” Albus agreed, trying to remain confident.

Together they began to climb a high ridge, neither speaking to conserve energy. Occasionally Albus reached out to help Scorpius keep his footing, but his best friend was surprisingly resilient. It was impressive how strong-willed Scorpius could be. Even as he visibly tired, as his lips were turning blue from the cold, he kept putting one foot in front of the other.

The Scottish Highlands were an excellent spot for a secret wizarding school, but not, Albus realised, the best place for taking a long walk. Although everything was beautiful, green, misty,
and mysterious, it was also extremely cold, wet, and muddy.

Several times Albus considered offering Scorpius his cloak before he realised that he wasn’t wearing one. The boys had only dressed for a quick trip to the Owlery. They really weren’t prepared for this.

Albus stopped himself from making a list of everything they currently didn’t have to hand. Having no wands, no cloaks, no brooms, no food, no friends, and no shelter, wasn’t an optimistic way to start a journey. And Albus wasn’t going to let himself give up.

As they walked, Albus reached up to scratch at his forehead where his wound was itching. It wasn’t overly painful, but when he glanced down at his numb fingers he spotted blood. It probably wasn’t as much as it looked, but Scorpius noticed and instantly began to fuss.

“Oh - I forgot! You hurt your head when you fell!” Scorpius exclaimed, turning to Albus anxiously. “Are you feeling okay, Albus? Is your vision fine? Do you have a headache? Oh! Do you feel nauseous at all? And what can you hear? Is there a ringing-”

It felt beyond wrong to have Scorpius worry about him for having a single, tiny cut, when his best friend had been forced to endure torture. Immediately, Albus decided to play the injury down. He was, after all, a less selfish Albus Potter now.

“I can hear you fussing?” Albus tried to tease, but all he got was a worried frown in response.

Scorpius was not at all deterred. He stopped Albus so that he could peer at his forehead with concern. Obediently (although with a roll of his eyes) Albus stood still, letting Scorpius get a good look at him.

“Please tell me I’m not going to have a scar…” Albus complained.

Scorpius pushed back Albus’s hair with his hand to get a closer look.

“No, it looks superficial. I can clean it for you. Let me just… oh… no wand.”

“It’s not in any particular shape is it?” Albus asked dryly, thinking of the irony of his acquiring some fantastical forehead scar. If his dad saw it he’d think he was trying to copy him, and Albus would never live it down back at Hogwarts, not to mention that James would have a field day…

“I don’t think so,” Scorpius answered seriously. “But we should apply pressure to it. Or at least we should have when it happened…”

Albus sighed. He placed his hands on Scorpius’s shoulders firmly. Scorpius blinked at him with confusion.

“Scorpius, I feel fine. Have you ever considered a career as a Healer?”

It was meant as a compliment, but it made Scorpius grow pale and contemplative. Albus immediately wished the words back. Clearly he’d just made Scorpius think of his mother. Why was he such an idiot? Every time he tried to be a good friend he managed to mess it up somehow…

“I’ll let you know if I’m about to keel over?” Albus volunteered, trying a smile.

Scorpius gave a weak one in return.

Together, they began to walk again. The atmosphere was ever so slightly better than before. Albus
could not help but feel a part of the tension had been lifted. Uncle Ron was definitely right when he said a bit of humour could get you through anything.

But it was difficult to laugh when you had seen your best friend screaming in agony. It was something Albus knew he would never be able to forget, and if he still felt numb at the mere thought of the recent memory, how on earth was Scorpius ever going to get over it?

Albus cleared his throat and thought of a way to broach the subject. He wanted to talk about it and couldn’t help but wonder if maybe Scorpius did too. Perhaps they were both avoiding what had happened to spare each other’s feelings?

He wished he was more like his mother. She would have known exactly what to say.

“And what about you?” Albus asked slightly awkwardly, blowing on his hands to fight the cold. “Are you all right?”

“Yes,” Scorpius responded quickly. Perhaps a touch too quickly.

“It was only pain. And it’s gone now. The Cruciatuus Curse doesn’t leave permanent damage… unless you go insane - but that didn’t happen to me - at least I don’t think it did. I’m pretty much the same as I was before, so unless I was utterly bonkers to begin with then - ”

“Scorpius,” Albus cut in, giving his best friend a look. Scorpius paused, then, understanding that Albus could see right through him, and accepting it. He began to play with his fingers, a nervous habit. He stopped walking entirely, frowning as he tried to find words.

“Mum always said that pain is temporary. It reminds us that we’re alive. She used to say that… that without it she couldn’t appreciate the good times so much. And that in some ways she was lucky to be able to have that comparison and… and to see the little things and enjoy them, in a way that other people couldn’t… and, you know, I think she was right, because right now I am definitely appreciating not feeling like… well, like that. Being fine.”

“And you really are fine now?” Albus clarified uncertainly. “Because there’s seriously no shame in not, you know, being fine. If you’re not.”

Scorpius gave a tiny smile.

“I’m a Malfoy, Albus. And we’re actually quite a lot braver than people think. Some of us. But thank you. For asking.”

Albus couldn’t help himself. He threw his arms around Scorpius in an almighty hug, almost knocking him over with the force of it.

Scorpius’s eyes widened, extremely surprised to find himself so suddenly in the arms of a very ferociously protective Albus Potter, but then he hugged back, just as fiercely.

It didn’t last for very long, because after about ten seconds Albus sprang back to check his face, looking a mixture of uncharacteristically wary and concerned.

“You were really, seriously brave,” Albus told him, as they broke apart.
Scorpius thought that perhaps being brave had all been worth it.

“That’s… um, the third time you’ve done that now,” he pointed out tentatively.

Albus frowned for a moment, and then realised what he meant. He grinned and rolled his green eyes.

“Are you keeping count?” Albus teased.

To his surprise, Scorpius blushed pink.

“Well, I mean… not exactly. But I do - you know - notice. Because it is quite noticeable. To get a hug. From you. In a nice way - not - you know - a bad sort of noticeable.”

Albus screwed up his face with confusion. Why was Scorpius using his flustered voice? He didn’t usually use it when it was just the two of them. Had he made him uncomfortable?

Perhaps, Albus thought, the hug had been a mistake. He hadn’t meant to make things awkward like that.

Scorpius began to walk again, at quite some pace.

“Okay, so. The plan. Our plan.”

“I didn’t know we had one of those,” Albus remarked, rushing to keep in step with Scorpius who looked more determined than ever before.

“We already know where we are. But we don’t know when. So that’s what we have to find out.”

“We could ask someone? Not at Hogwarts, but someone further out.”

“Yes, but we can’t risk being seen by anyone who might know us. We have no idea what time we’re in. Which means we could even be around.”

“I don’t think we’ve wandered the Highlands before.”

“If anyone sees us, Albus, anyone who knows us, then this could all go horribly wrong. Even more horribly wrong than it already has. And that would be very wrong.”

“Then… we need to find out when we are, somehow, but without making the Muggles suspicious, or coming face to face with someone we know or might know of us.”

“Yep! Exactly!” Scorpius agreed, taking heart in what Albus thought was a pretty vague plan of action.

They both looked around their empty surroundings. There wasn’t a single house in sight. Hogwarts was visible in the distance, but aside from the large school and the now minuscule lights of Hogsmeade, the rest of the world seemed eerily quiet and still. There was the loch, looking dark and peaceful, and a few birds flying in the early morning sky, but that was about the only movement Albus could detect.

“We’ll just keep looking and everything will be fine,” Scorpius declared. “The Highlands can’t go on forever.”

“I think England probably has to start somewhere,” Albus deadpanned.
That time, Scorpius beamed at him. That made everything feel a lot better.

Another twenty minutes of determined walking passed before Albus spotted something. Something that looked like it wasn’t a tree or a mountain or grass.

“Scorpius is that…?”

“What? Where are you looking?” Scorpius asked, peering in the direction that Albus was.

Albus pointed.

“Just down there. No, not there. Behind that ridge.”

He manoeuvred Scorpius into the correct position, reaching out to adjust where Scorpius’s arm was pointing.

“Is it a house?” Scorpius asked, hopefully.

Albus looked over his best friend’s shoulder.

“It looks like a station.”

“You have really, seriously good eyesight, Albus. That just looks like a triangle to me,” Scorpius said, turning his head slightly.

“No, look, I think I can see tracks. You see those?”

“Nope,” Scorpius said, sounding thrilled. “But I believe you.”

“Wizard station?” Albus asked.

“It could be. Even if it’s a Muggle one, we might be able to find something out. Muggles have newspapers, don’t they?”

“Well, they can read and look at pictures, so…”

“And if they’ve seen her, they’re bound to be talking about it! If I was a Muggle and I saw… her… flying past I’d probably faint.”

Albus only just stopped himself from mentioning that actually, probably most wizards would have that same reaction to seeing a witch flying without a broom.

Scorpius appeared utterly energised by this new triangle of hope on the horizon. His face had visibly brightened. He was regaining his usual optimistic disposition.

Albus really didn’t want to spoil that.

“Then let’s find your station, Albus!” Scorpius declared brightly. “Full speed ahead! Choo choo!”

Scorpius added some very embarrassing arm gestures to that, pretending to use his arms as wheels at his sides and then pulling on an invisible cord of some kind.

Albus raised his eyebrows. Just when he thought Scorpius could not possibly get any geekier, he went and did something like that.

“Too much?” Scorpius asked.
“Way too much,” Albus agreed, giving Scorpius a gentle shove and then pulling him along towards the station.

+++ 

It took them a lot longer to reach Albus’s station than they’d expected. It seemed to remain on the horizon for much of their journey.

Still, Scorpius had a new spring to his step now they had an aim, and Albus was feeling pretty proud of himself for spotting it.

But the closer they got, the more deserted the station appeared. They couldn’t see a single person.

“Maybe it’s abandoned?” Albus said, starting to sound miserable again. The thought of their absurdly long trek being wasted was just too much.

“But maybe it’s not,” Scorpius countered. “And even if it is, it’s shelter. And not Hogwarts.”

Albus had to agree that right now shelter sounded like a brilliant thing to stumble across. Especially seeing as Scorpius wouldn’t stop shivering.

“Aviemore Station.” Scorpius read out, delightedly, as they got close enough to read the sign. “It’s a Muggle station, Albus!”

Albus looked back, but Hogwarts was now shrouded by mist. They must have walked for longer than he’d realised, because there was no sign of the castle.

“There’s nobody here,” Albus commented as they trekked up towards the white fence cordoning off the platform.

“Well, it’s not going to be like King’s Cross,” Scorpius said reasonably. “There are far less Muggles up here. Hardly any, it looks like.”

The station was a pleasant building. Fairly small but admittedly well kept. It fitted in beautifully with the rest of the picturesque scenery. The sloping top of the station roof was painted grey, but the sides were a bright, optimistic white. Scorpius especially liked the red pillars that appeared to be holding the station roof up. He thought it was the sort of station his father might have approved of, even if it was small.

“It’s rather scenic, isn’t it?” Scorpius remarked as they walked up to the entrance of the platform. “Quaint.”

Albus raised an eyebrow. It just looked like a station to him.

“And houses, look!” Scorpius pointed out, as what looked like a smoking chimney emerged from behind the mist. It was some distance away, but better than nothing. “Muggle houses! Albus, I think we’ve made it! To a town! Or the start of a town. The outskirts at the very least. But there is definitely a Muggle town or village or something in that direction.”

The boys took shelter underneath the station roof. It was a relief to be out of the icy wind and occasional bouts of rain, but Albus had to admit the place seemed eerily quiet. It definitely wasn’t somewhere he wanted to run into Delphi. If they ended up getting attacked here then who would help them? Who would even hear?

A horrible thought struck Albus, then. What if Delphi had been here and that was why it was so
terribly quiet? What if the Muggles were dead?

Albus had been about to bring this sinister theory up with Scorpius (and drag him as far away from the scene as possible while he made sure it was safe) when an elderly Muggle man dressed in a flat cap, blazer, smart shoes, and waistcoat began to amble up the platform, humming contently to himself.

Scorpius gave Albus a thrilled shove at the sight of an actual person. Which meant the station wasn’t deserted at all.

Very aware of how suspicious they looked lurking uncertainly on the edge of the platform, Albus and Scorpius rushed to the nearest bench, sitting down side by side.

“He must be the Station Master,” Scorpius said quietly. Beside him, Albus gawped at the man in the strange clothes.

“No, don’t stare at him, Albus!” Scorpius declared. “Just sort of make it look like you’re admiring the scenery. We probably look strange enough as it is…”

Out of the corners of their eyes, Scorpius and Albus watched as the man walked down to the opposite edge of the platform. He looked down at his left wrist, as though checking a watch, and frowned a little, staring out along the tracks.

“One of us should talk to him,” Albus said quietly. “Don’t you think?”

Scorpius raised his eyebrows. It was not going to be easy to ask a Muggle to help them locate Delphi. No matter how casually they asked. Not to mention that they’d be breaking the 1689 International Statute of Secrecy in the process.

“Hello, Mr Station Master. Mr Muggle,” Scorpius whispered to Albus, in a deliberately foolish voice. “Question: did you see a flying witch passing here? And by the way, what year is it?”

Since when had Scorpius got so sarcastic? Albus was almost impressed…

“We just ran away from Hogwarts because we were frightened of upsetting things, but this is okay?” Scorpius demanded, his voice going rather high-pitched with the extent of his objection.

Albus sighed and slumped back on the bench. Scorpius was right - as usual. If they went ahead and asked the questions they wanted to, they’d probably be carted off to some Muggle hospital.

Why did everything have to be so complicated?

It was cold, Albus was exhausted, and Delphi was currently on the loose. He had hundreds of valid complaints to make, but as always, one in particular came to mind in his moment of despondency.

“You know what annoys me most of all?” Albus remarked. “Dad will think we did it deliberately.”

Scorpius turned to Albus with a look of pure disbelief.

“Albus,” he said flatly. “Really?”

Albus raised an eyebrow.

“I mean really really?”

Still Albus remained slumped and contemplative.
“We’re - trapped - lost - in time - probably permanently - and you’re worrying what your dad might think about it? I will never understand the two of you.”

“There’s a lot to understand,” Albus sighed, in a rather self-pitying manner, finding comfort in his usual criticisms of his father. “Dad’s pretty complicated.”

*Oh,* Scorpius was not going to let Albus wallow in misery right now. And he certainly wasn’t going to let him get away with, well… *this.* A strange sensation of exasperation began to rise in Scorpius, and he wasn’t sure exactly why it had.

“And you’re not?” Scorpius demanded.

Albus frowned at that and sat up straighter. He appeared surprised and maybe slightly hurt by the question.

But he had no right to be, Scorpius told himself, because Albus Potter was the most complicated person Scorpius knew. He was a walking, talking contradiction. He was sarcastic, and yet sensitive. Prickly, pessimistic, stubborn, and yet easily wounded. He could be hideously unobservant, and then suddenly, shockingly kind when you most needed it. He was beautifully loyal, but easily lead astray.

That brought Scorpius’s thoughts back to Delphi. If that even was her name. *How* had Albus ever liked that awful woman?

Hungry, tired, and afraid, Scorpius let the lingering resentment he’d been nobly fighting back burst out of him.

“Not to question your taste in women but you fancied… well…”

Almost immediately, Scorpius wished his words back. That had been cruel of him. He really shouldn’t have brought that up, not at a time like this, after all they’d been through. It was childish and just plain wrong.

Because it wasn’t Albus’s fault for getting a crush. Not really.

*Where* had that sudden meanness come from?

Albus shifted uncomfortably on the bench. He felt a mixture of defensive and ashamed. Yes, he had fancied Delphi Diggory. Or Delphi-whoever-she-was. And yes, it had made him act like a bit of a prat.

Now, with hindsight, Albus could see that that little infatuation had been a bad idea. A terrible idea. Probably one of the worst crushes anyone had ever had in the history of the wizarding world. Maybe even the worst.

But in his defence, to start with, Delphi had been charming. She’d been bubbly, and chatty, and sort of awkward. She’d seemed different to most people. Perhaps a bit of a kindred spirit. Another loser, just trying to find her way. Liable to put her foot in it whenever she opened her mouth. And she’d been so sunny and optimistic and brave, never dwelling on the bad things, always ready to laugh or make a joke. All of those traits had appealed to Albus. In a major way. As humiliating as that truth now was.

The old Albus would have denied those embarrassing feelings, but the new Albus Potter was going to face up to his mistakes. Even if they did make him want to sink into the ground and never emerge again.
“I did, didn’t I?” Albus admitted, bowing his head.

Scorpius gave a sad smile at that.

“I mean, what she did to Craig…” Albus continued, swallowing hard as he remembered that flash of green light.

“Let’s not think about that,” Scorpius said quickly, patting Albus on the arm and looking him in the eyes to distract him, perhaps to distract himself. “Let’s focus on the fact that we have no wands, no brooms, no means of returning to our time. All we have is our wits and - no, that’s all, our wits - and we have to stop her.”

Behind them, someone cleared their throat. Scorpius jumped on the spot, but Albus managed to keep his cool as the Station Master approached.

“Ye ken th’ Auld Reekie train is running late, boys?” he said.

Scorpius glanced at Albus with confusion. Albus shrugged his shoulders.

“Sorry?” Scorpius said politely.

“If you’re waiting oan th’ Auld Reekie train, you’ll need tae ken it’s running late. Train wirks oan th’ line. It’s a’ oan th’ amended time biurd.”

The Station Master looked at them expectantly. The boys looked back, bewildered. Scorpius seemed pained by how impolite he must have seemed, but it didn’t seem right to ask the man to repeat himself again.

Frowning a little at the Southerners, the Station Master handed the dark haired boy a rather rained on piece of paper.

Albus glanced at what looked like a timetable. The Station Master pointed out the correct part to avoid having to converse again.

“Late,” he said, as clearly as possible.

Albus took the timetable and examined it. His face changed only a few seconds after beginning to read. Horror gripped Albus quite suddenly, for what was unfortunately not the first time in the last few hours.

The Station Master gave a weary shake of his head and wandered off again, leaving the boys in peace. Scorpius watched him go with confusion.

“I know where she is,” Albus said lowly, not taking his eyes from the timetable.

Scorpius turned to him with surprise.

“You understood that?”

“Look,” Albus commanded, pointing at the correct part of the paper. “At the date. On the timetable.”

Scorpius leaned in closer and read over Albus’s shoulder. His eyes narrowed as he did so. Albus simply waited for him to figure it out.

years ago. But why is she? Oh…”

Scorpius gave a short gasp of realisation, and then his face fell. He turned to Albus with concern.

“The death of my grandparents,” Albus agreed grimly. “The attack on my dad as a baby… the moment when Voldemort’s curse rebounded on himself. She’s not trying to bring about her prophecy - she’s trying to prevent the big one.”

“The big one?” Scorpius repeated numbly.

“The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches…”

Albus paused to take a deep breath. When he began again, Scorpius joined him, hand on his arm.

“…born to those who have thrice defied him, both as the seventh month dies…”

For a moment they simply sat in silence. Albus could feel his heart pounding in his chest.

“It’s my fault,” Scorpius breathed out, looking devastated. “I told her that prophecies can be broken - I told her the whole logic of prophecies is questionable-“

“In twenty-four hours’ time Voldemort curses himself tying to kill the baby Harry Potter,” Albus said. “Delphi is trying to prevent that curse. She’s going to kill Harry herself.”

Scorpius looked ready to start crying beside him. He had gone even paler than usual with guilt.

Albus put the timetable back on the bench beside them and got to his feet.

“We need to get to Godric’s Hollow,” he said, full of action. “Now.”

“But Albus how can we…”

“My dad needs us. The world does. We’re all that’s left.”

Scorpius nodded his head at those words and rather shakily, stood.

“Albus, I’m so sorry,” he stammered. “I didn’t think… I should never have said… I should never have told her…”

“No need to be sorry,” Albus said, forcing confidence. He gave Scorpius a pat on the back. “Because we’re going to stop her. You and me. Together.”

“Are we?” Scorpius asked him doubtfully. “Can we?”

“Absolutely,” said Albus. “Because together - we can do anything. And, well… because we kind of have to do this.”

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed, finding strength from somewhere. “I suppose we do.”

Chapter End Notes

For anyone not sure what the Station Master says, 'ken' means know in the Highlands, apparently. I had to look that up.
I love writing Scorpius and Albus scenes. Sweet babies.

Please leave me a comment! I love those so much!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
“How do we get there?” was the first question to leave Albus’s lips.

Godric’s Hollow was miles away. In an entirely different country. And they were stuck in the Scottish Highlands with nothing to their names. As far as plans went, it wasn’t looking particularly promising.

“Aviemore to Somerset,” Scorpius mused nervously. “That’s a long way.”

Albus hadn’t known Godric’s Hollow was in Somerset. He felt a bit guilty about that. If his dad had ever mentioned the location of the famous wizarding village, Albus hadn’t been listening.

“If only we could Apparate,” Scorpius said, frowning. “That would make this so much easier.”

Albus shook his head.

“My dad says it feels like being sucked through a tube and getting crushed all at the same time.”

“Ouch.”

“That’s why he prefers to use the Floo Network. Or a broom. He tried to take me with him once, Apparating.”

“You’ve Apparated?” Scorpius asked with awe.

That look made Albus want to declare, very impressively, that indeed he had.

“No,” he admitted. “I refused to try it.”

“Oh well,” Scorpius said. “We couldn’t have done it anyway. We’d be in awful trouble. Underage wizards can’t just Apparate without a license.”

“Being arrested for underage Apparition is probably not the worst that could happen to us at this point,” Albus pointed out grimly.

“No,” Scorpius agreed. “Okay, well, what about the Floo Network?”

“We’d need to find somewhere to start from.”

“Aviemore is a Muggle town. I don’t know if any wizards are settled there at all.”
“Portkey?”

“I don’t know how to make one of those work. They take very complex magic, Albus.”

“Brooms?”

“Have you gone mad? Albus, do you know how long it would take us to fly from here to the West Country? Hours and hours! On brooms! We’d fall off! And we couldn’t be seen by anyone. Not to mention we’re not really the best at flying…”

Albus looked a bit sulky at what he saw as Scorpius’s attempts to ruin his plan. He needed to get to his dad. Why could nothing ever be simple?

“Well you could suggest something,” Albus said, moodily.

“I have! There’s Apparition - which we can’t do. Portkeys - which we can’t make. Flying - which would take a very long time and we might well die trying, plus we have no brooms. The Floo Network - which would require a fireplace. A wizard fireplace. And Floo Powder. And somewhere to end up. None of which we have.”

Albus thought on those options and deflated. He felt slightly bad for snapping at Scorpius. After all it wasn’t his fault that Godric’s Hollow was so far away.

Luckily, Scorpius didn’t seem to have taken his burst of temper to heart. He was looking thoughtful and frowning.

And then suddenly, he gave a jump.

“Albus!” Scorpius declared exultantly, gesturing around them.

Albus raised an eyebrow.

“You’ve got your idea face on…”

“Muggle trains!” Scorpius said, beaming.

“Muggle trains?”

“We’re at a Muggle train station, Albus! I can’t believe we didn’t think of this sooner!”

“We didn’t think of it because they’re for Muggles,” Albus said.

"Exactly!" Scorpius agreed. "Which means we won't be interfering with anything! Muggles don't know who we are!"

Albus swallowed and shifted from foot to foot.

"I've never actually..."

"Been on one before?" Scorpius asked, wide-eyed.

"Why would I have?" Albus answered, defensively.

"I have. Lots. Well, a few times. Once or twice. And they’re easy. Much easier than you’d expect.”

"When have you been on Muggle trains?" Albus asked suspiciously.
“Albus, when most of the wizarding world thinks you and your family are Dark wizards, sometimes it’s nicer to travel under the radar, so to speak.”

“Your dad took you on Muggle trains?”

Scorpius nodded his head.

“Mum liked them. Mostly because people didn’t know who we were on them and never… you know, were never rude. And they have everything you might need! Food, just like ours. And toilets - necessary. And carriages. Everything’s just less… comfortable. And smaller. But not if you pay for First Class which Dad did. Of course.”

“My grandad’s been on one before,” Albus remembered. "Mum and Dad got him a ticket for a birthday present. He loves Muggle things. They got him a ride all the way from Devon to London and back.”

Scorpius began to pace, tapping his fingers on his pointed chin, the very picture of deep thought.

“Okay, so we have to get to Godric’s Hollow. From here. Aviemore. In Scotland,” he said, wandering back and forth.

“Yes,” Albus agreed.

Scorpius took a deep breath and then spotted the notice board on the side of the station. He gave another little jump.

“We can do this!” he exclaimed.

He raced over to the large map on the notice board and began to study it. Albus went to stand beside him. He recognised the names of the main London stations, but not many of the others. He was more than a little confused.

“So first we get to King’s Cross. That’ll take about seven hours. Maybe more. Perhaps eight, actually. Or nine. Let’s say nine to be safe. And we have one change. At Haymarket. Okay,” Scorpius said.

“We have until tomorrow,” Albus reminded him, trying his best to contribute even though he was way out of his depth. "Twenty four hours.”

“Plenty of time,” Scorpius declared with forced optimism. “More than enough.”

“Isn’t that using up a lot of the time we have?”

“Not really. Less than half. We’ll have ages left. And we don’t have any other options, Albus. From King’s Cross it’s just a question of getting to Godric’s Hollow. Which might be difficult. I don’t know if you can get a direct train line. It’s quite a small village. But we’ll find a way.”

Albus nodded his head. It was a start. And it was better than nothing.

“Oh, wait,” Albus pointed out, deflating again. “No money.”

“No Muggle money,” Scorpius agreed sadly, conceding the point. “I have a Galleon in my sock.”

“You have a what in your where?”

“For emergencies. Dad always says I should have money. In case I get lost. Or need to buy
something. Usually I’d have more, but it can get a bit uncomfortable, and I didn’t know we were going this far…”

Albus raised an eyebrow and decided not to ask any further questions about that.

“But it won’t be any use here,” Scorpius continued, looking frustrated. "We can’t show them wizarding currency. And they probably wouldn’t accept it anyway.”

“So how are we going to get to King’s Cross with no money?” Albus asked. “We need tickets. If we don’t have tickets they’ll never let us on the train.”

Scorpius thought on that and then nodded his head.

“Leave that to me.”

“Why? What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to use one of my most amazing talents.”

“Which is?”

Scorpius raised his pointed chin.

“Getting adults to like me.”

Albus looked confused. He wasn’t quite sure how that was relevant to this situation...

“Come on,” Scorpius said, leading Albus further into the station and towards the Station Master, who was busy fixing a sign on the station wall.

“Excuse me, Mr Station Master,” Scorpius said politely, clearing his throat and standing with his hands clasped neatly behind his back. There were only a few times Albus could remember Scorpius having looked posher than in that moment.

The old man turned around and raised an eyebrow.

“Aye, lads?”

“Dreadfully sorry to bother you, but I have a problem. And I thought that you might be able to help me.”

“Aye?”

Scorpius gave a dramatic sigh.

“I am very very afraid that I don’t have any money. At all. And I need to reach my parents. I’m supposed to be meeting them and - you see - I’m not from here. I don’t really know how it all works. I got very lost and now I don’t know how I’ll get home. We’re both stranded. And we’ve not slept. And they’re waiting for me in London. And if I don’t get there they’ll be ever so worried. I just don’t know what to do…”

The Station Master sighed and abandoned the sign he was straightening.

“Nae bunsens, ye say?”

Albus hadn’t the foggiest what bunsens meant.

“Where are ye headed?”

“King’s Cross. London.”

“Ye and yer friend?” the Station Master asked, turning to look at the dark haired boy who was gawping at the exchange rather stupidly.

“Yes,” Scorpius confirmed solemnly, giving Albus a nudge. "Yes. We’re both lost.”

Immediately Albus got the message. He tried to look as sad as possible. Which wasn't hard, considering the circumstances.

The Station Master surveyed the boys, took in how tired they looked, and how young. They certainly did look out of place. The dark haired lad had a nasty scrape on his forehead and his friend looked like he had a similar graze on his wrist. With another weary sigh he nodded his head.

“Come wi’ me.”

The man led the boys to the front of the small ticket office. He went inside and printed off two tickets for King’s Cross station.

“Here ye gang en’, boys,” he said, handing them over.

Scorpius took the tickets with delight.

“Oh thank you so much! Thank you!”

The Station Master waved away the thanks, gave the blond haired boy a pat on the shoulder, and then left the ticket office, returning to his sign.

“I don’t know how you do that,” Albus said, looking awed as they returned to the platform to wait.

“Nor do I, to be honest. I just can.”

“You couldn’t teach me, could you?” Albus asked, thinking of all the professors at Hogwarts who disliked him, of the trouble he was constantly in for being sarcastic. “I’m not good at the charming thing.”

“You just have to smile. Really really widely,” Scorpius explained, demonstrating.

“Okay, well that is definitely not what you were doing just then, because if you had, he would have run a mile…”

In the distance, a rumbling sounded, and a train came into view. Scorpius grabbed Albus excitedly by the arm. Aside from the yearly trip on the Hogwarts Express, he’d never been allowed to travel without his father before. Especially not on Muggle transport.

Scorpius and Albus rushed to the nearest carriage and jumped on. Scorpius gave the Station Master a wave as they went. The man smiled back looking slightly bemused.

“There is nobody on this train,” Albus said, looking at the empty carriage they'd just entered.

“There are probably some people in the other carriages,” Scorpius responded, choosing a seat by the window and making himself comfortable. "And more people will get in. As we get closer to
London. Probably."

“And this is going to take nine hours?”

“Yep.”


“Yep yep.”

“For nine hours.”

“Think of it like another Hogwarts journey. Those are fun.”

Albus had to admit that they were. But this was nothing like his yearly Hogwarts journey. Those trips were an escape, an opportunity to relax with his best friend in the hours before they reached the school. Hogwarts might have filled Albus with dread, but it was nothing compared to what was waiting for them at the end of this journey.

The mere thought of Delphi on the loose made Albus nauseous. He didn't want to see her ever again. She terrified him. And yet he knew that he had to. That if he didn't face her, then there was no hope for anyone.

Albus held onto the metal hand rail and took a deep breath.

“It’s just hard… sitting still. When I know she’s out there. That she wants to hurt my dad,” he explained.

“Well you’ll have to sit down at some point, because nine hours is a long time,” Scorpius said, reasonably.

Albus went to sit down opposite Scorpius, and then the train began to move.

“So what do we do now?” Albus asked restlessly, tapping his foot on the floor.

“Talk?” Scorpius suggested.

“About what?”

“Anything.”

Albus ran an uneasy hand through his dark hair.

“Scorpius, I’m not like you. I’m… not good at this. Talking when I’m feeling sort of…”

“Oh, okay. Well we could just sit. And think. For a while. And look out of the windows. Because Scotland is quite lovely really. When you’re indoors.”

Albus looked out of the window and tried to appreciate the scenery. All he could see was Delphi. And Craig. And Scorpius screaming...

The ticket man entered the carriage and took their tickets without a word, stamping them before handing them back. He nodded and carried on walking to the other end of the train. Scorpius put his ticket safely in his pocket, and Albus did the same.

Albus’s stomach rumbled loudly. He put a hand on it, willing it to be quiet.
“Me too,” Scorpius answered it, patting his own stomach.

For a while the boys sat in silence, watching the scenery roll past the window. Every so often, Albus noticed Scorpius would almost let out a yawn and then stifle it. At some points Scorpius rested his head against the back of his seat as he looked out of the window. Occasionally his eyelids would droop.

“We haven’t slept,” Albus said, only just really thinking about it. It felt like months ago, being woken up by Scorpius in the Slytherin dormitory and going to destroy the Time-Turner. It felt like years.

Albus supposed that after you’d seen a person die life was never quite the same again.

“No, that’s true,” Scorpius agreed.

“So one of us should,” Albus prompted.

Immediately Scorpius sat up, eager to be helpful.

“I can keep watch if you like?” he volunteered. “If you want to sleep. I can wake you up when we’re almost at the right stop.”

Albus gave the smallest of smiles.

“I didn’t mean me.”

“Oh…”

“You’re one that should be sleeping. After everything. Just to make sure.”

Scorpius frowned.

“I’ve already told you, Albus. The curse doesn’t have any permanent effects. I feel fine.”

Albus wasn’t entirely sure he believed Scorpius when he said that, because after the Cruciatus Curse he’d definitely been shivering a lot more, not to mention he’d seemed weak on his feet. And even if there were no permanent effects, being in that much pain must have taken a lot out of him. Albus knew that enduring the Cruciatus Curse took incredible strength of mind.

He looked over at Scorpius, who was currently fighting back another yawn.

“I’m going to worry about you if you don’t,” Albus said, honestly.

“You’re going to worry about me?” Scorpius repeated, looking touched.

Immediately, Albus sniffed and looked away for a moment.

“Well, I don’t exactly want you passing out when we get there, do I? Someone has to do the thinking.”

Scorpius seemed to accept the logic of that.

“One of us should keep an eye out. For signs of her.”

“I will,” Albus said. “And I’ll wake you up if I spot anything.”
“Any signs of destruction at all? Even just something small?”

“Yes,” Albus agreed.

"And you'll remember it's Haymarket we need to get off at?"

"Yes," Albus said again, rolling his eyes.

“Then… well, if you don’t mind. Thank you, Albus. That’s really kind.”

Albus shrugged his shoulders, feeling gallant.

Scorpius smiled warmly and curled up on his two seats, falling asleep in an instant.

For a short while Albus watched him. He was sleeping on one side again like he did at Hogwarts, his cheek resting on his own hands as a makeshift pillow. Albus had the strange sensation of wanting to guard him. It felt important, somehow. It wasn’t quite like the way he wanted to protect Lily when she seemed a bit upset, but it was something similar.

On the seat behind them was a discarded Muggle newspaper. Albus had seen it on their way into the carriage. His grandad had lots of those at home. In fact, he had a large secret collection in the shed that Albus’s grandma didn’t know about. Albus thought the Muggle newspapers were eerie. There was something about the way the pictures stayed perfectly still which unnerved him.

With another glance at Scorpius, Albus leaned across the seat behind him and reached for the paper. Carefully opening it to its full size, he got up and placed it over Scorpius, feeling awkward as he did so. It wasn’t much of a blanket, and it only covered Scorpius's legs, really, but it was all he had to hand.

For hours Albus sat and thought, occasionally looking across at Scorpius who was fast asleep, limbs folded up neatly, breathing softly. They flew by with surprising speed.

In that time Albus thought of his dad a lot. It struck him that he might never see his dad again. That he might never get the chance to tell him that… well, a lot of things. That maybe he didn’t mean to say the things he did sometimes. And that maybe he regretted some of his actions. Even if it wasn't all his fault.

Albus thought of the argument he and his father had had at the start of the year. Not long ago, really. He thought of that stupid tatty blanket his dad had decided to give him, and the dodgy love potion from Uncle Ron, and the way he had fled the room, almost in tears, after his father’s hasty words. If only he’d stayed, Albus thought, now. If only he’d waited. Maybe things would have turned out differently?

Truly, in his heart, Albus wanted nothing more than to please his father. And perversely, this deep desire made Albus angry. It made him want to resist. In some ways, he was almost proud to be the disappointing Potter, of being different. Because it was better than trying to be like the others and failing. Better to be a Slytherin, and proud, Albus thought, than a failed Gryffindor.

Albus went into what was almost a trance, eyes on the world that rushed by the train window. He looked only for smoke or rubble or maybe worse. He tried not to think at all.

He was considering waking Scorpius, since they were almost at their stop, when the train rushed through a noisy tunnel and did the job for him.

Scorpius woke with a start.
“On the train to King’s Cross,” Albus answered, before his best friend even opened his mouth to ask the question.

“Oh… yes. Have we got long left?”

“No. I was about to wake you up.”

Scorpius gave a yawn and then noticed the newspaper resting on his legs. He blinked down at it with surprise. Albus looked away swiftly before it was brought up. For some reason he felt embarrassed.

“Sorry Albus… I should have kept watch a bit too. Aren’t you tired?”

“Not really,” Albus lied.

“Are you worried?” Scorpius asked, sitting up and stretching his arms into the air. “You look worried.”

“I’ve been thinking. A lot. About everything.”

“It is a lot,” Scorpius agreed. “Too much to think about, almost.”

“If we can’t do this… if we let her get away with it all. Then everything’s going to change. Everything.”

“Yes.”

“I won’t be here anymore. I’ll just… blink out of existence the moment she kills my dad.”

“At least you wouldn’t have to see it,” Scorpius said seriously. “You’ll never have to know. At least if we fail you won’t have to be there.”

“But you will.”

“I don’t expect I’ll last for long, either,” Scorpius pointed out. “I’ll be one of the first people on her list. That’s if I’m even born. She might just find my dad and save herself the hassle.”

“That’s… bleak,” Albus said.

“Very. Very bleak.”

Albus sighed.

“But that’s only if we fail,” Scorpius said. “Which we won’t. Which we can’t.”

“Scorpius, even if we do manage to stop her - this is a mess. How will we ever be able to look anyone we know in the eyes ever again? After what we’ve done. What I started.”

“We’ll be able to look them in the eyes because we stopped it. We may have been the cause of all this. But we can be the end of it too. Everyone can turn things around,” Scorpius said wisely. “Even people who do awful things. Terrible things.”

“Do you think we did a terrible thing?” Albus asked, anxiously.

Scorpius thought on that for a long moment.
“I don’t think we meant for it to be terrible - but I’m not sure if that makes a difference.”

Albus sighed with the truth of those words, even if they weren’t the ones he wanted to hear. He nodded his head and rested his feet up on the seat.

“But look on the bright side, at least we’ll have an exciting and maybe even slightly-cool story to tell our kids one day,” Scorpius said, trying his best to be optimistic.

Albus rolled his eyes.

“The time Dad almost messed up the entire wizarding world and brought the most evil Dark wizard ever back to life?” he suggested cynically.

“Well…”

“Sounds like a great bedtime story.”

“I see your point. That would probably give a child nightmares.”

“You don’t say,” Albus deadpanned.

“But what about: the time Dad saved the entire wizarding world and stopped the most evil Dark wizard ever from coming back to life?” Scorpius proposed.

“Better,” Albus agreed.

“Then we’ll try and go for that one.”

At Haymarket, Edinburgh, the boys hopped off the train. Albus’s legs were stiff from sitting down for so long. They boarded another which would take them to King’s Cross. This train was far busier and Muggles were sitting in every compartment. They chose the least populated they could find and sat down on two seats at the back of the carriage, near the train toilet, so they could have more privacy. It didn't smell particularly pleasant, but they both thought it was better than sitting in the middle of a group of Muggles and giving themselves away by accident.

“They could write books about us,” Scorpius commented quietly, as the second train carried them loudly towards London. “History books.”

“I thought I was already in books?”

“But this one would be about what you did! Not who you are. And I’m not in any good books. Apart from ones that… well, they’re not nice ones. I’d rather not be mentioned.”

“I didn’t know you were in books,” Albus said.

“Studies on the ancient pure-blood families, you know? I get a mention sometimes. In the newer ones, of course. Scorpius Hyperion Malfoy: heir of Malfoy Manor.”

Albus ignored the strange and dramatic voice Scorpius had put on when saying his full name. It felt too much like he was mocking himself for it to be entirely comfortable.

“Is that weird? Being an heir?”

“Very,” Scorpius agreed, hugging his knees. “Because it doesn’t feel like it. It’s just my home. And Dad is just my dad. And you don’t ask for a name, do you?”
Albus didn’t feel he needed to answer that question.

“What was it like growing up there?” Albus asked, curiously.

“Well I didn’t know any different. I suppose it was… nice. Although lonely. Sometimes.”

Albus turned away from the window, giving Scorpius his full attention. Part of being the new and improved Albus Potter meant showing Scorpius that he was listening when he spoke. Which he always was, anyway. But he realised he probably hadn’t showed it much before, which maybe came across as fairly rude.

Scorpius looked heartbreakingly thrilled to be encouraged to elaborate. The words appeared to pour out of him.

“There used to be peacocks,” Scorpius revealed. “They were wonderful. When Mum got worse, well, we couldn’t keep them anymore - but I still remember. And the grounds were nice, nicer than they are now. Dad used to pay people to enchant them so the flowers grew. For Mum to look at. Because sometimes she couldn’t go far, but we could always walk in the gardens. Well, I would walk. Sometimes Mum was in her chair. If her legs were shaky. She let me push her about in it. Those were nice times.”

“And you have your library,” Albus said, not wanting Scorpius to disappear completely into thoughts of his late mother. When that happened, it could take a while to get him back again.

“Yes! My library!” Scorpius agreed, beaming at the thought. “It’s not exactly mine, but I use it the most. Dad says it might as well be. I have a chair by the fire, and lamps, and so many history books! Sometimes when I get back from Hogwarts there are new ones. Dad buys them while I’m away. I think he likes to keep me busy over the holidays.”

The train gave a jolt which made Albus’s stomach lurch. The Muggles didn't seem distressed by it, and so Albus told himself that it was normal. That it wasn’t down to Dark magic. It was probably just a more rickety part of the track.

Thinking about their situation had startled him. Quickly he returned his attention to Scorpius, needing to hear more of his words so he could calm down a bit.

“So did you always read?” Albus prompted his best friend.

“As soon as I could,” Scorpius said, nodding. “Mum used to teach me. And sometimes at dinner Dad used to test me on words. I still remember that. Dad was pleased because I was so clever. Although he wasn’t so pleased when he tried to teach me other things. I wasn’t good at much else.”

“Lily used to like books too,” Albus remembered. “Although she liked the pictures best, not the words. Luna used to give her all these books with magical creatures in. Lily knew them all by heart. She probably still does. And there was this one stage where she kept dangling herself out of her bedroom window.”

“Oh…wow.”

“Because she said she was looking for Nargles in the garden. Mum used to go mental. She was scared she’d fall out and break her neck.”

“I’ve not heard of a Nargle before,” Scorpius admitted.

“Neither has anyone else,” said Albus with a grin.
The train travelled on. By now the scenery was grey, all housing estates and tall buildings. Albus felt his heart pound with nerves. Scorpius patted him on the leg to try and calm him down.

“How did your parents know you were a wizard?” Albus asked in a whisper, wanting to distract himself from what was to come. It was easier to do that when Scorpius was talking. He could get lost in his voice, in his stories.

Scorpius looked around to see how many Muggles were nearby. Luckily, the ones closest were wearing headphones and holding strange rectangular devices in their hands. Another two men sat at the opposite end of the carriage, but appeared to be in deep conversation about Margaret Thatcher, a woman Scorpius had read about in a book of Muggle history. They looked like they were about to begin an argument.

“Well, I think they just assumed,” Scorpius admitted, very quietly. "But there was one time, when I was about two, when Mum was bad. Really bad. Luckily it was just a short thing - but we were worried. And I was in her room with her, because she was in bed, resting. Dad had to go and get the door because there were people outside. Not um… anyway, just people. And Mum started coughing. A lot. And Dad had left her water too far away for her to reach, and her wand was in the other room. I was only small, so I couldn’t get it. I tried jumping up but the cabinet was too high. I was quite upset, and Mum kept coughing, and I was scared. Very scared. And then suddenly the glass was close enough for her to reach. Without her having to stretch much at all. It had moved! And she drank some water and she started to be okay again. Which was good.”

Albus’s eyes were wide. His own story hadn’t been nearly so dramatic or heroic. He was surprised he’d never thought to ask Scorpius this question before. What sort of a best friend was he?

“That’s… that’s amazing,” he breathed out, truly meaning it.

“Thank you,” Scorpius said, looking pleased.

“What happened when your dad came back?” Albus asked with interest.

“Oh, well he was a bit preoccupied. Other things, you know?”

Albus frowned. That seemed cold, even for Draco Malfoy.

Scorpius seemed to notice his expression, because he swallowed and leaned closer, rather more confidentially.

“There were people at the front door. They’d… well they wrote some things on the house - nasty things. And threw some rocks - or maybe it was bricks, I can't remember. They broke the front windows, which was annoying because those were really old and actually quite beautiful, and even once you repair these things it's never quite the same, you know? Because it's not original anymore and that can bring the value down, but more importantly, it's not old and it's a little piece of history gone and for no reason at all.”

Scorpius paused then, pulling himself away from his annoyance. Albus was sure he had seen him choose optimism. It really showed on his face.

"Luckily we weren’t anywhere near them," Scorpius said. "But Dad had to make sure they were gone.”

“People threw things at your house?” Albus repeated, stunned.

“Yes.”
“While you were inside? While your mum was sick?”

“It was okay.” Scorpius said easily. "Dad got us extra security after that. All new protective enchantments. All around the grounds. It took him ages. And new locks on the doors. And he did this really clever bit of magic where if someone ever threw something again, it would just rebound on them. Oh, and there were some quite nasty surprises lurking in the grounds for a while. That was until Mum found out and Dad reversed them. It made it look like we had something to hide, which we didn't.”

Scorpius paused, momentarily distracted as he thought he heard the word 'witch' come from the mouth of one of the men at the opposite end of the carriage. He peered over with confusion, only to see him arguing with his companion again. They appeared to be discussing politics.

“And what about you?” Scorpius asked with great interest. "When did your parents know you were a..."

He paused, unwilling to say the word on the Muggle train, even if it would have been impossible for them to be overheard, what with the sound of the train rushing to London. "...you know?"

Despite his agitation, Albus could not help but smile with satisfaction.

“I turned both of James’s shoes into left footed ones," he revealed.

Scorpius bit his lip to stop himself from laughing.

“He was being annoying. Really annoying. On a whole other level. I was two-ish, and James must have been four or five. Mum was about to take us all to the park and just like that his favourite trainers didn’t fit anymore.”

“Albus!”

Albus grinned at the memory.

“And the best part was that everyone was really pleased about it. Which served James right, to be honest. I never did turn them back.”

Knowing he had permission now, Scorpius began to laugh too, patting Albus on the chest. It was more because of the pleased look on Albus’s face than anything else. It felt wonderful to be able to laugh, even though he was terrified.

This time the two Muggle men sitting opposite them did stare over. Rather unpleasantly. Scorpius wasn't quite sure why that was, but it certainly wasn't very nice. Albus noticed them too and lowered his head. They decided to stop talking after that.

After what seemed like days the train finally arrived at King's Cross.

The station was just as busy and bustling as it had been on their first day. Scorpius loved the station with all his heart. It signalled the start of his yearly journey to Hogwarts, which he looked forward to more than anything. It meant another year getting to learn, and read books, and spend every single day with Albus.

The boys stepped out onto the platform looking dazed. The Muggles at King's Cross looked absurd. Along with the usual suited businessmen and station guards, were all sorts of men and women dressed in bright colours with wild, strange hairstyles. Some of the women were wearing bright eye make up, and so were a couple of the men.
“Well, we’re certainly in the 80s,” Albus remarked, raising an eyebrow as a man with long blond hair, a billowing, dramatic shirt complete with loose sleeves, and tight trousers strolled by.

“He looks a bit like my grandfather,” Scorpius said, feigning innocence.

Albus almost doubled over laughing in the middle of the platform. Scorpius beamed at him.

They went over to a board on which the train routes were written. There was quite a crowd, but they managed to find a way through. Albus knew exactly how to use his pointy elbows to their maximum effect.

Scorpius muttered to himself as he worked out their next move, occasionally chewing on his lower lip.

“Okay, from here, we need to get to Somerset. Or at least around that area. Right… so first we switch to the underground. That’s fine. We get to Paddington Underground then switch to the proper station. Easy, that’s just around the corner. From there we need Platform Four. Remember that Albus. Four. Very important. Then it’s Bristol Temple Meads. From there we get off. Switch to Platform Twelve. To Bridgwater. Then we walk again. And then it’s a bus. Or a walk. To St John Street. I’ve not heard of that before. Then a place called Butcher Shop, which is really close (and hopefully isn’t an actual butcher’s shop). We could definitely walk the rest and then we’re there. Or almost there. I don’t know where Godric’s Hollow is exactly in relation to that. But we’d be close enough to find it. Hopefully. What do you think?”

Albus simply stared at his best friend with a mixture of horror and awe.

“Why do Muggles make things so complicated?” Albus asked. “This is insane.”

“Not really. Not if you think about it step by step. Do you think that’s okay?”

“Okay? That was amazing,” Albus announced, patting Scorpius enthusiastically on the back. “You’re amazing!”

Scorpius blushed pink.

“But…oh no. Money,” Albus suddenly realised. “We’ve got no money. We need more tickets.”

“I can get us money,” Scorpius said confidently.

“Really? Again?”

“It worked on the Station Master before. I can make it work again. But you have to come with me. And make sure you look really sad and lost. It will work better with the two of us. You’re smaller than me.”

“Thanks,” Albus said sarcastically.

“We’ll tell them we’re hopelessly lost. On a school trip. And we need to get back pronto. And that we’re really hungry. Which isn’t a complete lie...”

“That will never work,” Albus said, frowning.

But it worked.

After two tries, both of which ended up with the boys sprinting quickly away through the crowds before the guards were called, they struck lucky with a middle-aged woman who took a particular
shine to Scorpius, patting him on his blond head. She gave them enough money for tickets, and a little bit extra just in case. Scorpius gave her a hug of thanks, something which Albus ducked his way out of.

"I think she thought we were about twelve," Albus said, as Scorpius counted the Muggle money delightedly.

"Oh, definitely. Which is an advantage."

Looking twelve did not seem like much of an advantage to Albus, who longed to be tall like his brother James.

"And do we have enough?" Albus asked, staring at the strange currency in Scorpius's hands. "I don't know much about Muggle money..."

"I think so," Scorpius agreed. "Although if not we'll just have to be twelve again. Sorry, Albus, but needs must!"

Albus's stomach gave another loud rumble.

"We'll get food on the next train. A snack," Scorpius decided, putting the money safely in his pocket and giving it a pat.

"I guess we can't fight her on an empty stomach," Albus tried to joke. It was a weak one, but Scorpius looked at his best friend with pride. If they were going to do this then they had to at least try and be optimistic. And Albus truly was trying.

"And we have all night to travel," Scorpius agreed. "That's loads of time. Time to think. And to sleep, if you want. And time for us to work out Muggle busses, which - I admit, is going to be a challenge."

"A big challenge," Albus agreed.

"We'll do this one step at a time," Scorpius said, as they began to make their way though the station, heading for the Underground. "That way... well, it will all be okay."

"Do you really think it will be?" Albus asked, suddenly serious. "D'you think we can do this?"

Scorpius looked directly at his best friend. He reached out to touch his arm.

"We have a better chance together than apart," Scorpius answered.

Albus thought that was probably about right.

Chapter End Notes

Well, first of all, the reason I wrote this filler is because according to the script the boys start out in Aviemore, which is Scotland, and then in the next scene they are in Godric's Hollow! Getting them there was a nightmare! I really struggled.

So I emailed moonandreaacre, who kindly left me their email address, and with their help a plan was formed! Muggle travel! And yes I looked into this using maps and
train routes because a) I am a nerd, and b) moonandreacre helped me loads with how it would work!

Although this stuff is hard to work out, especially when you think that this is in the 80s and things may have been a bit different, so if it doesn't make total sense logistically then please just pretend that it does!

If you see dear moonandreacre in the comments and you liked this chapter, then the Muggle train solution is down to them, so do say thanks!

If this feels like an unnecessary chapter then I am really sorry, but I love writing the boys together and also, hey, I want this to make sense. So I didn't want them suddenly popping up in another country with no explanation!

Also, I personally believe Godric's Hollow is in Somerset. It's not been officially revealed, but there is much discussion about this online, and I think it makes the most sense, personally.

Oh, and bunsens apparently means money in Highland slang. You learn something new every day!

Please do leave a comment if you can! They mean so much! Especially on chapters like this!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Godric’s Hollow was a truly beautiful village. The boys reached it on the morning of the thirty-first, after a long and complicated journey which involved accidentally getting on the wrong bus (several times), almost having to make up an entirely fictional Muggle school to explain their clothing, and once pretending their names were Sam and Alan. Albus had still not slept, and was, Scorpius assumed, running purely on adrenaline. There had been several opportunities, but he’d stubbornly turned them all down.

Scorpius couldn’t believe his eyes when he spotted the familiar church spire in the distance, almost by mistake as they wandered the nearby area, wondering whether to ask for directions or not, unsure if that might ruin things, seeing as they couldn't tell if the people around were wizards or Muggles. That spire, rising up in the distance, had marked the end of an exhausting journey. It marked the success of their plan thus far. It meant they still had a chance. Scorpius had dragged Albus all the way to it, causing his suddenly rather quiet best friend to jog to keep up with him.

He knew they were in the right place the moment Scorpius pulled Albus onto the first street. There was an air of magic about it, of wonder, of timelessness. If Scorpius hadn't been on a mission he would have stopped where he was, just to take it all in.

Albus and Scorpius walked down a narrow road with old-fashioned cottages on either side of it, each one exactly alike. Streetlights stood at regular intervals, leading up to the village square. A picturesque church stood at the centre of it all, stained glass windows glinting in the light.

Best of all it was full of life. A joyful, bustling little place. Windows of cottages were thrown open, to welcome in the morning sun. In the distance people walked, looking busy and content. There was an air of safety, of community. It didn’t seem like the sort of place where anything bad could happen. Not ever. It looked like the last place tragedy might strike.

Upon reaching the village (and perhaps a little before) Albus hadn't seemed quite himself. For a while, Scorpius had decided not to comment on it, putting it down to a mixture of exhaustion and stress, but it was starting to worry him now. He supposed this was extremely emotional for Albus. In a great number of ways.

“Are you okay, Albus?” Scorpius asked gently.

Albus did not feel okay. He felt overwhelmed.

“I’m just… yes,” Albus agreed, nodding. “Fine.”

"Are you sure?"
"I will be," Albus said bravely. "In a minute."

Scorpius frowned for a moment, and then nodded. He supposed Albus probably didn't want to be fussed over.

“Well, there’s no visible signs of attack that I can see,” Scorpius said thoughtfully as they walked down the street. People weren't screaming, fainting, or running for cover, which meant Delphi most likely hadn't arrived yet. That was quite reassuring.

“This is really Godric’s Hollow?” Albus asked, looking at the happy, busy little village. In the stories he’d heard, the place was always spoken about with quiet reverence. Mournfully. Something to be mentioned with the greatest respect and sadness. He certainly hadn’t imagined the place to look like this.

“Your dad’s never taken you?” Scorpius asked, surprised.

Albus felt ashamed. This place was a part of his history, a part of his dad, and he'd never taken the slightest interest. In fact he’d stubbornly refused to acknowledge it at all. Now, he felt fairly guilty about that.

“No,” Albus admitted, sighing. “He tried a few times but I refused.”

In their whole long journey, Scorpius hadn’t thought to ask that simple question. He’d simply assumed Albus would be familiar with the place. After all, why wouldn’t he have been? Plenty of witches and wizards visited Godric's Hollow to pay their respects, people who had nothing to do with the Potter family.

It certainly explained Albus's silence on their way up the street, and how seemingly unhelpful he'd been during their approach.

Scorpius couldn’t understand why Albus would have refused such an opportunity. He had pestered his own father time and time again, desperate to visit the famous wizarding village, to see the memorial to James and Lily, to see where Albus Dumbledore had once called home. But his father had never agreed to take him.

“It wouldn’t be right,” his father had always said. “Perhaps another time.”

But even though Scorpius hadn’t been able to go to Godric’s Hollow physically, he’d traveled there in his books hundreds of times. He had three books on the history of the wizarding village, and he had pored over the maps with delight, almost seeing the place for himself, imagining walking down those beautiful old streets from the large and lonely Malfoy Manor library. He had convinced himself it was almost as good as visiting, but now he realised it wasn’t even close.

“Well, there’s no time for a tour,” Scorpius said, sounding slightly disappointed. After all, showing Albus around sounded like a lovely thing to do. Something that really might have meant something to the pair of them. But he supposed they could do that some other time. When this was all over.

“We have a murderous witch to save the world from - but regard… the church… St Jerome’s…”

Scorpius pointed at the church ahead of them, sounding awed. It was even more fantastic than it looked in his books.

“It’s magnificent,” Albus admitted, partly because Scorpius seemed to like it so much, and partly because, well, it was quite beautiful. As far as churches went.

“And St Jerome’s graveyard is supposedly magnificently haunted,” Scorpius chattered on,
sounding rather more excited than was normal under the circumstances.

He pointed to the right of the church.

“And that’s where the statue of Harry and his parents will be-“

“My dad has a statue?” Albus asked, frowning.

“Oh.” Scorpius remembered. “Not yet. But he will. Hopefully. And this - this house is where Bathilda Bagshot lived, lives…”

That caught Albus’s attention. Scorpius never stopped going on about the woman.


“The very same,” Scorpius agreed, all but squirming with excitement. He paused for a moment, wanting to take in the sight of the home of one of the greatest witches who had ever lived. And then, like a dream, the front curtains opened to reveal a little old woman with her hair tied back in a bun. She was wearing purple robes and looked like she was thinking hard about something. She had a quill tucked behind one ear, and stared out at the sky before moving back into her living room slowly.

Albus recognised the expression on her face easily. It was the same one Scorpius made when he was reading his history books. Oddly distant and yet incredibly intense at once.

Scorpius couldn’t contain his excitement. He would have known that woman anywhere! She was a heroine! One of the greatest contributors to wizarding historical records ever! He grabbed Albus’s arm and beamed, only just stopping himself from doing a little dance on the spot.

“Oh my, that’s her,” he breathed out, squeezing Albus’s arm tightly. “Wow. Squeak. My geekiness is a-quivering.”

“Scorpius!” Albus exclaimed, not sure whether to laugh or roll his eyes to the heavens. If there was one thing he could count on, even in the depths of despair, at the potential end of the wizarding world as they knew it, it was Scorpius Malfoy being a complete and utter geek. There was comfort in that, somewhere.

“And here it is-“ Scorpius announced, sounding far graver as he gestured at the next cottage.

“The home of James and Lily Potter…” Albus said, numbly.

He paused on the spot, just staring. This cottage should have been a ruin. It was in their time. It was known throughout the wizarding world as a memorial, left forever in its damaged state to remind everyone what happened there, of the two young lives that were lost, and one which was changed forever.

But the Potters’ cottage was normal. Pretty, yes, and definitely ‘quaint’ as Scorpius would have called it, but still the home of a young family. There was nothing to distinguish it from any other cottage on the street. Outside was a carved pumpkin, ready for Halloween. A cat was currently dozing beside it, curled up in the sunlight. The front garden was fairly small and yet flowers grew attractively around the square lawn, looking both neat and hopeful. It was not the scene of a nightmare.

And then suddenly, just like at Bathilda's cottage, the curtains opened. Albus stared at what looked like the face of his father in the window… only it couldn’t have been him. His eyes weren’t green,
and he was far too young...

The front door opened shortly after. The sounds of talking came from the cottage, casual chatter, domestic and affectionate.

The man from the living room left the house first. He was tall, thin and had untidy, black hair. On his nose were a pair of round-framed glasses.

He was James Potter. Albus’s grandfather.

James was talking over his shoulder to someone, wearing a teasing smirk. The cat on the doorstep woke at the noise and wandered up to James Potter, clearly looking for attention. James instinctively reached down to stroke the cat, seeming to talk to it for a moment, and then got up again as there was more movement from inside the house. The cat wandered away.

Behind him came a young woman with long, auburn hair, manoeuvring a pushchair out of the front door and down the path. She was laughing. The baby in the pushchair was giggling too, and kicking his chubby feet. He had dark, messy hair and the strangest, indefinable air of being well cared for. There was no scar on his forehead.

They were Lily and Harry Potter.

Albus had never thought of his other grandparents as people before. Not truly. He had never known them, never had much cause to imagine who they might have been, long ago, before his father got his scar, before he’d come into the world. They were legend. The people who had given his siblings their names. Regarded with sombre respect throughout the wizarding community.

What struck Albus most of all was how young they were. Horribly young. In their early twenties. Too young to die.

James Potter waited for his wife to pass and then helped her roll the pram from the path and into the well-kept lawn of the front garden.

Albus found himself walking forwards, towards his grandparents, towards his father…

Scorpius spotted the movement in an instant and pulled Albus back, firmly.

Albus turned to him, looking betrayed and more than a little dazed.

“They can’t see you, Albus” Scorpius explained, apologetically. “It might damage time, and we’re not doing that - not this time.”

Of course. Albus pulled himself together. What had he been thinking?

His father was safe, for now. That was what mattered. Delphi hadn’t got to him. They had got there first.

“But this means, she hasn’t…” Albus stammered out. “…we’ve made it… she hasn’t…”

Scorpius nodded his head and patted Albus on the arm.

Together they watched as the glowing young couple began to lay out blankets on the lawn. James Potter put his arm around his wife’s shoulders and she turned to look at him with affection.

“So what do we do now?” Scorpius asked, trying gently to remind Albus of their mission. “Get ready to fight her? Because she’s pretty… fierce.”
Fierce was a huge understatement, but Albus was too shaken by the sight of his grandparents to point that out.

Scorpius was right that at the moment, they had no chance of defeating her. That if they fought with Delphi, they’d be overpowered in a heartbeat. They couldn’t just wait for her to arrive. They had to do something.

All this time they'd been working in steps. It was how they'd both kept going. Aviemore to King's Cross. King's Cross to Godric's Hollow. But then what? What came next? What could they possibly do?

“Yes,” Albus agreed, forcing back his emotions and turning, determinedly, away from the Potters' cottage. He wanted Scorpius to see that he was giving this his full attention, that he was doing his best. After all Scorpius had done, it was only right that he contributed. After all, it was his fault they were in this mess in the first place. “We haven’t really thought this one through, have we? What do we do now? How do we protect my dad?”

Chapter End Notes

Poor lil baby Harry :(  
Please leave me a comment if you can! They mean the world to me!  
(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Four: Scene Four

Chapter Notes

This is one of my favourite scenes from the play! I hope you enjoy it!

(Also my added bits!)

Please leave me a comment!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Following a long question session at the Extraordinary General Meeting, most of which Draco had found himself standing on the stage for, the witches and wizards in attendance began to disperse. Hermione shook hands with several people, and then rushed back to her office where she was needed in discussions. Ron went with her, guarding her from the journalists beginning to swarm, knocking a quill from one of their hands on his way and almost getting into a fight.

Professor McGonagall had approached her three former students (the ones who hadn't escaped) before leaving. She had been in a foul mood, but Draco understood. Clearly she was in a state of shock, and overwhelmed by the death of this Craig boy. Draco imagined she had a terrible amount of responsibility on her shoulders, along with blame she did not deserve.

“Unless I am needed, I will return to my school,” Minerva had declared, looking fierce.

Ginny had thanked her for coming, at which Minerva had softened ever so slightly. She had nodded at Draco with cold respect, but for Harry Potter she seemed unable to muster so much as the smallest of gestures.

She had stormed off, fixing her hat and tutting to herself, before quite suddenly turning back.

“Do wish you luck in finding your sons,” she said, rather stiffly. “And if there is any way I can be of service, then you need only contact me. Those boys are my students. I will do what I can.”

Draco had felt his respect for her grow in that moment.

Harry had disappeared soon after McGonagall, looking stressed. Ginny had given her husband a kiss and Draco had rather uncomfortably nodded his head at him.

And then only Ginny and Draco were left.

“I’m going home,” she told Draco. “I need to be… I want to be waiting. Just in case Albus…”

She stopped herself suddenly, remembering who she was talking to. It struck her that Draco Malfoy was horriby alone. The thought of him returning to Malfoy Manor, worried sick about his son, simply wasn’t right.

“Did you want to come with me?” Ginny volunteered. “I’m not much of a cook but I can make a good cup of tea.”
“I… thank you very much, Ginny,” Draco said stiffly, touched by the gesture. “But I have business of my own to attend to back at the Manor.”

“Of course,” said Ginny, nodding. “But Draco… please know that you’re always welcome. Especially now our boys are-“

“Please, don’t say what I think you’re going to,” Draco said, closing his eyes. He didn’t want to hear that Ginny Potter thought the boys were lost, that they weren’t coming back.

“I was going to say friends,” Ginny said softly. “We will find them, Draco. I believe they’re together. Truly.”

“Scorpius will take great comfort in that,” Draco admitted.

“And so will Albus,” Ginny agreed. “They’ll look after each other.”

Draco gave another nod of his head and then walked away. He didn’t want to talk about Scorpius just then. To be reminded of the distance between him and his son was too painful.

From the Ministry Draco travelled directly to Malfoy Manor. Potter was doing all he could, and so was Granger. But there was still one last hope he had to offer, if only he could find it. If only he could bear to face it.

He swept into the grand entrance hall, not bothering to take off his shoes, and headed for his private display room. Several pairs of grey Malfoy eyes stared out of their portraits at him as he went, but Draco ignored them.

His collection of Dark artefacts were well-kept, sorted into groups and maintained in excellent condition. Some were housed in more secure cabinets than others, such as the cursed items, which Draco only ever handled with dragon-hide gloves. He had always feared that young Scorpius might have one day attempted to investigate the objects, having been the curious boy that he was, and so the extra security measures had been introduced.

And yet there were some artefacts that Draco dared not display. The darkest and most dangerous of all, inherited from a long line of Malfoys. Some, Astoria had not even seen. She had declared she would rather not know what Draco’s ancestors had acquired, and in some cases, Draco himself wished he hadn’t come to know the terrible objects and weapons his family had possessed.

Many of the worst, Draco had long since destroyed. Despite the wailings of the portraits on the walls (many of which were now covered with curtains because of this very event) Draco had taken it upon himself to rid the world of many of these despicable items. It had been quite a challenge in some cases, to fully destroy them, and yet he had done it.

In all but one case.

Draco had kept the item out of sheer sentiment. It was the last object his father had acquired before his death, and to part with it would have felt like disrespecting Lucius Malfoy in some way. It would have felt like saying goodbye to this final trace of his once-beloved father.

Using his wand to open the hidden panels behind the main display cabinet and levitating the cabinet carefully to one side, Draco began to reverse the protective enchantments he had placed on the safe box within.

Inside was a small, silver box, engraved with serpents and adorned with emeralds. It had been found in his father’s bedroom, along with a letter which Draco had only ever dared to skim.
Lifting the lid, Draco let out a sigh of relief. For a horrible moment he had imagined the object had only existed in his mind, a figment of pure desperate hope that he might find his only son. But it was real. It was just as exquisite as Draco remembered.

Inside the safe box was a gleaming golden Time-Turner. A grand and beautiful item of fine quality and masterful craftsmanship. Draco picked it up tentatively. It was strangely light, despite the fact it was clearly made of solid gold. Draco was an expert on identifying such metals, and the mere thought of his father accepting anything less was absurd.

Beside it was a folded piece of parchment. The letter to Lucius Malfoy which Draco had kept with the item ever since his father's death. Draco lifted it from the box and began to read:

Dear Mr Malfoy,

Many thanks for your patience in this most delicate of matters. Enclosed is the item you asked for. It is an original. One of a kind. Modelled on the early series, it is not plagued with any such restrictions as the latest batch. It is indeed a tragedy that the Ministry feel the need to meddle in such beautiful magic.

You should find this item able to transport the user well beyond the Ministry’s assigned five minutes. Our tests lead us to believe it is capable of transporting the wearer back years, perhaps time beyond human classification. Certainly we have put no restrictions in place, although we would advise completing tests before using the item to its full capacity, as this is the first of its kind in a generation. Perhaps longer even than that.

I trust you will find your money well spent, and that you will will use your purchase wisely. We consider it an honour to contribute to the noble Malfoy collection. Your family has always been a faithful client of ours.

 Regards,

Mortimer G Burke

If the letter was correct and his father had not been tricked (although, who would dare to trick Lucius Malfoy?) then within his Manor Draco held a lifeline. A way to reach his son. A way to protect him, even now.

Could he use it? Truly?

Draco’s conscience gave a twinge. Long ago he had promised Astoria that he would never use any of the items from his family collection. And until now he had remained true to his word. Even on those lonely nights when the Manor seemed more like a prison than a home, and Draco longed for nothing more than one more hour with his wife. Just one.

But Astoria would have understood, Draco told himself. For Scorpius, she would have done anything. Their son had been the light of her too-short life. She had loved Scorpius more fiercely than she had loved even him, and Draco was glad of it. If Astoria had been there, beside him, she would have told him to do whatever it took to keep their son safe. She would have sacrificed anything for Scorpius. For her precious boy.

In honesty, Draco did not know how to begin. He did not know how to best utilise this new addition to his advantage. He knew that he was not a brave man.

But he knew who was. And who deserved to know about it. Who deserved to be involved, even if it put Draco in some considerable jeopardy. Even if his freedom and reputation were on the line.
Decisively, Draco stowed the Time-Turner in the pocket of his travelling cloak. He returned the room to its original state, using the usual protective enchantments, and then left the Manor without looking back.

+++ 

Harry had not had the opportunity to sit down all day. The past few hours, following the Extraordinary General Meeting, had been a seemingly endless stream of smaller meetings, research, and organisation. The entire Auror team had been sent out, all needing to be assigned groups according to their skill sets, each being utilised to the best of their abilities. Every so often a Patronus would arrive with news, with potential leads, but nothing Harry heard filled him with hope. He knew full well that they were grasping at straws. That there was very little they could do.

Hermione was determined they give the impression of action, however, to reassure the wizarding world, and so Harry continued his efforts. Even though he knew they would be fruitless. Even if what he truly wanted was to jump on a broom himself and join the search so at least he could feel less pent-up, less useless.

Instead of that tempting idea he stood in his office rifling through papers, searching desperately for something that could help him, for a eureka moment. As Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement it was his responsibility to stay put. Even if it pained him.

“Good evening, Harry,” came a familiar gentle voice from the frame to Harry’s right.

Harry looked up from his work to see Albus Dumbledore back in his portrait and smiling kindly at him. It was the first Harry had seen of him all day, despite the fact Harry had turned to the empty frame numerous times already, desperate for reassurance which never came.

“Professor Dumbledore,” Harry said coldly, not quite able to look the man in his twinkling blue eyes. How could they be twinkling at a time like this? “In my office. I’m honoured. I must be where the action is, tonight?”

If Dumbledore noticed his cool reception, he didn’t show it.

“What are you doing?” he asked Harry with interest.

“Going through papers, seeing if I missed anything I shouldn’t have. Marshalling forces to fight in the limited way we can fight. Knowing that the battle is being raged far away from us. What else can I do?”

Dumbledore said nothing. He had no answer to give him.

Starting to lose his temper, Harry abandoned his papers completely.

“Where have you been, Dumbledore?” he asked, trying to keep his face passive.

“I’m here now.”

Here now simply wasn’t good enough. It was too late. Albus was gone. The wizarding world was in danger. Did Dumbledore think he could just come and go as he pleased? That he could abandon Harry in his time of need, in his son’s time of need and then expect a warm welcome when he finally decided to show his face?

Perhaps once Harry would have been grateful for the fleeting visits, for the vague advice, but no longer. He wasn’t so in awe of Albus Dumbledore that he could forgive such poor counsel. Nor
could he forgive the infrequency of Dumbledore’s interest. Not now his son was on the line.

Harry Potter was now a father. A father of a teenage son. A boy of only fourteen years old. He could no longer excuse the fact that Albus Dumbledore had allowed him to step right into danger at that very same age. It was... irresponsible. It was beyond negligent. The very thought turned Harry's stomach and it stunned him that Albus Dumbledore had so calmly allowed him to head towards such peril all those years ago. How could anyone? If he, Harry, was going to acknowledge his wrongs in all this, then surely Albus Dumbledore had just as much to answer for? Perhaps even more.

"Here just as the battle is lost," Harry remarked darkly. "Or are you denying that Voldemort is going to return?"

"It is - possible," Dumbledore admitted.

For a moment Harry stared at the portrait of his former mentor, of his once adored Headmaster, of the man who had often played the part of a father to him. Was that all he was going to get? Was that all the reassurance Dumbledore could give him?

Rage rose up in Harry’s chest. Dumbledore was as good as useless. Just a foolish, doddering, selfish old man...

"Go," Harry declared. "Leave. I don’t want you here. I don’t need you. You were absent every time it really counted. I fought him three times without you. I’ll face him again, if needs be - alone."

Dumbledore did appear slightly shaken at that.

"Harry, don’t you think I wanted to fight him on your behalf? I would have spared you if I could-"

"Love blinds us?" Harry burst out, repeating the ridiculous advice Dumbledore had once left him with before, back when his son had been in the hospital wing. It was just another example that Albus Dumbledore was all talk and no action. After all, what was the use of coining a poetic phrase if you couldn’t save a child from harm? "Do you even know what that means? Do you even know how bad that advice was?"

Dumbledore blinked at Harry, listening intently, head slightly bowed as though accepting his criticism.

His civil acknowledgement of his complaints only made Harry angrier.

"My son is - my son is fighting battles for us just as I had to for you. And I have proved as bad a father to him as you were to me. Leaving him in places he felt unloved - growing in him resentments he’ll take years to understand-"

"If you’re referring to Privet Drive then -" Dumbledore tried, but Harry cut him off in an instant.

"Years!" Harry exclaimed, slamming his hands down on his desk. "Years I spent there alone, without knowing what I was, or why I was there, without knowing that anybody cared!"

"I - did not wish to become attached to you-"

"Protecting yourself, even then!" Harry declared with a scoff. He crossed his arms over his chest to prevent himself from lashing out.
“No. I was protecting you. I did not want to hurt you…”

Harry turned his head away. He couldn’t look at Dumbledore. He didn’t want to hear his excuses.

Dumbledore attempted to reach out of the portrait, to reach Harry, but it was impossible. Instead, he began, terribly, to cry, tears trickling down his wise old face, down his crooked nose. Worst of all he was doing his best to hide it.

“But I had to meet you in the end,” Dumbledore explained in an unsteady voice. “Eleven years old, and you were so brave. So good. You walked uncomplainingly along the path that had been laid at your feet. Of course I loved you… and I knew that it would happen all over again… that where I loved, I would cause irreparable damage… I am no fit person to love… I have never loved without causing harm…”

Harry chanced a look at Dumbledore and was forced to see his grief. It awakened something in him, and suddenly it became impossible to keep shouting, to keep hurling accusations.

“You would have hurt me less if you’d told me this, then,” Harry said, in a slightly calmer voice.

Dumbledore began to sob, now entirely openly.

“I was blind. That is what love does. I couldn’t see that you needed to hear that this closed-up, tricky, dangerous old man… loved you…”

Harry felt ill. Never before had he seen Dumbledore cry like this. Dumbledore had always struck him as a figure of strength, untouchable. To see him show such vulnerability was disturbing. More than anything he longed for a distraction to save him from this moment.

“Perfection is beyond the reach of humankind, beyond the reach of magic. In every shining moment of happiness is that drop of poison: the knowledge that pain will come again. Be honest to those you love, show your pain. To suffer is as human as to breathe.”

Harry sniffed and raised his head.

“You said that to me once before.”

Dumbledore dabbed at his eyes.

“It is all I have to offer you tonight,” the old man said gently, walking away.

Harry didn’t want Dumbledore to leave. Not like this. Not with tears streaming down his cheeks, his kind eyes glistening behind his half-moon spectacles.

“Don’t go!” Harry exclaimed, suddenly, uncrossing his arms and taking a step towards the portrait.

Dumbledore paused. He turned to look at Harry over his shoulder. To Harry’s relief he was smiling. It was only a small smile, and a sad one at that, but it was something.

“Those that we love never truly leave us, Harry. There are things that death cannot touch. Paint… and memory… and love.”

Harry swallowed hard.
“I loved you too, Dumbledore,” he admitted, as the old man began to walk away again.

“I know,” Dumbledore said quietly, and then he was gone.

Harry hadn’t realised that there were tears in his eyes until one trickled down his cheek. Taking off his glasses, he wiped them away swiftly.

At that moment, Harry’s office door opened and Draco Malfoy swept importantly into the room.

“Did you know that in this other reality - the reality Scorpius saw into - I was Head of Magical Law Enforcement?” Draco asked by way of greeting. “Maybe this room will be mine soon enough?”

Draco paused in the doorway, mid stride, as he took in the sight of Harry Potter standing gazing up at an empty portrait frame and seeming highly distressed.

He had the instant urge to walk back out of the room again and pretend he had never witnessed it. But before he could do so, Harry put his glasses back on and turned to him, swallowing.

Draco noticed the wet trails on Harry’s cheeks and the way his chest was heaving.

Had Potter been crying?

“Are you okay?” Draco asked awkwardly, unsure whether he was supposed to acknowledge the obvious distress on show or not.

Harry did not answer the question directly. Instead, he took a deep breath and gave Draco a weary smile.

“Come in - I’ll give you the tour,” Harry said, gesturing that Draco should enter.

Well, that was undeniably gracious of him, especially under their current circumstances. Draco nodded and accepted the offer.

Draco did not feel it was his place to be invited in. He couldn’t help but feel that he was intruding. And yet he was fascinated too, to witness the world of Harry Potter. Somehow, he had always imagined it to be a great deal more glamorous than this…

Harry’s office looked just like any other. There was a desk in the centre of the room, on which were several photographs. One was of Ginny Potter on a broom, clearly from her Quidditch days. Another was of the three Potter children. Draco recognised Scorpius’s Albus right away and noted the way he squirmed away from his siblings.

Also on the desk was a Holyhead Harpies mug, which looked like it contained cold coffee, a copy of the latest Prophet, two spare pairs of round-framed glasses, and what appeared to be stacks and stacks of Ministry documents.

In one corner was the very latest Firebolt model propped up against a broom stand. Beside it, on a shelf, stood a Foe-Glass, which currently displayed numerous faceless shadows. None of them appeared to have silver hair, although plenty of the figures were disturbingly close.

“The thing is though,” Draco found himself saying, mostly to save Potter the humiliation of having to speak in such a state of upset. “I never really fancied being a Ministry man. Even as a child. My dad - it’s all he ever wanted. Me? No.”
To his immense relief, Harry appeared to be pulling himself together.

“What did you want to do?” Harry asked.

“Quidditch,” said Draco easily, smiling slightly amusedly at the thought. “But I wasn’t good enough. Mainly I wanted to be happy.”

Harry nodded, understanding that. Understanding that Draco Malfoy was making a genuine effort to make conversation, possibly because he’d noticed how distressed he was.

It seemed almost like an exchange of vulnerability. Unable to talk to him in such a state, Draco had felt the need to level the playing field by offering a personal insight of his own. That sense of fair-play was not something Harry had ever expected from Draco Malfoy.

“Sorry, I’m not very good at smalltalk,” Draco said quickly, looking uncomfortable. “Do you mind if we skip on to the serious business?”

“Of course,” said Harry.

He summoned a chair for Draco, but he did not take it, instead choosing to remain standing before the desk. Harry settled in his own chair and couldn’t help but feel relief at being off his feet at last.

And then Harry frowned.

“What - serious - business?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

Draco took a deep breath. The information he had to impart was not something he wanted to be telling the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement. In fact, all things considered, Harry Potter was probably the last person he wanted to be confiding in.

And yet because of recent events things were different. Such perils hardly mattered. Not when his son was in danger. If he was to be charged for his knowing breach of wizarding law, then it was worth it, if only it meant Scorpius might be returned to safety. For what was freedom without his only family?

“Do you think Theodore Nott had the only Time-Turner,” Draco forced out, refusing to fidget in his unease. His father had taught him far better than to shuffle about under pressure.

“What?” Harry asked stupidly, squinting at him.

Oh for heaven’s sake, Draco thought. This was difficult enough as it was without Potter being his usual dense self.

“The Time-Turner the Ministry seized was a prototype,” Draco explained, gesturing grandly with his hands. “Made of inexpensive metal. It does the job, sure. But only being able to go back in time for five minutes - that’s a serious flaw - it isn’t something you’d sell to true collectors of Dark Magic.”

Harry wasn’t sure whether to be impressed or horrified by what he thought Draco was trying to tell him. A prototype meant more. It meant a finished version existed somewhere.

“He was working for you?” Harry asked.

“No,” Draco said quickly. “My father.”

The thought of Lucius Malfoy with a working Time-Turner was so beyond abhorrent that Harry
chose not to dwell on it.

“He liked owning things that no one else had,” Draco continued, talking in very matter-of-fact tones, although still very fast. “The Ministry’s Time-Turners - thanks to Croaker - were always a little vanilla for him. He wanted the ability to go back further than an hour, he wanted the ability to travel back years.”

Harry felt his stomach lurch. The image of a time travelling Lucius Malfoy was now refusing to disappear no matter how desperately Harry tried to force it away. He was sure it would haunt him for weeks, perhaps months to come.

“He’d never have used it,” Draco assured Harry, spotting his appalled expression. “Secretly, I think he preferred a world without Voldemort. But yes, the Time-Turner was built for him,”

Harry did not dare to get his hopes up. The fall would be too far if he had read Draco wrong.

“And did you keep it?” Harry asked, forcing himself to remain casual.

Draco reached into his cloak and pulled out a Time-Turner.

“No five minute problem, and it gleams like gold, just the way the Malfoys like it,” Draco said, turning his nose up a little as the Time-Turner gleamed in his hand.

Harry looked amused. Draco immediately stood to his full height. He wasn’t going to be laughed at by Potter at a time like this. Not after all he had just sacrificed.

“You’re smiling,” he said, narrowing his eyes.

“Hermione Granger,” Harry announced admiringly. For a moment Draco frowned, unsure where that strange outburst had come from. What did the Minster have to do with all this? “It was the reason she kept the first, the fear that there might be a second. Hanging on to this, you could have been sent to Azkaban.”

Potter really was surprisingly slow sometimes.

“Consider the alternative,” Draco said with forced patience. "Consider if people had known I had the ability to travel in time. Consider the rumour that would have been given increased - credence.”

Harry blinked and then understood.

“Scorpius,” he said.

Draco did not like addressing the vicious and unfounded rumour of Scorpius's parentage. Most of the time he refused to acknowledge it. It was beneath his dignity to give it any semblance of validation. The idea that his wife had been anything other than faithful, and that he, Draco, had allowed her to be used in such a foul way, was beyond comprehension. He would have died rather than allow her reputation to suffer such a smear, he would have never let the Dark Lord anywhere near his beloved Astoria. He would have duelled Voldemort himself to keep his wife safe from that man. For Astoria and Scorpius, he believed he could have defeated the Dark Lord himself.

And yet he found, now, that he wanted Potter to understand. That he wanted to defend the reputation of his family. That enough had transpired between them for Draco to trust that Potter would at least hear him out.

“We were capable of having children, but Astoria was frail,” Draco began rather uncomfortably. "A
blood malediction, a serious one. An ancestor was cursed… it showed up in her. You know how these things can resurface after generations.”

“I’m sorry, Draco,” Harry said, and he sounded sincere.

Draco waved away the meaningless apology. It was not pity he wanted.

“I didn’t want to risk her health. I said it didn’t matter whether the Malfoy line died with me - whatever my father said. But Astoria - she didn’t want a baby for the Malfoy name, for pure blood or glory, but for us. Our child, Scorpius was born… it was the best day of both of our lives, although it weakened Astoria considerably. We hid ourselves away, the three of us. I wanted to conserve her strength… and so the rumours started.”

Harry stared up at Draco with surprise.

He remembered the pure joy of learning he and Ginny were going to have James. How uncomplicated it had been. How the only worries had been the usual concerns of a young couple starting a family, where to live, how to juggle work and childcare, what colour the baby’s bedroom ought to be, who to tell first, what to name the baby when it came.

Draco Malfoy had clearly been living in a different world entirely. Not once had Harry considered the strain that might put on a person. The difficulties of a frail wife and young child.

If Ginny had become ill, Harry knew he would have dropped everything to care for her. Which was exactly what Draco had done for Astoria. And to Harry’s shame, even he had sometimes doubted the intent of this action of loyalty, love, and devotion. Often he had considered it suspicious that Draco Malfoy and his family had disappeared from public life. A few times he had even been urged to perform raids on Malfoy Manor, which to Harry’s immense relief he had argued against.

“I can’t imagine what that was like,” Harry found himself saying. Because he couldn’t. He couldn’t even scratch the surface. And it would have been wrong to pretend that he understood.

Draco appeared to consider his response and then nodded his head, perhaps with acknowledgement. Perhaps to show that he was grateful not to receive the same old consolations from men and women who couldn’t possibly understand the pain.

“Astoria always knew that she was not destined for old age,” Draco explained, talking more slowly now. “She wanted me to have somebody when she left, because… it is exceptionally lonely, being Draco Malfoy.”

Harry took a sudden interest in a paperweight on his desk, not willing to look up and see if that strange open, rather strained voice meant Draco was becoming emotional. Harry thought it was probably better for both of them if they ignored it. It was only right, considering how nobly Draco had ignored his own emotional moment earlier.

“I will always be suspected,” Draco said. “There’s no escaping the past. I never realised, though, that by hiding him away from this gossiping, judgemental world, I ensured that my son would emerge shrouded in worse suspicion than I ever endured.”

“Love blinds,” Harry remarked, thinking of Dumbledore’s words. “We have both tried to give our sons not what they needed, but what we needed. We’ve been so busy trying to rewrite our own pasts, we’ve blighted their present.”

“Which is why you need this,” Draco said forcefully, putting the Time-Turner down on Harry’s desk. “I have been holding onto it, barely resisting using it, even though I would sell my soul for
another minute with Astoria…”

Harry reached out for the Time-Turner, and then suddenly stopped. He was acting on impulse and he’d caught himself just in time. He couldn’t do that any more. He couldn’t put lives at risk for the small chance of finding his son. It wasn’t right. They had no plan, no idea what they were doing. Wasn’t this what their sons had done, to begin this nightmare journey?

“Oh, Draco… we can’t,” Harry breathed out with a grimace, pulling his hand back so that the temptation to take the Time-Turner was lost to him. “We can’t use it.”

Draco looked at Harry, grey eyes full of hope. Harry could see determination there, uncharacteristic impulsivity. Draco was nodding at Harry, as though hoping, desperately, to persuade him.

“We have to find them,” Draco said urgently. “If it takes centuries, we must find our sons…”

Slowly, reluctantly, Harry shook his head. Even if he wanted Albus back more than anything. Even if, oddly, he wanted to accept Draco’s offer, as some sort of olive branch. To put an end to their long enmity once and for all.

He saw Draco’s face fall.

“We have no idea where they are or when they are,” Harry explained. “Searching in time when you’ve no idea where to search, that’s a fool’s errand.”

Draco looked like he wanted to argue, but Harry shook his head again. He hoped Draco understood that he wasn't doing this to be difficult, to refuse his offer, to belittle his sacrifice. But to try and do what was right. For them and for their sons.

“No, love won’t do it and nor will a Time-Turner, I’m afraid,” said Harry. Draco let out a breath of disappointment and frustration, only the anger was not directed at Harry. “It’s up to our sons now - they’re the only ones who can save us.”

Chapter End Notes

Draco and Harry. How I love them.

Also, I enjoy Dumbledore as the next person, but Harry hits the nail on the head with his criticisms here! Kids should not be fighting evil murderous wizard dudes! Not good Dumby.

Please leave me a comment because I LOVE those!

(And say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
James and Lily Potter finished arranging blankets on their lawn and James sat down with a rather lazy air about him. Lily disappeared around the back of the house, leaving James with Harry.

“Walk, Albus,” Scorpius commanded, as James Potter looked around the street. “Do not stare. To that bench. Yes - Albus please stop looking at them. This is really important.”

“I’m not making it obvious,” Albus protested as they sat on the bench a little way down the street from the Potters’ cottage.

“They can’t realise you can see them,” Scorpius explained. “At all. If they see you looking then we’ll be in huge trouble. Almighty trouble.”

Albus gawped, and then understood.

“Oh - because the place is supposed to be hidden…”

“Exactly that,” Scorpius agreed.

They settled down as inconspicuously as possible, Albus grabbing the part of the bench closest to his ancestors before Scorpius could intervene. James didn’t seem to notice anything suspicious, because he gave a yawn and stretched up into the air.

“It’s a weird sort of time to sit in the garden,” Albus said. “And the weather isn’t great.”

“I suppose it’s the only contact with the outdoors they have,” Scorpius said thoughtfully. “The Fidelius Charm must stretch to the front gate. I suppose it could cover the entire property.”

“They can’t leave?”

“They’re in hiding from Voldemort, Albus. They can’t risk it. I think they’re probably protected so long as they stay within the bounds of the spell. Nobody can see them. Nobody but us.”

Albus hadn’t thought about that. It explained why nobody passing seemed to have turned to glance at the small family.

“Why us?” Albus asked. “The Fidelius Charm means only Secret Keepers can know, right?”

“Yes.”

“But we haven’t been told. How are we seeing this?”
“That, Albus, is a very good question,” Scorpius admitted, tapping his chin. “I don’t know much about the Fidelius Charm. Only what I’ve read. But since we can see the cottage, maybe it only works on those who were alive when the spell was cast? Or perhaps, because we come from the time after they died, we’re immune? Maybe the Time-Turner has some sort of counter spell on it? But that raises hundreds of questions, and the Fidelius Charm is known to be incredibly complicated, not to mention—”

Albus cut in before Scorpius got distracted.

“So they’re basically stuck in their house. In that tiny house. The three of them together?”

Scorpius nodded matter-of-factly.

“They have been for a while. Since Lily Potter realised she was pregnant. Since the prophecy. In order to protect your dad.”

At that moment, Lily returned to the front garden carrying what looked like Muggle gardening tools and wearing an apron over her dress. James had freed Harry from his pushchair and had his son sitting on his lap.

“She’s gardening?” Albus said, surprised. “In the middle of all this?”

“Looks like it.”

Scorpius took another glance at the garden. Lily was currently planting some pink and purple flowers, wearing a pair of yellow rubber gloves to keep her hands clean.

“Petunias,” Scorpius said knowledgeably, peering at the other flowers in the Potters’ garden. “My mum used to like those. Oh, and crocuses. And begonias.”

Albus looked confused.

“What’s the point?” he asked.

“The point?” Scorpius repeated, frowning. He didn’t understand Albus’s question at all.

“Of gardening. Of planting flowers. They’re stuck there, all three of them. And if they take one step outside Voldemort could find them. That’s… that’s bleak. Why aren’t they - I don’t know, panicking?”

“What use would panicking do?” Scorpius asked.

“I just don’t get it. Flowers. Sitting on the lawn. I’d be - I don’t know how I’d be. Probably not smiling.”

Scorpius gave Albus a pitying glance. Albus was probably right that had he been in a similar situation he would have got very dark indeed. It was simply a part of Scorpius’s best friend that he had come to accept. Albus was an almighty sulker who was always attracted to the worst case scenario, to the extent of sometimes even seeming to enjoy his misery.

“Albus, if you’re stuck inside your house all day everyday then think how lovely it is to have flowers growing outside. It’s a reminder that life goes on. That things can still be beautiful.”

Albus still didn’t look convinced.

Scorpius thought that perhaps he understood Lily Potter a little better than Albus did already.
Having spent a great deal of his childhood in (admittedly more grand) isolation, with a mother who often could not leave the house for long periods of time, he knew exactly what it could mean to someone to witness something as simple as flowers growing.

His mother had adored the grounds of the Manor, and Scorpius had always enjoyed pushing her around them in her chair. If she was feeling well enough to talk, she would tell Scorpius her favourite flowers, and then later, as a surprise at dinner, Scorpius would put some in a vase for her. Sometimes even his father got involved, in his formal, magnificent way, ordering more and more of the flowers his wife liked and having them planted in the grounds for her to enjoy.

“Sometimes you have to make your own happiness,” Scorpius said simply, knowing the long explanation would be lost on Albus. “That’s what your grandma is doing, I think.”

Albus stared, transfixed, as James Potter lifted his son into his arms then held him high above his head, so Harry could pretend he was flying, his little arms outstretched. He strained his ears to listen as his grandfather began to speak.

“And Harry James Potter has the Quaffle! He’s whizzing past the Beaters, dodging Bludgers left right and centre!”

James lifted Harry onto his shoulders, holding him securely by the legs. Harry clung to James’s messy hair.

“James,” Lily laughed, rolling her eyes as her son was paraded about the garden atop her husband’s shoulders.

“Oooh, what’s this? What’s Harry trying now?”

Harry made a noise of excitement, apparently asking the very same question, eager to know more.

“He’s on his feet! Yes, he’s performed a perfect Dionysus Dive. And the Quaffle soars through the air, the Keeper dives, and… Harry James Potter scores again! Ten more points for England!”

Harry was then thrown up in the air and caught. Lily looked slightly concerned, but Harry seemed delighted by the attention. His father gave him an almighty hug and then continued to soar him around the small garden.

“Why don’t you do some jogging?” Lily asked, wiping her nose carefully with a yellow glove and accidentally getting soil on her cheek. “There’s space around the back of the cottage.”

“I’m in perfectly good shape thanks very much,” James said, just the slightest bit testily.

Lily looked sad for a moment, but then she smiled, forgiving her husband with the instant understanding of the compassionate.

“Next I’ll turn around and you’ll be throwing him about like a Quaffle,” she joked, and the tension disappeared, just like that.

“He loves it, don’t you Harry?” James asked his dark haired baby. “He’s going to be a Chaser for England one day. He’s a natural. Just like his dad.”

“James, he’s one.”

“You’ve seen him on Padfoot’s broom. That’s natural talent. Isn’t that right, Harry?”
“Can you do something a little less adventurous? Because I’ve just fed him, and you know what happens when he gets excited after that.”

As if on cue, Harry gave a small burp. James reached out to wipe his chin with his bib.

Lily went back to her gardening, and James rested on his stomach, Harry propped up in front of him. He pulled out his wand and began conjuring colourful smoke rings, which floated towards Harry, making him shake with laughter as he tried to reach for them with his chubby palms.

“My dad and his dad,” Albus said with awe.

Scorpius thought it was rather sad. It was clear that James Potter adored his little son, but Scorpius couldn’t help but notice that he seemed to be treating him like a doll. Like entertainment. He supposed that under the circumstances that couldn’t be avoided. Harry Potter was probably one of the only distractions the young couple had.

“I wish I could talk to them,” Albus said wistfully.

“I know you do,” Scorpius said with great understanding. “But we have to stick to the plan. And you’re getting… attached. We can’t afford to do that. We can’t think about them as your family. You can’t think about it like that.”

Albus knew that was the truth. It was just so hard not to feel a sense of protection, of loyalty. They were his family. That was his dad.

“I know. I do know that,” Albus admitted. “I just… what if she turns up? She could, any second. What if she turns up and hurts them?”

“If she does try something then you can’t just leap in,” Scorpius said firmly. “Even if you want to. Even if she does something awful. If she shows up then we stay well back unless it’s absolutely necessary. Until the very last moment. We have to protect time.”

“But what if my dad needs me?” Albus asked plaintively.

“His parents are Lily and James Potter. They’re members of the Order. They’ll defend him better than we could. Although something tells me she won’t want to battle them.”

“Why not?”

“Because she might well lose. If Delphi wants time to change, she’ll want to make sure it goes her way. Lily Potter was a phenomenal witch. And we know that she would do anything in defence of her son. I don’t know if she’d risk taking them both on.”

“Maybe they’ll defeat her for us?” Albus asked hopefully.

“No, Albus,” Scorpius said, trying very hard to remain patient. “Because that would change everything. If they get attacked today, there’s no way they’ll die tonight. Voldemort catches them unawares. They think their living here is a secret from him. James doesn’t even have his wand when Voldemort arrives. They need to have no idea there’s any danger. They need to think this is just a normal day.”

“No wand?” Albus asked, frowning.

“No wand,” Scorpius agreed. “They really weren’t expecting trouble.”
“My granddad fought him with no wand?” Albus repeated, looking dazed.

“He didn’t fight him, Albus. How could he? He was killed. In an instant.”

“But he was an amazing dueller, wasn’t he? Everyone always says he was…”

“They didn’t know the Fidelius Charm had been broken. They thought they were safe. There was no way they could have known. He tried to buy them time, your grandmother and your dad. And he did.”

Albus glanced once again at his grandparents. Lily was still gardening, but unknown to her, James had just reached out to pick a purple flower, before placing it behind his son’s ear. Harry appeared thrilled by the new accessory.

“What… actually happened?” he ventured to ask Scorpius, trying not to sound as distressed as he was.

“On the night they died?”

Albus nodded.

Scorpius turned to him, shocked.

“Did your dad not tell you?”

“I… he tried. I didn’t want to hear. I only know the basics. The stuff everyone does.”

Scorpius chewed on his lower lip, unsure if telling Albus the truth was the right thing to do. Already Albus seemed to be attached to his grandparents. He kept gazing at them like he loved them. With longing. He was desperate for some connection, for some acknowledgement.

“Please,” Albus said quietly. “I won’t get upset. I just have to know. If it has to happen tonight then I need to know how…”

Scorpius let out a sigh and gave in.

“The history books don’t tell us what time he arrived, but it was unexpected. He got to your granddad first,” Scorpius revealed. “Lily took Harry into the bedroom to protect him. It’s said she tried to barricade the door.”

“Why didn’t she Apparate?”

“Maybe she tried? Voldemort had powers that even the most brilliant modern historians can’t understand. He may have cast an Anti-Disapparition Jinx. For all we know she didn’t have her wand with her either. We can’t know for certain. There are all sorts of theories, but without evidence it’s just speculation. And I can’t imagine more information will come to light…”

“Then what happened?” Albus asked, like a child asking for more of a terrifying horror story, afraid, but desperate to know what happened in the end.

“You know that she threw herself in front of your dad? That she refused to step aside?”

“Yes. That’s how Dad got his scar. It was what rebounded the Killing Curse. I know about that. Dad told me when I was young. He said he got his scar because his mum saved his life.”

“She had the choice not to. Voldemort didn’t want to kill her. Rumour has it that he wanted to
recruit her, and James too. They were a very promising young witch and wizard.”

“She could have lived?” Albus asked, stunned.

“She had the choice to step aside. He only wanted your dad. But she refused. And then… well. You know what happened after that.”

Albus went very quiet. He had always imagined the situation as something of an ambush, a sudden, animalistic sacrifice. But this sounded far worse. The way Scorpius described it, it sounded like Lily Potter knew what was going to happen. That she knew she had a chance and yet still chose to throw it away.

“She could have chosen to live?” Albus repeated. "Really? He would have spared her?”

“We can’t know for sure, but I think so. Yes,” Scorpius agreed. “He wanted Harry dead because of the prophecy, but not her. She could have survived it. But she didn’t. Because she thought some things were worth fighting for. Worth sacrificing for.”

“Dad always said she saved him with her love.”

“She did.”

“I just thought… I mean I thought that was him being stupid. Like a metaphor or something. I thought he was trying to be dramatic.”

“It is her love that saves your dad. It’s the only known way to stop a Killing Curse. It’s called sacrificial protection. It’s a very ancient counter-charm. Some people still argue it doesn’t exist, but I think it does. Albus Dumbledore believed in it, and so do I.”

“So she throws herself in front of the Killing Curse tonight?” Albus clarified, numbly.

Scorpius paused, hating himself for the words that had to come out of his mouth.

“As odd and insensitive as this is going to sound - yes. If we’re very very lucky.”

“And that means we’re here to make sure my grandparents die. That they can’t escape him? That my dad gets attacked. We have to do that?”

“I’m so sorry Albus, but yes. That’s exactly why we’re here. We need to make sure things happen as they should. Even if it’s painful.”

Albus went very pale.

“Did you need a moment?” Scorpius asked.

Albus shifted on the bench and tried to look casual despite the fact he was sure he could feel the world collapsing in on him.

“No, no. I’m fine. It makes sense. It has to happen. I know it does. Because without what happens tonight, what should happen - we don’t get the world as we know it. We have no choice.”

Scorpius very much admired Albus for those words. For how brave he was being.

Albus watched as Lily noticed the flower behind her son’s ear. First, she appeared to tell her husband off for picking her flowers, but then, after a guilty grin from James and a hand clap of excitement from Harry, she picked another to place behind her son’s other ear. Harry appeared
delighted by this.

“The Killing Curse, it doesn’t hurt, does it?” Albus asked after a while.


“So she won’t be in pain?”

“No,” Scorpius said, even though he knew that could have been a lie. “It will all be over before she knows it. And then she’ll be with James. They’ll be together.”

Albus heard Lily laugh at something, not able to look up at her in that moment. She had the most beautiful laugh. Confident and yet soft.

“She’s going to be terrified, isn’t she?” Albus said, grimacing.

“Try not to think about it,” Scorpius advised. “This is history. Just history. It’s already happened. Even if it feels like it’s right now to us. And what she did…it meant Voldemort could be defeated. It was amazing.”

“So if we fail then she’s died for nothing? If Delphi brings him back because of us, then I’ve made my own grandparents die in vain?”

“Standing up for what you believe in isn’t dying in vain,” Scorpius answered quietly. “At least, I don’t think they’d see it that way.”

Albus ran a hand through his hair and took a deep breath. Eerily, James Potter made the exact same gesture with his identical messy black hair.

Lily disappeared back inside the house for a moment, leaving her son and husband on the lawn. Harry was now trying to chew one of the flowers, something which James only just noticed in time to pry it away from him.

Bathilda Bagshot, clad in purple robes, wand tucked behind her ear, left her cottage, muttering to herself. She could clearly see the Potters’ home, because James greeted her on her way down the path, and Harry gave a wave which Bathilda returned with a kind smile on her wrinkled face.

Scorpius made a huge effort not to jump to his feet with excitement as the old woman trotted past the boys and down the street. He had to keep his head. This was important.

“We still need to figure out what to do,” Scorpius said firmly. “It’s all very well us being here, but we have no plan. Time is running out. For Harry. For all of us. What are our options? What can we do, Albus?”

Albus thought hard, frowning as he did so. Only one idea came to mind, and it was one he was pretty sure Scorpius wouldn’t approve of.

“We tell my granddad and grandma?” Albus suggested.

Scorpius sighed. Clearly he thought it was just wishful thinking.

“That they’ll never get to see their son grow up?”

“She’s strong enough,” Albus said with certainty. He thought of the vivacious young woman he had only just begun to know, how kind she looked, how much she smiled. How she planted flowers to remind herself how beautiful the world was. She reminded Albus of his own mother. Just as
strong. Just as ready to deal with anything. And Albus was certain that if she knew it would save her son, she’d still jump in front of that curse tonight. Even knowing what it would cost her.

“I know she is,” Albus continued, nodding. “You saw her.”

Scorpius smiled sadly.

“She looked wonderful, Albus,” Scorpius agreed. “And if I were you I’d be desperate to talk to her. But she needs to be able to beg Voldemort for Harry’s life, she needs to think he might die, and you’re the worst spoiler in the world that didn’t turn out to be true…”

Albus frowned, acknowledging the truth of that. It had been a stupid thought to begin with. But he had to ask, just in case. Scorpius patted him on the arm comfortingly.

“Dumbledore,” Albus said suddenly, sounding hopeful. “Dumbledore’s alive. We get Dumbledore involved. We do what you did with Snape-“

Scorpius thought about it. Having Albus Dumbledore at their side sounded fantastic. But was it safe?

“Can we risk him knowing your dad survives?” Scorpius asked himself. “That he has kids?”

“He’s Dumbledore!” Albus said confidently. “He can cope with anything!”

Scorpius wasn’t so sure about that. Albus Dumbledore was a complicated man (probably almost as complicated as his Albus) and his motivations were uncertain to say the least.

“Albus, there have been about a hundred books written on what Dumbledore knew, how he knew it, or why he did what he did. But what’s undoubtedly true - what he did - he needs to do - and I’m not going to risk messing with it,” Scorpius declared firmly.

Albus shook his head, ready to argue, but Scorpius held up a hand to silence him.

“I was able to ask for help because I was in an alternate reality. We aren’t. We’re in the past. We can’t fix time only to create more problems - if our adventures have taught us anything, they’ve taught us that. The dangers of talking to anyone - infecting time - are too great.”

For a moment Albus still looked like he wanted to contest the point, but then he hung his head and sighed.

“So we need to - talk to the future. We need to send Dad a message,” Albus said.

“But we don’t have an owl that can fly through time. And he doesn’t have a Time-Turner,” Scorpius pointed out.

“We get a message to Dad, he’ll find a way to get back here,” Albus said with certainty. “Even if he has to build a Time-Turner himself.”

It sounded implausible, but not impossible. Which was better than nothing. You could build Time-Turners, if you had the expertise, even though it was supposed to be horrendously difficult and absolutely illegal. Could Harry Potter create such a thing? Maybe with his resources he could?

It was a desperate, unsubstantial hope, but it was something. Scorpius refused to write it off as futile, no matter what logic told him.

Scorpius tapped on his chin, deep in thought. There had to be some way of making this work.
Every problem had a solution. You just had to think really really hard and refuse to give up. Unless, of course, Scorpius found himself thinking darkly, that problem was a family curse. Which must have been the only exception to the rule.

He blinked at the words. They weren’t his own. They were his father’s. From years ago. When he was a child.

He remembered his father saying those exact words. He had been standing at his tall and impressive best, sounding bitter and frustrated, having seen out the latest Healer he had paid to come and examine Astoria. Scorpius hadn’t known what a Healer was back then, but he remembered the strange men and women that were ushered quietly into his mother’s room and were so often escorted from the premises by his furious father.

*Wait a moment…* Scorpius thought, heart beating. *Memories…*

If he could still remember his father’s words, the angry, and yet clearly distressed look on his face, his helplessness while Astoria weakened, from all that time ago, then babies must be able to remember all sorts!

“We send a memory!” Scorpius declared exultantly. “ - like a Pensieve - stand over him and send a message, hope he reaches for the memory at exactly the right moment.”

Albus did not look convinced.

“I mean, it’s unlikely but… stand over the baby - and just repeatedly shout HELP. HELP. HELP. I mean, it might-traumatise the baby slightly…”

“Only slightly,” Albus deadpanned.

“A bit of trauma now is nothing compared to what’s happening… and maybe when he thinks - later - he might remember the faces of us as we - shouted.“

“Help?” Albus finished for him.

Scorpius looked at Albus and read his expression in an instant.

“You’re right. It’s a terrible idea.”

“It’s one of your worst ideas ever,” Albus agreed with gusto.

“Got it!” Scorpius suddenly declared, sitting up on the bench. “We deliver it ourselves - we wait forty years - we deliver it-“

“Not a chance,” Albus said. “Once Delphi has set time the way she wants she’ll send armies to try and find us - kill us-“

Ah, Albus had a point. They definitely wouldn’t be allowed to live for long if Delphi had her way. To imagine they could survive forty years, let alone a few days of her victory, was probably wishful thinking.

But that was only if Delphi could locate them…

Perhaps if they became hermits? If they hid themselves away and never showed their faces? Maybe then they might avoid her notice?

“So we hide in a hole?” Scorpius suggested, imagining some sort of underground bunker, perhaps
like the one he had seen beneath the Whomping Willow? The one in which Hermione and Ron had hidden in for all that time, fugitives, on the run from the law, fighting from the shadows.

It might have been a strange way to live, but at least he would have been with Albus. And he imagined he could decorate such a bunker in a way which made it bearable. Would they go mad down there? Perhaps. But perhaps not. Maybe if they were together they could keep each other sane?

But Albus merely raised an eyebrow, not taking the idea seriously.

“As pleasurable as it will be to hide in a hole with you for the next forty years… they’ll find us. And we’ll die and time will be stuck in the wrong position. No. We need something we can control, something we know he’ll get at exactly the right time. We need a…”

Albus paused, trying to think of what exactly it was they needed.

“There’s nothing,” Scorpius said, sounding disappointed. Strangely this realisation did not bring with it the expected panic, rather a dull, calm sensation of resignation.

Were they really going to have to accept defeat? Was that it? Was their failure truly inevitable?

Scorpius sighed and then gave the smallest of smiles.

“Still,” he said, trying to sound as bright as possible. “If I had to choose a companion to be at the return of eternal darkness with, I’d choose you.”

Albus looked across at Scorpius with surprise. For a moment, he seemed uncertain, taking in the words.

And then he gave that familiar roll of his green eyes.

“No offence,” he said, one eyebrow raised. “But I’d choose someone massive and really good at magic.”

Scorpius tried another smile. Albus gave his best friend a shove, rolling his eyes again. Scorpius beamed at him and gave him a rather more gentle shove back.

It had become a strange affectionate sort of tussle when the boys were distracted by the sight of movement at the Potter house. Immediately they sat back on their bench, trying to look inconspicuous.

Lily Potter returned to the garden, this time without her apron. In her hands she held a blanket. She shook it out and then took Harry from James, wrapping the blanket around her son to protect him from the cold.

“His blanket,” Albus said quietly, watching. “She’s wrapping him in his blanket.”

“Well, it is a moderately cold day,” Scorpius agreed.

“He always said - it’s the only thing he had from her. Look at the love with which she’s put it on him - I think he’d like to know about that - I wish I could tell him.”

Albus fell silent, slumping back on the bench. Perhaps he never would get the chance to tell his father. It was looking more and more likely that he would have to come to terms with that.

“And I wish I could tell my dad,” Scorpius said, suddenly. “- well, I’m not sure what. I’d like to tell
him that I’m occasionally capable of more bravery than he might think I am.”

Albus very nearly pointed out that Scorpius had endured the Cruciatus Curse more than three times already, which made him probably one of the bravest people Albus had ever met, but suddenly, a thought came to him. A wonderful thought.

“Scorpius - my dad still has that blanket,” Albus said, sitting up straighter in his excitement.

“That won’t work,” Scorpius said instantly, reading his thoughts. “If we write a message on it now, even really small, he’d read it too soon. Time will be spoilt.”

Albus ran a hand through his hair again and tried not to become frustrated. He was a new and improved Albus. He had to think, just like Scorpius always did. He couldn’t just sulk at the first sign of trouble.

“What do you know about love potions?” Albus suddenly asked. “What’s the ingredient they all contain?”

Scorpius frowned. He certainly didn’t approve of love potions, and he hadn’t thought that Albus did either.

His dad had always told him not to go near love potions of any kind. Never ever to use them, and not to drink anything which looked like it could have been tampered with. The idea of controlling the feelings of others was something Draco Malfoy despised, and Scorpius had been taught from a young age not to let others influence him in any way whatsoever.

Still, Scorpius did know a bit about them. They cropped up in his books every so often, and they were on this year’s syllabus for Potions. He frowned as he tried to recall his knowledge.

Laverne de Montmorency’s early concoctions back in the nineteenth century included powdered Moonstone and Ashwinder eggs. Of course, as time went on all sorts of variations had become popular. Scorpius had read recently about peppermint being used in modern love potions, and more predictably, rose thorns. There was only one ingredient Scorpius could think of which was vital to a love potion: Pearl Dust. As far as Scorpius was aware, Pearl Dust could be found in every love potion ever made. It was by far the most powerful ingredient, and definitely the most dangerous.

“Amongst other things, Pearl Dust,” Scorpius said, skipping to the most important part.

“Pearl Dust is a pretty rare ingredient, isn’t it?” Albus asked.

“Mainly because it’s pretty expensive,” Scorpius agreed (which he thought, personally, was a rather good thing, or else everyone would be making love potions).

He stopped suddenly, frowning at Albus again. Since when had Albus taken an interest in Potions? And why did he want to know about love potions of all things?

“What’s this about, Albus?”

Albus went slightly red in the face but refused to lower his head.

“Dad and I had a fight on the day before I went to school,” he revealed awkwardly.

Scorpius made an incredulous face. It stunned him that even now Albus was talking about an argument with his dad. Was there any conversation which Albus couldn’t divert to that topic? Scorpius wondered.
“This I am aware of,” Scorpius remarked dryly. “I believe it kind of got us into this mess.”

“I threw the blanket across the room. It collided with the love potion that Uncle Ron gave me as a joke.”

“He’s a funny guy,” Scorpius said, turning his nose up a little in an almost spot-on accidental impersonation of his father.

“The potion spilt and the blanket was covered in it and I happen to know for a fact that Mum hasn’t let Dad touch that room since I left it.”

“So?” Scorpius asked.

“So it’s coming up to Hallows’ Eve in their time as well as ours - and he told me he always finds that blanket, he needs to be with it on Hallows’ Eve - it was the last thing his mum gave to him - so he will look for it and when he finds it…”

Albus was staring at him like he ought to have understood something from that speech.

“No,” Scorpius said, shaking his head. “Still not getting you.”

Albus rolled his eyes.

“What reacts with Pearl Dust?” he asked Scorpius, giving his best friend a significant look.

“Well, it is said that if Tincture of Demiguise and Pearl Dust meet… they burn.”

“And is Tincture of…” Albus paused for a moment, unsure of how to pronounce the word. “… Demiguise visible to the naked eye?”

“No,” answered Scorpius.

“So if we get that blanket and write on it in Tincture of Demiguise then…”

Scorpius’s blue-grey eyes widened with sudden understanding. Albus grinned at him, nodding his head.

“Nothing would react to it until it came into contact with the love potion. In your room. In the present,” Scorpius breathed out excitedly.

Albus had done it! He’d solved their problem! Oh, Scorpius could have kissed him!

“By Dumbledore, I love it!” Scorpius declared, beaming at Albus with delight.

Albus felt about ten feet tall. In fact, he thought that he could probably have just floated off into the air right then, even without a broom, just like Delphi had.

Determined not to seem too thrilled, Albus cleared his throat.

“We just need to work out where to find some… Demiguises.”

Scorpius nodded his head with agreement. He seemed utterly invigorated by their plan.

“You know, rumour has it that Bathilda Bagshot never saw the point in witches and wizards locking their doors,” he said, with a very un-Scorpius-like glint in his eyes.
Albus looked confused, but Scorpius pulled him to his feet. He looked furtively at the Potter garden, in which Lily was busy putting away tools, Harry was wrapped up warmly, now sleeping in his pushchair, and James was lying flat on his back and looking up at the sky wistfully.

With a nod, Scorpius led him across the street towards Bathilda Bagshot’s house, walking on his tiptoes.

Albus couldn’t keep his eyes off the Potters, terrified they’d be spotted, but Scorpius walked right up the path with the optimistic confidence of someone who trusted in the ultimate good of the universe and gave Bathilda Bagshot’s front door a gentle push.

It swung open instantly.

Scorpius gave another of those eager grins of his.

“Rumour was right,” he whispered, dragging Albus inside the cottage before he was seen. “Time to steal some wands and get potioning!”

Chapter End Notes

This one is a mixture of mine and the script’s. I hope you like the James and Lily additions! Also thanks to everyone who gave me advice on the Fidelius Charm! If you have a copy of the script it looks like it doesn't account for that Charm, but obviously I want to make this as realistic as possible (for a story about wizards, anyway!)

I hope you enjoy it!

Please leave me a comment because they mean the world! These past chapters and the next are tough. Very complicated. So your support is hugely appreciated!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Bathilda’s cottage smelt very strongly of incense and old books. Scorpius gave a deep sniff of delight as the boys crept down the hall and into the living room.

“Oh this is nice. Very nice,” Scorpius said as they took a look around.

It seemed a bit cluttered to Albus. One wall was almost entirely covered in shelves, which in turn were overloaded with books. There were so many that they had been stacked one on top of the other, all the way up to the ceiling. Various cups and saucers were scattered about, along with interesting ornaments and magical items which were on display across the room.

Albus couldn’t understand how someone could possibly need so many books, but already Scorpius was starting to divert from his course and move towards them, as though pulled by an invisible rope.

“And what if she gets back?” Albus asked, as Scorpius looked the impressive collection up and down.

“We’ll just have to explain that we’re very very sorry but we got the wrong house,” Scorpius answered, scanning the book shelves with an expression of hunger.

“And we do all look the same.”

Scorpius spotted one particular volume and looked like he wanted to dance on the spot.

“Oh Albus! First editions! Some of these look like antiques! Originals!”

“Now is not the time for you to get distracted by books,” Albus said firmly, taking Scorpius by the arm and leading him away from the shelves.

“I wish I could read them,” Scorpius said wistfully, as he obediently went. “I bet she’s annotated them too. She does that, you know.”

“Great,” Albus responded, leading Scorpius to a large cabinet slightly further down the room.

“Okay, so we’re looking for Tincture of Demi... whatever it is. It has to be around here somewhere,” Albus said.

Almost immediately, Scorpius pulled himself together. He gave a nod, pulled up his sleeves, and
began opening cupboard doors.

“Remember it’s not visible to the naked eye,” he reminded Albus.

“So basically we’re looking for an empty jar?”

“I’d think so, yes. Although definitely shake it so you know it isn’t just - you know - full of air.”

Albus and Scorpius began scanning the shelves, pulling out various tubs and containers, only to put them back, disappointed. Bathilda’s house was full of the strangest concoctions, some of which even Scorpius didn’t recognise.

During their search of the room the boys came across a bow-fronted chest of drawers covered in photographs. Albus had been checking each drawer in turn (only finding tablecloths, parchment, and quills), when Scorpius gave a little gasp from behind him.

Albus turned to see Scorpius staring at the photographs over his shoulder. Immediately, Albus stood aside so he could take a closer look.

“What is it?” Albus asked anxiously. “Is something wrong?”

“Wrong?” Scorpius asked. “No. But look - it’s Gellert Grindelwald!”

Scorpius pointed to a frame almost hidden by all the others.

“The Dark wizard?”

“Don’t you recognise him?” Scorpius asked, leaning to pick up the frame, very careful not to dislodge the other photographs in the process. He stared at the photograph with great interest.

“That looks nothing like Grindelwald,” Albus commented, looking at the light-haired, merry faced teenage boy smiling lazily out of the silver frame at them.

“Grindelwald wasn’t always bald, Albus,” Scorpius told him knowledgeably. “Wow, this is amazing. I’ve not seen this photograph of him before…”

Albus frowned, immediately suspicious. After Delphi he was giving nobody the benefit of the doubt.

“Why does Bathilda Bagshot have a photograph of Grindelwald in her house?” he demanded.

Scorpius turned to Albus with surprise, as though he expected him to have known why already.

“Bathilda was his great-aunt. Or is. I suppose he’s in Nurmengard now. He must be quite old. Feels strange, doesn’t it, that he’s still alive?”

“He doesn’t look all that evil,” Albus said, reluctantly being drawn in.

“No, he was very handsome and charming. Everyone thought so. Back when he was young. Even Albus Dumbledore. In fact especially Albus Dumbledore.”

Albus looked confused again.

“Haven’t you read The Life and Lies of Albus Dumbledore?” Scorpius asked.

“That Rita Skeeter book?”
“Yes.”

“No. And I wouldn’t touch it either,” Albus said with a sniff.

“I know it’s very biased and probably mostly made of speculation rather than fact - but there are some very interesting points made.”

“Everyone knows she just wrote that to discredit him. To make money,” said Albus. He may not have read the book, but he had heard Aunt Hermione complain about it enough times to know it wasn't exactly great literature.

“While that’s probably mostly right, there is some truth to what she uncovered. Dumbledore did know Gellert Grindelwald. In fact they were very close indeed. And at first he did agree with him.”

“You’re kidding?”

“Albus, how can you not know this? You’re named after Albus Dumbledore! You must know about Dumbledore and Grindelwald.”

Albus felt extremely stupid in that moment. Scorpius was looking at him like he’d just declared he didn’t know what Butterbeer was.

“I know that they knew each other when they were young,” Albus said defensively. “But Dumbledore fought him. He defeated him. And that’s all there is to it.”

“Only that isn’t all there is to it, and I should know, because I have copies of almost every uncovered letter they sent to each other. It’s fascinating to look back on. Because they really truly were very- oh!”

Scorpius stopped and gave another gasp which sounded equally like a squeak.

“Look! There’s Albus Dumbledore! It’s the photograph from Rita Skeeter’s book! She hasn’t taken it yet! This is amazing. To actually see it! The real copy!”

Scorpius handed Albus the photograph of Gellert Grindelwald and reached out to pick up a slightly smaller golden frame in which two young wizards were standing arm in arm.

“That’s Dumbledore?” Albus asked, not recognising the young man at all.

“Albus, you do realise that when we’re old men we’re not going to look like we do right now, don’t you?”

“That’s assuming we actually get to that point,” Albus said darkly, but he looked at the photograph of the two young men all the same.

“Long hair was all the rage,” Scorpius said. “You can’t tell it from this, but Dumbledore’s was auburn. They were both geniuses. Two of the brightest wizards of their generation. Gellert Grindelwald got expelled from Durmstrang before he met Dumbledore.”

“And you’re telling me that Dumbledore really was friends with Grindelwald? That he believed in all that anti-Muggle stuff.”

Scorpius nodded his head.

Albus felt his stomach lurch. It was bad enough that Uncle Ron called Severus Snape a git, but to have his other namesake turn out to be equally as flawed was something of a blow.
“But it was far more complicated than it sounds,” Scorpius assured him, reading Albus’s dismayed expression. “And they were very young.”

“Older than us, it looks like.”

“Yes, but only about seventeen. And Dumbledore gave it all up in the end. He went on to become, well, Dumbledore.”

Albus found he couldn’t look away from those two young men with their linked arms and content expressions.

“They look fairly happy in this,” he muttered, unsure why this photograph in particular was holding his attention.

“They were,” Scorpius revealed excitedly, clearly keen to discuss the subject. “Dumbledore adored Grindelwald. You can tell from the letters. They’re really beautiful, some of them. Obviously some of the ideas they had back then were a bit awful, but if you read them knowing that Dumbledore changes his mind, they’re extraordinary.”

“Was Rita Skeeter right, that Dumbledore could have stopped him sooner?” Albus asked, not sure if he wanted to know the answer or not. "I thought it was just a rumour…”

“It’s not a rumour,” Scorpius confirmed easily. "He could have acted before he did. I think that’s probably a fact.”

“That’s… awful.”

“It wasn’t very good,” Scorpius agreed. “But it must be hard to have to fight someone you love.”

“Didn’t Rita Skeeter start the rumour that Dumbledore was gay?” Albus asked, feeling strangely hot as he said it.

“Yes, but I don’t think that’s a rumour either,” Scorpius said seriously.

“Really?”

“I think it makes sense,” Scorpius declared. “People say there’s not nearly enough evidence, but I have the letters, and I think it’s obvious. He loved Gellert more than anyone. He became infatuated. I think he was probably the only person he loved like that in his whole life. Because he never met anyone else or had another partner. Although maybe that was just because it was difficult, you know, back then. I imagine it must have been.”

“I thought she just made that up,” Albus admitted. He thought it was odd nobody had ever mentioned this to him before.

“I suppose it is open to interpretation, and it’s not really our business anyway. But I like to think that he was.”

“Why?” Albus asked, surprised.

“Because him loving Gellert like that only makes him braver. It makes what he did more heroic. Some people think that all those things Dumbledore believed in when he was younger ruin his reputation, but I don’t. I think it only makes him more wonderful, more fantastic. Because it must have been so much more difficult to turn against the person he loved than just an ideology. Changing who you are - that’s being a true hero. Standing up for what’s right in the end.”
Scorpius put the frame in his hands back on the chest carefully and Albus did the same with his own. Swiftly, they moved on to the kitchen, which was a cluttered, although clean and seemingly well-used room. After only a few seconds of searching, Albus came across some very promising jars in a cabinet next to the fridge.

He beckoned Scorpius over right away.

“Perfect!” Scorpius declared, utterly thrilled. “Look, she’s labelled them all! I can’t believe I’m seeing her actual handwriting!”

Albus looked past the various interesting concoctions, and picked out a jar of clear liquid. He turned it around and tried to make out the messy scrawl on the label.

“Is that it?” he asked.

Scorpius squinted at the label and then beamed.

“I think so! It says ‘Tincture of…’, well, I can’t read that but it looks like it says Demiguise. Oh, it’s already brewed! Bathilda Bagshot truly is a remarkable woman. That’s going to save us so much time!”

Albus busied himself looking for a spare flask. He found one on a shelf by the kitchen sink.

“How much d’you think we’ll need?”

“About a quarter? I don’t want to leave her with nothing because Tincture of Demiguise can be rather expensive…”

“Okay, half,” Albus decided. “Because we need to get this right.”

Scorpius nodded his head and poured the clear liquid into the flask.

“Is there anything else we need while we’re here?” Albus asked, looking around as he fastened the container and held it safely to his chest.

“Yes! We need wands,” Scorpius exclaimed, putting the jar neatly away and getting to his feet.

“Well obviously,” Albus said, looking confused. “So we can protect ourselves. But we’re not going to find any here-”

“Hold that thought!” Scorpius declared brightly, beaming and then disappearing from the room. Albus followed him, frowning.

“Scorpius-“

But Scorpius was already halfway up the stairs.

Albus stared after him as Scorpius disappeared onto the upstairs landing. He heard the sounds of rummaging, and then of Scorpius’s posh little gasp of delight.

“Albus, come up here!” he called out.

“Why?”

“Just come!”
Giving the front door an anxious look, Albus went. The staircase was steep and narrow and probably not best suited, Albus thought, to the home of an old lady. Scorpius was in the first room to the right, a bedroom with a low ceiling.

“Look at all these!” Scorpius declared jubilantly.

Albus warily moved through the cluttered little room full of shelves and china. There was a dressing table by the main window, and a small bed in the centre of the room. Scorpius was standing in front of a display cabinet on the wall and looking utterly thrilled.

Within the cabinet were about twelve different wands, each with their own stand.

“Are they real?” Albus asked, as Scorpius opened the clasp on the cabinet and pulled open the door.

“Would Bathilda Bagshot have them if they weren’t?” Scorpius asked incredulously. “Look at them all! I can’t believe I get to see them in person! That one belonged to Bridget Wedlock!”

“Who’s that?”

“She was the first witch ever to establish the magical qualities of the number seven. It’s said she wrote only in invisible ink so nobody could steal her theories.”

As Scorpius squinted at the engraved names beneath each wand, Albus looked around the room uncertainly. He still didn’t feel quite safe, not knowing that Delphi could be there any second.

“Ooooh, she has Ignatia Wildsmith’s wand here! I wonder how she got it?”

Albus didn’t bother to ask who Ignatia Wildsmith was, although the name did ring a bell.

“Why does she have these?”

“Bathilda’s collection is legendary! Well, maybe not legendary. But known of. By people who read books. Her whole set was stolen during the Second Wizarding War, but thank goodness they were rounded up again a little while after. Some even had to be bought back by the Ministry. They’re safely in a public collection now, but you can’t get nearly as close to them as this!”

“Okay, so let’s take a few and get out of here,” Albus said firmly, reaching out to the cabinet, but Scorpius stopped his arm.

“No, we can’t do that. We can’t just steal from Bathilda Bagshot.”

“Then how are we-“

“But we can borrow from her,” Scorpius declared. “For a while. If I can just use the Doubling Charm then that means we can put a couple of fake wands in their place, for the time being. Hopefully she won’t suspect.”

Scorpius released Albus’s arm and reached out for a rather thin and elegant looking wand made of light wood.

“This one belonged to Grogan Stump! The Grogan Stump!” he exclaimed joyously, waving it in front of Albus.

“The Minister?”
“Elected twice! Wow, this wand is old. Minister Grogan died in 1884. I think. Or it might have been 1883… no. It has to be 1884. Ignore me.”

“Will it do?” Albus asked impatiently.

“Do? Albus, this is a piece of wizarding history! In our hands!”

“But wands don’t work so well when they were made for someone else,” Albus pointed out. “And you know what they say about old wands…”

“That’s just an old witches’ tale,” Scorpius said instantly. “But you’re right that we should test them. Okay, you first.”

He pushed the wand into Albus’s hand, already reaching back into the cabinet with relish.

“Me?” Albus repeated.

“Yes, I’ll try something else.”

Albus took the wand. It didn’t feel quite right in his hand. To start with it was oddly flexible.

He pointed it a nearby china cup.

“Wingardium Leviosa!”

The cup gave a feeble wobble and then floated rather reluctantly a few inches from its shelf.

“This one’s no good,” Albus said with frustration, feeling embarrassed for making a mess of what was one of the most basic spells.

“Here, try this,” Scorpius said, handing Albus a shorter, almost silvery wand, and returning the first for him.

Albus pointed it at the very same cup.

“Wingardium Leviosa!”

This time, the cup shot up to the ceiling, crashing loudly and smashing into pieces.

Scorpius, who already seemed to have found an acceptable wand, pointed his own at the mess.

“Reparo,” he commanded, and the cup reformed before Albus’s eyes, without a single scratch on it.

“Sorry about that, I don’t know what happened…” Albus muttered with embarrassment.

“I bet Ollivander spent ages finding you a wand,” Scorpius commented, as he levitated the cup back to its shelf. “You’re quite tricky, Albus.”

Albus couldn't help but smile ruefully at that.

“You’re not the first person to say so.”

Scorpius examined the cabinet once again.

“Gulliver Pokeby,” Scorpius read, frowning as he stared at one particular wand made of dark wood. “I don’t remember him. His name does ring a bell but…”
“I’ll try it,” Albus said instantly. “Hand it over.”

Scorpius did so.

Almost immediately Albus felt a warmth in his palm. It wasn’t nearly as powerful as when he had first held his own wand, but it felt right.

With confidence this time, Albus pointed the wand at the now repaired cup.

“Wingardium Leviosa!”

The cup floated elegantly up into the air and remained there, seemingly waiting for permission to move again.

“This one’s fine,” Albus said, as Scorpius beamed beside him.

“Right, give it here then,” Scorpius said sounding businesslike. “I’ll make a copy.”

“That’s fairly complicated magic…” Albus began as he handed the wand over. Scorpius put on his best concentrating face, and Albus shut up in an instant, understanding he needed silence.

“Geminio!” Scorpius declared, and instantly a second wand appeared, tumbling to Bathilda Bagshot’s bedroom carpet.

“Wow,” Albus said.

Scorpius switched the two wands in his hands, and repeated the spell. This time a replica of his own chosen wand, which had once belonged to Cornelius Agrippa, famed wizarding author, tumbled to the ground.

Albus picked the doubles up and placed them on the correct stands in the cabinet. They looked identical to the real wands.

Scorpius handed Gulliver Pokeby’s wand back to Albus looking solemn.

“We are going to give these back,” he promised, to no one in particular. “We’re not going to steal from Bathilda Bagshot. We’re doing a good and very important thing. She’d understand completely…”

“So now we just need the blanket and then we can get a message to my dad,” Albus said. “Only one more step to go!”

“One more step,” Scorpius agreed brightly. “And then our part of all this is finished. After that it’s up to your dad.”

“He won’t fail us,” Albus said with great certainty. “I promise.”

The boys went back downstairs, careful to make sure they left the room exactly the way they’d found it. Cautiously, and ducking in a rather absurd manner (to ensure nobody saw them from the outside) they crept to the front window, kneeling on Bathilda Bagshot’s sofa.

“Can you see them?” Scorpius asked. “Are they still in the garden? Do they have the blanket?”

Albus threw caution to the winds and stuck his head out of the open window to try and get a glimpse of the Potter family. He shot back in in an instant.
“Lily’s not, but James is. Dad’s still got the blanket on him.”

“How are we supposed to summon the blanket if your dad’s in it?” Scorpius mused.

“Yes, I think levitating it over here with my dad still in it might just catch my granddad’s attention.”

Albus stuck his head out of the window again.

“What can you see?” Scorpius whispered.

“My granddad’s just staring up at the sky. Watching clouds or something. Wait, no he’s got his wand out. He’s making sparks with it. Wow, that’s cool…”

Albus gave up explaining and descended into noises of admiration.

Scorpius could not resist tentatively joining Albus, squishing up beside him and poking his own blond head out of the window as well.

They couldn’t hear the multicoloured sparks James was creating from where they were, but apparently they were making some sort of noise, because Harry gave a wriggle in his pram.

Seeing the movement, and looking fairly pleased with it, James reached for his son, taking him out of his blanket and putting him back on his lap. Scorpius thought that was fairly irresponsible, since Harry had previously been fast asleep.

“We need to get it now,” Albus said quietly. “Before Lily comes back.”

Scorpius nodded his head. He pointed his wand at the blanket.

“Accio Harry Potter’s blanket!” he whispered.

The blanket immediately began to fly from the Potters’ garden towards Bathilda Bagshot’s front window. James didn’t notice a thing, but baby Harry did. He watched as the blanket soared over his head, but was soon distracted as his father created more red sparks for him to look at.

Albus grabbed the blanket, heart pounding, and he and Scorpius shot back into the living room, heads disappearing from sight.

“We’ve got it! Yes!” Albus declared, flopping back on the sofa.

“Now to write our message,” Scorpius said, clearing a space on the coffee table. “We need to think really carefully about what to put. This message is the one link we have to our time.”

Albus arranged the blanket on the table and took out the flask of Tincture of Demiguise.

“This stuff isn’t dangerous, is it?” he asked Scorpius.

“Not unless it’s reacting with Pearl Dust, no, although some people say-”

Albus immediately opened the flask and stuck his forefinger into the clear liquid, much to Scorpius’s surprise.

“Dad,” Albus began, hovering his finger over the blanket, not sure how small to write in order to have room.
“We’re staring with ‘Dad’?” Scorpius asked, looking doubtful.

“So he’ll know it’s from me,” Albus said.

“Harry is his name. We should start with ‘Harry’.”

“We’re staring with ‘Dad’, ” Albus said firmly, choosing a spot and beginning to write the letters as best he could, with the tip of his finger.

“Okay. ‘Dad, HELP.’” Scorpius agreed, listening intently for the sounds of the Potters’ realising they had been robbed.

“Dad. Help. Godric’s Hollow,” Albus said, writing the words as fast as he could.

Scorpius only just managed to stop himself from telling Albus to write more neatly.

“Do you think that’s all we should say? Is it enough?” Scorpius asked anxiously.

“Let me just finish this a second-“ Albus muttered, finishing the world ‘Hollow’.

“Oh, Albus! The date! That’s very important!”

“There’s not much space,” Albus said, frowning.

“In numbers. Write it in numbers. And be quick because any second now they’re going to notice…”

“I’m going as fast as I can!” Albus said, obediently writing out the date.

Scorpius squirmed on the sofa, feeling so nervous he could hardly stand it.

“Hurry!” he urged Albus.

Albus was so focussed that he didn’t even roll his eyes. He finished writing, picked up the blanket, and gave it a shake, hoping it would dry quickly.

“Okay, done. We need to put it back.”

“No, wait!” Scorpius commanded, as he incanted the Hot-Air Charm over the blanket. “They’ll notice if it’s wet.”

Albus handed the now pleasantly warm blanket to Scorpius, who was already clambering to the window again.

Next door, Harry Potter was chortling as blue and red sparks circled his head like a halo.

“Wingardium Leviosa!” Scorpius whispered, and the blanket soared slowly back into the Potters’ garden, finally coming to a stop on Harry’s empty pushchair.

At that very moment, Lily Potter returned to the garden.

“James, he was sleeping.”

Scorpius ducked back into the living room.

“Did we do it?” Albus asked. “Have we done it?”
“We’ve done it!” Scorpius agreed, beaming.

Albus put out his hand for a high-five, which Scorpius very awkwardly gave a gentle tap with his own palm.

“Bathilda!” came Lily Potter’s voice from next door. “Harry adored that scarf you knitted him, thank you so much! He would be wearing it, but he had a little accident earlier…”

The boys jumped up from the sofa with horror. The answering voice of an old woman told them that Bathilda Bagshot had indeed returned home from her walk. She might have been an old woman, but something told Albus that if she found two intruders in her home, she wouldn't be best pleased.

“Back door?” Albus suggested.

Scorpius nodded his head. Together they rushed through the kitchen and out through Bathilda’s overgrown back garden, pushing open the gate and closing it quietly behind them.

The boys slumped against the garden gate, panting. That had been close. Almost too close.

“Where to now?” Albus asked. “Where do we wait for my dad?”

Scorpius looked up at the assortment of wooden sheds a short way from them, in which the inhabitants without space in their gardens presumably kept their gardening tools. They didn't look particularly comfortable, but they had roofs and didn't seem like the sort of places Delphi would come looking for them.

“Well, it’s not a hole, but we could hide in a shed?” Scorpius suggested.

“A shed?”

“We’d be out of the way, and it’s shelter. It feels like it’s going to rain.”

Albus glanced up at the darkening October sky and nodded.

“Fine,” he agreed. "But not for forty years. Because my dad is coming. He’ll be here, Scorpius. I know it.”

"I believe you," Scorpius said with sincerity. That calmed Albus considerably.

The boys put away their wands, grinned at each other, and then made their way to the sheds.

Chapter End Notes

I have to give huge thanks, once again, to moonandreacre who helped me with the logistics of this. I was tearing out my hair over how to get the boys to have wands! The solution to that little problem is all down to him, so thank you thank you thank you!!!

I hope you enjoy this one!

Please leave me a comment if you did!!!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)
Chapter Notes

Hope you enjoy!

Please do leave me a comment if you do!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry barely came home once during the first few days of Albus’s absence. Ginny missed her husband, but she felt angry with him too, more so with each passing hour with no word from their youngest son. She ended up staking around the empty Potter house like a tiger, full of rage but unable to show it, waiting on owls, trying (unsuccessfully) to write for her column, praying for a miracle.

As with most witches and wizards of her generation, Ginny had lost a great many people in her life. The worst loss she had endured had been that of her adored big brother Fred. When she was younger, she had imagined her grief to be the most awful feeling possible, a never ending, never easing ache in her chest. But now she knew that that wasn’t the worst a person could feel, because now she was a mother. A mother without her child, not knowing where he was, if he was safe or in pain, unable to reach him.

How had her own mother coped when Fred had died? Ginny found herself asking. How had she not gone mad with the grief?

And then she stopped herself sharply. Because Albus wasn’t dead. He might have been far from her, but he was very much alive. And he wasn’t alone. He had his dearest friend with him.

Please, Scorpius, Ginny closed her eyes and thought, look after my son. Look after my son until I can get to him.

On the first day after the Extraordinary General Meeting, James and Lily were called home from Hogwarts. They had used Professor McGonagall’s fireplace and arrived at the Potter home, James looking pale, Lily tearful.

Lily had run into her mother’s arms, sobbing, and James had seemed unable to stand still. He paced the room with his hands in his pockets, occasionally telling everyone that things would be okay, helping himself to Butterbeers.

Unable to deal with this alone, Ginny had sent for her parents, who arrived within minutes. Molly gave out hugs, food, and reassurances in equal measure as she bustled around the Potter house. James tried to cheer Lily up with jokes until Ginny snapped at him, which in turn upset James, who rushed out into the garden. Arthur was sent after him and found his grandson sitting on the garden wall with his head in his hands.

Owl after owl had arrived from Harry, none any more helpful than the last. They spoke briefly of new leads, of meetings, of potential sightings. Each was followed by a new owl which declared the
hopes dashed. The only letter of any interest spoke of a visit from Draco Malfoy. It had come on that first day, before even the children had been sent home. Apparently Draco had a Time-Turner and wished to use it to help with the rescue effort, but as Ginny expected, Harry informed her that even this idea was too risky. It was impossible to know where the boys were, and to travel in time even once would be dangerous.

Out of regard for Draco Malfoy, Ginny decided to keep that little bit of information private. If her husband had not informed Hermione, then clearly he didn't judge the artefact to be a risk, and Ginny was certainly not willing to make matters worse for a grieving father.

After one day spent at home, the children wanted to go back to their friends at Hogwarts. Ginny was strangely glad. Not because she didn’t enjoy their company, but because she thought it might distract them slightly. Lily and James were both popular students, and Ginny knew their friends would surround and support them, which was exactly what her children needed. They left having only seen their harassed-looking father for a fleeting ten minutes as he returned home for clothes and papers. Lily, who was used to having her father dote on her, took this very badly. Unlike James, who seemed to have hope that Albus could wriggle his way out of anything, Lily, ever perceptive and emotionally tuned-in, appeared to see this almost zombie-like version of her father as confirmation that her youngest brother might never be coming back. She stepped into the green flames of the Potter fireplace with tears in her eyes. James followed, promising his mother he'd look out for her. And then they were gone.

Some time alone might well have been helpful, but after her parents and children left the house, Ginny found herself inundated with visits from friends and concerned family members. Almost the entire Holyhead Harpies team back from Ginny's days as a star Chaser visited the Potter kitchen, followed by a fair few of Ginny's current work acquaintances from the Prophet. Ginny found herself making more cups of tea than seemed humanly possible and repeating the same old words. Yes, she was coping. No, there wasn't any news. Harry? Oh, he's working. Thanks for coming round...

Bill and Fleur turned up at one point, Fleur full of hugs and tears, offering to tidy the place up. Ginny liked Fleur, who had a kind heart even if she could be a bit much, but her fussing presence became so irritating after a while that Bill got the hint and they left again.

George and Angelina came the day after, followed by Percy, who patted his little sister on the shoulder stiffly.

“If there’s anything you need, Ginny,” he had declared in his pompous and yet devoted way. “You need only owl me. Audrey and I are only too happy to help.”

Charlie sent a long letter from Tanzania and offered to come back to England. Ginny thanked him but turned him down.

There was nothing any of her brothers could do. There was nothing anyone could do. And their carefully scheduled visits, their grave tones, their caution, only riled her. It was like they thought Albus was lost already.

She received a letter from Ron the following day, along with a pack of Bertie Bott’s Every Flavour Beans.

Gin,

I’ve been at the Ministry with Hermione. Sorry we haven’t been over. Harry’s here. He says to tell you he might not be home again. They’ve set up beds here for the whole department. Never seen
anything like it. Percy came up from Transportation offering to help out, but he got sent away again. To be honest I think he was winding everyone up.

Hermione is doing everything she can, and you know that when she puts her mind to something, it gets sorted. Everything will be all right. Just you wait and see.

Oh yeah, Hermione said we’ll be round soon as we can.

From your favourite brother.

x

Ron and Hermione finally managed to visit Ginny on Hallows’ Eve. Hermione looked utterly exhausted, and Ron kept glancing at her worriedly, as though she might collapse from the stress.

“Oh Ginny, I’m so sorry we couldn’t come sooner!” said Hermione, throwing her arms around her sister-in-law. Ginny hugged back, but she couldn’t smile. “It’s been so hectic. We’ve barely left the office. Ron’s been rushing back and forth to get me clothes.”

“Is Harry coming home today, do you know?” Ginny asked, trying not to get her hopes up.

Hermione looked worriedly at Ron.

“I… he ought to be. I’ve told him he can’t keep working like this. I’ve organised cover so he can get some rest, but I don’t know that he’ll take it.”

“You know what he’s like, Gin,” Ron said with a shrug. “He gets it into his head that it’s his fault. That he has to fix it. He takes this stuff badly.”

If her husband was not planning on coming home on Hallows’ Eve of all nights then something was truly wrong. Terribly wrong. It was the night his parents died. Every year of their marriage, without fail, Harry had taken this evening off work, to be quiet, contemplative, and remember his parents. Every year so far he and Ginny had spent it together.

“I would ask how you two are coping, but that seems like a ridiculous question,” Hermione said, as Ginny led her and Ron into the kitchen.

“I have no idea how Harry is coping,” Ginny said honestly, sinking onto a kitchen chair. “Because I barely see him. He comes home for clothes, to shower. I found him sleeping in James’s room the other day. He didn’t even wake me up. I think he must have got home in the early hours. And then before I knew it he was off again.”

“Have you two… spoken about this?” Hermione asked tentatively.

“It’s hard to speak to someone that’s not here,” Ginny said darkly.

“That’s not right,” Ron said, putting his hand down on the table. “He should be here with you. I’ll tell him, Gin. He’ll listen to me.”

“I know that this must be putting a terrible strain on you both,” said Hermione. “But you need to have hope. And you need to talk to each other. I can’t imagine how I’d feel if it was me…”

“He thinks I blame him,” Ginny revealed.

“Do you?” Ron asked tactlessly.
“No. I did. I even told him that. I thought he’d pushed Albus away. I thought Albus had run off to spite his dad... but I was wrong. Albus was... taken. We know that now.”

“So he’s got the wrong end of the stick,” Ron said, like it was simple. “Just tell him that.”

“He won’t talk to me, Ron,” Ginny repeated, losing her temper. “He hasn’t even been to Hogwarts to see Lily, and she’s desperate for a visit. If it wasn’t for James I don’t know what I’d do about her. I’ve never known her be like this in my life. McGonagall says she’s really acting out. I had an owl just today to say they’d found her skipping lessons, just crying in a bathroom. They had to go and get James to talk her out. She wouldn’t even move for McGonagall.”

“Brave,” Ron commented. Hermione shook her head at him sternly.

“They don’t even know what to tell the students,” said Ginny. “McGonagall asked me what I wanted her to say to them all. I told her to say he was missing. I didn’t know what else could be said. There’s so much we don’t know.”

“But that’s exactly it,” Hermione said consolingly. “We don’t know much at all. So there’s no point in us jumping to the worst conclusions.”

“She’s taken him to another time. Even if he is safe, we can’t get him back. Not unless she returns him. And somehow I don’t think Voldemort’s daughter’s going to do that, do you?”

A silence fell. Neither Ron or Hermione had a comforting answer to give her.

Just then, the front door opened. Ginny shot to her feet, wand in hand. A very stressed, very scruffy, very miserable Harry Potter walked into the kitchen, and looked shocked to see it occupied.

“I came back for a shower,” Harry told the room in general. “New clothes. Just to... check in.”

“Yeah, you look like you could do with a shave too, mate,” Ron said.

“Why don’t I make you a nice cup of tea, Harry?” Hermione volunteered, getting to her feet. “And you, Ginny. Both of you could do with something to calm your nerves. And then perhaps we could all talk about-”

“Are you going back to work tonight, Harry?” Ginny asked her husband, ignoring Hermione.

“Yes,” Harry said. “I’ve got things to sort through. One of my Aurors should be coming in. She thinks she has an idea for possible defence, and I want to hear her out.”

Ginny took that in and then turned to Hermione, shaking her head.

“Not for me, thanks,” she said, as though there had been no break in the conversation.”I’ve drunk enough tea these past few days to last a lifetime.”

Ginny looked up at her husband and found she had the extreme urge to either shout at him, shake him, or throw her arms around him. None of those options seemed appropriate in that moment.

“Do you know what?” she said, getting up. “I’m going for a walk.”

“Gin are you sure that-” Ron tried, but Ginny stalked out of the kitchen, slamming the door behind her.

“Well...,” Hermione said, ignoring the noise of the door slamming and Harry’s resulting grimace.
“Harry, why don’t you sit down?”

Ron watched the closed kitchen door with quiet devastation. He’d never seen Harry and his sister like this. They had rows, yes, but they were usually over in a flash, like a sudden fire. This seemed cold, and horribly distant. Even seeing them shout at each other, as they had done occasionally when they were younger was better than this.

“I really don’t have much time,” Harry said, but Hermione sighed.

“Harry, you do. I’ve already organised cover. We have all the Aurors working on this. You need to take a moment to breathe. We can’t have our Head of Law Enforcement collapsing from exhaustion, can we?”

“She’s right,” said Ron. “You look like you need a break. A serious break.”

Seeing that he had no choice, Harry sank wearily into a chair.

“Is she…?” Harry asked quietly, gesturing at the door.

“Ginny’s fine, Harry,” Hermione said briskly. “Worried, but fine. In fact, she’s dealing with this brilliantly. She’s an incredibly strong person.”

Harry ran a hand through his hair and let out a sigh. Hermione busied herself with the tea while Ron tried to look as supportive as possible.

“I keep thinking that I’ve missed something,” Harry revealed as Hermione handed him a mug of tea moments later.

“How could you have?” Hermione asked reasonably. “You’ve been working day and night. And I get copies of every report you file. I’ve been over them dozens of times. You’re being very thorough, Harry.”

“Clearly not thorough enough,” Harry said darkly. “Because I haven’t found him yet. Albus is still out there.”

“Harry, you can’t do this alone,” Hermione said. “We’ve been over and over this. This isn’t just your problem to solve.”

“But it is!” Harry burst out, furiously. “This is all because of me! Voldemort has a child and now she wants revenge. She’s chosen my son because of me. Because of who he is.”

“Harry…”

“I’m supposed to be the Head of Magical Law Enforcement. If I can’t even protect my own son then what hope do we have?”

Ron looked discombobulated by this. He turned to Hermione as he took a mug of tea, desperate for his wife to console his best friend. He’d never found it easy to comfort Harry in one of his rages.

“Harry, I want you to listen to me,” Hermione said firmly, placing both of her hands on the table in a businesslike manner. “You cannot make this into another problem only you can solve. I know that this is going to be hard to hear, but this is not just about Albus. Nor Scorpius. It’s far bigger than that.”

“You don’t get it do you-” Harry began angrily, but Hermione cut him off.
“Do you remember how it was with Remus?”

“Remus?” Harry repeated, thrown.

“When we were at Grimmauld Place he came to us. He volunteered to help us find the Horcruxes.”

“When Tonks was pregnant,” Harry said. “Of course I remember that. I called him a coward.”

“He thought he wasn’t good enough,” Hermione said quietly. “He thought his being around for Teddy would have hurt him in some way. He blamed himself for things that hadn’t even happened yet. He offered to help us because he was scared. He was ready to give his everything to the cause, but not for his family.”

“What are you trying to say?” Harry demanded, narrowing his green eyes.

“I’m trying to say that you’re working so hard to try and help your family, to get Albus back… and I think it’s because you’re afraid. Afraid of being here. With Ginny. Of facing things.”

“You don’t know anything about it,” Harry snapped.

“Oi, don’t talk to her like that,” Ron cut in. “She’s trying to help. And I reckon she’s right. My sister needs you right now, because she’s in the same boat you are, but you’re working non-stop. You need to face this, Harry.”

“I can’t face her because this is my fault!” Harry exclaimed with frustration. “I brought this on my own family.”

“Harry, we are your best friends and we love you,” Hermione said, refusing to back down. “But sometimes that means telling the truth. And I think you and Ginny need to talk. Or at least you need to be here. For her.”

Harry stared at his two best friends, unable to comprehend how they’d managed to misread him so badly. That was just like Hermione, giving her opinion when it wasn’t wanted. And just like Ron to miss the big picture...

“Please, Harry…” begged Hermione, sounding so very much like her young self that something inside of Harry suddenly awoke.

Harry let his head fall into his hands with shame.

“Look mate, I know this is a mess,” Ron said, patting Harry on the back. “And I get that you’re scared. We all are. But Albus is stronger than you think. He can look after himself.”

Harry did not speak.

“Think what we got up to. Think what you survived. It’s crazy when you think about it. But you did. We all did. One day when he’s home you’ll look back on this and it won’t seem so bad.”

“What if he’s-“

“You can’t think like that, Harry,” Hermione said firmly. “We’ve got no evidence either way. There’s nothing. So we can’t jump to the worst conclusion.”

“So… how come you’re here?” Harry asked, clearing his throat with embarrassment.

“We wanted to see Ginny,” Hermione revealed. “I’ve got the afternoon off and then I’m back in
again tonight. And... well. Harry, we hoped you’d be here. I know that tonight is going to be difficult for you…”

Harry took a moment to realise what Hermione meant. He had almost forgotten. It was Hallows’ Eve.

“It’s come up so quickly…” Harry breathed out, shocked.

“You’ve been lost in this,” Hermione said. “We all have. We’re doing everything we can, but please Harry, don’t fall to pieces now. Not after all you’ve done. When Albus gets home he’s going to need you.”

“Exactly,” Ron added, more confidently now that Harry had calmed down. “He’s not going to want to come back and see you in that state. I mean forget Voldemort’s kid, he’ll be traumatised for life by that beard thing you’ve got going on.”

“Ron!” Hermione hissed, scandalised.

But somehow, without meaning to, Harry gave a smile.

Hermione and Ron only stayed for another twenty minutes, but when they had left (with a hug from Hermione and a rather emotional pat on the back from Ron) Harry felt noticeably lighter. It was like they had taken some of his troubles with them.

+++ 

With his afternoon free, Harry went upstairs, had a shower, a shave, and put on some more casual clothes. Feeling a little uncomfortable on his own he came back down and began cleaning the house. He cleared the kitchen, washed up the mugs he, Hermione, and Ron had used, and even rearranged the egg cups. It was a habit left over from his days with the Dursleys. Muggle cleaning was somehow more satisfying than using magic, Harry thought.

He only stared at the photo of his three children on the fridge for a moment. Watching Albus squirming away from his siblings was too painful.

Harry watched the clock, waiting for the evening to draw in. He wished Ginny would come home. Hallows’ Eve was never a pleasant night for him, but without Ginny, Harry felt lost.

Feeling an intense need for comfort of some kind, Harry remembered his blanket. He went up the stairs and to his and Ginny’s bedroom, looking in the wardrobe for where he kept it, only to find it was gone.

For a horrible moment Harry thought he’d lost that, too, but then he remembered. He had given it to Albus before the start of his school year. Or tried to. The plan had been to visit Albus on this very night, at Hogwarts, so they could be together. In memory of his parents. A desperate attempt to connect with his son.

It seemed absurd, how very far from that hope he was now.

Harry went to Albus’s bedroom and turned on the light. It looked exactly the same as it had on the day Albus had left to embark on his fourth year at Hogwarts. The sheets of the bed still smelled like Ron’s love potion, vaguely flowery. Albus would hate that, Harry thought with the smallest of smiles. He hated anything even the slightest bit sentimental. Or he pretended to. Harry had an idea that Albus might have thought differently if there was no audience to be contrary in front of.
At the end of Albus’s bed was Harry’s blanket, half draped onto the carpet. He supposed it did look fairly tatty. What was it Albus had called it? Mouldy? He should have explained himself better, Harry thought. It probably appeared, to Albus, that he’d been given a raw deal. Lily’s wings and James’s cloak must have seemed like far more thoughtful presents.

Harry took a deep breath and stared around his youngest son’s bedroom. It was far neater than James’s ever was. There were a few socks left on the bedroom floor, but the carpet was visible, which was something. Unlike James, Albus had no Quidditch posters on his walls. In fact, his room seemed lacking entirely in the personal touch. To an outsider it might have made Albus look boring, but Harry knew this was more a testament to Albus’s intense sense of privacy than anything else.

The only sign of Albus’s personality were the deep green bed sheets. The kids had all been asked to choose what they wanted, and Albus had gone for the Slytherin House colours.

On the desk, which was supposed to be for Albus to do his homework during the holidays (although if the owls from McGonagall were anything to go by, he never did), were a neat stack of letters. Harry didn’t recognise the tidy, elegant handwriting, but he was sure those were from Scorpius Malfoy. They seemed to be the only letters Albus didn’t discard after the first read.

A movement in the doorway made Harry start. But it was only Ginny, back from her walk and looking slightly calmer for it.

“Surprised to find you here,” she said, carefully.

Harry sat up, eager to show that he was trying.

“Don’t worry, I haven’t touched anything. Your shrine is preserved,” Harry said, trying his best to be as upbeat and casual as possible, but suddenly wincing at his accidental implication. “Sorry. Poor choice of words.”

Ginny said nothing. She merely stood in the doorway, arms crossed over her chest. Harry looked up at her, thinking of Ron and Hermione’s advice. Confiding in Ginny was what he needed to do. Even if it was painful. Because Ginny would understand. She knew him better than any person on the planet.

He tried a smile.

“You know, I’ve had some pretty terrible Hallows’ Eves - but this is undoubtedly at least the - second worst.”

His wife took a deep breath, her expression blazing. She looked like she was fighting herself.

“I was wrong- to blame you,” Ginny suddenly said, brown eyes hard. “I always accuse you of jumping to things and it was me who - Albus went missing and I assumed it was your fault. I’m sorry I did that.”

“You don’t think this is my fault?” Harry asked, confused.

Ginny looked exasperated.

“Harry, he was kidnapped by a powerful Dark witch, how can that be your fault?”

“I chased him away,” said Harry, bowing his head. “I chased him to her.”
Ginny reached for a hairband and tied back her red hair in a ponytail, a sure sign of stress.

“Can we not treat this like the battle is already lost?” Ginny asked.

Harry looked up at his wife, with her brave brown eyes, her freckled cheeks, her determination. That same determination was in Albus. It was so striking in that moment that Harry ached for his youngest son.

Harry began to cry.

“I’m sorry Gin-“

“Are you not listening to me?” Ginny demanded fiercely. “I’m sorry too.”

“I shouldn’t have survived - it was my destiny to die - even Dumbledore thought so - and yet I lived. I beat Voldemort. All these people - all these people - my parents, Fred, the Fallen Fifty - and it’s me that gets to live? How is that? All this damage - and it’s my fault.”

“They were killed by Voldemort,” Ginny said firmly.

“But if I’d stopped him sooner? All that blood on my hands. And now our son has been taken too-“

“He’s not dead,” Ginny declared, clenching her fists at her sides stubbornly. “Do you hear me, Harry? He’s not dead.”

Harry couldn’t stop the tears from pouring down his cheeks. Ginny watched for a moment, and then all of a sudden she rushed to him, all flaming hair and resolve. Ginny took her husband in her arms and held him tightly, refusing to let the misery take him over, refusing to surrender him.

“The Boy Who Lived,” Harry said bitterly. “How many people have to die for the Boy Who Lived?”

Harry swayed, thinking of his parents. Of his beloved mum and dad who he couldn’t even recall properly. Suddenly, Harry remembered the blanket, the reason for his being in Albus’s room, and got slowly to his feet to fetch it from the end of the bed where it was half dangling onto the floor.

“This blanket is all I have you know… to remember that Hallows’ Eve,” Harry said quietly, knowing that Ginny was listening, knowing that she cared. “This is all I have to remember them. And whilst…”

Harry reached out for the blanket and then stopped sharply. It really did look tatty now. More so than he’d realised. Had he given it to Albus like that?

Rather dismayed, Harry shook the blanket out. To his horror, it was full of holes, whole sections simply stripped away as though burned.

“This has got holes in it,” Harry said, stunned. “Ron’s idiotic love potion has burnt right through it. Look at this! It’s ruined. Ruined!”

Ginny put a hand to her mouth, upset on her husband’s behalf. For one horrible moment she wondered if Albus had done it, in an act of rage.

Harry opened the blanket fully, to take in the scale of the destruction of one of his most precious possessions. But the holes in the blanket weren’t holes. They weren’t random marks. They looked like writing…
“What?” Harry breathed out, squinting.

“Harry, it has - something - written,” Ginny said, getting to her feet.

“‘Dad’, does it say ‘Dad’?” Harry asked, tilting his head slightly. “It’s not that distinct…”

Ginny went to her husband’s side to take a closer look.

“‘Hello’?” she read out, becoming more concerned by the second that this was an uncharacteristically extreme example of her youngest son’s retaliatory nature. “Does it say ‘Hello’? And then… ‘Good’…”

“‘Dad Hello Good Hello’?” Harry asked himself.

He frowned at Ginny, shaking his head.

“No,” Harry said, unwilling to believe that his adored son would do such a thing to him. “This is … a strange joke.”

Ginny readjusted her ponytail and took the blanket from her husband’s hands.

“Give me that. My eyesight is better than yours. ‘Dad, Hello Good’ - that’s not ‘Hello’ again - that’s ‘Hallow’ or ‘Hollow’? And then some numbers - these are clearer - ‘3…1…1…0…8…1’. Is this one of those Muggle telephone numbers? Or a grid reference or a…”

Harry’s head snapped up with sudden understanding. A hundred thoughts smashed through his head at once, several of them extremely unpleasant.

“No,” Harry said with certainty. “It’s a date. 31 October 1981. The date my parents were killed.”

Ginny looked at Harry and then back down at the blanket, her heart pounding.

“That doesn’t say ‘Hello’,” she said quietly. “It says ‘Help.’”


Harry reached out, overwhelmed with sudden hope, and kissed Ginny hard.

“Albus wrote this?” Ginny clarified, thinking it was too good to be true.

Harry grinned. It was the first time Ginny had seen her husband smile properly in a long while. He had changed in an instant, like a whirlwind.

“And he’s told me where they are and when they are, and now we know where she is, we know where we can fight her!”

He kissed Ginny again, exultantly.

“We haven’t got them back again yet,” Ginny reminded him, not ready to raise her hopes only to see them destroyed.

But Harry didn’t seem to care. He ran a hand through his hair and fixed his glasses on his nose.

“I’ll send an owl to Hermione,” he said, full of purpose. “You send one to Draco. Tell them to meet us at Godric’s Hollow with the Time-Turner.”
Ginny nodded her head in agreement. It didn’t matter to her that this plan was dangerous. That to
travel back in time left the possibility of permanently altering that past. For her son, she would have
done anything. For any of her children, Ginny Potter would willingly have died.

“And it’s ‘us’, okay?” she said, before her husband could race from the room. “Don’t even think
about going back without me, Harry.”

Harry gave a guilty sort of grin. Ginny felt her heart soar.

“Of course you’re coming,” her husband declared like it was obvious. “We have a chance, Ginny,
and by Dumbledore, that’s all we need - a chance!”

Ginny threw her arms around her husband, planted a kiss on his cheek, and then released him.
Together husband and wife dashed from the room. Ginny was sure she heard Harry let out an
exhilarated laugh as he went.

Chapter End Notes

The scene in Albus's room is from the script but the rest is mine. We had some time to
fill up until Halloween and I wanted to show a bit of the old Harry, Ron, and Hermione
dynamic again.

Also I think that having a child go missing would put a strain on any relationship. I
wanted to explore that a bit.

Hope you enjoyed this! Please comment if you did! It means the world!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
When Harry and Ginny arrived on the outskirts of Godric’s Hollow, Ron and Hermione were already there. Ron looked scruffy in his jeans and an ugly brown jacket, complete with orange Chudley Cannons scarf. Hermione had her arms crossed over her chest in a businesslike manner, her serious face on.

“You’re telling me he got a message to us using my love potion?” were the first words to leave Ron Weasley’s lips as his best friend and little sister approached.

“He burned a message into the blanket,” Ginny explained. “With something that reacted with an ingredient in the love potion.”

Hermione’s eyes had gone very narrow indeed.

“You gave your nephew a love potion?” Hermione demanded, rounding on her husband.

“Only as a joke,” Ron said quickly, throwing out his hands. “Because he’s usually so… you know. Not the most loving of people…”

Ginny joined Hermione in glaring at Ron.

“And it saved him, didn’t it? So I don’t know why you’re both looking at me like that-“

“We’ll talk about this later,” Hermione declared. Ron gulped, not looking forward to ‘later’ one bit.

Hermione then turned her attention to Harry, the quietest member of the group by far. His exhilaration at the idea of finding his son had turned quickly to anxiety as he and Ginny had reached the area surrounding Godric’s Hollow. He kept imagining he remembered certain details about the place, which even Harry knew could not be right. Harry still couldn’t work out if being back at Godric’s Hollow felt like a dream or a nightmare. Perhaps a little of both?

“Harry?” Hermione asked. “Are you all right?”


He put his hands in his pockets and fell silent again.

Sensing Harry wasn’t in the mood for an interrogation and eager to save him from being put on the spot, Ron cleared his throat.

“Right then. Shall we get going?” Ron asked, gesturing up the street. “Because it’s fairly cold out
and we’re not getting much done standing around here.”

“Draco should be here in a minute,” Ginny said, causing Ron to splutter with indignation.

“You invited *Draco Malfoy*?” Ron demanded. “Nobody told me he was coming.”

“How did you think we were going back forty years, Ron?” Ginny asked sarcastically. “Holding hands and wishing?”

“I... but how is he going to…”

“He has a Time-Turner, Ron,” Hermione said briskly, determinedly not looking at her husband. “One that can take us back years. An old model. He’s bringing it with him.”

Clearly Ron had not been told this information yet. Ginny could see why Hermione had chosen to keep it from him until now. Ron looked mortally offended at being left out of the loop.

“But... those are illegal,” Ron pointed out. “He can’t have one of those! Are you going to arrest him?”

“Don’t you think that would be a little hypocritical of me?” Hermione asked. “After what I did?”

“No!” Ron declared with gusto. “Why do you think he had it? Because he was going to get up to no good, that’s why. He should be behind bars.”

“Nobody is arresting Draco Malfoy,” Hermione said firmly. “He’s here to find his son. He’s here to help. We can have it destroyed after we get the boys back.”

Ron muttered something under his breath about Azkaban and ponytails. Everyone ignored him.

There was a muted popping noise and then Draco Malfoy strolled out from an alleyway close to them, head held high, dressed, as usual, in his best travelling cloak.

Draco got the measure of his companions in an instant. The four of them looked so cosy, standing there together in the last of the afternoon sunlight, so comfortable, so like good friends should. As soon as they spotted him Ron Weasley began to glare over like he was an intruder.

He didn’t need to be reminded that he was out of place. Draco was well aware he was the unwanted presence among the others, but he had learned to deal with that. It wasn’t often that anyone regarded his company as valuable these days.

Draco strolled towards the group, knowing full well what this could mean for him. Ginny Potter had informed him that Hermione Granger was going to accompany them on this rescue mission, and Draco understood that the Minister for Magic would then inevitably take some form of legal action against him for his possession of the Time-Turner.

He found that he did not care. If he needed to go to Azkaban for the rest of his days then that was simply how things had to be. Being parted from Scorpius would pain him, but at least his son would understand that he had given everything, his freedom, his world, to return him from a dangerous place. Perhaps, then, Draco thought, Scorpius might realise how very loved he was.

Looking around the rest of the group, only Potter- no, *Harry*, looked as dreadful as Draco knew he did. The man seemed about ready to pass out, and Draco couldn’t blame him.

Rather awkwardly, but keeping his head held high, Draco went to stand next to Ginny Potter, who
he regarded as his most likely ally.

“They sent a message with a blanket?” Draco asked them all, saving everyone the embarrassment of having to greet him.

“They somehow burned it in,” said Ginny. “There was a reaction with a love potion. It’s a lot to explain. But somehow they got hold of Harry’s blanket, the one that he had as a baby, and left their message, knowing that we’d get it.”

“And was it only for Harry?” Draco demanded.

“I think it was from Albus.”

“So we have no idea if my son is safe? No word from him?”

Ginny wished she had better, more reassuring news to impart.

“Albus didn’t say anything about that,” she admitted. “But we can’t assume the worst. Harry seems to think the boys are together, and I see no reason not to think that too.”

Draco swallowed and nodded his head.

“Scorpius is very skilled at Potions,” he said, forcing calm. “Perhaps he had some part in figuring out how to send the message?”

“I’m sure he did,” Ginny agreed.

Hermione Granger cleared her throat, after having apparently given Draco a moment to digest the information about his son. Ron had an eyebrow raised, and a very: serves you right look on his freckled face.

“Draco, you should have told the Ministry you were in possession of a Time-Turner,” Hermione said sternly, stepping forward.

Draco took a deep breath. He was prepared for this. He would not run from responsibility. Not when he had an example to set to his son.

“I… realise that. And I’m willing to accept whatever punishment you feel is fitting.”

“You understand that I’ll expect you to surrender the Time-Turner to the Ministry the moment this is over?”

“Of course,” Draco agreed.

Hermione took a deep breath and considered the man in front of her.

“Then we don’t need to talk about punishment,” she said.

Ron gawped.

“I can hardly have you arrested for a crime I am equally guilty of. But the Ministry will need to examine your Dark artefact collection. I’m afraid that’s just procedure.”

Draco wanted to fight that ruling with every fibre of his being. After all, what right did the Ministry have to interfere in family history? In his inheritance.
But Hermione Granger was being lenient. She may even have been being kind. Draco was not going to turn down such a gracious offer. After all, what were all the Dark artefacts in the world at the expense of his son?

“Confiscate what you need to,” Draco said, with an elegant gesture of his hand. “As long as I have my son you can raid the entire Manor for all I care.”

“She doesn’t need your permission to carry out a raid, Malfoy,” Ron declared, but Hermione silenced him with a glare.

“That’s actually Harry’s department,” Hermione told her husband sharply. “And this really isn’t the time, Ron.”

Ron shuffled from foot to foot and lowered his shoulders.

“Draco, do you know how to use this Time-Turner?” Hermione asked, businesslike again.

“It should be simple enough,” said Draco with some dignity. “It’s made like the originals. This one was built to those exact specifications, only with no limit.”

“So we can turn the device for whatever hours, days, or years we require to travel,” Hermine said, thoughtfully.

“I’ve been studying it,” said Draco. “The central hourglass clearly represents the amount of hours, but the two rings beyond that represent days and years. If you look carefully the gold is engraved. It seems simple enough.”

Hermione leaned in, eager to see this for herself. Ron found himself unceremoniously pushed out while his wife and Draco Malfoy examined the object. He looked to Harry, ready to give him a look of exasperation, but his best friend was too busy watching the street, clearly on high alert.

“Well, I recognise this mechanism,” Hermione said, stepping back with a nod of her head. “I think it will do nicely.”

Draco had expected Hermione to take the Time-Turner from his hands, but she did no such thing. Slightly confused at being given this amount of trust, Draco frowned.

“Right,” Hermione said, more loudly now, instantly taking charge of the group. “Is everyone here quite sure they’re willing to go through with this? I’m sure I don’t need to spell out the risks.”

Every member of the group nodded, even Harry who looked distinctly pale.

“Good. I’m glad that’s settled. Now, before we begin, we should go over a few things. It is absolutely vital that we are not seen by anyone from the wizarding community once we travel back. We’re aiming for the evening, so it should be fairly dark, but even so, we need to be careful.”

Hermione looked about as though somebody might argue. No one did.

“We all have to stay calm,” Hermione continued. “We stick together, we remain vigilant, and we don’t do anything which might interfere with time.”

“And when we find her?” Draco asked.

“We apprehend her,” Hermione said firmly. “We need to do so as covertly as possible. Nothing flashy. And once we have her we can take her in for questioning.”
Both Ron and Draco scoffed at that, and then glanced at each other with surprise. Clearly they had both thought arrest and questioning too lenient a punishment for the daughter of Voldemort, a murderer, and kidnapper of two teenage boys.

“Do I have your agreement?” Hermione asked. “Because we can’t go into this with different ideas about how we’re going to behave. We need this to be seamless. And as Minister for Magic I have a duty to ensure we at least give her a chance to stand trial.”

Everyone nodded once again.

“Right then,” said Hermione. “I think we ought to get moving. It’s a short walk.”

Hermione led the group down the street with great purpose. Ginny followed her, with Draco at her side. Ron hung back to remain with Harry, sensing he needed a bit of support.

“Is he… all right?” Draco asked Ginny quietly, inclining his head towards Harry, who was looking paler by the second.

“Fine,” Ginny said loyally. “This place is full of memories for him.”

“Of course. I understand,” Draco agreed quickly.

Behind them, Ron and Harry walked side by side, Harry with his hands in his pockets, as though ready to reach for his wand at the slightest provocation. Ron watched his best friend with concern.

“You all right, mate?” Ron asked Harry.

“Just a bit… you know.”

“Bound to feel like that, really,” said Ron. “But on the plus side, your Albus is one smart kid. And we’re going to find him, soon. And then he’ll be back to being the moody little git he is at home, only with added ego because he’s travelled through time. Good luck with that one.”

Harry tried a weak smile. He wasn’t sure he’d managed more than a grimace.

As the group walked, the streets became busier and far more attractive. Godric’s Hollow was clearly a thriving market town now and had expanded considerably in the years since Harry had been there last. Along with the many cottages which lined the roads were pleasant little shops and cafes. There were more cars parked around than Hermione or Harry remembered.

“Godric’s Hollow,” Hermione announced, as they walked down the bustling street, towards the spire of St Jerome’s Church which stood at the centre of the village. “It must be twenty years…”

“Is it just me or are there more Muggles about?” Ginny asked, getting closer to Hermione so she could lower her voice.

Hermione nodded her head knowledgeably.

“It’s become quite popular as a weekend break,” she informed the group.

“I can see why,” Draco piped up, falling into step beside Hermione and Ginny, not particularly wanting to be walking along on his own, not with Harry and Weasley behind him. “Look at the thatched roofs. And is that a farmers’ market?”

Hermione slowed slightly so that she could join Harry and Ron, leaving Ginny and Draco to lead the group. Ginny gave Draco a smile so that he didn’t feel snubbed. Draco offered her a nod of
acknowledgment. That, he thought, had been most considerate of her.

Hermione could see that Harry was in a state. He was as white as a sheet, his scar looking all the more prominent because of that fact, but thankfully it seemed her husband was keeping him occupied. Ron did have a gift for mindless chatter. His inelegant way of expressing support was strangely comforting.

“You remember when we were last here?” Hermione asked Harry quietly. “This feels just like old times.”

Harry gave a grateful nod, but Ron could not resist glaring over at Draco Malfoy.

“Old times with a few unwelcome ponytails added to the mix,” he said loudly. Hermione sighed.

Draco turned, recognising the barb in an instant. Ginny rolled her eyes at the utter tactlessness of her brother. Sometimes he acted like a real git.

“Can I just say…” Draco began, but Ron cut him off.

“Malfoy, you may be all chummy chummy with Harry—”

Harry and Draco exchanged a confused and slightly embarrassed look.

“- and you may have produced a relatively nice child, but you’ve said some very unfair things to and about my wife…”

Hermione turned to Ron sharply.

“And your wife doesn’t need you fighting her battles for her,” she said firmly.

It took one last withering glance at her husband for him to get the hint.

“Fine,” he said gracelessly, pointing a finger at Draco “But if you say one thing about her or me…”

“You’ll do what, Weasley?” Draco demanded, narrowing his eyes.

Hermione was quick to intervene before they had a full blown wizard’s duel on their hands.

“He’ll hug you,” Hermione said swiftly. “Because we’re all on the same team, aren’t we, Ron?”

Ron looked like he wanted to argue, but then hesitated in the face of his wife’s unwavering gaze.

“Fine,” Ron said, throwing out his hands. “I, um, think you’ve got really nice hair, Draco.”

Ron managed those words with only the barest hint of sarcasm.

Draco did not deign to dignify that with a response. As he saw it, Ron Weasley was the unnecessary and unwelcome presence on their current mission. After all, he had no child to rescue, and he certainly didn’t have the responsibilities of his wife. He was an idiotic joke-shop owner with absolutely no manners and no social standing. Despite having money now, Ronald Weasley had no class…

“Thank you, husband,” Hermione said, looking very grateful that a fight had been avoided. She led the group down a beautiful little street and behind a stone wall which looked big enough to conceal them all. “Now this seems a good spot. Let’s do this…”
They arranged themselves behind the wall, Ron having to bend down slightly so his red hair didn’t stick over the top.

Draco took out the gleaming golden Time-Turner and the others gathered around him. Ginny stood on one side of him, Hermione on the other. Ron made a deliberate move to get as far from him as possible. Harry moved as though in a nightmare to the space between Ginny and Ron.

They all put their hands on the chain, and then Draco began to activate the magical object with surprising skill. It started to spin wildly in his hands.

Ginny moved her hand ever so slightly on the golden chain, so that she could touch her husband. Harry gave the smallest of nods, grateful for the contact, but too anxious to say so.

There was a giant whoosh of light. A smash of noise. Time stopped, turned over, thought a bit, and began spooling backwards, slowly at first and then speeding up…

And suddenly the world was quiet and still. It was no longer the afternoon. The sky was growing dark, the surrounding area lit by lanterns and glowing carved pumpkins. It was raining and the wind was bitterly cold.

“So?” Ron asked stupidly, glancing around at the group. “Has it worked?”

+++ 

This rickety shed just behind the cottages of Godric’s Hollow was not the most comfortable place Albus had ever been forced to spend time in. Not to mention that it was small, smelled like soil, and contained a great number of uncomfortable Muggle gardening tools which made moving about extremely difficult.

Albus paced the restrictive area restlessly anyway, occasionally looking out of the tiny window at the darkening night sky. Scorpius had given up telling him to stop doing that in case they were seen. Albus seemed to forget every few minutes or so anyway.

They had entered the shed full of hope, but as the hours went by, Albus had become more and more dismayed. Where was his father? Why wasn’t he there?

“So what, now we just wait?” Albus demanded.

“You know that’s what we have to do, Albus. We’ve been over this hundreds of times. This exact same conversation. You using those exact same words…”

“What if this doesn’t work?”

“It has to.”

“I can’t just let her hurt my dad. I can’t let her kill him. I can’t stay in here while she’s out there…”

“We have to, Albus. It’s the only way. And there’s still time.”

“It’s been hours. How can you just sit there?”

“Because,” Scorpius said patiently, from his perch on a rickety bench at the back of the shed. “There’s nothing else we can do. We came up with a plan. A really really good one.”

Albus huffed.
“You came up with it,” Scorpius said placatingly. “And it was great. Really amazing. I could never have thought of it.”

“You could,” Albus argued.

“But you did. You solved this. Now we just have to wait. Even though that’s hard. And I know it’s really really difficult for you, because if it was my dad I’d be the same. But you have to just… try.”

Albus saw the sense of that. He went to sit down beside Scorpius, tapping his feet on the floor. Usually, Scorpius was the one who couldn’t stop fidgeting, but for the last few hours he’d seemed oddly and frustratingly calm.

“We just have to think positively. To believe that this can work.”

“And how has believing in things worked for you so far?” Albus snapped nastily in his frustration. “Because the world doesn’t seem to be listening, does it?”

Scorpius fell silent, wounded.

Immediately Albus realised what he’d just said. It sounded, terribly, like he’d just made some sort of comment on the death of Scorpius’s mother. The shame of it filled him with remorse.

“I am so sorry,” he breathed out, grimacing. “I didn’t mean… I just meant with this. This situation. Not anything else.”

“We haven’t failed yet,” Scorpius said with some strength. “We’re doing our best.”

“You know I didn’t mean…”

“I know,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. “I know you wouldn’t… you wouldn’t have meant that.”

A silence fell in which Albus felt a desperate need to atone. It was broken by the rumbling of his stomach.

Scorpius began to rummage around the rickety shelves closest to him and peered hopefully at a round tin decorated with a floral pattern. He reached out and opened it with a clattering noise which made Albus wince.

“Aha!” he declared, triumphantly. “Biscuits! Look, Albus! Food!”

Albus leaned over to stare into the tin. Perhaps the contents had once been biscuits, but now they looked distinctly soft and unappetising.

“They look stale to me,” he commented.

Scorpius reached into the tin, selected a biscuit, and took a tentative bite.

“Maybe slightly past their best. But still better than nothing. And if you forget about the… texture, they’re honestly okay.”

Scorpius offered the tin to Albus with a smile. Only really doing so as an apology for his earlier rash words, Albus selected the least foul-looking of the biscuits and forced himself to eat it.

It tasted like cardboard. Stale cardboard.

“See, I’m feeling less faint already,” Scorpius declared, swallowing with some determination.
“Waiting is better on a full stomach.”

Albus watched as Scorpius went to pick out another.

“How long do you think those have been in here for?” Albus asked uncertainty.

“Well, biscuits don’t really go off,” Scorpius responded. “They just get a bit… less crunchy. And maybe lose a bit of taste.”

Albus raised an eyebrow. Sometimes Scorpius’s optimism really wasn’t in his best interests.

“Scorpius, I really don’t think you should eat those because if you get sick in this shed while we’re stuck in here, I will never forgive you,” he said with a trace of his usual humour.

Scorpius thought that over, put the lid back on the tin, and then the tin back on the shelf.

“Okay, no more biscuits for me,” Scorpius agreed cheerfully. “Actually, perhaps they were a bit stale. But at least we know we have something. Just in case.”

“Just in case we’re stuck here forever,” Albus finished for him, gloomily. “Just in case Dad doesn’t get the message. How did this happen? How did this happen to us?”

Albus had meant it as a rhetorical question, but Scorpius considered it.

“Well, personally I feel that a lot of this has happened because we… well we didn’t think enough.”

Albus let his head fall into his hands.

“You mean me,” said Albus with resignation. “You mean I didn’t think enough.”

“I mean both of us,” Scorpius said honestly. “Maybe you made a few bad decisions. But I did too.”

“You think this is my fault, and you’re right,” Albus declared stubbornly. “I dragged you into this. I got us into this mess.”

Scorpius frowned.

“You didn’t drag me into anything. I chose to go with you. Because you’re my friend. My best friend. My best and only friend ever.”

Albus could see that Scorpius was trying to cheer him up, but he didn’t feel in the mood to allow that to happen. Nor did he need Scorpius to spare him his shame. Albus was ready to accept his faults. Even if it was painful.

“I know this is my fault, Scorpius,” Albus said firmly. “And I’m not… I’m not going to pretend it’s not anymore. Because I’ve changed too. After all this. After seeing what we have. All that bad stuff. And I think it’s time I took some responsibility.”

Scorpius blinked with surprise. Clearly he had not been expecting such a speech.

“That’s very mature of you, Albus,” he said supportively.

“Like how I totally fell for Delphi’s lies,” Albus continued.

Scorpius made a face. The Delphi-and-Albus thing was really not something he wanted to talk about.
“Even though you didn’t,” Albus said. “Right from the start you saw through her. I should have seen it too.”

Scorpius smiled a bit sadly.

“Well, I didn’t think she was an evil witch hell-bent on the destruction of all that’s good in the world, Albus, if that makes you feel any better. I just… didn’t particularly take to her.”

“But I did,” Albus said. “I really did. Like an idiot.”

Scorpius looked away and decided to reposition the biscuit tin on the shelf beside him.

“She was very persuasive,” Scorpius admitted. “To you, anyway.”

“I can’t believe I thought someone like her would ever be interested in me,” Albus burst out with embarrassment. “I thought she genuinely liked me, you know?”

Well, now there was no getting out of it. Albus was in one of his rare conversational and contemplative moods. Scorpius had known something like this was coming, but he hadn’t counted on it being quite so soon. Albus really did have a talent for picking the wrong moment to have these very important conversations. And, Scorpius thought, some might say he took a rather unintentionally self-centred angle too…

“Albus, she was a bit old for you,” Scorpius cut in, but Albus didn’t seem to hear him.

“Like an idiot I seriously thought that she was interested. Her. Which is a joke. Because I’m Albus Severus Potter. Nobody sane was ever going to like me. Which should have been the first clue that something was up.”

Scorpius had now run out of ways to reposition the biscuit tin. With a sigh, he placed his hands neatly in his lap and gave Albus his full attention.

“Albus, as much as I applaud your introspection, and - actually - your modesty, because I don’t think even you believe you’re that horrible to look at, because you’re really really not, I think this is a conversation we should be having later on…”

“But this is all part of it,” Albus tried to explain. “I really liked her. Certain things about her. This idea I had of her in my head. But now I know it wasn’t real. Any of it. Not the way she talked or the things she said. She made that person up. She made that person up specifically to mess with my head. And I let her.”

“Albus-“

“But at least now I know I was an idiot. And I swear I am completely over whatever that was. Because the the real her is… “

“Terrifying?” Scorpius suggested.

“Beyond terrifying,” Albus agreed. His face twisted into something far more angry “And I bet her hair wasn’t even silver…”

“I’m pretty sure she enchanted it that way,” Scorpius said. “I mean, unless you have Veela blood, that’s very rare. And the blue tips? Overkill if you ask me.”

There was a pause then, a fairly companionable one. It soothed Albus slightly.
“The tattoo was kind of cool, though,” Albus admitted, trying a smile. “I still wouldn’t mind a tattoo.”

Scorpius frowned.

“You do realise that a tattoo will stay with you for the rest of your life? Especially a magical mark. You don’t want to go getting those lightly because you never know when you might regret them…”

“You sound like my dad,” Albus said, grinning now.

“And mine,” Scorpius revealed, looking slightly embarrassed.

There was another silence. During it, Albus rested his shoulder slightly against Scorpius’s.

“Scorpius,” Albus asked, letting out a sigh. “Do you think I’ve been stupid?”

“By falling for Delphi’s act?”

Albus nodded.

“You’re not stupid,” Scorpius said with certainty, patting Albus on the knee. “It’s not stupid to like someone. She manipulated your feelings. But you mustn’t let that stop you from having feelings. Because that’s what makes a person into someone like her. That’s a terrible terrible dark way to live.”

Albus scoffed and turned his face away. He personally felt like the biggest idiot in the wizarding world. He’d never live it down if James found out, and the thought of his dad knowing was beyond mortifying.

Scorpius cleared his throat and put on his reciting voice.

“To love is to be human. When we turn our faces from love, we turn our faces from our own humanity. If we run scared from connection, because it threatens pain, then we only prolong our injury. To love is the greatest gift life gives, and to be loved in return even greater.”

“Is that a Dumbledore quote?” Albus asked curiously.

“Yes.”

“I’ve not heard that one before.”

“Not many people have,” Scorpius said. “He wrote it in a letter to Gellert Grindelwald. It’s actually quite sad, when you think about the context. But very beautiful.”

“Because he’s asking to be loved in return?” Albus asked.

“I think so. But of course he never is. He spends his life pining for Gellert Grindelwald. All that time. And then he has to fight him.”

“I suppose that is fairly brave,” Albus conceded.

Scorpius nodded his head.

“I seriously hope you don’t go all Dark wizard on me one day,” Albus tried to joke. “Because I don’t think I could take you on in a duel. You’re way too good at magic.”
“I don’t want to think about us fighting, Albus,” Scorpius said quietly.

Albus blinked, his eyes widening.

Scorpius turned to look at him, and then his own eyes widened as well. He moved slightly closer.

“Oh, Albus! Your cut!” he exclaimed. “It still needs to be treated. How did I forget? Give me a moment and I’ll see to it. I know just the spell.”

Albus couldn’t help but let out a laugh at the way Scorpius had suddenly resumed his flapping about. Why he found himself almost hysterical in that moment was beyond him. And why his heart was beating so fast was yet another mystery.

“I’m going to try Tergeo,” Scorpius informed him seriously. “It should work on the dried blood. I’ve not actually used it before, but I’ve read about it and it’s supposed to be fairly simple. Is that okay with you?”

“I trust you,” Albus said.

Scorpius reached up to push back Albus’s hair from his forehead. He aimed his wand at the cut there.

“Tergeo,” he whispered, and then he gave a bright smile which Albus took to mean that it had worked.

“Is it okay?”

“Fine, just fine. You might have a scar, but only a tiny one. And it’s not in a shape. Just a sort of - well - an indent. And your hair hides it anyway.”

Albus reached up instinctively to touch the cut and grimaced at the pain.

“You mustn’t touch it,” Scorpius declared sternly. “The first rule of injuries is that you keep them clean. It needs to heal. I would try healing it myself, but that’s pretty advanced magic, and I wouldn’t want to try it out on you - just in case.”

“Well, thanks,” Albus said slightly awkwardly. Scorpius nodded in return.

“Oh, wait a second. What about you?” Albus asked, suddenly remembering. “Your wrist. You hurt it when you fell. That was a nasty graze.”

Scorpius seemed to have forgotten his own injury, because he looked down at his left wrist with surprise.

“Let me see that,” Albus said, reaching out to take a look at the graze. He took Scorpius’s arm and carefully pulled up his sleeve. The graze was far worse than he’d realised. It stretched right from Scorpius’s wrist to his forearm and was bloody in places.

“Oh, wow,” Scorpius said, blinking down at it. “That looks - not good.”

“How did you not notice that?”


Albus frowned and took his own stolen wand from his pocket.
“Albus what - what are you doing?” Scorpius asked nervously.

“I’m going to Tergeo it, like you did with mine.”

“Um, have you… have you actually tried that spell before?”

“You said you hadn’t tried it before either,” Albus pointed out, looking wounded. “I mean, I don’t have to. I just thought…”


With a nod of his head, Albus held Scorpius’s left wrist gently, to keep his arm in place. He pointed Gulliver Pokeby’s wand at Scorpius’s poor, wounded arm, and concentrated.

“Tergeo,” Albus declared, moving the wand through the space just above Scorpius’s wrist and forearm.

At first, nothing happened. But then the blood on Scorpius’s arm began to clear, leaving his skin looking horribly scratched, but no longer raw.

“Albus!” Scorpius declared proudly. “That was really good!”

“I didn’t hurt you, did I?” Albus asked, looking uncertainly at Scorpius’s arm. “I mean it looks sore.”

“It looks fantastic!” Scorpius said. “You have a real skill for Healing spells, Albus, and you’re very gentle too.”

“I’m what?” Albus asked, embarrassed.

“Not that I expected you to be bad at Healing spells, or not be gentle. I mean - not that I even - you’re very good, is what I mean to say…”

Albus shrugged his shoulders with embarrassment. He wasn’t used to praise. It felt strange to hear he’d actually done something well for a change.

“Well, anyway. I did my best,” he mumbled, modestly.

“Um… Albus?” Scorpius ventured, fairly quietly.

“Yes?”

“You’re still holding my wrist,” Scorpius pointed out.

Albus looked down and indeed he was.

He let go suddenly, shifting back on the bench and managing to collide with the handle of a Muggle wheelbarrow in the process. As he reached out to stop himself from falling into anything else, Albus managed to knock a few tins from a shelf with a loud clatter.

Outside, perhaps alerted by the commotion, came the sudden sound of voices.

“Did you hear that?”

“No, not over there! It was from those sheds!”
“I told you they’d seek shelter—”

“This one has a light on…”

Albus only just had time to right himself and stare at Scorpius before the boys heard footsteps outside of their shed. Scorpius raised his wand, ready to defend both he and Albus to the death.

The doors swung open and there, illuminated by moonlight, was Ginny Potter.

“MUM?” Albus all but shouted, shooting up from the bench.

“Albus Severus Potter,” said Harry Potter, walking in behind his wife and sounding so fatherly that Albus wanted to cry. “Are we pleased to see you.”

Albus ran towards his mother, throwing himself into her arms without caring who saw him. She received him, delighted.

Scorpius watched that and did his best to feel happy about it. There had been times, long ago, when he had been able to do the very same thing, to rush towards his mother and be embraced, even if afterwards he'd get told off for being too rough. All gone now...

“You got our note?” Albus asked, still clinging to his mother tightly, unwilling to let go.

“We got your note,” Ginny agreed, smiling.

At that moment Draco Malfoy fought his way past the embracing Potters and caught sight of his son. There was his boy, his precious heir, his Scorpius, sitting nervously on a bench, watching the Potter family’s jubilation and kicking the toes of his shoes together. Draco could have fallen to his knees with pure relief. There were no words to describe the ache in his chest, the happiness that the sight of his son, safe and well, brought him. In that moment he was sure he could feel Astoria at his side.

Tentatively, but with cautious delight, Scorpius hopped off the bench and trotted up to his father. He stopped in front of Draco, simply beaming, his fingers fidgeting together.

Draco did not miss the wistful glance Scorpius gave the joyous Potter family. Ginny was currently squeezing her son tightly, and Harry was ruffling his son’s dark hair.

Had Astoria been there, she would have wrapped their precious son up in a hug and kissed his forehead. Draco would have stood at her side proudly, and perhaps patted his son on the shoulder. But Astoria was not here now, not physically. And Draco knew that his boy longed for the easy, tangible affection that the Potters gave Albus.

“We can hug too if you like…” Draco suggested, rather formally.

Scorpius looked up at him uncertainly, shocked by the words. His blue-grey eyes were wary for a moment, and then he shuffled closer, resting his head against his father’s chest and patting him oddly on the back. Draco wrapped his arms around his son and placed his hands on his son’s shoulders, unused to the gesture but trying his best to copy what he could see Ginny Potter doing.

The moment he did so, he felt Scorpius cling a little.

Draco smiled.

Ron and Hermione, who had tactfully decided to hang back, now made their way into the small
shed, making the room very cramped indeed. Ron had to duck in order to fit, and even then he managed to bang his head on the ceiling.

“Now, where’s this Delphi?” Ron asked as he entered.

“You know about Delphi?” Scorpius asked, as his father released him, but placed a very comforting hand on his shoulder.

Ron gawped at the sight of what had looked like Draco Malfoy hugging his son.

“She’s here!” Albus declared, as his mother released him as well. He turned to his father with urgency. “She’s trying to kill you we think. Before Voldemort curses himself. She’s going to kill you and so break the prophecy and…”

“Yes, we thought that might be it too” said Hermione grimly. “Do you know where specifically she is now?”

“She’s disappeared,” Scorpius said, looking to Albus with a frown. It struck him suddenly that neither his father or the other adults in that tiny shed had mentioned how they’d reached them. Scorpius blinked up at Hermione with curiosity.

“How did you - how did you without the Time-Turner…”

For a moment the shed was silent. Ron looked like he was fighting to keep his mouth shut. Hermione seemed lost for words.

Behind him, unseen by Scorpius, Draco went rather red in the face.

And then Harry Potter cleared his throat.

“That’s a long and complicated story, Scorpius,” Harry Potter answered, thus saving Draco. “And we don’t have time for it.”

Draco smiled at Harry gratefully, although Albus looked rather unimpressed by his father’s unwillingness to answer Scorpius’s question. As thrilled as he was to see him, his dad still knew exactly how to push his buttons.

“Harry’s right,” Hermione declared. “Time is of the essence. We need to get people into position. Now, Godric’s Hollow is not a large place but she could be coming from any direction. So we need somewhere that gives us good views of the town - that allows for multiple and clear observation points - and that will, most importantly, keep us hidden because we cannot risk being seen.”

They all frowned, thinking.

Scorpius looked about ready to open his mouth when Hermione spoke.

“I’d say St Jerome’s Church ticks all those boxes, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh!” Scorpius exclaimed excitedly. “I’ve always wanted to look in there!”

“And I’m fairly keen to get out of this shed,” Ron added, glancing at a spider hanging from the ceiling with dislike. “So shall we make a move?”

“Lead the way then, Weasley,” Draco said without any malice whatsoever.

Blinking, very startled indeed, Ron nodded his head, but Hermione stopped him with a hand on his
“Actually, I’d prefer it if we didn’t walk through the village again,” she said. “Apparition seems the safer option. Is everyone okay with that?”

“Fine with me!” Scorpius said cheerfully. “Can I go with you, Dad?”

“Of course you’ll come with me,” Draco said, putting out his left arm. His son took it gladly.

“Albus, you’d better come with me, then,” Ginny said.

Albus looked incredibly doubtful, but faced with Scorpius’s optimistic bravery, he had no choice but to take his mother’s arm.

“On the count of three,” Hermione said.

Albus took a deep breath, and so, he noticed, did his father.

“One, two, three…”

Chapter End Notes

I HOPE you enjoyed this!

We are getting so close to the end of this story now! Ahhhhhhhhhh!!!

Please leave me a comment! I love those so much!

I honestly am so grateful for each and every comment and the support you give me is so wonderful! It helps me keep going!

xxx
Act Four: Scene Nine

Chapter Notes

I have added a lot to this chapter. I hope it works!!!

Please leave me a comment if you enjoy!

xxx

Scorpius felt like he was being pressed very hard in all directions. It was nothing like travelling via Time-Turner, because there was no light. Simply darkness and his father’s steady arm, which he clung to for dear life.

The Malfoys emerged in the centre of St Jerome’s Church with a quiet popping noise which echoed around the stone structure.

“Are you all right, Scorpius?” Draco asked, releasing his son.

“Oooooh, wow. That was… ooooh,” Scorpius said, blinking rather a lot.

Albus was already there, seeming dazed and rubbing his eyes. Ginny was standing beside him looking slightly windswept.

“Ow,” Albus muttered with a small smile at Scorpius.

“Double ow,” Scorpius agreed, wobbling over to Albus. “It really does feel like getting sucked through a tube and crushed. But also a bit like drowning. Do your ears hurt? Because my ears hurt.”

“Why does anyone ever do this?” Albus complained, as he and Scorpius were led to a set of pews by their parents, who were both straightening their ponytails.

With two more popping noises came Harry Potter and Ron Weasley. Ron was only grimacing slightly, but Harry Potter looked frankly ill.

“This is why I prefer brooms,” Harry said dryly, holding onto the edge of a pew as he regained his breath.

A third pop, and the quietest of all, signalled the arrival of Hermione Granger. She emerged gracefully and looking as though she had done this quite comfortably many times. Before even turning to the others she swept her wand in a wide circle about her head.

“Protective enchantments,” Hermione said. “Harry, would you mind?”

Fairly easily Harry repeated the gesture.

Although he hadn’t been asked, Ron rushed to do the same.

“Excellent,” Hermione said, seeing Albus and Scorpius already seated with Draco and Ginny
standing beside them. “Now, before we begin, I’ll need to ask you both a few questions. We know
that she’s coming here because she wants to kill Harry. But is there anything more? Anything that
could help?”

In their pew, Scorpius couldn’t stop fidgeting, and Albus was still rubbing his eyes. Never again
was Albus Potter Apparating. If that meant actually learning to fly on a broom properly then so be
it. He felt like he could be sick at any moment, not to mention that he was fairly sure his eyeballs
had been forced at least a few centimetres back into his head.

His father took one look at him and gave a small, understanding smile. In an odd and thoughtless
moment of pure nausea, Albus gave a rather pained smile back. His dad really hadn’t been dramatic
about the Apparating thing. If anything, he’d played it down.

“Time is of the essence,” Hermione said, nodding at the boys.

Scorpius made a face, hating to appear so useless in front of Hermione Granger of all people.

“I’m afraid we don’t know much. We’ve been trying to avoid her - actually. We only knew she
was here when we found out the date,” Scorpius admitted.

“I mean, she might be injured?” Albus offered. “When she left us she didn’t attack and she was
moving sort of weirdly. But that was right after Cedric’s spell so-”

“Cedric’s spell?” Harry repeated.

The boys looked at each other, wordlessly deciding who would begin the story. It was a lot to tell
and in a very small space of time.

“She took us back to the third Triwizard task, Dad,” Albus explained. “We were in the maze. She
wanted us to humiliate Cedric. To turn him bad. To make him a Death Eater again so Voldemort
could come back. To make the world Scorpius saw happen.”

“That was when she used the Time-Turner again, because her plan went wrong,” said Scorpius.
“We got away from her so the five minutes would be up (because it has to take you back after five
minutes), but she decided to go back even further. She would have left us in the maze in 1995 but
we saw her activating it. I don’t think she meant to take us with her. We - well - sort of tagged
along. Jumped, actually…”

“We ended up back at Hogwarts, on the Quidditch pitch. But in this time,” Albus said. “She
stamped on the Time-Turner too. Really messed it up. We thought we might be stuck here. ”

“And she said… well, she flew off saying that prophecies could be broken. Which was… my
fault,” Scorpius revealed. “Because I told her that to buy us time in the maze. I told her that
prophecies could be changed, or avoided. Because if they were inevitable then why go to so much
trouble? Why make them happen? It’s just not logical to-“

Albus interrupted him with a nudge of his elbow.

“Anyway, I’m the reason she’s come here,” Scorpius finished, swallowing hard. He looked up at
his father, feeling ashamed.

“And she’s a murderer,” Albus burst out, remembering. “She used the Killing Curse. She’s evil.
She killed Craig. Craig Bowker. Right in front of us. She didn’t even warn him, she never even…”

Scorpius reached out then to touch Albus’s arm. The memory was clearly painful for the boys.
“We know about Craig,” Hermione said, looking grave. “And we know she snapped your wands. The pieces were found on the Owlery roof, where we assume she also stole the Time-Turner from you.”

“Um, yes - about that,” Scorpius began, looking embarrassed.

“We can discuss what you were doing with that later,” Hermione ruled sternly. Albus and Scorpius glanced at each other nervously. Albus made a rather transparent face which clearly meant: don’t worry, we’ll make up a lie. Scorpius looked conflicted and yet grateful.

“So how did you get here?” Harry asked, frowning. “If you had no wands? Brooms? Did you fly?”

“Oh, no,” Scorpius said, doing his best to be helpful. “We used Muggle trains. We walked from Hogwarts to Aviemore Station. And - well - from there it was quite easy. We got a bit lost on the busses, but…”

“So you’ve been here for how long?” Hermione asked, thoughtfully.

“Since yesterday,” Albus said. “She left us at Hogwarts yesterday morning. We would have gone to get help but we didn’t want to mess with time. In case people recognised us.”

“And the blanket message? How did you manage that?” Hermione asked.

“It was Albus’s idea,” Scorpius said proudly. “We knew we had to get a message to you, Harry. And Albus suddenly remembered your blanket and the love potion, and how some things react with other things…”

“That was you, Albus?” Harry asked, looking surprised. Draco looked equally as stunned but admittedly impressed.

“Well, Scorpius knew all about the ingredients. And he got us our wands,” Albus said, shrugging. “And without wands we could never have got the blanket in the first place.”

“These belong to Bathilda Bagshot,” Scorpius explained, pulling out his wand and waving it about a bit. Albus produced his own with a lot less enthusiasm. “She has a historical wand collection, you know the one that was stolen in the Second Wizarding War?”

“If she notices they’re gone…” Hermione mused, looking worried.


“That was clever of you, Scorpius,” Ginny said.

Scorpius went rather red in the face, but Albus beamed at his mother in a most un-Albus-like way.

“We’ll still need to take those back,” decreed Hermione. “Bathilda Bagshot won’t be fooled by fakes for long. Once we’re done here it’s vital we return them.”

The boys went to hand the wands over, but Hermione shook her head.

“You might need them,” she said, sighing. “Just as a precaution. I think we all ought to remain armed.”

“But what do you know about her? About this Delphini?” Ron asked, stepping forwards. “About… who she is?”
“She wants to bring back Voldemort,” Scorpius said. “She said she wanted a return to ‘pure magic’. We don’t know why. But she seems like a very dedicated Voldemort supporter. I didn’t notice a Dark Mark though.”

The adults looked awkwardly at each other. Hermione seemed unwilling to give any further information, but Harry wasn’t about to lie to his son. He knew how that felt, to be so involved in something as terrible as this, and for the adults around you to keep you in the dark. It had led him to nothing but pain.

Harry looked over at Ginny, who nodded.

Knowing what was coming, Draco placed a hand on his son’s shoulder.

“Boys, we believe she may be Voldemort’s daughter,” Harry said.

The words seemed to echo horribly around the church. Hermione made a tutting noise, like she thought that had been a terrible idea. Albus digested that information and then went green. For the second time in the past few minutes he tried exceptionally hard not to vomit.

Scorpius, however, frowned with confusion. He had his best thinking face on.

“But how can that be?” Scorpius asked, sounding almost as though he was talking to himself. “There’s no record of Voldemort having any issue. Surely someone would have-”

“We know it sounds ridiculous,” Hermione agreed. “But we have reason to believe it could be true.”

Albus leaned a little against Scorpius’s shoulder with the horror of that revelation. Scorpius gave him an absentminded pat on the knee. Ginny noticed that her son certainly didn’t flinch away from that little bit of affection.

“But then she must have a mother…” Scorpius pointed out. “She said she had a guardian. Euphemia Rowle. That she took her in for the gold…”

“Euphemia Rowle died last year,” Draco piped up, frowning. “Didn’t I tell you there was something suspicious about that? That sudden heart attack. The missing Dark artefacts…”

“You thought it was some person getting revenge on her for having Death Eater ties,” Ron pointed out. “And to be fair, you said that about every single one of your lot who kicked the bucket-”

“My lot?” Draco repeated, narrowing his eyes.

“He doesn’t mean it like that, Draco,” Harry said in an instant.

“He’d better not have…”

“I genuinely didn’t that time,” Ron said weakly. “Sorry… mate.”

“We don’t know who her mother is,” Hermione said loudly. “And that’s assuming she was even conceived in the usual-”

“Yeah, let’s not go there,” Ron said quickly, grimacing. “I don’t need that mental image, thanks.”

Scorpius jumped up on his pew as he remembered another detail.

“Oh, and she calls herself the Augurey. That’s important! Because her guardian used to keep one,
she told us, although that might have been a lie…”

“We’re aware of her title,” Draco said darkly. “She’s clearly a fantasist.”

“And she was the Augurey in the other world too,” Scorpius remembered. “The Dark world. Only I never knew it was her. I never saw her. She sounded… powerful.”

Hermione took a deep breath.

“Well, she may be powerful, but so are we,” she declared, sounding businesslike. “When she gets here, we’ll deal with her. But the question is: when will she get here and from where? We need to keep an eye out. So I recommend we split up and take a different section of the church each. There are windows on every side, excellent vantage points.”

Immediately the adults began to discuss who would take which section and what additional defensive charms they could produce to secure the church in case of an ambush. The five of them stood close together, and seemed, much to Albus’s surprise, to actually be cooperating. Even Draco Malfoy was making suggestions.

Albus and Scorpius were left sitting side by side, watching them. After their adventure, it didn’t feel very pleasant to be ignored. In fact, it felt slightly insulting.

Suddenly, Scorpius cleared his throat, getting to his feet.

“Scorpius what are you-“ Albus hissed.

“Excuse me,” Scorpius said politely.

The group turned to him with surprise. Draco raised an eyebrow at his son.

“I just wanted to say, Harry… um,” Scorpius stammered out nervously. “That I’m really very sorry I told her about changing prophecies. Because that part is entirely my fault. And it’s why she’s here to kill you. So… I thought I should - you know - say so, in case someone else gets the blame. Because I can take responsibility when we get home. You don’t need to worry about that. I’ll tell them the truth. About all of it. And I… I truly am sorry.”

Albus looked up at his dad, watching for his reaction. Draco did the same, with equal curiosity and slight menace.

Harry Potter merely sighed. He looked young Scorpius Malfoy (who had puffed out his chest grandly) right in the eyes and forced a smile.

“She seems pretty determined to me,” Harry said. “I’m sure she would have found a way to do this even if you hadn’t said anything. You’re not to blame, Scorpius.”

Draco gave Harry Potter an approving nod. Even Ron looked fairly impressed with Scorpius’s words.

“Right then,” said Hermione, clapping her hands together. “Let’s take our positions and wait for her to show herself.”

“What position should Scorpius and I take?” Albus asked, getting to his feet. Scorpius nodded beside him.

“Boys, you’ve done more than enough,” Hermione said briskly. “If you two could just sit here
while we-

“No chance,” said Albus, boldly.

“Albus-“ Harry began.

“We want to help. This is our fault. And we want a chance to put it right,” Albus said, a stubborn glint in his green eyes.

“Fine,” Ginny said, surprising everyone.

Albus gave Scorpius a triumphant look.

“Albus, you can come and stand with me and your father,” Ginny continued, eyebrow raised. “If you want to help, then you can keep an eye out for her with us.”

“And Scorpius, you can accompany me,” Draco agreed, sharing a look with Ginny.

“Oh, Mum!” Albus complained.

“You either stay out of things, or you come with me. No arguments,” Ginny decreed. “Not today, Albus. There’s too much at stake.”

With an apologetic shrug at Scorpius, Albus followed his mother and father to the west side of the church where a large window looked out upon the village and surrounding town.

Draco and Scorpius moved towards the east side of the church, before the great stained-glass windows which even in the dark of the evening seemed to attract the moonlight. Scorpius craned his neck to look at them, parting his lips with wonder.

Draco made a mental note to buy Scorpius a book about Muggle stained-glass and architecture, sensing that such a purchase might be a well-received addition to the Malfoy library. He wasn’t sure that he’d ever bought a book about Muggles before, but if Scorpius had an interest, he would make an exception. Even if several of the portraits might find it distasteful.

Together, Draco and Scorpius took their place at a window, Scorpius standing up slightly on his tiptoes, arms crossed on the cold stone ledge.

“You can sit, if you like,” Draco said, glancing at his son. “I’m sure you’re tired.”

“I’m okay. I’d prefer to watch with you,” Scorpius answered, staring out of the window with awe. In the distance he could see glowing pumpkins, and the lights from various cottages. It was a truly beautiful sight. Godric’s Hollow was everything Scorpius had ever dreamed it might be.

For a long time father and son watched in silence. They could hear Ron talking to Hermione somewhere beyond them, but aside from that the church was oddly calm. Pleasantly private.

Draco found he could not stop glancing at the reflection of his son’s blond hair in the window. He was so relieved to have him back again that it seemed too good to be true. Every so often he caught sight of Scorpius’s fascinated expression and remembered all over again how very close he had been to losing his beloved son.

“When we found you were gone again, Scorpius, I didn’t know what to think,” Draco said quietly. His son shifted a little.
“I’m sorry, Dad. But we didn’t run away this time. I promise. We never meant to leave the castle at all.”

“Albus didn’t encourage you?” Draco demanded.

Scorpius chewed on his lip for a moment before answering.

“Actually, it was… it was me,” Scorpius admitted, bowing his head. “I was the one that woke him up and asked him to go with me. I was the one who kept the Time-Turner. I thought… I thought it was the right thing to do. Albus was the one who said we shouldn’t. He said we should tell someone - but I didn’t listen.”

“Why did you try to keep it, Scorpius?” Draco asked, thinking he probably already knew the answer to that.

“I thought it would be safer that way. Because we managed to get to it when it was at the Ministry. And that means a lot of people could. All sorts of people. It was too great a risk. So we had to destroy it.”

“You were trying to destroy it?” Draco clarified, surprised.

Scorpius nodded his head.

“Someone might have brought that awful world back. The one I was in before. Meddling in time is dangerous. We thought that we could make up for what we did by getting rid of it. Once and for all.”

Draco knew that at some point he would have to accept that his son had a terrible case of the heroics somewhere in his genetics. Certainly it had not come from him. More likely it was a lingering part of Astoria, who had always been so determined to do what was right, to create goodness wherever she could.

“Then how did this Delphi get her hands on it?” Draco asked, frowning.

Scorpius went quiet for a moment, thinking.

“We owled her,” he breathed out. “I know it was stupid. We didn’t know who she was then. We thought that she was Cedric’s cousin, and because we were getting rid of it, her only chance to see him again, we thought she should know.”

“I see.”

“And then she turned up. Suddenly. Far too quickly. I should have wondered how but I… I was too busy thinking about other things. We handed it over and then… she changed. Completely. She was… scary.”

Draco merely listened. As he continued his observation from the church window, he caught sight of Harry Potter’s reflection in the opposite window across the church. Harry looked away the moment he was spotted, as did Draco when he saw him looking. He couldn’t help but wonder if Harry was considering having a similar conversation with his own son.

“I realised something was wrong,” Scorpius said, talking faster now. “She had a tattoo on her neck. An Augurey. And she was talking about the Rowles, and I know they were Death Eaters once. I tried to make her give the Time-Turner back. I told her to. I tried to take it from her.”
Draco grimaced at the thought of his brave son putting himself in danger like that. Hadn’t he always taught him that self-preservation was one of the most vital skills a person could develop? Courage was all well and good, but not at the expense of one’s own safety.

“And then… well. That’s how it happened,” Scorpius explained. ”She took our wands and when we woke up we were on the Quidditch pitch and then Craig came to find us and she…she killed him.”

Draco bowed his own head. His only son had witnessed a murder. Draco knew how hard that was, how devastating. And for a boy like Scorpius? A boy so good and kind and gentle? It seemed too much for him to bear.

Scorpius had stopped talking. Instead he was dragging the tips of his shoes carefully over the stone tiles beneath them.

“Scorpius, I’m going to ask you a question, and I would like you to be honest when you answer me,” said Draco.

Scorpius looked up at him, blinking. He seemed horribly nervous.

“Oh… okay.”

“Did she hurt you?” Draco forced himself to ask, keeping his voice steady.

The lack of any immediate denial made Draco’s heart pound unpleasantly.

“Dad I..”

“Scorpius.”

Draco saw his son drain of colour. Scorpius looked about himself desperately, turned on the spot to see where Albus was (asleep in a pew), finished his strange fidgety spin and then suddenly seemed to brighten as he spotted his arm. He lifted it up for his father to see with some relief.

“I have a bit of a graze on my wrist. Albus cleaned it for me, though. Using Tergeo. It’s probably fine. It feels fine.”

Draco reached out to examine his son’s arm. The wound looked superficial. Albus Potter had indeed cleaned it well. But there was something in the way his son was smiling and nodding at him which alerted him to deception of some kind.

“And that’s all she did to you?” Draco asked, carefully pulling Scorpius’s sleeve down over his scratched arm.

“Actually, it was me as well. In the maze she sort of pushed us over and Albus and I fell. Well, skidded, really, because we were trying to get away. Almost right into a hedge. A live hedge - because some of them were alive. Albus got hurt worse than I did. He had a cut on his head from the Owlery…”

Draco was experiencing a hideous sinking sensation. Because he knew his son. And he could recognise when he was trying to avoid a topic. Scorpius was talking too fast, mentioning separate, irrelevant details, trying to lead the story elsewhere. He was fiddling with his pale fingers and talking too animatedly.

“Although I cleaned that up for him too,” Scorpius continued. “My first Tergeo - and it went quite
well. Albus did it better, but it was still good. I checked him for concussion, too, like you’re supposed to. But I think he’s fine. He says he is. Albus likes to tell you when he’s not—"

“Scorpius,” Draco cut in firmly.

Scorpius seemed to wilt a little at that tone.

“As your father I am asking you to tell me the truth. Were you harmed? Did she harm you?”

Scorpius looked over his shoulder at Albus, who was still sleeping. Draco noticed that Harry Potter was clearly aware of what was going on, because he was determinedly not looking over.

“I… well it’s not really quite as…” Scorpius tried.

To Draco’s horror, his son began to cry, his blue-grey eyes welling up, his lip wobbling like it had when he was a small boy.

“… and I’m fine now, which is what matters… I… it’s not permanent… only temporary… being silly…”

“Please, Scorpius, why are you crying like this?” Draco asked, narrowing his eyes with concern.

“It was… horrible,” Scorpius gulped.

“What was?” Draco asked, feeling like he could collapse.

Scorpius wiped his eyes with his hands, trying desperately to erase his tears, but they simply kept on falling.

“She used the… to try and get Albus to do what she wanted… to try and make him… she used the…”

“The Cruciatius Curse?” Draco said, naming his worst fear. “She used the Cruciatius Curse on you?”

Scorpius chewed his lower lip, not answering.

Draco used the window ledge to support himself as his legs started to buckle. He felt the urge to vomit. Suddenly the window ledge wasn’t enough, not with the way his arms had gone numb. Draco sank to the cold stone floor on his knees.

Scorpius watched him with wide, teary eyes, clearly utterly shocked by what he was seeing. From across the church, Harry Potter shifted uncomfortably, as though unsure whether to intervene or not.

And then Scorpius trotted forward, despite his own tears, and held out his arms.

“Would you like another hug?” Scorpius asked.

Before Draco could answer, or even comprehend the bravery, the sheer kindness, the selflessness of those words, Scorpius had wrapped his arms around him.

“It’s okay, Dad,” he said quietly, through his sobs. “I didn’t mean to upset you… I’m sorry. I know it was all so dangerous, and I’m sorry…”

Draco was reminded so strongly of Astoria in that moment. Of the day his wife had received the terrible news that the Greengrass family curse was indeed to be fatal in her case. Instead of crying
for her own sake, Astoria had taken him in her arms and promised him it didn’t matter. That they
would appreciate what they had, and bring up their precious son, and love each other.

“You don’t have to apologise,” Draco said, getting to his feet so he could return the hug properly.
He placed one hand behind his son’s head, stroking his fingers through his hair as he had seen

For all Draco’s efforts, it seemed his son was only getting more upset. He rubbed Scorpius’s back
and ignored the fact that his best travelling cloak was becoming damp with his son’s tears.

By this point, from over the top of Scorpius’s head, Draco was aware of Harry and Ginny Potter
looking determinedly away, of Hermione Granger dutifully carrying out surveillance at the main
window, and Ron Weasley simply staring straight at him with shock and disbelief. Draco ignored
him. He wouldn’t push his son away for fear of what others might think. That was their own affair.
His priority was Scorpius, and Scorpius alone.

“I thought we might die,” Scorpius admitted, face pressed against his father’s chest.

“Well, you didn’t,” Draco said firmly. “Neither of you. And now you’re here with me, and I will
never, never Scorpius, let anything like this happen to you again.”

Finally, Draco released his son. Scorpius’s face was red and blotchy, but he had stopped crying,
thank goodness. Draco placed his hands on his son’s shoulders firmly.

“Scorpius,” he said, taking a deep breath. “I need you to understand something. And it’s… I hope
you know that I’m sincere when I say that-“

Scorpius blinked up at him and gave a sniff.

“That you are everything to me. You are my world. And no matter how… different, you may be
from what you think I expect - you will always be my son. And I love you. Dearly.”

Scorpius looked stunned by the words. He chewed on his lower lip.

“Perhaps I don’t say so enough. I know I ought to. Your mother was always… she was better… at
this.”

“I love you too, Dad,” Scorpius said quietly. “A lot.”

Draco reached out to touch his son’s cheek. It was the first time he’d ever done such a thing, and
Scorpius closed his eyes, trying to savour the moment.

“And I don’t care what it takes,” Draco declared, finding this sentiment easier to express. “This
woman will be brought to justice. And if she’s not then I’ll have her dealt with myself. I promise
you that.”

Scorpius opened his eyes and gave a small smile.

“We’re going to defeat her,” he said, with more of his usual brightness. “You and me and Albus,
and Harry Potter, and Ginny Potter, and Ron Weasley, and Hermione Granger.”

“Whether we defeat her or not,” Draco said, taking a neatly folded monogrammed handkerchief
from his pocket and handing it to his son. “I’ll protect you, Scorpius. You needn’t be afraid.”

Scorpius beamed and wiped his face with the handkerchief. He blew his nose rather loudly, which
made Albus, who was sleeping across the church, make a startled noise before drifting off again.

“We should probably get back to keeping watch,” Scorpius said.

Draco nodded and patted his son proudly on the shoulder as they returned to their places at the window, and continued their silent observation of Godric’s Hollow.

+++  

Albus was still sleeping. Even after that spectacular nose blow by Scorpius Malfoy from across the church about twenty minutes ago. Ginny supposed her son hadn’t slept in quite a while. He certainly looked exhausted.

It was a relief to see Albus looking so peaceful, and a privilege to be able to watch over him while he slept. Usually her youngest son was so very private, so spiky. The act of sleeping in front of others was one he would have viewed as vulnerability.

Ginny had the urge to stroke his dark hair like she had when he was a child, but even Ginny knew that Albus would have resented the babying. He wasn’t Scorpius Malfoy, who had rather heartwarmingly been embraced by his father following a bout of tears. Albus was an altogether more difficult individual, and for the extra work that took sometimes, Ginny wouldn’t have changed him for the world.

Harry stood beside her, looking out of the church window anxiously. He had been growing more distressed with every minute that passed.

“Still no sign?” Ginny asked.


Ginny put on her best calming voice.

“We’re together, your mum and dad are alive, we can turn time Harry, we can’t speed it up. She’ll come when she’s ready and we’ll be ready for her.”

She turned once again to Albus’s sleeping form with a small smile.

“Or some of us will be.”

Harry looked at his son and gave a sigh. Coming away from the window for a moment, he sat down beside his wife.

“Poor kid thought he had to save the world,” said Harry heavily.

“Poor kid has saved the world,” Ginny responded. “That blanket was masterful. I mean, he also almost destroyed the world, but probably best not to focus on that bit.”

Harry tried a smile for her benefit.

“You think he’s okay?” he asked, thinking of how Scorpius Malfoy seemed to have suffered something of a minor breakdown a short while ago and wondering what horrors his son was keeping stubbornly to himself.

“He’s getting there,” Ginny said, reaching out to pat Harry’s hand. “It just might take him a bit of time - and you a bit of time too.”
Harry nodded. The Potter parents both looked down once again at their sleeping child.

Albus was already small for his age, and in some ways fairly immature, but it wasn’t until he was asleep that his youth truly showed. It could get lost behind his sarcasm and his fierce sense of privacy. Ginny wasn’t sure she remembered Harry ever looking so young, but she supposed he must have. Him being Ron’s best friend and a year older meant he’d always seemed so mature, so grown up.

But Harry Potter wasn’t infallible. He had his fair share of flaws: his reckless heroism, his sarcasm (something his son had woefully inherited), his tendency to act first and think later. Ginny accepted all of those things because they were part of her husband, and she truly believed they made him greater. But Harry seemed determined to be perfect. To be the perfect Auror. The perfect father. He was horribly afraid of letting people down, of being a disappointment to people who knew of his glorious reputation and not the man himself. Somehow, in this quest, Ginny believed her husband had managed to alienate Albus, the most awkward of their children, who needed desperately to see that his father worried, that he cared what people thought of him, that he shared many a trait with his youngest son.

All Albus needed was that acknowledgement. To know that Harry Potter had once been an awkward teenager too. Very much like his father, Albus feared disappointing those who knew only of his name. It just so happened that they dealt with this situation in different ways. Harry chose to try and live up to his reputation, to do the best he could, and Albus - well, Albus seemed to think not trying at all was better than trying and failing. He was determined to subvert everyone’s expectations, almost eager to shock people with his dissimilarity to his father. Ginny had a distinct sense that Albus almost enjoyed being something of an outsider. And that he wanted his father to accept him as he was. Without needing to become a traditional ‘Potter’ like his brother and sister. That perhaps he wanted to push his father’s buttons just to prove that he’d still be loved at the end of it.

“‘You know,’” Ginny remarked. “‘After I’d opened the Chamber of Secrets - after Voldemort had bewitched me with that terrible diary and I’d almost destroyed everything-‘“

“I remember,” Harry said, nodding his head and holding Ginny’s hand at the mere mention of what he knew been a traumatising event for her.

“‘After I came out of hospital - everyone ignored me, shut me out - other than, that is, the boy who had everything - who came across the Gryffindor common room and challenged me to a game of Exploding Snap.”

Harry frowned a little.

“People think they know all there is to know about you, but the best bits of you are - have always been - heroic in really quiet ways. My point is - after this is over, just remember if you could - that sometimes people - but particularly children - just want someone to play Exploding Snap with.”

“You think that’s what we’re missing?” Harry asked, a little bemused. “Exploding Snap?”

“No. But the love I felt from you that day - I’m not sure Albus feels that,” Ginny admitted quietly.

Harry looked stunned. He blinked down at his son with surprise.

“I’d do anything for him,” Harry said sincerely.

“Harry, you’d do anything for anybody,” Ginny pointed out. “You were pretty happy to sacrifice
himself for the world. He needs to feel specific love. It’ll make him stronger, and you stronger too.”

Harry thought on that. He loved Albus, truly. Just as much as he loved Lily and James. All three of his children were utterly adored. It was true that Lily was the most obviously and physically affectionate, James able to slip into easy banter with him which was their own form of connection, and Albus- well, Harry could admit that he and his youngest son didn’t really communicate well. But that wasn’t for lack of love. Albus was just so… complicated. He wouldn’t want a hug like his sister. He wouldn’t laugh at a joke like his brother. Every time Harry spoke to him he seemed to irritate Albus. His very presence could put Albus in a bad mood.

Until Albus had gone missing, Harry had never had to contemplate what life without his sulky, secretive son could be like, but he had been forced to realise, following the nightmare of his disappearance, that without Albus a part of himself vanished. He hadn’t felt whole until seeing the boys in that shed. The love he’d felt, in that moment, was beyond description.

“You know, it wasn’t until we thought Albus had gone that I truly understood what my mother was able to do for me,” Harry admitted. “A counter-charm so powerful that it was able to repel the spell of death.”

“And the only spell Voldemort couldn’t understand - love.”

“I do love him specifically, Ginny,” Harry said, quietly.

Ginny nodded her head.

“I know, but he needs to feel it,” said Ginny, sadly.

Quite how he was going to show Albus how much he cared, Harry wasn’t sure, but he would double his efforts the moment they got home. If that meant Exploding Snap in the Slytherin common room three times a day then so be it. If it meant inviting Scorpius Malfoy to family dinners, Harry would send the owl himself. No matter what it took, he would reach his son. Even if it took years.

And if Draco Malfoy, of all people, could hold his sobbing son in front of them all, with no thought at all for his name or reputation, then Harry could be a better parent too. He could change. With Ginny’s help, he could improve.

“I’m lucky to have you aren’t I?” said Harry, running a guilty hand through his hair.

“Extremely,” Ginny agreed, giving her husband a wink. “And I’d be delighted to discuss just how lucky at another time. But for now - let’s focus on stopping Delphi.”

Harry nodded his head.

“We are running out of time,” he said helplessly.

Ginny frowned, glancing up at the grand church clock above them. Surely soon Voldemort would appear at Godric’s Hollow to curse baby Harry, and then Delphi would lose her chance? Was she not running short of time as well? Was it not odd that she’d remained hidden for so long?

A thought occurred to Ginny, quite suddenly. She let go of Harry’s hand and fixed her ponytail.

“Unless - Harry, has anyone thought - why has she picked now? Today?”
“Because this is the day everything changed…”

“Right now you’re over a year old, am I right?” Ginny asked, sitting up straighter.

“A year and three months,” Harry agreed.

“That’s a year and three months she could have killed you in,” said Ginny. “Even now, she’s been in Godric’s Hollow for twenty-four hours. What’s she waiting for?”

“I’m still not entirely following—” Harry admitted.

Ginny shook her head, ponytail swinging, and took Harry’s hand again, this time with both of hers.

“What if she’s not waiting for you - she’s waiting for him… to stop him.”

“What?” Harry asked, frowning.

“Delphi’s picked tonight because he’s here - because her father is coming. She wants to meet him. Be with him, the father she loves. Voldemort’s problems started when he attacked you. If he hadn’t done that…”

Harry’s green eyes widened with understanding.

“He’d have only got more powerful,” Harry muttered. “The darkness would only have got darker.”

Ginny nodded as Harry finally caught on.

“The best way to break the prophecy is not to kill Harry Potter,” said Ginny confidently. “It’s to stop Voldemort doing anything at all.”

Chapter End Notes

The only part of this which is from the script is the conversation between Ginny and Harry. I'm assuming time has passed since Albus is asleep and Harry is getting agitated that Delphi hasn't shown up yet.

I also thought this was a good opportunity to show the new Draco and Scorpius relationship.

I HOPE HOPE HOPE you enjoyed this!

Please leave me a comment!

To anyone reading this I love you SO much!

(Also say hi on twitter if you like! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Ginny and Harry assembled the group in the middle of the church. Hermione kept glancing furtively back at the main window, uncomfortable with leaving her post even for a second. Draco and Scorpius came over together, looking solemn but attentive. Albus, who had been woken up by his father, was trying to look as with-it as possible.

“I really feel that we ought to stick to the plan-“ Hermione declared, but Harry shook his head.

“We’re running out of time and options,” he said. “Ginny’s got an idea.”

The group turned to her eagerly.

“We’ve been thinking about this all wrong,” Ginny began. “We’ve been treating her like she’s Voldemort.”

“Well, she is his kid,” Ron pointed out.

“Exactly,” Ginny declared. “She’s his child. And all this, this has been to bring him back. To change time so Voldemort never loses power. Think about that from her perspective.”

Nobody spoke. Draco had a distinctly sour expression on his face, but even he frowned with thought.

“She loves her father,” Ginny said. “This is for him. She’s put herself in danger too. She’s risked everything to do this. There’s respect there - at the very least. And here she is, on the night he decides to act. On the night everyone knows he was present here at Godric’s Hollow.”

“So what are you saying?” Ron asked. “That she’s come to see him?”

“Not just see him,” Harry answered, grimly. “We think she’s come to save him.”

“What?” said Ron.

“Think of her as a child-“ Ginny tried.

“That woman is no child,” Draco declared fiercely, holding his son a bit tighter.

“No, she’s not,” Ginny agreed calmly. “But just think. She’s an orphan. She has no one. No allies. She’s done this alone.”
“Do you expect me to feel sorry for her?” Draco spat.

“No, Draco, she doesn’t,” Hermione said, deep in thought. “Please Ginny, go on.”

“This is all for him. She’s looking for her only family. Think of her room. What she carved into the ceiling.”

“What did she carve into the ceiling?” Scorpius asked curiously.

“Not now, Scorpius,” Draco said, although he patted his son on the shoulder all the same.

“She’s waiting for something. Why? Why not kill Harry before now? He’s a baby, it wouldn’t be hard. We think she’s going to stop Voldemort from casting the Killing Curse at all. That way he never curses himself. That way he doesn’t create the one enemy which could stop him.”

“She’s waiting for him to get here,” Harry agreed. “It makes sense. It explains why I’m still alive. So we need to stop her from reaching him. That should be our main objective. We intercept her.”

“So let me get this right - we’re fighting to protect Voldemort?” Ron asked, looking confused.

“Voldemort killing my grandparents. Voldemort trying to kill my dad?” Albus added, making a face at his uncle with baffled disapproval.

Hermione had been silent for a long time, her thinking face on as she considered the theory and weighed the likelihood of it being correct against every counter argument she could think of. Finally, with a nod to herself, she broke into a smile.


Scorpius gave a little gasp of understanding, and his father frowned, apparently also seeing the sense of the Potters’ words.

But even understanding her motivations and intentions didn’t provide a solution, and that was what they needed. Draco wasn’t keen on seeing the world through the eyes of the young woman who had tortured his only son. The plan for her arrest (and life sentence in the depths of Azkaban) was all he cared for.

“So - we just wait?” Draco demanded. “Until Voldemort turns up?”

“Does she know when he does turn up?” Albus asked. “Hasn’t she come here twenty-four hours early because she isn’t sure when he’ll arrive and in what direction?”

Albus looked to Scorpius, drawing courage from his attentive gaze.

“The history books - correct me if I’m wrong, Scorpius - show nothing about when and how he arrived at Godric’s Hollow?”

“You’re not wrong,” answered Scorpius and Hermione at once.

“Blimey!” exclaimed Ron. “There are two of them!”

“So how can we use this to our advantage?” Draco asked, glaring at Ron.

Everyone paused to think. And then, unexpectedly, Albus Potter cleared his throat and got ready to speak again.
“Do you know what I’m really good at?” Albus asked, stepping forward.

Ginny had never seen her son act so confidently in public. It was something of a breakthrough.

“There’s plenty you’re good at, Albus,” Harry said firmly.

“Polyjuicing,” Albus said, nodding his head at Scorpius. “And I think Bathilda Bagshot may have all the ingredients for Polyjuice in her house. We can Polyjuice into Voldemort and bring her to us.”

A silence fell in which the idea was considered.

Ron shook his head and patted his nephew on the shoulder, as though consoling him for his slightly rubbish attempt to help.

“To use Polyjuice you need a bit of someone,” Ron said. “We don’t have a bit of Voldemort.”

“But I like the concept,” Hermione added, nodding proudly at her nephew. “A pretend mouse for her cat.”

With Hermione Granger’s approval, the idea suddenly took on a great deal of weight. Albus’s held his head high, proud of his contribution.

“How close can we get through transfiguration?” Harry asked urgently.

“We know what he looks like,” Hermione said, thoughtfully. “We’ve got some excellent witches and wizards here.”

“You want to transfigure into Voldemort?” Ginny clarified, looking about the group with mild horror.

“It’s the only way,” Albus said, with more confidence still.

Hermione gave a sigh and smiled sadly at her nephew.

“It is, isn’t it?”

For a moment the group stood still, taking that information in. Nobody seemed to want to speak. It was obvious there would need to be a subject for this transfiguration. Someone would have to volunteer for this dangerous task.

It was Ron Weasley who stepped forward first, clearing his throat.

“That I would like to - I think I should be him,” he said. “I mean, it won’t be - exactly nice being Voldemort - but without wishing to blow my own trumpet - I am probably the most chilled out of us all and … so maybe transfiguring into him - into the Dark Lord will do less damage to me than - any of you more - intense - people.”

Harry stepped away from the group introspectively, running a hand through his hair.

“Who are you calling intense?” Hermione asked, eyebrow raised.

“I’d also like to volunteer,” said Draco.

Scorpius’s head shot up to stare at his father with awe.
“I think being Voldemort requires precision… no offence, Ron… and a knowledge of Dark Magic, and -“

“And I’d like to volunteer too,” Hermione said briskly. “As Minister for Magic I think it’s my responsibility and right.”

“Maybe we should draw lots-“ Scorpius suggested.

“You’re not volunteering, Scorpius,” cut in Draco, firmly.

“Actually-“ began Albus.

His mother stopped him with a hand on his shoulder.

“No, no way,” Ginny declared. “I think you’re all mad. I know what that voice is like inside your head. I won’t have it in mine again-“

“And anyway - it has to be me,” Harry said grimly.

Everyone turned to Harry with surprise.

“What?” Draco demanded.

“For this plan to work she has to believe it’s him, without hesitation. She’ll use Parseltongue - and I knew there was a reason why I still have that ability. But more than that, I - know what it is to feel - like him. I know what it is to be him. It has to be me.”

Draco scoffed loudly.

“Rubbish,” Ron declared robustly. “Beautifully put, but beautiful rubbish. No way are you going to-“

“I’m afraid you’re right, my old friend,” said Hermione, sadly, nodding at Harry.

Ron stepped forward, shaking his head.

“Hermione, you’re wrong. Voldemort is not something to be - Harry should not-“

Ron turned to the group, looking for an ally. To his relief, Ginny was wearing her hard, blazing look and appeared ready to argue.

“And I hate to agree with my brother,” Ginny said. “But…”

“He could get stuck - as Voldemort - forever,” Ron finished, ominously.

“So could any of us,” Hermione pointed out. “Your concerns are valid but…”

Harry raised a hand.

“Hang on, Hermione,” said Harry, turning to his wife. “Gin.”

Ginny looked up, horrified by what her husband was asking of her.

“I won’t do it if you don’t want me to,” Harry said quietly. “But it feels like the only way to me. Am I wrong?”

Ginny thought for a moment, desperate for some reason to spring to mind. For some excuse to stop
Harry from doing this, from becoming that man, that man who Ginny loathed beyond all others.

But there were no other options. If they didn’t try this, then what hope did they have?

With a great deal of bravery, Ginny nodded her head, giving her permission. Harry’s face hardened with acceptance.

“You’re right,” Ginny agreed, refusing to look at Draco Malfoy, who seemed shocked and appalled that she hadn’t argued against the idea.

“Then let’s do this,” Harry said, grimly.

Draco frowned at the group with disbelief. The finer details had not yet been decided upon. This was reckless. Unbelievably so. And no back-up plan? No proposition for escape? What was wrong with these people? If this was how they strategised then how had they survived this long?

Harry walked from the group, full of resolve, clearly getting ready to be transfigured.

Draco stepped forward, reaching out for Harry’s arm to stop him. Ron Weasley’s eyebrows raised so high that they disappeared beneath his red hair.

“Don’t we need to discuss the route you’re taking - the -“

“She’s watching for him,” Harry told Draco calmly. “She’ll come to me.”

“And then what?” Draco demanded. “When she’s with you? May I remind you this is a very powerful witch.”

“Easy,” said Ron. “He gets her here. We zap her together.”

“Zap her?” Draco repeated incredulously.

Hermione began to scan the room thoughtfully. She spotted the large main church doors and tilted her head, considering them. Then her attention caught on a smaller set of doors, just off the main nave, which most likely led to the church vestry. Would they do?

“We’ll hide behind these doors,” she declared, gesturing at the vestry doors decisively. Hermione glanced up at the stained-glass windows, and the point where the moonlight shone through them, casting beautiful light upon the stone floor. It fell perfectly in the centre of the church, a large area which was ideal for Delphi’s capture, and in close proximity to the vestry. “If you can get her to this point, then we can come out and make sure she has no chance to escape.”

“And then we’ll zap her,” Ron agreed, with a glare at Draco.

“Harry, last chance,” said Hermione, as Harry moved his head from side to side, limbering up in a way that was almost comical. “Are you sure you can do this?”

“Yes, I can do this,” Harry assured her.

“No!” Draco burst out indignantly. “There’s too many what ifs - too many things that can go wrong - the transfiguration could not hold, she could see through it - if she escapes us now there’s no telling the damage she can do - we need time to properly plan to-“

“Draco,” said Albus, turning to his best friend’s father and looking him right in his panicked grey eyes. “Trust my dad. He won’t let us down.”
Draco hadn’t been worried about Harry Potter letting them down, rather more that he might die during this recklessly heroic exploit, which would result in Delphi getting away and going unpunished.

He had been about to say so, but then he saw Harry Potter’s expression. He was watching Albus with surprise, clearly moved by that vote of confidence. Draco bit back his words and let out a sigh instead. He wouldn’t rob Potter of that moment, not if it could be one of his last.

“Wands,” said Hermione, briskly.

Reluctantly, Ron held up his wand, pointing it at his best friend. Hermione did the same with a steady hand. Ginny could barely look at her husband as she moved forward and raised her own.

Draco was the last to comply, and he did so with a very dissatisfied noise. There had been many points in his life at which he’d longed to use magic on Harry Potter, but not now. Not in these circumstances.

Harry clasped his wand in his hands to calm himself as Draco, Ginny, Hermione, and Ron surrounded him.

Albus and Scorpius watched on anxiously from outside of the small circle. Now their parents had moved, they gravitated to each other. Scorpius took Albus’s arm and Albus leaned against him, eyes on his father’s grave face.

No words were spoken, but light gradually began to build, emanating from each wand and circling Harry Potter, beginning to consume him.

Albus held onto Scorpius just that little bit tighter.

The light became blinding, and everyone closed their eyes. The transfiguration was slow and monstrous, Harry’s whole body seeming to shake with the strain. Ginny bit down on her lip so she didn’t scream as from the form of her grimacing husband emerged someone new, someone horrifying…

Harry turned on the spot, an odd slowness to his movements. He looked from one face to another, trying not to panic. Draco Malfoy had blanched white and was shielding his son with one arm. Scorpius was half hidden behind Draco, staring up at Harry with wide, terrified eyes. Albus was clinging to Scorpius’s arm and watching his father with confusion, his lips slightly parted, not quite understanding what it was he was seeing. Hermione was forcing calm and nodding, as though reassuring herself this had been the right thing to do. Ron was gawping at him with a mixture of horror and interest, looking about ready to swear.

Worst of all, Ginny could not look. She kept trying to raise her head but turning away again the moment she did so.

“Bloody hell,” breathed Ron, letting out a long whistle.

“It worked then?” asked Harry, in a high, clear, cold voice.

“Yes,” Ginny agreed gravely, averting her eyes. “It worked.”

Harry stretched out his pale arms, which were shrouded in a black cloak. He was oddly thin now, and his skin seemed so white that it was almost translucent, the purple veins showing hideously from underneath. His fingernails were long and his hands were elegant, in a rather monstrous way.
“Not the best you’ve ever looked,” Ron commented, trying to break the tension. “But on the bright side you’re not quite as snake-y as I remember.”

“Of course he’s not, Ron,” Hermione said, seriously. “This is Voldemort before the cursed backfired. Before he was reborn. Look, his eyes are still quite normal, just more bloodshot…”

Feeling very uncomfortable now, especially having Hermione stare at him like some sort of museum exhibit, Harry shifted on his feet and pulled up the hood of his cloak.

“Dad?” Albus asked, nervously. “Do you feel okay?”

“Fine,” Harry assured his son, determinedly not wincing at the voice that came out of his mouth. Hermione nodded her head and took a deep breath, crossing her arms over her chest, wand in hand.

“Go now, Harry. Quickly,” said Hermione. “We’ll be watching. All you have to do is lure her here.”

“You can do it, mate,” Ron added, patting Harry on the back and then making a face. “You know, I’m probably the first person to do that to Voldemort without getting cursed. Doesn’t strike me as an affectionate sort of bloke, if I’m honest.”

Scorpius was the only one who laughed at that, the noise bursting out of him almost hysterically before he could stop it. Ron looked over at him, surprised, but fairly pleased.

“Ginny are you—” Harry asked, but the words only made Ginny wince. She didn’t like to hear her name spoken in that awful voice. She turned her face away and put a hand to her mouth, determined not to say a word.

“Go on, Potter!” Draco snapped, feeling nauseas at the very sight of the Dark Lord. Not least the Dark Lord so close to his son. “We don’t know how long this will hold…”

Harry nodded and moved towards the church doors. Ron and Albus rushed along on either side of him. Ron opened the doors with a flick of his wand, and Albus stood supportively by.

“You’ve taken him down before,” Ron said quietly. “You can deal with his kid. I mean, what’s she compared to the real thing?”

“I’ll make sure Mum’s okay,” Albus declared valiantly.

“Albus, Ron, if this looks like it’s going wrong then I want you to use the Time-Turner and leave—“ Harry tried, but Ron and Albus both shook their heads.

“No chance,” Ron said firmly. “Because it’s not going to go wrong.”

“Dad I… I know you can do this,” Albus agreed.

“There you go,” said Ron, moving to stand next to Albus and putting an arm around his nephew’s shoulders. “No need to worry about us. I’ve got a whole new set of jokes I want to try out on my nephew, and the acoustics in here are great—“

Albus gave his dad what he hoped was a reassuring smile.

“Right then,” Harry said, allowing himself a final glance at his son.

He took a deep breath, steeled himself, and then stepped out into the cold and windy evening,
cloak billowing behind him.

Chapter End Notes

Hope you liked it!

I added some of my own stuff in terms of dialogue but mostly I had to work with the dialogue from the script. I hope I did an okay job!

I love you so much if you are reading this and please leave me a comment because it makes my day!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Ron, Hermione, Draco, Albus and Scorpius crammed in at the main window, as they watched the dark and sinister figure of Lord Voldemort leave the church and walk slowly down Church Lane, nearer to the village square.

Ginny did not join them. She found she could not bring herself to watch. Instead, she sat further back, in the nearest pew.

“I think we ought to split into two groups when he gets her here,” Hermione declared. “It will be easier to surround her. The first hides in the vestry, as planned.”

“The side chapel will work equally as well,” Draco pointed out, gesturing at the room slightly further down the nave. It seemed, to him, better protected than the vestry, and he wanted his son kept safe beyond all else. “Scorpius and I will move to that one.”

Hermione glanced at the chapel doors, thought, and then nodded her head.

“If something should go wrong it might be a good idea to have us spread out,” she agreed.

“Nothing’s going to go wrong,” Albus piped up. “Dad can handle this.”

Ron put a hand on his nephew’s shoulder.

“I’ll go with you two,” Ron said, nodding at Draco. “Seems only fair we have three in each place. Evens it out.”

Draco inclined his head, accepting the logic of that.

For a moment, Harry seemed to disappear, and the group edged closer to the glass, but then he turned, and his pale skin was once again visible in the darkness. He was quite some distance away and appeared to be turning on the spot.

“What’s he doing?” Scorpius asked.

“He’s circling the square,” Hermione answered. “And giving her an opportunity to spot him. Look, he’s walking back around again.”

“He’s hardly going to pass for Lord Voldemort if he’s circling the place,” Draco said, sounding stressed. “She’s going to notice he’s waiting for something.”

“I think Harry knows more about Voldemort than you do,” said Ron loyally. “And besides, nobody
knows what happened that night. Tonight. And who’s going to question Voldemort anyway? ‘Excuse me, mate, but you’re taking the long-route’? I don’t think so.”

Draco took a deep breath and did not retaliate.

“And we’ll be able to see her?” Draco asked.

“She has silver hair. She’ll show up easily,” Scorpius assured his father. “She’s quite hard to miss.”

Albus turned to check on his mother, and was concerned to see her with her head bowed, as though in prayer, her limbs stiff, not even listening to the group. It was so unlike his mum to look anything but totally sorted that it shocked him.

Leaving the others to watch, he went to her.

“It’s going to be okay, you know that, Mum?” Albus said, awkwardly.

“I know it is,” Ginny agreed. “Or I hope I do. I just - don’t want to see him like that. The man I love shrouded in the man I hate.”

Swallowing, and trying his best to be responsible, Albus sat down beside his mum.

For a while they sat in silence. Albus half-listened to the conversation of the group, and allowed himself to drift into thoughts of his own.

“He can’t keep wandering,” Draco pointed out.

“Draco, you have to trust that this will work,” Hermione told him firmly. “It’s the only idea we have, and it hasn’t failed yet.”

“For a guy marked out as Voldemort’s nemesis when he wasn’t even toilet trained, he’s more lucky than you’d think,” Ron agreed.

Hermione looked furiously at her husband, who fell silent.

Albus shifted a little closer to his mother, and she reached out instinctively to put an arm around his shoulders. It was oddly comforting, that small gesture.

He watched his mother's brave profile, the way her eyes had gone hard with the determination not to cry, and couldn't help but feel responsible. If he hadn't started this then everything would be fine. His dad would be safe. His mum would be at home writing for her column. Scorpius would never have suffered all that pain...

"How do we know she won't be disguised? What exactly does she look like?" Draco demanded from the window.

"She could well be," Hermione answered patiently. "But why would she go to the trouble? She's here to change everything to his world. To create what Scorpius saw. What would it matter if a few Muggles saw her?"

"And Albus and I aren't much of a threat," Scorpius agreed.

"That's what she thought," Ron countered, giving Scorpius a nod of his head. "But she got you wrong, didn't she? They never remember that, the bad guys. That we work together. That you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us."
"The 'bad guys'?" Draco repeated incredulously. "What are you? Five?"

"Will you two please just leave this for later?" Hermione sighed. "I know we're all stressed."

"Look, I was only saying that us lot, the good guys, we're a team," Ron said, looking at Draco. "All of us. Okay?"

With sudden understanding, Draco swallowed, eyes wide. Scorpius smiled up at Ron with admiration. Hermione gave her husband an approving nod.

In their pew, Albus and Ginny still sat in silence. Albus could think of a hundred things he wanted to say to his mother. About what he'd seen. About what he'd done. About the past two days spent travelling on Muggle trains, about what had happened to Scorpius, about Cedric Diggory, about seeing James and Lily, about the shed...

But oddly, only one topic seemed broachable. The topic which weighed most heavily on Albus's conscience. The reason they were all here, now, in danger.

It seemed to burst out of him without permission.

“I liked her, Mum,” Albus admitted, the guilt too much to bear. “You know that? I really liked her. Delphi.”

Ginny looked up. She gazed at her son with mild confusion, brown eyes trying to read him.

“And she was - Voldemort’s daughter?" Albus said, feeling sick as he spoke the words aloud. He, Albus Severus Potter, had fancied Lord Voldemort’s daughter. He had allowed her to use him. His pathetic crush had started all of this. His stupid, stupid, idea to impress her, to show that he wasn't his father, to be a hero in his own right, had put all of their lives at risk.

If only he’d listened to Scorpius to begin with…

“That’s what they’re good at Albus,” Ginny said consolingly. “Catching innocents in their web.”

Now was not the time to tell the story of Tom Riddle’s diary, not in the midst of this nightmare, but Ginny promised herself that as soon as they were home, and safe, she would tell her youngest son everything. Not just about the fear, the trauma, but about the one fact that haunted her to this day. That she had made it easy for him. That she had been a perfect target for Tom Riddle, an older, intelligent, very manipulative young man. And she too, at times, had found herself in awe of him. Hadn't she wanted to impress him? Hadn't she been taken in by his understanding, by his willingness to listen? Hadn't it been exciting? To have someone older pay her, the youngest of the Weasleys, special attention.

Even if it was painful, she would tell Albus, and soon. So that he knew it didn’t mean he was stupid, or naive, or had some blame in what had happened. It was what Ginny had needed to hear, all those years ago.

“This is all my fault," said Albus heavily, bowing his head.

The gesture was so like her husband in miniature that Ginny couldn’t help but give a small, sad smile.

Ginny took her son in her arms. Albus didn’t squirm away. Instead, he rested his head on his mother’s shoulder.
“How funny. Your dad seems to think it’s all his,” Ginny said. “Strange pair, you are.”

“That’s her!” Scorpius exclaimed, jumping up and pointing at the window. “That’s her! She’s seen him!”


Ginny and Albus got immediately to their feet and rushed to the vestry, reaching for their wands as they went.

Draco put a hand on his son’s shoulder and began to lead him briskly towards the side chapel.

“And remember, don’t come out until he’s got her in the light,” Hermione said firmly, looking importantly at the group, who paused to listen to her. “We’ve one shot at this, we don’t want to mess it up.”

“Hermione Granger, I’m being bossed around by Hermione Granger,” Draco declared.

Ron turned, ready to defend his wife, but he had no need. Hermione looked to Draco uncertainly, but he broke into a sudden smile.

“And I’m mildly enjoying it,” Draco finished.

Hermione smiled back with a breath of relief.

“Dad…” Scorpius said, tugging at his father’s arm.

Ron gave his wife a good luck kiss and then followed the Malfoys to their hiding place.

Hermione watched the group scatter, and then finally, with one last glance out at where Harry, no, Voldemort, was leading a young silver-haired woman slowly but steadily towards them, she ran to the vestry with Ginny and Albus, closing the door softly behind her.

+++ 

Harry had been out on Church Lane when he’d become aware of the person following him, a safe distance away but drawing closer with every moment. One glance had confirmed that that person was Delphi. Her silver hair reflected the moonlight, making her appear almost ghostly.

The urge to up his pace had been strong, but Harry knew he had to remain in character. Delphi had to believe he was her father. She had to witness his slow, purposeful steps. She had to see his confidence, his sense of complete and utter control. Voldemort had a very particular way of moving. He hardly made a single sound, and yet he walked with elegance, with erect posture, as though he feared nothing.

Harry led the young woman past the graveyard where his parents would soon be laid to rest, and up towards the church, opening the heavy wooden doors with a simple movement of his wand.

He was halfway into the church, pews on either side of him, stained glass windows glowing up above, when she made the decision to follow him inside the structure.

Harry waited until he head the young woman’s quiet footsteps on the church floor behind him before he spoke.

“Whichever witch or wizard is following me, I assure you, you will regret it,” Harry declared, with quiet confidence and just the barest hint of menace.
“Lord Voldemort,” came a rather well-spoken female voice. “It is me. I am following you.”

“I do not know you,” Harry declared dismissively. “Leave me.”

The young woman took a deep breath, summoning courage.

“I am your daughter,” she said, simply.

Harry paused, letting the words echo around them. How would Voldemort react to a revelation such as that? Not with warmth, that was for sure. There would be no embrace, no loving reunion.

At best, Harry could imagine Voldemort displaying mild fascination. Dumbledore had told him long ago that Voldemort was unable to understand love, but he certainly knew how to use those around him for his benefit. He knew how to twist and manipulate love for his own ends.

Harry settled on a tone of detached interest.

“If you were my daughter, I’d know of you.”

“I am from the future,” Delphi insisted. “The child of Bellatrix Lestrange and you. I was born in Malfoy Manor before the Battle of Hogwarts. A battle you are going to lose. I have come to save you.”

With his back turned to Delphi, Harry frowned. He could not recall Bellatrix Lestrange being pregnant around the time of the war, not even the slightest rumour. How had this taken place at Malfoy Manor? How was Draco unaware? Who had been involved in this almighty secret? How had it possibly been kept for so very long?

Finally, slowly, as though he was fairly disinterested, Harry turned.

Before him stood the young woman he had known as Delphi Diggory, the woman he had once invited into his home, and yet her posture was completely different from the nurse who had cared for Amos. She stood with her back straight, like a soldier awaiting inspection, chin held proudly high, although her dark eyes held a deference, a reverence. She seemed simultaneously older and younger than her years.

Delphi then did a very brave thing. She gave the smallest movement of her wand, and the large, heavy church doors closed quietly behind her, sealing her own exit. She looked up at her father as though willing him to see what that meant. Desperate for him to know that she was entirely and willingly at his mercy. That she did not fear him.

“It was Rodolphus Lestrange, Bellatrix’s loyal husband, who on return from Azkaban told me who I was and revealed the prophecy he thought I was destined to fulfil. I am your daughter, sir,” Delphi finished, slightly breathlessly.

Harry theatrically pondered that for a second longer.

“I am familiar with Bellatrix,” Harry admitted evenly. “And there are certain similarities in your face - though you haven’t inherited the best of her. But without proof…”

Delphi took a deep breath and forced herself to recover from the obvious pain of that insult, clearly prepared for his moment and utterly determined not to spoil it.

With some pride, she opened her mouth and out came the words: *I am your daughter.*
She was using Parseltongue. Delphi spoke intently, her dark eyes fixed on her father’s face. She did not flinch from his bloodshot eyes or waxy skin. She did not look at him as something monstrous.

Delphi was looking at him as a father. A beloved father. A father whom she longed to impress.

Harry forced himself to let out a cold, vicious laugh.

“That’s your proof?” he crowed with amusement.

Distressed but not giving up, Delphi put out her hands and then slowly, effortlessly, rose into the air.

Harry took a step back, amazed. The boys had said she’d flown, but Harry had naturally assumed they meant with a broom, not like this...

Delphi seemed thrilled by her father’s reaction, clearly believing she had managed to prove her identity at last.

“I am the Augurey to your Dark Lord, and I am ready to give all that I have to serve you,” she declared with new confidence.

“You learnt flight - from - me?” Harry asked, fighting to keep his face impassive.

Delphi nodded her head and landed gracefully back on the stone floor.

“I have tried to follow the path you set,” she said, bowing her head.

Stunned by her power, Harry recovered himself. How would Voldemort react to seeing such a thing?

The answer came easily to Harry. It made him feel something akin to pity for the young woman before him.

He would see her as a rival. As a threat. He would want to ensure she would not put his status in jeopardy, because if she did, Voldemort would not stand for her existence, blood or not.

“I have never met a witch or a wizard who’s attempted to be my equal before,” Harry declared.

“Do not mistake me,” Delphi said quickly, bowing her head even lower with respect. “I would not claim to be worthy of you, Lord. But I have devoted my life to being a child you could be proud of.“

“I see what you are,” Harry declared, interrupting. Delphi fell obediently silent. “And I see what you could be. Daughter.”

Delphi raised her head. Even from the shadows, there was no mistaking the emotion in her eyes. Harry recognised something in her then. A longing from years ago. It was the dream of every orphan to be acknowledged by their family, to know where they came from, to feel connected to their past. Hadn’t Harry dreamt enough times of meeting his parents? Of them calling him ‘son’?

“Father?” Delphi asked, her voice very quiet.

Voldemort may have been an orphan himself, but Harry doubted he had the empathy or compassion in him to recognise a shared struggle. All he would see was a powerful young woman, bound to him by blood, claiming loyalty.
He would see her not as a person, but as a pawn to be used to his advantage, to be discarded if it came to that. He would think only of her usefulness to him, as a tool in his quest for ultimate power.

“Together, the power we could wield,” Harry remarked.

“Father…”

“Come here, in the light,” Harry said, gesturing at the point he needed Delphi to reach, where the light from the stained-glass windows hit the stone floor. “So I may examine what my blood made.”

But Delphi did not move. Stubbornly, she remained on the spot, shaking her head.

“Your mission is a mistake,” she said boldly. “Attacking Harry Potter is a mistake. He will destroy you.”

Harry made a sweeping gesture with his hands, about to chastise Delphi for daring to think she could imply his plan was flawed, but to his horror, one of his hands was becoming darker, the nails shortening. The transfiguration was already starting to wear off.

Swiftly, Harry pulled his hand back inside his sleeve.

“He is a baby,” he said firmly, starting to back further into the church, hoping that Delphi might follow.

“He has his mother’s love,” Delphi informed him. “Your spell will rebound, destroying you and making him too powerful and you too weak. You will recover, to spend the next seventeen years consumed in a battle with him - a battle you will lose.”

Harry felt an odd tingling sensation in his scalp. As his hair began to sprout, dark and messy, Harry pulled his hood swiftly back over his head, attempting to cover it.

“Then I won’t attack him,” Harry said quickly. “You are right.”

“Father?” Delphi asked, tilting her head curiously to one side. For a moment, her expression was one of deep concern. The thought of her father coming to harm, of being weakened in any way, seemed to distress her. She looked ready to walk forward and tend to him.

But Harry could feel himself turning back. His whole body was itching, fizzing. An unpleasant dizziness hit him as he began to shrink down, returning to his usual height. Startled, Harry turned his back on Delphi.

“Father…” Delphi repeated, uncertainly.

“Your plan is a good one,” Harry announced, hoping he could distract her with praise, even as his voice deepened. “The fight is off. You have served me well, now come here into the light so I may examine you.”

To her left, Delphi spotted a side door sway open. It was not this odd movement which alerted her to deception, but rather her father’s failure to notice the way the door was pulled shut again from the inside. He would never have permitted an eavesdropper. He would never have led her to a place which was inhabited…

Unless perhaps they were his allies? Perhaps his Death Eaters?
But in this Muggle church? Would her father bring them to such a foul place?

“Father…” Delphi said, moving to try and get a glimpse of her father’s face. But the moment she moved the man in the cloak moved too.

Delphi’s stomach lurched.

Never would her father have hidden himself from her in such an absurd manner…

“You are not Lord Voldemort,” Delphi said clearly, eyes narrowing as she drew her wand.

“Incendio!” she shrieked, a burst of orange and red flame shooting towards the imposter.

The man turned in an instant, matching her.

“Incendio!” came a deeper, more desperate voice, as the spells collided, forming a beautiful ball of light in the middle of the church, orange flames flickering everywhere.

“Potter!” Delphi declared, recognising the wizard she was duelling.

The doors to her left began to open, as did a set on her right. Immediately Delphi used her free hand to block them.

“Colloportus!”

Two locks swung shut over the doors, blocking out Potter’s allies.

Harry looked over at the doors, dismayed as the people on the other side of them seemed to hammer on the wood but to no avail. He was alone. Alone and facing Voldemort’s daughter. A young woman who was so proficient that she seemed to be able to perform wandless magic.

“What?” Delphi demanded, letting out a laugh of triumph. “Thought your friends were going to join you, did you?”

“Harry… Harry…” came the muted and disturbed voice of Hermione Granger.

“She’s sealed the doors from your side…” shouted Ginny.

Delphi tilted her head at Harry Potter, in obvious challenge. In the place of her respectful reverence was now a form of wild mania. She looked startlingly like her mother, wand raised, dark eyes dangerous.

“Fine,” Harry said grimly. “I’ll deal with you alone.”

Harry took a step forward, ready to attack, but before he could fire a single spell Delphi summoned his wand to her own pale hand. She caught it with triumph, twirling it in her fingers.

Disarmed and helpless, Harry stumbled back.

“How did you…? What are you?”

“I’ve watched you for a long time, Harry Potter. I know you better than my father did,” Delphi announced grandly.

With no wand, Harry had no choice but to try and keep her talking. Eyebrows raised, Delphi dropped Harry’s wand and kicked it to one side with the heel of her shoe.
“You think you’ve learnt my weaknesses?” he demanded.

“I’ve studied to be worthy of him!” Delphi spat. “Yes, even though he is the supreme wizard of all time, he will be proud of me. Expulso!”

Harry rolled across the stone tiles as the floor exploded behind him, only just dodging the carnage. Panting, Harry crawled under a church pew, frantically trying to work out how he could fight her.

“Are you crawling away from me?” Delphi laughed, her voice echoing madly around the church.

“Alohomora!” came the voice of Ron Weasley, shouting desperately from the locked side chapel. “Alohomora! Come on!”

Why weren't they Apparating? He was only a few metres away...

Harry realised with grim acceptance that Delphi must have cast an Anti-Apparition Charm on the church. There was no way his friends were going to be able to get to him. They were close enough to hear, but still not close enough to help him.


Harry could hear her moving closer. He tucked his feet in and tried to slide himself under the next pew on his stomach.

“Alohomora!” Delphi shrieked.

The pew ascended into the air, revealing Harry, curled up and wandless, glasses hanging from his nose. Before Delphi he was absurdly vulnerable. He wasn’t even on his feet. Harry didn’t want to die on the ground, he didn’t want to die like this…

“The question is whether it’s worth my time to kill you, knowing that as soon as I stop my father, your destruction will be assured…”

“Get out of my way!” came the distant voice of Draco Malfoy. “Confringo!”

A muted explosion sounded, but the door still did not break down.

“How to decide,” Delphi said, relishing the words, holding the pew elegantly in the air above her. And then suddenly, just like her mother, she gave an expression of pure derangement. “Oh, I’m bored. I’ll kill you.”

Delphi sent the pew hurtling down upon him. Harry tried to roll away, only half successfully as the wooden pew smashed into pieces. It avoided most of his body, but his left arm, which hadn’t moved quite fast enough, burned with sudden pain. Harry let out a shout of agony.

From the corner of Harry’s eye was a movement. For one strange moment he thought he could see Albus, there in the church with him. At the moment of his death, it was a comfort. Harry closed his eyes.

“Avada-“ Delphi shrieked, raising her wand.

“Dad…” shouted Albus Potter, emerging from a grate on the floor and leaping to his father’s side, rolling him his wand, his own wand held out before him with a trembling arm.

“Albus! No!” Harry yelled, eyes opening the moment he heard his son’s voice.
“Two of you?” Delphi remarked, savouring the sight of the two Potters before her. Albus was shielding his father, as though he believed he could protect him. It was really rather amusing…


As the flash of blinding green light shot towards Albus Potter’s chest, Harry lunged to his feet and threw his son out of the way, sending him sprawling. In his rage, Harry fired the Killing Curse right back at Delphi, who dodged effortlessly, cackling as she did so.

“You think you’re stronger than me?” Delphi asked, exhilarated by the dance.

“No,” Harry panted. “I’m not.”

Delphi fired another Killing Curse, and Harry returned it with ease. It didn’t matter to him that he was supposed to restrain her, that she’d need to face trial. Not while his son was in danger. He wasn’t the Head of the Department of Magical Law Enforcement in that moment. He was a father defending his child.

Albus picked himself up off the floor and half crawled, half ducked under the fierce battle raging between Delphi and his father, pointing his wand towards the vestry door.

“Alohomora!”

He spun around and pointed his wand at the side chapel.

“Alohomora!”

As the two sets of doors swung open, Harry let out a sigh of relief, knowing that Albus would be safe. That even if he went down fighting, his friends and family would be there to shield his son.

“I’ve never fought alone, you see,” he told Delphi. “And I never will.”

Hermione and Ginny raced out of the vestry, Draco and Ron charging in from the other direction, wands raised.

Delphi tried to fend off the attacks, but she was overwhelmed. She dodged a spell from Hermione Granger, only to find herself in the path of Draco Malfoy. Spinning on the spot she tried to send a Killing Curse towards Ron Weasley, but Hermione Granger blocked it by levitating a pew into her husband’s path, Delphi only just stumbling out of the path of several nasty wooden shards from the resulting explosion in time.

Harry Potter rejoined the fray, no longer fighting to kill. Not now Delphi was falling. Ginny fought at his side, blocking any attempts to wound him with furious accuracy.

The church reverberated with bangs, causing the floor to shake as the battle raged, explosion after explosion threatening to shatter the stained-glass. And then suddenly, Ron Weasley sent out a Blasting Curse, which caused Delphi to tumble to the floor.

“No…” Delphi groaned, trying to get to her feet. “No…”

“Brachiabindo!” Hermione declared, and in seconds Delphi was bound, arms and legs stuck fast to her body, her head forced back where her silver hair had caught in the binds.

The church was suddenly still again, almost silent. Nobody lowered their wands, but the spells ceased as Delphi was surrounded.
Draco turned immediately to the chapel room, where Scorpius was peering nervously out, chewing his lower lip, face white. At the sight of Delphi restrained, he made to rush out to his dad, but Draco held up a hand. He wasn’t about to let his son come close until they were certain the danger Delphi posed was over.

Ginny rushed to Albus, who was rubbing at his grazed hands and looking dazed.

Delphi tried vainly to wriggle free of her binds, baring her teeth as Harry Potter advanced towards her. Nobody moved to stop him.

“Albus, are you okay?” Harry asked, not taking his eyes from the woman before him, wand aimed squarely at her chest.

“Yes. Dad, I’m okay,” Albus said, sounding shaken.

Harry didn’t seem to believe it. He found that he couldn’t turn away from Delphi, terrified of her even now. And if she’d injured his son…

“Ginny, has he been injured?” Harry demanded through gritted teeth. “I need to know he’s safe…”

“He insisted. He was the only one small enough to crawl through the grate. I tried to stop him,” Ginny said, sounding equally as horrified. She had been so close to losing her son. He had so almost run right into danger…

“Just tell me he’s okay,” Harry begged.

“I’m fine, Dad,” Albus said, stepping forward on shaking legs. “I promise.”

But the confirmation did not calm Harry. He found that his fear had been replaced with almighty rage. Yes, his son was unharmed, but things could so easily have been different. If he hadn’t pushed Albus out of the path of that green light in time…

Harry advanced further towards the young woman who had tried to murder his son.

Hermione stood restlessly, watching, looking like she wanted to intervene but wasn’t sure if she should or not. Ron remained at her side, watching Harry intently.

“A lot of people have tried to hurt me,” said Harry, looking down at Delphi, looming over her. “But my son! You dare hurt my son!”

Draco made a noise of agreement. If Potter was about to curse Delphi into oblivion then he would gladly watch, help, if he needed to.

“I only wanted to know my father,” Delphi moaned.

Harry stopped on the spot, thrown by those unexpected words and their childlike delivery.

Draco Malfoy tutted loudly, clearly believing her words to be an act, a last, desperate attempt at gaining mercy, but Harry was an orphan, and he knew better.

“You can’t remake your life,” Harry said, firmly. “You’ll always be an orphan. That never leaves you.”

“Just let me - see him,” the young woman begged, tears forming in her eyes. They weren’t tears of sadness, but tears of frustration, the tears of an utterly defeated person with nothing left to lose.
“I can’t and I won’t,” Harry said.

“Then kill me,” Delphi pleaded, pitifully.

Harry had his wand in his hand. It would have been so easy to curse her. To end the threat once and for all. To punish her for what she had almost done to his son...

But that was what she would have done. It was what Voldemort would have decided in a heartbeat.

“I can’t do that either…” Harry admitted, deflating as he said it.

“What?” Albus demanded. “Dad? She’s dangerous!”

“No, Albus…” Harry breathed out wearily.

“But she’s a murderer - I’ve seen her murder -“

Finally, Harry found the strength to turn his back on Delphi. Albus was staring at him with confusion, and Ginny hand a hand on her son’s shoulder, nodding at Harry with pride.

“Yes. Albus, she’s a murderer,” Harry said quietly. “And we’re not.”

“We have to be better than them,” Hermione agreed, looking relieved by Harry’s restraint and good-sense.

Ron stepped forward, making a consoling face for his nephew’s benefit.

“Yeah, it’s annoying,” he agreed. “But it’s what we learnt.”

On the ground, Delphi began to writhe again.

“Take my mind,” she begged. “Take my memory. Make me forget who I am.”

“No,” Ron said darkly. “We’ll take you back to our time.”

“And you’ll go to Azkaban,” Hermione agreed. “Same as your mother.”

“Where you’ll rot,” Draco added with venom.

And then Harry heard a familiar and disturbing noise. He looked first at Delphi, whose mouth was shut, and then around himself, seeming utterly paranoid. He felt suddenly sick.

Seconds later, the others heard it too. A hissing, rattling noise which filled the air with terror. Ginny held Albus tighter.

Harry experienced the sensation of icy water being poured down his spine as he heard the words:

_Haarry Pootttter..._

He almost stumbled back with panic.

“What’s that?” asked Scorpius, who had tentatively crept from the doorway of the side chapel to his father’s side.


“What?” Albus asked.
“Voldemort,” Ron answered grimly.

_Haarry Potttter_...

Delphi’s head shot up suddenly, as she too heard the words.

“Father?”

“Now? Here?” Hermione asked, frowning.

“Father!” Delphi shouted, trying to shift herself into an upright position, eyes bright with sudden hope.

Draco, who had gone even paler than usual, turned his wand on her in a second.

“Silencio!” he declared. “Wingardium Leviosa!”

Delphi was gagged and sent upwards and away, in the direction of the side chapel, where she landed unceremoniously on the ground. She tried vainly to call for her father, but not a single sound left her lips. With a flick of his wand, Draco closed the door on her.

Everyone turned to Harry, knowing what was about to happen. Knowing what _had_ to happen.

Scorpius and Albus exchanged a look. Albus's grandparents were about to meet their deaths. In moments. It was time.

“He’s coming,” Harry breathed out, reaching for Ginny, who took his hand. “He’s coming right now.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this one!

Please leave me a comment if you did cause this was tough!

(Also say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Four: Scene Twelve

Chapter Notes

It's a sad one!

Please leave me a comment!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ron was the one who went to the window, the only one who seemed able to stomach it. He peered out grimly, his face pressed against the glass. As he watched, a sinister, cloaked figure was moving closer, seeming almost to glide through the night, leaves slithering along the pavement in his path.

The moment Lord Voldemort turned past the church and began to make his way towards the Potters’ cottage, Ron shot back from the window.

“He’s here,” he confirmed darkly. “I’m sorry, Harry.”

“We can go,” said Hermione, briskly setting the church to rights with a wave of her wand. “We can go right now. I'll just have to return Bathilda's wands but that shouldn't take a moment. Draco, if you could prepare the-”

“No,” Harry said firmly, sounding just as stubborn as his youngest son.

Letting go of Ginny’s hand he made his way to the front window. Ron was waiting for him. He patted him on the back as Harry looked out at the cloaked figure that had walked right past them, and was now heading further down the street, cloak billowing.

The rest of the group followed, curiosity overtaking them, Hermione looking deeply conflicted.

Harry simply stared after the nightmarish figure, helplessly.

“Voldemort is going to kill my mum and dad, and there’s nothing I can do to stop him,” he breathed out.

For a moment, nobody spoke. And then Draco Malfoy cleared his throat.

“That’s not true,” he pointed out, eyebrow raised.

“Dad,” Scorpius whispered, shaking his head at his father. “Now is not the time…”

“There is something you could do - to stop him,” Albus agreed, addressing his father but nodding at Draco Malfoy, conceding the point. “But you won’t.”

Draco took a deep breath and thought on that.

Could he have stood by if it had been his own parents in danger? Could he have allowed his mother and father to be killed before his eyes?
No, was the answer he came to. Never. The rules of time be damned. If his mother, father, Astoria, or Scorpius had been in danger, no power on Earth would have been enough to stop him from intervening. Not even if the world depended on his inaction.

But Harry Potter was an entirely different man. Harry Potter was brave. He had always been that way. Willing to put the needs of the many above the needs of those few he was most loyal to. Draco had always, secretly, admired his courage. Never more so than now.

“That’s heroic,” Draco admitted. Scorpius nodded his head in eager agreement.

Voldemort paused on the street, just in front of a square window full of warm light. He was right before the Potters’ cottage now, simply standing outside, watching. Waiting.

Ginny slipped her hand into Harry’s.

“You don’t have to watch, Harry,” she said softly, trying to persuade her husband to move away from the window. “We can go home.”

“I’m letting it happen… of course I have to watch,” Harry responded, in an odd, strained voice which wasn’t his own.

The group exchanged a conflicted look. They could hardly leave without Harry. Nor could they force him to go.

“Then we’ll all witness it,” declared Hermione, nodding her head.

Ron gave Harry another pat on the back.

“We’ll all watch,” he agreed.

As Voldemort seemed to glide up the path, Scorpius pressed his face to the window, standing next to Albus. Draco kept a hand on his son’s shoulder, peering over his head.

The sound of a muted blast came from down the street, and the figure of Voldemort was illuminated as light from the hallway of the violated Potter house streamed out. And in he walked, disappearing into the family home.

Scorpius knew what was happening now. He had read about it hundreds of times. James Potter would meet Lord Voldemort in the hallway, wandless. He would try to hold him off. In seconds, he would be struck down with a Killing Curse.

_Lily, take Harry and go! It’s him! Go! Run! I’ll hold him off…_

Nobody knew exactly how James Potter tried to delay Lord Voldemort, only that he was found, soon after the destruction of the Potter cottage, body slumped in the hall, fragments of his woefully forgotten wand discovered later in the living room.

_You keep away, you understand - you keep away!_

A blast of green light illuminated the area outside of the Potters’ cottage, flashing like a firework had gone off inside.

James Potter was dead.

Harry flinched as though he had been the recipient of the curse. Albus reached out for his father’s hand. Harry grasped it almost too tightly, but Albus didn't care.
“He did everything he could,” Albus said, watching his father’s poor, pale face.

Ginny squeezed Harry’s other hand, and together, Ginny and Albus held Harry up as his legs threatened to give way.

On the upper floor of the Potter cottage, a figure became visible at an upstairs window. It was Lily Potter, holding her son, looking for escape and finding none.

“That’s my mum,” Harry said, unnecessarily. “At the window. I can see my mother, she looks beautiful.”

Nobody pointed out that the figure of Lily Potter was too distant to truly make out, that even if she had been close enough, she would likely be screaming or shouting. There was no beauty, Draco knew, in seeing those you loved in pain, trapped in a moment of horror from which you could not save them.

She disappeared after a moment, her loose hair flying about her, most likely to barricade the door. Lily had used boxes and chairs, or so Scorpius's history books said. Some argued that she had attempted to shift a heavy desk as well, which would account for the deep scratch marks on the damaged floorboards of the room.

They heard more banging, distant, but just as terrible. The door had been blasted off, the makeshift barricade discarded with ease. Something hit the window, momentarily blocking the light before smashing against the glass. Perhaps a box of toys? Maybe a pack of nappies?

Lily was placing Harry in his cot now. She was putting her baby down for the very last time.

*Not Harry, not Harry, please not Harry…*

*Stand aside, you silly girl… stand aside now…*

Lily Potter had the chance to choose life. Voldemort had not intended to kill her. In that room, right now, a young mother was refusing to move from the path of her infant child.

*Not Harry, please no, take me, kill me instead…*

*This is my last warning-*

Like James she had no wand either. She could not know that her love would save her son. Lily Potter was defying Lord Voldemort inside that room, unarmed, right to his face. In her final moments she was choosing to defend the helpless.

*Not Harry! Please… have mercy… have mercy… not my son! Please - I’ll do anything!*

*Stand aside - stand aside, girl -*

Green light flashed out of the house and a terrible high-pitched scream echoed through the night, distorted by the howling wind.

As the mother fell, Draco held Scorpius close, kissing the top of his head as his son sobbed quietly against his chest.

Ron put an arm around Hermione, who was in tears.

But Harry Potter was not crying. He was still watching, breathing heavily, unable to look away until it was over.
Finally came the third and last flash of green light, and with it the small cottage seemed to burst. Half of the top floor of the house was blown apart, the glass windows shattering. Inside, the baby screamed and screamed.

A sensation like lightning passed through Harry’s body and he was sent to the floor in a mess of pure grief, his chest aching with despair. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he let out a low noise of anguish which wasn’t quite a shout, and wasn’t quite a howl, but somewhere in-between.

Ginny made a move to comfort her husband, but Albus got there first. Instinctively, he sank to his knees beside his father on the cold stone floor, and wrapped an arm around Harry’s shaking shoulders.

“I’ve got you, Dad,” Albus said firmly. “It’s over. It’s going to be okay.”

Chapter End Notes

This one was tough to write. It's really really sad. I can't get over how young James and Lily are in this!

I hope you enjoyed it!

Please leave me a comment if you did! The comments keep me going!

I am probably not going to novelise the Hagrid chapter, just so you know.

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Ginny and Albus led Harry to a pew, and sat on either side of him, Ginny looking determined, Albus devastated. Albus listened as his mother kept quietly offering reassurances, knowing the exact right words to say. He wasn’t sure how she did it, but he wanted to learn how to support his dad too, and so he listened, eyes wide, patting his dad on the arm over and over, hoping that it might help in some way.

The rest of the group politely ignored this. Draco busied himself tending to Scorpius, who was badly shaken, and Ron remained at the window with Hermione, watching the dust settle around the Potter cottage. An ominous muted banging noise was coming from the side chapel.

“Will someone please see to her?” Hermione said, looking uncomfortable as she wiped away her own tears. “We can’t have her harming herself in there.”

“You can ‘see to her’ if you want,” Draco declared dispassionately. “But my priority is Scorpius.”

“I’m fine, Dad,” Scorpius sniffed.

“Besides, I can’t see the harm she can do,” Draco remarked. “She wants attention, and she isn’t getting it from me.”

“Even wandless magic needs hands,” Ron agreed. “Which she can’t use right now. So I reckon we should leave her to it—“

“Oh, wands!” Hermione exclaimed suddenly remembering. “We don’t have much time. I need to return them! Ron, can you see Bathilda?”

“Not yet,” Ron said. “Wait. Yes. Yes! She’s just come outside, looking at the house.”

Ron thought it best not to mention that the tiny old woman was sobbing into her hands.

Scorpius handed Hermione Cornelius Agrippa’s wand with reluctance. He didn’t want to say goodbye to that little piece of history, but he consoled himself with the knowledge that few wizards would ever get the same opportunity he had. And perhaps he could go and visit the wand in the Ministry’s public collection sometime?

“Albus?” Hermione asked, clearing her throat. “I need your wand.”

Albus turned to his aunt, looking confused. His mother and father did not raise their heads. They had quite suddenly become a pair, and Albus was once again on the outside. It was an
“Gulliver Pokeby’s wand, Albus,” Scorpius said. “Hermione needs to take them back now.”

“Oh… right,” Albus mumbled, getting up and handing his own wand over like it was nothing.

“I’ll be back in a moment,” Hermione declared. She rushed out of the main church doors and disappeared.

“She’s not going to walk there?” Draco asked, eyebrow raised. “She’ll be seen.”

“Disapparition Charm on the church,” Ron reminded Draco.

“Ah,” Draco said, nodding.

“You better get started with the Time-Turner,” Ron suggested. “I’ll keep watch. Hagrid’s got to come for Harry, but then the Muggles’ll be out and we have to keep away from them. We don’t have long.”

Draco nodded his head and pulled the Time-Turner from the inside of his robes, beginning to prepare it.

“You have a Time-Turner?” Scorpius asked, staring at his dad. Albus wandered to Scorpius’s side, feeling lonely.

“We have a Time-Turner,” Ron agreed, still looking out of the window. “Like Harry said, it’s a long story. Pretty boring, actually.”

“Did you build it?” Scorpius asked, squinting at the object with fascination. “Oooh, this one is made of real gold.”

Draco looked up at Ron, hoping for his help in diverting his curious son. Taking the hint, Ron cleared his throat.

“Albus, you’re not looking too good over there, mate,” Ron said, and Scorpius turned instantly to his best friend with concern, entirely distracted. Draco nodded his thanks, continuing his task.

Scorpius put a hand on Albus’s shoulder and led him a few paces away from his father. It wasn’t privacy, but it felt slightly more confidential. Now Ron mentioned it, Albus did look terrible. Horribly peaky, like he might be sick.

“I can’t believe he killed them,” Albus said, frowning.

“He always killed them, Albus. It happened long before we were born.”

“But to see it…” Albus breathed out, heart still pounding with the horror of what he’d witnessed.

“I know. It was awful,” Scorpius agreed. “And they were so brave. Especially Lily. You must be so proud. I would be.”

Albus could not seem to shake the reality of his grandparents’ deaths. His bright green eyes had taken on a haunted quality.

“How could anyone do that?” Albus whispered, looking right at Scorpius. “How could he just… just walk in there and…”
“Because he’s a monster,” Scorpius answered quietly. “An evil, evil man. But we won, Albus. In the end. Good won. Your dad destroyed him, imagine that! And… you have to hold onto that. Because he’s never ever coming back, and Delphi… she’s going to Azkaban for a really really long time, and nobody is ever ever ever going to take their places, because people like us won’t let them.”

Draco, who was listening in on the conversation, felt pride swell in his chest.

Albus turned awkwardly to where his father was sitting in a pew, head bowed. Now Albus came to think of it, his dad was holding his left arm at a bit of a strange angle.

Scorpius turned to Harry and Ginny too. He was especially drawn to the way Ginny was stroking her husband’s dark hair. Scorpius had never seen his mother do such a thing to his father, but he imagined that she would have, perhaps when he wasn’t there.

“My dad, he’s…” Albus breathed out, gesturing at his grieving father.

“Upset,” Scorpius finished for him. “Of course he is. But he’ll be okay. He will, Albus. You have to believe me. I know his mum and dad are dead, and when that happens you can think that… that life is over and you’ll never be happy again and that the world is a horrible, horrible place - but it isn’t over, and at least he has his family. You and James and Lily and your mum. And you all love him so much. That’s what matters. And he will be… okay.”

Albus blinked at Scorpius.

“What if I’ve driven him over the edge?” Albus asked with unintentional drama.

“He’s Harry Potter, Albus,” Scorpius reminded him, reaching out to touch Albus’s arm. “Nobody can drive him over the edge. He just… probably needs a break sometimes. From being Harry Potter.”

Albus swallowed.

“And do you think we will be?” Albus asked.

“Do I think we will be what?”

“Okay?”

“I know we will,” Scorpius said with certainty. “Because you have your family, your brother and sister and mum and dad and cousins and aunts and uncles and everyone. And I have Dad, and you. Which is… well, it’s all I need - really.”

“And I have you,” Albus pointed out. “I do have you, don’t I?”

For a moment, Scorpius felt wounded that Albus even had to ask, but when he saw Albus’s worried expression, he gave a small smile.

“Absolutely,” Scorpius agreed brightly. “One hundred percent. Forever. Until you can’t take another second of seeing my face and I’m really really getting on your nerves.”

“Good,” Albus said, and he sounded like he meant it too.

“Blimey,” Ron breathed out, from the window, letting out a short whistle. “Harry - you might want to see this.”
Harry did not look in a fit state to see anything at all. He remained in his pew. Ginny looked up and shook her head at her brother.

“What?” Draco asked, drawing his attention away from the conversation between Albus and his son.

“Hagrid’s just turned up outside the house. Merlin’s beard, he looks a state. Poor bloke…”

Hermione rushed back into the church at that moment, sounding rather out of breath.

“I’ve done it. I’ve replaced them. The fakes are here.”

“And so’s Hagrid,” Ron informed his wife. “He’s come to get Harry. Time we made a move?”

“I’ve readied the Time-Turner,” Draco added. “Now all that remains is getting her to travel with us.”

“Should be easy enough if we Body-Bind her,” said Ron, leaving the window.

“Harry?” Hermione called out, briskly. “Ginny? We’re leaving.”

Together, the Potters got to their feet and rejoined the group.

Draco and Ron went to the side chapel together to collect Delphi. They found her banging her head repeatedly against the floor in what appeared to be an attempt to knock herself out. It was a pitiful sight. The young woman had clearly been unsuccessful, but she was sporting an unattractive lump on her forehead. Draco was reminded heavily of his old house-elf Dobby, who was equally as prone to self-punishment. Although Dobby, as irritating and vile as Draco had found him at the time, had been admittedly easier to empathise with than Delphi.

“Petrificus Totalus,” Draco said coldly, and Delphi’s limbs stiffened. Only her dark eyes moved, full of rage.

Draco levitated Delphi back into the main body of the church, Ron holding the door open for him.

“Excellent. Everyone in position, please,” said Hermione. “Ron, would you mind having her next to you?”

Draco took the Time-Turner from around his neck and offered up the chain. Everyone reached out and took a portion. Ron wound a part of the chain firmly around Delphi’s pale wrist, tethering her to the group.

Outside of the church, blue lights were starting to flash, sirens drawing closer and closer. There was the distinct sound of a motorbike revving.

Harry raised his head, for the first time since witnessing the murder of his parents, and peered desperately in the direction of the window, squinting to try and see beyond. But Draco Malfoy had already activated the Time-Turner, and the world began to change once again…

+++}

A large team of Aurors met the group on the outskirts of Godric’s Hollow. Delphi had been transported through the village covered by a Disillusionment Charm, and with Hermione’s permission, she was handed over. She would be taken to the Ministry directly, to be held near the courtrooms on Level Ten under maximum security, until a trial could be arranged.
When the Aurors saw the state of their Head of Department, they respectfully looked away. Harry was grateful for that.

“We’ll be needed at the Ministry,” Hermione declared. “Ron and I can see to this. The rest of you ought to go home. Get some sleep. I’ll contact you tomorrow with news of the trial. I’m afraid you’ll all be needed as witnesses. And Harry, when you’re feeling a little better, I’ll need a report on this. So sorry to have to ask, but as Head of Department…”

“I understand,” Harry said, nodding. “If you need me to come back with you now I can-“

“No. I won’t hear of it,” Hermione responded sternly. “Not after what you’ve been through.”

“Yeah, you get some rest, mate,” Ron agreed. “And you, Gin.”

“We’ll contact McGonagall so she knows the boys are safe,” Hermione added. “She’ll be so relieved.”

As Hermione was ushered off by an Auror to discuss security arrangements, Ron hung back a moment.

“Well, I’ll see you lot later. I’m getting too old for this. Is anyone else thinking that?”

“You are looking slightly worse for wear,” Draco retorted, eyebrow raised.

Ron paused, considered the comment, understood it not to be malicious, and then smiled.

He shook Draco Malfoy’s hand (a historical moment for all), ruffled Albus’s hair, and gave Scorpius an awkward pat on the shoulder.

He gave a sort-of wave to Ginny, who nodded back. Harry didn’t look up at his best friend, but Ron didn’t take offence. He knew that if he’d been about to start crying he probably wouldn’t have wanted everyone looking at him either.

“Ron,” said Draco, suddenly, as Ron turned to follow Hermione.

“Yeah?”

“You forgot this,” Draco declared, handing over the Time-Turner. “I’m sure Hermione will want this disposed of.”

“Right you are,” Ron agreed, nodding. “I’ll pass it on.”

As Ron rushed off after Hermione, Draco cleared his throat, feeling that he, too, had outstayed his welcome. A part of him was sorry about that. It was more pleasant than he had realised to be part of a group. He had seen Scorpius’s joy at being with others, at experiencing something that felt like family. He tried not to let that wound him.

“Well, we’d best be going,” Draco said, patting his son on the shoulder. “I’m taking Scorpius to St Mungo’s.”

“Dad, I feel fine-“ Scorpius argued, but his father was having none of it.

“Would you like me to take Albus as well?” Draco volunteered, wondering if Ginny and Harry would rather be alone. Not to mention that he was sure Scorpius would benefit from Albus's company.
“Albus?” Ginny asked.

Albus looked from Scorpius, to Harry, and then back again. Scorpius gave a small smile of understanding.

“I’d better stay with my dad,” Albus said, and Scorpius smiled more broadly. “I feel fine.”

Draco gave a nod of his head.

“I’m sure I’ll hear from you shortly,” he said, not wanting to intrude for a moment longer. “Come, Scorpius.”

“Wait a second, Dad,” Scorpius said, dashing carelessly over to Albus and throwing his arms around him.

Ginny and Draco politely averted their eyes as a rather dazed Albus received his beaming friend. Harry was too busy ensuring he kept some semblance of dignity in front of Draco Malfoy that he hardly noticed.

“We did it, Albus,” Scorpius declared quietly. “We made it through!”

“I guess we did,” Albus agreed, as Scorpius finally released him.

At the moment of his best friend’s leaving, Albus found he suddenly did not want him to go. Ahead of him was the prospect of being alone with his parents, of having to face the reality of what had happened. It was a scary thought.

“Scorpius,” Draco said again, raising an eyebrow and tapping his foot impatiently on the pavement.

“See you at school, Albus!” Scorpius called, hurrying after his father. In moments the pair of them disappeared, a small popping noise sounding from behind the nearest corner.

And then only the three Potters were left.

Alone with his family, Harry felt ever so slightly more relaxed. Few Muggles remained wandering the outskirts of the town, but the ones that did looked over at the small family with concern. Harry realised he must have looked awful and tried to pull himself together.

“The Ministry… Law Enforcement… what if they need me-“ Harry said.

“No,” Ginny decreed firmly. “I’m putting my foot down this time, Harry. Because you need rest. You’ve been to hell and back this evening. We all have.”

“We’re here for you, Dad,” Albus said, nodding.

+++ James and Lily were sent for that afternoon, and they arrived though the fireplace in the Potter living room to greet their brother as soon as they received word that their parents had returned with Albus.

Harry was sitting in an armchair looking pale and ever so slightly green. Ginny was sending messages to every family member she could think of to inform them that Albus was safe. Albus merely loitered in the living room, hands in his pockets, feeling sick as he waited for his siblings to arrive.
The first to hurtle through the green flames was Lily, who upon seeing her brother, threw herself at Albus in a tearful hug which Albus willingly returned, lifting her off her feet with the force of it.

He really didn’t hug his sister enough, Albus realised.

“Luna said you’d be back!” Lily sobbed. “But I never believed her…”

“Well… here I am,” Albus said, looking embarrassed. “And you don’t have to worry, Lil, because I’m fine.”

“Everyone is,” Ginny reassured her daughter.

“But Albus… where did you go?” Lily asked, looking up at her brother with large, watery brown eyes. “They said you were taken-“

“We’ll talk about it later,” Harry said, saving Albus from having to explain. “For now let’s just be glad he’s back.”

Lily nodded her head, as always, keen to follow her dad’s example, and went to sit on her exhausted father’s knee.

James emerged from the flames a moment later, ashen-faced and looking uncertain. He stepped into the living room and stared at Albus like he was seeing a ghost.

“Hi,” Albus said awkwardly.

But still, James did not speak. Albus was so unused to James being quiet that he felt his stomach churn. For a moment, the two brothers stared at each other, saying nothing. Ginny, Harry, and Lily watched tentatively.

And then finally, James cleared his throat.

“Well, if you ask me, everyone’s been making a huge deal out of nothing,” James declared.

Ginny narrowed her eyes.

“I mean, I did tell them all you’d just eloped but for some reason they wouldn’t take me seriously.”

There was another moment of silence in which everyone waited for Albus’s reaction. Harry sat up a little straighter in his armchair in case he needed to separate his sons. He wouldn't have put it past Albus to jinx his brother after the night he’d had.

Albus paused, thought, and then suddenly, broke into a grin.

The tension in the room evaporated. Lily laughed. Even Harry found a tired smile from somewhere.

Ginny rolled her eyes to the heavens and wondered how her mother had ever coped with six sons.

“Good to have you back Dithering Slytherin,” James declared, as he ruffled his little brother’s hair (rather emotionally) and Albus squirmed away, grinning. “Only you could get lost for a whole month. Trying to challenge my crown as the best prankster of the family? ”

“It wasn’t a prank, James,” Ginny said sternly.

James got the message and decided to stop teasing his little brother for now.
“Did you speak to Professor McGonagall?” Ginny asked James, summoning Butterbeers for everyone.

“I think she almost broke into a jig when she told us,” James said. “The portraits started clapping.”

He turned to Albus, remembering.

“And that Phineas must have mentioned you and Scorpius were in Slytherin about a million times.”

“Has she still not put up a curtain?” Harry asked, trying to sound like his usual self.

“Dad, she can’t just put a curtain over a Hogwarts Headmaster,” Lily said, leaning against her father fondly like she had as a little girl. “Anyway, I think he’s funny. I like his beard.”

“Lily’s going to marry a guy with a goatee, Dad, be warned,” James declared.

“Shut up, James!”

“You and your friends can’t get enough of the new Divination guy…”

“He doesn’t even teach me!”

“Oh, but you know the one I mean?”

Lily leapt up from Harry’s knee and charged towards James like a red-headed bullet. James let out a laugh and dodged her. Albus stepped safely out of their path.

“Can you kids settle down,” Ginny said warningly. “Your dad’s had a tough night.”

Actually, Harry felt quite soothed by seeing his children back to normal, back to how they should have been. After the events of the past month, to see James and Lily scrapping while Albus watched from a safe distance was a huge relief. But he was exhausted, so exhausted that his eyelids kept drooping of their own accord. His chest still ached for his parents.

“Yeah, actually, would you mind if I went up?” Harry asked his family in a mock-cheery voice that didn’t fool any of them.

Lily and James immediately stopped play-fighting and turned to their dad.

“Not at all,” Albus said quickly. “I’ll probably go up soon.”

With a kiss from Ginny and one on the cheek from Lily, Harry went upstairs for a rest. The three Potter children watched him go, united by concern.

“Mum, what happened?” asked Lily, quietly.

Albus and Ginny exchanged a glance. Now didn’t seem like the right time to explain everything.

“They were saying stuff about Voldemort’s daughter,” James added tactlessly. “Saying she had gold hair or something?”

“He doesn’t really have one, does he?” Lily asked, looking worried. “I think it was just a rumour. Luna told me people start saying all sorts of things when they’re scared, to explain what they don’t understand. That’s what this is, isn’t it, Mum?”
Albus looked down at his shoes to avoid the question. Ginny took a deep breath and made a decision.

“We’ll talk about it later,” Ginny said firmly. “All you need to know for now is that your dad is safe, and Albus is safe. We’re not in any danger.”

“And what about Scorpius?” James asked his brother.

Albus was surprised to see that James wasn’t mocking him this time. He looked genuinely concerned.

“He’s going to be okay,” Albus said, nodding.

James put a hand on Albus’s shoulder. Albus wanted to lean into that touch, but somehow, it didn’t feel right. He might have had a difficult few days, but he still had his pride.

+++ 

Albus went to bed after finishing his Butterbeer and eating a sandwich. There wasn’t much food in the house, seeing as his dad hadn’t been around to cook, and his mum seemed to have hardly been eating at all during his absence.

He changed into his night things quickly, and got settled in his room, trying to take comfort in those familiar surroundings. One thing was for sure, his bedroom at home wasn’t nearly as nice as the Slytherin dormitory. Not to mention that it was far lonelier.

Albus wondered how Scorpius was getting on at St Mungo’s. A dreadful voice in his head told him that Scorpius was horribly injured somehow, that the Cruciatus Curse had badly wounded him, perhaps in ways that weren’t immediately apparent, but he forced those thoughts away. Scorpius was right that pessimism really wasn’t good for a person.

And then there were his grandparents. That happy, silly couple and their adored baby boy. All gone now. Gone in a few minutes, perhaps even less. They had been wiped from the face of the earth by a single curse, as though they’d never existed. People remembered them, yes, but that wasn’t the same as them living, Albus thought. They would forever be thought of solemnly, with the strange dignified respect people took on when talking of the dead. Hardly anyone would remember Lily busy at her gardening wearing an apron and ugly yellow gloves, James parading his baby son about on his shoulders and staring restlessly up at the cloudy sky.

*I’m going to remember them like that,* Albus thought, stubbornly.

As though sensing the restlessness of her son, Ginny came up to check on Albus a little while later, knocking politely on his door before entering.

Albus was sitting up against the headboard and looking lost.

As she opened the door, the sounds of James and Lily bickering downstairs became slightly louder. Albus was oddly happy to hear that.

“Is Dad okay?” Albus asked as Ginny closed the door behind her.

“Fast asleep,” she revealed. “In his clothes. It’s a wonder he kicked his shoes off.”

“Guess he’s worn out,” Albus said, wrapping his arms around his knees.
“Can I sit?” Ginny asked.

Albus nodded, and his mother settled down beside him on his deep green sheets.

“Did you want to talk about any of it?” Ginny asked. “Because I’m here. If you want me to be.”

Albus thought about that offer. Yes, he wanted to talk. There were hundreds of things he needed to talk about. But he didn’t know where to start.

“Mum I…”

Ginny tilted her head, listening.

“I know I let this happen. I know it was me. And even if you say it wasn’t - without me… without me falling for Delphi’s act - Dad would never have had to see that. None of us would.”

“You’re not to blame,” Ginny said firmly.

Albus looked away, unconvinced.

With a sigh, Ginny reached out for her son’s hands. There were times when she allowed him to isolate himself, because her youngest son valued his privacy, and seemed to see his independence as an important part of who he was, but not today. Not now. To be left alone with guilt was dangerous. Not least when you didn’t deserve it.

“I’ve been there, Albus,” Ginny said, voice quiet. “I know what it’s like.”

“Yes, but you were just a kid,” Albus argued dismissively.

“Albus, you’re just a kid too,” said Ginny, sadly.

Albus frowned. He wasn’t a kid. He was fourteen years old. And that meant he should have known better.

“I can’t believe I didn’t see it,” Albus burst out. “I feel so stupid, Mum. I feel like an idiot. I feel like I let everyone down…”

“For trying to help? Albus, you may have made some awful decisions, but you didn’t let us down. You fixed it, didn’t you?”

“Bet Dad never messed up like that,” Albus muttered, sniffing moodily to hide his distress.

“Oh, you’d be surprised,” Ginny said, with a small smile. “And you’re not your dad, Albus. Which is fine. Because you’re Albus Severus Potter.”

“Great,” Albus mumbled, not looking his mum in the eyes.

Ginny sighed and watched as her son played with a loose thread on his duvet cover, doing his best to look sulky instead of upset.

“She manipulated you. She’s much older. She knew exactly what she was doing. You’re not to blame. You’re not.”

“I let her-“

“You got a crush, Albus. That’s natural at your age.”
“Albus kicked out at his covers with frustration.

“Scorpius saw it from the start. He never liked her. Every time she showed up he hated it. I mean, he was polite about it because - well, he’s Scorpius, but he knew. He could sense there was something up.”

“Or maybe there was another reason he didn’t like her?” Ginny suggested lightly.

“He’s much smarter than me. I should have listened instead of thinking I knew better.”

“There are different ways to be smart,” Ginny said, but her son was no longer listening. Another thought was growing in his head, a dark one. Ginny simply waited for Albus to speak.

“Mum… when we were in the maze, she used the Cruciatux Curse on him. To make me… to try to make me do what she wanted…” Albus revealed.

Ginny bowed her head. She had suspected as much from the snatches of conversation she had heard from Draco and his son in the church.

Encouraged by his mother’s silence, Albus went on.

“It was the worst… one of the worst…,” he tried, his voice cracking suddenly. Horrified, Albus composed himself before continuing. “And all because of me…”

“All because of her,” Ginny corrected her son. “She did that to him. Not you.”

“What if he’s not all right?” Albus asked, sitting up a little straighter, green eyes shining. “What if there’s some… I don’t know, but what if he gets complications? What if they find out he’s not… not okay?”

“You saw him earlier, Albus. He looked okay to me,” said Ginny, reasonably.

“But he’s had so many bad things happen to him already,” Albus said, the words coming out in a rush. “His mum died and I wasn’t even… I never… I was rubbish. I’m always rubbish. I never know what to say. And then when we came back the first time and I was in Gryffindor - I let him down. I keep thinking about it.”

“Albus…”

“And now this. She didn’t only get him once, Mum. She got him more than that. All to try and make me do what she wanted - and he says it wasn’t that painful but I know it was. He was crying, Mum. He was… he was just crying…”

Albus began to cry too, tears trickling down his cheeks. Ginny wrapped her arms around her son and shushed him like she had when he was much younger. Albus allowed himself to be held, expression fixed stubbornly to try and stop himself from breaking down further.

“Have I ever told you about what happened to me in my first year at Hogwarts?”

“Not properly…” Albus admitted, sniffing.

“You know about the diary, and that it had a piece of Voldemort’s soul in it. And that it was given to me, so that the Tom Riddle inside could use me to do whatever he wanted. So he could manipulate me.”

“It was a Horcrux,” Albus agreed. “Scorpius told me about that. It made you open the Chamber of
Secrets. And I know that… that his grandad gave it to you.”

“Lucius Malfoy,” Ginny said, sighing. “Not a pleasant man. But the diary… Albus, what happened to you, happened to me. The Tom Riddle of the diary was charming. An older boy, someone I trusted. I told him everything. About my family, and the fact we were poor, and even about your dad.”

Albus listened intently.

“And every tiny bit of my soul I poured out, he started to take over. I don’t know how, but his soul started to seep back into me. It must have taken time, but I didn’t notice. By the time I realised anything was wrong I was blacking out, huge patches of my memory gone. It had control of me, Albus. He had control of me.”

“But Delphi didn’t control me,” Albus said in a strained voice. “She never forced me to do anything. I made it easy for her.”

“Don’t you think I thought the same? All these years… I still think about it. I still wonder if I could have stopped it sooner. I wish I’d picked up on the signs.”

“How could you have?” Albus said, looking up at his mum. “You were just a first year.”

“That’s what they do. They take advantage of good people. Delphi used you, and it wasn’t your fault. Tom Riddle saw I was a little girl who needed a friend, and he became that. He became exactly what I needed.”

“She acted with me as well,” Albus confided in his mum, quietly. “She pretended to be a whole other person. She was… funny. And silly. And she made me feel good about myself, you know?”

“I do know,” Ginny agreed, rubbing her son’s back.

“But it was all a lie. It wasn’t her. She created a person. A person I’d like. Someone who’d gain my trust.”

“She did.”

“And she was so easy to be around, you know? So easy to talk to. It was just like talking to Scorpius…”

Albus fell silent, frowning.

“I mean, Scorpius says she was way too old for me anyway…” he admitted.

“Your Scorpius seems like a very sensible boy,” Ginny said, smiling.

Albus paused, and then strangely, his face became more animated once again. Ginny watched as the tears seemed to disappear entirely.

“Well, you’d think that, but sometimes he gets these crazy ideas,” Albus said. “And once he has one of those there’s no stopping him. You should see him in History of Magic when we start on a new topic.”

Albus stopped, suddenly, aware he was talking too much. He glanced at his mother to see if she minded. It didn’t appear that she did.

“Dad does get it now, doesn’t he?” Albus asked. “About Scorpius. He knows he’s good for me.
After all this… he has to make an effort. Because without him I’d be dead.”

“It sounds like you looked after each other,” Ginny said peaceably. “And your dad does know. If it’s important to you, then it will be important to him.”

“Really?” Albus asked, doubtfully.

“Really,” Ginny agreed. “He loves you, Albus. Like everyone, he makes mistakes. But he wants what’s best for you, and anyone can see that. Just… give him a chance.”

Albus gave a half shrug which Ginny presumed meant that he would.

From downstairs came a smashing noise, followed by a hushed argument. It sounded like James or Lily had accidentally knocked over one of their Butterbeers and were trying to rectify the problem.

“I’d better get back to those two before they destroy the living room,” Ginny said. “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“Yes, Mum,” Albus answered, because he was as okay as he was going to get that evening.

“Good. I’m assuming it’s school as usual tomorrow. James and Lily are due in, and knowing McGonagall, you won’t be allowed to miss much.”

“I don’t really mind,” Albus admitted. “I’ve… actually sort of missed it.”

Ginny kissed her son on the forehead and got to her feet.

“Will you tell me if there’s news from Draco?” Albus asked. “About Scorpius? If he sends an owl?”

“Of course I will,” Ginny agreed. “But I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

“Mum?” Albus called out, as his mother reached for the door handle. She turned to him over her shoulder, and looked, quite startlingly, like Albus’s grandmother; Lily.

“Yes?” Ginny asked.

“I do, you know, love you,” Albus said, reddening. “I thought I should say.”

“I love you too,” Ginny said, smiling. “We all do.”

Another shattering noise sounded downstairs followed by complaints from Lily.

“Sometimes,” Ginny remarked. “I think you may be my only sane child.”

Albus grinned at his mother, as she left the room, closing the door quietly behind her.

Chapter End Notes

I'm only going to do one more chapter before getting to the big one!

Hope you enjoyed!
Please leave me a comment! We are so close to the end!

I am just letting you know that if I do not post tomorrow I have not abandoned this fic. My brother is going to uni and we are taking him so I will be out all day. I may still get to update, but if I don’t, do not worry!!!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Four Scene Thirteen and a Half

Chapter Notes

This one is all mine! I hope you enjoy it!

Please leave me a comment if you do! We are so close to the end! Two scenes to go!!!

xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next morning the Potter household was alive with the usual pre-school stress. James had overslept, Lily wanted to stay home for an extra day, Harry was getting ready to head to the Ministry to oversee a meeting about how best to structure trial proceedings for their most high-profile captive in years, and Ginny was dealing with the influx of joyous owls from Weasley family members celebrating Albus’s return. Only Albus was ready on time and waiting by the fireplace in silence.

James and Lily joined him soon after, Ginny following, quill still in one hand.

“Now, you three tell Professor McGonagall that your father will be in to see her as soon as the Ministry gives him clearance,” Ginny told her children who were gathered around the fireplace.

Harry walked into the living room to see them off, wearing his Ministry suit and looking a great deal less pale than he had the previous evening. He put an arm around Ginny, who was wearing her Holyhead Harpies dressing gown.

“Dad, can’t we stay home with you,” Lily whined, batting her eyelashes at her usually susceptible father.

Harry grinned at his daughter.

“No,” Ginny cut in, firmly. “And James, what are you doing with that toast?”

“I’m hungry,” James protested with his mouth full, spraying crumbs on the carpet.

“You can’t take toast through with you,” Ginny said.

Shrugging his shoulders, James stuffed the remainder of the toast in his mouth, thus solving the problem.

Ginny rolled her eyes.

“Now if anyone asks you about what happened,” Harry said. “You need to say that you can’t talk about it yet. Ministry guidelines. They’ll understand.”

“Dad,” James pointed out, swallowing the remains of his toast in one impressive gulp. “If you think that’s going to stop them asking then you’re on another planet.”

“You heard your father,” Ginny said sternly.
It was time to go. Lily rushed over to give her father a hug, which Harry returned with his usual adoration. She was then passed to her mother, who kissed her on the forehead and offered her the pot of Floo powder.

James gave his dad a strange high-five and then received the same kiss on the forehead from his mother.

“You’re covered in crumbs,” Ginny sighed, trying to brush her oldest son’s robes down as he took a handful of glittering powder.

James and Lily turned to Albus, waiting for him to say his goodbyes before they threw their powder into the flames, but their brother looked quiet and contemplative. They understood his expression well enough, and with a last look at their parents, disappeared into the flames one by one.

Alone with his parents, Albus looked down at his feet awkwardly.

“Mum… Dad… I just…”

“Come here,” Ginny said, walking up to her son and hugging him tightly. Albus breathed in the comforting flowery scent of her red hair.

“They’re going to ask questions, Albus,” Harry said knowingly, watching the embrace. “You know what students are like. But you just have to keep your head high and tell them what I said, okay? You’ve not got Ministry clearance. Hopefully that’ll shut most of them up.”

Ginny released Albus, and Albus stood uncomfortably before his father, stomach churning with guilt.

“You sure you’re okay, Dad?” Albus asked, not able to meet his dad’s green eyes.

“No,” Harry admitted. Ginny gave a sad sigh.

“But after what we saw, all of us, I think that’s probably to be expected,” Harry continued, trying a small smile for his son.

“Dad I’m… I should never have…” Albus began.

“Neither should I,” Harry admitted.

Ginny watched her husband and youngest son, wishing that they could just tell each other the truth, that they could find the courage to articulate their true feelings. But that simply wasn’t her husband, and that definitely wasn’t Albus.

This, Ginny realised, would have to do, for now.

“I should probably…” Albus said, gesturing at the fireplace.

Ginny offered Albus the Floo powder, and he took a handful. He kept looking up at his father, uncertainly. Ginny gave her husband an encouraging look, and Harry obediently cleared his throat.

“You look after yourself, Albus,” Harry said, reaching to pat his son on the shoulder. “And, er, you tell Scorpius we said hello.”

Albus nodded and his father released him.
“I hope everything’s all right, at the Ministry - I mean,” Albus offered.

Harry nodded his head.

With one last kiss from his mother, Albus Severus Potter threw the handful of glittering powder into the flames, stepped into the fireplace, and clearly said the name of his destination.

+++ 

When Albus arrived in Professor McGonagall’s office, James and Lily were waiting for him, sitting in comfortable armchairs before McGonagall’s desk. James was eagerly taking a biscuit from a tin and McGonagall herself looked like she was fighting back a smile.

A couple of the portraits on the walls began clapping, and those that didn’t either smiled warmly at him or peered out of their frames with disbelief.

“Ah, Mr Potter,” McGonagall declared, sounding pleased to see him. “Please, come and take a seat.”

Rather embarrassed by the strange welcome, Albus wandered over and sat down in the third, empty armchair, wishing that the portraits would stop staring at him.

“Biscuit?” McGonagall said briskly, gesturing at the tin James once again had his hand in.

“Er… no thanks,” Albus mumbled.

“Now, to business,” Minerva declared. The portraits on the walls obediently fell silent, although they seemed to be listening intently. “I have already spoken with your brother and sister, and they have agreed to keep the details of your disappearance to themselves for the time being. The last thing we need is panic.”

James and Lily nodded.

“And I trust that they will keep their word. Isn’t that right, Mr Potter?” McGonagall said, glancing sternly at James.

“I’m the soul of discretion, Professor,” James said, grinning.

McGonagall gave a huff, but Albus thought it sounded like a fairly fond one.

“Now unless you two have any further questions, you may go.”

James and Lily turned loyally to their brother, unwilling to leave him alone with McGonagall.

“He’s not in trouble, is he?” Lily asked with concern.

Albus was privately wondering the very same thing.

“I do not bite, Miss Potter,” Minerva said with exasperation. “I assure you he will leave this office in one piece.”

Reluctantly, James and Lily got to their feet. McGonagall offered them both one last biscuit before they went. James put a whole one in his mouth.

“And James, I will be talking to you at a later date about the state of your Charms homework,” McGonagall added sternly.
Albus gave his brother and sister a nod of his head, and together, they left, Lily with a final worried glance at him.

As the door closed behind them, Albus was sure he had seen a smile flash across McGonagall’s face, quick as anything.

With a flourish of her wand she transfigured the armchairs James and Lily had been sitting on into paperweights and then levitated them back to her desktop. Albus watched with awe.

“Mr Potter, are you quite sure you’re ready to undertake your studies?” McGonagall asked, peering at Albus though her spectacles.

“I think so?” Albus said.

“Because you know that I do not like my students to fall behind, and Mr Malfoy and yourself have missed a month-“

“Are you putting us down a year?” Albus asked with horror.

“I am quite confident that Mr Malfoy can catch up, but Mr Potter, to be blunt, you’re not known for your studious nature…”

“I’ll work really hard,” Albus promised, sitting forward in his chair.

McGonagall studied a piece of parchment on her desk.

“You have good marks here for Herbology and History of Magic,” she said. “Your Potions work is also promising.”

Albus swallowed and decided not to mention that his Herbology marks were only high because of Neville, and that the only reason he was any good at History of Magic and Potions was Scorpius, who was his partner in Potions, and talked so endlessly about History of Magic in their free time that Albus couldn’t help but pick some of it up.

“I will catch up,” Albus said firmly. “I’ll do anything.”

McGonagall raised en eyebrow. It surprised her that Albus Potter seemed so very distressed.

“Just don’t put me down a year,” Albus continued.

Ah, Minerva realised, quite suddenly. She held back another smile.

“I don’t intend to separate you and Mr Malfoy, but be warned, I expect to see you working hard, Mr Potter. No more late homework. I simply won’t have it.”

Albus nodded his head, sinking back in his armchair with relief.

“Now, I shan’t ask you to tell me what happened during your absence,” McGonagall said briskly. “I have heard the full account from the Minister. Are you quite all right, Mr Potter?”

McGonagall watched Albus with concern, which for some reason, made Albus feel slightly distressed. Not wanting to start crying, he avoided her gaze.

“Yes, thanks.”

“Professor Longbottom is a close family friend, I understand?”
“Yes.”

“He has told me to inform you that if you ever need to discuss… if you feel you would like to talk about what went on, then he is more than happy to have you help him in the greenhouses during breaks. Mr Malfoy is also welcome.”

Albus nodded his head, not trusting himself to speak.

For a short while, Minerva busied herself with closing the biscuit tin and putting it away beneath her desk. When she was done, she was glad to see that Albus looked reasonably composed again.

“Is Scorpius here?” Albus asked, sitting up again as he suddenly remembered that Scorpius had told him they’d see each other back at school.

“I believe he’s in St Mungo’s currently,” McGonagall said with disapproval. “His father insisted. I am told to expect him this afternoon.”

Albus looked down at his shoes.

“He’s not hurt, is he?” he asked.

“No. I don’t believe so. He stayed overnight at St Mungo’s as a precautionary measure, although why the Hogwarts hospital wing would not suffice…”

Minerva caught herself.

“The dormitory has been made ready for him,” she finished.

Albus let out a sigh of relief. Scorpius was okay. He was coming home.

McGonagall allowed Albus a moment to take that information in, and then put on her sternest face. Albus gulped, and several of the portraits watched on with interest.

“I needn’t impress upon you the recklessness of what you did,” Minerva declared. “I’m sure you’re quite aware.”

“I… yes,” Albus agreed swiftly. “It was stupid-“

“As I understand it both you and Mr Malfoy have been through quite an ordeal, and as such I have decided not to punish you.”

Albus couldn’t believe his luck. Up on the wall, Albus Dumbledore smiled kindly down at him. Albus looked at his knees, feeling embarrassed.

“However, you did break one school rule,” Minerva continued.

Albus’s head shot up.

“I am informed that Scorpius Malfoy and yourself were wandering the corridors after hours, for which you will both receive detention.”

Considering they’d been given constant detentions the last time they’d disappeared, it seemed a reasonable punishment, but it still struck Albus as harsh.

“You have Peeves to thank for giving you away,” McGonagall said, with a strange twinkle in her eyes.
Albus knew there was a reason he hated that ghost.

And then Albus remembered exactly what it was Peeves had thought he’d interrupted that night on the way to the Owlery...

Blushing furiously, Albus cleared his throat.

“Professor McGonagall, we weren’t…”

“Mr Potter, I do not need to know the details. I don’t care for them,” Minerva declared. “Now, you will go down to breakfast in the Great Hall, or if you’d prefer you may eat in your dormitory and then go to lessons.”

“I’ll… I’ll go to the Great Hall,” Albus decided, feeling very hot all over.

McGonagall nodded with approval.

“The students have been expressly forbidden from questioning you. Of course, some will still try, but you may tell them that you have been instructed by me to speak nothing of what happened, seeing as I understand an investigation is beginning at the Ministry.”

“That’s what Dad said,” Albus said, running a hand through his hair. "I'll have to give evidence, I think."

"I am sure you will," Minerva agreed.

Understanding he could go, Albus got swiftly to his feet. Albus Dumbledore was still smiling kindly at him from his portrait. Red in the face, Albus gave a short nod back and then headed for the door.

“And Mr Potter?” Minerva said briskly, as Albus turned. “It’s good to have you back.”

“Hear hear!” came the voice of Phineas Nigellus, who was proudly wearing the Slytherin colours. Several of the other portraits chimed in with a similar cry, and a few began to clap once again.

“Quite,” McGonagall said.

+++.

It was surreal, travelling down the revolving staircase alone. Albus took a moment to compose himself. As soon as he walked into the Great Hall, all eyes would be on him. It would have been okay if Scorpius was with him, but Scorpius was far away in St Mungo's. Albus was dreading it. Eating breakfast alone was embarrassing, not to mention it was off-putting when everyone was whispering about you.

He was walking rather reluctantly down the Gargoyle Corridor when someone raced around the corner.

Rose Granger-Weasley was hurtling towards him, brown bushy hair a mess, fire in her eyes. Before Albus knew it, she had all but jumped on him in a fierce embrace.

“Oh Albus!” she exclaimed, almost knocking him over.

Albus didn’t know what to do. He hadn’t received a hug from Rose since they were children. Rather awkwardly, he patted his cousin on the back.
“James and Lily said you were back! I was so worried about you! I thought you were dead! I can’t believe you went and did something like that!”

“Um…”

“You’re the most stupid person I know,” Rose continued, releasing Albus only to give him a push.

“Thanks?” Albus said, shifting from foot to foot and rubbing his arm. Rose was far stronger than she looked.

Rose had clearly hoped for a warmer reception, but she did not give up. Taking a deep breath, she refused to back down.

“Albus, I’m so sorry,” she declared.

“It didn’t hurt really-” Albus muttered.

“Not about that!” Rose exclaimed with very visible exasperation. “I’m sorry, Albus. For everything. For being so stubborn. For acting like a… a git.”

“Are you actually apologising?” Albus asked, shocked.

“Yes!”

“You?”

“Albus! I’m serious. I’m sorry. I’ve been a really bad cousin. We’re supposed to be family and I treated you like…”

Albus could feel heat rushing to his face.

“I treated you the same,” Albus said, slightly awkwardly, scuffing his shoes on the floor. “On the train, I mean. At least you tried. I was the one who wasn’t having any of it. I pushed you away. You made the effort and I never did.”

A silence fell in which Rose surveyed her shifty cousin, and Albus wished himself elsewhere. He really wasn’t good with this sort of thing. He was full of too many conflicting emotions: relief, anger, embarrassment, surprise. It was a lot to deal with.

“How’s Scorpius?” Rose tried.

Immediately Albus’s expression darkened.

“Fine,” Albus answered defensively.

Rose noticed how prickly he was being, but decided to ignore it.

“Then why’s he not here?” she demanded.

“He’s fine, all right?” Albus snapped.

Rose widened her eyes.

“No need to bite my head off.”

Albus felt slightly guilty then, but not guilty enough to take it back. Rose had been consistently vile
to Scorpius. Albus wasn’t simply going to let that slide. His loyalty was with Scorpius, his best friend and most important person. Rose may have been family, but in Albus’s opinion, you had to *earn* someone’s allegiance. If he had to choose, Scorpius would come first. After all, hadn’t he come first with Scorpius for all these years?

“When’s he coming back?” Rose tried again.

Albus looked up and understood that Rose would continue to question him until she got her answers.

“Later,” he admitted, with resignation. “Probably this evening.”

“What happened with you two?”

“I’m not supposed to talk about it,” Albus said, vaguely.

“I’m your cousin, Albus.”

“Dad said I’m not supposed to talk about it.”

Rose nodded her head. She respected her Uncle Harry.

“Fine. Then let’s talk about something else,” Rose said determinedly.

“Rose…”

“I’ve said sorry, haven’t I? Stop being so stubborn. We were best friends once. And you’ve missed me. Admit it.”

Albus remained stubbornly silent.

“Because I’ve missed you,” Rose finished.

“You’ve been really unfair on Scorpius,” Albus said, looking up at Rose accusingly.

“Albus!”

“No, you have. He’s always been nice to you. He thinks you’re great, okay? Every single time you’re mean to him he refuses to stop thinking you’re amazing. And do you know how many times he’s tried to get me to make up with you?”

It was Rose’s turn to look embarrassed. She chewed on her lower lip.

“And I’m not just going to forget that. Because Scorpius is my best friend. And if you want us to be friends again, then you have to live with it. It’s both or neither. End of.”

Rose blinked. Never in her life had she seen Albus act so assertively.

“Fine,” she remarked.

“Right then,” said Albus, turning away, heart sinking.

“I’ll apologise to Scorpius,” Rose clarified.

Albus spun on the spot, green eyes wide.

“You’ll *what*?”
“You’re right. I’ve given him a hard time. If it means that much to you, I’ll say sorry.”

“Are you serious?” Albus demanded.

“Of course I am.”

“And you have to stop treating him like… like he’s contagious or whatever.”

Rose put her hands on her hips.

“Since when have I treated him like that?”

Now Albus came to think of it, he couldn’t actually remember Rose taking part in the bullying…

“Okay, well maybe not you,” he admitted. “But the other Gryffindors. You know what they can be like.”

“I don’t control the whole of Gryffindor House,” Rose pointed out, fairly. “And none of my friends do that. I wouldn’t let them.”

Albus frowned, and then another thought came to him.

“You kicked him in the shin!” he declared, pointing at his cousin accusingly.

“He hugged me!”

“So?”

“So… I panicked?”

“You panicked?” Albus repeated incredulously.

“Look, I wasn’t expecting it,” Rose said defensively. “And he did it in front of everyone… and I don’t really know him.”

“He thinks he knows you,” Albus said. “Because you’re my cousin.”

Rose gave a sigh, which Albus knew for a fact meant she felt guilty. Uncle Ron did the exact same thing when he’d managed to inadvertently upset Aunt Hermione.

“Well, maybe I shouldn’t have kicked him,” Rose admitted.

“You don’t say?”

“I mean, it was sort of his fault as well…”

“Rose!”

“Albus, I’ve said I’ll say sorry. Maybe I got him wrong, okay? But you have to understand—“

“I don’t,” Albus said, glaring.

“His parents were Death Eaters!”

“His dad was,” Albus said on instinct, narrowing his eyes still further. “But his mum wasn’t. You know that. And his dad is different now. Because people change. Your dad shook Draco Malfoy’s hand last night.”
Rose blinked, not sure if she was being teased or not.

“He helped. Okay? Draco Malfoy helped us. So you need to stop with your prejudice-“

“My prejudice?” Rose repeated, almost laughing at the absurdity of the remark.

“Yes! Just because he’s a Malfoy-“

“It’s not just that!” Rose exclaimed.

“Then what is it?” Albus demanded. “Because there’s no other logical reason for you to dislike Scorpius.”

“Oh really?” Rose said, darkly.

Albus frowned at his cousin, confused.

“What?” he asked.

Rose composed herself and then took a deep breath, the words bursting out of her.

“You and me were best friends! All our lives! We were always going to be, don’t you remember that?”

“Of course I do.”

“And then you got put in Slytherin and you got pally with him and suddenly you didn’t need me anymore.”

“Come off it, you were surrounded by Gryffindor friends. Don’t act like you were lonely.”

“Friends aren’t the same as family! I looked for you, Albus! But every time I found you you were with him. It was like you’d replaced me.”

Albus stared at his cousin with surprise. Never had he considered that her dislike of Scorpius might be rooted in jealousy. Was she really jealous over him?

“And he did tell me I smell like bread,” Rose added.

“Bread is one of his all-time favourite smells!” Albus explained, rolling his eyes like this should have been obvious. “If you’d just stuck around to hear him out instead of storming off like you always do, you would have realised!”

“Well how was I supposed to know that? You have to admit, he’s a little bit… weird.”

Albus’s eyes were now slits.

“Maybe I like weird?” he declared.

“I’m not saying it’s a bad thing!”

Another silence fell. Rose watched her cousin hopefully.

Albus wanted more than anything to make up with Rose. He wanted them to be friends again. He wanted them to argue and for her to boss him about and for them to get up to all sorts of trouble.

But now he had Scorpius. Family or not, Rose could not possibly hope to compete.
“Look, Rose…” Albus muttered. “After everything. I’m not sure we can be the same as we were. We’re both… different. And things have happened…”

“I’m not asking for things to be the same. I’m just saying… we were friends once. We were best friends and-”

“I have a best friend already.”

“For heaven’s sake!” Rose exclaimed, sounding scarily like Aunt Hermione. “You can have more than one friend! I want to be friends with you. I want us to make up. I don’t care if you and Scorpius are best friends or whatever it is you are. I just want you to know that I’m really sorry, okay?”


“And I will apologise to Scorpius. Because he’s not as bad as I thought,” Rose promised, stamping her foot on the floor. “Is that good enough for you, Albus Potter?”

Albus looked up at Rose and had the urge to smile. He stopped himself at the last moment.

“You really don’t like being in the wrong, do you?” Albus asked, raising an eyebrow.

For a moment, Rose looked fierce, and then she smiled, slightly embarrassed.

“I’m not exactly used to it,” she admitted.

Albus took a deep breath of his own.

“Okay, and I’m… I’m sorry too. For not… well, for sulking,” he said, with some difficulty.

“You are a terrible sulker,” Rose agreed.

“And you’re the most stubborn person I know.”

Rose grinned, and Albus found himself grinning back.

“So what do you think?” Rose asked, briskly.

“About?”

“About us being friends again.”

“I would… yes, I’d like that.”

“So would I,” said Rose with satisfaction.

Rose gave her cousin a shove, just because she could.

“Are you coming to breakfast?” she asked.

“Yes. It’s that or eat in the dormitory and I don’t really want to be on my own right now.”

“Then you can sit with me,” Rose declared.

“At the Gryffindor table? They’ll love that,” said Albus, rolling his eyes.

“Okay then, I’ll come and sit with you.”
“Again, not sure that’s going to go down well.”

“Oh, who cares? Who cares if they don’t like it?” Rose said. “If I want to sit with my cousin then I will. And if anyone complains, I’ve just learned the best new jinx which I am itching to try out…”

Albus could not help but admire his cousin’s tenacity.

“Rose, has anyone ever told you that you’re terrifying?”

“They wouldn’t dare,” Rose responded, grinning. “Come on, little cousin.”

“Same age.”

“I’m still older!” Rose sang, already heading back down the Gargoyle Corridor, hair bouncing as she went.

With another roll of his eyes, Albus followed her, his heart lighter than it had been in months.

Chapter End Notes

I loved writing this. Rose is one of my favourites and I really wish there had been more of her in the play. A lot of people think she's awful but I think she's just a terrible mixture of her parents. Which actually makes her great. Flawed characters - I love them!

(Think Ron in the Goblet of Fire and Deathly Hallows. Very jealous and stubborn. But it comes from a place of love!)

Only two scenes to go! So close to the end now!

Next one takes us to Summer. We are jumping towards the dreaded Scene Fourteen! Ahahaha

Please leave me a comment and thank you so much to anyone who has stuck with this!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

xxx
Act Four: Scene Fourteen

Chapter Notes

7 months later, whoo!
Saddle up, gang, we’re going off-road!
(AKA ignoring canon. You have been warned!)
Leave me a comment if you enjoyed!!!
xxx

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Scorpius bounded into the Slytherin dormitory, beaming. As it was a Saturday, he was dressed in his ‘casual’ clothes, jeans and a smart grey jumper with a white shirt underneath, buttoned right up to the top. Like his father, Scorpius never could bring himself to look unpresentable.

“You’ve been ages,” Albus complained, not even pretending he’d been revising. He was sprawled lazily back on his bed, arms crossed behind his head, textbooks scattered about, unread.

“Sorry. Library. I’d just finished reading up on the Girding Potion again, when I spotted a new history book all about the Goblin rebellion of 1612 and well, one page led to another…”

“You are such a geek,” Albus declared affectionately. Scorpius was the only person Albus knew who was actually enjoying revision. Even Rose hated having to reread her notes, preferring the more practical elements of magic. At Easter, she had complained constantly about the revision timetables Aunt Hermione had kindly prepared for her. Albus was glad his parents had a more laid back approach.

“Yep. Oh, and also, they’ve started selling tickets already! There’s a sign up list in the common room, did you see it?”

Albus sat up, leaning back on his arms, and raised an eyebrow.

“You mean for the Solstice Ball?”

“Ya-huh,” Scorpius agreed cheerfully. “And since there’s going to be dancing involved, I’ve decided I need to make time to practice as well as making time for extra revision, because I trip over my own feet a lot-“

“I’ve noticed.”

“-and I really don’t want to look silly. Or fall over. Because that would be embarrassing.”

Albus shifted slightly awkwardly on his bed. He wanted to avoid the ball, and he had hoped that Scorpius might be inclined to avoid it with him. Albus had imagined they might spend the time amusing themselves, just relaxing, making the most of the free common room. But Scorpius looked so excited that he could tell those pleasant ideas would have to be abandoned.
“I thought we’d give it a miss…” Albus said, looking away from Scorpius.

“Albus! This is our first big opportunity to go to a Hogwarts ball!” Scorpius exclaimed.

“Look, I’m just not really into all that…”

Albus knew he was disappointing Scorpius, but he tried his best not to feel guilty, because Scorpius was disappointing him as well. It wasn’t Albus’s fault, after all, that Scorpius had become so very keen to socialise over the past year. After their ordeal early in the first term, Scorpius had shocked everyone by becoming even more optimistic than before. He seemed determined to enjoy life, something which (unfairly) irritated Albus. It had been all right when they were outcasts together. In that situation, Scorpius being so sunny had been great, it had been amazing. But now they weren’t quite so isolated Albus couldn’t help but panic that Scorpius would realise what he had been missing out on all along.

Albus’s worst fear was that Scorpius would no longer need him.

“Well, I still want to go,” Scorpius declared. “I have dress robes already. Dad had me fitted for them at Easter and they’re lovely. Classic - of course, but with the modern touch. We got a special tailor to make them, and Dad told me I looked ‘smart’.”

From Draco Malfoy ‘smart’ sounded like high praise.

“You’re forgetting that you still have to ask someone if you want to go,” Albus pointed out, not exactly sure why a perverse part of him wanted to burst Scorpius’s bubble so badly, only that it had to be done. “They’re selling the tickets in pairs. How messed up is that?”

“Very,” Scorpius agreed. “But every problem has a solution. There must be someone who’ll go with me. I could pay them?”

At the very thought, Albus felt a sharp pain in his chest. It was as though a very determined monster was trying to claw its way out of his ribcage. A hot burst of anger shot through Albus.

“You’re not paying someone to go with you to the Solstice Ball,” he said, more furiously than he’d intended.

“No, it does seem a bit… desperate,” Scorpius agreed.

“Very desperate,” said Albus, and the monster seemed to settle.

“But I have to find someone,” said Scorpius thoughtfully. “Who do you think I should try?”

Albus frowned. He didn’t like the idea of Scorpius heading off to the ball with someone else at all. What a cheek, Albus thought, asking him that…

“I don’t know,” Albus said, rather sulkily.

“I suppose I’m not the most attractive prospect,” Scorpius agreed, not taking the slightest bit of offence. Part of Albus wished that he had. “But I do have my good points. I can be very gentlemanly. Mum always used to say that.”

Albus didn’t need to be reminded of how charming Scorpius could be when he put his mind to it. He knew that already. Only he wasn’t sure he wanted other people knowing.

“Why do you want to go so badly?” Albus demanded.
“Because it’s all part of being here, at Hogwarts,” Scorpius said easily, still not seeming to notice his bad mood. “I know that in the past, well, we’ve sort of… kept out of things.”

“Not by choice. People treated us like rubbish. Most of them still do.”

“But I don’t want to do that anymore,” Scorpius continued, refusing to be swayed. “I want to enjoy myself. Even if other people don’t want me to. Because life is short and… and we need to be happy while we can. And dancing at the Solstice Ball in my new dress robes would make me very happy.”

Scorpius looked endearingly cheered by the very thought of it. Albus felt like the worst person in the world for having tried to ruin that for him. What sort of a best friend was he?

“You really seriously want to go?” Albus clarified, already knowing, deep down inside, what had to be done.

“Desperately,” Scorpius agreed.

Albus had the sudden, reckless urge to do something gallant. Scorpius wanted to go. To go he needed a partner. Albus did not want him taking another person. And it wasn’t like he had anything planned for the evening…

“Right, well… okay,” Albus said, the words leaving his mouth before he thought.

“Okay what?”

“Okay I’ll come,” Albus clarified.

Scorpius’s face lit up.

“How?” he declared, jumping up into the air. “You’ll love it! People are saying Professor McGonagall’s booked Queen Kelpie! The Queen Kelpie!”

“The rapper Queen Kelpie?”

“The very same,” Scorpius chattered on. “You can ask our Rose! She’s bound to go with you. Yann’s desperate to ask her, but I know for a fact he hasn’t had the guts to do it yet - and besides, you’re family. She won’t say no to you.”

“What do you mean go with Rose?” Albus asked, frowning.

“I know it’s a bit odd to go with a family member, but it’s not unheard of. Lots of people do it. And I’m sure Rose can find a friend for me. All the Gryffindor girls love Rose. There must be one of them that she can persuade-“

Albus felt his heart race. This was somehow going wrong.

“No, Scorpius, I meant…”

“Or she could go with me and you could go with her friend,” Scorpius said thoughtfully. “But I think if it’s a choice between me and Yann Fredericks, she’s going to choose Yann. I mean, I would choose Yann instead of me. And I couldn’t really do that to him, not after he told me how much he likes her…”

“Scorpius-“
“I suppose there’s always the lower years. Do you think it’s a bit odd to ask one of them? What about Lily? She loves getting all dressed up. Then again James might kill me…”

“Scorpius, will you shut up a minute?” Albus snapped.

Scorpius blinked at Albus, looking wounded.

Albus flushed, feeling hot all over. It was very difficult, in that moment, to meet Scorpius’s eyes, and so instead he focussed his attention on his own socks, one of which had a large hole in, through which his big toe poked.

“When I said I’d come,” Albus said, in a strained voice. “I meant… you know.”

“I really don’t,” Scorpius admitted, puzzled.

Albus wanted to swear.

“Okay, right,” he said, taking a deep breath and forcing himself to raise his head. He attempted to school his features into something cool and composed. What he got instead was a strange sort of grimace.

“Scorpius… willyougototheballwithme?”

“Pardon?”

It was times like this that Rose was needed to point out the obvious.

“Will you go to the ball. With me. Together,” Albus clarified, his voice sounding strangely deep.

“We already are both going to the - oh,” Scorpius said, seeming to freeze on the spot. “Oh. As… did you mean as friends or…”

Albus wasn’t quite sure himself. All he knew was that if Scorpius had to go with someone, then it had to be him.

Scorpius was watching him intently, like the next words to leave Albus’s mouth would be important. That was… a lot of pressure.

Albus’s first urge was to bolt from the room. He wasn’t good with words and he was scared. But the monster in his chest protested.

The time had come to be brave. And he could be brave. Hadn’t he proved that already? Albus Severus was not some immature little kid. He was named after Albus Dumbledore and Severus Snape!

Actually, Albus realised, perhaps considering those particular wizards had apparently been in unrequited love with their best friends for their whole lives, it was best to leave them out of this…

Why had he thought about love? Where had that come from? He wasn't in love with Scorpius. That was ridiculous. He just liked him. Quite a lot. And found himself thinking about him sometimes. Which was normal. Because they were best friends. There was nothing suspicious about that.

And if occasionally Albus found himself slipping into daydreams which disobediently featured a rather sunny, optimistic, blond-haired boy, then that was just a huge coincidence.

Wasn’t it?
Scorpius was still watching him tentatively, waiting for an answer. Albus rethought his question, aware he probably looked like an idiot for taking so long to respond.

_Did you mean as friends or…?_

What was the alternative? Was an alternative being offered? Would it have to be an alternative? Or just something additional?

Going to the ball with Scorpius was… huge. Would they have to dance? Did that mean they would dance together? Albus hadn’t danced much before. Would people laugh?

_Rose would jinx anyone who laughed_, came a helpful voice in Albus’s head. _And think of the slow dances…_

Albus’s stomach did a somersault.

“Which… which sounds better - to you…?” Albus asked, trying not to show a preference either way, as though Scorpius had merely asked him which type of confectionary delicacy he wanted from the Hogwarts Trolley Witch.

Scorpius opened his mouth and then closed it again. He held his hands together in front of him and then swung them back to his sides. His cheeks had gone faintly pink.

“I… either,” he said (or actually, squeaked), nervously. “Unless you don’t…”

“I do…” Albus said quickly. Perhaps a little too quickly.

Albus cleared his throat. Scorpius blinked a bit and then began sort of twisting on the spot, apparently wanting to move about, but also rooted to the ground.

It struck Albus that the Slytherin dormitory was a very stuffy place. If only they could have opened a window…

“So… er,” Albus said, unable to take the stress any longer. “D’you think you might-“

“Yes,” Scorpius agreed in an instant, seeming surprised that he hadn’t answered already. “I will.”

Albus let out a breath he hadn’t realised he’d been holding.

“Good. That’s good.”

“Very good,” Scorpius agreed, nodding his head and looking slightly dazed. “Fantastically good, actually.”

His voice had gone rather high-pitched. In any other circumstances, Albus would have laughed.

What now? Albus wondered. What was he supposed to say? Was he supposed to say something? Or did they just act the same as always? Nobody had ever told him.

What had Scorpius even agreed to? Did he think they were going as friends? Why, Albus asked himself, furiously, had he been so vague? He should have asked Scorpius outright.

Scorpius gave a full turn on the spot, looked confused by his own action, and then fiddled with his fingers again. He felt the urge to jump into the air again with excitement, his stomach seeming to fizz with euphoria. His dad would be _so_ pleased that he had a partner for the Solstice Ball! Scorpius knew for a fact that his dad approved of Albus. He couldn’t wait to send him an owl and
tell him his news!

“Yann fancies Rose, then?” Albus found himself asking, finding it rather hard to catch his breath.

“Oh, yes,” Scorpius agreed. “Since second year… he said. But she can be quite fierce, and he’s scared to ask in case she… you know…”

“Kicks him in the shin?” Albus suggested.

Scorpius laughed. The atmosphere seemed to change a little. It had become more comfortable, more familiar. The world was returning to normal.

Perhaps, Albus thought, it didn’t matter what they went to the ball as, so long as they went together. For now, it would have to do.

“So… are you going to Quidditch?” Scorpius asked, coming up with a conversational topic after a moment of total blankness. “Slytherin are playing Hufflepuff - it’s a big one-“

Albus seemed relieved by the change of subject. He cleared his throat again and raised an eyebrow. His face was quite red, but Scorpius valiantly tried not to notice.

“I thought we hated Quidditch?” Albus said, his voice still a touch too low.

“People can change. Besides, I’ve been practicing,” Scorpius said, striking his best ‘sporty’ pose. “I think I might make the team eventually. Come on-“

“I can’t,” Albus said awkwardly. “My dad’s arranged to come up-“

Scorpius paused, eyebrows raised.

“He’s taking time away from the Ministry?”

“He wants to go on a walk - something to show me - share with me - something,” Albus said, shrugging his shoulders. It still felt very hot in the dormitory, Albus thought.

“A walk?” Scorpius asked. That was an unusual request from Harry Potter. He had visited Albus several times over the past year, but always with Ginny, and James and Lily had been present. A one-on-one visit like this was a big step. A step that Scorpius knew would make Albus very nervous indeed.

“I know,” Albus agreed. “I think it’s a bonding thing or something similarly vomit-inducing. Still, you know, I think I’ll go.”

Scorpius nodded his agreement, seemed ready to say something, and then swallowed his words. He almost wandered towards Albus, and then changed his mind, diverting instead to his wardrobe.

What he really wanted was to ask a little more about the invitation. Had Albus been serious when he’d asked him to go to the Solstice Ball? Did he mean they would go together, or together? His father would never have been this uncertain. He would have been assertive.

But, Scorpius thought, fairly, it wasn’t right to bring the subject up now. Not now Albus was busy thinking about his father’s visit. His mother would have told him not to be selfish. She would have told him to support Albus. And so that was what Scorpius was going to do.

Still, it was hard to hold in his excitement entirely…
“Quidditch, Quidditch, Quidditch,” Scorpius all but sang as he hunted out his Slytherin flag. He gave a happy gasp when he found it, and brandished it with pride. Scorpius then combed his hair, straightened his white shirt, and last of all put on his black armband, in memory of Craig. It was one accessory all the Slytherins wore to Quidditch matches now.

When he was done he turned back to Albus, who was still sitting up on his bed, looking uncertain.

Scorpius gave a small smile and went to him. This part was easy. It always had been.

“Don’t worry about your dad, Albus,” Scorpius said, perching beside Albus. “Things have been much better recently. And I think you’re doing really well.”

“Am I?” Albus asked, looking up.

Scorpius nodded his head.

“Yep. Brilliantly well. Rose said you were wonderful at Easter.”

“I only peeled some potatoes—“


“I… thanks,” Albus mumbled.

“And Dad says… well he said, at Christmas, that if you wanted to ever come to us. Maybe for next Easter… I know it’s a long time away. Or maybe for a weekend? Or New Year? I know it’s a bit… well, gloomy where we live, but you might like it…”

Albus had forgotten all about Draco Malfoy. How would he react to the fact he’d just asked his precious only son to the Solstice Ball? Come to think of it, Albus suddenly remembered that his own parents would have to know, but worse than that was James. Oh his big brother would be unbearable.

“You can think about it later,” Scorpius said quickly. “You probably have plans. But any time, really. Dad likes you.”

“Does he?” Albus asked, doubtfully.

Scorpius nodded with certainty.

“He’s liked you ever since third year. And before, but mostly since… well, you know how supportive you were when Mum… since that.”

“Thanks,” Albus said. “I’ll, er… talk to Mum. See if it’s okay.”

A silence fell. Albus scratched at the back of his neck. Scorpius kicked his feet together.

If only his father had decided to visit another day, Albus thought bitterly. Going to watch Quidditch with Scorpius suddenly seemed like an excellent idea. Even if the game was deadly dull, it might be nice to sit in the stands with him and Rose, and even Yann, if he still insisted on tagging along, although Albus personally thought Rose could do way better.

“Well, I should go,” Scorpius said reluctantly. “Rose and Yann will be there already. They’re supporting us again today. Isn’t that great?”
“Great,” Albus agreed, in that same strained voice from earlier.

“Try not to worry. I’m sure it’ll be fine,” said Scorpius, but still Albus looked terribly distracted.

“Albus…” Scorpius tried again.

Albus appeared to be in another world entirely.

Scorpius thought about something, chewed on his lower lip, wondered what his mother would tell him to do had she been there to guide him, and then made a decision.

He leaned in kissed Albus on the cheek.

“What’s this?” Albus asked, blushing scarlet, heart pounding in his chest. “I… do we do this now? Is this a thing that we… do?”

Scorpius shot back, uncertainly, terrified he’d made a mistake.

“I wasn’t sure. Whether we should. In this new version of us I had in my head…”

The room was now unbearably hot. Albus’s cheek felt strange where Scorpius’s lips had touched it. Numb and yet tingling.

“Was that… okay?” Scorpius asked, tentatively. “I just thought… you were sad… stupid idea probably…”

“No,” Albus said quickly. “It’s… it’s okay. With me. I mean, it’s very… I definitely feel more cheerful.”

Albus saw the relief bloom on Scorpius’s face. His blue-grey eyes seemed to shine with hope.

“Is it really okay?” Scorpius asked. “You don’t have to say that just so I’m not embarrassed… although that would be embarrassing. It’s probably best that I know… because I… well obviously I quite like you. I mean you know I like you - of course. I mean like. But if that’s not… if that wasn’t what you meant before when you asked… we don’t still have to go. We can be friends. I like us being friends… and I’m sorry if I’ve made that awkward…”

“Scorpius-“

“And now I’ve probably made things even more awkward… you know that I just… I can’t stop talking when I’m nervous - not that you make me nervous… not you as a person, you probably make me the least nervous out of everyone… but at this point in time. Nervous. I’m talking. I should stop. I’m going to stop.”

“No… I do,” Albus said, wishing he sounded less flustered. “I do - like you. I think. I never actually… is this new for you? This is new for me.”

“Absolutely new,” Scorpius agreed, nodding. “Sort of new. Maybe not quite as new as with you. I’ve thought... I have considered it. A few times. But I wasn’t sure if you… if maybe I was just confusing-“

“Confusing being friends with - something else?”

“Yes,” Scorpius said, letting out a breath of relief. The exact same thought had gone through his head hundreds of times. “Do you think that’s what we’re doing?”
Albus thought on that. It was surprisingly easier to have things out in the open. To be able to discuss this like it was just a normal topic of conversation allowed Albus to consider the situation with new clarity.

“I wasn’t sure until you just… you know,” Albus admitted, gesturing at his right cheek. “That maybe cleared some things up.”

“In a… good way?” Scorpius asked, hiding his hands in his jumper sleeves.

“In… not a friendly way,” Albus agreed, clearing his throat again.

“Oh, okay. That’s definitely new then. Righty-ho! Now we know that. We are entirely aware that this (this being us) is a potential thing that could happen. Knowledge is power. So now we just keep that in mind and…”

“This might just be, you know-“ Albus said swiftly.

“Yes. Stress. You are full of stress. A great big ball of stress about your dad. Stressed humans do not make the most sensible humans.”

“What are you, an alien?” Albus teased.

“I know you, Albus. And you can be fairly fickle…”

“How am I fickle?” Albus demanded, rather offended by that remark.

“Well… one minute you like someone, next you hate them-“

Scorpius had been referencing Delphi and they both knew it. Immediately, Scorpius appeared to regret his words.

“Okay, sorry. I’m sorry. I’m just… you didn’t like me much then. Not that it was your fault, because it wasn’t. Please never ever think it was. But just in terms of the you and me part, I… got a bit left out. And that wasn’t nice, you know. Since you’re my one and only person. And I have loved you since you sat in my train compartment and -”

“Loved me?” Albus repeated, a bit thrown by that sudden exclamation.

“I don’t mean… I just mean that I knew you were special. My best ever friend,” Scorpius clarified. “And it hurt… it hurt very much, in fact, when she came along. Because you definitely fancied her, which again- was not your fault, but it still meant that you forgot about me.”

“I never forgot about you,” Albus argued, frowning.

“I just - I don’t want that to happen again. So maybe we should just see how things go? Just for while? Maybe have a trial run?”

Scorpius appeared encouraged by his own idea.

“What do you think of that?” he asked Albus.

“You want us to have a ‘trial run’?” Albus repeated, eyebrows raised.

“Yep. I know that’s not the most romantic suggestion in the world, but it’s probably the most practical, and sensible, and if you’re going to do something then you have to do it properly, so that is what I am proposing.”
“I cannot believe you’ve just suggested that,” Albus remarked, utterly amazed.

Scorpius looked only the tiniest bit embarrassed. He continued to fiddle with his sleeves.

“So - shall we try?” Scorpius asked.

“And trying would entail…”

“Just doing what feels right - only not having pressure, because if it doesn't work then, Albus, I need us to still be okay. We have to still be friends. You’re my best friend ever, even if you’re not my only one anymore, and if I didn’t have you… I need to still have you. I need us to be friends. Always. No matter what.”

Albus suddenly got it, and the moment he did he stopped being offended.

“Okay,” Albus said, nodding. “I promise we’ll always be friends.”

“I promise too,” Scorpius agreed, solemnly.

Then all of a sudden, Scorpius gave a jump.

“Oh! Quidditch! It starts soon. I should go. I completely forgot! They’re saving me a seat…”

“Right, well, have a good time,” Albus found himself saying. He couldn't help the disappointment forming in his stomach. This had been too short, too rushed. He'd picked the wrong time. Like an idiot...

Scorpius paused. Albus still didn’t seem completely okay, and that bothered him.

“And are you… are you sure you’ll be all right with your dad?” Scorpius asked kindly. “You don’t need me to wait here, just in case? Because I can always tell them something came up. They won’t mind.”

Albus did rather want Scorpius to be waiting for him when he got back, but he knew that Scorpius was excited about the match. Besides, they’d have plenty of time together that evening.

“No, you watch your game;” Albus said, nobly.

“Sure?” Scorpius checked, frowning at Albus and scanning his face.

“Yes,” confirmed Albus, impressed by his own selflessness.

“Okay then,” said Scorpius, nodding to himself, but he didn’t get up.

Albus watched him for a moment. Was he waiting for something? Was he supposed to… oh. Of course.

“Um, just stay there,” Albus said, shifting forward.

Scorpius followed Albus’s progress, looking a little apprehensive. Scorpius thought he appeared to be preparing for a hug, but the look in his bright green eyes said otherwise...

“If… if you are about to kiss me, Albus, then maybe you should save it for later - because you are stressed, very stressed, and what if this is just stress?” Scorpius asked, eyes widening.

“It’s not stress,” Albus confirmed, moving closer still. "It's a trial run."
And I should warn you that… I have never done this before and I need to practise, so… I might not be…"

Scorpius put out a hand, suddenly, stopping Albus where he was. Obediently, Albus paused. He felt a bit stupid, just sort of leaning up, staring right at Scorpius, but at least he hadn't moved back. His heart was pounding so loudly he felt sure Scorpius would be able to feel it.

"Not that I don’t want to,” Scorpius said quickly, his eyes looking very large up close. “Because I would… um, well I am just a tiny bit… a weeny bit… the smallest bit… nervous about…”

"Me too,” Albus agreed, feeling relieved that he didn’t have to be the one to say so.

"I mean, you’ve done this before so you’re probably an expert…”

"What?” Albus asked, bemused.

"Well, you did kiss your aunt quite a few times…”

"Those were not my lips,” Albus argued, leaning back slightly. “And did you really have to bring that up right now?”

Scorpius took Albus’s hands a little nervously, not wanting him to withdraw.

"I have zero experience in anything. At all.”

"What do you think I am?” Albus deadpanned. “I’m not exactly beating potential suitors off with a stick-“

That familiar sarcasm from Albus made Scorpius beam.

"That’s… okay that is a good point,” he admitted, relaxing.

Albus rolled his eyes.

"I mean, you have a game to get to, and I have to see my dad, so d’you think we could…” Albus prompted.

"Oh, yes. Okay. Wow. Right then. You may proceed…” Scorpius agreed, sitting up a little straighter.

Albus leaned in…

"Wait!” Scorpius said suddenly. "Are we using tongue?”

"Merlin’s beard,” Albus exclaimed, not sure whether to start laughing or collapse with the stress of everything. “I was just going for a very basic, very simple sort of-“


"Ready?”

Scorpius nodded his head. Albus leaned in again.

"Because this is momentous…” Scorpius added, wriggling a bit.

"Scorpius!”
“Sorry! I just… talk. I’m going to focus on not.”

“I am going to have a heart attack right here,” Albus said dryly. “Right on this bed. I am going to keel over and you’ll have to explain to everyone that you killed me because you wouldn’t shut up long enough for me to actually kiss you.”

“That would be tragic.”

“Doubly tragic for you,” Albus agreed. “Because I would haunt you for the rest of eternity. Right. Take three?”

“This is actually the fourth time you’ve tried to…”

Albus did not wait for him to finish. He leaned in with determination, and pressed his lips against Scorpius’s, who went immediately silent and pressed back.

It was certainly nothing like kissing Aunt Hermione. For starters, Albus was sure his stomach had taken to doing backflips without his permission. Then there was the fact that Scorpius was very warm, and very soft, and if Albus was allowed he was definitely doing this again...

It had only been a short peck on the lips, but when Albus drew back to check Scorpius’s face, he was exceptionally pleased to see his best friend looking an unattractive shade of crimson.

“Well,” Scorpius breathed out, swallowing hard. “Okay then. There’s that.”

“I’ll see you at dinner,” Albus said, grinning. The monster in his chest was purring with satisfaction. Albus felt the most confident he ever had in his entire life. This had been easy. Easier than he’d ever imagined. He felt about ten feet tall. What did it matter if he had to see his father in twenty minutes? What did anything matter, really, after that?

“I… yep. You will. See me at dinner. See you at dinner, I mean,” Scorpius said, getting to his feet and looking the most disorientated Albus had ever seen him as he wandered towards the door. His legs were definitely wobbling, but he was beaming as well. He gave Albus a thumbs-up and then a strange excited sort of wave. “I will see you at dinner. Bye then, Albus! I… um… yes! Okay. Quidditch…”

Albus waited until he heard Scorpius’s footsteps disappear down the corridor (followed by what may have been a ecstatic squeak), and then flopped back down on his bed. The euphoria would not last forever. Albus, being the pessimist he was knew that much. But he could enjoy it for now.

Ten minutes, Albus told himself, throwing his arms out at either side of him and sprawling like a starfish, knocking textbooks onto the floor. You’re allowed ten minutes to process this, and then it’s time to deal with your dad.

Alone in the Slytherin dormitory, Albus let out a jubilant laugh.
just a random classroom.

If you have read up to this point I am assuming you gathered this was where it was going. If you are someone who thinks Albus and Scorpius would be better as friends then just imagine they try it out and it doesn't work. I mean they are fourteen (almost fifteen) so I guess anything could happen. That's all for your imaginations!

One more chapter to go which is being posted today. Please leave me a comment!

xxx
Act Four: Scene Fifteen

Chapter Notes

This is the final chapter. I hope you have enjoyed this novelisation! I’ve loved writing it so much! Your comments are appreciated and they mean the world!

If you’ve liked this then please let me know! It makes me smile so much to get a notification!

xxx

Albus waited for his father at the Hogwarts gates, listening to the distant sounds of cheering from the Quidditch pitch. It sounded like Slytherin might have been winning. Albus smiled as he imagined Scorpius screaming with delight from the stands, Rose beside him, just to make sure nobody tried anything.

He saw his dad walking towards him from a distance. Albus looked away to save them both the awkward seconds of being too far away to speak. When his father reached him, Albus pretended he’d only just noticed his arrival.

Harry was wearing one of his smart Ministry outfits, but he’d loosened his tie, and Albus thought he looked fairly cheerful.

“Albus, good to see you,” Harry said, smiling at his son in a way he hoped would show how much he meant those words.

“And you,” Albus replied, a little awkwardly.

“You look well. Did Slytherin win at Quidditch? There was a game today, wasn’t there?”

“It’s happening now,” Albus revealed with a shrug.

Harry paused, and seemed to register the distant sound of the excitable crowd. There was a distinct hissing noise, which Albus knew to be a favoured battle cry of his House. Harry only looked the slightest bit perturbed by it, before realising that it was not, in fact, Parseltongue.

“Oh, I didn’t realise,” Harry said. “Did you want to watch with your friends? I can wait. I’ve taken the whole afternoon.”

Albus shook his head.

“Thanks, but Quidditch still isn’t my thing.”


“Fine,” Albus said quickly.

Harry knew his son well enough to change the subject. For some reason, Albus had tensed up at
the very mention of Scorpius Malfoy. Harry hoped the boys hadn’t argued.

“And how about Rose? Are you still getting on?”

“Rose is Rose,” Albus admitted, almost immediately seeming to relax again. “And there’s Yann. He’s Rose’s friend. A Gryffindor.”

“That’s good,” Harry said supportively. “Having friends in other Houses can be helpful. Luna was a Ravenclaw—“

“I know that, Dad,” Albus said, sounding irritated, but then he stopped himself. His dad was trying. And so he would try too. “But you’re right. It’s good to have a couple of Gryffindor friends. Handy in Potions, you know? They sit in front of us.”

“And is this Yann the one Uncle Ron’s been talking about?”

“What’s he said?” Albus asked, innocently.

“He seems to think he might be about to ask Rose to the Solstice Ball. You know what Ron’s like. Your aunt’s told him to keep out of it.”

“Yann’s… okay,” Albus admitted. “He’s not the sort of guy you’d worry about dating your daughter. Mostly he’s just into Quidditch.”

“I’ll tell Ron he has your seal of approval, then,” Harry joked.

Albus forced a laugh, but it wasn’t particularly convincing.

“So, shall we go, then?” Albus prompted, feeling uncomfortable just standing at the gates.

“Yes,” Harry agreed, pulling himself together. “Are you okay with Apparating?”

Albus forced away his grimace.

“I guess so. If you are,” he said.

Together, father and son walked out of the Hogwarts grounds in silence. Albus kept his hands in his pockets, although unknown to his father, he had his new wand clutched in his hand. Even after all these months, he didn’t like to be without it - just in case.

On the edge of the grounds, Harry offered his son his arm.

“I would have brought brooms, but it’s a long way,” Harry explained apologetically.

“It’s fine,” Albus said, taking his father’s arm and resolving to keep his mouth shut just in case he was sick.

They disappeared with a faint popping noise, and Albus, thankfully, did not vomit as he and his father reemerged in what looked like a sunny field. Here the sky was blue, the weather warmer. Albus had an inkling they were in the countryside.

“We’re in Devon,” Harry explained, taking a moment to catch his breath. Albus noticed, with some pride, that he seemed to have dealt better with the Apparition than his father had.

“Not far from Somerset,” Albus remarked. “It’s just east of here.”
Harry glanced at his son with surprise.

“When we were travelling, Scorpius and I, we got a bit lost on busses. It’s a long story. I learned more about the south west than I’ll probably ever need to know.”

Harry smiled, and Albus smiled back, rather more tentatively.

“It’s not far,” said Harry, getting his bearings and pointing in the direction of a large hill. It was a hill that Albus recognised, although he’d never been this close to it.

“Dad, where are we going?” Albus asked, frowning. “Are we going to see Grandma and Grandad? This is Ottery St Catchpole, isn't it? Stoatshead Hill?”

“The village is just over there,” Harry agreed. “But we’re not here to see your grandparents. Although we could. If you wanted. After.”

Albus frowned.

“Nice day to be outdoors,” Harry commented, clearly finding strength in the pleasant weather as they approached the hill.

Albus decided not to point out that he much preferred being indoors to outdoors. And he had to admit that it was fairly nice to be out in the sun, the smell of freshly cut grass all around him. Scorpius would like this place, Albus thought. It had an optimistic vibe.

“You okay for a climb?” Harry asked.

Albus shrugged. A climb up Stoatshead Hill wasn’t his idea of a fun day out, at least, not with his dad. But he had a sense that this was important, so he didn’t complain.

“I suppose so.”

Together, father and son began to climb. The grass here had not been cut particularly well, and daisies and buttercups grew stubbornly in patches. The hill was fairly steep and covered in half hidden rabbit holes. It was quite a task not to fall over on the way up.

Harry didn’t talk, and so Albus decided not to either. The silence was okay. Not as awkward as it could have been. Maybe even a bit companionable. Although Albus thought probably his father was being quiet to preserve his energy. He was definitely panting with the effort of the climb.

They stopped for a moment when they reached the top. From where they stood, Albus could see the small village of Ottery St Catchpole.

It wasn’t nearly as pretty as Godric’s Hollow, and in the distance cars passed by, houses starting to rise up. Albus couldn’t make out his grandparents’ house, but he could see roughly where it was.

Beyond them, on the other side of the hill, was a small Muggle church complete with a small, square graveyard.

“So are you ready?” Harry asked as they began to walk down the other side of the hill, leaning back absurdly to remain upright.

“For what?” Albus asked.

“Well, there’s the fourth-year exams - and then fifth year - big year - in my fifth year I did-“
Harry paused and looked at Albus. He was very aware of the advice Ginny had given him that morning.

‘Don’t do all the talking. Let Albus be Albus. He wants to spend time with his dad, not Harry Potter.’

A little apologetically, Harry smiled.

“I did a lot of stuff,” he said quickly, thinking of Dementors, and the Order, and Cho Chang, and Dolores Umbridge, and the DA, and his beloved godfather. He pushed every one of these images away. His son didn’t want to know the details, not yet. But maybe in time, Harry hoped, Albus might ask a few questions of his own.

“Some of it good. Some of it bad. A lot of it quite confusing,” Harry settled for.

Albus rolled his eyes, but it wasn’t with his usual obstinance.

“Good to know,” Albus said. He gave the smallest of smiles.

Harry smiled back, relieved.

“I grew up a lot when I was your age,” Harry revealed, sheepishly. “I don’t think the world’s ever been quite as… well, let’s just say your emotions will lay off a bit soon.”

“Dad, if this is the puberty talk, you’re about four years too late,” Albus deadpanned.

“This is not the puberty talk,” Harry said, with some relief. “I just want you to know that… well I’ve been there. It can mess with your head. I was… fairly angry at your age.”

“You had a lot to be angry about,” Albus pointed out.

“Well, I suppose so. But things can be tough enough as it is, without all the rest,” Harry continued. “I know that after something happens, like what happened at the start of the year—“

“Don’t, Dad,” Albus said, quietly.

“You don’t have to talk to me, but make sure you talk to someone. Because there were times when I wished I could have asked my dad for advice. Just know, please, Albus, that I’m here if you ever need me.”

That was a lie, Albus thought bitterly, because his dad spent most of the time at the Ministry. But it was the thought that counted. And to be fair on his dad, in an emergency, he probably would have taken time off.

Albus wished he had something to offer his dad in return. But what could he say? Some gesture had to be made. His father had reached out, and now he had to do the same.

As Albus looked out at the gravestones which they were getting closer to by the minute, he realised he had exactly the thing.

“I got to watch them - you know - for a bit,” Albus said suddenly.

Harry frowned, not understanding.

“Your mum and dad,” Albus clarified swiftly. “They were - you had fun together. Your dad used to love to do this smoke ring thing with you where you… well, you couldn’t stop giggling.”
“Yes?” Harry prompted, hopefully.

Albus thought of that happy, adored little baby he had seen being paraded about on James Potter’s shoulders, of the halo of blue and red sparks that danced around his head, of the way his father watched him sleeping, quietly hoping he might wake up again so he could hold him in his arms.

But how could Albus possibly describe all that and do it justice? It was already hard enough to find the right words when it came to his father. There were so many opportunities to slip up, and so many ways to look like an idiot.

“I think you would have liked them,” Albus tried, wishing he didn’t sound so childish. “And I think me, Lily and James would have liked them too.”

Almost immediately Albus wished his words back. He’d probably overstepped the mark. After all, who was he to tell his dad what he would have thought of his own parents?

“You know,” Harry said, tapping at his forehead. “I thought I’d lost him - Voldemort - I thought I’d lost him - and then my scar started hurting again and I had dreams of him and I could even speak Parseltongue again and I started to feel like I’d not changed at all - that he’d never let me go.”

“And had he?” Albus asked curiously.

“The part of me that was Voldemort died a long time ago, but it wasn’t enough to be physically rid of him - I had to be mentally rid of him. And that - is a lot to learn for a forty year old man.”

Albus gave an awkward sort of nod. He didn’t want to talk about Voldemort.

Harry looked at his son as they reached the bottom of the hill and slowed down again to catch their breath.

“The thing I said to you,” Harry tried, clearing his throat. “- it was unforgivable, and I can’t ask you to forget it but I hope we can move past it. I’m going to try to be a better dad for you, Albus. I am going to try and - be honest with you and…”

“Dad, you don’t need to-“ Albus cut in swiftly, wanting anything but a heart to heart. Not now. Not when he wasn’t ready.

But his dad didn’t seem to get the message.

“You told me you don’t think I’m scared of anything, and that - I mean, I’m scared of everything,” Harry admitted. “I mean, I’m afraid of the dark, did you know that?”

Afraid of the dark? What was the point in that? At least in the dark nobody could see you. Albus saw the dark as something of a friend, a comfort, almost.

“Harry Potter is afraid of the dark?” he repeated incredulously.

His father nodded his agreement, doing his best to look unashamed.

“I don’t like small spaces and - I’ve never told anyone this but I don’t much like -“

In spite of himself, Albus’s eyes were wide with curiosity.

“-Pigeons.”
Albus almost rolled his eyes. Thank goodness he stopped himself at the very last second.

“You don’t like pigeons?” Albus clarified.

Harry scrunched up his face with disgust.

“Nasty, pecky, dirty things. They give me the creeps.”

“But pigeons are harmless!” Albus pointed out, still rather convinced he was having his leg pulled.

“I know,” Harry admitted, looking sheepish. “But the thing that scares me most, Albus Severus Potter, is being a dad to you.”

Albus looked down at the grass, taking a sudden interest in the various wild flowers that they passed and occasionally giving one a kick.

“Because I’m operating without wires here,” Harry continued. “Most people have a dad to base themselves on - and either try to be or try not to be. I’ve got nothing - or very little. So I’m learning, okay? And I’m going to try with everything I’ve got - to be a good dad for you.”

Was it really that hard? Albus wondered. It hurt that his own dad felt he had to make an effort to like him, but then, Albus remembered that he found his father equally as difficult. Perhaps he was guilty of the same?

“And I’ll try to be a better son,” Albus said, still not looking up. “I know I’m not James, Dad. I’ll never be like you two.”

“James is nothing like me,” Harry said, looking confused.

“Isn’t he?” Albus asked, doubtfully.

James and his dad seemed pretty similar to him. Or at least, they got on like a house on fire. They never had awkward silences, or unspoken resentments, or struggles to connect. Most of the time (when James wasn’t getting told off for some prank or another) they laughed together. Albus knew that well, after years of watching them, wondering why it was that he couldn’t quite fit the same template as his older brother.

“Everything comes easy for James,” Harry explained. “My childhood was a constant struggle.”

Now that, Albus could relate to.

“So was mine,” he agreed with feeling. “So are you saying - am I - like you?”

Harry looked down at his fiercely independent son and smiled.

“Actually you’re more like your mum,” Harry admitted. “Bold, fierce, funny - which I like - which I think makes you a pretty great son.”

Well now Albus knew his dad was laying it on thick, because that description sounded more like Rose than him.

He definitely wasn’t bold. Albus was the type to run away from trouble if he could. And fierce? Maybe when he absolutely had to be, but not by choice. As for funny… was he funny? His dad had never laughed at one of his jokes. Only Scorpius seemed to do that.

“I almost destroyed the world,” Albus pointed out, as they headed towards the small Muggle
Harry sighed. He wished his son would take a compliment occasionally, instead of finding a hundred reasons why he wasn’t worthy of it.

“Delphi wasn’t going anywhere, Albus - you brought her out into the light and you found a way for us to fight her. You may not see it now, but you saved us.”

*Yeah right*, Albus thought. He hadn’t saved anyone. He’d got everyone into that almighty mess, no matter what people said on the contrary. And he wasn’t about to forget about it. Not because he wanted to dwell in misery, or whatever it was his father thought, but because he’d learned to take responsibility for his actions.

“But shouldn’t I have done better?” Albus asked.

“You don’t think I ask myself the same question?” Harry countered.

“And then -“ Albus burst out, thinking of one of the very worst discoveries of his nightmare start to the year, the one that still haunted him when he slept. “When we caught her - I wanted to kill her.”

Although those words were painful, Harry couldn’t help but feel relief that his son had decided to open up.

“You watched her murder Craig,” Harry said, fairly. “You were angry, Albus, and that’s okay. You wouldn't have done it.”

Only Albus knew that he could have. And he *would*. Because even now, all these months on, Albus woke up in the night terrified that she was back. That she’d taken Scorpius again. That she'd come to torture him. That she wanted to make him watch.

Sometimes Albus wished that someone would break into Azkaban and murder her. He didn’t care how. He didn’t care who. All he knew was that he wanted her gone. Permanently. Even if Scorpius was able to feel some form of pity for her, Albus refused to see her as anything but a threat. And no matter what happened, no matter how much time passed, he would always hate her. He would forever wish her nothing but suffering.

“How do you know that?” Albus asked, not quite willing to burst his father’s bubble. Not when he seemed to finally have gained his dad’s respect. “Maybe that’s my Slytherin side. Maybe that’s what the Sorting Hat saw in me.”

“I don’t understand your head, Albus,” Harry admitted. “Actually, you know what, you’re a teenager, I shouldn’t be able to understand your head-“

Albus frowned at that.

“-but I do understand your heart. I didn’t - for a long time - but thanks to this - ‘escapade’ - I know what you’ve got in there. Slytherin, Gryffindor, whatever label you’ve been given - I know - know - that your heart is a good one.”

Albus visibly cringed.

“Yeah,” Harry agreed, with a small smile. “Whether you like it or not - you’re on your way to being some wizard.”

Those words, which were meant so well, sent a shot of horror down Albus’s spine. They reminded
him of a day on the edge of the Forbidden Forest with a silver haired young woman…

‘You’re becoming quite some wizard, Albus Potter’

Albus forced the words away, the very memory causing his heart to race unpleasantly. His father was watching him with confusion, unsure how he had managed to upset his son this time.

“Oh, I’m not going to be a wizard,” Albus said quickly, desperate to change the subject. “I’m going into pigeon racing. I’m quite excited about it.”

Harry grinned with relief.

Harry led his son down a short path to the village church. Albus wondered if they were going to sit inside. The thought made him a little nervous, but he forced himself to be brave.

“These names you have,” said Harry. “They shouldn’t be a burden. Albus Dumbledore had his trials too you know - and Severus Snape, well, you know all about him-“

Albus thought he probably knew more about Albus Dumbledore’s trials than his dad did, but the time wasn’t right to point that out. As for Snape, well, since he was such a hero of Scorpius’s, Albus was inclined to feel more warmly towards him than he had before. Even if he still did seem like a git. Maybe, just maybe, it was possible to be a git and a hero at once.

“They were good men,” Albus conceded.

“They were great men,” Harry agreed. “With huge flaws, and you know what - those flaws almost made them greater.”

Harry stopped again. Albus stood beside him, wondering why they weren’t continuing up the path. His father opened the gates beside them, which led into the small and empty graveyard.

“Dad?” Albus asked, rather anxiously. “Why are we here?”

“That is where I often come,” Harry revealed, holding the gate open for his son.

That was the first Albus had heard of it, but then he supposed he never did ask his dad much about his life. He never really bothered to talk to him.

“But this is a graveyard…” Albus pointed out, as his father neatly closed the gate behind him.

“And here,” said Harry, leading Albus past gravestone after gravestone, finally stopping before one in particular, “- is Cedric’s grave.”

“Dad?” Albus asked, feeling shaky.

“The boy who was killed - Craig Bowker - how well did you know him?” Harry asked.

Albus thought about that. He knew that Craig liked to shine his shoes, that he was a stickler for rules, that he was the sort of person who would drop you right in it with the teachers if he thought you might lose Slytherin points. He had always been smartly presented, he liked to suck up to Professor McGonagall, and fairly often he could be found assisting the first year Slytherins with their homework assignments (although point-blank refusing to do it for them).

Craig had been an annoying sort of person, since he was always on at Albus to look less scruffy, constantly nosing in on everyone’s conversations (probably to check nobody was planning anything which might put Slytherin’s reputation at risk), and clearly thought himself the brightest
student of their House (which Albus knew for a fact wasn’t correct, since Scorpius was the
brainiest person he knew).

But not once had Albus sat down with Craig to have a proper conversation. Even after his mum
and dad split up. Most of the time Albus had tried to avoid him. He tried to avoid everyone aside
from Scorpius.

“Not well enough,” Albus admitted, kicking at the grass.

“I didn’t know Cedric well enough either,” Harry said quietly. “He could have played Quidditch
for England. Or been a brilliant Auror. He could have been anything. And Amos is right - he was
stolen. So I come here. Just to say sorry. When I can.”

Hundreds of thoughts formed in Albus’s head, desperate to break out.

‘It wasn’t your fault, Dad.’

‘You don’t have to say sorry.’

‘Voldemort killed Cedric, not you.’

‘You’re not a bad person, Dad.’

‘I do… love you, you know.’

But none seemed quite right. Not while his father was standing respectfully before the grave in
thoughtful silence, his shoulders looking heavy with the strain.

“That’s a - a good thing to do,” Albus found himself saying, as he went to stand beside his father.

He chose not to look properly at the damp card resting against the grave, the front of which read
‘To a Beloved Son’.

Amos clearly hadn’t been able to visit in a while. Albus had the sudden idea to put down a wreath,
just like he’d seen Draco Malfoy do at Astoria's funeral. He knew exactly how, too. Scorpius had
helped him learn the Orchideous spell, and he was fairly good at it.

He took out his wand, but his father looked down at him with confusion. Albus realised that
perhaps the wreath was too much. Maybe it wasn’t his place? Maybe Amos wouldn’t like it?

And so instead, knowing that his father’s green eyes were on him, he put his wand away, reached
down, picked two daisies, and placed them at the bottom of the grave. They looked almost as
though they had blown there. Almost.

Harry smiled at his son, wishing he could tell him everything he wanted to. How much he loved
him. How very proud he was.

But Albus was Albus. And Harry wouldn’t have changed him for the world.

“I think it’s going to be a nice day,” Harry remarked, looking up at the blue sky and taking a deep
sniff of the fresh air.

Albus shifted the tiniest bit closer to his father. Hoping he’d read his youngest son right, Harry
reached out to touch Albus's shoulder.

At first, Albus did not move. But then, almost imperceptibly, Albus seemed to melt against his
father. Harry put an arm around his son’s shoulders, feeling the strange urge to cry.

“So do I,” Albus said, in a strained voice which Harry recognised.

Harry held his son closer, and Albus allowed his head to fall against his father’s shoulder.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you have enjoyed reading this as much as I've enjoyed writing it. It's been an intense project, but 100% worth it!

Please leave me a comment! I am sad this has come to an end, but it makes me so happy that people have enjoyed it!

It honestly means so much that you've stuck with this!

(Say hi on twitter! I am @ClaudiaBoleyn)

Also, for anyone wishing for more, I may be writing a few extra bits and pieces in future. I am starting my English degree in a few days, but I will absolutely be writing more fic. Shorter pieces, but I hope you will still enjoy them.

I mean - I couldn't leave the boys behind, could I!

xxx

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!